

SOFIA COPPOLA AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN  
APPEALING AESTHETIC

by

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A THESIS

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This thesis grew out of an interest in the films of female directors, producers, and writers and the substantially lower opportunities for such filmmakers in Hollywood and Independent film. The particular look and atmosphere which Sofia Coppola is able to compose in her five films is a point of interest and a viable course of study. This project uses her fifth and latest film, *Bling Ring* (2013), to showcase Coppola's merits as a filmmaker at the intersection of box office and critical appeal. I first describe the current filmmaking landscape in terms of gender. Using studies by Dr. Martha Lauzen from San Diego State University and the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to illustrate the statistical lack of a female presence in creative film roles and also why it is important to have women represented in above-the-line positions. Then I used close readings of *Bling Ring* to analyze formal aspects of Sofia Coppola's filmmaking style namely her use of distinct color palettes, provocative soundtracks, car shots, and tableaux. Third and lastly I went on to describe the sociocultural aspects of Coppola's interpretation of the "Bling Ring." The way the film explores the relationships between characters, portrays parents as absent or misguided, and through film form shows the pervasiveness of celebrity culture, Sofia Coppola has given *Bling Ring* has a central

message, substance, and meaning: glamorous contemporary celebrity culture can have dangerous consequences on unchecked youth. In conclusion, this paper hopes to illustrate *Bling Ring* as another nuanced portrait of emptiness despite excess from Sofia Coppola, a female filmmaker whose techniques and visual motifs can be isolated and are indicative of the term “auteur.” Female filmmakers do not lack the ability or competency to be filmmakers, nor do they suffer a deficiency of stories to tell or visions to translate to film. They simply lack opportunity.

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## Research Question

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the style Sofia Coppola has established in her small but singular body of work by focusing on her most contemporary film, *Bling Ring* (2013). In establishing Coppola's caliber as a filmmaker I also hope to answer a larger question of why female voices in mainstream film matter in terms of representation, gender equality in the industry, and presenting new voices in film. In an industry dominated by men, my hopes are that this research will show the possibilities for new (female) perspectives by looking at one of the few established contemporary female directors and an exception to the rule. While many critics are quick to note the privileged circumstances and noteworthy support Sofia Coppola has in getting her films off the ground (i.e. her father Ford Francis Coppola), the subsequent products are nonetheless examples of a unique female voice in an industry bereft of female filmmakers.

*Bling Ring* utilizes the techniques Coppola has honed over the course of her career to display loneliness and disconnect in her previous four films but redirects them here to show aspects of emptiness in contemporary teen and celebrity culture. This includes how a celebrity saturated culture can contribute to the manifestation of a different kind of loneliness exemplified by the "Bling Ring" members' self-destructive behaviors. By drawing on Coppola's previous films, scholarly journals, and industry trade texts there are two questions this thesis seeks to answer:

1. How does Coppola's brand of filmmaking and desire to delve into the interior worlds of the character manifest itself in *Bling Ring*?



2. How does contemporary youth culture, specifically celebrity culture and the prevalence of social media affect the ensemble of characters in *Bling Ring* and why?

These questions will provide evidence that Coppola is worthy of critical consideration and a unique female voice in contemporary films.

I will describe the contemporary landscape of domestic filmmaking in terms of gender to show how rare women's voices are and the significance of women creators in film. Then I will perform a two-part close reading of *Bling Ring*. First I will describe formal aspects of *Bling Ring* to show Coppola's aesthetic tendencies. The most notable in this particular film and the elements I will be exploring in this paper are her ability to create distinct color palettes to distinguish setting and mood, cultivate provocative soundtracks and create unique POVs, car shots, and tableaux. Lastly I will perform a social/cultural analysis of the film based on the aforementioned formal elements to show how those aesthetic tendencies in *Bling Ring* convey Coppola's message of the dangerous consequences glamorous contemporary celebrity culture can have on unchecked youth. *Bling Ring* is not devoid of meaning or substance and makes a statement which can stand alone throughout the film. In answering these questions I will show the inter-relation amongst Coppola's decisions as a filmmaker as evident in the text of the film, the subject material of celebrity culture excess, and her continuation of such tropes as monotony and longing.

## Introduction: Giving Context

### Gender Issues in Hollywood

The issue of gender equality is certainly not confined to media and entertainment sectors, but the heightened visibility of the film industry in particular makes gender gaps much more visible. Numerous and ongoing studies from independent groups and commentary from outspoken insiders consistently describe how women are at a disadvantage in a majority of areas (MSMU; Lauzen; Anderson and Daniels; Blinderman, Daniels, and Friedman; Dowd). These include the creation of films whose themes, content, and dialog accept misogyny; sexualized images and limited portrayals of women in leading roles; and above-the-line roles such as directors, producers, writers;. On some level these three deficiencies are interconnected. Compelling annual research done at San Diego State University's Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film and commissioned studies by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media conducted at Mount Saint Mary's University in Los Angeles consistently report discouraging numbers for women in entertainment. For example, SDSU's annual *It's a Man's (Celluloid) World: Report 2015* found, "In 2015, females comprised 22% of protagonists, 18% of antagonists, 34% of major characters, and 33% of all speaking characters in the top 100 domestic grossing films" (1). These numbers highlight how women are physically left out of top grossing/popular films and create worlds where women hardly exist when in reality women make up half or more of the population.<sup>1</sup> There are also issues of age imbalances between male and female

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<sup>1</sup> According to the CIA World Factbook, there are 0.94 males for every female in the United States as of 2015.

actors, issues of female characters portrayed with limited or omitted professional statuses, and the regularity of highly sexualized female characters. For example, “Women were nearly three times as likely as men to appear partially or fully nude in the 100 highest-grossing films of 2014” (MSMU 29, 31). Equating women with opportunities for sexuality is far from ideal in the pursuit for gender equality. From here, the numbers detailing how many of those already few roles were filled by women of color are even more dismal and a predictor of the 2015 anti-Oscar slogan #OscarsSoWhite. Another SDSU annual study entitled *The Celluloid Ceiling* looks at women’s behind-the-scenes employment. The 2015 edition found

Women comprised 19% of all directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 domestic grossing films of 2015. This represents an increase of 2 percentage points from 2014 but is even with the figure from 2001. In 2015, women accounted for 9% of directors, up 2 percentage points from 2014 but even with the figure from 1998. In other roles, women comprised 11% of writers, 26% of producers, 20% of executive producers, 22% of editors, and 6% of cinematographers. (1)

These statistics echo themes of consistent gender disparity. The 19% cumulative total of women in high-ranking, content-creating positions is “an increase of 2 percentage points from 2014 but is even with the figure from 2001” and 9 % of female directors is “up 2 percentage points from 2014 but even with the figure from 1998.” This shows that the number of women in these male dominated positions remains low and fluctuates within a range from year to year. Meaning that while some landmark years have seemed to be the beginning of an upward trend in female filmmakers, such as the first woman Academy Award winner for “Best Director” in 2010, these are more exceptions to an otherwise consistent rule.

The number of women in above-the-line positions are consistently low but especially so in domestic, top-grossing films. Figure 1, from the MSMU’s *Report on the Status of Women and Girls in California*, shows increases in the number of women in top ranking positions as the scope widens from the top 250 to the top 700 U.S. Films. It also includes the percentages of women in independent films at U.S. festivals, the highest number in every category. These statistics were reiterated in *The Celluloid Ceiling* (Figure 2). As the scope of highest-grossing films expanded from 100 to 250 to 500 so did the percentage of women. This data leads us to believe that gender disparaging hiring practices are more common in the mainstream film industry and filter down to smaller budget and independent film. The gap however is extensive at every level. These top-grossing films are by definition among the most viewed in theaters and in a field with such high visibility the issue of gender representation is not one to be overlooked.

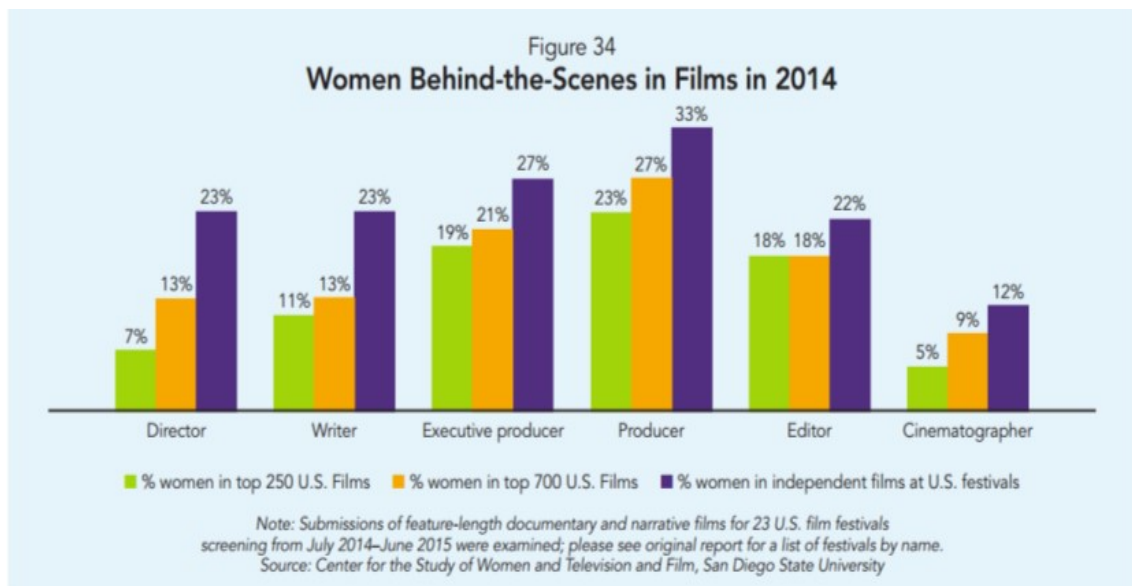


Figure 1: “Women Behind-the-Scenes in Films 2014” (29)

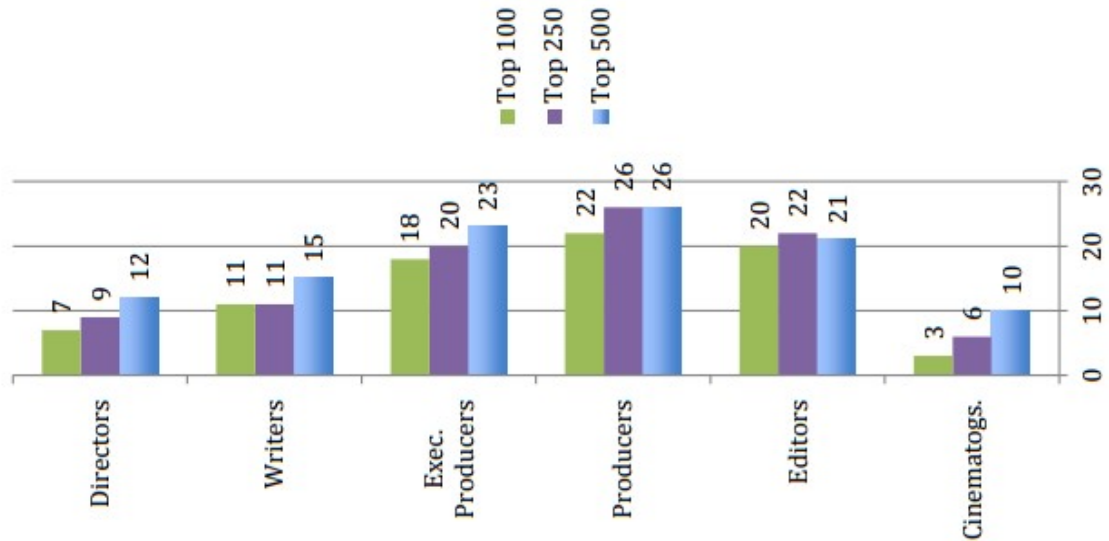


Figure 2: “Comparisons of Percentages of Women Working in Key Behind-the-Scenes Roles on the Top 100, 250, and 500 Domestic Grossing Films of 2015” (5)

Another way to look at the lack of female representation is by applying the Bechdel Test. Although it’s not a bulletproof indication of a film’s feminist interests, the Bechdel Test is a good place to start when looking at the quality of a female’s existence on screen. Passing the Bechdel Test requires a film to 1) have at least two named women, 2) the women must talk to one another, 3) about something besides a man. This test can eliminate films which have none to one named female character, such as *The Revenant* (2015), and rule out films in which the women only talk to each other about a man or men, for example *The Little Mermaid* (1998).

*Polygraph*, a publication that uses visual storytelling to convey data and explore popular culture, created an interactive overview of the 200 highest grossing films from 1995-2015. For each section they showed which films pass or fail the Bechdel Test based on if the writing team, producing team, or director(s) had at least one or no women. They also look at notable studios, top producers, top directors, and top writers

for percentage of films that pass/fail the Test, along with a “Bechdel Test Simulator” to calculate the likelihood of failing the Bechdel Test.

The Bechdel Test is crude but telling. At the very least it points to the imbalance of female to male content creators in mainstream filmmaking and the truly minimal growth of women in these positions due to successful and higher grossing companies and industry trendsetters refusal to place women in key creative roles over the past 20 years.

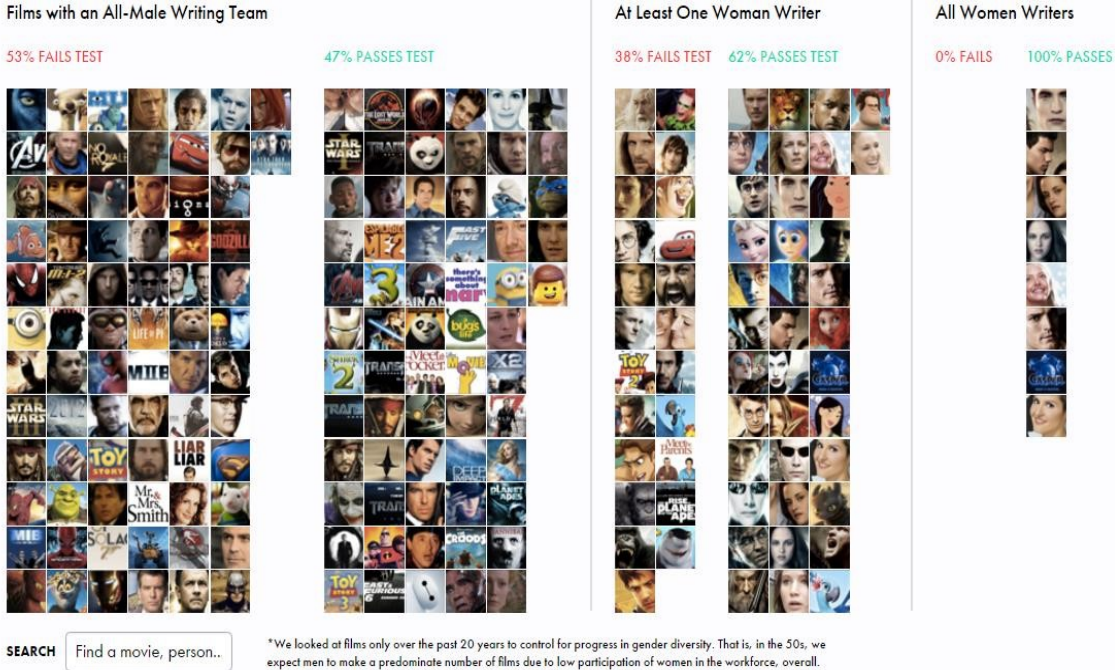


Figure 3: The 200 Highest Grossing Films: Bechdel Test Results and Gender Diversity of the Writing Team (Blinderman, Daniels, and Friedman).

There are at least two ways these numbers can be significant moving forward. One, research shows that women in above-the-line positions such as directors, writers, executive producers, producers, editors, and cinematographers are much more likely to hire other women. This is an important factor for achieving gender parity. The 2015 MSMU study is a summary of gender-based research in 12 categories including health,

economy, education, and, for the purposes of this paper, “Film and Television.” The statistics found in this report show that “the presence of women behind the scenes and in front of the screen increases when women occupy key roles as producer, director or creator” (32). The report goes on to demonstrate exactly how extreme that increase is:

In film, when men solely occupy director and producer roles, 7–15% of projects have women writers, editors and directors. In comparison, when one or more women occupy these same roles, 52% of directors hire female writers and 35% hire female editors; with women producers, over 20% of projects have women writers, directors and producers... The most dramatic impact in the film industry of having one or more women in key behind-the-scene roles is the increase in the percentage of female protagonists from 4% to 39%. (32)

Having women in key creative positions not only leads to more women in equally esteemed positions but even increases the amount of women in leading positions on screen. From there the possibility for improved representation is increasingly feasible.

This leads to significance number two: the presence of women behind the camera has direct correlation to the representation of women on screen. It’s no surprise that female directors want to direct films about women and female writers want to write screenplays about women because it represents their reality. In a recent interview with Jodie Foster following the debut of her fourth feature film as a director, *Money Monster* (2016), she speaks about the prevalence of one-dimensional female characters. She says that having more women in the film business could be good for the art form and create, “More multi-dimensional female characters... [and] some of the more prevalent trends in films directed by men who attempted to give their female characters some huge emotional arc or big motivation, and who often returned to the same issues [i.e. rape]” (Erbland). Representation in this case is simply the positive and more complex presence of women on film. Lauzen’s *It’s a Man’s (Celluloid) World* found:

In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 40% of all speaking characters [whereas] films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 30% of all speaking characters. In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 50% of protagonists [whereas] films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 13% of protagonists. In films with at least one woman director and/or writer, females comprised 29% of antagonists [whereas] films with exclusively male directors and writers, females accounted for 15% of antagonists. (4)

Ratios of 50:13 male to female protagonists is quite simply shameful. Among several things it implies is that women do not have stories worth telling or that audiences would not find films about women interesting. Another report by Lauzen, titled *Women @ the Box Office*, found that this is simply not true. In fact, the study concluded that data often misrepresented box office grosses as evidence that films featuring a male protagonist(s) perform better than those with female protagonist(s). However, Lauzen found that films featuring one or more male protagonists consistently had larger budgets, an important factor in earning more at the box office. The report states,

When the size of the budget is held constant, films with female protagonists or prominent females in an ensemble cast earn similar box office grosses (domestic, international, opening weekend) and DVD sales as films with male protagonists...However, the differences in box office grosses are not caused by the sex of the protagonist but by the size of the budget. Films with larger budgets generate larger grosses, regardless of the sex of the protagonist (1-2).

Cate Blanchett puts it most succinctly in her acceptance speech for the 2014 “Best Actress” Oscar when she said, “And perhaps [this is for] those of us in the industry who are still foolishly clinging to the idea that female films, with women at the center, are niche experiences. They are not. Audiences want to see them. And in fact they earn money” (Oscars). So if the problem is not a low demand for films involving or portraying women, then what is? The answer is quite simply opportunity.



## **Sofia Coppola: Writer, Director, Producer**

With the establishment that gender inequality exists in U.S. mainstream film, Sofia Coppola's presence as an established female filmmaker is an interesting and important case study. As an independent filmmaker, her films have enough spotlight to be recognized and seen internationally while maintaining the freedom to exhibit unusual content and form. Coppola has five feature films to date: *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Somewhere* (2010), and *Bling Ring* (2013). All five of these were directed, produced, and written by Coppola.<sup>2</sup> From an awards angle she won her first Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay with *Lost in Translation* in 2004. This film also earned her a nomination for Best Director, making her the first American woman in the Academy's history to be nominated in this category.<sup>3</sup> The award would eventually go to Kathrine Bigelow for *Hurt Locker* in 2010.

So why study Coppola instead of a female filmmaker like Bigelow? This question is one of the cornerstones of this inquiry. For one, this thesis is concerned with exceptions to the rule in a filmmaking landscape bereft of female creators. Part of that focus involves exploring female filmmakers who embody a female angle rather than a continuation of male-centric perspectives in terms of aesthetics and content. That is, they focus on female issues or characters and/or push against masculine conventions of storytelling. Kathrine Bigelow's Oscar winner, *Hurt Locker* and previous films, "such

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<sup>2</sup> In the cases of *The Virgin Suicides*, *Marie Antoinette* and *The Bling Ring*, Coppola adapted the screenplays from a novel of the same name by Jeffery Eugenides, *Marie Antoinette: The Journey* by Antonia Fraser, and a *Vanity Fair* article entitled "The Suspects Wore Louboutins," respectively.

<sup>3</sup> There were two previous female nominations for Best Director: Lina Wertmuller for *Seven Beauties* (1976, Italy) and Jane Campion for *The Piano* (1993, New Zealand.)

as *Point Break* (1991) and *Strange Days* (1995), are not overtly about women characters and do not deal explicitly with feminine issues” (Tay 129). Furthermore, Bigelow’s film *Hurt Locker* is not dissimilar in style to other male-directed war films whereas Coppola’s films have a unique, discernable form and method of storytelling. And while there are plenty of female directors whose films are focused on feminine issues, these often drift into the realm of art house. For example, Sally Potter’s *Orlando* (1992) meditates heavily on what it means to be a woman and the restrictions of each gender. These art house films draw smaller niche audiences compared to larger mainstream films which are more or less meant to appeal to everyone. Films that intentionally subscribe to feminist ideals are often seen as too radical for mainstream or multiplex viewing. And as noted above, mainstream films, which have top-grossing capabilities, are often created by all-male or mostly male collaborations whereas there is greater gender parity among lower budget films. On a scale of multiplex to arthouse, independent films, like Coppola’s, traverse the gray area in-between, often challenging and combining elements of both extremes resulting in films which are outside the studio commissioned norm while still possibly profitable at the box office.

Sofia Coppola’s films fulfill this framework of operating within mainstream, masculine film conventions and pushing against them by existing in that space between the arthouse, indie, and mainstream. She is considered an independent filmmaker and operates with larger budgets and resources.<sup>4</sup> According to IMDB, Coppola’s five films, from *The Virgin Suicides* to *Bling Ring*, had budgets of \$9 million, \$4 million, \$40

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<sup>4</sup> At present, the term “independent” refers to a particular aesthetic rather than methods of funding (Newman, 48). *Lost in Translation* operated under a \$4 million dollar budget while *Marie Antoinette* had a \$40 million dollar budget (IMDB).

million, \$7 million, and \$20 million respectively. In the same order, the box office grosses of these films were \$10 million, \$120 million, \$60 million, \$13 million, and \$19 million respectively. The independent nature of Coppola's work allow it to engage with both feminist film theories and the patriarchal language of Hollywood cinema in a way that does not drastically alienate audiences. And it is precisely this possibility that makes her films an important case study on the road to expanding opportunities for female filmmakers.

Sofia Coppola's films are an invaluable step in "affirming a cinema by and for women" and changing the aesthetic and ideological expectations of general audiences to see women as diegetic figures and not the objects of a male hero's gaze (Woodworth 142). One luminary feminist film theorist whose work cemented claims of male-centric filmmaking is Laura Mulvey and her landmark essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." This 1975 work uses psychoanalysis to assert the presence of an inherently male gaze in film language. Her theory recognizes that we live in a patriarchal society, that the American film industry is a primarily male community, and that these elements have undeniably shaped the evolution of film practices. She writes, "As an advanced representation system, the cinema poses questions about the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking" (Mulvey 59). She also notes that cinema is inherently voyeuristic: the audience is placed in a darkened auditorium which creates a sense of separation from other viewers, allowing them to focus on the characters shown on screen. This is problematic when combined with filmic conventions which facilitate women's' "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 63). These include:

Fragmenting their bodies through close-ups, not just their faces, but also of body parts such as legs; compressing the depth of field to flatten their images and reduce verisimilitude, thus turning them into icons; denying them roles as agents within the plot; and glamorizing them through special effects, such as lighting and soft focus. (Woodworth 143).

What may have begun as a desire to mirror the natural conditions of human perception, Mulvey writes that current filmic practices have become the accepted conventions and practices of traditional narrative film. Mulvey writes, “It is these cinematic codes and their relationship to formative external structures that must be broken down before mainstream film and the pleasure it provides can be challenged” (Mulvey 68). The continued representation of deeply rooted patriarchal conventions has enacted invisible barriers which continue to this day.

It is these “conventions” which new female voices and filmmakers can work to dispel. Claire Johnston, a contemporary of Mulvey, also wrote of the necessity of changing the depiction of women in film. She writes, “Any revolutionary strategy must challenge the depiction of reality; it is not enough to discuss the oppression of women within the text of the film; the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected.” What she means is the sexist portrayal of women in film can be challenged through written dialog, filmic dialog, and aesthetics at large. Talking about gender on film and create films which provide an alternative are equally important steps. However, unlike Mulvey, Johnston writes that this alternative can be entertaining as well as politically significant. She offers a strategy for creating a place for women in film, “which embraces both the notion of film as a political tool and film as entertainment” (Kennedy 39). In other words, films by women which differ from typical male-dominated

Hollywood fare can still be enjoyable to watch and less of a duty than a pastime. In fact I believe this is concept is crucial. And the more women who are involved in films that portray positive and complex female images, the more diverse and innovative future films will be.

### **Creating an Aesthetic**

So how does Coppola create an entertaining yet ‘feminine aesthetic’? Over the course of her five films she has developed a trademark style composed of idiosyncratic sequences and camera techniques indicative of an ‘auteur.’ Some are subtle and nuanced while others are glaringly obvious. These signature shots/techniques include, a non-traditional first person point of view by “shadowing a character from behind” using a handheld camera or a dolly shot, zooming in and out of a tableau, shooting characters in or looking out of cars, enhanced diegetic sounds and exceptional soundtracks (Rickey). Her use of handheld camera often becomes an intimate lens through which the audience can see the character’s emotions viscerally. These are all in pursuit of a common goal: to put the audience in the characters’ shoes so viewers can feel like they’re there with them and develop an understanding or compassion for them. As I will explore later in this paper, Coppola often invokes the writings of Mulvey and Johnston by using these trademark shots and playing with filmic form.

The characters she writes are all in a place of transition, often experiencing loneliness, isolation, detachment, and longing for something they may or may not be able to name. Her themes typically focus on characters who want in or out. She artfully portrays ‘outsiders’ looking in and perceiving freedom such as the boys in *Virgin Suicides* and the group of teens in *Bling Ring*. Conversely, her films also show

‘insiders’ looking and wanting out of their lives. These include the young girls in *Virgin Suicides*, Charlotte and Bob in *Lost in Translation*, Marie in *Marie Antoinette*, and Johnny Marco in *Somewhere*. Coppola’s intense focus on character is as recognizable as her clean and often impeccably composed shots.

Sofia Coppola’s films have amassed a fair amount of criticism invoking everything from her often slow style to her privileged upbringing. Her background in photography and a detailed knowledge of fashion becomes evident in aesthetically pleasing shots which are often an artfully blended mix of costume and setting.<sup>5</sup> She wields these abilities with a deftness that allows her to celebrate fashion and/or critique it depending on the film at hand. Her films are also known for their slow pacing, which often heightens the already dreamy, apathetic, or otherwise muted mood and/or allows attention to details. These elements have often led her films to be regarded as impressionistic dreamscapes. And while her films are visually rather than dialog driven, they are often criticized as self-indulgent and simply ‘pretty.’ Todd Kennedy observes in his article “Off with Hollywood’s Head” that,

The source of attack, for those who wish to attack her, has routinely focused on a perceived lack of depth... Essentially, the implication is that Coppola 1) as a woman, only has the ability to make films because of her economic privilege, 2) only has whatever talent she does possess because of her all-powerful director/father, and 3) because her movies are feminine, can only produce pretty films that "lack depth.

Essentially, the circumstances of Sofia Coppola’s existence as a female filmmaker, with a clean and paced style, forces scrutiny scarcely asked of male filmmakers: Prove that they have substance, significance, or meaning.

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<sup>5</sup> Coppola’s photography has appeared in fashion magazines including *Paris Vogue* and *Allure*. She launched her own boutique, Heaven-27, and clothing label, Milk Fed, and “has been the muse, friend and occasional model for American designer Marc Jacobs” (Smaill 151)

## ***Bling Ring***

Sofia Coppola's fifth and most recent film *Bling Ring* hit theatres in June of 2013. Coppola wrote, directed, and produced the film. The story chronicles real life events involving a group of teenagers in the Los Angeles area who burglarized multiple celebrity homes including Paris Hilton, Lindsey Lohan, and Orlando Bloom. From October of 2008 to August of 2009 the group, nicknamed "Bling Ring" by the media, stole upwards of \$3 million in clothing, jewelry and other high-end items (Sales). Coppola was inspired to convert the story into film after reading the article Nancy Jo Sales wrote for *Vanity Fair* which was based on extensive interviews with two "Bling Ring" members. There are five members of the "Bling Ring" in the film: Rebecca, Marc, Nicki, Sam, and Chloe. Rebecca is the ringleader, Marc is her fashion-obsessed friend, Nicki and Sam are privileged, party-hungry sisters, and Chloe is an independent "badass" ("Making the Bling Ring").

Like *Virgin Suicides* and *Marie Antoinette*, *Bling Ring* is an adaptation. So what is it about this particular story that convinced Coppola to embark on an enterprise of filmic proportions? According to Coppola, "I thought their perspective on it provided this whole other element which showed how wrapped up they were in celebrity. That part of our culture used to be small – that pop, 'guilty pleasure' side of things. Now it just won't stop growing" (Gilbey). While this quote is outright, this premise is more subtle in the film.

Some moments may seem to glorify or exaggerate the burglaries but, as my research will show, most if not all the events are direct quotes from members of the "Bling Ring," excerpts of "The Suspects Wore Louboutins," or scenes from member

Alexis Neirs' reality television show *Pretty Wild*. These true-life details augment a film already based in reality, adding leverage to its message and credit to Coppola as a filmmaker.



## Formal Analysis

*Bling Ring* follows in a tradition of Sofia Coppola films which share several characteristics. Among these, and the ones that will be expanded upon here, are a recognizable attention to setting and color palette, distinct music and sound choices, and use of trademark shots specifically involving a car or creating a tableau. These trademarks are one of the ways in which Coppola has created a singular and recognizable body of work characteristic of an ‘auteur’ and worthy of study.

### Setting and Color

The original “Bling Ring” members lived in Calabasas, California, a city 35 minutes from Los Angeles and the Hollywood Hills. Many of the locations are very similar if not the exact same as the locations frequented by the original group. For example the bars and school are in the same area but the scenes in Paris Hilton’s home are filmed at her actual home where the burglaries took place. It is in the staging and color palette, however, where Coppola makes it her own.

Color palette and framing are two qualities which often contribute to the notion that Sofia Coppola films are simply “pretty” or simply superficial, a notion I hope to dispel here through further inquiry. Color scheme plays a noticeable role in each of her previous films. *Virgin Suicides* often had a gauzy, sepia tone that when matched with suburban settings invoked a sense of nostalgia which mirrored the film’s content. *Lost in Translation* was often slightly washed out similar to how the characters felt and invoked cool tones that contrasted with the brightness of the city setting. *Marie Antoinette* employed a palette of primarily pastels especially in moments of food and

fashion which tried to help the audience understand Marie's attraction to them in the gaudy isolation of Versailles. *Somewhere* oscillates between muted, hazy colors and clear brighter colors depending on whether the protagonist's daughter is present or not to show the sense of purpose she gives to his otherwise aimless high-end lifestyle (Figure 4).



Figure 4: Color Palettes of Previous Films

Top Left- *Virgin Suicides*, Top Right- *Lost in Translation*, Bottom Left- *Marie Antoinette*, Bottom Right- *Somewhere*

In a similar fashion *Bling Ring* represents the worlds of the story and its characters while providing context and invoking texts like Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Using color palettes of white versus red and blue, Coppola and her production designer Anne Ross are able to demonstrate the lure of the Hollywood lifestyle by contrasting the "Bling Ring's" home life and their perceptions of celebrity.

### *Palettes of Reality*

The settings of *Bling Ring* operate as a dichotomy between the banality of home life and the glamour of the perceived celebrity lifestyle. The homes of each of the five burglars are introduced at least once during the film. Nicki's house is shown most frequently but all four (Nicki and Sam live in the same home) are disturbingly similar.

First we'll look at Nicki's home (Figure 6). It is the first introduction to Calabasas after the loud, fast-paced, and bright neon montage that begins the film. The first thing to notice is the blandness of the colors used outside and inside the home. The house itself is essentially a beige box, nearly blending into the color of the blindingly bright sky behind it. The scene cuts to Nicki and Sam's bedroom. The white dresser, bedsheets, bedframe, walls, and lamp are made even brighter by the oversaturation of sunlight that pours in through a nearly wall-length window. Then it cuts to the kitchen downstairs which is unmistakably bland. Nearly every piece of the kitchen, the chairs, placemats, cupboards, countertops, walls, are a drab peach or beige. This too is oversaturated by sunlight, washing out not only the kitchen but its two inhabitants as well. These three frames in Figure 6 are the first three shots the audience sees that provide exposition and character context. The picture it paints is a perceptibly dry one, nearly devoid of color save for one aspect: the clothing. Here we also get the first hint of character motivation in the film. When looking at the bedroom and even the kitchen we see bright blues and reds of clothing which really pop against the blandness of the home environment. If you live in a world that has no variety, as the beige colors of the home suggest, it is easier to understand how the girls gravitate towards colorful clothing

and towards bling. Through color palette the audience can begin to realize the “Bling Ring’s” sense of purpose.

This theme is reinforced throughout the film as we see each of the “Bling Ring’s” homes. Most noticeably are the portrayal of kitchens throughout the film. In Figure 5, the top image shows Marc’s mother reading a newspaper in off-white pajamas. The kitchen counters, cabinets, and walls are all entirely beige. The only color comes from the black appliances but even here black dictates a different idea of lacking color. The kitchen is almost interchangeable as the one in Figure 6 and Marc’s mother almost blends in as simply another facet among her surroundings. The picture on the bottom in Figure 5 shows the kitchen in Chloe’s home. The scene functions almost as a tableau, a characteristic Coppola uses often and will be explored further later in this paper. Chloe is positioned centrally and made even more prominent by wearing the only real color in the frame. Her blue shirt and cheetah print flats are the sole statement and flair present in a room with three other people. Beyond Chloe, her father and mother are in white and beige respectively and the two small white dogs are nearly invisible against an extremely bright white floor. Like Nicki and Marc’s homes, every single piece of the room is some variation of peach or beige and the parents seem almost fixtures themselves within the kitchen. Again, the room is washed out and sundrenched. These homes are depicted as interchangeable and lacking any sense of individuality, which helps to explain why these young burglars were so eager to spend time outside the home and preferred to be out partying and at clubs where life is much more colorful and interesting.



Figure 5: Calabasas Color Palette- Marc and Chloe

Top: Marc's home and mother moments before Marc's arrest, Bottom: Chloe's home and family before Chloe's arrest



Figure 6: Calabasas Color Palette- Nicki and Sam's

### *Palettes of Glamour*

The appeal of L.A. nightlife and celebrity homes is better understood through their visual presentation in the film. Whereas the homes in Calabasas were beige boxes of peach upholstery and beige inhabitants, the clubs are painted as alluring spaces with deeply saturated and bright colors which often stood out in these otherwise dark spaces. There are three main examples of this: Paris Hilton's home, the Hollywood night club, and montage scenes of stolen loot.

About 22 minutes into the film, Rebecca and Marc break into Paris Hilton's house for the first time and begin to explore. As they travel through the house expressing wonder and amazement (most likely echoed by the viewers) it becomes clear that the life of a celebrity is a culture of its own. Right when they walk into the house, Marc gets scared by the screeching of Hilton's pet monkey, caged by the doorway. It's not enough to hold Rebecca's attention however and soon they're walking through hallways adorned with framed magazine covers featuring Hilton, pillows with Hilton's face, Hilton's famous club room and various other rooms full of high-end clothing and jewelry.

In one telling shot Rebecca and Marc explore a sitting room. As the camera pans back and forth between Rebecca on the left and Marc on the right, a clear-jeweled chandelier cuts the frame between them. As the two burglars move on, they head up the stairs and become obscured by the shimmering crystals as the camera pulls focus from the teens to the dangling bling (Figure 7). This quick but lingering shot draws our eye to the objects of glamour the same way it draws the attention of the characters. Throughout this entire scene the camera shifts focus between the characters and the

home itself, allowing viewers to explore as well and begin to understand how Rebecca and Marc must be feeling to be inside this crazy world.



Figure 7: Framing- Paris Hilton

Paris Hilton's home is dimly lit but full of color. It's a mixture of mystery and attainability. Like fireflies on a dark night, the "Bling Ring" members are all drawn into the folds of grandeur and high-end clothing and products. The lighting and the clothes are made to look tantalizing. In Figure 8, the disco ball in the bottom right-hand corner is backlit by a deep cotton candy pink light while a deep blue engulfs the floor and walls. It is far removed from the various off-white shades of Calabasas and invokes an almost mouthwatering response. Likewise, the image on the bottom shows the shoes highlighted by backlighting in an otherwise dimly lit room. They are lit like candy and the "Bling Ring" takes them like candy. The materialism and attraction to 'bling' that pervades the entire film is emphasized in these scenes at Paris Hilton's mansion.





Figure 8: Paris Hilton Color Palette

Top- The “Night Club Room,” Bottom- The “Shoe Room”

The Hollywood night club that the “Bling Ring” frequents throughout the film also emphasizes notions of glamour by highlighting color in dark spaces to enchant and entice them. Strobe lights bathe the partygoers in and out of the same deep blue seen in Paris Hilton’s club room (Figure 8). Drinking and more specifically “bottle service” are

made alluring. Bottle service, buying overpriced bottles of liquor and private booths is a luxury of the rich with money to burn. A 2015 LA Weekly article laments that,

With bottle service, people can pay to look important, to act like they're famous. They can party the way that Angelenos in gated communities and luxury complexes live, disconnected from the people that surround them...Bottle service is the constant reminder that, even in the party scene, the gap between rich and poor is now too wide to close (Ohanesian).

Sam refers to bottle service in the first club scene saying, “Where’s that bottle service?

Let’s get that going,” and it is then explicitly shown in the next scene at the club later

on. The top picture in Figure 9 is from the stylized bottle service scene. In slow motion

the woman dances over evocatively biting her lip and holding a large bottle of vodka

topped with a sparkler. It’s almost like bringing out an adult birthday cake. Except

these five are not adults and although the bottle is frosted like a cake it is still hard

liquor. One last important location piece in the club scenes is a piece of artwork hung

above the dancefloor. A female mouth open in ecstasy, cut off right below the nose,

can be seen in the first round of clubbing. The camera starts as a cowboy shot on Nicki,

Sam, and Chloe dancing and then floats up to a medium shot revealing the mouth open

above them as they beckon the other two to come join (Figure 9). The piece is backlit

and bright against the blue strobe lights and a harsh rack of bulb lights. The image

seems to hover over the girls to establish mood in this space of complete and reckless

freedom. Simultaneously it invokes what feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey regarded

as a convention which facilitates a women’s “to-be-looked-at-ness.” This cornerstone of

Mulvey’s “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” and Woodworth’s interpretation

describes how fragmenting the female body through close-ups of legs, torsos, and, in



Figure 9: Los Angeles Club Color Palette

Top Down: Bottle service, Blue hue, Open mouth, Selfie flash

this case, faces, are micro gestures which accumulate and ultimately portray women as objects.

The act of selfies, as demonstrated by the “Bling Ring” also engages with Mulvey’s writing. If we look at the bottom-most picture in Figure 9, which is indicative of how selfies are taken throughout the film, we can see the way the girls tilt their heads, widen their eyes, and leave their mouths slightly open plays into the issues of framing that Mulvey identifies in her “Narrative Pleasure” essay. Whether subconsciously or consciously the young “Bling Ring” members are playing into their own visual subjugation. This is one of the ways Coppola incorporates new aesthetics with principles of past feminist theory texts.

Lastly, the montage sequences are a combination of the images used in Hilton’s house and the club scenes to convey glamour. These moments of steady and rapidly paced clips highlight the objects that the “Bling Ring” desire and dually show the audience the appeal through color and quantity. Two minutes into the film there is a montage of brightly colored shoes, underwear, jewelry, bags, and sunglasses. In Figure 10 the camera slowly pans along a shelf of deep blue shoes which pop against a black background and increases temptation. By starting the film with a colorful sequence of high-end goods, stylized to look almost like confections, viewers can begin to understand why the ring was so attracted to bling.



Figure 10: Opening Montage- Shoes

The settings of *Bling Ring* operate on a dichotomy of color and images which inform the character's actions and present a hypothesis on their behavior. The drab beige and interchangeability of the Calabasas homes stand in stark contrast to the deep reds and blues of the shadowed and exotic world of glamour and celebrity. The presentation of this high-end world is not far from how it is presented in reality on expensive television commercials and elegant print advertisements. If it is tantalizing for the audience then it is tantalizing for the characters and these images are part of the larger theory that Coppola is proposing with *Bling Ring*. With misguided or no parental presence, the saturation of celebrity culture and materialism leaves these teenagers essentially defenseless.

Song Title	Artist	Year Recorded	General Function
Crown On the Ground	Sleigh Bells	2010	Atmospheric
9 Piece (ft. Lil Wayne)	Rick Ross	2011	Lyric
Sunshine (ft. M.I.A.)	Rye Rye	2010	Atmospheric
212 (ft. Lazy Jay)	Azealia Banks	2011	Atmospheric
Ouroboros	Oneohtrix Point Never	2013	Atmospheric
Money Machine	2 Chainz	2012	Lyric
Bad Girls	M.I.A.	2012	Lyric
All of the Lights	Kayne West	2011	Atmospheric
Drop It Low (ft. Chris Brown)	Ester Dean	2009	Atmospheric
Gucci Bag	Reema Major	2013	Lyric
Halleluwah	Can	1971	Atmospheric
Power	Kayne West	2010	Lyric
Freeze	Klaus Schulze	1984	Atmospheric
FML	Deadmau5	2009	Atmospheric
The Bling Ring Suite	Brian Reitzell & Daniel Lopatin	2013	Atmospheric
Bankrupt!	Phoenix	2013	Atmospheric
Super Rich Kids (ft. Earl Sweatshirt)		2013	Lyric

Table 1: *The Bling Ring* Soundtrack

## Music and Sound

Coppola's use of sound has been noted at length in several scholarly articles and critical reviews. From her dreamy use of "Just like Honey" as Bob and Charlotte part ways at the end of *Lost in Translation* to the anachronistic use of punk rock songs in *Marie Antoinette*, the soundtracks to Coppola's films are often eclectic yet precise in terms of defining mood. Coppola herself said in an interview, "I find the movie after the sound mix. The sound adds so much to make you feel you're really there" (Rickey). In addition to soundtracks, Rickey's article also notes Coppola's frequent use of enhanced diegetic sound. Like many of her filmmaking choices, the diegetic sounds of the city are invaluable in terms of putting the audience in the world of the characters and guiding them through their experience simultaneously.

Many present-day viewers will recognize the anthemic songs of the last few years which bolsters the connection between the "Bling Ring" and the audience. The music which appears in the film and on the *Bling Ring* soundtrack is, with the exception of three tracks, contemporary party music. This includes rap, urban pop, and techno/house music. Some songs simply function as background party tunes complete with a steady bass beats and easy, repetitive or explicit lyrics. Examples of these include: "Live from the Underground" during the party at Rebecca's, "Hell of a Night" at the pool party when Marc and Rebecca tell the rest of the gang they broke into Paris Hilton's home, and "Big Lights" when Nicki is dancing in Paris Hilton's club room. These songs however did not make it onto the soundtrack. The songs which did make the cut drive the film by reinforcing the scenes they accompany lyrically and/or atmospherically.

### *Atmosphere*

The opening song of *Bling Ring*, “Crown on the Ground,” sets the tone of the film impeccably well. Under the cover of night, the camera follows hooded teens alongside a large home until they find an unlocked door and walk inside. Up until this point, ambient noises of crickets, footfalls, and distant traffic are enhanced creating tension and drawing audiences into the apparently illicit action. The moment they step inside the house however a screeching electric guitar begins to play, evoking the sound of a house alarm. It’s audacious after the quiet silence that preceded it. The “Bling Ring” walks down a short hallway and then Rebecca turns to face the camera. With a wicked smile she says, “Let’s go shopping” and throws the closet door open. Simultaneously the song kick it up a level by adding a heavy drum beat kicks in accompanied by a woman repeating “uh uhuh” in time with the guitar. A montage begins of various hands opening and pilfering drawers of beautiful shoes and clothing items. The song kicks it up one final level by adding a bass so heavy the sound becomes fuzzy as the title card flashes “THE BLING RING” over the L.A. skyline. The song is brazen and in-your-face much like the brash burglaries committed by the five main characters.

Two other contemporary songs used to create atmosphere are “Sunshine” (ft. M.I.A.) and “FML” by deadmau5. “Sunshine” is the suitable accompaniment to Marc and Rebecca’s splurging shopping trip after their first burglary. It reflects the literally sunny day in the scene but more importantly the upbeat rhythmic clapping, funky backbeat, and mellow chorus perfectly match the scene’s atmosphere. It shows Marc’s complete happiness in that moment to have finally found a friend and it shows their



carefree attitude towards using stolen money to buy clothes. After the store they're driving down a palm tree-lined road. The film cuts from the two teens laughing and completely blissful to a low-angle POV of the sun shining blindingly through palm trees as the car drives by. The issue of theft aside, the scene is a perfect portrait of friendship and happiness.

"FML" however comes two-thirds of the way through *Bling Ring* and helps illuminate the dark consequences of what originally appeared relatively harmless by adding intensity to scenes of spiraling out and Marc's arrest. The song appears in the "Bling Ring's" last club scene montage, then it fades out for three minutes and resumes during the scene where the police collect phone tips and Marc is arrested. The heavy, trancelike beats play alongside a montage of various "Bling Ring" members cutting and snorting lines, shopping, and dancing in the club. Some of the shots are in slow motion and others are in regular time. Put together it reveals the highs of the stealing and partying lifestyle are addictive and at this point has begun to spiral out of their control. At one point Sam is center frame dancing at the club but her eyes are half closed and zombie-like as if in a stupor. It has become compulsive rather than enjoyable. The song's title "FML" becomes clear shortly after. A steady snare beat kicks in as voiceovers of people calling in tips to expose the "Bling Ring" is followed by police showing up at Marc's home and arresting him. The song erupts with a snare kick as it cuts to the police bagging evidence in Marc's room and returns to a steady crescendo snare drum beat as Marc is placed in a police car and driven away. The cadence of the snare is reminiscent of an old-fashion public execution accompanied by an almost militaristic drum cadence. Similarly it is clear that Marc is about to face the music.

The three songs on the soundtrack that were not recorded from 2009-2013 are indispensable as accompaniments to the atmosphere. The first is “Freeze” by Klaus Schulze, a slow tune which uses subtle hissing, soft vibraphone tones, and bells to create tension. When the “Bling Ring” is inside Megan Fox’s home, Nicki finds a gun and Sam promptly takes and starts to casually swing around a point at Marc. At this point “Freeze” starts, almost imperceptible bells as a stiff Marc tries to stop Sam from pointing a gun towards his face. The music creates a sense of foreboding as Sam swaggers around the room, empowered by the weapon. Then the scene cuts to the “Bling Ring” sneaking off with their loot, shadowed by the L.A. skyline. The music continues as the scene cuts to a backseat POV of a car focused exteriorly straight ahead through the front seats on a dark road. Then there is a rack focus to the interior front seats of the car onto the shadowed outlines of Marc and Rebecca. The bells become pensive and time seems to suspend and stop as Marc asks, “If I ever became not your friend anymore, would you rob me?” To this Rebecca replies (and as we learn later lies) with a serious tone, “I would never do that to you.” As if the matter is closed, focus is pulled back to the exterior of the vehicle. “Freeze” here has two meanings: 1) Freeze and don’t move because there is a weapon pointed at you and 2) freeze time and enter a non-space of unusual seriousness.

The second atmospheric addition is the krautrock song “Halleluwah” by the German band Can. The song involves an intense and hypnotizing drum cadence as the very first scene of the “Bling Ring” hopping a gate is shown as if from a night-vision security camera. As the gang pilfers through Orlando Bloom and Miranda Kerr’s home the intense drum song continues, pushing the scene forward and adding a sense of

urgency. The sparse electric guitar becomes more prominent and starts to wail as they run out of the house and the scene cuts to police reviewing a security footage tape that clearly reveals Marc's face. As the still cuts closer and closer, the guitar wailing intensifies signaling increasing danger for unsuspecting Marc.

The third song is "Locomotion" by Plastikman which is heard during the pivotal moment when Marc and Nicki see the first news report about their celebrity burglaries. Although not on the official soundtrack, "Locomotion" adds a subtle layer of dread for an already worried Marc. When the scene cuts from the television footage back to Marc and Nicki an aggressive bass line begins to play, low and subtle. The bass line almost mimics the sound of an animated train on the tracks with a "chugga chugga chugga chugga" rhythm. The bass line continues through Marc's dad's brief intrusion and as Marc lays awake in bed that night worrying. The sound and image of a train can have several meanings, and in this case introduces the idea that events have now been set in motion which are difficult if not impossible to stop, similar to a moving train.

### *Lyrical Reinforcement*

The remaining songs on the soundtrack also contribute to atmosphere by nature of their party-conducive genres and modern sounds but dually provide insightful linguistic components. Four prime examples are: "Gucci Bag," "Power, and "Everythang." "Gucci Bag" by Reema Major plays in the background while Nicki and Sam try on clothes for Marc and Rebecca looks on. As the girls try on multiple outfits and Marc plays stylist, Nicki haughtily announces to Rebecca, "Let's go to Paris's. I wanna rob." During this scene Major raps, "I'm a shopaholic, Gucci addict, gotta support my habit. Juicy Couture, I'm a sucker for Prada, sucker for couture, fresh

dressed like a million bucks. Plus my hair and my nails go with my Gucci Bag.”

Between these lyrics and the character’s attitudes, this scene reinforces the importance this lifestyle puts on owning name brand designers and the addictiveness of this pursuit.

Another incredibly well-known song used in *Bling Ring* is Kanye West’s “Power.” It starts to play as the five members strut down the street in slow motion in new, ‘chic’ clothing towards the camera and peel off around it. With rhythmic clapping and driving vocalizations, Kanye begins to rap saying, “I’m living’ in that 21<sup>st</sup> century. Doing something mean to it. Do it better than anybody you ever seen do it. .... No one man should have all that power...I’m tripping’ off the power.” Like Kanye says, the “Bling Ring” is “tripping off the power,” that is bolstered by a sense of confidence they get from symbols of wealth such as new clothes, designer sunglasses, and Starbucks. This is part of “living in that 21<sup>st</sup> century,” especially near Hollywood where wealth and fashion can be synonymous.

Lastly, “Everythang” by Young Jeezy has a clear narrative and lyrical connection to the narrative. After robbing Rachel Bilson’s, Marc, Rebecca, Sam, and Nicki meet Chloe at a house party packed with their peers. As they brashly brag about their exploits and confirm the burglaries for everyone to hear, Young Jeezy echoes their actions rapping, “I used to have nothing, but now I got a whole lot of everythang. That’s why I come through stuntin’ and now the whole world gonna know my name.” “Stuntin’” or flaunting expensive jewelry/signs of wealth are precisely how “the whole world gonna know [their] names.” It is exactly what gets them caught. And while members of the “Bling Ring’ may have felt they “used to have nothing” before the burglary-financed new clothing, it only shows how wrapped up their sense of self-

esteem and self-worth is in this celebrity and designer-goods culture. They are willing to get caught if it means they can let everyone know exactly what they possess and how far they were willing to go for it.

### **Trademark Shots**

Through the course of Sofia Coppola's five films, there are certain shots which reoccur to support repeated motifs. The regularity of these shots are indicative of an auteur with a formalized sense of style all her own. The recognizable use of car shots and tableaux are a reminder of Coppola's vision and filmmaking brand.

#### *Car Shots*

Car shots in Sofia Coppola films involve an intimate use of close-ups to film a character who is inside a car from the outside and provide commentary on whether a character is 'in' or 'out'. By focusing on these in-between moments where it's not so much where the character is going but how they're feeling in the moment creates a dynamic that is difficult to replicate with words. On the one hand, the audience sees the character in a private moment which other characters do not witness, but simultaneously there is a separation happening in which the viewer gets a sense of what they are feeling but it is not explicit. This is reinforced by up and closed car window, often reflecting what the character is physically looking at.

Coppola films often aim to transfer the protagonists' perspective onto the viewer to create understanding and if possible, empathy. The car shot is a prime example of letting the viewer get into a character's head. In addition, the car shot invokes her film's frequent emphasis on characters on the inside wanting out and characters on the outside

wanting in. The car is simultaneously intimate and acts as a wall from the outside world, for better or worse. In a Sofia Coppola film the car isn't so much about where you're going but instead a focus on ordinary, everyday, "pre-aesthetic" moments (Woodworth).

In *The Virgin Suicides* a shot of Lux through the car window communicates the devastation of Trip's betrayal and the failed attempt to get 'out' from under oppressive parental control. Similarly framed shots in *Lost in Translation* show Bob and Charlotte separately gazing out into a foreign world they neither understand or belong to, exuding a sense of isolation and alienation. Accompanied by Bow Wow Wow's remix of "Fools Rush In," a shot in *Marie Antoinette* through a carriage window gives an intimate look into Marie's giddiness after the romantic encounter with the Count leaves her feeling the future is full of promise. There are several similar shots in *Somewhere*, however, the opening shot uses a car in another way. A high-powered car speeds past the camera, around the track in the distance and out of sight continuing in and out of frame four times accompanied by nothing but the sound of the revving engine. Nearly three minutes long it can appear monotonous, but perfectly sets the pace of the film: a slow portrayal of the duality of never-ending fame and desert-like emptiness.

*Bling Ring* also uses car shots to express intimate moments and provide commentary on inside versus outside. Of the five "Bling Ring" members, shots of the character from outside the car window are only used with Marc and Nicki. This becomes especially important in the context of the film's ending. The shots of Marc evolve as the film progresses. Figure 11 is a visual record of the changes he undergoes throughout the course of the film. The top frame is taken from the "Sunshine" montage



Figure 11: Car Shots- Marc

in which Marc and Rebecca cement their friendship through a post-burglary shopping spree. From the screen capture alone the viewer will recognize the fulfillment and contentment her friendship gives him. This is reinforced by the reflected palm trees and sunlight. The frame on the bottom however takes place towards the end of the film after Marc learns that Rebecca sold him out. This betrayal runs deep for him. As his mother drives him home from interrogation, the reflection of a building passes over

Marc's face, imitating jail bars such as the ones he will encounter by the film's end and the ones over his psyche now that his dearest friendship is over.

### *Creating Static: Tableaus*

Tableaus are another trademark frequently seen in Sofia Coppola films. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a tableau is "A group of people or objects positioned so as to form a vivid or picturesque scene [used in theatre for] drawing attention to a dramatic scene or situation."<sup>6</sup> There are two prominent examples of this. Coppola artistically uses tableaus in *Marie Antoinette* to recreate famous paintings of the infamous queen and her children at several points throughout the film. To a different end, there is a striking tableau in *Somewhere* in which the protagonist Johnny Marco has to sit and let a face mold dry. For a minute and thirty-two seconds the camera zoom in, agonizingly slow, with only the slight movement and sound of Johnny breathing heavily through nose holes (Figure 12).

The two significant moments of tableau in *Bling Ring* occur in the scene with Chloe's family as discussed in "Calabaras Color Palette" and the glass house scene. In Chloe's kitchen, Chloe front and centered in blue while the off-white kitchen and parents stay physically and emotionally away. The four have minimal movement and never leave their designated areas, stuck in their roles. This forty second long take showcasing the family's immobility through explicit staging works to denote separation within the family emotionally.

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<sup>6</sup> A modern interpretation of a tableau can be found in the music video of a song from *Bling Ring*'s soundtrack: "Power" by Kanye West





Figure 12: Tableau examples from previous films

Left- *Marie Antoinette*, Right- *Somewhere*

The second and more explicit example occurs when Marc and Rebecca rob reality television star Audrina Patridge's home. Much like the tableau from *Somewhere* the shot frames a home which is essentially a glass box, minimalistic, glass, and exposed. As the camera imperceptibly zooms in over a period of just under two minutes we see two figures, Marc and Rebecca, let themselves into the home. As they make their way upstairs, grabbing items along the way, lights turn on and then off as the figures hurry in and then out (Figure 13). Rather than music, this scene features enhanced ambient sounds of city noises such as dogs, crickets, sirens, and helicopters. This intense focus on one action pulls viewers in and adds tension to an already precarious situation. Of the shot, Rickey writes

From this perspective, Coppola found a wide-angle shot so that as the teenagers break in, enter, and turn on the lights, they resemble dolls in a dollhouse. The startling angle both underscores a sense of child's play and suggests the aphorism that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. 'I loved how the twinkling city lights below looked just like the jewelry the kids were stealing,' Coppola says, obviously pleased with the results.

The scene also has an understated malice to it. These teens are unchecked and shamelessly pilfering someone's home. Their movement through the house is arbitrary and efficient making them seem murine and trapped in the maze of their fame addiction.



Figure 13: Glass House Tableau

## Conclusion

Attention to setting and color palette, distinct song and sound choices, and the use of trademark shots support overall themes in *Bling Ring* and aligns the film with previous Coppola film motifs, namely characters on the outside looking in. The divide between locations, which is made more distinct by opposing color palettes, shows the allure of bad behavior and tantalizing bling for the young burglars. In addition, *Bling Ring* selects specific songs to enhance atmosphere or reinforce character and narrative ideas. Enhanced diegetic and ambient noise in unusually quiet scenes places viewers in the film alongside characters to elicit an understanding of their actions or create tension. Lastly, specific shots involving cars or tableaus also function to explore the separation between people who are ‘inside’ and those who are ‘outside’ and how that creates a sense of isolation and loneliness.

## Celebrity Culture, Social Media, and Isolation

In the worlds of Coppola's films, the true quest, for fulfillment as a countermeasure to alienation and loneliness, comes from genuine connections to others, not possessions. If we imagine Coppola's films in dialogue with one another, overarching themes emerge involving fame and excess. In addition, by examining her films in which the characters are 'in,' we can begin to see how futile the "Bling Ring's" quest for celebrity lifestyle through material possessions is.

The aural and more specifically visual dichotomies created throughout *Bling Ring* not only create tension within the film but also create tensions within the context of Coppola's other films. By looking at the aimlessness of and restrictions of those who are already the 'in' crowd, like in *Somewhere* and *Marie Antoinette*, we begin to see from Coppola's point of view, that fame and the lack of are not a significant part of the equation for happiness. For example, *Bling Ring* feature five teenagers who fantasize about the lives of the rich and famous to the point of invading them. *Somewhere*, however, is from the perspective of someone who has already made it and is an established movie star. This fourth feature, *Somewhere*, is a commentary on how having everything can still result in emptiness and seclusion. The superstar Johnny Marco discovers his real and only interest is the relationship with his daughter, that is, human connection over contracted and material ones. *Marie Antoinette* is visually akin to *Bling Ring* in its excess of material and gastronomic images. But these images are also used to make a point: Marie lacked human connection with her husband the King and faced alienation from the royals in court. Lavish sweets and clothing in many ways serve as a release from political pressures and gendered scrutiny. In a time when the

Queen's body has a singular purpose of producing an heir, food and clothing become two small ways to assert control over herself. In *Marie Antoinette*, "shopping" is a coping mechanism while in *Bling Ring* "shopping" is a misguided effort to create identity.

The second component of this inquiry addresses *Bling Ring*'s message to viewers involving the pervasiveness of 'celebrity culture' and its effect on youth. This is not to say celebrity culture is conceptually harmful, but it is vital to realize from tabloids to feature films, star texts are manufactured and 'fame' is a concept given by 'fans.' In recent decades, the invention of the internet provides the concept with newfound immediacy which is exploited by the "Bling Ring." The film also proposes that the group's physical proximity to a hub of celebrity culture, Los Angeles, also catalyzed their obsession with fame and celebrity. Through a mix of character emphasis and various symbols of celebrity culture's pervasiveness, Coppola shows the ubiquity of celebrity culture and proposes that leaving teenagers unattended in such a glamorous, alluring, and incessant world is the real danger.

### **Character as Example**

Using a mix of dialog, parent portraits, and conflicting images, *Bling Ring* often elicits disbelieving humor and incredulity made more potent by its substantial sources and realism. The five members of the "Bling Ring" are inspired by real and well documented people. The three members who are focused on the most, Marc, Rebecca, and Nicki, all express different desires throughout the film which bring them together in similar coping methods (i.e. drugs, alcohol, partying, stealing). The first time we see Marc is in his bedroom as he's about to leave for school. He looks in the mirror, tries

buttoning his flannel, then with a disappointed shake of his head we get a sense he is unhappy with his body image. This is corroborated in the interview with a surrogate for Nancy Jo Sale, “Kate” in which Marc reveals several points of interest informing his character. First he confesses, “I had a lot of self-loathing and anxiety issues. I thought that I was ugly...I never saw myself as an A-list looking guy...I was always self-conscious that I wasn’t as good looking as other people.” This rhetoric suggesting that anything less than “A-lister” looks is ugly begins to expose a larger problem concerning image and celebrity exposure. His self-consciousness paints Marc as isolated which makes Rebecca’s arrival all the more poignant.



Figure 14: Marc’s View of Rebecca

In the scene where Marc and Rebecca first meet, she is brightly backlit by large school windows, which produces an ethereal effect. He sees her as an angel for simply noticing him and inviting him to hang out after school (Figure 14). After their friendship is cemented through a similar obsession with celebrity lifestyles and high end clothing, Coppola presents another stylized image. As they walk up into the school, the scene becomes slow motion and unfiltered sunlight makes the frame gauzy and dreamlike. This suggests Marc is delusional, willing to overlook her faults and truly sees her as this happy, teenage girl laughing in the sun. In a voice over he confesses, “I loved her, I really did. She was the first person I felt like was my best friend. I loved her almost like a sister. That’s what made this situation so hard.” His confessed brotherly love is emblematic of his driving desire and human need for companionship.

Rebecca is exposed more in action rather than dialog. Throughout the film she maintains a cool, composed, and bridging on haughty nonchalance. She walks through celebrity homes as if they were hers suggesting delusional playing pretend like a child. The scenes which expose her need and desire the best, however, are the stylized moments of product fetish and celebrity worship. Although Marc has moments of reverence for high-end clothing and jewelry, for example the two scenes where he runs his hands over a suitcase full of prized items in veneration, Rebecca represents another level. She wants what celebrities have for the sole reason they are celebrities. Marc tells Kate that Rebecca’s (life) style icon is Lindsey Lohan. Lohan herself was arrested for stealing during the years the “Bling Ring” was active. It is not difficult to see how an obsession with certain celebrities can lead to a reevaluation of values and consequently similar behavior. In the scene where Marc, Nicki, and Rebecca burglarize

Lohan's home, there is a moment when Rebecca is standing at the dressing table and uses Lohan's perfume in the slow motion glow of the vanity lights (Figure 15). The moment feels similar to worship and the glow in Rebecca's eyes reflects the fulfillment she feels by 'being' her idols.



Figure 15: Celebrity Worship- Rebecca

Nicki is similar to Marc in her value emphasis on image, but there is a painful lack of awareness that makes her character and her character's family even more symbolic of the failures in idolizing celebrity culture. Several lines of dialogue and images show the genuine emphasis Nicki finds in physical appearance. For example, in one scene Sam is trying on clothes in their bedroom and asks, "Does my butt look good in these jeans?" Nicki stops what she's doing/puts down her compact and looks Sam in the eye to tell her, "Your butt looks awesome." The line is said with a seriousness that is laughable but implies Nicki's mentality places praise of someone's appearance as the highest compliment. In an inverse scenario, Nicki is trying on clothes at Marc's house

when he says, “Oh yeah you could totally pull this off. You’re like an off-duty supermodel.” Nicki is genuinely taken by the compliment, saying with a bashful “Oh really?” It is one of the only moments where Nicki’s true personality shines through and her validation in looks and cosmetics is on display.

### **Misguided vs. Absent Parents**

While Marc and Rebecca’s lines and actions are almost entirely derived from “The Suspects Wore Louboutins” and Coppola’s personal interviews, key scenes involving Nicki come from the reality television show *Pretty Wild*. Alexis Neirs, the real life “Bling Ring” member Nicki’s character is based on, had just started filming the reality television show on EW when she was arrested in conjunction with the crimes. Canceled after one season, *Pretty Wild* is a disturbing portrait in terms of family issues and values. However, it provided great moments to explore with Nicki’s character in *Bling Ring* and emphasize the lack of parental supervision which spans throughout the film as a whole. The incredulity viewers must have felt with some of Nicki’s lines is made more troublesome by the documented link it has to reality.

A fantastic scene about twenty minutes into *Bling Ring*, emblematic of the parenting issue presented in the film, involves clueless and overly upbeat mother Laurie homeschooling Nicki, Sam, and Emily. She tries fruitlessly to keep their attention as they are continually distracted by text messages, the family dog, an open magazine, and breakfast cereal. It is clear Laurie is not in control. Her overt cheerfulness is almost self-deceiving, as if convincing herself she is acting like a good mother and how her daughters are behaving is normal. Her schooling however is not only questionable but essentially harmful. The curriculum is derived from *The Secret*, a book and movie



phenomenon presenting a highly controversial ideology which teaches if you want something badly enough it will happen. Laurie's activity for the day is to create vision boards of people who exhibit good behavior. Her example? Angelina Jolie. This is problematic in that not only are the teen's lives inundated with celebrity culture but their education and home life are also framed in terms of entertainment celebrities. One could argue Jolie exhibits good character, for example her humanitarian efforts and overcoming cancer and depression. However the girls name superficial measurements of character: "Her hot bod" and "Her husband [Brad Pitt]." Lastly Laurie wants to finish the lesson with "flower essence work," another example of displaced curriculum goals. This scene is taken almost word for word and frame by frame from *Pretty Wild*. Both frames in Figure 16 show the living room decorated in Buddha images, saris, and lotus flower imagery. This mise-en-scene works as an allegory for the characters, specifically Nicki's character in *Bling Ring*. During her first appearance in the film, she declares in front of the press, "I'm a firm believer in karma. And I think this situation was attracted into my life as a huge learning lesson for me. To grow and expand as a spiritual human being. I want to lead a huge charity organization. I want to lead a country one day for all I know." The rhetoric of "attracted into my life" invokes the teachings of *The Secret* and like the living room's ethnic decorations her speech implies a misunderstanding of karma and an exploitation of the word "spiritual." Although reality television is more susceptible to taking liberties with the narrative, the scene is a self-explanatory and disturbing picture of misguided parenting.



Figure 16: Homeschooling Comparison

Top- *Bling Ring*, Bottom- *Pretty Wild*

Near the end of the movie there is a humorous albeit depressing interview scene in which Nicki fights her mother for the spotlight, at one point exclaiming, “This is MY interview!” Instead of getting upset Laurie lets Nicki take control. Laurie does not provide any sort of discipline and as a result Nicki frequently disrespects her mother and lives her life with a sense of visible entitlement.

The alternative presented by the film is equally concerning: no parental presence at all. In a world where these five teens are shown frequently drinking, smoking, using drugs, and staying out late partying, the lack of parents results in no accountability until the law gets involved and a life devoid of guidance. *Bling Ring* presents a world that supposes when teens and forming young adults live in a world saturated in celebrity culture, and no parents are around, celebrity culture becomes their guidance and idol. Rebecca's parents are divorced; her father lives in Nevada and her mother is frequently out of town. Before his arrest, Marc's mother is only seen driving him to school and, as demonstrated by the scene where Marc and Nicki see the "Bling Ring" on the news, his dad is clueless or simply doesn't care. The one instance we see Chloe's parents they seem too preoccupied to notice her, not to mention each other. The lack of parental supervision or simply competent adult presence is a large component of Coppola's message in *Bling Ring* and a statement about the world today.

### **Pervasiveness of Celebrity Culture**

There are a variety of ways *Bling Ring* puts celebrity culture on display. For example, when Marc and Rebecca go on their shopping spree during the "Sunshine" scene, the store Kitson is touted as a celebrity destination. Marc and Rebecca enter a building with window mannequins and a vertical banner and window print labeling it Kitson. While they're inside shopping, at one point Rebecca walks out of the frame and focus is pulled to the wall behind her where a board labeled "CELEBRITITES [heart symbol] KITSON!" Below, cluttered photographs of indistinguishable celebrities wearing assumedly Kitson clothing are shown (Figure 17). The implied celebrity

endorsement is a selling point to young shoppers like Rebecca and Marc, who idolize the lifestyle of the rich and famous. In this way they are “being” like celebrities.



Figure 17: Celebrities Love Kitson

Another manifestation of celebrity culture is a variation of the vision boards prominent in Laurie’s homeschooling lesson which can be seen in the rooms of Nicki/Sam and Rebecca throughout the film (Figure 18). The wall-sized collage of magazine cutouts provide a snapshot of what these teen value. For example, in Nicki and Sam’s room, among cutouts of designer sunglasses and bags, prominent phrases like “BEAUTY,” “LIFE NATURE LOVE,” and “CHANEL” can be seen. A photo of a sign reading, “Kitson Corner” can also be found. The handmade poster in Rebecca’s room is conclusively different. Instead of objects and materials, Rebecca’s poster features cutouts of female celebrities, namely Lohan, Jolie, and Hilton. These posters provide provocative insight and evidence of their values. As discussed above in “Character as Example,” Nicki is guided by principles of *The Secret* and fashion while

Rebecca is driven to ‘be’ her celebrity idols, which entails high-end clothing and jewelry.



Figure 18: Vision Boards

Top- Nicki and Sam’s room, Bottom- Rebecca’s room

Another example is the young burglars’ attention to celebrity gossip through the incessant presence of tabloid magazines and websites. When Marc and Rebecca first hang out alone, they both flip through celebrity gossip magazines commenting on “cute” celebrity outfits (“But she needs better hair extensions”) and discussing brand names such as Miu Miu, Prada, and Chanel. This act of celebrity gossip is featured throughout *Bling Ring* and is discussed extensively by Johansson in a chapter of *Framing Celebrity*. Conducting research in the form of interviews, Johansson delves into how celebrities function in the everyday lives of those who read tabloids. Her argument pinpoints celebrity culture, and specifically celebrity gossip through tabloids as a “bridge to shared cultural ground.” Holmes and Redmond write, “Tabloid reading in general was described as a social activity, exemplified in how some of the

participants would read the paper together...to strengthen social bonds” (348). Even more interestingly she writes,

Celebrity stories can further play a role in the negotiation of social norms. A major part of the conversations about these focused on morality: how to behave in society...The discussions about celebrity and morality, then, can serve a normative function, that that a sense of togetherness is established through common evaluation of easily identifiable subjects. (348-349)

As Johansson points out, the act of sharing celebrity gossip acts as a bonding mechanism and for the young and unsupervised teens in *Bling Ring*, the conclusions of that gossip is left to them. For example, Lindsey Lohan is referenced in at least two instances of criminality. While scrolling through a celebrity blog Marc comments to the girls, “Lindsey got another DUI” and later on we are shown a news clip of Lohan while a reporter voice over explains, “Lindsey Lohan is fighting back against accusations she stole a \$2,000 necklace from a southern California jewelry store.” The “Bling Ring” are involved in both a DUI and stealing jewelry. The statement of values provided by tabloid stories and celebrity actions can have a direct correlation to the actions of the young and avid readers. Especially in the case of Rebecca, who, we are told throughout the film, completely idolized Lohan. With no framework of morals provided by parents OR a framework of morals provided by misguided parents such as Laurie, can help make sense of the “Bling Ring’s” outrageous crimes.

Lastly, social networking plays a significant role in expressing the disconnect felt by these young teens. At the time of the crimes. 2008 and 2009, the predominant social media site was Facebook which is reflected in the many images of the networking

site in *Bling Ring*.<sup>7</sup> At first we see Marc posting pictures of his night out with the girls on Facebook. Without restraint each member posts pictures of stolen goods, illicit activities such as drinking, or simply holding stacks of money during the first half of the film. This notion of visibility and self-constructing image is evocative of tabloid culture and references to Facebook near the end of the film point to something more worrisome. The conversation between Marc and Kate emphasizes this most clearly.

Marc: I was always self-conscious that I wasn't, you know, as good looking as other people.

Kate: And now you're a star.

Marc: Yeah on my Facebook page recently I had over 800 friend requests. I accepted them all I mean I didn't even look at them. And then I noticed someone had created a fan page for me.

Marc is pointing out the quantifiable nature of 'friendship' that Facebook provides for teens. The ability to count friends can lend itself to a sense of likability, although as he mentions he doesn't know any of them or even cared to look at them individually. In a social media context, the friends or followers are a single entity much like the fans of a celebrity are a single fan base. It points to beginning of an evolution of the term 'celebrity' in which celebrity is attainable in a plethora of new ways as technology continues to provide more platforms. For example the concept of reality television becomes a gray area between the binary of fan and celebrity. These shows function on the premise that a person's private life, as set apart from their public and work-related life, can be a form of entertainment. The media of celebrity culture benefits from the assumption that it is "'special' and significant, and to enter it, or even briefly pass

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<sup>7</sup> According to *statista*, the most popular social media sites used by teenagers and young adults (12-24) in the United States as of February 2016 are 1)Snapchat, 2)Facebook, 3)Instagram, and 4)Twitter. Snapchat was launched in 2011, Instagram was launched in 2010, and Twitter in 2006.

through it, is to receive a form of symbolic capital. Reality TV has epitomized this assumption, and is seen as catering to a new era of public narcissism...in which the self is validated by performing for the gaze of others” (*Framing Celebrity* 10). One of the celebrities robbed by the “Bling Ring” was reality TV star Audrina Patridge. She starred in, *The Hills* which focused on the lives of several young women living in Los Angeles. Likewise, the inspiration for Nicki’s character, Alexis Neirs, also starred in a reality TV show, *Pretty Wild*. The social capital of reality television is equal and pertinent to explaining the “Bling Ring’s” condemning social media posts on Facebook.

Another essay from *Framing Celebrity* explores this concept of fans becoming meta-celebrities and further explains Marc’s behavior and motivation in *Bling Ring*. In his chapter, Hills explains that if celebrities can be defined by “mass recognition,” the binary of the celebrity and the fan can be broken down as more and more methods of recognition are produced. He posits:

‘Mass recognition’ is said to be concentrated on a symbolic elite of celebrities, who ‘belong to a very restricted visibility class,’ meaning that the media world is effectively divided into two groups: those who are visible in the media, and so possess high status, and those who are invisible- the far lower-status audience of fan-consumers. 101

This visibility can help explain the compulsion for the “Bling Ring” members to post their exploits online despite the obvious dangers of getting caught. The symbolic power granted to the ‘seen’ and ‘in’ crowd is something Marc especially strives for and contributes to his sense of fulfillment. The teenage years are a significant period of personal development where self-esteem is critical to behavioral tendencies and peers can have an impact on developing values. Marc transcends lower-class invisibility but his fame or ‘visibility’ comes from a source of notoriety. And he finds the fan base



isn't what he needs to be socially fulfilled as demonstrated by the devastation and sense of betrayal of Rebecca "unfriending" him before their trial.

## The Ending

The conclusion of *Bling Ring* provides further confirmation of the director's message. The last two scenes show Marc and Nicki's distinctly different fates post-sentencing (Figure 19). Marc is seen boarding prisoner transport labeled, "Los Angeles County Sheriff" with a handful of more hardened looking men. He sits alone and looks dolefully out the window as he is carried to his new future behind bars and the consequences of his actions. He has accepted the consequences of his actions, however daunting they may be. Nicki, however, seems to have moved in a reverse direction.



Figure 19: Final Scenes

Left- Marc going to jail, Right- Nicki talk show appearance

After Marc's scene there is a cut to black followed by 4 seconds of black frame. It acts almost as a psych out: these kids messed up but in the end they accepted their actions and paid the price, right? Wrong. The screen flashes back on revealing a male interviewer announcing, "We're here with Nicki Moore who just served 30 days for her involvement in the "Bling Ring" and shared a cell block with one of its victims, Lindsey Lohan." First of all, in the scene where the outcome of the trial is provided by a judge

voiceover, we know that Nicki was sentenced to one year in county jail so she served a minute portion of her punishment. What's more disturbing, however, is how the film's final statement asserts celebrity as a cycle. The first question posed by the interviewer concerns celebrity gossip, and Nicki's value as a provider of that gossip allows her to continue enjoying 'visibility.' He asks, "There were reports that Lindsey was crying, with you being next to her, did you actually hear any of this...How'd she look?" The interviewer's desire for intimate details leads to probing questions which would be considered crude and disrespectful in the most real life discourses.

Nicki is all too willingly to spill the beans on her celebrity encounter behind bars but not without plugging herself in the very last lines of the film: "Anyway, you can follow everything about me and my journey at [nickimooreforever.com](http://nickimooreforever.com)." With this final line Nicki turns to the camera, dually addressing viewers of the interview and viewers of *Bling Ring*. Her piercing stare and provocative body language leave little to the imagination regarding her intentions and desire for fame. The breaking of the fourth wall is as unsettling as the statement it is trying to make, a final attempt by Coppola to get viewers to understand what is at stake. Unlike Marc, Nicki does not accept the consequences of her actions by recognizing her mistakes and accepting fair or any punishment. In the final interview she continually denies her involvement saying, "Little do people know, when that first [surveillance] video came out, I was actually in contact with [Lohan's] manager to tell her who I believed the people were who robbed her house." Between the law and her mother Laurie there is nothing keeping her in check while she strives to be a part of the celebrity culture world.

## Conclusion

The disparity of gender in filmmaking is undeniable: men outnumber women in all positions behind and in front of the camera. Research shows a positive correlation between the presence of women in prominent behind-the-camera positions and larger numbers and improved representation in front of the camera. Positive female representation in visual media is an inarguably worthy goal for future filmmakers.

Some female directors, however, have been able to make an impact despite the statistical odds. This project focused on one filmmaker whose films have the ability to traverse the spectrum from arthouse to indie to multiplex for maximum visibility and traction to the plight of nonexistent female authorship while remaining viable for multiplex viewing. As the writer, producer, and director of all five of her films, Sofia Coppola can be credited for the distinct visual and aural nature of her oeuvre. In *Bling Ring* alone, auteurist techniques and motifs can be isolated such as distinct color palettes, meticulous soundtracks, and her use of unique POVs, car shots and tableaux. *Bling Ring* redirects the techniques Coppola has honed in her previous films to show aspects of emptiness in contemporary teen and celebrity culture. Visual motifs used to describe ennui in *Lost in Translation* and alienation in *Marie Antoinette* become agents of superficial fulfillment in *Bling Ring*. The film's premise interacts with Coppola's previous films in terms of themes of insiders and outsiders. The "Bling Ring" members are outside looking in until they physically insert themselves in the spaces of their celebrity idols in the attempt to shift from invisible to visible.

In her most recent film, all of these elements work to convey a message for viewers. While it is possible for the practice of unrelenting celebrity discourse to

produce true heroes to idolize, there are far more sinister repercussions of the seductive and glamorized culture. The “Bling Ring,” irreverent and reckless, represent an almost anaesthetized viewpoint of people and celebrities. Inundated with celebrity texts and paratexts such as tabloids, celebrity magazines, websites, and blogs, the young burglars clearly adhere to a separate value system. If Coppola had a thesis statement for *Bling Ring* it would be that loneliness can manifest itself in self-destructive ways. These young adults are in a stage of identity formation, and susceptible to outside sources such as peers and media outlets. The lack of guidance or even presence of parents and adults allows the “Bling Ring” members to be submerged in the glitz, glam, and bling of the Hollywood’s rich and famous. Their proximity physically and via the internet/social media also become significant factors. *Bling Ring* creates a nuanced portrait of emptiness despite excess. The superficiality of bling and constructed representations of celebrity lifestyle are on display as a warning of what unchecked exposure can do.

It is my hope that Sofia Coppola’s films and my exploration of *Bling Ring* can serve as a proponent for an increased support for women filmmakers. Every year films made by women can be seen in film festivals and art house cinemas around the country, yet a minute number of blockbusters and big-budget films involve women. In the current frenzy of hundred-million dollar budget superhero films, Patty Jenkins is the first and only women to date who has been hired to direct such a film with the upcoming \$100 million live-action *Wonder Woman*. The slow and arduous process of women taking a place in Hollywood has time and again shown they are as capable as men in genres outside the niche feminist art film. In 2012 Colin Trevorrow showed his quirky indie \$750,000 budgeted film *Safety Not Guaranteed* at Sundance and found a

mentor in Brad Bird, a formidable figure at Pixar. With Bird's connections, Trevorrow was next hired to co-write and direct the \$150 million *Jurassic World* and signed to direct the ninth *Star Wars* film, a drastic transition. According to an article by NY Times journalist Dowd, this is far from unusual and, "Every woman who has ever had a film at Sundance has ...watched male peers at the festival vault with ease across the chasm to Hollywood studios, agents, financing and big paychecks." Writer and director Leslye Headland also had a film at Sundance in 2012, a play-based indie entitled *Bachelorette*. According to Dowd's article, "She bristles with ambition to do everything he [Trevorrow] is doing... She wants to be a Martin Scorsese, and "not just the female Martin Scorsese." She wants to direct a James Bond movie...She wants to make films in which women behave badly and are not held to a higher moral standard." And I truly hopes she gets to do it.

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