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**FROM OBJECT TO ICON: THE UNPREDICTABLE PATH
TO EVERLASTINGNESS**

BY

DONNA M. DESIDERI

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2021

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

From Object to Icon: The Unpredictable Path to Everlastingness

by

Donna M. Desideri

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This thesis explores how a squeaky-clean object transformed into a girl-next-door icon and became a role model for generations to come. And in an industry built on illusions and dreams, reality wore many masks.

Still in its beginning stages and looking to sell tickets, the motion picture industry needed to reconstruct its current downscale public image by presenting a much-improved polished and upscale public image to audiences, all while silencing contradictory images and information. Appealing to a middle-class sensibility to boost this new public image gave the motion picture industry the acceptance it was seeking. By marketing to middle-class audiences, producers promoted only the cultivated images and middlebrow narratives they wanted people to see. Fan magazines contributed to these illusions by enhancing stories to satisfy the growing curiosities that audiences developed about players. And soon, the motion picture industry revolved around manufacturing and selling illusions to middle-class audiences, while simultaneously concealing contradictory private images. And in addition to selling illusions, the motion picture industry discovered that selling the American Dream to American audiences generated substantial profits.

This thesis focuses on three special female stars: Lois Weber, Doris Day, and Karen Carpenter, and their images, both public and private, and their lives, both public and private. And it

examines what these stars shared in common, their assets and their liabilities, while following their career paths before and after they were stars and by taking a brief look at their biographies, which include their objectification in their separate industries controlled by men. Additionally, my thesis researches the rise of celebrity culture and the importance of star studies since its inception not only in academia but in society as well.

Weber, Day, and Carpenter, three prominent stars with wholesome, girl-next-door appeal and middle-class beginnings and values, did not need glitter or glitz to shine. Each star sparkled in her own unique way. And in studying the intricacies of these women's lives and careers, it became clear why these stars and their exceptional gifts did not go unnoticed. Thus, when a contradictory private image escaped their purview, camouflaged charisma came to the rescue. (Inevitably, there was always a rescue.) Yet some misconceptions linger, and the true illusion persists to some extent that Weber, Day, and Carpenter were stars of everyday ordinariness, when in reality, they were stars of the utmost extraordinariness.

Keywords: Stars, Celebrities, Celebrity Culture, Doris Day, Karen Carpenter, Lois Weber, Fame, Girl Next Door, Wholesome, Star Studies

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I dedicate my thesis to my father from Rome, Italy. I am part of his American Dream.

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Introduction

After the turn of the twentieth century in America, a new kind of culture began to form—the celebrity culture—and it quickly ascended. Audiences found themselves fascinated with the performers they watched, and there grew a need to learn more about their private lives. Fame occurred for many entertainers because of audience familiarity with their public images and public performances, as well as their private images and private lives. This thesis explores the career paths and immense popularity of two extraordinary female celebrities: Doris Day and Karen Carpenter. I examine how both of these women drew from what initially seemed to be a liability for them, their squeaky-clean, girl-next-door public images, to propel them into a level of superstardom no one believed they would actually ever achieve, all while hiding contradictory private images, which inevitably seeped through anyway, unwanted.

Day and Carpenter went against the grain of what was happening at the time they each arrived on the scene. For Day, she arrived in Hollywood when blondes were more popular than ever, and she still stood out. Marilyn Monroe, Jayne Mansfield, and Mae West were just a few of the high-profile platinum blondes of the era. They were overtly sexy and known sex symbols. They appeared as part of Hollywood's fantasies. Yet Day, not a glamour girl, was in a category all by herself. There was no one else like her in Hollywood at the time. Meanwhile, Carpenter signed to A&M Records in 1969 with her brother Richard. A&M's founder, famed trumpeter Herb Alpert, respected their soft, blended sound. They, too, were in a category all by themselves. For context, at the same time in 1969 Woodstock, one of the largest rock music festivals ever held, took place in Bethel, New York. But by May 1970, the Carpenters, who had eschewed the Woodstock scene, had their first hit single on the *Billboard* charts, "Close to You," and they would continue to keep producing hit record after hit record from there on out. Both Day and

Carpenter, against all odds, proved themselves to be “the trendsetters next door.”

Here I follow the lives of these two women before they catapulted to stardom and examine their girl-next-door images that seemed a liability to each as opposed to other similarly situated stars and their popular images. Both Day and Carpenter bucked the trend, and each started her own trend, and both women became pioneers of their respective generations. In addition, I present the feminist aspects of both Day and Carpenter that have become obscured by their good girl images, and I situate my comments within Richard Dyer’s examination of stars’ complex, contradictory, and different images (Dyer and McDonald ch. 2). Moreover, I investigate the rise of celebrity culture in America, audiences and their effect on stars and fame, and include here pioneer Lois Weber and her remarkable career. Lois Weber, an important Hollywood director of the silent period, was a trendsetter herself who forged new byways so other women could follow in her footsteps. I appraise Lois Weber’s feminist aspects, her career path, and the commonalities all three women shared on their journeys as everyday middle-class artists who did not use sex to sell themselves but were still hot enough to blaze their own trails, nonetheless.

In my literature review, I provide an overview of my primary and secondary sources on Day and Carpenter, giving background and biographical information on their lives, and delving into their public images and public lives and their private images and private lives. Additionally, I take a look at the vital field of star studies—a continuously growing field initiated by the highly respected Dyer in 1979 with his revolutionary book *Stars*. From there, I proceed to a scholar influenced by Dyer, Jackie Stacey, who used his work as an example to formulate her theory of spectatorship in star studies. Stacey, who conducted more research than Dyer regarding star studies and feminism, admits there are gaps and obvious absences in feminist research today,

mostly concerning Hollywood stars of the 1940s and the 1950s in striking contrast to the female spectators' interest in them.¹

My work builds on and diverges from these scholars by placing a feminist focus on the dilemma of the contradictory image for these female stars. Both Day and Carpenter were forced to entrust their superstar careers to Hollywood producers and record producers, or in other words—men. Each woman's chapter reveals her determination to preserve her public image at all costs. Additionally, I explore the notion for both Day and Carpenter that by adding these prominent and often derided-for-being-Goody-Two-shoes stars to the discussion, I will be developing the importance of what I am calling the *approachable star*. Looking at these two significant celebrities together, it becomes clear that they navigated their careers and their celebrity images at times when societal norms were shifting, and women were receiving contradictory messages about femininity. And in some ways, their paths illustrate the dangers and the pitfalls of these changing roles for women. Dyer emphasizes that “the whole star phenomenon is profoundly unstable. Stars cannot be *made* to work as affirmations of private or public life. In some cases, the sheer multiplicity of the images, the amount of hype, the different stories told become overwhelmingly contradictory” (Dyer intro.). As will become evident, contradictions are at the heart of Day's and Carpenter's star images. Like Lois Weber before them, both Day and Carpenter had public images that were closely aligned with their private images, but the media often overstepped their boundaries at the mere hint of a damaging story, especially concerning a virtuous girl next door. Ultimately, though, the all-American celebrity next door, wholesome and ordinary, became famous for possessing an extraordinary magnetism

¹ In a footnote, Stacey mentions that in recent publications (1991) on stars, several authors have filled that gap to some extent (Stacey ch. 3).

and radiance of an indescribable nature that, above all else, grabbed the gaze of the audience and of the media—the two biggest and most powerful starmakers.

Literature Review

Scholarship in image and star studies varies and research dating back as far as the late nineteenth century to the present day sharpens the focus when investigating the rise of celebrity and fan culture. Due to the significance of the stars' prominence in today's entertainment industry and in popular culture in general, the relatively recent acceleration of star studies in academia should come as no surprise. Ever since Dyer published his now groundbreaking book *Stars* in 1979, star studies has become a legitimized and acceptable branch of research within academic studies. Much of Dyer's own work originated with his analysis and review of another scholar's work, the late nineteenth century German economist, sociologist, and philosopher, Max Weber, and his highly influential work on charisma. Published posthumously, *Economy and Society*, Weber's comprehensive manuscript, serves as the foundational text for the social sciences of the twentieth century while also providing a classification of political forms based upon systems of rule and rulership. In this book, Weber developed three models of authority: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic (Weber ch. 2). Each model represented a different conceptual justification of legitimacy that the ruled must accept, whether it be the traditional rule of continual habit of the past, the rational-legal rule by virtue of the law, which accommodates the faith in the soundness of the legal statutes and legal system, or lastly, Weber's most famous theory, adapted by Dyer for star studies, known as the charismatic rule of authority, which describes the rule of an exceptional personal gift of grace or charisma (Weber ch. 2). Weber explains charisma in these words, "This gift can neither be taught like a technical skill nor entirely robbed by rational structures. As such, it defies rational grounding and marks a person as

extraordinary” (Weber intro.). This magnetic gift is deemed so strong, it gains people’s entire personal devotion and trust. Even the pull and attraction of charisma as a conceptual justification of legitimacy seems to stand out from the others with its own unique quality. Weber’s notion of charismatic authority greatly impacted star studies and celebrity theory as evidenced by the fact that stars do tend to be trendsetters and leaders who possess a powerful allure and thereby exert great influence over others. Scholars tapped into the idea that charisma separated stars from people and their ordinariness by treating them as blessed with extraordinary qualities and uniquely exceptional gifts.

Dyer adopted Weber’s theory and incorporated charisma as an integral part of the star phenomenon. Today, much of the academic literature favors viewing stars through the lens of commodification, with an interest on the trade, promotion, and publicity of a star’s image at the forefront. And especially in film, scholars focus on the image and how the audience received the star’s image. Twenty years after its first publication, Dyer updated *Stars*, having written *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* in between in 1986 (and then updating it in 2006) and directing the text in his newer book to the idea that the audience plays a part in the making of the image. In *Heavenly Bodies*, Dyer posits that audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections, and contradictions that work for them. Moreover, the agencies of fan magazines and clubs, as well as box office receipts and audience research, mean that the audience’s ideas about a star can act back on the media producers of the star’s image (Dyer intro.). Utilizing Judy Garland as an experiment during the time period that occurs after 1950, which was the year she was fired by MGM and tried to commit suicide, Dyer explored how specific aspects of Garland’s image turned her into an icon for gay men. Garland’s sudden

break from MGM at this time revealed her in a new light of suffering, ordinariness, and normality that structures much of the gay reading of Garland (Dyer ch. 3). Focusing on an all-male gay subculture, Dyer included responses to advertising letters he placed in gay newspapers and magazines, namely, *Gay News* (political and social paper) and *Him* (Britain) (pornographic magazine), *Body Politic* (Canada), *New York Native* and *The Advocate* (USA). The letters asked people to write to Dyer about their memories of Judy Garland and why they liked her. All were written after Garland's death and the emergence of the modern gay movement (Dyer ch. 3).

Across his work, Dyer provided a methodology for studying stars by introducing three new key concepts: (i) stars as images; (ii) star images having structured polysemy that enable multiple interpretations (i.e., offering numerous meanings and pleasures); and (iii) stars as embodiments of ideological contradiction, through which social conflicts are negotiated and resolved at a symbolic level. Dyer encouraged the analysis of press articles and publicity and promotional materials as a key part of film scholarship, as well as textual analysis of film sequences. One of Dyer's main concerns centers around audience response to a star's performance (Shingler ch. 1). And Dyer held that stars represent figures of human individuality and differing social types, functioning as stereotypes, but combining both ordinary and extraordinary qualities. Dyer establishes this as one of the primary contradictions of stardom. That star quality, unidentifiable, defines them as being special (different from everyone else, more talented, or more beautiful) but at the same time also like people in real life. This creates the paradox of the stars (Shingler ch. 1). Dyer states, "All stars are in one way or another exceptional, just as they are all ordinary. The un-extraordinary 'girl next door' types like June Allyson, Doris Day and Betty Grable are no less characteristic of the star phenomenon than are the extraordinary types like Hepburn *et al.*" (Dyer and McDonald ch. 5).

An alternative approach to Dyer's, in terms of a more thorough examination of stars and their audiences, cropped up in the early 1990s with the publication of Jackie Stacey's *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (1994). Stacey set out different ways for film scholars to inspect established historical and cultural film interpretations, providing various approaches for exploring film spectatorship than earlier theoretical methods. In *Star Gazing*, Stacey refers extensively to Dyer's work, arguing that little attention has been paid to female stars and their feminine images by feminist film theorists, except in terms of how the stars function within the film text. With a few notable recent exceptions, however, the small amount of feminist work that does exist on stars has barely begun to address the question of the relationship between stars and spectators. Stacey builds on the beginnings of work on cinema audiences through an analysis of the relationship between female spectators and female stars, as well as analyzing how male and female spectators watch female stars differently (Stacey ch. 1).

Stacey always keeps the audience as her primary focus while she not only builds on but also diverges from Laura Mulvey's work on spectatorship and Dyer's work on stars. Stacey also reviewed the role of Hollywood glamour in the forming of relationships between female fans and Hollywood stars, their written testimonies perused as much as the images of the stars. Following Dyer's example, Stacey placed advertisement letters in two of the leading British women's weekly magazines, *Woman's Realm* and *Woman's Weekly*, requesting readers write to her about their favorite Hollywood star of the 1940s and the 1950s (Stacey ch. 1). This is the period that much of the feminist work on Hollywood has taken a look, and it is the period where the definition of femininity started to change not only in Hollywood but also in society. Both magazines appeal predominantly to a white readership (Stacey ch. 3). Stacey's ads asked the following two questions: "Were you a keen cinema-goer in the 1940s and 1950s? Who was your

favourite film star and for what reason” (Stacey app’x 1)?

Stacey received over 350 letters (Stacey ch. 3). While most came from Britain, she also received some from Canada, Australia, and New Zealand all attesting to the ongoing significance of Hollywood stars in women’s lives and imaginations. Her respondents were all white, mostly 60 years old or older, and typically came from lower middle-class or working-class backgrounds (Stacey ch. 1). Stacey considered it “a study of white British women’s fantasies about glamour, about Americanness and about themselves” (Stacey ch. 1). The letters varied in length, and some respondents included original newspaper clippings about their favorite stars, old photos, and even scrapbook pages and detailed stars’ appeal in their own words (Stacey ch. 3). The letters expressed a variety of interests about how much these stars and their films meant in women’s lives, how important the cinema was during the war in Britain, why women stopped being fans of stars, if they did, and any particularly fond memories of their cinema experience of the 1940s and the 1950s. The spectators shared what seemed like interactive memories and relationships between themselves and their star ideals, including the possibilities of becoming more like their screen ideal through the purchase of commodities associated with particular stars (Stacey ch. 7).

Another scholar working within the feminist vein of film and star studies is author and critic Molly Haskell, who focused her critiques on women and film with an emphasis on women as objects of the male gaze, characterized by Mulvey as a three-way process involving the camera and the other actors on the screen, both acting as surrogates for the male viewer—that a woman was deprived of her own subjective desires and converted into this symbol of male desire (Haskell and Dargis ch. 9). Haskell wrote the innovative books, *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* and *Holding My Own in No Man’s Land*. Both of these books discuss Doris Day but *Holding My Own in No Man’s Land* includes the interview Haskell had

conducted with Day that first appeared in *Ms.* in January 1976 entitled “Icon of the Fifties.” Haskell remarked her revisionist view of Day went against the feminist grain because Day turned out to be politically incorrect, and Haskell had been a long-time fan of Day’s (Haskell 23). And like a true fan, Haskell explored Day’s films and her roles in them. Haskell was the first feminist critic to attempt to unpack Day’s image in light of the female spectatorship of Day’s era. Haskell claimed Day was misunderstood, overlooked, and undervalued (Haskell and Dargis ch. 6) and that most women of her era did not possess the passion, driving ambition, and no-nonsense approach that Day did to challenge, in her workingwomen roles, the limited destiny of women to marry, live happily ever after, and never be heard from again (Haskell 26–27).

Turning now to critics and authors who focus on girl-next-door Karen Carpenter, author Randy Schmidt’s biography, *Little Girl Blue: The Life of Karen Carpenter*, with a foreword by Dionne Warwick, plays a key role in my project. This book sensitively pieces together and recounts the details of Karen Carpenter’s short life through friends, family, acquaintances, business partners, and connections—basically anyone who had anything to share about Karen Carpenter. Schmidt admits to first being drawn in by Karen’s “mournful voice” after having viewed the 1989 CBS biopic, *The Karen Carpenter Story*, on New Year’s Day 1989 (Schmidt and Warwick auth.’s note). Still a teenager and taken with her, Schmidt felt the filmmakers answered many of the questions surrounding Karen Carpenter’s life and death, but he also felt the entire truth remained hidden. The biopic continued to haunt him. Karen’s voice continued to haunt him. Schmidt set out to resume the investigation into what happened to Karen and why. With Harold and Agnes Carpenter deceased, and with some distance now since Karen’s 1983 death, Schmidt, who published in 2010, felt confident the people he interviewed had ample time, opportunity, and freedom to express themselves. Karen’s brother, Richard, declined to be

interviewed for the project but did not discourage others from contributing (Schmidt and Warwick auth.'s note).

Karen Carpenter with her ordinary, wholesome image and extraordinary singing voice, just like Doris Day, also managed to reach a level of stardom no one believed she would reach but unfortunately for Karen, her career (and her life) did not have the longevity that Doris Day's had. Through his biography, Schmidt conducts a thorough probe into Karen's life and death. His research seems accurate and corroborated. However, Schmidt does not focus too much on Karen's girl-next-door image. In fact, when image is mentioned, it is usually concerning body image and weight loss. Schmidt devotes much time to tracing Karen's beginnings in New Haven, Connecticut, to the family's relocation to Downey, California, so Richard could become the great pianist they knew he was born to be. Schmidt highlights interesting moments that made Karen unique, such as when the owner and engineer of a recording studio at one of Spectrum's earlier recording sessions noticed Karen unpacking a set of Ludwigs and said, "Gee, your boyfriend has you trained really well." (Spectrum was a short-lived band made up of several student musicians from Long Beach State University.) Karen then asked, "What do you mean?" And he replied, "He has you trained really well for you to come and set up his drums for him." And with a sheepish grin Karen responded, "*I'm* the drummer" (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). Schmidt fully fleshes out Karen to give the reader a better idea of how she became who she became and perhaps why her life unfolded the way it did.

There is remarkably little sustained scholarly writing on the culture of Karen Carpenter considering her international success as a pop star and her success as one of the only female drummers and lead singers in the industry (McKay 2). George McKay discusses the inherent destructive nature of popular music and the industry's pressuring of its own stars, especially its

female artists, to stay thin. McKay researches the connection between pop music and anorexia nervosa mainly as detected in Karen Carpenter and her relationship with eating in his article, “Skinny blues: Karen Carpenter, anorexia nervosa and popular music.” Written in 2018, McKay takes note of the fact that not a word was spoken regarding Karen’s anorexia from the pop star herself or anyone around her until after her death leaving her brother Richard to shape her narrative and protect her legacy (McKay 2). And until 1983, anorexia nervosa did not receive much public attention. Karen suffered from a distorted self-image of her body weight as she continued to restrict her eating. Once she no longer could hide behind her drum kit on a regular basis as pressure mounted to bring her to the foreground, she expressed body dissatisfaction and an unwillingness to be seen. McKay stated that anorexia gained the attention of medical professionals during the 1960s and beyond as a result of the media’s obsession with thinness (McKay 4). Culturally, young women (and some young men) who are in the public eye whether it be as singers, dancers, actors, models, or musicians feel it is part of their job to remain thin. But Karen internalized the industry’s pressure on her (McKay 5) and took it too far.

My work will build from these theorists and writers by illuminating the difficulties female celebrities face navigating their ordinary private lives with their extraordinary public images and their extraordinary public lives in the male-dominated industry of show business by utilizing real-life examples from the lives of Day and Carpenter. Both women grew up retaining that tomboyish quality that set them apart and eventually guided them to develop their nod towards feminism. Dyer conveys, “A star image consists both of what we normally refer to as his or her ‘image,’ made up of screen roles and obviously stage-managed public appearances, and also of images of the manufacture of that ‘image’ and of the real person who is the site or occasion of it. Each element is complex and contradictory, and the star is all of it taken together.

Much of what makes them interesting is how they articulate aspects of living in contemporary society” (Dyer intro.). Both Day and Carpenter maneuvered through uncharted territories with grace and middle-class morals. Still, dangers and pitfalls were no strangers. In the long run, both women outachieved their male counterparts in a man’s world, thus becoming role models for young women everywhere. In fact, spectator Betty Cole in a letter to Jackie Stacey wrote, “Doris Day . . . seemed to epitomise the kind of person, who with luck, I as a child could aspire to be” (Stacey ch. 5). Young women wished to emulate these two outstanding stars in our history of celebrities. Two women with so much in common, forced to hide their contradictory, sometimes troubling, private lives and private images, only to have them leak out to the public anyway—at the most inopportune time.

Since the origin of the celebrity culture in the early 1900s when stars’ images began their construction and promotion, the mass media, and in particular, the medium of photography, have played a central role in the dissemination of these images (Holmes and Redmond ch. 12). Over the years, star photos ran the gamut from too glossy and idealized to unflattering and unappealing, just like the stars themselves. Somewhere in between lies what audiences have been seeking: the approachable star—not too glamorous and not too realistic. But plainspoken with natural good looks and a wholesome appeal. Stars like Day and Carpenter who were squeaky-clean and down to earth also seemed warm, friendly, and easy to relate to on a one-to-one basis.

By adding Day and Carpenter to the discussion of stars and their images, two extremely good-natured and likeable personas become part of the conversation. Fresh-faced and attractive, wholesome but not necessarily sexy, these qualities combine to contribute to their approachable star appeal. Each star lived by a set of middle-class values that complemented her agreeable, upbeat, good girl image making her an exemplary role model to identify with for young fans.

With the help of their girl-next-door charms, each knew how to connect with an audience and how to make people feel at ease. Day and Carpenter were no-nonsense, sensible, and determined. Fun-loving and trustworthy, they remained unchanged by their fame and fortune. Unpretentious and welcoming, both stars created strong bonds with their audiences who seemed to prefer the sincere and unassuming qualities of the girl-next-door type. Dyer claims, “What is abundantly clear is that stars are supremely figures of identification, and this identification is achieved principally through the star’s relation to social types” (Dyer and McDonald ch. 7). Audiences identified and related to Day, Carpenter, and their public images. Both stars presented a certain degree of openness about who they were—just enough, in fact, to satisfy the curious minds of their fans. But not too much to reveal their hidden contradictory private images.

Lois Weber: The Quintessential, Unflappable Matron Next Door

“Star images have histories, and histories that outlive the star’s own lifetime”—Richard Dyer (2006, 3)

While the main focus of this thesis is on Day and Carpenter, I will take a few pages to describe one of the early female pioneers of film and of celebrity from the silent era: Lois Weber, whose rise to fame as one of the first and few known women directors in Hollywood cast her as an anomaly of exceptional gifts. Weber most clearly illustrates an example of genius carving her own path so that others may one day travel it as well. A trailblazer, innovator, and unique talent, Lois Weber started her career as a concert pianist and opera singer before turning her talents to film. In 1908, American Gaumont Chronophone hired her to sing in short synchronous-sound films, where she also utilized her skills as an actress, writer, and director (Norden chron.). She soon married Phillips Smalley and they joined Edwin S. Porter’s Rex Motion Picture Co., where Weber wrote, directed, starred in, titled, and edited films. After the Universal Film Company acquired Rex as a subsidiary (Norden chron.), Weber and her husband left New York and arrived

in Los Angeles just as film production began to coalesce there in and around the city (Stamp intro.). Weber began working within the emergent studio system, quickly becoming the studio's top and highest paid director, and the first woman inducted into the Motion Picture Directors' Association (Stamp intro.). Weber also became known as one of the first celebrity filmmakers (Stamp intro.), and Weber's reputation as a filmmaker radiated for producing quality films associated with respectability (Stamp intro.). Lois Weber and her image of wholesomeness and middle-class values highlighted her ordinariness mixed with her extraordinary talent—all identical qualities possessed by Day and Carpenter—as she influenced young women by opening up vistas for them.

Something of a feminist² herself, Lois Weber receives a prominent place in my thesis because she represents a celebrity whose appeal was based on her ordinariness. And yet she epitomizes extraordinary talent. Lois Weber's public persona precisely reflects the image the early motion picture industry concentrated on for its target audience—refined, married, squeaky-clean, and noticeably middle class. In the 1910s, middle-class stability and respectability formed the hallmark of the American Dream. Movie magazines sold the fantasy of becoming middle class in their advertisements (Sternheimer ch. 2), and films steered their themes away from the working classes to themes that would be concerned with more wholesome, middle-class entertainment that the whole family could enjoy together.

But in spite of this, Lois Weber had different ideas. She wanted to make films with messages. Weber viewed motion pictures as “living newspapers” capable of engaging popular audiences in debates about the most deeply provocative subjects (Stamp intro.). Her status as a silent film star might have aided her as she lashed out at contemporary controversial social issues

² While the word “feminist” existed, it was not as commonly used in Weber's era as it is today. Still, Weber encouraged other women and focused on female-centered narratives.

as a screenwriter and director. Weber, well-known, well-respected, and well-established in the industry, forged new territory by going against the grain of what the other directors of her time, such as D. W. Griffith and Cecil B. DeMille to whom she was often compared (Polan and Stamp ch. 3) were filming with their historical epics and literary adaptations. And thus, she wrote and directed narrative features advocating abolition of capital punishment and legalization of birth control, while drawing links between urban poverty and women's wage equity (Stamp intro.). Lois Weber, a progressive-thinking director for her time, realized these films with their socially relevant topics would continue to carry meaning and significance as women would continue to seek out equality and fair treatment for their lives and for their children's lives. A fearless pioneer concerning social issues films, her work brought forth landmark censorship cases that challenged early regulatory practices, and she emerged, alongside Griffith, as a steady voice against efforts to censor the movies (Stamp concl.).

Weber's image was instrumental in defining both her particular place in filmmaking practices and women's roles within early Hollywood more generally. Her wifely, bourgeois persona, conservative and staid, mirrored the film industry's idealized conception of its new customers: white, married, middle-class women perceived to be arbiters of taste in their communities. At the same time, Weber's frequent creative collaborations with her husband offered a more forward-looking portrait of gender equality in the workplace modeled on new ideas of companionate marriage (Polan and Stamp ch. 3). Newspaper articles published throughout the country described the director in various hyperbolic alliterative configurations as the "wonder woman of the films," the "super woman of the silent drama," and "the director deluxe of filmdom"—all suggesting a celebrity status reaching far beyond the confines of movie buffs, and certainly eclipsing that of any other director or screenwriter at the time. In many

magazine profiles Weber came to stand for the very image of twentieth-century womanhood: “Among the modern women who are accomplishing big things,” Lois Weber provided a “splendid example of what may be accomplished by a woman both in a creative and an executive capacity,” an example that “opens up vistas for other women” (Polan and Stamp ch. 3).

As movie star culture took off after 1910, celebrity writing increasingly focused on performers’ personal lives and living spaces. Fame in early Hollywood was built as much through audience knowledge of a star’s on-screen roles as it was through familiarity with her or his off-screen, “private” life, as Richard deCordova has shown. “This was a fan culture that,” Kathryn Fuller argues, “increasingly tailored its appeal to women by catering to ‘feminine’ interests in romance, beauty, decorating, and family life, rather than the technical and scientific details that had colored much of the earliest film publicity” (Polan and Stamp ch. 3). Lois Weber’s marriage to Phillips Smalley stood at the heart of both her professional persona and depictions of her private life (Polan and Stamp ch. 3). Publicity photos often pictured the pair side by side in analogous poses, where the visual parallelism seems to echo their broader artistic synchronicity. A portrait of Weber and Smalley “conferring on a manuscript” depicted the two posed intimately together with their bodies literally intertwined as they worked. With domestic furnishings visible in the soft-focus background, Weber rests her elbow on Smalley’s thigh as she holds a script in her lap. Such allusions offered marriage as an appropriate template for working partnerships between men and women, and egalitarian collaboration as a new blueprint for modern romance. These images seem to suggest that films produced by such a partnership, however controversial they might appear to be, could surely only be grounded in the finest bourgeois virtues (Polan and Stamp ch. 3).

Weber’s matronly stature enhanced her claims to cinematic respectability, and her

marriage, far from competing with her creative interests, was cast as the couple's emotional and creative center (Polan and Stamp ch. 3). The degree to which Weber's marriage underscored her reputation for respectability is most notable in celebrity profiles structured around visits to her Los Angeles bungalow. Interviews staged in stars' homes became familiar conceits in celebrity writing of the mid-1910s, focused as it was on private lives and living spaces. Beginning with a reporter's approach to the dwelling—"she met me on the deep veranda of her pearl-gray bungalow" (Polan and Stamp ch. 3)—such pieces offered fans a virtual tour of stars' off-screen lives. And unlike so many other early star profiles that played up lavish Hollywood lifestyles, portraits of Weber's life at home did not celebrate the glamour of her surroundings. Rather, it was precisely the ordinariness of the couple's "beautiful little vine-covered flower garden bungalow," their "charming house in Hollywood," and their "modest little bungalow" that was cherished (Polan and Stamp ch. 3).

Arguments about quality filmmaking in the early 1910s raised the specter of cinema's uplift and an appeal to refined middle-class audiences, a cause invariably championed by industry trade papers. Trade critics saw the promise of an evolving medium. An emphasis on drama over action became a philosophy Weber and Smalley would maintain in their filmmaking (Stamp ch. 1). Weber's visual storytelling attracted the middle class, and her femininity played an important role in selling to an audience, which included appearing in fan magazines that started to make an appearance in 1911.³ Thus, Lois Weber's work was aimed at middle-class audiences, not simply to recruit them into particular progressive causes, but also to suggest a broader agreement between film viewing and reformist sensibilities. Weber, in other words,

³ Beginning with *Motion Picture Story Magazine*, newsstands and movie theaters sold fan magazines in an attempt to create a more refined image of both the movies and their players (Sternheimer ch. 2).

sought to engage moviegoers directly in activist reform (Stamp ch. 2). If Weber's life structured her star persona then, it did so in a contradictory fashion. At a time when the industry was eager to present someone so upstanding, so righteous, so ladylike as its public face—someone whose behind-the-scenes persona mirrored that of the industry's idealized female clientele, Weber's reputation for high-minded feature filmmaking traded upon her celebrity image as married, middle-class matron (Polan and Stamp ch. 3).

Ironically, Weber's persona, which had stressed her independence within marriage, paved the way for newer forms of female independence outside of marriage that came into vogue with the youthful flapper stars. But ultimately, Lois Weber's persona did not fit in with the new modern Hollywood of the late 1920s, where femininity, no longer the signifier of dignity and gentility, now signified playfulness, rebellion, sex, and sexuality, issues avoided by Weber's matronly persona. Youthful flappers fit in better, but for a time what Weber offered her fans was a model of female professional accomplishment that would not be seen again for decades in the film industry and, Lois Weber felt unwilling to adapt to new Hollywood. Her persona was perfectly suited to a different time, when films of serious social import were Hollywood's desired product, not entertainment and glamour, and when married, middle-class women—not young dating singles—were the desired clientele (Polan and Stamp ch. 3).

When Lois Weber began carving out her own career course by utilizing her natural talents and applying her good work ethic to prove herself early on in what was soon to become a masculinized business—this newly forming motion picture industry—she could have no idea as to the enormous success she would one day achieve by adhering to her middle-class values. The same holds true for Doris Day and Karen Carpenter. In the right place at the right time, Lois Weber personified the ideal middle-class woman of her era. And although the “girl next door”

was not a type or a term in common parlance then, I would argue that Lois Weber embodied the archetype of what we now know as the girl next door. Like Weber, Day and Carpenter also brought an ordinariness to their public personas and drew on similar feminine characteristics. Additionally, Weber brought an extraordinary talent while drawing on a forward-looking femininity in the role of careerwoman, which when combined with her progressive thinking made her a feminist in her own right—just like Day and Carpenter. The enormous success and appeal all three women had in their respective careers stands out and links them together. While it is impossible to know whether Doris Day and Karen Carpenter would have known about Lois Weber (probably not given that until recently Weber was largely forgotten), Lois Weber helped to create and solidify the possibility of the wholesome, girl-next-door image within Hollywood's celebrity pantheon.

A Day Like No Other

“Star images are constructed personages in media texts”—Richard Dyer (2019, 148)

The All-American Girl Next Door

In 1921, when Alma Kappelhoff was pregnant for the third and final time, she told her friends she was hoping for a girl and that her daughter would one day become an actress (Kaufman 4). Born Doris Mary Ann Von Kappelhoff in Cincinnati, Ohio, on April 3, 1922, Doris Day was named after her mother’s favorite silent film actress, Doris Kenyon. Her father, Frederick Wilhelm Von Kappelhoff, a music teacher, choir master, and church organist at their church, also taught violin and piano and loved classical music (Hotchner 11). Her mother, Alma, a true hausfrau, enjoyed listening to country and western hillbilly music and regularly attended films and the theatre (Hotchner 13). Day’s father spent more time away from the household than with his family (Hotchner 15). By the time she turned eight years old, Day grew aware of the talk around town that her father had been secretly involved with her mother’s best friend. One night at a party in their home, Day saw her father sneak off with his mistress. She heard them having sex in the spare room next to hers (Hotchner 16). With her parents’ constant quarreling, their marriage was destined to fail. By the time Day entered her teens, they divorced (Kaufman 12).

Day had been seriously studying dance since kindergarten and became part of a dance duo that won amateur contests held almost every weekend in Cincinnati. One weekend, after she and her dance partner, Jerry Doherty, won first place and the big prize of \$500 (Hotchner 25), they spent their prize money on a trip to Hollywood where they studied dance at a famous dance school (Hotchner 28). After receiving much encouragement, they planned to move out there permanently until a train hit the car Day was riding in. Day’s leg received a double compound fracture (Hotchner 31) forcing Day to give up her dreams of a professional dance career. While

on the mend, Day discovered her natural singing abilities and started singing lessons. Hired by Barney Rapp to sing with his band soon after recovering, Day started out singing in local nightclubs and then on radio before working with swing orchestras. Rapp suggested she adopt the stage name “Day” because “Kappelhoff” was “too long for the marquee” (Hotchner 43). The name Day was plain, generic, nonethnic, and yet memorable—and it fit with Doris rather nicely. She just needed to get used to it. Plus, after World War II, many Americans whitewashed their ethnicities, especially in show business and especially Germans to avoid typecasting in certain roles and to avoid the stigma attached to having a foreign-sounding name in postwar America. Rapp had already anglicized his own name from “Rappaport” to hide his Jewish roots and knew Day needed to change “Kappelhoff” if she were to succeed in show business⁴ (Kaufman 22).

In this chapter, I examine how Day drew from what initially seemed to be a liability, her squeaky-clean, girl-next-door image, to propel her into a level of superstardom no one believed she would actually ever achieve, all while hiding a contradictory private image. I start by sharing some biographical information, followed by familiar roles she played, as well as an examination of the changing roles for women of that era in which she played a pivotal part, then move to the sexless sex comedies and boundary-pushing roles for which she became most known and for which she eventually became a role model and an icon, and throughout, just like Day, the focus remains on her wholesome, all-American, girl-next-door image, which followed her everywhere.

The Bandleader Next Door

When Les Brown first heard Day sing in 1940 at the Edison Hotel in New York City, she was with Bob Crosby (Bing’s brother) and the Bobcats, and Brown signed her immediately to

⁴ Day’s wholesome, all-American girl image gained popularity at a time when being ethnic in America was unpopular and often ridiculed. In fact, many Americans during the postwar period broke with their ethnic pasts by severing the ties to their former ethnic backgrounds (Matelski 34).

tour with him (Hotchner 56). Day preferred working with Brown and his band because his musicians were very disciplined, and Brown had a policy of no drugs, no alcohol, and no strong language (Hotchner 55), which fit in perfectly with her wholesome, all-American, girl-next-door image. A few years had passed since Day first sang with Brown, and he made sure to supply her with new material to showcase her talent and to welcome her back. One of those songs became her first No. 1 hit, “Sentimental Journey,” which was co-written by Brown and recorded with His Band of Renown (Hotchner 82). “Sentimental Journey” hit No. 1 on the *Billboard* charts and stayed there for nine weeks in that spot, after which it spent several months in the Top 10 (Kaufman 39). “Sentimental Journey” reached the charts after “My Dreams Are Getting Better All the Time,” Day’s second No. 1 hit, which was recorded later (Hotchner 83).

“Sentimental Journey” became an anthem of wartime America because it reflected the thoughts of the troops as they returned home from overseas. “For the rest of the war, I received a flood of mail from G.I.’s all over the world, telling me over what army juke or radio they heard me sing the song and what it meant to them. Some of them wrote me love letters. It was very touching,” Day recalled (Hotchner 82). Day embodied the quintessential girl next door with her ultra-feminine good looks while her voice with its smooth sound and soothing tone seemed inviting and represented renewed optimism and real hope for a bright future that America had after the war. Day brought a sense of calm to the uncertainty people felt upon returning home from war—a war that brought anxiety, fear, and doubt to the American culture after World War II as much as it did during World War II.

The “It” Girl Next Door

On the outside, Day seemed never to have a care in the world—or so her image would lead the world to believe—as Day spent the 1950s and the 1960s as America’s “It” girl. Joseph

Roach describes “It” as the power of apparently effortless embodiment of contradictory qualities simultaneously: strength and vulnerability, innocence and experience, and singularity and typicality among them (Roach intro.). With her wholesome image, Day became America’s sweetheart in many notable movie musicals of the 1950s by winning over audiences with her girl-next-door charm. These were all challenging feats considering that, after World War II ended, roles for women in Hollywood decreased as men regained control upon returning home from the war. However, Day’s sunny disposition and freckles, epitomized the fresh-faced, wholesome, all-American girl, and she possessed a down-to-earth quality that made people feel they could trust her. Day with her blonde hair, fair complexion, blue eyes, and bright smile—“on stage . . . she lights up the house . . . she radiates,” admired Bob Hope (Hotchner 122). Day catapulted to fame, in large part, because her image represented the postwar American ideal. Day moved seamlessly between musicals, comedies, and dramatic roles—an accomplishment not achieved by many actresses. Yet Day, known for her lighter fare, actually possessed great depth as an actress and was capable of playing much more than the simple girl next door (Santopietro ch. 2). But in her private life, she could not escape objectification and that required constant masking. And Day wore many masks.

Day’s carefully crafted image reflected the contradictions that lived side by side in the 1950s. Often the embodiment of ideological contradictions gives rise to a star’s sense of charisma. Part of Day’s appeal was, and remains, her wholesome image, which confirmed social norms regarding the idealistic vision of “woman” (Borda 232). Day’s image was not only her livelihood, it was her life and her way of life—to be protected at all costs. Oftentimes the terms of a star’s contract, especially in the Hollywood postwar studio system, would be designed to protect against any discontinuity and inconsistency to the almighty public image (McDonald ch.

3). Plenty of stars dealt with all sorts of scandal and lived in dire need of reconciling their publicly controlled private image with their star image. Ever since the Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle case in 1921,⁵ all studios inserted a morals clause in talent contracts to protect against moral indecency. And Universal became the first studio to do so with a clause that read as follows:

The actor (actress) agrees to conduct himself (herself) with due regard to public conventions and morals and agrees that he (she) will not do or commit anything tending to degrade him (her) in society or bring him (her) into public hatred, contempt, scorn or ridicule, or tending to shock, insult or offend the community or outrage public morals or decency, or tending to the prejudice of the Universal Film Manufacturing Company or the motion picture industry. In the event that the actor (actress) violates any term or provision of this paragraph, then the Universal Film Manufacturing Company has the right to cancel and annul this contract by giving five (5) days’ notice to the actor (actress) of its intention to do so (Pinguelo and Cedrone 5).

Once Day left Warner Bros., many of her films were produced by Universal. Thus, her contract would have contained a morals clause similar to this one. Hardly the rebellious type, Day adhered to her contract—as did Rock Hudson to his.⁶ That meant not everything was as it seemed, and the public’s gaze was always upon her. And like Hudson, Day had reason to keep her private life private. Day could only have one image—her on-screen, public image. This cohesiveness between Day’s public and private lives enabled the studio to market her as the wholesome girl next door for much of the decade. According to Dyer, “A film star’s image is not just his or her films, but the promotion of those films and of the star through pin-ups, public appearances, studio hand-outs and so on, as well as interviews, biographies and coverage in the press of the star’s doings and ‘private’ life” (Dyer intro.). Many factors combine when, and each plays a vital role in, forming a film star’s image that will endure.

⁵ Arbuckle, one of the highest paid silent film actors of the time, had been accused of raping and accidentally killing actress Virginia Rappe at a party. Innocent, Arbuckle still stood trial three times before finally being acquitted, as people tried to extort money from him and withheld the truth. The scandal ruined his career (deCordova 124–132).

⁶ The world would not have been prepared to learn that Hudson’s strong, handsome public image hid his private homosexual life.

The Other Blondes Next Door

Day entered Hollywood at age 26 when director Michael Curtiz cast her in his film, *Romance on the High Seas*, where she sang the soon-to-be hit song “It’s Magic.” Curtiz said he cast Day because, “Her freckles made her look like the all-American girl” (Romano). Unlike other high-profile blonde stars of the time such as Monroe and Mansfield, Day was and appeared wholesome. In her book, *From Reverence to Rape*, Haskell described Mae West as a lascivious, sexually aggressive woman (Haskell and Dargis ch. 3); referred to Mansfield as the real cartoon of overblown sex appeal; and defined Monroe as a pinup fantasy of fifties’ fiction who was never permitted to mature and who was always paired with sexless leading men, and although she aroused jealousy in women, embodied the dumb blonde (Haskell and Dargis ch. 6). All three women used their bodies and their sexuality to get what they wanted, and they set themselves up to be treated like sexual objects. The other blondes included Kim Novak, who was being groomed to follow in Rita Hayworth’s footsteps (Haskell and Dargis ch. 6), and Grace Kelly, who exuded an upscale classic elegance. All the other blondes appeared as part of Hollywood’s fantasies. Yet Day’s constructed image suited her. She was not a glamour girl but a luminous girl next door. There was no one like her in Hollywood at the time. According to Haskell, Day’s naturalness and girl-next-door personality made her the antithesis of the other Hollywood blondes (Haskell and Dargis ch. 6). Although Day’s image was a construction, it was largely constructed around who she was. Any contradictory private images that she needed to hide over the years developed out of her good girl image—usually involving trusting the wrong man. Thus, in a way, Day never had to go against who she was to play a part.

In fact, Dyer discusses just that in his book, *Heavenly Bodies*:

People often say that they do not rate such and such a star because he or she is always the same. In this view, the trouble with, say, Gary Cooper or Doris Day, is

that they are always Gary Cooper and Doris Day. But if you like Cooper or Day, then precisely what you value about them is that they are always “themselves”—no matter how different their roles, they bear witness to the continuousness of their own selves. This coherent continuousness within becomes what the star “really is.” Much of the construction of the star encourages us to think this (Dyer intro.).

Dyer suggests that by aligning the star with the same image repeatedly, audiences trust the cohesiveness between star and image but at the same time take the star for granted because they do not think the star puts forth any effort to “act.” Dyer means precisely that audiences overlook the importance of how fortuitous it is when the blend between star and image becomes so seamless that audiences cannot distinguish between the two. Thus, Day’s performances always come across so natural and effortless. Day’s strong sense of ethics (and perhaps a desire to protect her image) guided her when she turned down roles that did not appeal to her.⁷ She created herself (Haskell and Dargis ch. 6) and her image and went directly after what she wanted—whether it be a job or a man. Day would not twist herself out of shape to win men’s love, and find instead only lust (Haskell 25). Day did not require a man in her life to find happiness.

Day embodied the contradictory messages that were being given to and received by young women in the 1950s and 1960s—that romance equals excitement, and sex equals forbidden territory. That “look but don’t touch” attitude helped to objectify women. Day represented a living doll-type persona of looking gorgeous but knowing to take a relationship with a man only so far. Society pressured young women in two ways: preserve your virginity or lose your virginity. The taboos against sex, encoded in the paralyzing edict that no man would marry a woman who was not a virgin, held fearful sway (Haskell and Dargis intro.). M. G. Lord,

⁷ Day told her autobiographer, A. E. Hotchner, that when Mike Nichols offered her the role of Mrs. Robinson in *The Graduate*, she turned it down because she could not see herself rolling around in the sheets with a young man half her age whom she had seduced. “I realized it was an effective part,” she said, . . . “but it offended my sense of values” (Hotchner 232–233).

author of *Forever Barbie*, describes these contradictions on Studio 360's *American Icons*' podcast as reflected in 1959 with the introduction of Barbie. "Barbie had the wholesome American girl personality invented for her," Lord explains, "and it was kind of perfect for what was expected of women in terms of sexuality at the time when Barbie appeared. Women were expected to look highly sexual but to comport themselves like these wacky . . . virgins in the movies, you know. The tarted-up girl next door" (Andersen 4:03). Like Barbie, Day represented the all-American girl next door whose wardrobe and fashion sense sometimes conveyed sexy but whose persona signaled pure, wholesome, and approachable yet unavailable and unattainable. Day epitomized the sexy virgin and was unthreatening compared to the Marilyn Monroe types. Day's sex comedies were sexless, which precisely reflected the times.

One way we can see the contradictory messages women received in this era is through the advertising in women's magazines.



Figure 1

Based on *The Kinsey Report*,⁸ this clever advertising campaign (Figure 1) created in 1955 by a woman⁹ reflected the virginity-obsessed culture of the 1950s. “Does she or doesn’t she? Only her hairdresser knows for sure”—Kinsey and the ad seemed to affix a metaphorical question mark over the head of every young woman (T. J. McDonald ch. 1). “Miss Clairol hair color looks so natural” reassured women that there was no stigma associated with dyeing one’s hair when using Miss Clairol (Klara). Two big taboo topics were addressed in that Clairol ad campaign that ran for fifteen years (*Clairol.pdf* 84): who was having sex before marriage and who was dyeing their hair. The entire nation had become preoccupied with both of those frowned-upon topics because at that time in the mid-1950s, it was not socially acceptable to do either. Only sexually promiscuous women did such things. “Does she or doesn’t she?” asked the ad. It had already been established that Day “*doesn’t*”—on-screen or off. And not only did Day’s hairdresser know, everybody knew. Although by this point in time, Day had two failed marriages and a baby, her private life had been kept hidden from the public making her somewhat virginal in the public’s eyes. Still, Day (and each of the characters she played) appeared to be saving herself for Mr. Right. According to Dyer, “a star’s image is also what people say or write about him or her, as critics or commentators, the way the image is used in other contexts such as advertisements, novels, pop songs, and finally the way the star can become part of the coinage of everyday speech” (Dyer intro.). Dyer’s comments here add more dimensions to the star’s image and address the media who are responsible for so much of the star’s image and how it is perceived by the public. Day’s star image fit so perfectly within that wholesome, girl-next-door niche that no

⁸ Written by Dr. Alfred Kinsey, et al., *The Kinsey Report* came out in 1953 and was the first-of-its-kind study on female sexuality.

⁹ Shirley Polykoff of the Foote, Cone & Belding advertising agency created this ad campaign for Clairol in 1955. This particular model was featured in their 1957 campaign (Polykoff). Clairol used a variety of models and ran the ads through 1970.

matter what other diverse roles she played later on in her career, the critics and commentators still wrote and spoke of wholesome Doris Day, the girl next door. Day would always be remembered that way.

Day's image finally became immortalized in *Grease*, the 1971 Broadway musical written about teenage life in the 1950s, which later became the more well-known film in 1978. The song "Look at Me, I'm Sandra Dee" mentions Day and her iconic virginity: "Look at me, I'm Sandra Dee / Lousy with virginity / Won't go to bed / Till I'm legally wed / I can't, I'm Sandra Dee / Watch it, hey, I'm Doris Day / I was not brought up that way / Won't come across / Even Rock Hudson lost / His heart to Doris Day" (Kleiser 28:33). Girls were as terrified of being labeled "fast" as they were of being labeled "square." What the peer-group pressures of both decades—1950s repression and 1960s license—have in common is an undue emphasis on sex, and it becomes the defining quality of the self (Haskell and Dargis intro.). And although to an extent her virginal, good girl image defines her, James Garner acknowledges Day as one of the sexiest stars to play a love scene with because of a disguised eroticism, the buoyant readiness, the hourglass figure hinted at beneath the calico frocks or tailored suits—Day was one of the most "notorious girls next door" (Haskell 22–23). Day's sex appeal was safe. And as an independent, sexy careerwoman, women looked up to Day and modeled themselves after her, especially her fashions, which she wore so well.

In *Star Gazing*, Stacey's study on Hollywood stars and their impacts on British women's lives, she describes receiving over 350 letters (Stacey ch. 3), attesting to the continuing significance of Hollywood stars in women's memories and imaginations. Although Stacey requested "to hear from any readers who were fans of such stars as Bette Davis, Katharine Hepburn, Barbara Stanwyck, Doris Day, Marilyn Monroe, Jane Wyman or any other favourites"

(Stacey app'x 1), writing about Stacey's book, Dennis Bingham noted that Day is one of the stars most often mentioned in Stacey's survey (Bingham 13). Stacey reviewed the roles played by fashion and beauty products in the forming of relationships between female fans and Hollywood stars. Spectator Patricia Ogden wrote, "and I bought clothes like hers (Doris Day) . . . dresses, soft wool, no sleeves, but short jackets, boxey type little hats, half hats we used to call them and low heeled court shoes to match your outfit, kitten heels they were called" (Stacey ch. 5). By identifying with particular commodities that are part of the reproduction of feminine identities, Patricia Ogden produces a new feminine identity for her own appearance (Stacey ch. 5). Spectator Mrs. D. Delves replied, "The Doris Day films I used to watch mainly for the clothes – she was always dressed in the latest fashions" (Stacey ch. 6). And spectator Shirley Thompson felt, "Doris Day was a natural star to me, when she did anything it was always 100% – everything about her is perfect, the clothes she wore and everything" (Stacey ch. 6). In these statements the role of film stars as fashion models, advertising the latest styles to female spectators, comes across clearly (Stacey ch. 6). Along with everyday female fashion choices, Day likely influenced fans in other ways as well. Day played strong characters who showed women they could juggle a husband, kids, and a career, and look good doing it. Because of Day, women learned they could have it all.

Day's all-American, girl-next-door appearance stayed with her all her life. It was her brand, her identity, her image. Day, similar to Wayne Koestenbaum's description of Jackie Kennedy in his book, *Jackie Under My Skin*, exists as an icon because she resided in an aura-filled niche (Koestenbaum ch. 1). Moreover, it is exactly this radiance that will make her last as an icon. Later in his book, Koestenbaum feels it worth mentioning a comparison between Jackie and Day, Hitchcock's frosty blonde from *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. "Jackie, like Doris

Day,” Koestenbaum sets forth, “was the paradoxical Cold War woman, alternately frosty and hot. . . . Odd, how Doris Day and Jackie could look at once highly sexed and radically frozen. The necessary pretense of hygienic frigidity—a self-protective coolness—magnified their allure” (Koestenbaum ch. 11). Koestenbaum with his wit and clever descriptions captures the contradictions that both these women embodied of the 1950s and 1960s with their ice princess exteriors that read “Keep your distance” while also radiating an inner intensity. The paradoxical qualities that these women exuded granted them their popularity. Day, who began her career as a big band singer in the 1940s, emerged as number one in the Quigley exhibitors’ poll¹⁰ as a favorite in the 1950s as the girl next door. Of the top ten U.S. box office stars in the 1962 Quigley exhibitors’ poll, only three were women with Day still holding a top spot (Elizabeth Taylor ranked sixth and Sandra Dee ninth). This comparatively deficient showing by actresses in the poll reflected the reality of fewer roles for women in Hollywood since the end of World War II (Farber and McClellan ch. 4). Day, the “It” girl next door, became not only the most popular blonde but the most popular female actress in the 1950s and 1960s despite her troublesome, hidden, private life.

The Feminist Next Door

Seventy-five percent of Day’s films present her with a career outside the home, and the majority of her films indicate that marriage and a career can be simultaneously enjoyed (Peary and Kay 101). Day’s characters, decisive with a no-nonsense attitude, seemed fearless and independent, though they always stood by their men. Part of her iconicity is that Day fit into that category of women who did not always fit in, and especially when she became a pioneer for

¹⁰ The Quigley Poll, an annual survey of motion picture theatre owners and film buyers conducted each year since 1932, asks them to vote for the ten stars they believe generated the most box-office revenue for their theatres during the year (Quigley).

women's roles that had not been explored by the other blondes. Only 29% of women who were of working age worked in the 1950s and 34% of women who were of working age worked in the 1960s (Wells 5). Most women did not work and were still looking to get married and raise children. Yet Day played high achieving women who had it all and could do it all. She played businesswomen in charge and women who balanced domesticity, motherhood, and career responsibilities—when most women in America never considered leaving their children to work outside the home—and most husbands would not have approved of such an arrangement either. Day showed women how it could be done. Day managed to convey a hybrid woman of the 1950s—part conventional and part unconventional—at a time when traditional gender roles never fully recovered after the war had opened more professions to women.

Day also played more classic female roles in these old-fashioned romantic musicals who upheld the traditional principles of America in the 1950s, perhaps because they were all filmed in the 1950s but set in earlier time periods, such as *On Moonlight Bay* (1951) and *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* (1953). Still, one musical film highlighted Doris Day's ability to play paradoxical characters: *Calamity Jane* (1953). Day's tomboy in *Calamity Jane*, set in the Wild West and loosely based on the life of cross-dresser and Wild West legend Martha Jane Canary Burke, struggled for equality with men, only to have them shame her into becoming a traditional woman. According to Koestenbaum in his book, *The Queen's Throat*, "A tomboy is just a phase on the way to becoming a butterfly; tomboy is not a vocation—only a temporary, endearing, transcendable affliction" (Koestenbaum and Kushner ch. 1). We see this illustrated in Day's film when Howard Keel as Wild Bill Hickok insults Calamity by asking her why she never fixes her hair (Butler 14:37), his male gaze and condescending tone shame her into realizing a man's interest in a woman has nothing to do with how well she can shoot a gun. A man wants a woman

who looks and acts like a woman.

Calamity Jane gained popularity because of Day's perky, fresh-faced, whip-cracking performance and the role showcases Day singing the Academy Award-winning song, "Secret Love."¹¹ Day claimed Calamity Jane was her favorite role because the character was closest to who she really was (Strickland 8). In a BBC documentary, Day said, "I think Calamity Jane is the real me." And she would tell another interviewer: "I am Calamity Jane, didn't you know that?" (Kaufman 151). Yet Day in her married life exhibited mostly traditional behavior by retaining her husband Marty Melcher as head of household and finances and chief decision-maker. Award-winning author, Cara Strickland, who penned "Doris Day Changed Us Forever" sees it differently. Strickland posits Day relates to her character of Calamity best because Day "did not have dinner on the table and a cold martini ready when her husband came home" like other housewives of that era. "Calamity was defending a stagecoach . . . and would shoot a drink out of Bill Hickok's hand when he questioned her" (Strickland 10). True, Day, always employed outside of her home, defied tradition that way. However, Day left her man in charge of her life, starting with her finances, and it led to her undoing. At best, Day defined the stark contradictions of 1950s femininity. While married, Day never appeared liberated in her personal life the way Calamity was. And one imagines that Calamity would never have tolerated Melcher and his deception for one Deadwood minute, let alone seventeen years of marriage. She might have shot more than just a drink out of his hand. Thus, it could be that Day may have been enhancing her public image in a move away from uptight towards unrestrained when she made the claim that Calamity Jane was most like who she was. After all, Day did represent the modern, liberated woman on-screen before it was fashionable to do so. Notwithstanding, in all three of these

¹¹ Warner Bros. created this role for her after refusing to loan Day out to MGM for *Annie Get Your Gun* (Kaufman 151).

musicals, Day called on old-fashioned values by celebrating America's past to offset some of the doubt that still existed after the war. Because as progressive as the feminist next door may have seemed at the time compared to the other blondes, her inevitable shift from tomboy into bourgeois beauty reinforced traditional ideals for women in American society in the 1950s.

The Hunk Next Door

Day rose to the top of an industry that manufactured illusions while never losing sight of her values. Day tackled feminist themes before they were called that with the wide range of roles she played, though her good girl star image often overwhelms these and may obscure them. Over the years, audience demand for her films continued to grow making her more powerful and increasing her wealth. It was not unusual for the star of a film to earn more money than the top producer. Thus, in a sense, besides needing her, Hollywood used her. As Edgar Morin observes in his book, *The Stars*, "Their private life is public; their public life, publicity" (Morin 4). Day's star image became a powerful asset for Hollywood in selling tickets for films as did Rock Hudson's. And in 1959, Day paired with Hudson to star in the biggest hit film of that year, *Pillow Talk* (T. J. McDonald ch. 3). That was to represent the optimum quality of films for the second half of Day's career. Both Day and Hudson had fabricated star images to hide the secrets of their private lives, and they both proved they had great chemistry together. *Pillow Talk* (1959), the most well-known of all of Day's films, ironically, became the first film where the producer altered her image and decided to "sex her up" a little to add some spice to the picture. Even so, Day was careful not to go too far in terms of remaking her girl-next-door image. Day claimed, "I liked those scripts about the man-woman game as long as they were done with style and wit and imagination" (Griffin ch. 12).

Filmed in Technicolor, with Day outfitted in an expensive designer wardrobe, *Pillow Talk* spared no expense when it came to a lavish mise-en-scène. It also helped that it had a witty script (T. J. McDonald ch. 2) that won the Academy Award that year for Best Original Screenplay. From Day's first shot on the edge of her bed in only her kitten heels, a short slip, and silk stockings (that she shows off by caressing her leg), *Pillow Talk* earned Day her first and only Academy Award nomination for Best Actress, proving perhaps that sex sells or at least shakes things up a bit. A split-screen shot (there are many in this film) of Day in her bathtub, bubbles included, and Hudson in his, as they provocatively "touch" feet on the edge of frame from their respective apartments grabs viewers' attention in this romantic comedy. Visually, Day and Hudson look stunning together as the ideal images of femininity and masculinity. Their public images fit perfectly together, and their readiness to hide their private images works well for them and the industry too. Hudson, in his first comedic role who was forced to live a lie regarding his sexuality in real life, plays a straight man impersonating a gay man in *Pillow Talk*. "I don't know how long I can get away with this act," Hudson's character says to himself at one point. Thus, audiences were treated to the ultimate round of an illusion-on-an-illusion (Griffin ch. 12). That line must have seemed like an inside Hollywood joke to those who knew the truth about Hudson. At that time, his private image was considered taboo and was hardly known outside of Hollywood. *Pillow Talk*'s narrative centers on the sharing of a telephone party line by the two protagonists and the mischief that ensues when masquerade and deception dial in for some fun. Snippets of playful sexuality sneak their way onto the screen, while Day's pristine track record as the wholesome girl next door, now grown up, remains intact and unbroken, bringing her the much-deserved recognition and longevity throughout the end of the 1950s and right on into the

1960s. *The New York Times* named *Pillow Talk* one of the Ten Best Films of 1959 (Griffin ch. 12).

Pillow Talk proved to be the most lucrative for the duo, which secured Day's superstar image in the public's mind. But Day's prominent position at the top of the box office charts began to slide when the anti-establishment counterculture of the 1960s took control. And when the studio system largely gets replaced after 1968—the same year of Day's last films—what arrives to take its place can and will only be referred to as New Hollywood (Bingham 3). Suddenly, sex comedies actually have sex. Day felt unwilling to adapt to New Hollywood. Thus, Day counts herself out, ending her 20-year film career after 1968 (Bingham 4). And before this decade dissolves, this all-American, top-grossing film star will begin her downward direction as sex comedies gain popularity and sexless comedies discover they no longer have an audience—except on television—the one place Day refused to work.

But when Day's husband Melcher died suddenly from an unknown heart condition, her son Terry, from her first marriage and Melcher's adopted son, now a successful record producer, had the unpleasant task of informing his mother that, not only did Melcher bankrupt her, he also signed her up to do a television series. Day thought at first that this must have been a mistake. Melcher could not have bankrupt her; she had millions. Plus, Day had made it clear to Melcher that she opposed the grind of television work, and like any film star, confessed it might diminish her box-office appeal someday. Day recalled that Melcher had tried to convince her to do television as a replacement for the films with sex that were becoming fashionable. And since he had power of attorney, he committed Day to star in five seasons of her own TV show. And he never told her. Because Melcher treated Day as if she were a commodity or an object—and not a

human being—much less his own wife, Melcher selfishly proceeded with his profitable deal forcing Day to confront her obligation to star in her primetime CBS sexless TV sitcom.

Not MeTV¹²

With Melcher finally gone for good, Day seized the opportunity to take back her life. She needed to do her television show to earn a living. Melcher, although deceased, still managed to receive credit as executive producer for the entire first season of *The Doris Day Show*. He had spent one year negotiating an all-time plush talent deal for his wife because CBS felt Day's image would be the perfect one to replace Lucille Ball's when Lucy retired the following season (Kaufman 388–89). CBS even recycled plot lines from old *I Love Lucy* shows and adapted them for *The Doris Day Show* (Santopietro ch. 4). But *The Doris Day Show* series rarely aired in reruns after its original network run. Most likely, Day, who had no desire to appear on television in the first place, wanted control—not only over the shows—but also over her image. Once she fulfilled her obligations to CBS, Day pulled herself off of television (Kaufman 445), and by not allowing reruns of her show, Day was able to take back control of her image. Melcher took away Day's control, and now she took it back. All of it.

The Doris Day Show presented wholesome, family-style, entertainment for the first three seasons, and then by the fourth season, CBS decided to switch its programming to more urban, adult-oriented programs. Remembering how unhappy she had been with the way Warner Bros. had handled the start of her career,¹³ Day had decided it was now time for her to handle business for herself (Santopietro intro.). Thus, a power struggle with CBS ensued at the start of her show

¹² Television made Day more reachable and almost touchable. No longer was there that huge distance between her and her audience. And the smaller screen of the television set did not diminish Day; it simply brought her up close and personal and into millions of American's homes each week. More than ever, the girl next door felt like she was really, well, next door. But large screen or small, Day's image still glowed, and Day radiated her trademark ordinary goodness that people loved.

¹³ Day had made seventeen films in seven years suffering through fourteen of them with inane scripts.

in 1968. But CBS finally gave in and gave Day creative control over her television show (Hotchner 308). A huge victory for Day and unheard of in 1968, she became a pioneer of television in her own way with her revolutionary sitcom. Its unique formula saw its cast and characters and format and storylines change each season, which offered Day a wider range of possibilities for her character (Kaufman 421). Thus, Day geared her fourth and fifth seasons to align with CBS's interests. By the fifth season, Day became executive producer of her show. But when CBS requested a sixth season due to her success, Day felt five contracted seasons were enough (Kaufman 445). Day's off-screen persona proved her equality in a man's world by fulfilling her contract, and then, essentially, cancelling her own show. And for the first time, Day's off-screen persona not only connected with her on-screen image, it rivaled it. And won.

The Quintessential Public Image Next Door

In the annual Quigley exhibitors' poll, Day topped box office charts for four years in the 1960s—1960, 1962, 1963, and 1964 to be exact—beating out Elizabeth Taylor (who ranked first in 1961) and Marilyn Monroe (her rankings slipped in popularity after the mid-1950s), and what most people may not realize, as a result of her hit comedies year after year—sometimes two in one year—Day became the top female box-office draw of the twentieth century (Farber and McClellan ch. 4). This also meant that Day became the last person to hold that position for any significant amount of time (Bingham 3). Still, no actress comes close to beating her record. This may be partly because Day exuded an undeniable charisma.

Stars possess charisma, and Max Weber's theory of charisma characterized charisma as a certain quality of an individual personality, an exceptional personal gift of grace by which that person is set apart from all others (Weber ch. 2). Morin described charisma as magical (Morin viii). Charisma fascinates with its magnetic attraction. And the public craves charisma. And in

film, charisma becomes more concentrated and intense displaying the ability to transport the viewer to the world of the extraordinary (Morin viii). Day's charisma, captured on film for eternity, transported the viewer and transcended reality to transform the quintessential girl next door into the all-American top female star of the twentieth century. And audiences rejoiced that Day's charismatic vibrancy had been preserved in the emulsion as the projector released Day's image for them to watch radiate again and again on the silver screen (Morin viii).

“Doris Day, Hollywood's Favorite Girl Next Door,” perfectly titles the obituary written by Duane Byrge and Michael Barnes, in which they describe Day as both a “virginal actress and singer” and as “the fresh-faced, squeaky-clean singer and actress who was a ray of sunshine during the 1950s and 1960s, when she reigned as the queen of the box office” (Byrge and Barnes). This headline for Day and the obituary that accompanied it proves that her strong, bankable public image did not die when she did. But in 1975, Day said, “This image I've got—oh, how I *dislike* that word ‘image’—but it's not me, not at all who I am. It has nothing to do with the life I've had” (Hotchner 4). Day poured out the frustration that had been building inside her for years regarding her constructed public image to her autobiographer, A. E. Hotchner, whom she hired to reconstruct her public image more truthfully. And although an image may never exactly reflect her true persona, Day strongly felt that by sharing her story this way, it would shine a brighter light on, and add some clarity to, how she became who she became. “I'm tired of being thought of as Miss Goody Two-shoes, that's why—the girl next door, Miss Happy-Go-Lucky. You doubtless know the remark dear Oscar Levant once made about me—‘I knew her before she was a virgin.’ Well, I'm not the All-American Virgin Queen and I'd like to deal with the true, honest story of who I really am” (Hotchner 4). Whatever will be, will be she must have thought. A woman taking charge of her own career must be applauded, especially one who

started out as a squeaky-clean object and followed her unpredictable path to iconicity. Neither Day nor her memoir succeeded in changing anything. Doris Day's public image had been crafted so well, it outlived her into everlastingness and was even stronger than her desire to change it.

Day's public image gave her the private life she lived. Thus, during the height of her career, preserving her impeccable public image became everything, not only to her but also to the studio. Dyer claimed stars are widely regarded as a vital element in the economics of Hollywood in terms of capital (or assets); investment (or guarantee on a film); outlay (as far as a major portion of the film's budget); and the market (the star's ability to sell a film) (Dyer and McDonald ch. 2). Thus, Day and her image, according to Dyer, are a vital aspect, part, product, thing, or object—in the economics of Hollywood needed by Hollywood to support a financial structure that will overcome any potential economic concerns. For a while, Day's public image fit perfectly into the ideal nuclear family that Hollywood capitalized on and that dominated the 1950s in postwar America. Day's many strong, independent, and capable female characters carried her right on through to the 1960s, where she achieved her greatest success in film (Farber and McClellan ch. 4). Haskell noted that Day never adapted herself to changing tastes as her method of survival. Rather, she represented conservative values that went defiantly against the grain of the swinging sixties (Haskell 24). But the tension that existed between Day's virtuous, on-screen, fabricated image and her real-life, calamitous, off-screen image would haunt her throughout her entire career, highlighting the contradictions her life and career represented as she worked her way up from squeaky-clean object to singer to star, and then finally, to girl-next-door icon.

Weighing In on Sudden Stardom: Manual Not Included

“The general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American Dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success and ordinariness”—Richard Dyer (2019, 59)

The Tomboy Next Door

Born on March 2, 1950 in New Haven, Connecticut, superstar-to-be Karen Carpenter exhibited musical talent at a young age and shared her brother Richard’s passion for music. The two spent hours each day listening to the sounds of Nat King Cole, Guy Mitchell, and Perry Como and were particularly fascinated with the overdubbed sounds of Les Paul and Mary Ford (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 1). Karen grew up idolizing her older brother. Everything he did, she wanted to do. After more or less teaching himself to play piano by ear, Richard began formal piano lessons, then accordion lessons (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 1). Richard progressed so quickly on piano he outgrew his piano teacher who recommended he audition at Yale School of Music. He studied piano there until parents Harold and Agnes decided they needed to move their family to Los Angeles to give their son Richard the chance to become the famous pianist they knew he could be (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 1). They pinned all their hopes and dreams on Richard after learning his first piano teacher deemed him a prodigy (Coleman 41). In addition to his being a talented pianist, Richard was also a composer, arranger, lyricist, keyboardist, and vocalist. He would eventually go on to producing records as well. Richard would be the success, they thought. Additionally, Harold and Agnes felt that Richard personified the serious musician, not Karen. She was just a novice. No one ever thought that Karen would become the more famous Carpenter. And ultimately, her success was success in a man’s world. In this chapter, I examine how Karen Carpenter, like Doris Day, drew from what initially seemed to be a liability, her squeaky-clean, girl-next-door image, to propel her into a level of superstardom no one ever believed she would actually ever achieve, all while hiding a contradictory private image. I start

by sharing some biographical information, followed by her musical development and influences, then the shaping of the Carpenters' sound, her feminist role within the duo for which in the end she became a role model and an icon, and finally her struggle with anorexia nervosa, which became part of her legacy. Throughout the chapter, the focus remains on her wholesome, all-American, girl-next-door image, which followed her everywhere.

Karen and Richard were raised in a typical yet dysfunctional 1950s household. Their mother Agnes was a compulsive and meticulous cleaner. Their two-story home, with its three bedrooms and two bathrooms, was always spotless and looked perfect—even the garage seemed clean. The neatly manicured lawns fit in with the rest of the neighborhood's obsession with landscaping that existed in the 1950s (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 1). Agnes, more so than their father Harold, always kept a close eye on the children. She was a domineering woman who had trouble displaying her affection for her children, especially for Karen, who played outdoor sports while Richard spent time indoors working on his music. These were the only times Karen would be separated from Richard. Even though Karen was a tomboy playing baseball, Wiffle ball, and football with the neighborhood boys, she loved to dance and studied ballet and tap dance too. Karen's childhood was "a balance of blue jeans, baseball and ballet" (Schmidt ch. 4).

By 1963, the Carpenter family moved to Downey, California, and soon Richard and Karen began entering talent shows. From there, Richard was asked to play organ at the church, which meant that Karen would sing in the choir (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 2). In high school, Karen played the glockenspiel in the percussion section of the marching band but wanted to join the drum line. A feminist in her own way, she finally convinced the band director to give her a chance, after first being told, "Girls don't play drums" (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 2). Karen started on the tenor drum and worked her way up to the snare drum. She spent countless hours

rehearsing, playing along to LPs like the Dave Brubeck Quartet's *Time Out* and *Time Further Out*, which were filled with difficult time signatures (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 2). Karen took to the drums quickly and naturally, displaying great skill, speed, and timing. Thus, Karen remained part tomboy with her drums and socializing with Richard and their male musician friends. More comfortable sitting behind a drum set than standing out in front with only a microphone, Karen always considered herself a drummer who just happened to sing (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 2).

Karen, a contralto with a three-octave range, received some classical and pop vocal training from Frank Pooler, the head of choral studies, at California State University Long Beach, where Richard was then studying until she was old enough to enroll there on her own. Karen displayed natural singing ability (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 2). When Karen attended CSULB as a music major, focusing on voice, she joined Pooler's college choir where she sang a variety of solos because her voice exhibited versatility (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). "Her range was spectacular," Pooler praised. "She could sing higher than anybody else but also lower than anybody else," Pooler recalled (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). It was Pooler's emphasis on vocal blend, precise attack and release, and vowel shaping that left such an impression on both Richard and Karen that would influence and shape the Carpenters' sound (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3).

The Quintessential Girl (and Boy) Next Door

Following some failed attempts as a band, playing local gigs, and sending out group demo tapes, Karen and Richard recorded a new demo tape—this time as a duo. Richard arranged their songs and overdubbed their voices. Two-part harmonies built to four-part and then to eight, and finally reached twenty-four voices. By overdubbing all the harmonies with just their two voices, Richard achieved the massive sound he had been seeking (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). They called themselves "Carpenters" without "The" because they thought it sounded simple but

hip like Jefferson Airplane (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). Carpenters' tapes of songs with perfect blend, balance, and intonation (hold the vibrato) were ready for distribution (Schmidt ch. 1).

One of the Tijuana Brass band members passed along Carpenters' demo tape to famed trumpeter Herb Alpert, who admitted years later, "I was really knocked out with the sound of Karen's voice to start with. It touched me. It had nothing to do with what was happening in the market at that moment, but that's what touched me even more. I felt like it was time" (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 4). Alpert respected the soft, blended Carpenters' sound, whose music came straight from their hearts. Alpert was one of the few purveyors of popular middlebrow 1960s music to attain great success in the rock-dominated music scene (Bingham ch. 11). Jerry Moss, co-founder of A&M Records, signed the Carpenters to their recording contract in 1969 after hearing their tape. A&M, founded in 1962 and known as a "family" label, took great pride in their artists, encouraging them to reach their creative potential (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 4).

Well-groomed and well-bred, Karen and Richard epitomized the quintessential girl and boy next door, conspicuously noticeable during one of the most tumultuous years in our nation's history—1969. In that year, Nixon's term as president commenced; the trial of Sirhan Sirhan began; 10,000 University of Wisconsin-Madison students protested the National Guard presence; the NYPD arrested 21 Black Panthers on conspiracy charges; the Who released *Tommy*, the first "rock opera"; *Midnight Cowboy* opened; the Stonewall Riots began; *Easy Rider* premiered; the first man walked on the moon; the Manson Murders shocked; Woodstock rocked; U.S. soldiers mutinied during a battle in South Vietnam; the Beatles released *Abbey Road*; *Sesame Street* debuted; half a million people participated in the Mobilization Rally in Washington, D.C.; and the Rolling Stones headlined the ill-fated rock concert at Altamont Speedway to name some of the major events that took place in 1969 (Kirkpatrick timeline). Unaware of just how out of sync

with the rest of the world they appeared, the Carpenters with their “goody-four-shoes” image went against the grain to launch their career at the height of the 1960s anti-establishment counterculture. And Karen with her good girl image offered an alternative to the hippie chicks and flower children of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The Carpenters’ wholesome public image would have struck such a dissonant chord with the hard rockers and acid rockers of Woodstock during that summer of 1969 had they been known or even invited. Still, it was the biggest event in music history happening 3,000 miles away in New York with some of the biggest names in music in attendance. But by May 1970, the Carpenters, who had eschewed the Woodstock scene, had their first hit single on the *Billboard* charts, “Close to You,” and they would continue to keep producing hit record after hit record from there on out. The wholesome image of the Carpenters seemed to offer hope and promise to America during the turbulent times of a restless period in American history that included the escalation of the Vietnam War, anti-war protests, and the hippie movement. The Carpenters were the response to the counterculture of the late 1960s and the early 1970s.

Mired in the Watergate scandal and with his days in office numbered, President Richard Nixon invited the Carpenters to sing at the White House during West German Chancellor Willy Brandt’s state visit on May 1, 1973 (Tongson ch. 1). From 1970 through 1976, every Carpenters’ single reached either No. 1 or No. 2 on the *Billboard* charts. By this point in time, the duo had already won eleven gold records and three Grammy Awards, and were on their way to the sixteen consecutive Top 20 hit singles and five Top 10 albums they would have by 1976 (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 11). President Nixon took pride in this opportunity to forget his own legal and political woes for an evening of good, clean entertainment with the duo he described as “young America at its very best” (Tongson ch. 1). The Carpenters had first visited the White

House in April of 1972 as guests of Julie Nixon Eisenhower and returned to the White House just months later on August 1, this time meeting briefly and posing for photos with Nixon in the Oval Office. Nixon thanked Karen for her work as National Youth Chairman for the American Cancer Society, an organization the duo supported with the donation of more than one hundred thousand dollars in proceeds from concert tour program sales (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 7). It is not hard to see how the all-American image of the Carpenters, who happily donated money to a worthy cause, could be described by the president as young America at its very best.

Between their string of hit singles and their multiple invitations to the White House, the Carpenters were fast becoming somewhat of an anomaly. A&M Records flew in curious writers to meet the Carpenters and see their ordinariness. Some came looking or hoping for scandal and left disappointed. The wholesome image that the Carpenters maintained throughout their career was viewed as an asset by A&M Records (Coleman 163), even though all those in the industry who embraced the anti-establishment counterculture of the late 1960s thought it to be a liability. Squeaky-clean, smiley, and sweetly saccharine took hold as words to describe the Carpenters as did jokes about them looking like mannequins. But they were in a category all by themselves. According to *Billboard*, in 1970 the only other women in the Top 10 with Karen (who was No. 2 with her brother) were Diana Ross (No. 6) and Freda Payne (No. 10). In 1971, the Carpenters had “For All We Know,” “Rainy Days and Mondays,” and “Superstar,” all in the Top 40 for the entire year. Carole King, Janis Joplin, Cher, and Lynn Anderson also had hits in the Top 40 that year. By 1972, “Hurting Each Other” recorded by the Carpenters became a hit, and Roberta Flack and Melanie each had a hit song. In 1973, more female recording artists turned out than usual. While the Carpenters had two hits with “Sing” and “Yesterday Once More,” Carly Simon, Cher, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Bette Midler, Anne Murray, Maureen McGovern, Helen Reddy,

Diana Ross, Roberta Flack, and Vicki Lawrence all had hits in the Top 100. The only name that remained on the list each year: The Carpenters. A&M Records protected the Carpenters and their wholesome image because they sold millions of albums and concert tickets (Coleman 163).

According to Dyer, “stars are made for profit . . . Stars also sell newspapers and magazines and are used to sell toiletries, fashions, cars and almost anything else . . . Stars are involved in making themselves into commodities” (Dyer intro.). Pop stars are the reasons their albums get sold. And as with the Carpenters, emphasis gets placed on their image. The Carpenters’ albums sell, their concert tickets sell, and their publicity stays positive to keep their wholesome image intact. Changing their image could mean losing the audience. In a consumer-driven economy, the consumer wants to buy, and the stars want to sell. Thus, the Carpenters need to produce new hit records as often as possible. And they did.

The Square Next Door

The Carpenters’ popularity increased as reaction to the harsh electronic hard rock of the anti-establishment culture began, which coincided with the start of the 1970s (Schmidt ch. 2). To the rest of the world, it may have seemed that the Carpenters’ timing was off, but it could not have been more “right on.” In contrast to rock’s loudness, the Carpenters’ musical effect was to soothe, since it was quieter, using the same electric guitars, drums, and horns as rock used, but not as loudly. And in contrast to the angry lyrics of so many anti-establishment rock songs, the Carpenters with their wholesome and squeaky-clean image leaned toward songs that spoke of love in the rain or white lace and promises (Schmidt ch. 2). Richard, with his vast knowledge of music theory and composition, arranged and chose all of their music. For the duo to achieve such a full-bodied vocal sound, Richard continued to layer their voices by overdubbing the tracks. There was something special about the familial sound that resulted from the layering of Karen’s

voice with Richard's (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3). Influenced by the Beach Boys as well as Les Paul and Mary Ford (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3), this new sound would expand to include arrangements with lavish orchestrations (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 10). And with the focus increasing on Karen as lead singer, she could no longer hide her sultry voice behind that drum set. Feeling uncomfortable and self-conscious, Karen also felt psychologically unprepared for the constant spotlight (Coleman 100–101). And she worried about her weight.

According to *The Washington Post*: “Karen may eat a peanut butter cup for quick energy, but not an amphetamine, and there are no groupies camped out in hotels where the Carpenters stay. Autograph hounds perhaps, but not groupies. ‘No,’ said Karen. ‘We don’t seem to attract that crowd’” (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 7). Soft rock stars, like the Carpenters, are proud to belong to the establishment. In a 1977 interview with *Billboard* magazine, Karen remarked, “There are a lot of fans who kind of hide the fact they like the Carpenters.” Both Karen and Richard concede that their somewhat wholesome image has made for “closet Carpenter freaks” (Schmidt ch. 3). “That is because Karen was suddenly being painted as young, gifted, and square,” admitted Rob Hoerburger, a fan himself, in a 1996 article he wrote for *The New York Times*. “Once they squeezed her out from behind the drums, she found her appearance under constant scrutiny” (Hoerburger 3).

But somebody liked them—that is, millions of somebodies liked them—because their albums sold millions. By 1981, A&M had sold 79 million Carpenters’ singles and LPs (White ch. 1). The Carpenters were an extraordinarily popular anomaly who scored twenty Top 40 hits between their debut single “Close to You” in 1970 and February 1983 (Hilderbrand ch. 4). Even with all their awards, Alpert, of A&M Records who signed them when Karen was 19 and Richard 22, said “Richard’s contributions were enormous, and underrated” (Hoerburger 3).

A&M Records knew that the Carpenters did not appeal to people in their own industry. Few people rang to ask for free tickets to see a Carpenters show. A staffer once said, “If anyone did ring up for tickets, they quickly added that it was for their parents” (Coleman 164). There was a stigma in being associated with admiration for them.

The Musicians Next Door

By 1978, Karen, who never outgrew her ordinary, wholesome, girl-next-door image confessed, “I’m getting sick and tired of this image thing” (Schmidt ch. 3). Karen told Ray Coleman of *Melody Maker* magazine in 1975:

Being brother and sister, which was again different in this business, it ended up being a kind of goody-two-shoes image, and because we came out right in the middle of the hard rock thing, because we didn’t dress funny and the fact that we smiled, . . . we ended [up] with titles like vitamin-swallowing, Colgate-smiling, bland, Middle America.

The fact that we took a shower every day was swooped on as symbolic. And reviewers didn’t like the fact that anybody clean was successful. And the more successful we got the more they attacked our image.

They never touched our music
(Schmidt ch. 2).

The squeaky-clean image of the Carpenters stayed with them throughout their career, especially because they arrived at a time when dirty, long-haired hippies with mismatched, disheveled clothing ruled the scene. Like Doris Day, Karen Carpenter’s wholesome, girl-next-door image was constructed around who she was, and it suited her. Thus, it somehow seems misguided for Karen to denounce her girl-next-door image as she does in the quoted lines above from Schmidt. Her public image and extraordinary voice generated her fan base.

Not only did Karen’s public image and extraordinary voice generate her fan base, but they also gave her the private life she lived. Thus, during the height of her career, preserving her impeccable public image and extraordinary voice became everything to her. In his book, *Stars*, Dyer states that:

Stardom is an image of the way stars live. For the most part, this generalized lifestyle is the assumed backdrop for the specific personality of the star and the details and events of her/his life. As it combines the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary, and is seen as an articulation of basic American/western values, there is no conflict here between the general lifestyle and the particularities of the star (Dyer and McDonald ch. 4).

The Carpenters achieved the level of stardom they had always dreamed of by showing the world their extraordinary talents that were packaged in their ordinary, squeaky-clean selves. Karen offered no glitz, no glamour, and no sexy outfits. The Carpenters built their act on who they were and what they believed in: wholesome, all-American, middle-class values. But the media oversimplified their image for the public to relate to, and because their image was crafted out of their value system, the media also enhanced it. The Carpenters' image became like another layer of skin that they could never shed. "The image we have," Karen said, "it would be impossible for Mickey Mouse to maintain. We're just . . . normal people" (Schmidt ch. 2). In reality, they were both normal people and gifted musicians. But Karen felt their image had become too unrealistic. Even the squeakiest of squeaky-clean could not live up to it.¹⁴

Whereas stardom offers undeniable advantages, such as wealth and success, an extravagant lifestyle, adoring fans, name recognition, and artistic freedom, it also offers a myriad of problems, including loss of wealth, loss of career, drug and alcohol addiction, an unhappy love life, and a fear of failure on the world stage (Dyer and McDonald ch. 4). Serious musicians thrust into sudden stardom with little or no warning may become thrown off balance and have their lives turned upside down and inside out, especially women who experience objectification early on in the industry. In the music industry, objectifying women is so commonplace that it is

¹⁴ Everyone reacts differently to stardom. Although their ordinariness combined with their extraordinary talents then gets combined with uncommon circumstances, it is the degree or the extent to which their ordinariness becomes upset or affected that determines whether or not stardom becomes problematic. The Carpenters were never unhappy they became famous. They faced mounting pressures at various times throughout their career.

hardly noticed (Lieb ch. 4). No manual exists to prepare these objectified women for something as jolting as sudden stardom. And it may not even last forever. Because it seems that stardom attained gradually has more staying power and longevity, whereas stardom achieved too quickly burns out and disintegrates (G. Kaufman). Thus, not only can sudden stardom be ephemeral, it can also be hazardous to one's health, even when you're on top of the world.

Going against the Grain of the Voice

The Carpenters became an overnight sensation with "Close to You" by going against the grain of the hard rock counterculture of 1970 with their middle of the road, easy listening, mainstream pop. And without much warning, their career would move at lightning speed (Coleman 93). Nonetheless, they converted their sudden stardom into something longer lasting by continuously producing hits. Richard's choice of songs to arrange for Karen suited her voice perfectly. Her singing reflected a traditionally expressive style, but the grain of her voice is what made it unique. According to Roland Barthes, the "grain" of the voice is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs (Barthes and Heath 188). And in singing, the sound starts within the singer's body, musical vibrations resonate through the body, making it a deeply personal experience—unlike any other instrument (Taylor ch. 5).

Karen, obsessed with her singing voice, her body, and her appearance, wanted perfection in her singing—not only for herself but because she knew Richard wanted that (Jarman-Ivens ch. 3). By cultivating the purity and the grain of Karen's voice by using overdubbing techniques that fascinated him growing up, along with those tight-knit harmonies, and by adding memorable melodies that he arranged for Karen to sing, Richard allowed the Carpenters to achieve (Jarman-Ivens ch. 3) their own unique musical style in which the grain of Karen's voice becomes controlled entirely by him. Intentionally, Richard left evidence of the body of Karen's voice in

some of their songs. In “Goodbye to Love,” Richard kept the sound of her audible breaths at the beginning and in other places within the song giving her a human quality on top of those layers of electronic dubbing (Jarman-Ivens ch. 3). Richard added the grain, the body, as Karen was losing so much of hers and was becoming weakened. Here the grain is interpreted as that distinct sound the world recognized as Karen Carpenter. Without Karen, there would be no lush, touch-of-sadness-even-when-happy, one-of-a-kind voice that defined the 1970s. Karen’s voice exuded a certain girl-next-door warmth and familiarity that made her listeners feel as though a private concert was being given for them. An undeniable authenticity existed in Karen Carpenter’s interpretation of the lyrics of their songs that added to the immediacy and closeness of her performances. The fact that Karen sang unusually close to the microphone—almost touching it—also added to this intimacy. This allowed subtle details of her diction and tone production to become suddenly audible creating a sense that she was present (Morris ch. 5), and it became an extra special quality to the Carpenters’ songs that made Karen more of an approachable girl-next-door star. But when the girl next door skyrocketed from squeaky-clean object to superstar icon and achieved the level of success no one ever imagined, Olivia Newton-John exclaimed, “She IS the Carpenters’ sound” (Coleman 274)!

The Anorexic Next Door

Society places tremendous pressure on women to maintain their appearances. The same does not exactly hold true for men. And sudden stardom pressured Karen to an unimaginable breaking point. At 5’ 4” tall, when she was 17 years old, Karen weighed 145 pounds and was called chubby. Feeling self-conscious about her weight, she proceeded to put herself on the Stillman Diet (high protein, low carbs). From the summer of 1967 until early 1973, Karen remained at or around the comfortable weight of 115 to 120 pounds (Schmidt and Warwick ch.

3). Whenever she started losing too much weight, Karen began disguising her weight loss by layering her clothing. She was maintaining control over her body until September 1975 when her weight dropped to 91 pounds (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 3).

In his article, “Skinny blues: Karen Carpenter, anorexia nervosa and popular music,” George McKay explores the place of anorexia across the creative industries more generally and then specifically in pop music as encountered in Karen Carpenter and her relationship with eating. McKay posits that anorexia resonates in pop music as part of its destructive economy and that online media sources, such as celebrity news and fans’ websites reveal many pop figures, mostly female, presenting and repeating a familiar narrative (McKay 5). The Carpenters rose to fame so quickly, their recording and touring schedules left them little time for anything else. After Karen Carpenter collapsed onstage in Las Vegas in 1975 mid-“Top of the World,” all tours and shows were canceled—the rest of the U.S. tour and the Europe and Japan tours (McKay 7).

Karen’s dieting may have been how she kept her body perfect, except her body image had become distorted due to her anorexia. Therefore, she became too thin. Being under constant media scrutiny pressured Karen, and Karen pressured herself by always wanting to look and sound perfect. Even pop music pressured Karen because every pop group had the attractive girl up front singing, not sitting behind some drum kit hiding. When the Carpenters gave in and conformed to pop music’s standards by putting Karen up front, away from her drums, Karen grew sullen. After her collapse, Karen had to be hospitalized to regain her strength and some weight. Touring was on hold. A&M Records sought to protect their investment in their superstar—the common view was that the success of A&M Records was largely built on the Carpenters’ huge sales (McKay 8). Filled with guilt, she internalized her problems, which only made things worse.

When she first met with psychotherapist Dr. Steve Levenkron in Manhattan, Karen weighed only 78 pounds (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 16). Under her mother Agnes's close watch, Karen slept 14 to 16 hours a day, and eventually, her weight climbed to 104 pounds (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 9). But Karen spent the last seven years or so of her life in a repetitive cycle of weight gain, weight loss, collapse, and then hospitalization, with every change in her body weight being discussed worldwide, yet with no eating disorder ever named. At the time of her death, she weighed 108 pounds. Richard noticed the difference in her voice from her illness. "There's definitely a marked difference in Karen's voice from the time most of our hits were recorded around 1970 to 1973 or 1974. From 1981 to 1982, there was a weakness to her voice" (Schmidt ch. 5). Karen, who adhered to high standards in her work and who sought flawlessness in her singing, hid her eating disorder for most of her life, only to have to struggle to deal with it publicly when the pressures of stardom gave her no choice.

The Superstar Next Door

In 1987, four years after Karen's death, Todd Haynes created and directed what became a notorious underground film, *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story*. He utilized Barbie and Ken dolls, manipulated on miniature sets, to bring his dramatization of the investigation into what happened to Karen Carpenter to life. A copyright infringement lawsuit from Richard Carpenter removed the film from circulation, but initially bootleg VHS tapes and today the Internet keep this film alive. After displaying the opening black and white title card with the date February 4, 1983 on it—the date Karen Carpenter died—a handheld first-person camera playing the role of Agnes Carpenter lures the viewer through this somewhat mysterious tour of the Carpenter household. First, a shot of the stereo system that played so much of the Carpenters' music in the past as Agnes's voice-over calls out Karen's name in search of her. Haynes uses a door motif as

subjective camera sweeps and pans around the kitchen with its sliding glass doors, then the living room, and finally through an open door down the hallway to Karen's bedroom where Agnes's hand starts to open Karen's bedroom door but then knocks, the subjective camera enters Karen's bedroom—all while Agnes's voice-over becomes more and more panicky as she continues calling out Karen's name. It is an opening scene filled with suspense, setting the stage for the horror that is to unfold (Elsaesser and Hagener 46).

The viewer walks in Agnes's shoes wondering why Karen is not responding. The scene builds towards Agnes's hand pushing open the closet door where subjective camera reveals Karen's limp body lying on the floor of her walk-in closet, Agnes now screaming uncontrollably (Haynes 1:07). The threshold to Karen's closet transports the viewer from the world of the living on one side to the world of the dead on the other side. Karen Carpenter suffered heart failure and died on February 4, 1983 at the age of 32 due to her weakened condition after the physical stress placed on, and irreversible damage done to, her system for years from anorexia nervosa—an eating disorder unknown to the public until her death brought awareness.

In the film, it is actually Barbie who portrays Karen and who is lying on the floor of her walk-in closet. Haynes shines the spotlight on the unhealthy and disturbing treatment of women as objects in the music industry by casting a toy—a doll—and not just any doll, but the most famous doll, Barbie, to portray Karen Carpenter. Haynes argues that Karen's visibility as a pop singer intensified certain difficulties women experience in relation to their bodies (Haynes 6:07). Barbie, the all-American girl next door, popular feminine icon, and role model for generations of young girls, whose perfectionist ideal of beauty contained flawed, unrealistic physical proportions, makes a powerful substitute for Karen Carpenter, an ordinary girl next door with extraordinary talent whose squeaky-clean image and perfectionism did not fit in with the realities

of the time when she rose to stardom. Karen's body image contained flawed, unrealistic physical proportions as her anorexia gained control. Barbie maintained a certain allure with her wholesome sex appeal and represented the ultimate unattainable female. Karen's wholesome, girl-next-door sex appeal made her definitely unattainable. Barbie represented a new type of woman whose career came first and whose independent thinking pushed the boundaries of societal norms. Karen also represented a new type of woman who brushed up against the softer side of feminism and whose independent thinking challenged the confines of societal norms. Barbie, superstar icon, was the perfect casting choice to play Karen Carpenter, superstar icon.

Balancing a public image and a public life with a private image and a private life to reveal the true essence of an individual—whether likeable or not—while communicating a compelling narrative should come together to formulate a successful biopic. Dennis Bingham in *Whose Lives Are They Anyway?: The Biopic as Contemporary Film Genre*, explains that “the long-standing appeal of biography lies in its promise to juxtapose the public and private selves, completing a full and satisfying impression of the subject's personality and motivations.” He continues, “This promise has sometimes led the biopic to extremes—either to sanitize a subject's personal life, as biopics of the studio era were often accused of doing—or to ‘expose’ a sensational and sordid personal life” (Bingham ch. 11). Haynes's film attempts to unearth hidden parts of Karen's life, parts that her professional connections would have preferred not to see. As with Doris Day who was part of the studio system and contracted to keep her squeaky-clean image intact, A&M Records had a vested interest in keeping Karen Carpenter's squeaky-clean image unblemished as well. By the last seven years of her life, Karen Carpenter became in dire need of reconciling her publicly controlled private image with her star image.

Haynes's pop culture experimental tribute to Karen Carpenter's life explores all

avenues and possibilities but still finds no answer or way her death could have been prevented. Interviewed by Richard Dyer at London's Tate Modern on June 4, 2004, Haynes explained *Superstar* as a challenge to this vague orthodoxy: "We wanted to redeem Karen Carpenter's image and felt that she was a victim of not only an eating disorder, but an incredibly . . . invasive family drama. . . . Even in death she was still being controlled by her family . . . and it just seemed like there was no escape, and we wanted to do our little movie out of a desire to make you cry for Karen" (White ch. 1). Overprotective Agnes Carpenter could not allow her children to grow up and make their own decisions. When Karen wanted to move out of the house at age 24, Agnes threw a tantrum and called her a traitor (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 8). And in 1975 when Karen moved into boyfriend Terry's Beverly Hills home, Agnes became furious. Terry Ellis owned Chrysalis Records and could have made Karen a solo artist, a clear threat to the Carpenters and to Agnes's control. The relationship soon ended (Schmidt and Warwick ch. 10).

With this film, Haynes accomplishes a few things: he shows how a celebrity like Karen Carpenter never stops entertaining us and enthralling us. Her great, sad life so easily turns into melodrama, echoing the female biopic of the subject who never wanted her success and for whom the American Dream becomes an unmanageable nightmare. The dichotomy of the public image and the private life here becomes violated (Bingham ch. 11). *Superstar's* notoriety increased sales of the Carpenters' albums and functioned as an incredibly effective promotional vehicle for the by-then-unfashionable duo (Hilderbrand ch. 4). By 2000, *Superstar: The Karen Carpenter Story* had earned a place at No. 45 on *Entertainment Weekly's* list of the Top 50 Cult Films of All Time (Schmidt ch. 4).

Karen's sudden superstardom gave her the life she lived. As a singer, she wanted to be heard. And as an artist, she had a desire to receive recognition. David Hume suggests in "Of the

Love of Fame,” that it is this need to be praised that is at the root of longing for fame. Fame is an attestation of worth, and it provides the assurance that one’s abilities, status, or work is admired and recognized. It is the sweet sound of public applause (Halberstam 95–96). Fame seekers usually crave attention. Performers and musicians also share a need for attention. There exists a universality on fame—that it stems from the desire to be immortal. In Godard’s *Breathless*, the novelist played by the important French director Jean-Pierre Melville, says his greatest wish is “to become immortal, and then die” (Halberstam 99). While the film pokes fun at this snobby character, his wish for his art to live on long after his body has perished is a common one. Musicians have hit songs that live on long after they do. That is something Karen has plenty of with songs, such as “(They Long to Be) Close to You,” “We’ve Only Just Begun,” “For All We Know,” “Top of the World,” “Superstar,” “Rainy Days and Mondays,” “There’s a Kind of Hush,” “Yesterday Once More,” “Goodbye to Love,” “Sing,” “I’ll Never Fall in Love Again,” and many more. Karen accomplished a great deal in her relatively short career.

Fame was cruel and took its toll on Karen, and she fell prey to sudden stardom. She was an extraordinary artist, happy in her ordinariness as a person, who was never going to be prepared for superstardom at any time in her life. But the fact that it was so sudden only made it worse for her. Deeper issues surfaced as a result of the enormous career pressures she faced. Karen hid her eating disorder, which went unnoticed for too long. Karen’s legacy of hit songs gained her long-lasting fame after death making her an icon, something most people never achieve. But her sudden stardom and enduring fame stimulated her preexisting eating disorder and self-destructive tendencies that weakened and eventually destroyed her. Fame is fickle, sometimes random, and its effect on any one person is not predictable (Carey 5). And there was no way of knowing in advance how this squeaky-clean object would react to a life in the

spotlight as she became a girl-next-door icon who influenced so many other singers by following her unpredictable path to everlastingness.

Conclusion

From the early days of silent film when Hollywood was new, Lois Weber's newfound celebrity status opened the door for further opportunities for women, not only on-screen in the film industry, but behind the scenes as well. Fast forward to the anti-establishment counterculture of 1968 when girl-next-door Doris Day shot her last films, and her career faced a crossroads. Does she or doesn't she? Day did not. Day turned her back on New Hollywood and walked away, closing that door behind her for good. But just as the anti-establishment counterculture raged on, one year later in 1969 Karen Carpenter and her brother Richard found a new way in with A&M Records because their soft, blended sound went against the grain of what was happening in the market at the time. Exuding that wholesome, all-American image built on middle-class values, their career had only just begun . . .

All three women became superstars in their respective fields achieving the highest level of accolades during their time. Still, in thinking about the female celebrity, we are conditioned to think of a more glamorous, sexy, and exciting woman. Yet all three fascinating women here were ordinary with a girl-next-door appeal, although they all three possessed extraordinary talents, which made them unique. In addition, as opposed to notorious Hollywood glamour, all three women were strongly associated with traditional, wholesome, all-American middle-class values, which coincided with the roots and growth of the film industry and its audiences at the turn of the twentieth century by establishing itself on middle-class stability and respectability. Fan magazines would illustrate the promise of the American Dream through its stories of newly minted celebrities and ads for products that promised to provide entrée into middle-class life

(Sternheimer ch. 2). Our history as a nation came from this vision of people aspiring to become middle class. That was the dream. In a way, it has been ingrained in our thinking so much that it might have helped buoy these women on their rise to the top.

Weber, Day, and Carpenter all drew from what initially seemed to be a liability, their squeaky-clean, girl-next-door images, to catapult them into a superstar level of fame no one believed they would actually ever achieve. All three women offered hope and optimism to the American people after times of great uncertainty—Lois Weber after World War I, Doris Day after World War II, and Karen Carpenter after the Vietnam War. And these women came from an accessible place because of their ordinariness making them *approachable stars*—down to earth and likeable. All three were on the soft side of feminism and present at different times in history when women's roles were changing. And they each made their mark in their own way. And they radiated. Their ordinariness hid the extraordinariness of their talents. They reached the heights of their careers more so than any other females for what they accomplished. They also influenced generations of young women and became role models. It will be difficult for any other females to unseat them or move past them because they achieved what few women have ever achieved, partly as a result of charisma. And they have traveled a great and unpredictable distance to go from squeaky-clean object all the way to superstar icon and into the history books to everlastingness, now permanently.

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