



5-22-2013

Rape Culture Ruined My Favorite 80s Movie

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Adamczak, Stephanie K., "Rape Culture Ruined My Favorite 80s Movie" (2013). *SURGE*. 126.
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Rape Culture Ruined My Favorite 80s Movie

Abstract

I will admit that I wish my best friend was [Duckie](#), I want to attend just one Saturday detention with Emilio Estevez, and I listen to an unhealthy amount of music from the [Smiths](#) and the [Psychedelic Furs](#). Yes, I am a child of the nineties, but I spent many high school nights watching John Hughes films and attempting to dye my hair the perfect shade of Molly Ringwald red. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Surge, Surge Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Center for Public Service, sexuality, gender, rape culture, sexual objects, Sixteen Candles, stereotypes, racism

Disciplines

American Film Studies | Educational Sociology | Politics and Social Change | Social Psychology and Interaction

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Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

RAPE CULTURE RUINED MY FAVORITE 80S MOVIE

May 22, 2013

I will admit that I wish my best friend was [Duckie](#), I want to attend just one Saturday detention with Emilio Estevez, and I listen to an unhealthy amount of music from the [Smiths](#) and the [Psychedelic Furs](#). Yes, I am a child of the nineties, but I spent many high school nights watching John Hughes films and attempting to dye my hair the perfect shade of Molly Ringwald red.

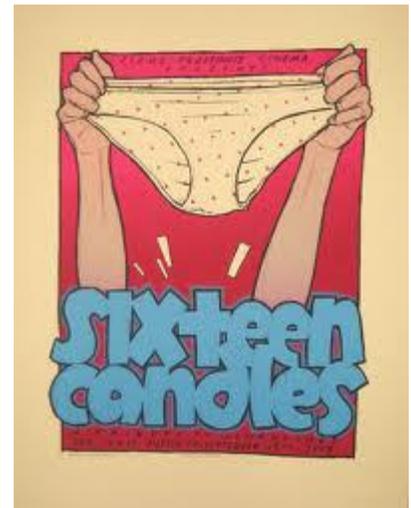
Upon revisiting one of the Hughes classics, "[Sixteen Candles](#)," I couldn't help but draw a few alarming and uncomfortable parallels to a touchy subject that has recently been brought to light in mainstream media. Putting aside the extremely racist character portrayal of Long Duck Dong and characters referring to him as the "Chinaman," and the many other stereotypes used throughout this film, what I found most appalling was the strong underlying semblance to the [Steubenville rape case](#). I'm sure everyone has heard about this case, but a quick recap: a young girl at a high school party was rendered unconscious from consuming too much alcohol and was raped multiple times on camera, and nobody attempted to stop the star football players from harming this girl.

Now, what exactly does this have to do with a super-awesome eighties flick? Nothing, I thought, before I re-watched it, but then I realized something that my high school brain could not comprehend at the time: Caroline, the beautiful, popular blonde, was treated as a sexual object throughout the entire film.

The film portrays the inebriated and borderline incoherent Caroline as an object that was simply there to be molested. Jake Ryan, the film's token popular boy who just wants to find true love, basically [sells his girlfriend](#) to nerdy and clueless Farmer Ted. Jake even admits that "he could violate her ten different ways" if he so pleased because she not only belonged to him, but was too inebriated to even realize. My heart sank. One of my favorite teen films was justifying the rape of a girl simply because she was drunk.

This isn't the only evidence of the rape-rationalization in this film. While drunkenly driving around town with Ted, Caroline shouts that birth control means that girls "can be extra careless". The way I interpreted this: if a girl is drunk and there's no chance she can get pregnant, you can go for it because you won't actually be harming her, right?

Wrong.



And then came the most shocking resemblance to Steubenville: Ted goes to his friend's house and has them take a picture of him with Caroline as proof. Of course, this was a way more innocent gesture than the filming and broadcasting on social media of the Steubenville rape because Ted and Caroline were not actually having sex at the moment, but the implication of sex was present, and now there would be proof for their whole school.

Furthermore, later in the film, a more sober Caroline seems completely fine with the fact that her boyfriend practically sold her to a complete stranger. Despite being treated like an object throughout the film, having been traded for a pair of underwear to a fifteen-year old who has sex with her while she is drunk, Caroline [indicates](#) that she liked it. By having her say this, the filmmakers further dehumanize Caroline for the sake of the development of Farmer Ted as some kind of geek turned sexual hero. (A similar portrayal of a female not giving consent, but liking it anyway for the sake of the male character's development can be seen in this [commercial](#). This is by no means an isolated case.)



A film that had previously brought me so much enjoyment was now doing nothing but making me uneasy. Right there before my eyes was a further representation of rape culture and victim blaming. A film that is considered a family classic was further perpetuating the idea that if a woman is too drunk to give consent it does not matter; go for it anyway because she A) is an object that belongs to you B) got too drunk on her own accord and this is her fault and/or C) will enjoy it.

I apologize for possibly ruining one of your favorite nostalgic films, but I think this should be taken as a learning experience. This doesn't mean that you can never watch the movie again, but it does mean that we must pay closer attention, not just to "Sixteen Candles," but to all films, commercials, print advertising, television shows, and other media that lie about gender roles and perpetuate rape culture. We should all become more knowledgeable about the ways our society justifies rape in the presence of alcohol and other drugs. Realize that your awareness of little social hints such as these will help us get one step closer to stopping this process of victim-blaming and one step closer to stopping rape.

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<http://surgegettysburg.wordpress.com/2013/05/22/rape-culture-ruined-my-favorite-80s-movie/>