

Lateral Likeness and Legion
A Psychoanalytic Film Study of Siblingship in *The Color Wheel*

by
Fallen Matthews

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Approved: Dr. Michele Byers
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Sailaja Krishnamurti
Supervisor

Approved: Dr. Trish Salah
Examiner

Approved: Dr. Benita Bunjun
Reader

Date: August 28, 2018

Abstract

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Abstract: Narcissism not only influences, but can define the sibling relationship in psychoanalytic theory. The distinction of the sibling relationship is identified and discussed in psychoanalytic theory and film theory. Upon analysis, it is clear that film can relate the reality that siblings are substantial psychic forces on one another and against others. “Lateral Likeness and Legion” involves discovering how the sibling relationship can be significant in psychoanalytic film theory. Literature surrounding psychoanalytic theory and film theory is reviewed and correlated to a case study of *The Color Wheel*. This study shows how narcissism can define siblingship cinematically through the emergent themes in the literature of labour, loss, and legion [correlative to the Self]. *The Color Wheel* depicts this in its narrative of siblings. The film follows a brother and a sister who reunite after being estranged. Siblings are distinct markers of narcissism in addition to development and catharsis in film. This project establishes the significance of siblings in psychoanalytic film theory.

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Introduction

According to Juliet Mitchell (2013), the significant but curiously overlooked relationship between siblings is indispensable in psychoanalytic theory. Siblings, she says, “are essential in any social structure and psychically in all social relationships, including those of parents and children” (p. 1). Mitchell, in her book, *Siblings: Sex and Violence*, studies the psychoanalytic distinctiveness of siblingship, particularly narcissism. In addition to narcissism, Mitchell (2013) distinguishes between **laterality**, an equalized positionality in sibling relationships, and **verticality**, or marked power differentials in parent-child relationships (p. 5, p. 20, p. 23). Even though siblingship has been little explored in psychoanalytic theory, some theorists like Abramovitch (2014), Bank and Kahn (1982; 1982), Coles (2003; 2009), Cicirelli (1995), Edwards (2006), and Milevsky (2011), in addition to Mitchell (2013), have researched the distinction of the sibling relationship in and of itself as opposed to siblings being oedipal or electoral surrogates (Cook, 2013, p. 239; Mitchell, 2013, p. 20, p. 23; Sherwin-White, 2007, p. 5). Despite this research, siblingship in psychoanalytic theory has remained largely overlooked. Siblingship in psychoanalytic film theory is also still unexplored.

In this thesis, I analyze the film, *The Color Wheel* (Brooke, Byington, Hirsch, Kaplan, & Perry, 2011), using psychoanalytic approaches to siblingship. The film follows a pair of siblings—a cis, white, suburban, middle class, heteronormative brother and sister who are twentysomethings. The film uses their complex sibling relationship to explore how the roles of man and woman are connected to the roles of brother and sister, as well as to the status of insider and outsider. In my analysis, I focus on the

psychoanalytical correlations between narcissism and concepts of siblingship, attachment, identification and deidentification, and gender roles and representation. I use *The Color Wheel* as a case study of how these concepts are cinematically represented.

The Color of Self-Love

Filmed in black and white 16mm, *The Color Wheel* is a 2011 film written by and starring Carlen Altman and Alex Ross Perry, and directed and produced by Perry. The film follows two estranged siblings: JR (Altman), an unemployed aspiring news anchor, and her brother Colin (Perry), a focus group copywriter albeit hopeful literary writer. JR enlists Colin to help her move her belongings out of the home of her ex-boyfriend, a former broadcasting professor. The move involves quite a commute as the pair drive through New England and overnight at a motel as well as their family cabin. A detour to a dinner party results in shared revelations.

In *The Color Wheel*, JR and Colin interact differently with each other than they do with other relatives, friends, and significant others. Colin is relatively soft-spoken if not muted amongst others, whereas he is sarcastic and self-assured when he speaks with JR. Ever acquiescent, he often mutters and his eyes are perpetually downcast in conversation with others, but he glares and blares at JR straight on; that is, when he isn't arguing with her. In contrast, JR is self-deprecating and defensive, albeit considerate with Colin instead of pretentious and supercilious. With other people, she always gloats about fabricated career prospects and famous contacts. With Colin, she is self-conscious and humble; she encourages him to pursue his happiness even at the expense of others',

including her own. The siblings' relationship shows trust and an absence of filters that characterizes a distinct, discretely intimate bond. Moreover, they are frank with one another despite having been out of contact for an undisclosed number of years. Confined to a car and nightly stops in shared motel rooms, the siblings eviscerate each other at almost every turn. Colin disdains his sister's superficiality and believes her lack of clear life goals indicates a lack of responsibility, while JR likens her brother to a stagnant suburbanite: she believes he's following a pre-approved life course instead of creating his own.

Perry's choice to shoot this in 16mm film locates the sardonic siblingship against black and white backdrops of rural road stops—mostly diners and motels architected with vintage Americana iconography—and wide angle shots of mountainous landscapes and the open highway; as well as an airy, acoustic score. I can't speak for Perry; but based on my reading, I would suggest that the film is the product of a particular historical moment. The year of the film's release, 2011, was marked by the Occupy Wall Street protests which began in New York and sparked a worldwide movement protesting social and economic inequality (Schwartz, 2011). I recall several 'occupy events' happening around my city in Canada and further orchestrated by student collectives [hoping to protest rising tuition costs] on campus. But, I also remember how those events seemed eclipsed in the media by the Royal Wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton (Wells, 2011). Noting how widely prioritized and publicized that wedding was that year, despite the economic disparities evident everywhere, solidified my impression that for many people, the key to success or a good life is wealth and excess; it isn't being a good person.

In an interview, Perry (2011) says, “I felt like...film is kind of about spending a lot of your childhood and your adulthood believing one thing and then, finding out all of a sudden that it’s not true.” His filmography reinforces this disenchantment as his main characters face unoptimistic, alienated realities only to grow disillusioned with their initial idealism (Bale, 2011; Sicinski, 2011). Surrounded by relatively passive and wealthy antagonists, Perry’s characters are challenged by the very artifice and avarice that they strive to attain.

The Color Wheel was praised by critics for symbolizing that people don’t thrive by reciprocity, but through infamy or viability in accordance with a bureaucratic meritocracy in which one must formally earn credentials that they can monetize (Brody, 2011; Lanthier, 2012; Linden, 2011; Scheib, 2011; Scott, 2012; Sicinski, 2011; Sullivan, 2011). Capital—social, material, familial—conveys credibility as well as formidability. Those who lack this capital are indebted to others or relegated to failure. Siblingship can convey a distinct form of familial capital through its sheer bond:

We needed to make a film that starts with two people who you are told are related who can’t stand each other, and we knew what had to happen to them at the end. And, just everything needed to push them together. Every person they encountered, every character they spoke to needed to just push them closer and closer together until, you know, they realize that nobody in the entire world will have any tolerance for either one of them except each other; and that they might not be perfect, but they’re the best they’ve got
(Perry, 2011)

Through JR and Colin, Perry depicts how the sibling bond can serve as a reprieve from the hurtful hierarchies that structure the social world. Like trust, inversion is definitive of the sibling relationship; and psychoanalytically, as the following literature review details, inversion through narcissism [i.e. inverted narcissism] within siblingship is notably definitive.

Locating the Researcher in the Research

As a racialized feminist and as a femme academic, I find that the personal is often political. I often find myself unable to divorce my positionality from the reality that academia prescribes through not merely intellectual, but institutional ways of knowing. Those ways of knowing are historically and presently resultant from, as well as located within, eurocentric, androcentric binary trains of thought that discern dichotomies and overviews as opposed to critical considerations or distinctions beyond generalities (Bourdieu, 2001). As an undergraduate sociologist, my academic experience in courses in the social sciences and humanities taught me that people are not simply passive, objective receptacles that uncritically favour or mimic things. I learned that people create and comprise subjective lives. They locate themselves in relation to others.

As I show in the literature review below, a standard premise of psychoanalytic theory asserts that the initial and foremost relation of the child is to their mother and father. As Nancy Chodorow (2015) states, psychoanalytic theory suggests that “part of our innate psychic makeup is that we infuse experience with unconscious meaning.” Juliet Mitchell (2013) says the same, but notes the significance of the distinct relation one

has to one's sibling(s) as it is informed by narcissism, self-recognition, and laterality (p. 5; p. 20; p. 23). I propose that the distinction of the sibling relationship further correlates to gender in differentiating between brothers and sisters. Gender is a product of the internal, conscious and unconscious capacities which are imprinted through our primary identifications with mothers and fathers, and which are informed by institutions that prescribe particular forms of gender performance (Lindsey, 2010, p. 67). However, I state this bearing in mind the limitations of psychoanalytic theory which tends to ascribe a universal family model contingent upon a gender binary, whereas I acknowledge that gender fluidity and nonbinary ways of being exist. There is also a diversity of family models albeit psychoanalytic theory acknowledges this rather narrowly, proposing that developmental complexes ensue as children impose their attraction and anxiety upon other figures whom serve as substitute parents (Akhtar, 2009, p. 109, p. 111, p. 168; Jones, 2007; Sants, 1964; Shenkman, 2015). My understanding of gender is as a definition of appearances, which include temperaments and aesthetics, that reflect distinctions between human beings as discerned by social and cultural norms. The text for my case study—*The Color Wheel*—centralizes heteronormative, amatanormative, cis, and white positionalities.

Given my own positionality, I can also appreciate that psychoanalytic theory has a shortcoming in its tendency to discount, if not omit, the disparities arising from a eurocentric, patriarchal cis-heteronormative social reality that affect the psychic reality of marginalized peoples. It posits profound, perceptive insights into psychic development—specifically, the correlation between psyche, society, and self-concept—yet does not

account for the systemic subjectivity or praxes that shape our realities in hierarchical and unequal ways.

In psychoanalytic theory, identities are often defined through contrast; we describe what something is not in an effort to decipher what it is (Spelman, 1988, p. 137). Padgug (1979) asserts that biology is merely “a set of potentialities, which is never unmediated by human reality” (p. 9). Institutions like the family and religion, as well as social structures like the economy shape consciousness and identity. Freud likens the psyche to physiology; only briefly does he acknowledge the importance of social relations in the shaping of individual psychology, noting that society “is the medium in which the individual psyche grows and operates, but it is also in fundamental ways antipathetical to the individual, forcing him or her to repress instinctual desires” (p. 17).

Although psychoanalytic theorists have made strides towards defining the realm of psychic life, it remains incomplete. If the psyche is a complex composite of its bearer, this composition is not a mere sum of parts which are neatly divisible. Gender, class, race, and other social locations create intersectional matrices through which the self comes to be known. These aspects of self are symbiotic, relative and interactive—they cannot be isolated from one another. Psychoanalytic theory does not engage with this complexity, as it remains focused on kinship as a dominant form of social relations that determine the course one’s life (p. 16). Despite these shortcomings, psychoanalytic theory does acknowledge the significance of the psyche; and critical race theorists note how elements of psychic life inform social movements and countercultures which explore dimensions of identity, oppression, and sexuality (Zaretzky, 2015). I have found

psychoanalytic theory extremely useful in this thesis because it has allowed me to explore and articulate distinct aspects of siblingship evinced through psychic life, identifications, and development.

Bringing it Full Circle

I began my thesis with three main objectives, which became four after I realized that my analysis was narrative; chronologized in accordance to the events in the movie. First, to investigate whether narcissism informs siblingship in *The Color Wheel*. Second, to identify emergent themes regarding siblingship in the context of attachment and deidentification. Third, to examine how sibling relationships are scripted through gender or how siblingship is engendered. Fourth, I discern temporal and spatial distinctions in the film as they informed the narrative. My study of narcissism in *The Color Wheel's* representation of siblingship provides insight into siblingship's rich potential as a concept within psychoanalytic film theory. By identifying the lack of analysis of siblingship in psychoanalytic theory, my aim is to show how these concepts can be applied in psychoanalytic film theory and to provide a better understanding of representations of sibling relationships in cinema.

In what follows, I begin with a review of discussions of siblingship in psychoanalytic theory. I then proceed to explore how these discussions are taken up in psychoanalytic film theory. Next, I discuss my methodology; including my choice of a case study approach. Finally, I apply these concepts to a reading of *The Color Wheel*.

Literature Review

Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic Theory in Siblingship

Psychoanalytic research on siblingship primarily focuses on the correlation of parents to siblings concerning childhood development (Edwards 2006, p. 25; Conger & Little, 2010, p. 88; Kramer & Conger, 2010, p. 5; Morley, 2007, p. 65; Portner & Riggs, 2016) and analyses that discern the sibling relationship as distinct dynamic on its own (Best & DeLone, 2015, p. 274; Cicirelli, 1995, p. 4; Coles 2003, 2009; Kenichi & Aoki, 2005, p. 13; Milevsky, 2011, p. 44, p. 59). While parents are posited as primary role models for children, siblings also influence one another's identities (Coles, 2009, p. 104, p. 109; Milevsky, 2011, p. 60). The values encoded through birth order (Milevsky, 2011, p. 2), age difference (p. 3), number of siblings (p. 8), and gender (p. 10) also act as qualitative determinants of the overall sibling relationship (p. 33). I also recognize that these values intersect and that further experiences of ability, health, and education will also contribute to this relationship.

Psychoanalytically, the bond of siblingship can exist as a form of **narcissism** (Kieffer, 2014, p. 25). Narcissism involves choosing oneself over others. For siblings, it is through a shared phenotype in which the narcissist may be “in love with himself and seeks everywhere for a mirror in which to admire and woo his own image” (Horney, 1939, p. 89). In childhood development, parental attachment motivates behaviour and value formation because children seek proximity to their caregivers due to their dependence on them whereas the sibling relationship is viewed as a subsystem (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 6).

Sibling relativity involves individuals recognizing their separate existences as siblings as they don't have the sole occupation of the lateral dimension in their families (Morley, 2007, p. 66). Sociability and intimacy are learned through playing, fighting, caring with siblings shape relational and psychic relations experienced in the social world (Edwards, 2006, p. 5). Sibling rivalry can be attributed to natural selection, wherein genetic links lead parents to feel love and commitment to their offspring, and siblings compete "to maximize parental investment in the continuity of their genes" (p. 25). Sibling relationships are adaptive to parental environment: half-siblings may compete for their shared genetic parent's investment whilst stepsiblings may be more attached to their biological parents and jealous of unrelated siblings (p. 25). Psychoanalytically, siblings can also supplant parents in stages of development; namely, where another sibling ruptures the mother-child relationship in lieu of a father figure (Morley, 2007, p. 67).

Aside from their rivalry, there are also definitive aspects in siblings' alliance. Siblings can serve as surrogates and foundational references for interpersonal relationships (Coles, 2009, p. 102, p. 108; Conger & Little, 2010, p. 89; Davidoff, 2006, p. 18) as they can provide respite during adolescence as well as compensatory support in the absence of parents or peers (Cicirelli, 1995, p. 117; Milevsky, 2011, p. 44, p. 59). Sibling relationships are also affected by the employment of their parents and access to childcare, because elder siblings may be required to babysit or otherwise actively engage in childrearing (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 15). Longer lifespans can also cast siblings as alternate caregivers or support systems in old age (Edwards, 2006, p. 4) as biological and genealogical connections primarily define familial bonds in industrialized societies, whereas non-industrialized societies follow a more open model of kinship irrelevant to

blood ties (Cicirelli, 1995, p. 84). Bank and Kahn (1982) also state that the decline of primogeniture and rise of feminism in the 20th century equalize inheritance rights and privileges of brothers and sisters (p. 10), biological or otherwise. Like the parent-child relationship, the sibling relationship is one of the longest relationships in a person's lifetime (p. 4).

The lateral positionality of siblings informs their similarity and individuality through a history of shared and unshared experiences in siblingship. Similarity is manifest as **attachment** (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 18; Edwards 2006, p. 4) and individuality involves **deidentification** (Best & DeLone, 2015, p. 274; Milevsky, 2011, p. 36, p. 87, p. 88; Whiteman, Becerra, & Killoren, 2010, p. 30, p. 34, p. 40). While attachment involves supportive reciprocity, deidentification is where siblings strive for distinction amongst themselves and therefore, create or identify their differences (Kieffer, 2014, p. 24; Milevsky, 2011, p. 87). Attachment and deidentification are polarizing. The former sees siblings reliant and benevolent through their lateral similarity, while the latter is threatened by similarity and engages in differentiation.

While the oedipal complex in childhood development culminates in the child's identification with the same-sex parent, deidentification occurs amongst siblings. The rivalry and competition between child and parent within the phallic stage of development is gradually minimized as the child not only processes their inability to attain the opposite-sex parent, but suspends their desire until adolescence knowing they will be able to pursue a partner of their own (Milevsky, 2011, p. 87). The assurance of adolescence amends nothing across siblings, because of the power dynamics. Kieffer (2014) states that "children do not experience their siblings as necessary to their survival as they do

parents, thus aggressive wishes are less conflicted” (p. 24). Therefore, siblings deidentify to “create a distinct mark in comparison to other family members” (Milevsky, 2011, p. 89) and champion their unique characteristics.

Narcissism

In the body of psychoanalytic theory, narcissism is a significant idea and it is not always pathologized. “Loving oneself,” Freud (1914) argues, is the “libidinal complement to the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation” (p. 74). There is **primary narcissism** which occurs from infancy to early childhood, a self-love manifest as the desire for self-survival (Freud, 2012, p. xii-xix, p. 5, p. 18, p. 20, p. 110, p. 115). **Secondary narcissism** is what occurs in older children and adults, which seeks personal pleasure over the conformity to social values (Freud, 2012, p. xvi, p. 36, p. 110, p. 115, p. 128). **Cerebral narcissism** pertains to gleaning egotistical satisfaction through a sense of intellectual superiority, while **somatic narcissism** is driven by the egotistical gratification bodily in physique, sexual conquests, and appearance (Vaknin, 2000). Narcissism itself is normal and universal, but becomes abnormal or pathologized when it is excessive and involves manipulating others to attain one’s ends. However, narcissism is less likely to be pathologized than favoured in a positive correlation to high self-esteem, empowerment, and quality of life for privileged—covert, white, cis, heteronormative, etc.—positionalities (Matias, 2016, p. 69; Rose, 2001, p. 379).

The concept of narcissism has been well explored by a number of theorists. Although Freud discerned that narcissism was a critical component in ego formation and object choices, he offered little insight into distinct narcissistic personalities (Akhtar,

2000, p. 112). Jones (1923) identified these distinctions years before Freud would endeavour to describe narcissistic character types, likening narcissism to a god complex and noting that narcissists were markedly grandiose, sought glory, needed constant praise, and had a love for language (Akhtar, 2000, p. 112; Jones, 1923, p. 207). Most importantly, he understood that narcissists could mask those traits consciously, “superficial in the mind and more in harmony with social feelings” in the interest of feigning modesty or humility (Jones, 1923, p. 208). He recognized that narcissists were not all “flamboyant, openly acquisitive, and assertive” (in Akhtar, 2000, p. 112). After Jones and Freud, Reich (1933) found that some narcissists strive to amass social capital whilst others may daydream or indulge addictions. Tartakoff (1966) followed, differentiating between narcissists who had an active fantasy of being powerful or decidedly outstanding, and those who imagined themselves through a passive fantasy of being special or virtuous and exceptional (p. 232, p. 237). Bach (1977) later addressed that narcissists could have “a divided self in which the hidden part of themselves shows a ‘mirror complementarity’ with their conscious complaints” (in Akhtar, 2000, p. 112); and that in contrast to the braggart narcissists who dread and conceal their cowardice, narcissists who are conversely feeble and weak on the surface tend to “harbour a dangerously powerful split-off self image” (p. 113). Furthermore, Kohut suggested that “less colourful and socially hesitant” narcissists had a “horizontal split” in their psyche that represses their grandiosity and discouraged their egos of confidence (Akhtar, 2000, p. 113; Kohut, 2011, p. 63)

Narcissists may assume aloofness to ensure they are inaccessible psychically or to preserve their delusions of grandeur from arbiters or authorities who threaten it (p. 209).

These are known as **covert narcissists**. They are unable to form meaningful social relationships due to a pervasive sense of grandiosity and a lack of empathy, but they are nonetheless dependent on others for psychic gratification (Akhtar, 2000, p. 110; Behary, 2013, p. 24; Cooper, 2000, p. 71; Vaknin, 2013). **Overt narcissists** are comparably more charismatic, consistent, and deceptive; they wilfully, knowingly, and calculatedly disguise their true intentions (Brookes, 2015, p. 172). They actively seek admiration and superficially sublimate adverse [repressed] characteristics or behaviours to effectively glean acclaim and retain the notice of others (Akhtar, 2000, p. 13).

In the context of siblingship, narcissism relates to attachment and deidentification (Kieffer, 2014, p. 25). For attachment, narcissism establishes a basis of *us vs. them* in the context of shared laterality as siblings recognize—and sometimes, weaponize—their likeness to each other against those outside of their laterality and family. For deidentification, narcissists acknowledge similarities so as to subvert them in asserting individual uniqueness (p. 25). Yet, siblingship always involves shared narcissism (Coles, 2003, p. 52-65; Fraley & Marks, 2010, p. 1202; Davidoff, 2006, p. 19-24; Meltzer, 2008, p. 39; Mann, 2002, p. 181). Research shows that narcissism shared amongst siblings may be due to **projective identification** (Coles, 2003, p. 53; Coles, 2009, p. 104, p. 109; Edwards, 2006, p. 42; Mann, 2002, p. 166). Projective identification involves **projection**: a defense mechanism or disavowal, wherein one contends with their adverse feelings, emotional conflicts, and stressors by attributing them to another person or object (Waska, 2011, p. 68). There is an active relation in projective identification wherein the projector associates what they have projected with what or whom they have projected upon.

However, the association is not impartial, but a matter of misattribution: people who project are ascribing their realities upon others (p. 70).

Oedipus Wrecks

Freud (2001) describes narcissism as manifest in the father from *Totem and Taboo*. He recounts how a jealous, tyrannical father drives away his sons so that he may retain all wealth and female companions. This prompts the sons, brothers to one another, to resolve to murder the father as a means to reclaim and fairly redistribute his belongings (p. 164). The sons' hatred of their father casts him as a malignant obstacle to their positional and sexual agency, but they had also "loved and admired him too" which resulted in their remorse (p. 166). In death, the father's supremacy is strengthened by his sons' guilt, thus the sons' continue his legacy by upholding his prohibitions. They forbid killing their tribal totem, a substitute for their father, and abdicated what wealth and companions of which their father's death had bequest (p. 166). The totem from this tale was established by Freud to be an allegory for the symbolic order of fathers and sons (Perelberg, 2015, p. 2). The distinction between the murdered father—*the narcissist*—and the dead father—*the memory*—is definitive of the Oedipus complex, as the father perceived to be an ambivalent character whose supremacy regulates his sons' desires which wills them to sacrifice their sexualities (p. 12). Reflecting upon their dead father, the murderous sons in *Totem and Taboo* ultimately realize that sacrificing their sexualities is necessary for their survival and social order lest avarice or libido consume them and incite them to turn on one another (p. 16).

After *Totem and Taboo*, Freud gradually discovered what he would call the **Oedipus complex**, which expounded upon the idea of survival and social order as contingent to sexual sacrifice and transmuted patricidal prowess (Perelberg, 2015, p. 2). The Oedipus and Electra complexes have been referred to as the attractions, anxieties, and consequential identifications of young children to their parents; wherein children unconsciously sexually desire their opposite-sex parent while feeling jealous of their same-sex parent who has sexual access to the former (Mitchell, 2013, p. x-xii). These complexes are psychoanalytically foundational in establishing the distinctions, notably power differentials, between parents and children. In addition, these complexes position parents as the foremost psychodynamic influence upon children (Sasso, 2007, p. 18, p. 96). However, as I noted before, these complexes are contingent upon the assumption of cis-heteronormative identity (Shenkman, 2015). Although the scope of my thesis does not amend this limitation, I still note that the complexes falter against the reality of gender fluidity and nonbinary identities.

Yet, contemporary psychoanalytic research addresses siblingship's complex dimensionality and how it affects psychic development beyond natural selection and oedipal theory. I believe that Freud and most of classic psychoanalytic theory fails to acknowledge the siblingship in *Totem and Taboo* as a critical context. The patricidal sons are siblings—*brothers*—marginalized according to psychoanalytic theory as rivals vying for the most parental affection (Sensale, 2009). Some recent theorists show how siblings serve as attachment figures who contribute to developments of personality and self-esteem (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 14; Coles, 2003; Coles, 2009; Duschinsky & Walker, 2015, p. 2, p. 6, p. 7; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003, p. 140; Mitchell, 2013, p. 15;

Morley, 2007; Nixon, 2015, p. 193). The brothers in *Totem and Taboo* do not rival one another for parental favour; they collectivize for their own favour. Their patricide is collaborative. *Totem and Taboo*'s patricidal brothers sanction sexual sacrifice and social order because they saw themselves in one another. Just as a shared murderous desire inclined them to unify against their father, enacting that very desire allowed them to see themselves reflected in each other as their patricide manifest because their siblingship does not simply evoke parental instincts or curiosities. To be cognizant of a sibling is to be aware of another being whose positional likeness is reflective and further associative than that of other relatives or peers. Siblings share the same quantum of halved genetics and a shared status distinct from their parents (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 18).

Progeny liken themselves to their parents in the context of erogeneity and survival, not sympathy or semblance. Therefore, the parent-offspring relational dynamic is definitively hierachal or vertical. The likeness between siblings is located within social conscience and social responsibility which foster a “development of a group feeling and a demand for equal treatment and justice” (Edward, 2011, p. 1). A shared or equitable—lateral—status as dependents upon their parents elicits empathy through a sense of helplessness and need for attention which may ally them against external threats (Edward, 2011, p. 4; Duschinsky & Walker, 2015, p. 12; Levin, 2010, p. 96; Mitchell, 2013, p. 5, p. 20, p. 23). The solidarity between siblings is founded upon the recognition that a sibling is not just responsive, but supportive as loyalties are established to be distinct from outsiders and are cultivated by similitude (Edward, 2011, p. 5).

Family Matters

Freud actually made substantial notes on siblings (Cook, 2013, p. 239). There are many references to brothers and sisters in his work and through these, several themes can be identified:

- a positive correlation between sibling incest and child sexual abuse
- intense childhood emotions and identifications that inform sibling relationships
- the impact that the birth of a younger sibling has upon their elder sibling, which serves as a developmental stimulus to the elder whose sexual, emotional, and intellectual curiosities are piqued in pondering the younger's origin
- the subsequent jealousy, envy, and rivalry that the arrival of a younger sibling evokes in an elder sibling; and how siblings can be cited in addition to parents as initial love objects, which makes them key roles in cultivating social skills
- psychic infantilism, the concept that one who is unable to move beyond their initial love objects will seek a partner in adulthood who resembles said love objects
- the identifications between siblings and their effect upon internalization
- the significance of birth order
- sibling transference
- the trauma of sibling loss (i.e. death or estrangement)

(Sherwin-White, 2007, p. 5-6)

Gender and the Oedipus Complex

The studies I have undertaken during my master's degree have enabled me to acknowledge gender as a construct operant upon a patriarchal praxis that marginalizes

identifications and expressions that deviate from a cis, heteronormative male-female gender binary. I have also noted this prior in the limitations of psychoanalytic theory, particularly the developmental complexes. Yet, in my studies, I found that gender was never identified in and of itself. Rather, it was only defined in or as relation to other forms of difference. Even Mitchell (2013) discerns that gender “refers to a wider field of relations in which sexuality may not be a determinant” although “there is always some at least residual sexuality in play...the degree to which this sexuality does not inform the concept of gender is the reason why is cannot be a seamless translation of ‘sexual difference’ ” (p. 112).

Stewart and McDermott (2004) in their article “Gender and Psychology” provide a review of the uses of these concepts in the field. Despite the reality of a spectrum of gender identities, a binary view of gender is predominantly used to conceptualize the ways in which men and women are defined (p. 519).¹ The concept of gender inclines critical considerations of sex differences wherein appearances, personalities, abilities, and behaviours vary according to distinctions of sexual characteristics (p. 519). The male-female gender binary assumes that there are pre-existent, innate differences between male and female organisms that are definitive as well as fundamental, and are linked to biological differences. Examples of such differences include lactation, pregnancy, and childbirth are associated with women; and erections and ejaculation which are associated with men (p. 520). However, gender is not limited to differences merely located in sex. It spans beyond biology, differential treatments and socialization, as well as distinctions of

¹ As also examined and discussed by other theorists such as Judith Butler (1999) and Anne Fausto-Sterling (2008)

social roles or social contexts (Kane & Schippers, 1996, p. 650; Stewart & McDermott, 2004, p. 520). Moreover, Stewart and McDermott note that “beliefs about gender are expressed in actions that actually create confirming evidence for those beliefs, but also in the social structures that define power relationships throughout the culture” wherein “maleness signals authority, status, competence, social power and influence, and femaleness signals lack of authority, low status, incompetence, and little power and influence” (Stewart & McDermott, 2004, p. 521).

The prevailing theory in psychoanalysis is that gender is produced by the Oedipus and Electra complexes. In these complexes, through interactions with parents, children’s understandings of gender come into being. I argue that the acquisition of these concepts is traumatic. The complexes are normalized in psychoanalytic theory, but their normalcy does not diminish their traumatic realities. These complexes are not merely psychoanalytic dramas, but articulations of violence: a violent disruption of desire, wherein resolution is a matter of dependent children obliging oppressive, the hegemonic authority of their parents. The disavowal of desire and differentiation breaks our self-concepts regardless of whether that fracture is formative or reaps relief. Gender is conveyed as a development of sociogeny², temporality, and phantasmagoric fleshing of these complexes; and subsequently, gender affirms disparities in its multiplicity.

Gender is further expressed through this distinction of the familial space. The mere denotations of parent and child designate power differentials in which parents—or parental figures—assume authority over children. Therefore, it is not possible that the

² I mention sociogeny as conceptualized by Franz Fanon (2008), in interrogating what it means to exist and what it means to exist as a human; wherein the meanings of identity and existence are relative to social dynamics and political formations (p.4)

family space be benign when children are subjugated because their subclass takes precedent in how they are viewed and what agency they are afforded. Father and mother subject son and daughter to their worldviews. Children may mature into autonomous adults, but their worldviews are foremost cultivated through the lens of their parents who imposed their ideologies (Cicirelli, 1995). Thereby, gender power relations are produced by parents' coercion of children into adherents to compulsory sexual values for care and acceptance.

Role and Relative Reckoning

Family relationships are developmentally important because progeny acquire information about gender roles and norms through dyadic relationships in the family. Offspring schemas of gender are shaped by their differential treatments and experiences with not only mothers and fathers, but with brothers and sisters (McHale et al., 2003, p. 126). Moreover, offspring may serve as more sympathetic models or social partners to one another given the lateral likeness of siblings. Siblingship is a context of social comparison that structures the family complex by influencing everyday intrafamilial activities and routines (McHale et al., 2003, p. 126; Stoneman, Brody, & MacKinnon, 1986, p. 501). Developmental research also found the tendency for younger siblings to imitate older siblings [who are perceivably higher status models] in their "gender role attitudes, gendered personality qualities, and gender-typed activities" (McHale et al., 2003, p. 140).

Studying school-age sibling dyads in unstructured play settings...

found that the sex of the older sibling had implications for the

nature of the dyad's play: brother–brother pairs engaged in more stereotypically masculine play (e.g., play with balls, vehicles, or toy weapons) than any other group, and older brother–younger sister pairs engaged in more masculine play than did sister–sister pairs. In contrast, sister–sister and sister–brother pairs engaged in more stereotypically feminine play (e.g., art activities, doll play, play house) as compared to dyads that included an older brother (p. 141)

Offspring with elder siblings of the opposite sex were found to have less stereotyped concepts of gender roles (p. 141). Overall, siblings were shown to affect gender development because they encourage their own gendered qualities in their siblings (p. 141). Deidentification conversely prompts engendered attitudinal and behavioural differentiation, even polarization, amongst siblings (p. 141). Likewise, parents impose behavioural expectations of both sexes upon sole offspring [without siblings] who consequently exhibit ascribed masculine and feminine characteristics (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 21). For parents, sole progeny must symbolically, simultaneously be both son and daughter in the absence of siblings who may be ascribed as comparably mannish or effeminate (p. 21).

Siblingship is often contextualized in respect to oedipal and electral theory; and there is always a context of rivalry for the affection of caregivers regardless of gender (Kluger, 2012, p. 200). While I don't discount the view that siblingship is interrelated with oedipal and electral theory, I argue that siblingship is *more* than that interrelation. As other theorists have suggested, psychoanalytic theory is marked by a tendency to

perpetually galvanize oedipal and electral rhetoric which belies other ideas that do not involve significant reinforcement of parent-child ideations (Butler, 2015; Huppert, 2015, p. 49; Lapsley & Westlake, 1988, p. 82). There are positive correlations of siblingship to parental investment and birth order, and the complexes and envies illustrate how intrafamilial psychodynamics are foundational in psychoanalytic development; in addition to how parental dependency yields anxiety or hostility within offspring that may be repressed or [subsequently] displaced sociogenically (Freud, 1959, p. 60, p. 67; Lucas, 2015, p. 166). However, research shows that the phenomena of rivalry and polarization are specific to siblings who are similar in age and gender, not *all* siblings (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 19).

Siblings divide the psychic space they share within their familial environments. That division defines siblingship in its benevolence or hostility, and substantial polarization discerns the latter (Milevsky, 2011, p. 36). The partitions of cerebral and somatic territory demarcate respective claims upon psychic life wherein siblings forbid one another from infringe on their spaces (Kahn, 2014, p. 48). However, greater differentiation results in siblings who become significantly dependent upon one another for a sense of wholeness (Taloumi, 2014, p. 87; Topolewska, 2014, p. 170). Dependency is marked by envy for the perceived qualities of the other sibling (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 22; Kahn, 2014, p. 54; Magagna & Amendolagine, 2014, p. 195). The relevance of gender and birth order in siblingship conveys that despite shared characteristics of siblings, there is nonetheless a relation of identification to differentiation; and any claim to distinction or likeness declared by one's sibling is perceived as antagonism or an invasion of psychic space (Abramovitch, 2014, p. 22; Cantone & Guerriera, 2014, p.

246). These concepts are also played out in film. Cinema serves as a medium to depict primal desires and the reality of gender power relations.

Film Theory

Our Movies, Ourselves

Psychoanalytic film theory generally uses psychoanalytic concepts to apply film theory in respect to viewership and identification; or the parent-child relationship and how interrogating or deconstructing aspects of the verticality of that relationship uncovers a fractured foundation that catalyzes deviant behaviour in children. It is also a feminist theory and thereby, is informed by how sex and gender symbiotically inform narratives on- and offscreen. Cinema presents a plethora of perspectives that resonate with the familial complexes even if they are too abstract to relate to personal lived experience. Moreover, it is through this resonance whereupon cinema can incline viewers to critically consider their privileges, positionalities, and personalities.

Friedberg (1990) structurally employs the apparatus of identification, conceptualized through psychoanalytic theory as a “cognitive choice” (p. 36), to create a system of identification in viewing cinema. Psychoanalytic identification classifies three types of identification: primary, secondary, and tertiary or partial (p. 39). Friedberg’s cinematic identification discerns the primary identification with the camera in observance of an object, whilst secondary and tertiary identifications are founded upon the “metonymy of the body” in identifying the actor(s) onscreen (p. 41). For film, she proposes an additional category of identification, extra-cinematic identification: identification beyond duration or event of the film, wherein the film’s content is related

beyond its screening and the viewing itself is a form of devouring only to embody the filmic context in identifying with it (p. 43).

Doane (1990) discusses a similar connection of the audience to film through identification with a focus on memory, noting the psychoanalytical element in the “tautological nature of relation to film” (p. 46). She thinks of how viewers are affected beyond their film viewing and acknowledges that their memories [internalization] render content to inscription, via the social complexity of a past which transcends the individual; and reinscription, via the establishment of a link to the individual (p. 58).

Identification-wise, Silverman (1992) uses psychoanalytic theory to propose that cinema resonates with its audience only if both text and viewer “inhabit dominant fiction” played onscreen (p. 52) and shows how films “dramatize the centrality of the penis/phallus equation to the survival of our ‘world’ ” in respect to androcentric and patriarchal status quo (p. 54). She discusses the presence of narcissism in the act of looking as well as the consciousness of being seen. Subjects onscreen are specularized and sexualized as actors’ bodies become erotic spectacles and form representations (p. 140) whose resonance results in identification (p. 7, p. 173).

De Lauretis (1984) relates that “imagistic identification and any reading of the image, including its rhetoric, are inflected or overlaid by the oedipal logic of narrativity” in that filmic identification is the result of an actant-subject [viewer] identifying with an actant-object [characterizations in film] invoking retentions correspondent to the childhood Oedipus complex (p. 79). Her analysis discerns that both subject and object are active, not passive, because the Oedipus complex has enabled a dialogue that rouses identifications—memories, sensations, emotions—retained (albeit repressed further into

psychological development) in relation to the Oedipus complex experienced in childhood (p. 79, p. 81). This reading not only alleges, but acknowledges how a critical developmental complex in accordance with psychoanalytic theory transcends childhood as it is referenced and identified with in adulthood, and affects our perception of both creating as well as understanding narrative (p. 86).

Somewhat similarly, Copjec (1988) uses psychoanalytic theory to assert that there is a degree of alienation in identification (p. 235). In analyzing *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Halfon, Dauman, & Renais, 1959) and *Le Camion* (Barat, Barat, & Duras, 1977), Copjec notes that the recognition of neuroses as well as [theories related to] psychoanalytic, developmental drives and the pleasure principle in films “displace trauma from the immediacy of the present, the present unfolding of the film, exteriorize it in some vague profilmic, make of it an event that never takes place” (p. 236). We can live vicariously through characterizations and contexts onscreen whilst being conscious that we are not truly within them; and that consciousness correlates to a psychoanalytic respect in that the identification is informed by narcissism (p. 238, p. 240) as well as driven by a need to displace retained, unpleasant, or unwanted feelings steeped in fears of castration (p. 241). Moreover, Copjec links fears of castration [felt by children, and appealing to childhood complexes in adults] as inextricably connected to the father (p. 241).

Creed (1993) analyzes gender roles within horror films. She specifically focuses upon the mother-child relationship [including maternity and motherhood], and notes how many iconic horror films are backgrounded as well as foregrounded within plots driven by malignant maternal figures. Her analysis of *The Exorcist* (Blatty & Friedkin, 1973) uses the psychoanalytic concept of abjection, where one’s sense of meaning falls apart, to

propose [demonic] possession as a parallel to prohibitions placed upon the maternal body in accordance with complexes and developmental stages in childhood [according to psychoanalytic theory] in which the child struggles to exist as a separate object of independent meaning (Creed, 1993, p. 12). She notes that the film accentuates the abject in excrement and corpses, as well as the possessiveness and narcissism of a mother who clings to her child.

Williams (2002) identifies maternal figures in film as objects to be seen or consumed in a psychoanalytic context wherein women are associated psychoanalytically with sex, horror, and punishment; the mother figure, who is psychoanalytically defined as a passive receptacle of love, is distorted to play upon childhood fears of castration and penis envy associated with the Oedipus complex (p. 63-64). The destruction of the distorted maternal image involves besting the “subversive recognition of power and potency of power” within the mother (p. 65). The Oedipus complex posits that the father, the perceived rival by the child for psychosexual access to the mother, poses a threat to castrate his competition [the child] (Leichty, 1960, p. 212). Williams (2003) recognizes that the mother is also capable of castration, eliciting fear through her genitalia—vagina—as its “gaping mouth” can be consumptive and therefore, castratory (p. 63).

The literature correlates psychoanalytic theory to identity and interpersonal development, particularly regarding the significance of family dynamics and complexes. It acknowledges siblingship as relevant to psychoanalytic development, but doesn’t posit the distinction of sibling relationships in and of themselves beyond oedipal and electoral theory—in psychoanalytic theory or film. There are some noticeable themes that emerge in cinematic siblingships which can and do parallel sibling relationships in real time, yet

there is no critical consideration for these themes in psychoanalytic film theory as distinct. I discuss this further in the following theory section.

Lights, Camera, Narcissism

The primary theoretical model I am using is psychoanalytic feminist film theory. I believe that cinema is an integral social construct. Films serve as a means to impart ideologies, but they also provide domains that are subjective and therefore subjugated to interpretations yielded by the psyche. According to psychoanalytic film theory, the resonance of cinema is located within its correspondence to conscious and unconscious psychic anxiety, envy, and complexes (Creed, 1993, p. 12; Copjec, 1985, p. 235; De Lauretis, 1984, p. 79; Silverman, 1992, p. 52; Williams, 2002, p. 65). Psychoanalytic film theory also argues that movies not only represent psychic apparatuses, but may also appease them and thereby entertain spectators by calming angst (Creed, 1993, p. 5).

Doane (1990) and Friedberg (1990) describe one of the pleasures of the cinema as related to processes of identification between viewers and text. For Silverman (1992), narcissism is present in that identification (p. 7, p. 173). I think that narcissism is not only present in identification, but necessary for identification. Moreover, the necessity of narcissism for identification speaks to the paradoxical nature of psychic inflation: how the psyche can embellish the ego through the indulgence of an imaginary that it transmutes as reality (Bromberg, 1996, p. 509, p. 511). Perhaps a little lie is needed to produce identification since the ascription of likeness involves imagination in the imposition of identity and ideology—which is why spectatorship itself is subjective.

I believe that identification can be an intrapsychic mechanism itself. Identification may serve to insulate us from anxiety, envy, and the like associated strains in psychic development or stress; because identification enables us to humanize or moralize subjects through the act of (cor)relation. This concept helps me think about narcissism in my reading of the film as reactionary. Identification involves socialization. It relates and therefore translates the assets of collectivity in the interests of the Self. This rationalizes and reinforces the social order that is influenced by familial order (Edwards, 2006, p. 25). In terms of my own project, identification is key to understanding how the text stages the sibling relationship.

Sibling Cinema

While *Totem and Taboo* premised an oedipal setup, Krzywinska (2006) relates that psychoanalytic theory models how “family relationships are rendered in melodramatic terms” and how an increased interest in therapy popularized and further legitimized the Oedipus complex as a rhetorical construct (p. 162). Consequently, the dissemination of oedipal discourse resulted in “the effect that aspects of psychoanalytic ideas take up a place in cinema where they are used to create storylines and/or provide character motivation” (p. 162). Cinematically, it substantiates characterizations in familial terms. It inclines viewers to not only note, but identify with the innate influence of family: every relational choice or style will be codetermined by people with whom they live first, closest, and longest (Krzywinska, 2006, p. 164; Toman, 1961, p. 5). Characters and relationships will replicate their earliest interpersonal relationships in varying degrees. The more alike earlier interpersonal relationships are to new ones, the likelier they are to last and be positive (Toman, 1961, p. 5). *The Color Wheel* centre this

question of how sibling relationships ultimately influence the social networks of the characters.

For many films that centre siblings or feature sibling interactions, sibling rivalry is a prominent theme. Siblingship as a film focus often defines characters in the context of competition (sibling rivalry), trauma (family abuse), or exclusivity [of those outside of the sibling bond] as Nelson (2011) notes in his analysis of the filmography of Stephen Poliakoff; particularly in the film *Close My Eyes* (Pickard & Poliakoff, 1991) which follows a brother and sister in an incestuous relationship, with absent parental figures and an assortment of adversities in their interpersonal relationships (Nelson, 2011, p. 73, p. 123). Siblingship is a device that conveys identity and locality as being inextricably linked, wherein film posits siblings as living and shared phenotypes that are coexistent because they are relevant via common genes, homes, or upbringings (Krzywinska, 2006, p. 127). The shared phenotypic premise of siblingship—and laterality as opposed to verticality—articulates a common “grounded reality” that sets the stage for reunions or separations that serve to strengthen or weaken the sibling bond (p. 128).

Krzywinska (2006) discerns that sibling rivalry in film conveys [sibling] characters “sharpening their irritation and testing each other’s toleration through sibling power play” and that absence of parents and estrangement as primary condition for viability of the presentation of incest (p. 167). She notes that cinematic siblingship is characterized as “a game of prevarication” through sibling rivalry as well as marked mutual attraction “until passion [or estrangement] overcomes them only to be followed by immediate regret” (p. 167). Another way she identifies siblingship onscreen is that, “Childhood sibling games of power...have been transposed into the genital sexual

economy of adulthood" (p. 168). Discussing the symbolic inflections of storytelling, folklore, and narrative, Greenhill and Brydon (2010) note that in film, siblings are also primarily shown to ally or compete physically and economically; often compared and contrasted through references of kinship as well as [their roles in] family dynamics (p. 125, p. 127).

Exploring cinematic depictions of sisterhood, Rueschmann (2000) states that film uses siblingship as a vehicle for characters' quests for self-knowledge (p. 9) and demonstrates how sibling rivalry is shown to be prolonged for parental love, possessions, and living space within the family in the movies (p. 15). She further discusses how cinema is conscious of the psychoanalytic motifs within sibling rivalry given how siblings are shown as vying for love and attention either against or from one another through attachment and deidentification (p. 16, p. 47). The genders of the siblings did not affect this (p. 54).

The Game: Labour, Loss, and Legion

Toman (1961) provides an exploratory hypothesis for analyzing family dynamics as initiators and institutions of social order in *Family Constellation: Theory and Practice of a Psychological Game*. Although his study is concerned with psychological treatment and clinical contexts, he nonetheless proposes a way to situate the family in correlation to personality, individuality, and social order in addition to the significance of siblings (p. 2, p. 24). He explores how different familial formations frame psyche and socialization, discerning how characteristics like gender and birth order cultivate interpersonal interests, health, and success through a developmental, psychoanalytical game:

The game is about *the individual person*, what he is like in some of his most basic aspects, what he does in some of the most crucial matters, and what he wishes to do. The principal ingredients are *people*—those who have been living with him the longest, most intimately, and most regularly—and all incidental *losses of such people* wherever they have occurred. First of all, the game concerns a person's parents and siblings, but then also the parents' parents and siblings... The rules of the game derive from the rules of combination of only two characteristics of these people: their sexes and their age ranks (p. 5)

A full examination of Toman's theory is beyond the scope of my project, but I intend to draw upon his discussion of the construction of sibling pairings in relation to gender roles, identification, and how siblingship influences future relationships.³

The game may serve to contextualize the resonance of siblingship in cinema in three ways. First, films that centralize siblings predominantly focus on rivalry which involves a good deal of **labour** such as exhaustive efforts to compare (Ohlsson, Matalon, Teper, & Hallström, 1993; Lafferty & Gillard, 2005), contrast (Johnson & Levinson, 1988; Ruddy & Coppola, 1972), and reconcile (Kent, Paterson, & Tucker, 1998). Those efforts foreground siblingship as a game in itself in a literal sense; and viewing those efforts reflects not only a desire to observe other games, but also an opportune medium upon which viewers can liken their own games, their flaws and assets.

³ For more on family constellations, please see Toman (1961).

Second, the game conveys a sense of **loss** seen in cinematic siblingship: the loss of happiness (Oh, Oh, & Kim, 2003; Ripstein & Franco, 2009), innocence (Brown, Churchill-Brown, & Ward, 2009; Gilbert, Vanaveski, & Birkin, 1993), security (Berman, Christely, Trzebiatowska, & Sallitt, 2012; Evans, Macy, Blum, & Flanagan, 2013), or faith (Coppola, Costanzo, Hanley, Halsted, & Coppola, 1999; Ruddy & Coppola, 1972). The distinctions of loss may change from film to film, but the articulation and purpose of loss remains the same: to affirm the pain and adversities of familial maltreatment or disavowal, and how that consequently threatens the stability of future relationships and pleasure. Some films that focus upon siblings illustrate the loss of will and confidence in the wake of family disputes and deaths in families. Others draw upon the instability or erraticism of relationships [with peers, lovers, spouses, etc.] of siblings who were abused or estranged from one another or their families (Haas, Herilhy, Law, Orent, & Haas, 1995). Additionally, some films follow a living sibling reflecting, suffering, and unable to cope upon the death of another (Coppola, Costanzo, Hanley, Halsted, & Coppola, 1999). These losses depict burdens and unhappy outcomes.

The third way game orders siblingship in cinema is the construction of **legion**,⁴ wherein the sibling bond serves to encapsulate a sense of distinction or exclusivity to outsiders, like parents, other relatives, peers, or strangers. The laterality of sibling relationships located in genotypical and phenotypical similitude coupled with perspectives of projection inclines siblings to relate to one another not merely through projective identification, but through inverted narcissism. While siblings are distinct, separate individuals onscreen, their likeness to one another is operant upon their

⁴ See the Glossary for an explanation of the meaning of “legion” in this project

understandings of one another as literally reflective of themselves (Aleksa, Jakubiec, & Marczewski, 2012; Bernard, Thomas, & Bertolucci, 2003; Cunha Telles, Cunha Telles, & Martins, 2009; Hall, Hoban, & Fawcett, 2000; Méndez & Campos, 2008; Oh, Oh, & Kim, 2003; Pickard & Poliakoff, 1991). They negotiate their affinities or aversions in the interests of their siblings whose appearances and socialization mirror theirs, and thereby become a site of simultaneous comfort and conflict. No matter what esteems, enemies, effort, or estrangement arise, the sibling bond is reinforced in the movies as an inconstant albeit indefinite intimacy because it symbolized as a permanent, pervasive parallel to the Self and anyone and everyone else is rendered Other.

Lateral Likeness

In the films I mentioned above, I found that sibling relationships tend to evidence benefits of unity and underwrite imperatives of antagonism or codependence common to action (Krzywinska, 2006, p. 128). Despite whatever conflict or catharsis unfolds, siblingship in cinema is manifest as a stronger, greater force at work because it is definitive of characters' identifications (Whitehouse-Hart, 2014). Often, siblings are depicted as opposites in media and psychoanalytic case studies which concentrate on rivalry and deidentification (Kieffer, 2014, p. 25; McHale et al., 2003, p. 141; Rueschmann, 2000, p. 47). The game can account for how and why their personalities parallel dichotomously, wherein elder siblings may be portrayed as comparably conservative and traditionalist, while younger siblings are more liberal and impulsive. The latter are often outgoing and popular, attention-seeking or idealistic as they are incapable of accepting harsh realities despite any evidence to the contrary (Orr, 1997, p. 10). While they may be irresponsible, they may also be inadvertently charismatic as their

liberal personality can be admired by others. Their blithe antics are usually their undoing, which can either irk their siblings or incline them toward protective instincts (p. 38). Older siblings tend to exemplify conventionally good or acceptable behaviour as they abide rules or assume more responsibility, sometimes to substitute parental figures (Rueschmann, 2000, p. 152). In contrast to younger siblings, they are more austere and practical, occasionally smarter (Freeman, 2016, p. 46; Porter, 2007, p. 410). Generally, they may make some effort to reform their younger siblings. However, their efforts prove fruitless because their siblings seldom appreciate their efforts until they themselves internalize the morals of their experiences; or they may an absence of catharsis entirely (Freeman, 2016, p. 66).

Cinematic narratives of siblingship may also be characterized as cautionary tales since siblings may illustrate the consequences of disparity or impulsivity regardless of their polarized personalities. The conscientious elder may be demonstrably numb or dissatisfied despite how devoted or dependable they appear to be, and thereby liberated or reinvigorated by their younger whose penchant for play may relieve them. Yet, the interests of social order compel the elder to resume their uninspired albeit dutiful routine as opposed to playing indefinitely. Alternatively, the younger can be disruptive due to a sense of loss. Against the recreation or revelation rescinded by routine, their erraticism can be cast as emancipatory; but their impulsivity and indulgence may manifest as an attempt of fulfillment, betraying a void caused by indirection, uncertainty, or self-doubt (Combs, 2007, p. 45). Even as they are distinguishable personalities, these gamers stand to lose out if they are too obliged and ostentatious.

However, these roles may vary or be reversed: the younger may be more responsible and obliged, while the elder may be the more impulsive and noncommittal; additionally, a middle child could embody either personality ascribed to elder or younger, and other siblings may be inclined otherwise (Freeman, 2016, p. 46). Disparities in parental investment, psychic development, or the multiplicity of roles in accordance with the game may also account for this reversal (p. 46). The trope of contrast assigned to siblings in film ultimately shows that divergent natures culminate in siblings better understanding and befriending one another at the film's conclusion (p. 66). Conversely, abuse, estrangement, or siblicide may ensue when siblings are defined by rivalry or pain and are therefore, unable to relate or reconcile past, present, or prospective grievances (Bartkowski, 2008, p. 21; Combs, 2007, p. 90, p. 236; Kirshner, 2013, p. 132).

While unrelated characters or parental figures may be contrasted, the lateral likeness of siblings intensifies identifications. There are considerable senses of kinship beyond cultural definitions of what siblingship means and the obligations of siblings to themselves and within familial order (Combs, 2007, p. 90). Cultural proscriptions are operant upon structures of birth order and gender, in which inheritors in accordance with primogeniture or patrilineage demonstrate how siblingship can be institutional and influence vocations or life paths (p. 240, p. 253). Yet, siblingship is not a choice. A person may pick their friends, but they cannot pick their siblings. This makes emotions between siblings "characteristically intense" which "cycle rapidly between love and hostility" (Lobato, 2015).

Similar to their parents, siblings in cinema are developmentally socialized as primary companions and competitors; but they are markedly more intimate given their

shared occupancy of a lateral role [in phenotypical, genotypical, and status resemblance] distinct from their parents and insulative from other relatives or peers. Laterality gradually enables inverted narcissism through the longevity of attachment as well as deidentification. Siblings learn to navigate competition and conflict in distinguishing themselves from one another, striving to differentiate themselves in identity or role within their families. They are inclined to individuate because they are cognizant of their likeness; and just as that likeness prompted them to differentiate and develop qualitative distinctions, that likeness also subsequently becomes a site of loyalty.

Through laterality, the game coordinates siblings as possessive of mutual interests in psychic assets and deficits. Cinematic siblinghood conveys reciprocity within the sibling relationship that is founded upon likeness. Whether the sibling bond is contextualized in terms of benevolence, malignance, or uncertainty, an intimate interchange ensues due to identification (Quart & Auster, 2011, p. 32, p. 47; p. 100; p. 199) and deidentification (Kirshner, 2013, p. 85, p. 86; Sutton & Wogan, 2009, p. 40, p. 42). Moreover, sibling likenesses are retained due to narcissism exemplified in how siblings reference one another as reflective of themselves—which consequently likened them as *themselves* (Sutton & Wogan, 2009, p. 97, p. 112).

Whether siblings in film unite, reconcile, drift apart, clash, or destroy one another: they see themselves in one another. In my analysis of the literature review, affirmation inspires unity and reconciliation as siblings recognize and sympathize with one another's values and vulnerabilities. Mutual interests manifest to create friendship founded upon loyalty. Aversion motivates siblings to quarrel or murder one another as their likeness triggers pain or anger. They may see one another as epitomes of their weakness or

trauma, wherein besting or eliminating one another is a means to purge their psychic frailty. Irresolution may also be articulated through avoidance when siblings are unwilling or unable to face one another and therefore themselves. Such narratives involve characterizations of siblingship that portray despondence or disgust.

Methodology

To test the theoretical understanding of siblings in film that I have outlined above, I have undertaken a content analysis of a single film as a case study. According to Bryman, Teevan and Bell (2009): “With a case study, the case is an object of interest *in its own right* and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it” (p. 38). Further, “[C]ase studies are often idiographic in nature, seeking to provide a rich description of the subject matter” (p. 38). As the authors suggest, there can be myriad reasons for choosing a particular case study. I chose to do this analysis because there had been no prior research on siblings in psychoanalytic film studies and felt a case study would effectively illustrate the theory. As a text, *The Color Wheel* features a sibling relationship as primary to its narrative and as such, provides fertile ground for the questions I had about the application of psychoanalytic theories of narcissism to film. Its centralization of siblingship illustrates the themes of narcissism, deidentification, identification, and engendered elements of social and psychic constructs.

The Color Wheel intrigues me because its siblings primarily internalize and relate to one another performatively. JR and Colin are overinvested in norms that invalidate their identities as siblings since they have individuated themselves from both their parents and peers through their pursuits of autonomy whilst simultaneously seeking approval (p. 198). The context of a classist, concrete jungle appears to override any semblance of conscience; but doesn’t affect their loyalty to one another as siblings. Additionally, *The Color Wheel* inclined me to critically consider the distinction between pretense and protocol, if there was any distinction; if society and esteem are established less upon self

than surveillance; and if happiness is more quantifiable than qualifiable in the context of visibility and how we perceive ourselves to be seen.

My method is qualitative, content analysis. I believe that content analysis is ideal for this film study because an integral component to appreciating the sociological significance of film is its audience, viewers engaged in receptive and affective potential of films (Eichner, 2014, p. 176). For Bryman, Teevan, and Bell (2009): “[Q]ualitative content analysis comprises a search for underlying themes... The processes through which the themes are extracted through which the themes are extracted in a content analysis are often left implicit, although they are usually illustrated with quotations from the text being analyzed” (p. 300).

The content analysis proceeds with three main objectives in mind:

- First, in accordance with my objective of investigating whether narcissism informs siblingship in *The Color Wheel*, I look for narcissism as a theme. My project is interested in how narcissism informed the sibling relationship in this film and I suspected these would be fruitful themes given my preliminary reading. (They were).
- Second, I watch for emergent themes regarding siblingship in the context of attachment and deidentification. (i.e. What informs the sibling relationship? Are there parental loyalties to consider? In what ways are JR and Colin similar and different? Does laterality truly liken them to a unique, exclusive bond; and how? Are their attitudes alike or unified when regarding those outside their laterality, including parents and peers?)
- Third, I watch the film for emergent themes regarding JR and Colin’s positionalities in terms of gender relations; specifically, how the film articulates characteristics and capacities scripted through their genders and how their siblingship is

engendered (i.e. How does JR's womanhood contrast Colin's manhood? Do JR and Colin identify—identify with—gendered traits in one another? Are expectations related to gender roles imposed upon them, and how? Does their siblingship affect gender ideations?)

- Fourth, I acknowledge the spatial and temporal distinctions of this text. *The Color Wheel* depicts a particular positionality, time, and geography. To critically consider this, I incorporate it narratively in my analysis.

The limitations of this study are mostly researcher based. My readings are informed by my own positionality and theoretical orientation. It is based upon my interpretations as a scholar, and I am aware that a proliferation of interpretations exist that I can't account for. This is also a case study which means that its focus is upon a single case as opposed to a selection, but emergent themes can be correlated to other texts (Johansson, 2003).

Case Study: The Color Wheel

She asked for a favour, and I said yes. You know, you don't have any siblings so, you have no frame of reference for what it's like when one of them asks for a favour.

Colin, *The Color Wheel*

The Color Wheel takes place in modern day America [2011]. It follows a pair of siblings, sister (JR) and brother (Colin), as a breakup leaves the former homeless, and she enlists the latter to help her move her belongings from Pennsylvania to Boston (Scott, 2012). I recognize their whiteness and normativity in the context of gender and respectability.

They are a cis, heteronormative man and woman who articulate concepts of occupational status within a particular time and space; specifically, in the year 2011 and in the northeastern, mid-Atlantic United States. JR and Colin haven't seen each other for an undisclosed number of years and are effectively estranged.

JR is the older sibling and presented as the outcast in the family. She is a twenty-something journalism major and aspiring news anchor who, through her fierce, exclusive identifications with these roles, articulates profound ambition. Unfortunately, her prospects are dwarfed by her artifice as she constantly ingratiates herself to people in an effort to *work connections* as opposed to actually *work*. This is a flaw she not only concedes to throughout the movie, but is directly referenced by her ex-boyfriend—her former broadcasting professor, Neil—when he puts her out of his apartment. Colin, her younger brother, often stresses this flaw whenever they speak of their family. For example, when she prods him about his job and personal life, he asserts that it justifies his and their parents' exclusion of her from family events and correspondences, likening her want and wanderlust to idealism and futility.

In contrast to his elder sister, Colin has parental favour and steady employment. He is represented as proud albeit pessimistic in his admission that he feels assured financially yet unfulfilled and awkward amongst others, as he states when prodded by JR to indulge himself creatively. He lives with his parents and girlfriend, Zoe, in a quaint townhouse, apparently supplanting his dream of being a writer with conventionality. Instead of pursuing the path to publication that he professes to want, he sticks to what he describes as a monotonous internship at a local printing press as the employment guarantees income and imparts not only a sense of direction, but also a sense of purpose.

Other characters in the film appear to see JR as an unambiguously vain and desperate figure, someone who: coasts indefinitely in a journalism programme; pesters strangers with crass and clumsy attempts at humour; cohabitates and sleeps with one of her professors [who dumps her]; exaggerates or fabricates professional prospects; and roams as opposed to settling down. Her dream of landing an agented news anchor job defines her as the film repeatedly shows her waiting for her phone to ring, presumably expecting a miraculous call from an executive. Each time she encounters a new character in the film, she overstates the success of her sporadic and unsuccessful auditions.

The film's juxtaposition of JR and Colin reinforces a perspective on femininity as unwise and undesirable in the patriarchal, primogenital order. Her fruitless search for success and approval accentuate her lack of direction. Moreover, her desire for the limelight and likeability has ironically made her unpopular and estranged from family and friends. For example, in the dinner party scene, JR is shown to be an impoverished, unemployed outsider due to her inability to effectively assume an air of success.

The ego may be galvanizing and emancipatory, prompting one to cultivate their own catharsis outside of restrictive protocols; but it also serves as a site of weakness and destruction if it is subsisted wholly through external approval (Jones, 1923, p. 207; Kohut, 2011, p. 63; Tartakoff, 1966, p. 232). I see this in JR: she is free, but not free. She deviates from respectability politics in order to chase her dream, yet continually self-sabotages. Particularly, in leaving Neil's and at the dinner party, she demonstrates that while her attempts to perform successfulness are necessary to make impressions in accordance with social norms and values, it can be destructive if it begins to consume her. JR conveys how a sense of identity, friendship, and kinship are undone by the social

demands of capitalism wherein the psyche becomes cultured, objectified, and moulded to accomplish cultural [capital] goals (Valsiner, 2014). Whenever asked to expound upon her motives for being an anchor, she never identifies with the career or offers any insights into the industry. She simply insists upon the distinction of the profession: the esteem of being seen and heard; the esteem of being broadcast. JR's affirmations are simultaneously overdramatic and vacant as she exaggerates esteems which she knows are nonexistent, but attempts to inveigle into reality. Only when she refers to her brother does she discern between amity and social capital.

Colin concedes that JR is also his ally as their interests parallel as much as they polarize. He is substantially quieter than his sister. Subtlety appears to strengthen him. He inadvertently entreats strangers or new acquaintances with candid, quiet considerations of his surroundings—which conversely annoy Zoe and JR, and bolster the infantilization from his parents. While JR is embarrassed about her failure to secure a new anchor job, he appears unfazed. It seems from Colin's point of view that people are fickle and thereby, it can be futile to invest in long-term, meaningful relationships outside of the sibling relationship. At the subsequent dinner party, asking others for information, his charisma is unintended; whereas those closest to him tend not to believe in him, perhaps because relativity demystifies his every task and triumph. Colin himself appears to understand this in his distinctions between lateral and temporal space, making gradual reflections on how he will likely to grow numb—or *number*—as he matures into the increasingly monotonous son and eventual husband [to Zoe] everyone except JR expects him to be.

Overall, I read JR and Colin's siblingship as defined by rivalry, arguments, and candor in which they come to see one another as confidantes. Their existential and experiential positions are defined by personal and work-related ambitions that they have yet to achieve.

The Game: As the Wheel Turns

As I discussed in the earlier section on theory, family constellation affects one's psyche and socialization. Toman (1961) notes that gender and birth order are part of a developmental 'game' that influence one's personality and relationships (p. 5, p. 24). As a younger brother of a sister, Colin's masculinity is characterized primarily through the evocation of maternal instincts of women around him (p. 53). JR fusses over him as she inquires into his quality of life, prods him to be more self-indulgent, and tends to his aches and pains. In addition to musing about his safety, Zoe questions his judgment for choosing to aid JR and we later see her berating JR when they are introduced. Furthermore, other women at the dinner party dote on him in a nurturing way. According to Toman's framing of social and familial order as a game, Colin arouses the attention of women by triggering their caregiving instincts, an instinct ascribed to femininity by a patriarchal social order that discerns women to domestic, interpersonal spheres in contrast to men who are assigned professional, rationalistic spheres beyond the home (Sayer, 2010, p. 33).

While Toman (1961) discusses the arousal of these attentions from women positively (p. 53), I think Colin elicits behavioural and emotive ascriptions of maternity or caregiving from women negatively as well. Since he is not exclusively favoured by the

women closest to him—JR and Zoe—maternal and interpersonal likeness are expressed through basic evil and basic hostility⁵, which are further manifest in his dependency. Like JR, he desires approval, but he strives to attain it through conformity. Infantilism is his defense mechanism since he makes recurring references to his youth [in comparison to JR's being older, and in being the youngest sibling] to legitimize his uncritical acquiesce or awkwardness. Therefore, maternity and interpersonality may be correlations underlain in his interactions with women who antagonize him and vice versa; because dependency and interrelation force his forbearance rather than [innate] likeness.

Colin plays Toman's game casually, somewhat carelessly. Despite his male privilege, his youth and subtlety incline him to falter against other more aggressive male figures, like at the dinner party. His parental favour concerns less respectability than resignation because he believes abidance, not authenticity or fondness, is the only means to love or approval. As the younger brother of a sister, Colin also belongs to a cinematic trope of fraternal figures such as the inconsiderate individualist (Pickard & Poliakoff, 1991), runt (Brown, Churchill-Brown, & Ward, 2009), and follower fixated upon his elder sibling (Cunha Telles, Cunha Telles, & Martins, 2009). The younger brother of a sister represents a masculinity that is minimized by the psychic supremacy not of his mother, but of his elder sister whose laterality affords him more amity and attachment, and therefore, more identification. Colin's frequent falls, cynicism, and tantrums convey

⁵ Horney (1937) redrafts this through her psychoanalytic concept of basic evil, termed as the failure of parents to meet the basic needs—food, safety, and love—of their offspring (Harris, 2016). Characteristics of basic evil include: parental neglect, abuse, broken promises, rejection, isolating offspring from others, and the preference of other children—notably, siblings—over another (Harris, 2016; Horney, 1937, p. 80; “Karen Horney,” 2014; Talia, 2008). Resultant of basic evil are basic anxiety and basic hostility (Horney, 1937, p. 89).

a distinctive continuum of diminutivity that is defined by self-consciousness and pessimism. This is noted when he and JR leave Neil's and at the dinner party. He appreciates and abhors the artifice of performative⁶ social order, shrugging off the inconsistency and the lack of integrity in a grand scheme of fickle, free enterprise such as when he and JR banter in a diner. However, he miscalculates values. His charm, employment, and overall tact in comparison to his unproductive and impulsive sister are emphasized at the dinner party. Yet, his supplanting identity with indemnity renders these qualities insubstantial. His fluctuations between finesse and failure are a result of not predisposed, but prescribed proclivities (Toman, 1961, p. 55, p. 56).

Guided by Toman's game framework, I read JR, the elder sister of a brother, as self-effacing yet noticeable (p. 83). She desires independence, but she does not challenge the competence or capital of others. However, JR's complacency is a fruitlessly attempt of tactical allowance towards an endgame. She is aware of social privileges, status quo, and how she can manoeuvre to esteem them and herself (p. 84, p. 85). This may account for why she is relaxed regardless of Colin's rants and tantrums about her declaredly airy behaviour: because she has internalized her strategy and seniority. She understands not just the relevance, but the importance of pleasure and will in identification—which inspire her to oppose rather than oblige prescribed roles of decorum and femininity. This is shown prominently when she scorns and eventually deescalates Colin's tantrums at a diner; when they are clothes shopping for his new outfit after deeming his regular clothes

⁶ I say “performative” in reference to Judith Butler’s (1999) concept of gender performativity in which gender is enacted and embodied in accordance to societal constraints which have a tendency to ascribe that gender is binary (p. 165)

unstylish; and again, when she quells his anxiety about literally aging into apathy at their family cabin.

While Colin may appear more secure and practical as an unadventurous [paid] intern, JR is the one who administers and evaluates aspects of their family affairs. She often ponders her positionality in seniority as the eldest sibling; notably, how her seniority distinguishes her as more mature than Colin for whom their siblingship has bred her protective instinct. This is articulated in how, of the two of them, she assumes authority and responsibility in interactions with others in scenes at the motel, diner, antique store, Neil's house, and dinner party.

After a long day of driving, Colin and JR decide to stay at a hotel for a rest stop. Before picking up JR's stuff at Neil's, they eat brunch at a diner. Throughout their stay at the hotel, the diner, at Neil's: the siblings argue about their competing versions of responsibility and respectability. Colin's sense is a broader one of social contract: the respects and values of peers and parents. Whereas, JR's sense is individualistic and selfish. Antagonism that involves her dreams of acclaim and approval unnerve her, but appear to catalyze a sense of conviction when it concerns defending or arguing with Colin.

At the diner, as JR prods Colin about the politics and values of conventionality, she maintains that the pursuit of her dreams is valid because there is pride in sheer perseverance. She notes that Colin's realism is resigned because his reflections betray less comfort than despondence. JR views her brother as rather dull and deferential. She finds his insistence on obliging systemic order to be ignoble, uncritical reverence because it is subservient—compared to her desperate quips for attention to amass an audience

which appease an objective. Therefore, she is decidedly superficial. She thinks Colin simply conforms to the aesthetic and behavioural standards of successful people in order to be acknowledged by them, then cites his professional and financial stability or feigns cynicism when his complacency fails to fulfill his personal or existential voids.

Despite Zoe's cohabitation with Colin, she is emotionally as well as sexually uninspired and unavailable. This is conveyed as Colin excitedly yet fruitlessly tries to endear her at the beginning of the film. She declines to even say goodbye to him once he leaves to aid JR. JR always snorts, rolls her eyes, and likens Zoe as "gross" whenever Colin mentions her. Later, Colin admits they may be mismatched as their relationship is monotonous, aromantic and asexual: a matter of convenience where they can simply reference one another as significant others for the sake of doing so.

This is not unlike JR's prior relationship with Neil, her ex-boyfriend and former journalism professor, who has thrown her out of his apartment. She later quietly concedes that the relationship was idealistic and impersonal. Even though they are both adults, there is a substantial age disparity. As a professor, he preyed upon her as a pupil and promised to aid her career as an anchor. She mistook these advances as genuine, inflating them through an ascription of interpersonal inferences. The realization of his predatory bearing strikes her only after she confronts him in retrieving her belongings from his apartment with Colin in tow, who awkwardly waits alongside his latest scholarly and sexual consort on a couch in another room. While JR challenges Neil, her former professor, in questioning his commitment to their relationship as well as his prestige, he insists she remain seated while he stands when they speak.

After their exit from Neil's, JR strolls stoically alongside Colin who hefts her boxed belongings. She strides silently and sullenly to her car as Colin makes a grim attempt at humour, "Why don't we go to the local soup kitchen and we can feed the hungry while listening to their sob stories? I think that's probably the next fun thing we can do after what just happened." The suggestion isn't serious, but illustrates how he views his relationship with JR; that he feels a need to establish how siblings are obliged to one another to justify helping JR, his suggestion here further affirms that the nature of their relationship—their siblingship—is exclusive. Moreover, how he resorts to quips about those more marginalized or impoverished as opposed to complimenting or reassuring JR of her own assets indicates his humility through hierachal thinking. His perception of positionality is self-conscious, literalizing the game, wherein he concedes that those more privileged in wealth and social networks are victors.

Colin quips: "That was even more fun than I anticipated. What's next on this exciting tour? Abortion clinic, you need an abortion? Rape factory? Children's wing of the local leper colony?" He cites less fortunate positionailities in an effort to hearten, then embolden he and JR as superior to offset their inferiority against Neil whose wealth and esteem—gleaned from academic and professional respectability—outclasses them. He reverts to invoking systemic victims to imply their conquest, if not survivorship; as if the class and health-wise misfortunes and marginalities subsidiary to theirs denotes they are somehow, someway triumphant in the game of social order. They are not winners, but are assured as nonetheless accomplished because they can luxuriate in a shared reality devoid of adversities like abortion, rape, leprosy, famine, and their associated stigmas that Colin so crudely references as comic relief.

Colin is still unsure of the meaning of sibling loyalty despite articulating it earlier in justifying to Zoe why he helps JR. His earlier claims of how their parents don't care about JR are even and convictive, provoked by her inquiries into how and why he fares so favourably within their familial order. Moreover, she discerns that he is feeble as his favour comes at the expense of his own happiness. He doesn't deny his displeasure at his choices and their family dynamic, but insists upon distinguishing himself as rational and dutiful rather than dejected. Clearly, JR's reading of him bothers him: the prospect of authenticity unsettles him he associates respectability and accomplishment with artifice and acquiesce, not solidarity or sentimentality. His sister unnerves him because she is unmoved by his respects or conventionality, and epitomizes agency through some contrarianism herself. The mere suggestion of assuming an different, autonomous outlook affirms the spiritless reality of his conformity. Any mention of his home, work, and family extols acquiesce as accord; but JR's converse pursuit affronts this accord. To him, her independence and romanticism lionize absurd principles, not respectability or responsibility. His perception of her as fickle accounts for why he earnestly maintains JR is unwanted and uncared for by their parents and now, Neil.

JR: "Why wouldn't they care about me?"

Colin: "Because [of] the fact you're living with some creepy, gross professor man nearly twice your age who threw you out. And, you dropped out of school; and now, you have nowhere to go; and you're picking me up...Yeah, he's such a great professor. That's why he got you all those jobs, all those wonderful auditions, all those pathetic events you were always going to with your dumb little headshot."

Colin begins to glare as JR shakes her head and rolls her eyes, unfazed and

unapologetic. “Yeah, you have so many jobs now because of him,” he continues. “That’s why nobody likes you: because you’re too *successful* to hang out with us. You’re so *successful*. I forget... I forget sometimes how *successful* you are, because that’s all we can ever talk about when we’re sitting around the dinner table at night: what a success you are. I just don’t understand. Of anyone you could’ve asked, why me? You must know like, two dozen people... Of anyone, I’m just shocked... I’m just shocked that you asked me. You know, you must have... Whatever... There must be a reason you asked me, and I don’t know what it is yet.”

JR: “Colin, I asked you because I trust you...with my stuff. And, mainly because you have nobody important to tell.”

This exchange portrays how their relationship is lateralized by siblingship through a distinct trust and understanding. Trust corresponds in how siblingship is likened as allyship which produces understanding. Neither sibling truly understands one another, but they also don’t understand themselves. Yet, they see themselves in another—which is why they cannot look away. Siblingship serves as an incontrovertible marker of not merely loyalty, but vanity. Narcissism inclines JR and Colin to unearth and encroach upon behavioral boundaries through jointly uniting against external forces (shared perceived threats) and mutual attraction (autoeroticism).

Colin is cognizant of the game-like dynamics of social order, but cannot fathom genuine loyalty because it does not abide conventional, transactional rationale. Conversely, JR is embittered and emboldened by the game which inhibits disclosure. However, their narcissism drives an incremental, internalized identification with Self and

desire. Identifications of siblingship occur within a site of Self, a deadlock, wherein they are biologized, socialized, and normalized. When it outclasses all other relationships, it also becomes a site of distinction. Therefore, this identification enables narcissism to fulfill emptiness with embodiment (Mitchell, 2013, p. 38; p. 103).

A Contractual Constellation of Siblingship

The solidarity distinct to siblingship is thematic to JR's ensuing encounters after she absently pockets her keys and therefore, strands Colin—still holding her boxed belongings—by her car. She pleads that he leave her alone as she wanders off, eventually wandering through the town visibly afflicted by the awkward, antagonistic exchange with Neil and the bitter conclusion of their relationship. Additionally, her sadness is augmented by background music set in a minor key which further effects she is meant to be doleful and downcast (Wattenberg, 2010).

The mood shifts when JR drifts into a diner, doodling on a napkin as she peruses a menu at the counter. She overhears a waitress checking in on another patron who is revealed to be a famed anchoress, Ms. Wagner. The latter's celebrity is accentuated as the waitress humbly requests an autograph that may be later displayed in the diner. Meanwhile, JR takes a deep breath, runs a hand through her hair to presumably even it, moves to straighten her blouse and skirt, and prepares to approach Ms. Wagner.

For me, the patricidal brothers from *Totem and Taboo* come to mind throughout JR's subsequent self-conscious sales pitch because she understands her relationship with Ms. Wagner through the lens of siblingship. She approaches Ms. Wagner not out of desperation, but as a fellow albeit 'aspiring' news anchor. Their likeness in industry

assumes some mutuality in positionality. Their likeness is a provision of an unwritten, unspoken, but implied social contract characterized by siblingship; a social contract established as tangential to survival by the bereaved brothers in *Totem and Taboo*.⁷ However, unlike the brothers in *Totem and Taboo*, it is a failed attempt at evoking a sibling relationship because Ms. Wagner ultimately rejects JR and doesn't identify with her.

Mitchell (2013) discerns how foundational familial orders are based on blood whilst social order is the symbiosis of understanding blood relationships (biological kinship) and constructs of social place (positionality) informed by patriarchy, primogeniture, and the distinctions drawn between private versus public spheres (p. xiii, p. xv). She goes on to state that the “social imaginary,” the values cultivated by social order, can only contemplate verticality whereas siblingship is characterized by laterality (p. xv). While Mitchell is concerned with trauma in the context of neuroses, I believe deidentification is also relevant to gender power relations resultant of the identifications in developmental envies and complexes.

Siblings undergo a distinct trauma that I believe is articulated by the brothers in *Totem and Taboo*. They are driven by a fear of being replaced and therefore, annihilated; and by the realization that they are not unique (p. 42). Their lateral and literal likeness

⁷ Sulloway (1996) notes how birth order affects siblings. He rationalizes that because firstborn siblings are accustomed to life with the full parental investment, they are likelier to become jealous of younger siblings whose existence forces them to now share parental investment (p. 70). Younger siblings who share parental investment from their beginnings—specifically, the onset of psychic development—never appreciate or experience this firstborn jealousy, even with the introduction of later born siblings (p. 70). Perhaps, these associations and temperaments that are consequential of birth order account for why siblingship serves as a metaphor for social order or social contracts; particularly in narratives which typecast elder siblings as reliant, capable conservatives in contrast to liberal, impulsive younger siblings who struggle to assert their strengths or independences (p. 14; p. 21).

[similitude in genotype, phenotype, and status distinct from parents and peers] nonetheless prompts them to extend their narcissism, self-reference, to formulate their own social group (p. 43, p. 47). However, the prospect of failing to be unique jeopardizes their self-esteem and prompts them to dislike shared similitude which displaces their identifications from Self to Other (p. 48). The presence of a sibling serves as a testament to the reproductive abilities of their parents and establishes the concept of seriality; whereas hate is a precondition for seriality due to the aversion of similitude, the perception that one loses identity if they share it (p. 51, p. 52, p. 75). Concurrently, there is a narcissistic motif as siblings are reimagined as duplicates of one another to supplement their sense of grandiosity (p. 64, p. 80). This narcissistic motif drove the brothers in *Totem and Taboo* to both unify against their father and recognize their reflective murderous capacities. Their desire for distinction was manifest through seriality which in turn prompted them to consider the annihilative instincts *amongst* one another and *for* one another.

Narcissism underlays JR's appraisal of Ms. Wagner as a comparative asset because she believes the latter is socially contractually obligated, if not motivated to aid her given their relative positionality. Whereas, antipathy prompts Ms. Wagner to snub JR as imitative and inconsequential. The snub shames JR to disassociate and shrink away because it is a denial of their perceived social contract; because she believes the social contract entitles her to Ms. Wagner's time, effort, and person. The exchange demonstrates the efficacy of Mitchell's distinction of the social imaginary's limitation to the vertical as opposed to the lateral. It posits the lateral as indeterminable since the social imaginary is founded upon verticality, the ascent and descent of ancestors and superior-

subordinate relations that underlay social networks, wherein loyalties of mere legion fail to abide ordered constructs of value. The social imaginary is operant upon a contractual system of mutual gains and losses, not reciprocal loyalties and identifications. Which is why likenesses of ascribed kinship are faulty: because social order thrives upon the revelation of privileges and faults, not the attrition of them. Verticality cites social contractual terms of protocol and power differentials, whilst laterality is defined by dialectical somatic and/or cerebral conversions of dependability and desire.

Moreover, JR and Ms. Wagner's exchange illustrates how figurative siblingship likened to social contract is disingenuous. Siblingship can only be figurative if it is emblematic of actual siblings; which is why it is not only marked by shared genotypes, phenotypes, and interests, but by shared loyalties and identifications cultivated by shared intimacies [interpersonality] or upbringings (Mitchell, 2013, p. 72; Perelberg, 2015, p. 12). Impersonality is inherent to frames of contract. Comparably, JR and Ms. Wagner lack any sense of loyalty to one another because they are *strangers*, whereas JR and Colin—actual siblings who articulate, associate, and reciprocate loyalties to one another—are simply *estranged*.

Identification and Play

Later that day, JR stumbles upon some old friends from high school: Kim and Julia. JR forces a smile, claiming that she is in town to connect with renowned news anchor Ms. Wagner for a potential job opportunity. Julia invites JR to a party she's hosting later that evening. Initially, JR declines saying her attendance would be awkward [given the context of their estrangement, the dissolution of their friendship]. Only after

Julia mentions Kim's cousin, a casting agent, will be present, does JR accept the invitation. Few words are spoken by the characters in this scene, but their silence says much. Estrangement does not disincline JR from lying about her personal and professional 'success' to Julia and Kim, while she discloses her lack thereof to Colin despite her familial estrangement. Her brother does not prod her to be forthcoming or inspire shame. Rather, trusting him compels her to confide in him. Kim and Julia however incline her to inflate her esteem. To them, she wants to be seen as an admirable, successful aspirant. She feigns indecision to ensure an appearance of independence through arrogance; as if her individuality is a matter of being nonchalant. Colin then becomes a means to distinguish herself as assuredly aloof and noncommittal. Her brother is an accessory to her lies to embellish her success.

JR: "Well, I mean, maybe. I don't know. I'm here with my brother so, I don't know if we'll have time, but..."

Kim: "You're here with Colin? You should totally come. Bring Colin. That'd be great."

JR: (rolling her eyes) "Uh, no. Really?"

Julia: "Is he still kind of fat?"

JR: "No, no. He's not fat anymore. He went on a bunch of... He tried a lot of diet and [it] finally worked for him."

Julia: "Is he cute?"

JR: "I guess. I mean, he's my brother, but... I guess, my *brother*..."

Here, JR's statement "he's my brother" is engendered by a desire to disclaim the possibility that siblingship might be accountable for shaping the sexual affinities of the

lateral subject. Significantly, the statement of siblingship is predicated on a shared responsibility and denial enacted through the construct of taboos. Belatedly, JR remembers leaving Colin locked out of her car and takes off with a flustered farewell. She seems proud and dignified when she finds him stretched out on the sidewalk, lounging, as he awaits her arrival with her boxes stacked by his feet. Colin doesn't blink nor does he think twice to decline going to Julia's party. Not even bothering to get up, he stares blankly as JR towers over him and tries to cajole his attendance. Only after JR says that Kim, revealed to be his childhood crush, will be present at the party does he rise. Even then, he is skeptical; but JR insists they will go as it is her car, her rules. She then proceeds to undermine his wardrobe as inelegant and outdated. Colin concedes to go on the condition that JR not buy him new clothes.

Yet, the very next scene finds the siblings sifting through racks at a clothing store. Specifically, JR sifting through the racks as Colin silently stares, follows, and models her selections. At a nearby mirror, her musings into her own reflection arouse reflections upon attachment. She asks Colin if she should grow out her bangs to favour a more conservative appearance, but wonders how casting directors and production personnel will know she likes "music and art; and like, cultural stuff" without "funky bangs."

When Colin complains the short sleeves of the shirt JR's selected for him exposes and chills his wrists, she quotes their father in saying that the person who exposes themselves is "the life of the party": a saying which contradicts how the siblings so earnestly maintain pretension. JR either avoids or deviates from tasks, trials and tribulations, which proves more ludicrous than lucrative to those around her given her lack of financial or professional success. She is established as a rash nomad whose

compulsion, pride, and superficiality demerit her; while Colin is cast as passive and principled given his obedience to his parents, steady employment, and self-deprecating musings. His conformity affirms his likelihood to ‘earn’ esteem through profitable enterprise. He is extant, but not expressive. As JR travels and leaves home to pursue journalism, Colin remains to tend the hearth. Her idealism and let-downs cultivate an absence that is arbitrary, but the permanence of her daughterhood and siblingship ensures a temporal presence. However, both her presence and absence are purportedly most felt by Colin [through reflections and loyalty] because he is only one who helps her.

The comparison and contrast between Colin and JR is crucial because, through lateral likeness in siblingship, uncertainties and instincts of annihilation may be narcissistically recognized. The concept of annihilation is psychoanalytically defined as the **death drive**, the drive to self-destruction and death to allow pleasure cessation (Smith, 2010, p. 4, p. 7, p. 110). Just as siblings process their commonality as a threat against their uniqueness or distinction, they understand their resemblance which inclines them to identify with one another nonetheless (Mitchell, 2013, p. 28). Just as sibling interactions are prime facilitators of Self-Other differentiation, the likeness of siblingship invokes a sense of one’s own death or absence in the context of annihilative insecurity and instinct (p. 28, p. 29). Notably, the transmutation of the death drive is required to condition sibling play and rivalry (p. 27).

While the eradication of the ego in deidentification and the relation of social order to psychic development via the superego precludes autoeroticism, narcissism enables the diffusion of the ego into a sibling (p. 104). Moreover, the preservation of life and species is psychically manifest through the **life drive**, which is sustained by narcissism as self-

love that is necessary albeit disruptive in excess (p. 106, p. 113). The subsumption of self and sexuality is further shown after JR and Colin exit the clothing store wherein a merry montage backgrounded with buoyant beats and up-tempo music follows them playfully prodding one another through the town, in and out of shops as well as down the streets. In spite of estrangement, as siblings, their likeness is innate. It is manifest in the delight depicted in addition to the prior references to loyalty and disclosure distinct to their siblingship, which articulates that the narcissism invoked by the lateral likeness of their siblingship reflects and bolsters their life drive (p. 113).

For me, the glee shown and shared through JR and Colin is reminiscent of *Totem and Taboo*. Their loyalty and likeness to one another resembles that of the patricidal brothers who ignobly renounce their desires to ensure social order; because mutual happiness in siblingship reflects not indulgence, but a survival pact wherein siblings thrive and survive when they unify. For *Totem and Taboo*'s brothers, unity mitigates the guilt of their patricide and eliminates any pretext of competitive claims or struggles for survival amongst one another. Further, the sibling relationship serves as a vehicle to satisfy a shared, sublimated wish for love; for self-love and to be loved by another person (p. 65, p. 76). Additionally, playtime is manifest in fantasy refuted by materialistic, performative, patriarchal, and primogenital institutions of social order (p. 93). JR and Colin playing together—frolicking through the city streets and shops—conveys how siblings not only serve as sites for play, but also reciprocate and reinforce fantasy.

Square Brother: How Colin Conforms

The playtime segment depicts the sociability and intimacy gleaned in siblingship as brother and sister revel in one another's company, cultivating and occupying a shared physical and psychic proximity (Edwards, 2006, p. 5). JR and Colin's playtime around town concludes at an antique store. The siblings tease through trinkets, but the segment focuses upon blackface figurines. Colin quips much like he did after leaving Neil's: in an attempt to glean some sense of superiority in his distinct privileges over marginalized peoples. Now, his primary focus is whiteness: "Do you know how rare these offensive figurines are?" JR asks, to which he chuckles: "I wish real Black people were as rare as this." This sentiment reveals how Colin's liberalism is hardly concerned with equality and ultimately operant upon white supremacy. I suggest that how he conveys such casual, unapologetic antiblackness signifies a youth that is twofold. In one respect, Colin's attempt at humour negates his prior claims of social consciousness and respectability as a white being overall (Dyer, 2008, p. 9). Through this sentiment, he sports his whiteness and conveys the reality of how "whiteness is a form of make-believe, a game played by children who refused to grow up, though the existential stakes are high for Black people" (Yancy, 2012, p. 33). The other aspect is that his sentiment reverses the roles of the siblings as JR, the eldest, now assumes a moral high ground. She ardently chides him for his antiblackness to which he simply shrugs and states his sexual preference is for white women as opposed to women of colour.

Moreover, this is another instance where he is contrasted against JR altogether. Like his identification with JR, his conservatism is projective; because his attempts at humour project that he is aware of his privileges, how particular odds are in his favour

and how institutional inequities benefit him as a white, cis, able-bodied, middle-class, straight man. His interest is conservative precisely because in these references, he strives to *conserve* active systems of oppression which enable his privilege and perceived superiority that he is unable to glean otherwise. Therefore, his conservatism and narcissism are not mutually exclusive. JR's narcissism is related to her identification with liberalism, which is noted in her distinction of herself and Colin as comparably and redeemably open-minded as opposed to their parents and classist peers later at their family cabin.

Despite this contrast, the game setup sees the latter, younger sibling [Colin] subtly relent to the former, elder [JR]. Colin constantly abides JR's requests: helping her move from Neil's; driving for the entire commute; agreeing to attending Julia's party; relenting to JR's insistence that he purchase and wear new clothes. His initial attempts—or rather, declarations—to distinguish himself as more responsible, strong, and reasoned contradict his acquiescence to his sister's every whim. Given his condescension and conformity, Colin seems sanctimonious and spineless. He argues against JR's suggestion of new clothes not out of attachment to his current clothes, but because he believes it would be pretentious to assume a new wardrobe. His sentiment goes on to complement a critical consideration of capitalism to quality of life, as he feels gratification from JR's compliments upon seeing his new outfit. Dismissing JR's queries into her appearance, social states of affairs, and speculations into the meaning of life with "I don't care" coupled with his penchant for ignoring questions altogether, Colin articulates that he is uninterested in the merit or lack thereof of conventions. Akin to Toman's (1961) likeness

of a younger brother of an older sister, Colin aspires to be more accepted than respected (p. 53).

However, Colin assumes apathy in lieu of misery or mirth since his conservatism and conformity cultivate a degree of nihilism. His humourless attempts at humour, modes to achieve confidence at the expense of marginalized positionalities, and indifference to populism articulate that he is aware of the artifice—via omissions and repressions—that underlays systems and orders. He does not dispute JR’s sense of play or vigour. He disdains her overall indulgence as a poor measure of her worth because he is cognizant of the social status [or lack thereof] associated with her present priority and positionality. Furthermore, his disdain for the party itself and others is relevant to superficial status ideations. His contempt is conveyed as he bites his tongue against domineering men who antagonize him; and in conversation with another guest who scorns whomever has brought the pineapple he carves in a corner (unbeknownst to her, he is the one who brought the pineapple). Silently, he begrudges the loud and crude guests, men whose aggressions dwarf his muted masculinity.

Later, he casts a slight glance to the woman who patronizes him as he pares his pineapple.

Woman: “Yeah, who’s the idiot who brought that anyway?”

Colin: “Pineapple is a sign of hospitality so, maybe it’s not such an idiot who brought this after al. Perhaps, the person who provided this just wanted everyone at the party to have a nice, nutritious snack. I’ve also heard that if a man eats a lot of pineapple, it will make his ejaculate taste delicious.”

Woman: "Ugh, why are you telling me this?"

Colin: "I don't know. I figured maybe I could eat this entire thing and we can all see what happens."

Colin's attempt at wit here is more pointed as his objective is not to appeal, but to unnerve. The pineapple symbolizes his propensity for familial, blood affinities that are substantive of emotion whereas the materiality declared by avarice and the lavish mise-en-scène convey institutional, impersonal ideals of decorum. In general, his characterization inclines me to discern that sincerity is qualifiable, whereas affluence is concerned with being quantifiable; and will therefore be insatiable given the insecurity and imitability of psychic quandaries underlain by traumatic complexes, envies, and basic evil. The conception of his privilege over other marginalities parallels his disaffection of male privilege wherein he himself is more accommodative than androcentric and therefore, more susceptible to be demoralized by oppressive or officious men. Moreover, his reticence despite their antagonism may indicate he is aware of his susceptibility whereas his disinterest in diplomacy and fashion compounds that awareness. Just as he shrugs into his new clothes earlier at the clothing store, he shrugs against derision now. The show of mocking him and all else does not faze him, because he is antipathic to materialistic and misogynistic measures of worth. This is another site of estrangement for he and JR because, like the elites—oligarchs, nepotists, rich folks—in attendance, JR clamours for costumed ideals of happiness and success.

Colin's provocative pineapple cracks are spurred by a desire to be acknowledged and gain the attention of others. His alignment in the game, being the youngest brother of an elder sister, makes him ambivalent of the amount of authority he can exercise. He is

subordinate to the authority of his sister, yet conscious of his male privilege and tries to deploy it to his advantage (Toman, 1961, p. 184). He is often languid, inept, and awkward amongst others; keen to being *taken care of* by women rather than *caring himself* (p. 53, p. 182). Moreover, he is likelier to have been babied or doted upon as the youngest in his family to which he might have taken advantage of and became spoiled by his parental and sibling superiors (p. 182, p. 186). Psychically, that spoilation [i.e. spoiled child] is literal and figurative as the failure to conceive a sense of competition, risk, or damage control hinders interpersonal and social development as well as self-concept. Colin's constant acquiescence to convention, conservativity, and prejudice prevent him from discerning between tact and timidity, as well as taking pride in his appearance or appreciating notions of appearances (p. 186). He is simply marked by his avowal of acknowledgement and approval, because authorities and conformity serve to buffer him against hardships (p. 189). It is in this particular construction that I see the limits of psychoanalytic theory; because while we can account for his narcissism as a younger brother, there isn't enough in the realm of psychoanalytic theory to critically consider his white, male, middle-class privilege. This instance of casual antiblackness and sexism enables me to think about his behaviour psychoanalytically in terms of narcissism, but it lacks the capacity to interrogate structural relations and social locations that we find in sociology, critical race theory, or feminist theory.

Twisted Sister: How JR Conflicts with Norms

Narcissism is *shared* between JR and Colin, but I will explain that its *inversion* can be understood by their contrast. Colin wants to be acknowledged and he pursues this desire through acquiescence and contempt. JR strives to be in the spotlight; not just

acknowledged, but *emphasized*. She espouses ideals of autonomy, positivity, and freedom. Her flaw, in my reading, is that she is unable to treasure, transmute, or translate abstract parameters of artistic integrity. Consequently, she conflates visibility, connectivity, and marketability with quality, which disrupts her resolve to be independent, inimitable, and innovative; and is thereby unable to fully grasp or abscond the artifice within social hierarchies. Her fruitless forays into the esteem of others cast her as disingenuous and dramatic rather than successful.

In contrast, Colin is complacent to the guests' statements in the scene. He muses within the macrocosm. Later, alone with JR, he notes that privileges of wealth and value are either inherited by greedy elites or 'earned' by prospering within a labour class. I think voicing this amongst the group at the party would force the acknowledgement of bigotry and bias. He remains silent amongst the guests, perhaps because he lacks the will or interest to disrupt the group dynamic of the party. The aggressive antics of the other men at the party could have exhausted him and made him feel weak. Ultimately, JR is the one who confronts these other men, calling them out in his defence. His characterization conveys the inefficacy of insight if it is idle or impassive.

In contrast, the portrayal of JR inclines me to think of how much capitalism influences reified social orders. Economically, the flaws of capitalism are identifiable and moreover classifiable: its inexorable predisposition to exploit the poor and otherwise marginalized to cultivate haves and have-nots; and its foundation and affordance of power in the hands of few. Narcissism yields the psychic need and nature of distinction, which is why no system works in its pure form. The imbalance and overall imperfection of the psyche—psychic inconsistency, impulsivity, and indulgence; in addition to basic

evil, basic hostility, and basic anxiety—requires that transgressions are punished and that virtues are rewarded.

The State and its overarching systems serve to contextualize the realities they construct, which is why social orders of patriarchy and primogeniture positively correlate to occupational and sectorial segregation amongst genders (Williams, 1989, p. 3). While the party sees Colin mostly resigned to reticence and obscurity, JR impudently intersperses herself wherever she can. Her clumsy attempts to charm those around her are exacerbated because they are made possible by her ditching Colin, who she initially promised she would not leave alone. JR abandons her brother, attempting to endear wealthy elites for crumbs—tidbits of references, contacts for her career, general applause—who nonetheless walk away to luxuriate in their own full meals; even after noting Ms. Wagner who literally proceeds to enjoy her own meal after snubbing her prior. Although the latter exchange seems to incline JR to consider that she has finite resources—“...I realized that I’m practically homeless so, I figured what’s the rush?”—she chooses to gamble what little she has on people [more privileged than her], an industry, an industry maintained by said people, who are apathetic to her professional and personal struggles.

Despite her contentions against Colin’s conformism, JR’s aspirations of a news anchor career credulous entitlement in the sense of capricious social contracts illustrate she has gravitated towards a bitter culture of egoism and expenditure. This is depicted in her and Colin’s sharp contrast to the established elites and indulgent inheritants who surround them at the party, and whose collective opinion is that that financial and occupational success (as opposed to honesty, equality, or affection) determine life

meanings. That JR so intently strives to be accepted by these guests is a testament to the reality of how professionals are infused with authority; how society tends to default to professionals because it ascribes power and respects to them based on their administrative specialties. JR's evident isolation and unease amongst them—seen in her constant failures to impress, stammering, and visible tension in her movements—furthers the futility of *perceived* siblingship within social contracts reminiscent of her exchange with Ms. Wagner. JR's characterization and context conveys a literal lack of loyalty, the futility of feigned favours even to one's psychic detriment. This was most evident to me when she subsequently scorns Colin in an effort of comic relief to elicit acceptance. She amasses a small crowd of guests to watch her news anchor impression only to botch the performance, sputtering, throwing up her hands to state that it [anchoring] is harder than it looks. Once the unimpressed crowd disperses, Colin approaches her to ask if they can leave. She refuses. They proceed to argue before they are interrupted by Kim and other guests.

Kim (eyeing Colin) "Who's your friend?"

JR: "Colin."

Colin: "Hi."

Kim: "I didn't even recognize you."

Colin: "You've known me since I was six?"

Kim: "Yeah, but you used to be so... I mean, you look so different now."

Colin: "Do I? I didn't used to have this drink spilled all over me."

JR: “You know, Colin used to have the biggest crushes on you guys growing up. I don’t know if you knew that. Do you remember in tenth grade when we took those photos in our bathing suits? He saved *all* of them, even the ones of me. Isn’t that kind of weird?”

No one seems to think so, notably Kim and another woman who assure Colin they are flattered to JR’s chagrin. Colin counters with a jab of his own, stating that JR was illiterate until she was ten and that he had to teach her to read even though he was younger. She grumbles and excuses herself as the crowd erupts with laughter. The exchange shows that yet again, JR opts to merely *attempt* to appease those with more affluence even at her own or Colin’s expense: her brother, her only ally.

The film cuts to an unspecified period of time later, where JR is visibly bored and sulks as she listens to another guest gush about their wealthy spouse and children. She stares with a slight scowl and forces a smile when the guest laughs until Colin creeps up on her, asking if they can talk.

JR: “This is way less fun than I thought it was going to be.”

Colin: “You think I have a shot at Kim tonight? I think things are going well with us.”

JR pauses, then recovers to affirm Colin’s convictions and encourages him to continue. This development casts JR as the insistent albeit caring and dutiful older sister of a brother Toman (1961) defines in his game: simultaneously maladroit and wary (p. 92). There is a flicker of panic in her eyes that Colin misses as his briefly wander elsewhere, but she recovers to reassure him that his—and therefore, *their*—presence will be fruitful. She smiles and states that his chance with Kim is the “only good thing” she

thinks will come of this party. Their roles seem somewhat reversed here as Colin is now aspiring, expectant, even a little impractical as he humours the prospect of his and Kim's sudden, certain affinity; while JR stiffens, pallid and pensive, indulging her brother at her own expense.

The next shot centers JR amidst a seated crowd gathered in what looks like a living room, where another guest describes her as [looking] "bohemian" and wonders how she can get a job in contrast to those who might appear conservative. The query effects elitism quite frankly as there is nothing remotely "bohemian" about JR in comparison to the other attendees. She models a polka dot dress whilst wearing her hair down, and other women sport a similar attire. Kim even wears a cap and jeans. This "bohemian" likeness can be conclusive as a matter of classism, given that JR hasn't divulged her profession or salary insofar as she has spent most of the party stressing her aspirations of being a news anchor, as well as having a manager [who she has concocted] seeking jobs on her behalf.

Before JR can address her perceived "bohemian" impression, another guest comments that professionalism entails not only gainful employment, but: "finding a job that matters, always working towards being the best in your field, making good career choices." This prompts this guest to declare his distinction as a "soon-to-be senior" accountant of the biggest telecommunications firm in the city. With a wink at Colin, Kim then announces she is the assistant to the head of client management at an artists union. Julia says she works at a temp agency to which JR attempts to claim some solidarity as a former temp, only for Julia to haughtily clarify: "No, no, I'm not a temp. That's sort of ridiculous. I work *for* the temp agency. I place people in positions."

Another guest prods JR, asking how she has time to do her “little auditions”—which leads the other guests to chuckle as they state it would be pathetic if she were simply waiting for feedback from casters, hoping for some opportune moment or figure to pluck her out of obscurity, instead of having an actual job. Colin says nothing, while JR stutters and eventually blurts out that [the lie] she is a nurse. “Well, there you go,” another guest toasts. “For a minute there, we thought you didn’t do anything.” The siblings exchange glances as the crowd concedes that nursing is such a distinguished and noble profession and begins to applaud.

Later, the guest who initially called JR “bohemian” approaches her to apologize, claiming that they wouldn’t have “put her on the spot” had they known she was a nurse: “You and *that guy* just seemed so uncomfortable.”

JR: “You mean my brother?”

Guest: (staring) “*Brother?*”

However, the befuddled look frozen on the guest’s face upon realizing that JR and Colin are siblings doesn’t depersonalize their siblingship to me. It instead resituates their exclusive likeness as both distinctive rivals and allies; and their likeness is not merely manifest, but mutual. The guest distinguishes them as concurrent, complementary objects and notes their discomfort as not only odd, but reciprocal. The recognition of their ‘discomfort’ articulates how inversion is operant within their siblingship altogether; how they are defined as a pair by both incongruity and intimacy due to a distinction of not only being, but appearing to feel *out of place*. Rather, that siblingship is adventitious as *another place*, a place of its own, and that symbiosis characterizes its legion. Discomfort is thematic of this: that JR concedes her comfort, prolonging her stay at this dreadful

party, for Colin given his newfound romantic prospect with Kim. While Colin neglects his comfort overall in attending the party to oblige her conveys loyalty; loyalty that is vindicated simply by siblingship.

Sibling Solidarity

As the party wears on, JR shrinks into a completely different person than the brazen hopeful who strove for the spotlight when she first arrived. She is now moping, muted amongst guests. When Julia asks if JR and Colin are staying for only one night, she says they are, under the guise of likening his narrative to hers. JR says she's helping Colin move his things from an ex with whom he cohabitated, claiming that she took him to this party because he was "down in the dumps."

Julia: "That was really sweet of you. I don't think I'd ever do that for my brother."

JR: "Yeah, neither would I."

The exchange suggests that JR and Colin have a notably intimate siblingship wherein they expend labour and likeness upon one another, whereas Julia cannot see herself doing the same. Perhaps this may serve to further illustrate the impersonality underlain in aristocratic affinities, as Julia previously conveyed her wealth as a matter of social and material capital through connectivity amongst the party guests and her professional affluence. Like other guests, she shares the sentiment that success is rather quantifiable than qualifiable; an objective that is amassive, not sentimental. JR recognizes that wealth is relative, which is why she endeavours to effect an elite esteem. Her efforts are not palatable to the partygoers because they fathom purpose as a matter of profit, not

perseverance. She lacks the privilege of such capital as Julia's and the other guests' whose abundance in stock and affluence have referenced them to prosperous jobs and selective social circles. Unlike Julia, JR also lacks confidence as she is staggeringly self-conscious to the point of fabricating almost every facet of her life for the sake of appearances.

In the game, JR's lack thereof [in contrast to Julia and others] accounts for stronger loyalties to her sibling. Her lack of privileges and therefore, prospects may make for an abundance of aversion and anxiety. The social and biological bindings of siblings are institutional (Edwards, 2006, p. 5). Siblingship enables an identification that is constant, immutable, and irrefutable. Moreover, a sibling affords an unremitting outlet upon which one may externalize and engage to control. The legion of siblingship is consequently not a choice, but a compulsion; a means to amend insecurity, loneliness, and imperfection through inverting cerebral and somatic modules when one is actively or instinctively impoverished (Toman, 1961, p. 92; Volkan & Ast, 2014, p. 90). However, psychic elements cultivated by socialization and positionality determine the clemency or extremity of that legion (Volkan & Ast, 2014, p. 90). To one another, JR and Colin express attachment through candour and sympathy. Their siblingship is cited [by them to others and themselves] as the constancy through which they justify their likeness and loyalty.

Conversely, I propose that although someone with such wealth like Julia may be less inclined to revel or reference that legion upon which they are less reliant given their profuse resources, their legion nonetheless exists albeit in a lesser capacity; which is suggested in JR's muttered admission—"Neither would I"—even if it is inaudible to

others. Her exasperated, eschewed disclosure reinforces the juxtaposition of her and Julia as well as the other guests. She sounds sullen and self-conscious, crestfallen over the false pretense and begrudging her privation and fruitless labours which constrain her to Colin as her one and only likeness.

Meanwhile, Colin seems content with Kim. He embarks upon a beer run he was bullied into by the men by whom he was previously antagonized. Upon his return, he is tripped and falls head first to his antagonists' amusement. JR tends to him, admonishing the men as "assholes" as she helps him to his feet and leads him to a quiet room. She recovers, then applies a cool handkerchief to his head to which he deadpans: "Should I disrobe for the remainder of my physical?"

JR: (chuckling) "Yeah, sure. Let 'Nurse JR' go and get you a paper robe."

The sight of his pained grasp prompts her to apologize for the trip which she bemoans has been a "nightmare."

Colin: "No, it's no problem. I'm having a great time."

JR: (frowning) "It's definitely not as cathartic as I thought it was going to be."

Colin: "I think it's pretty nice."

JR: "Yeah, right."

Kim: (in the doorway) "Am I interrupting something?"

The siblings exchange quizzical glances. Colin blanches as JR snickers "No" and stands to leave, saying she'll be right back. Upon her exit, Kim offers Colin a drink. The

scene then goes black, then cuts to a shot of Colin and Kim heatedly kissing. His hands wander while hers remain still, one of which clutches her wineglass.

Colin: "I've wanted to do that since I was eleven."

Kim: "Mmm... I've been wanting to do that since you walked in the door this evening."

Kim flirts rather fickly noting that she has registered Colin as a worthy sexual prospect only tonight where he discloses a longtime unrequited crush. The disparity further translates in terms of positionality as JR walks in and nervously chuckles.

JR: "What's going on in here?"

Kim: "Nothing."

Colin: "We were just making out. But, we're finished now."

JR: "Thanks, Kim. My brother really needed that."

In response, Kim derides JR's "stupid weathergirl career" and retorts that people only befriended her as children for the trampoline in their backyard. The remark elicits a "fuck you" from Colin who places a hand on JR's shoulder, saying he intends to throw up before they leave. Finding the bathroom occupied, he hurls upon the shirt of one of his antagonists.

These scenes [of the exchange between Kim, JR, and Colin; and the latter subsequently vomiting upon one of his antagonists nearby] are powerful because they illustrate the figurative and literal, lateral likeness between JR and Colin. The shots of the siblings standing alongside each other, resigned but resolved, coyly accentuate the contrast of just them against everyone else. Colin's eyes are alight as she sports a slight

smirk, denoting he has gleaned some satisfaction in finding some sexual fruition from his longtime crush, despite however tangential it was to the party's pretensions and politics. Yet, he is also disillusioned from any meaningful interpersonal prospects with he and Kim given her demotion of their budding, however brief affinity. Meanwhile, JR is content to depreciate Kim as Colin's consort: less intimate or otherwise important than insubstantial. As she feigns gratitude, she subverts artifice as spite as opposed to positing it as decorum. Her smirk is more noticeable than Colin's, perhaps pronounced by the airy tone she assumes. The outburst disparaging JR's news anchor career or lack thereof doesn't faze her, but rather affirms her composure. Leaning slightly to Colin, empowered by her effrontery, she simply snorts at Kim.

Whereas Kim references the privileged positionalities of herself and others—specifically, former friends of JR—to assert the siblings are inferior, the distinction ceases to be of significance because their likeness and legion proves priceless. The exclusivity of the sibling bond is literally pictured as JR and Colin stand side by side, exchanging embittered albeit enlightened glances. The sight of JR and Colin, proud and poised together, conveys they have made a conscious choice and effort of loyalty to one another; an accord that is inverted and internalized by them both, against elite antagonists. The precarious thread of kinship that bound them to oblige one another now knots as their aversions and affinity, prior and present to this party, consolidate their distinction as outsiders: pawns, players, even paupers to those outside of their sibling bond. Only united do they function as insiders privy to a likeness that is exclusively their own. Therefore, their distinction renders the solidarity and superiority cited by Kim as

pretentious and provisional. In addition to the ensuing scene where Colin hurls upon one of his tormenters, their distinction also premises the emancipatory exit from the party.

Inverted Narcissists, Opposites Attract⁸

Inverted narcissism is conveyed in Colin and JR's exit from the party as they exchange chuckles and banter in the spirit of gleaning triumph from sheer defiance. With a snort, Colin thanks JR for bringing him to the party as he likens it as "cathartic." He then tosses his bagged new clothes—the same clothes JR insisted he purchase and wear—over his shoulder to the premises: "Can we drive home now?" The scene is then intercut with shots of the highway and the siblings in dialogue in the aftermath of their [party] exit. JR assesses, then asserts that Colin is too drunk to make the commute. He contends that he doesn't "want to spend the night in another hotel," and JR proposes they alternatively spend the night at their grandparents' cabin. When Colin argues it is too far away, JR reasons that it is in fact closer as she and Neil would go there "all the time."

Reading JR's behaviour through the lens of psychoanalytic theory suggests that she resorts to disassociation and splitting as defensive intrapsychic mechanisms. Her actions could imply a lack of object constancy on the grounds of simultaneous dual operant realities: that of the pretentious, purposeful news anchor who awaits casting; and that of the failure who is impoverished financially, socially, and family-wise because

⁸ Projective identification is involved in **inverted narcissism**, which is experienced vicariously precisely because of projection and identification. But, it is not just a matter of transference (re: projection) or seeing oneself in another (re: identification). I refer to inverted narcissism because it is derived as a shared sense of narcissism. Notably, inverted narcissists depend exclusively upon other narcissists for gratification. This is a significant distinction to make precisely because to *share* narcissism, one must *possess* narcissism. The shared narcissism within siblingship is possible because it is operant upon a distribution amongst *narcissists*.

those around her deign her as insolent and indistinct.⁹ As a reaction formation, she purports to be nonchalant and nonplussed; but beneath, she is self-conscious and lost. Her being and presence are the only things she can speak to. Her illusive personality and performativity become means to mitigate some sense of control. She exercises autonomy by controlling with whom she engages or disengages; cultivating a disposition of a nomad of sorts as she constantly comes and goes, but never commits to stay nor elucidate an end goal or destination (p. 24).

In the context of gender, this nomadism relates to the trope of women who travel as a means to claim traditionally ascribed masculine privileges of literal and figurative mobility wherein “tropes of travel address women’s struggle to practice the prerogatives of experience” beyond the attribution of domesticity or immobile interpersonality to women in accordance with primogenital, patriarchal social order (Forer & Still, 1976, p. 5; Mitchell, 2013, p. 11; Wesley, 1999, p. 37, p. 38). JR as traveller, tourist, or *indefinite itinerant* is akin to the game of social and psychic order proposed by Toman (1961) since she is not simply the *eldest daughter*, but distinctly the *eldest sibling*. Forer and Still (1976) note that the eldest offspring will liken themselves more with their father after the arrival of a younger sibling who requires the mother’s attention (p. 10). They also note that female progeny who are eldest will consequently “develop a desire for intellectual achievement rather than the domestic pursuits associated with her mother” and that “conflict may result from this shift” due to its opposition of the patriarchal social order that prescribes gender roles of passivity and

⁹ Attachment appeases the need for **object constancy**, an enduring emotional investment marked by the ability to understand an object is unchanging despite different conditions or views of it (Bremner, Slater, & Johnson, 2015, p. 8; Sophian & Yengo, 1985; p. 932).

caregiving assigned to women (p. 10, p. 147, p. 151). For women, patriarchy and primogeniture sanctify stagnancy in a literal and figurative sense: likening them to home and hearth, in addition to establishing and enduring respectability politics that censure their autonomy (Mitchell, 2013, p. 11).

However, it is through seniority *and* sorority that JR wields dominance over Colin. That dominance is narcissistically inverted as it correlates to Colin's positionality as the youngest, whose youth is distinctive of a prolonged and empty neonate self that seeks fulfillment through identification with others who seem full of themselves (Mitchell, 2013, p. 13). His likeness to JR is obvious, but obstinate. Most significantly, it is impassioned because his identification with her is characterized by a loss of ego boundaries and reality distortion (Freud, 1988, p. 34). The accord and affinity he demonstrates for JR is something she recognizes: a recognition which is subconscious since she appears irrational and inarticulate to herself as well as Colin, who initially expresses he is dumbfounded she would ask him of all people for help. In helping her, he makes a conscious choice to transgress his own boundaries: his predilections and peripheries of acquiesce for and approval from his parents and Zoe; yielding to JR's insistence they attend the party and that he buy new, pretentious clothes that betray his current, comfortable wardrobe.

Against JR's quest for acclaim and adventure, Colin expresses contempt then ambivalence. Finally, he expresses regret once they settle into the cabin. The passion he finds in legion inspires him to critically reflect on his life, wondering if he has simply wasted it since he is admittedly unhappy with Zoe and his job. This admission follows a somewhat ambiguous opening where he had knocked before entering the room to which

JR replies that he needn't have knocked since it's just the two of them. Ambiguity is articulated as JR implies their kinship legitimates them to be intimate and immodest, uninhibited despite their various states of disarray or dishabille, further distinct and exclusive from the outset of peers or unrelated acquaintances. The intimacy and immodesty seems unorthodox because they are of the opposite sex and would traditionally be segregated and subject to sexual as well as gender division despite their kinship (Mitchell, 2013, p. 23; Kluger, 2011, p. 217, p. 220).

Nonetheless, JR appears comfortably lain out on what appears to be a couch as Colin sits by her feet. They quietly contend over his awkward queries of, "Can I put something to you?" as opposed to "Can I ask you something?" which is reminiscent of their earlier banality and bickering that I found analogous to the trope of sibling rivalry. Colin's awkward expression relates tension as anxiety replaces his characteristic capitulation and concurrence, and coincidental charisma. This is climatic as it serves as a summation for the siblings who have coursed onscreen: the elder sister who is impatient but well-intentioned and moderately active; and the younger brother who tries to broach his concerns with affection, but doesn't know how. After their brief squabble, Colin doubts his disclosure and hesitates. JR prods him to continue, coaxing out his query, with a soft nudge of her knee. He asks if she likens him at all to the contemptible guests at the party and confesses he couldn't stand if anyone looked at him the way she looked at them: "with such hatred."

"You annoy me," JR chuckles. "But, I could never look at you like *that*. Those people are losers."

Colin goes on to muse that he feels pressure to have “an interesting, exciting, or unpredictable life,” to which JR replies that she realizes having an unpredictable life is “sort of overrated.” Yet, this elicits an admission that he found what she had told him at the diner dispiriting—how she had likened his life, or rather *life choice* as “pathetic”—because of his perceived prospective, allusive likeness to the partygoers who admired productivity and prosperity entirely in terms of hierarchy and capitalism. Again, he states that couldn’t bear if she ever looked at him like that.

JR: “I could never look at you like that. Those people are fails. *We’re* special. They’re like...normal. Wait, but you wanted to make out with Kim though, right?”

Colin: “Yeah. Well, I mean, I had to. I owed it to myself, my younger self.”

JR: “I guess. I wonder what she’s doing now. Do you think she hates us?”

Colin: “I don’t know, probably.”

From her, the repeated distinction of “we”—her and Colin—and “them”—the partygoers, anyone else—discerns the siblings as superior. JR embarks on a tangent about sleep, specifically how odd it is that everyone sleeps at night; how every lifeform, except sharks, is diurnal. However, her musings evoke the reality that life does not cease with slumber; that the autonomic activities in the physiology of each species, including sharks, proceed despite the “sympathicotonic activities with restrain them” (Tridon, 1999, p. 185). Moreover, it inclines me to consider how JR herself parallels a sleeper in her waking state—awake and dreaming—insomuch as performativity is operant upon

stringent moral, aesthetic spectrums that either repudiate or force us to moderate our innermost desires. “Zoe’s probably asleep now,” Colin offers.

Like Colin, the subject of sleep makes me think of how one could parallel the unconscious with consciousness: the psychic and social motives that underlay our affinities and aversions, compared to the wakeful cognizance of one’s self-actualization. He articulates his dissatisfaction with his life given his job and Zoe, the latter with whom he likens their relationship as “so fucked.” They haven’t had sex in months, he admits. Shaking his head, he muses: “I’m sure with the way things are going, I’m going to be on this suburban marriage wagon any day now. Male-pattern baldness, varicose veins...” When Colin moves to lay down to JR, the shift entangling their legs, she assures him he won’t end up as some suburbanite cliché or caricature, “I’ll come whisk you and your stupid—err, precious gargoyles away before I’d ever let that happen.” The “gargoyles” she refers to are his collected gargoyle figurines that Zoe doesn’t permit him to display in their room. “I see you like, twice a year,” he mutters. “I’d be... I’d be completely a lost cause before you ever got me.”

The way he says this is somewhat resentful, yet the narrative has established that their parents are the ones who endeavour to keep JR at a distance. She may exercise her autonomy through her travels, journalism, and the aspiration of being a news anchor; but she doesn’t choose to be excluded from family events or decisions. This is conveyed earlier when she discovers a flyer for a late aunt’s funeral service: a funeral she wasn’t informed of or invited to. “No,” she assures. “Just call me and I’ll whisk you away to my—whatever my new mentor/suitor is. We can live in their basement.” “It’s way too late for me,” Colin grumbles. “I’m trapped, and I floated away to sea.”

JR asks Colin what he would do if he could choose, and he answers that he had taught of teaching. Notably, she recalls word-for-word how he'd disparaged teaching, stating that, "teaching is allowing others to fail while spinning your own wheels." She admits that she personally considered teaching, but he talked her out of it. This admission establishes that JR actually listens to and is influenced by Colin's opinions; which nullifies his prior concerns about her judging him as akin to the people at Julia's party. His sister is keen to his input and values him to heed it, whereas he appreciates and respects her feedback and friendship as he worries she may hate him for his contempt and conventionality. The siblings care not only for one another's [positive] judgments, but for one another. Unlike everyone else in their lives, it seems. Their parents support Colin because he defers to their codes of respectability and productivity, working at a job he dislikes that offers him a staid, salaried life course with a single partner. In contrast, they discredit and seem to have disowned JR for deviating from this lacklustre course. The siblings' significant others are not affectionate, but are, rather, apathetic and even antagonistic the 'friends' they encounter at Julia's are overindulged, arrogant, and superficial.

"You're not qualified to teach," Colin pokes. "You're barely qualified to learn." JR asks if teaching would truly offer him advancement, if he could do anything meaningful in the profession; and Colin jokes he could have sex with his students and promise them jobs. The pun parallels JR and Neil's former relationship deliberately. The likeness is not lost on her as she chuckles.

JR: "No, but... I guess I could imagine you though."

Colin: "What, fucking my students? Thanks."

JR: "Yeah, having sex with your students. I mean, just the way you were with Kim tonight. I could just imagine all the creepy, perverse stuff that you're capable that I didn't think before."

Colin: "You don't know the half of it."

The revelation conveys that JR possesses a newfound respect as well as awareness for Colin: being privy to he and Kim's proclivity at the party has afforded her insight into her brother as a sexual object as well as sexual receptacle. The siblings sound flirtatious as JR admits she had never thought Colin capable of "creepy, perverse stuff" in respect to sensuality and Colin goads her to marvel into a *whole* she knows not *half of*.

"Remember what I was saying earlier about Mom's vibrator?" she asks. "Or, I started to tell you and then you cut me off at the store?" Admittedly, I had to rewind to find the remark she's referring to, which was in the antique store. I missed it initially because she only manages to ask him if he'd ever found "any weird sex things" when they were "growing up" as a phallic shaped spindle catches her eye. Colin never answers, instead saying that he might purchase an antique bedpan to which she asks if he heard her [question]. He then rolls his eyes and says he did, but is choosing to ignore her.

Now, JR mentions and expounds upon the remark as relevant to a sex toy of their mother's. Colin laments this, as his own awareness of his parents as sexual objects and sexual receptacles repulses him—which is a noteworthy contrast to JR's impartiality to their parents as sexual beings, that may be attributed to her status as the eldest. Her seniority would've enabled her to see her mother gestate and perhaps breastfeed her younger sibling, which would mark an exigent bodily moment characterized by an

association with maternity to the womb as well as a fear of displacement (Mitchell, 2013, p. 10, p. 69, p. 141). A narcissistic break occurs in the elder who fears they may be displaced by new offspring, only to identify with that offspring as a fellow lateral subject (p. 69). The elder fears displacement rather than merely replacement, because of their identification; because in their lateral likeness, they presume the inexorable offspring will be exactly like them thereby eliminating their distinction or uniqueness, and consequently the need for their existence in the logic of singularity as opposed to multiplicity [as the elder thinks there cannot be two or multiples of themselves] (p. 69). Only later does the elder grasp the reality of seriality, how the sibling is not a clone of them but distinct in their personality and visuality as well as similar as a lateral subject (p. 76). The younger conceives of their elder as not a clone, but a lateral subject from which they must discern themselves as unique, superior, or equal (p. 80, p. 142). Therein locates the need for siblings to demarcate themselves from one another lest they be relegated as indistinct and therefore insubstantial (p. 80).

Similar to her newfound consideration of Colin upon seeing him with Kim, bearing witness to the gestation and lactation of their mother bestowed by the conception and arrival of a younger sibling may account for why JR has amended and reconciled the reality of her mother's sexuality. She admits that after finding her mother's sex toy that she was compelled to smell it, marvelling that it lacked a scent, proposing that unscented female genitalia may be genetic and favourable for Colin's future daughters. "Don't tell me that a scent-free vagina is a great thing like I don't already know that," Colin smiles; and I couldn't help but dwell upon this smile because he seldom smiles. As he quips into musing about what other scents she may have picked up or oddly missed, she laughs

somewhat hysterically as he jokes, “Okay, I’m sorry. I’ll stop. I’ll stop with all the *butt cracks.*”

Recovering, JR exhales and contemplates the idea of Colin as a professor. A measurable mood manifests as she starts to narrate the prospect and conversely divulge her own fantasy. Even though he stated he wanted to be a “teacher,” she imagines him as a “professor.” This could be likened to a potential unresolved, perhaps waning attraction to Neil; but she discerns this professor character as unmistakably Colin as she likens his wardrobe [that she previously disapproved of] and how he would intone, “Look at my gargoyles!” She also mentions him being awkward in this fantasy, akin to how awkward—clumsy, prone to falling and faux pas—he is in real life. Now, her proclivity for partners with professorship ceases to imply an underlain interest in Neil. This tale becomes a transposition of Colin as she cites his distinctive qualities.

With his face just inches from her shoulder, Colin studies JR as she speaks. Their eyes drift closed as she continues to craft the fantasy and elucidate its eroticism through Professor Colin and one of his students to whom he gifts a brooch, who admires him from afar and lingers after his classes, and later encounters at a cinema. In a psychic sense, the closure of their eyes signifies an active denial of insight and an aversion to vicissitude enabled by expression in lieu of repression (Mahon, 2014, p. 17, p. 207). The act is mutual, so the fantasy, in addition to the eyes and vision contained beneath the eyelids become, countertransferential (Kirshner, 2013, p. 74; Mahon, 2014, p. 133). They become invested in the tale, gradually disassociating with whom and what they are: siblings who have yet to quell their qualms amidst the social order, currently ‘losing’ in the game as they cannot foresee any past, present, or future prizes.

JR's likeness to the student in this fantasy is evident as she notes specific qualities: that this student is the only one who appreciates Prof. Colin, being the only who laughs at his jokes and being the active pursuant contrary to him being a passive recipient. The film has shown JR as the dominant sibling who assumes control and charges tasks as well as directions, while Colin simply goes along passively and sometimes petulantly. She is also the only one who indulges him with likeness and laughter, most visibly in during their montage frolicking through the town in addition to in and out of shops. Moreover, her likeness to the student is pronounced as masturbatory once she starts to trace over her nipple, an erogenous zone, as she recounts Prof. Colin gifting the student a brooch for her sweater.

Once JR describes how Prof. Colin writes down his address on an essay he's graded for this student, the illicit intimacy and advancement of the relationship is emphasized. The clandestine carnality parallels the incest taboo, which prohibits sexual and otherwise romantic relationships with family members. Due to the congenital defects arisen from the progeny of consanguineous partners and the inclination for exogamy which enables diverse groups to thrive, the incest prohibition purports the preservation of the species (Mitchell, 2013, p. 151; Skrzypek, Maciejewska-Sobczak, & Stadnicka-Dmitriew, 2014, p. xxii). Mitchell (2013) further states that, "The [incest] prohibition here [re: siblings] relates to not treating the other as the same, to not continuing with narcissism and grandiosity in the field of the social" (p. 107). However, she also asserts that narcissism in siblingship is operant through likeness and thereby transformative from self-love to object-love; and that this transformation is distinctly

lateral given the “interpenetration of violence [through rivalry], power and non-reproductive sexuality...forged out of the matrix of sameness” (p. 225).

Mitchell’s assertion may be correlated to the patricidal brothers in *Totem and Taboo* as additionally, sibling rivalry and competition is proposed to be correlated to a healthy sublimation of an annihilative instinct siblings initially have for one another; because, the urge to demarcate is prefaced with the urge to destroy (p. 27). Establishing distinction in siblingship is a matter of separation whereas incest would be a matter of synthesis, however the realization and reinforcement of laterality through legion synthesized as siblings acknowledge *one another* as *each other*. There is a synthesis of values, sentiments, and desires which enable and exclude the likeness from outsiders. JR and Colin experience this synthesis through the inversion of their narcissism, identifying *with* one another as outcast and overcast by inhibitions [Colin] and insecurities [JR]; and identifying *as* one another in legion, assuming one another’s affronts as assaults upon themselves wherein they are compelled to defend one another or unite against adversaries. Likewise, sibling incest is often related to legion as a provision of respite in the absence of parental care and attention as well as an attempt to fulfill a desire for attachment and affection (Coles, 2003, p. 63; Skrzypek et al., 2014, p. xxv). The incest of siblings purports to “search for a more primitive merged state” wherein sexual play and intense interpersonality arises due to loneliness, which may stem from parental neglect or abandonment (Coles, 2003, p. 63, p. 64; Davidoff, 2006, p. 24).

Yet, I think back to the brothers in *Totem and Taboo* in considering the active and autonomous choice of incest, wherein Mitchell (2006) posits that the prohibition of sibling incest is akin to the denial of “narcissistic totality” (p. 171). The brothers whose

patricide keened them to their murderous capabilities as active, individual objects despite their legion; how the brothers—as siblings—are laterally distinct and adjacent to one another as a repetition of their Selves [which beseeches narcissistic love], yet simultaneously sinister as the aversion to difference yields murder (p. 171). However, I propose that narcissism likens siblings entirely in the context of laterality. JR and Colin demonstrate a coalescent, coexistent state of likeness and difference wherein the inversion of their narcissism [as they thrive upon one another as narcissists] conveys their distinctive and unique personalities, *while* their desire and solidarity for one another are effected through similitude. Furthermore, their legion and laterality as siblings premise that inverted narcissism is a *complementary* narcissism, where affection, accord, and acclimation can be cultivated and equalized as antithetic forces.

The conclusion to the fantasy of Prof. Colin and his student sees the latter arrive at the former’s address, “not a minute late,” as told by JR. “You guys get each other,” she breathes. “Which is so rare, and it just... I don’t know, it just makes sense. That’s what it would like if you were a professor, I think.”

Colin: “Sounds like your kind of guy.”

JR: “I guess he is.”

The siblings’ noses nudge as they close the space between them.

Full Circle

From JR, the repeated distinction of “we”—her and Colin—and “them”—the partygoers, anyone else—discerns the siblings as superior: comparably impoverished and imprecise, but not ignoble. As I watched JR and Colin kiss, I found the scene unreal.

Because, the fantasy that prefaced this eroticism as ultimately *fictive* no matter how *implicative* of the siblings' personalities in reality. The purpose of fantasy articulated through storytelling involves projection that may be divorced from the egotized Self and married to misrecognition; and infantilizes JR and Colin as indulgent in psychosexual developmental stages of childhood through play, specifically make-believe (Freud, 1988, p. 37, p. 38; Kluger, 2011, p. 199). Together, in their grandparents' cabin, they are couched away from the rest of the world as occupants and erotic constituents of their own. Yet, fantasy functions to convey the futility of performativity and social order; which transmutes the likeness of social, familial, and psychic order as a game wherein requisitions and realities may be fantasies themselves in kind.

The siblings suckle at one another with their eyes closed, aimlessly undulating to undress, when JR suddenly exhales: "Hey, Colin?"

Colin: "Yeah?"

JR: "Can you call me 'Jeanette' right now...please?"

Colin: "No one's called you 'Jeanette' since you were eleven."

JR: "Just do it."

Colin: (Breathlessly) "*Jeanette...*"

The reveal that *JR* is [a nickname for] *Jeanette* relates back to the game. As stated before, as the older sister of a brother and altogether eldest sibling, she derives a stronger likeness with her father given her mother's preoccupation with the younger (Forer & Still, 1976, p. 5; Mitchell, 2013, p. 11; Wesley, 1999, p. 37, p. 38). Moreover, this paternal likeness is engendered as she presumes an identity and behaviours that are traditionally masculinized: the moniker *JR*, extroversion, tourism beyond the home and

hearth, professional pursuit, aversion to [engaging in] acquiesce, and dominance over Colin (Forer & Still, 1976, p. 11, p. 14; Toman, 1961, p. 92; Volkan & Ast, 2014, p. 23). She is entitled because she expects people, including Colin, to support or compromise for her; and that entitlement as well as her endeavour to be an esteemed anchoress result from the internalization and identification of eminence ascribed to the eldest. The fantasy about Colin as a professor and her likeness to a student with whom he has a liaison serves as a surrogacy for her renounced femininity, wherein she assumes a passive albeit receptive role as a student enamoured with a clumsy, but capable male superior. Subsequently, she requests Colin indulge that likeness as she ceases to be JR and becomes Jeanette (Volkan & Ast, 2014, p. 23).

However, the siblings gradually become inarticulate. Everything seems muted by their moans and motions. Fantasy appears to engulf them throughout their thrusts and throes, yet the emphasis on their faces, obscured and fuzzy given their movements and film quality, produces an absolute absence wherein the narrative is then void of fantasy as well as reality. The likeness of laterality denotes a concurrent entity and nonentity exclusive to siblingship that is impalpable to external terms [beyond the siblings themselves]. Through laterality, they comprise a reality that is not conceivable and consequently unverifiable or *true* to onlookers. In legion and likeness, JR and Colin ascertain that there is no truth and therefore, they can never lie. The reverence of respectability politics and quest for class ascension is fruitless against oligarchical, ostentatious odds.

For the first time, JR and Colin seem satisfied in the closing scenes. They are silhouetted sometime in the night, with JR leaning on Colin's shoulder against a starless

landscape. Then, they are back at their family home exchanging smiles and goodbyes in the daylight.

JR: "Is that it?"

Colin: "That's it."

JR: "Do you think I'll ever make it to a major market?"

Colin: "Why do you keep acting out like you do?"

JR: "I could say the same thing to you."

The siblings exchange a hug and kiss.

Colin: "I guess we'll just have to wait and see."

JR: "Yeah. We'll see. Have fun. Good luck."

Trudging to the house, Colin hangs his head and doesn't turn back to see JR's retreating form. Once inside, he sees Zoe awaits him by the front door and proceeds to scoop her into a hug—similar to the one he momentarily shared with JR. His eyes flicker open, somewhat unfocused, over Zoe's head as she settles into his embrace. The penultimate shot is a panning perspective of JR walking to her car as she replaces her sunglasses and sniffles, and her lips quiver as she eases into her driver's seat. The siblings are visibly saddened to depart, because they are helpless to their constellatory positionality. Their departure reaffirms their locations. JR, the elder sister of a brother, strives to be acknowledged and autonomous albeit supportive [to her younger brother] despite a patriarchal social order of conservatism. Colin, the younger brother of a sister, craves attention and his sensibilities are contingent upon the approval of others even though he is aware of his male privilege. The siblings do not, perhaps cannot abandon their stations in life as they know it. Despite their likeness, they cannot coexist. The final

shot is a brief flash of the family home's front door opening, an optimistic allusion to the distinctive prospects and mutuality in kinship, especially siblingship, that transcend a shared living space or shared values.

It may seem as if I am dismissive of the importance of incest. The reader may feel that a case study of a film that ends with incest should foreground or center incest, especially if that case study is operating through a psychoanalytic perspective. However, it was my intention not to center the question of incest in this thesis because my focus was upon inverted narcissism distinct to the sibling relationship overall, not sexuality. While incest is a very provocative theme to include in a film, it is not the central theme of this film in my reading.

Conclusion

The Color Wheel portrays siblingship as a vehicle of narcissistic pathos. In psychoanalytic theory, the narcissistic sibling is transgressive and their distinction is a matter of lateral likeness unlike the narcissistic parent whose attentions privilege subordinate progeny. I read Colin and JR's continual citation of siblingship as a means of justifying their loyalties to one another as a commentary on the social convention through which the likeness and constancy of siblingship are normalized, conceived of as something innate as opposed to monitored or excised. Given the many sibling relationships onscreen, this tells me the field of psychoanalytic film theory may be advanced through the investigation of the sibling relationship as distinct in and of itself, as opposed to a footnote to the parent-child dynamic described by the oedipal or electoral complexes.

Contributions to Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory regards siblingship as outside the Oedipus and Electra complexes. Mitchell (2013) established that narcissism not only influences, but can define the sibling relationship in psychoanalytic theory (p. 13, p. 14, p. 19, p. 23, p. 30, p. 35, p. 205, p. 215). Psychoanalytic film theory has yet to reference how narcissism characterizes siblingship despite numerous films that concern siblings. In this thesis, I have argued that inverted narcissism may define siblingship onscreen through the emergent themes of labour, loss, and legion [correlative to the Self] in my analysis of *The Color Wheel*. While the literature notes that narcissism is distinct in siblingship, inverted narcissism is manifest as shared; it is a narcissism that relies upon other narcissists for gratification. This is important to note because, as I have stated: to *share* narcissism, one must *possess* narcissism; as in one must *possess* something prior and in order to *share* it. The shared narcissism within and yielded from siblingship is possible because it is operant upon a distribution amongst *narcissists*. The identification of this distinct form of narcissism—a mutual narcissism—is significant because it discerns the importance of siblingship which evidences a greater breadth of theoretical concepts both in psychoanalysis and in film studies.

I will investigate how and why siblingship informs gender, self-concept, and narrative

[Here – add another paragraph on multiplicity. You can say that this film constructs family/siblings in very conventional/heteronormative and white Euro-centric ways. This is a limitation of the film which extends into your own analysis. However, you believe that one of the contributions your work makes is in the introduction of the

concept of “projected likeness.” This concept can be applied to all forms of familial relations and configurations, and thus opens the potential of psychoanalytic study of sibling to a multiplicity of flexible family forms, well beyond those conceptualized in traditional psychoanalytic theoretical models. This is a strength of this work and one of your contributions.]

A Reflection on Film Theory

While I cannot make a generalization about film theory overall, I can say that essentially siblingship in *The Color Wheel* appears to be employed to create a visual reference of characters’ intimate intersubjectivity: a means of conveying conjoined or correlated attractions, experiences, or perspectives. These are not merely dialectical, but represented as parallel—as reflecting a likeness (between Colin and JR) that is distinctly less hierarchical than reciprocal. This case study demonstrates how narcissism breeds narcissism in the sibling relationship onscreen. *The Color Wheel* presents siblings who constantly reflect one another, which drives their relationship and reliance upon one another. This evinces that there is a positive correlation to the literature concerning the clinical psychoanalytic theory of siblingship (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 18; Best & DeLone, 2015, p. 274; Coles, 2003, 2009; Edwards 2006, p. 4; Milevsky, 2011, p. 36, p. 87, p. 88; Whiteman, Becerra, & Killoren, 2010, p. 30, p. 34, p. 40) and how JR and Colin’s siblingship conveys the ways in which siblings are understood as transgressive allies or adversaries based on mutual likeness and identification, in contrast to parents and peers, whose relations are characterized by ancestral or superior-subordinate relations.

Contributions to Psychoanalytic Film Theory

Psychoanalytic film theory has not yet addressed the sibling relationship beyond oedipal theory. Yet, as an example of how psychoanalytic theory frames siblingship in relation to theories of identification and gender generated this case study offers insight into the potential for new developments in psychoanalytic film theory. I have shown how narcissism—particularly, inverted narcissism—defines siblingship onscreen. The sibling relationship is shown to be a substantial psychic element in the reviewed literature and the case study, and I believe it establishes the significance of siblings, and the need for their more robust theorization in psychoanalytic film theory. Future research into how inverted narcissism in particular manifests amongst siblings in film may elucidate further insights into siblingship and further developments in psychoanalytic film theory. In addition to the other categories of narcissism covered in the literature of psychoanalytic theory, inverted narcissism may also be an interesting avenue to investigate regarding siblingship because my thesis has shown its distinction in the sibling relationship in accordance to psychoanalytic film theory.

A modicum of psychoanalytic theory literature I have reviewed regards siblingship as an influence independent from oedipal and electral compositions, however psychoanalytic film theory has yet to reference this despite the existence of countless films that concern siblings. The literature notes that narcissism altogether is distinctly involved psychoanalytically in siblingship, and that inverted narcissism is manifest as a shared sense of narcissism that is reliant upon [sharing with] other narcissists for gratification—which is important to note because to *share* narcissism, one must possess narcissism. One must possess something prior and in order to concurrently and conjointly

share it. Moreover, shared narcissism within siblingship is possible because it is operant upon a distribution amongst narcissists. This contributes to psychoanalytic film theory because while psychoanalytic theory has succinctly regarded siblingship as an influence independent from Oedipus and Electra complexes, psychoanalytic film theory has yet to reference this distinction of narcissism and siblingship onscreen—despite numerous films that concern siblings.

In closing, this case study has shown how narcissism—particularly, inverted narcissism—defines siblingship onscreen. In the literature I have explored and in the case study I have presented, the sibling relationship is shown to be a substantial psychic element in the reviewed literature and the case study. This establishes that significance of siblings in psychoanalytic film theory. Future research into how inverted narcissism in particular manifests in film amongst siblings may elucidate further insights into siblingship and psychoanalytic film theory. In addition to the other categories of narcissism covered in the literature of psychoanalytic theory, inverted narcissism may also be interesting to investigate regarding siblingship in accordance to psychoanalytic theory and psychoanalytic film theory.

Glossary

Attachment: lasting bond that connects one person to another; the process of establishing and maintaining this bond

Death Drive: the drive to self-destruction and death motivated by the prospect of pleasure cessation; likened to a longing of reverting to a quiescent state prior to birth

Deidentification: the process wherein siblings discern their identities in attempting to be different from one another. This also allows them to explore and form their own distinct, unique identities and develop individual personalities.

Labour: a distinct premise in sibling relationships onscreen defined by efforts to compare, contrast, or reconcile.

Laterality: denotes the equalized positionality reflective of sibling relationships. It is defined by a shared, equitable status distinct from other subjects whom are authorities or outsiders to the sibling bond.

A shared or equitable—lateral—status as dependents upon their parents elicits empathy through a sense of helplessness and need for attention which may ally them against external threats

Legion: ¹concept of the distinctive solidarity that defines sibling identities and relationships. Historically, ‘legion’ pertained to a military context to designate cavalry and presently implies a vast collective. For this project, I liken legion to siblingship on the premise of shared loyalties, interests, and characteristics within a definitive unequivocal multitude; in addition to factions which form and fight against outsiders. ²

Legion is also a theme identified in onscreen siblingship defined by the unity of siblings against external forces such as parents, other relatives, peers, or strangers.

Life Drive: the instinct to preserve and create life; manifests in needs for safety, health, and provisions through libidinal drives

Loss: a thematic distinction of siblingship in cinema defined by the loss of happiness, innocence, security, or faith. Loss affirms pain and adversities yielded from familial maltreatment or disavowal which threaten healthy prospects of future relationships and pleasure.

Narcissism: involves choosing, loving oneself over others.

cerebral narcissism: pertains to narcissism of the mind and intellect

covert narcissists: discrete, reserved personalities whom preserve their delusions of grandeur from arbiters or authorities who may threaten it

overt narcissists: active narcissistic personalities who seek acclaim and admiration

primary narcissism: self-love manifest as the desire for self-survival; occurs in infancy and early childhood

secondary narcissism: aspires to personal pleasure over the conformity to social values; occurs in later childhood and onward

somatic narcissism: concerns narcissism manifest through aesthetics and physicality

Oedipus and Electra complexes: encapsulates the complexes of childhood emotions associated with arousal and unconscious desires for parents of the opposite sex and the exclusion of same sex parents. The Oedipus complex is understood to correspond to boys in reference to the myth of Oedipus, whereas the Electra complex is associated with girls through the myth of Electra.

Projection: one's unconscious attribution of aspirations or fantasies upon someone or something else.

Projective Identification: projection that directly involves another subject. The projector directly associates with whom or what they have projected upon.

Verticality: defined by marked power differentials instead of equity or solidarity. It concerns a relational dynamic that is hierachal.

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