"The Sadness of Goodbye in a Funny Movie": Desiree Akhavan's *Appropriate Behavior* and the Melancholic Legacy of *Annie Hall* in Contemporary US Film and Television Break-Up Narratives

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Introduction

In her 2011 autobiography *Then Again*, Diane Keaton, who famously played the title character in *Annie Hall*, encapsulated what she saw as the core theme at the heart of the film: "However bittersweet, the message was clear. Love fades" (Keaton 2011, 128). She acknowledges that Woody Allen had taken something of a risk in letting "the audience feel the sadness of goodbye in a funny movie" (128). With these remarks, Keaton pinpoints the essence of *Annie Hall*, its status as melancholic rumination on the sad reality of faded love, and on the disintegration and demise of a once joyful romantic relationship. Indeed, as Wes Gehring writes, *Annie Hall* and the breakup it depicts between Annie and Alvy is "a comically mundane litany of why most relationships fail" (2016, 171).

The last decade has seen a noticeable cluster of tonally and narratively cognate narratives of failed romance and relationship breakdowns/breakups emerge in relationship comedy, drama, and memoir narratives across the spectrum of American entertainment media, as well as elsewhere in popular culture at a more discursive level. Noteworthy examples of this include but are not limited to films such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel Gondry, 2004), *Blue Valentine* (Derek Cianfrance, 2010), *Take This Waltz* (Sarah Polley, 2012), *Begin Again*

(John Carney, 2013), *What If* (Michael Dowse, 2013), *How to Be Single* (Christian Ditter, 2016) and *Marriage Story* (Noah Baumbach, 2019). It can also be seen in television shows such as the Netflix series *Master of None* (2015–2017) and select episodes of the Amazon Video anthology web series *Modern Love* (2019), as well as phenomena such as the entrance of the term "conscious uncoupling" (Woodward Thomas 2015) into millennial pop culture parlance.

Part of this mid-2010s cluster, and arguably the epitomic and paradigmatic example of the legacy of *Annie Hall* in this respect, is Desiree Akhavan's *Appropriate Behavior* (2014), which adopts a non-linear flashback-oriented structure to chart the demise of the queer intercultural relationship between first-generation Iranian American Shirin (played in the film by Akhavan herself), and her white girlfriend Maxine (Rebecca Henderson). As Maria San Filippo has explored at length, the breakdown and eventual breakup of Shirin and Maxine's relationship is a 'fictional chronicle' of the breakdown and breakup of Akhavan's own relationship with her former partner, the filmmaker, writer and performer Ingrid Jungermann (2019, 991-1008). Comparisons to *Annie Hall* on these grounds and others formed a structuring discourse in how the film was received by industry critics and press reviewers, so much so that the film came to be known and referred to in critical circles as "the gay *Annie Hall*" (Hair 2017; San Filippo 2019, 1007). Indeed, Akhavan herself has openly and explicitly characterised her film in exactly this way on numerous occasions. For example, as far back as 2012, in an interview with Nick Dawson for *Filmmaker* magazine, Akhavan made reference to a "big-screen" project she was scripting at that time, explicitly calling it "a gay *Annie Hall*" (Dawson 2012). Later, upon the film's general release, in a 2015 interview with comedian Scott Rogowsky for an episode of his live talk show *Running Late With Scott Rogowsky,* Akhavan responded to the host's invitation to provide a "capsule synopsis" of her film with the candid description, again: "It's a gay *Annie*

Hall." She goes on to nod in agreement with Rogowsky's follow-up description of it as "A Persian *Annie Hall*." Thus, a reading of *Appropriate Behavior* as a queer riposte to Allen's film is very easily opened up.

Appropriate Behavior's opening depicts a mournful looking Shirin as she rides the New York City subway en route to move the paltry remainder of her property out of the Brooklyn apartment that she had formerly shared with Maxine. After a sombre and tense exchange by way of goodbye, the tone shifts to comedy at the conclusion of this sequence, as Shirin thinks better of her decision to toss her meagre collection of possessions into a dumpster, and doubles back on herself to retrieve her discarded strap-on—originally gifted to Maxine, but now unceremoniously returned in an unnecessary act of comic but cruel pettiness. The film thus wears its queer credentials on its sleeve from the outset; and declares its intention to temper the sadness of goodbye with bittersweet laughs and moments of tragicomedy in what unfolds to be a funny but melancholy rumination on Shirin's experience of mourning the end of her relationship with Maxine. This break-up leaves Shirin feeling lost and purposeless, and we spend much of the ensuing present-day scenes observing her attempts (hindered at first by her insistent attempts to reconcile with a manifestly unwilling Maxine) to move on with her life by forming a new flat share, getting a new job and, eventually, coming out to her family. Many of the ensuing scenes take place in intermittent flashback though, as the lifespan of Shirin and Maxine's relationship is related to us in vignettes that each offer different little insights into their relationship dynamic—how it formed, how it was cemented, and how it withered and ultimately came apart. Much of what troubled their relationship, it is revealed over time, stems from Shirin's fearful unwillingness to come out as bisexual to her family, and Maxine's impatience and inability to empathise with the cultural specificities attendant to Shirin's experience as a closeted queer first

generation immigrant ethnic minority. In the film's final scene, Shirin makes eye contact with Maxine, standing on the platform as she talks on a mobile phone, from her seat in a moving subway car. Shirin raises her hand into a motionless wave and offers a small smile, both of which are eventually reciprocated, just in time for Shirin to see them before her train pulls away. In this way the film is bookended by encounters between the two of them at the beginning and end of Shirin's mourning of their lost love.

This chapter explores the influence of *Annie Hall*'s treatment of the ending and aftermath of (particularly queer intercultural) romantic relationships in contemporary US film and television, culminating in a comparative and contextual interrogation of Akhavan's *Appropriate Behaviour*, including quantitative and qualitative analysis of comparisons to *Annie Hall* made by reviewers during the film's critical reception. It also discusses how contemporary examples like this (and some others) push back against what has heretofore been the compulsory heteronormativity and universal whiteness of the *Annie Hall* break-up narrative paradigm.

Break-Up Narratives and Failed Romance in Contemporary Popular Culture

As indicated above, *Appropriate Behavior* is one of the key center-pieces of a cluster of recent and current cultural texts that deal with discourses of modern romance, and which narrate, or otherwise ruminate, on experiences of mourning and melancholia that are attached to the breakdown and dissolution of failed or failing love relationships. Maria San Filippo observes the emergence of this trend in her remarkably astute take on the contemporary cultural discourse of "uncoupling":

> In the last decade, amid the waning popularity of the neo-traditional rom-com[1] and the genre's migration away from Hollywood and into indie, international and online realms, rom-com revisionism has taken hold and with it an enlivening trend for uncoupling narratives (San Filippo 2019, 993).

San Filippo points to the moderately successful mid-noughties American film *The Break-Up* (Peyton Reed, 2006), which narrates the breakdown and dissolution of the romantic relationship between characters played by Vince Vaughn and Jennifer Aniston, as a noteworthy early example of this trend to emerge out of Hollywood (2019, 993). While *Annie Hall* is undoubtedly the ur-text for this narrative paradigm in Anglophone cinema, San Filippo is right to single out *The Break-Up* as an early example of its appearance in the recent cluster. She then situates this "originary film" (Klein 2011, 4) in relation to a number of subsequent films that likewise follow the pattern of narrating an 'uncoupling' process, including the American independent film *Breaking Upwards* (Zoe Lister-Jones and Daryl Wein, 2009), documentary feature *Flames* (Josephine Decker and Zefrey Throwell, 2017), and French film *In The Move For Love* (Romane Bohringer and Phillippe Rebbot, 2018) (2019, 993). She thus positions this thematic and narrative pattern towards break-ups and "uncoupling," albeit implicitly, as constituting the emergence of a cycle; or, if not a full-blown "film cycle" of the kind that scholars like Amanda Ann Klein (2011) and others have theorised and conceptualised, then certainly as a noteworthy cluster of narratively and thematically cognate films.

It is worth noting further that the named examples, with the exception of *The Break-Up*, have had relatively little reach or impact. Elsewhere in film, television and media culture, as highlighted above, there have been a whole slew of more mainstream and higher profile

examples that compound and cement San Filippo's observation of the emergence of this cultural trend. In film culture, for example, Derek Cianfrance's 2010 romantic drama *Blue Valentine* moves backwards and forwards in diegetic time (as do both *Annie Hall* and *Appropriate Behavior*) to narrate the formation, breakdown and ultimate dissolution of the romantic relationship, and then marriage, of the central couple Dean (Ryan Gosling) and Cindy (Michelle Williams). The following year, Sarah Polley's Canadian relationship drama *Take This Waltz* narrated the end of the marriage between Margot (Michelle Williams again) and Lou (Seth Rogen), after Margot begins to experience doubts about the solidity of their marriage and her satisfaction with the relationship, alongside a flirtation and ultimately a burgeoning romance with Daniel (Luke Kirby). In John Carney's 2013 film *Begin Again*, Keira Knightley plays Gretta, an undiscovered musician who must rebuild her life in New York City following her break-up with long-term boyfriend and musical collaborator Dave (Adam Levine). The same year, in Michael Dowse's Canadian film *What If* [aka *The F Word*], the young male protagonist Wallace (Daniel Radcliffe) is processing the double disappointment of a thwarted medical career and a failed love relationship when he begins to realize that he is falling in love with his best friend Chantry (Zoe Kazan) (this one is something of an outlier in that while it begins by privileging the mourning and melancholia that follows a painful break-up, it ends more traditionally with the formation of a new relationship). In 2016, Christian Ditter's *How to Be Single* (adapted from the novel of the same name by Liz Tucillo) resisted the narrative imperative of the "neo-traditional rom-com" (San Filippo 2019, 993) to hetero-romantically partner the central female protagonist with a suitable man, enabling a narrative conclusion that sees Alice (Dakota Johnson) hiking the Grand Canyon solo, rather than partnered up with any of the romantic prospects the film had earlier placed in front of her. More recently, Noah

Baumbach's emotionally charged 2019 family relationship drama *Marriage Story* charts the traumatic process of parenting through a painful divorce while the adult parties in the now divided family, Nicole (Scarlett Johansson) and Charlie (Adam Driver), attempt to manage their working lives at opposite ends of the country, in Los Angeles and New York respectively.

Centering her discussion on Akhavan's post-*Appropriate Behavior* sit-com charting the aftermath of a break-up between Leila (Akhavan) and Sadie (Maxine Peake), *The Bisexual* (Channel 4/Hulu, 2018), San Filippo argues that television (especially "Indie TV") is "proving a more amenable incubator than Hollywood" for break-up narratives and discourses of failed romance and 'uncoupling' (2019, 1002). She does so on the grounds that it "accommodates a greater degree of departure from the 'positivity and palatability' ethos governing legacy television" (something that San Filippo views as particularly germane in the case of shows that depict queer relationships) (2019, 1002). In line with this then, the following television shows represent a range of relatively high-profile examples that likewise form part of this trend, albeit the relationships they depict are, for the most part, hetero ones.

The 2015 first season of the Aziz Ansari fronted and scripted Netflix series *Master of None*, melancholically charts the inception, formation, disintegration and end of a New York City intercultural romance between Ansari's Dev, a 30-year-old first-generation Indian American, and his white (seemingly WASP) girlfriend Rachel (Noël Wells). The 2017 second season begins with a depiction of the period of mourning that Dev undergoes to get over the end of his relationship with Rachel, which he spends undertaking a pasta-making apprenticeship in a small shop in the town of Modena in Italy. Upon his return to New York, the show proceeds to chart Dev's misadventures in the world of online dating, the perils and pitfalls of which Ansari has written about at length in the book that emerged from his research collaboration with

sociologist Eric Klinenberg on the vagaries of "modern romance," and which was published in the same year that *Master of None* began streaming on Netflix (2015). It then proceeds to provide Dev with yet another failed romance narrative, this time with his friend Francesca (Alessandra Mastronardi), albeit one that ends ambiguously.[2] The two meet and befriend one another in Modena. Francesca is the granddaughter of the proprietor of the pasta shop to which he is apprenticed. Later in the series, Francesca, who is engaged to her childhood sweetheart Pino, visits Dev in New York, and as they spend more and more time together, his feelings for her become romantic, but she does not (or will not) reciprocate them. Dev eventually comes to the conclusion that Francesca has been using him as an escape from her stale, passionless and failing relationship with Pino.

The Amazon Video series *Modern Love*[3] is adapted from stories published in the long-running (since 2004) weekly column, and later podcast, of the same name in the *New York Times*. For the associated podcast, the stories are narrated by prominent actors and performers from US entertainment media, many of whom bring intertextual baggage to their readings from their appearances in other, and sometimes contemporaneous, failed romance and break-up narratives. For example, British actor Ruth Wilson, who is best known to Anglophone media audiences for her starring role in Golden Globe Award winning Showtime series *The Affair* (2014–2019), narrated the December 2019 episode "Never Tell Our Business to Strangers." *The Affair* begins by charting the relationship breakdowns of two married couples: Noah and Helen (Dominic West and Maura Tierney) and Alison and Cole (Ruth Wilson and Joshua Jackson), viewing them from the point of view of the love affair that ensues between Noah and Alison. This is offered up in the first instance as a result rather than the cause of the faded love that

characterizes the relationship dynamics between the two married couples when we first meet them in the inaugural season.

There are two episodes of *Modern Love*'s inaugural season that stand out in particular for their narrativisations of failed romance and faded love: the second episode "When Cupid is a Prying Journalist," and the fourth episode "Rallying to Keep the Game Alive." In the former episode, Joshua (Dev Patel), a dating app entrepreneur, narrates the tragic story of his former love Emma—lost to him after he ends their relationship when she is unfaithful—to Julie (Catherine Keener), a journalist, who reciprocates by telling him her own tragic story of love in a time before smartphones, lost to circumstances unknown to her at the time, when her lover fails to arrive for a planned rendez-vous, and she has no way of contacting him. In the latter episode, married couple and parents Sarah (Tiny Fey) and Dennis (John Slattery) attend couples counselling, only to arrive at the conclusion that their relationship has failed, their love no longer exists, and their marriage is over. In thus thematizing faded love and failed romance, these episodes can clearly be understood as cognate examples to the aforementioned entries in this patterned cluster. Equally noteworthy however, is that both episodes ultimately adhere to the hetero-romantic imperative of mainstream romantic storytelling – repairing (and re-pairing) the broken bonds of their respective couples, and revivifying their lost loves.

Contemporaneously, the mid-2010s also saw the emergence elsewhere in popular culture and media of the term "conscious uncoupling." This arose from the celebrity flashpoint that occurred around a public announcement made by film star Gwyneth Paltrow and rock star Chris Martin of the British band Coldplay. They were ending their romantic relationship, and were doing so performatively amicably. The entrance of this term into the pop culture lexicon at that

time was thus symptomatic of a cultural trend towards what San Filippo has described as "the destigmatizing of the breakup" (2019, 992).

Critical Reception of *Appropriate Behavior*—The "Gay *Annie Hall*"

> Imagine, if you will, that Woody Allen, Jerry Seinfeld, and Louis CK go together to create a love child who had Lena Dunham as a nanny, and who grew up to become a bisexual Iranian-American woman. Such a person, if they also happened to have become a filmmaker, would probably make something like *Appropriate Behavior*, the wonderful debut feature from writer-director-actor Desiree Akhavan. (Bourne 2015)

This excerpt from a press review of *Appropriate Behavior* is typical of much about the way the film was talked about by cultural commentators upon its release, in the build-up to its release, and subsequently; it draws the reader's attention to the film's thematic concern with (and Akhavan's) queerness, intercultural identity and intercultural romantic relationships, non-white ethnicity, the influence on Akhavan of revered (albeit in two out of three of the named cases, reverence has turned to disgrace after sexual abuse allegations) white male forebears, a specifically named white female peer (Dunham in this case, although on other occasions the named female peer is Greta Gerwig) and the interaction of all of these things in the context of the film itself and Shirin's melancholic but humorous narrative of faded love and failed romance.

The critical reception of *Appropriate Behavior* was characterized by comparisons of the film to *Annie Hall*, and comparisons of Akhavan to Allen.[4] Looking at the corpus of criticism in

bald quantitative terms: of the 57 reviews and articles under analysis, 21 (37%) of them either make or invoke a straightforwardly direct comparison between *Appropriate Behavior* and *Annie Hall*, while a further four reviews/articles make or invoke a comparison between *Appropriate Behavior* and the cinema of Woody Allen more broadly. For example: "her [Akhavan's] work also references Woody Allen" (Silvester 2015), the film unfolds "with a whiff of Woody Allen" (Nixey 2015), and "It's clear that this is a very personal work for Akhavan—she is Shirin, in the same way that Woody Allen's characters are proxies of himself" (Arnold 2015). Taken together these articles therefore represent 44%—which is not a majority, but is nonetheless a very sizeable proportion—of the total number of reviews and articles included in the corpus.

The size of the proportion is noteworthy in itself, symptomatic as it is—irrespective of the undeniable extent to which *Appropriate Behavior* does indeed lend itself to formal and thematic comparison with *Annie Hall*, as any cursory textual reading would reveal—of the persistence of a problem often faced by women filmmakers. This is a problem whereby their work struggles to be seen or understood on its own terms, independently of comparison with a canonised male filmmaker (all the more noteworthy in this case given that the filmmaker in question is a queer, minority ethnic woman of colour). Akhavan herself is quoted in one of the articles from the corpus reflecting on this issue, albeit she limits the scope of her critique to gender:

> I don't see my male counterparts written about in the same way, as being the new Woody Allen, or the new Noah Baumbach, or Todd Solondz. I think the implication is that there is a limited amount of space for an intelligent, funny

> woman and right now it's Lena Dunham. But there is an infinite pool for men to play in. (Akhavan quoted in Aftab 2015)

For Akhavan, these comparisons play a part in diminishing the value of her work to film culture. She also positions this in relative terms alongside the way that the work of her male peers has been seen and treated (she is certainly correct that hers is far from the only work to emerge from recent American independent cinema that bears obvious comparison with Allen's). This, Akhavan indicates, is also relative to the way that Dunham was contemporaneously discussed by critics and commentators. Dunham, she suggests, has been singled out and held up as exceptional (for a woman), and that being the case, the work of Dunham's female peers, herself included, is devalued by default.

Continuing to examine this 44% of reviews more qualitatively, a number of noteworthy recurring themes emerge concerning the nature of the comparisons being made, and on what grounds they are made. The thing that rises to discursive prominence above all others, across the surveyed comparisons, is the film's non-linear structure, encompassing the way that flashback is used to depict the coupling and uncoupling of the central duo of Shirin and Maxine in the case of *Appropriate Behavior* and Annie and Alvy in the case of *Annie Hall*. 18 reviews/articles (81% of all those in the corpus that directly invoke a named comparison with *Annie Hall*) make the comparison by explicitly citing their structural similarity, with particular respect to the use of flashbacks, and the cutting back and forth between flashback and the present of the diegesis. In this way, *Appropriate Behavior* has, to cite just a few examples "episodic flashback overtones of *Annie Hall*" (Kermode 2015), is "structured much like *Annie Hall* (Barker 2014) and "borrows the flashback structure of *Annie Hall* (Kang, 2015).[5]

Other points of comparison between the films that are made in the corpus include the city of New York as a setting for a melancholically romantic narrative (Kang 2015; Phelan 2015; Schwartz 2016), the "bittersweet" tone of the two films (Kang 2015; Phelan 2015), and the obsessive tendencies that Alvy/Shirin respectively manifest in the form of things like "neuroticism" and "self-loathing" (Hassenger 2015; Hermsmeier 2015). Rarely are individual moments or scenes from either film pointed to as grounds for comparison, but one reviewer invokes what is arguably *Annie Hall*'s most famous scene in highlighting what he views as a divergence in the films' respective depictions of the pre-breakup relationships of the central couples as joyful (Alvy and Annie) versus joyless (Shirin and Maxine): "Oh, for a lobster-wrangling scene!" (Goldstein 2015).

The next most prominent theme after structure that emerges from the critical discourse comparing the two films is, significantly for the purposes of this chapter, their shared status as films that are principally concerned with the loss of love and the aftermath of romantic relationships. It is more common, of course, in films that have been assigned to a "rom com" genre classification, as both of these films, to different extents, have been, that it is the beginnings of love and the formation of romantic relationships that is most prominent in the storytelling.[6] For example, the grounds on which Sheila O'Malley offers up her observation that *Annie Hall* was "a clear influence on 'Appropriate Behavior'" is the core subject matter of "lost love" (2015). Jesse Hassenger compares them on the grounds of their shared status as "relationship post-mortem[s]" (2015), and Rachel Lubitz on the grounds that they each depict their central characters "trying to get over the… breakup of a… relationship" (2015). Similarly, Chris O'Falt's comparison highlights the films' shared depiction of "life after breaking up" (2014).

Several articles go to great lengths to emphasise that in making a comparison with *Annie Hall* they are not minimising Akhavan's achievements as a filmmaker in her own right, or diminishing the sound of her own authorial voice. In these instances, the reviewers and critics point to divergences between Allen and Akhavan, things they see as individual to her, and to what they see as path-breaking about her film or her as a filmmaker. In this way, Amanda Waltz writes that "unlike Woody Allen, Akhavan has no desire to portray her protagonist as the neurotic, but well-meaning good guy. She writes Shirin as an amusing, but ultimately flawed character prone to delusion" (2015). In a similar vein, David Ehrlich states that "For all of its matter-of-fact modesty [via, for example, textual nods to *Annie Hall*] …*Appropriate Behavior* comes uniquely into its own as Shirin comes into hers. Akhavan does small wonders with the role she was born to play, and by the time her film gets to its note-perfect conclusion, it's clear that she's nothing less than a true original" (2015).

The remarks, in this regard, of critics like Leslie Coffin and Inkoo Kang further highlight some important aspects of what is ideologically at stake in how Akhavan's film's treatment of the core theme of lost love manifests differently from Allen's in *Annie Hall* (notwithstanding the extent to which Allen's film offers itself up as an intercultural romance due to the Jewish/WASP relationship dynamic between Alvy and Annie). As Kang notes, *Appropriate Behavior* echoes *Annie Hall* in some ways, "but in service of a startlingly new love story that's… queer and contemporary" (Kang 2015). And as Coffin writes, "*Appropriate Behavior* is admirable in that it takes elements of the *Annie Hall* genre of romantic comedy or break up film, and uses them in relation to different ethnicities, genders, and relationships" (Coffin 2015). In this way, both Kang and Coffin signal to different extents, that for all the obvious comparisons that there are to be made between the two films, one of the key things that sets *Appropriate Behavior* apart from

Annie Hall is that the former is a queer film, depicting lost love between women in a queer relationship, and that Shirin's gender and sexuality (as well as those of Maxine) change the stakes of the intercultural nature of their relationship. The nature of these stakes manifest in different ways, but most vividly around Shirin's fearful reluctance to come out to her Iranian immigrant parents (as Shirin is at pains to remind Maxine when she gives her a hard time for having thus far remained closeted: Iran is a country in which "you get stoned to death if you're convicted of being gay"). Hence, this strand of the critical discourse circulating around the release of *Appropriate Behavior* does noteworthy ideological work in communicating the extent to which Akhavan's film makes a needed and long overdue intervention in the status quo of the break-up sub-genre of relationship comedy/drama by depicting that queer minority ethnic women of colour can get their hearts broken too. In this way it pushes back against the compulsory heteronormativity and universal whiteness that has tended to characterize the *Annie Hall*-esque break-up narrative paradigm.

Conclusion

Thus, with *Appropriate Behavior* and its non-linear charting of the lifespan of the queer intercultural relationship between Shirin and Maxine, Akhavan too lets the audience feel "the sadness of goodbye in a funny movie." Long before audiences had Diane Keaton's words as a go-to for characterising it, this basic principle was always key to *Annie Hall*'s appeal. In some ways the sadness of goodbye in *Annie Hall* remains as moving as it ever was. But in others it gets harder and harder over time to separate text from context. And in a film where the protagonist is such a clear avatar for the filmmaker himself, the possibility of empathy for Alvy

has inevitably become complicated by Allen's extra-textual celebrity persona. And all the more so since the broadcast of the 2021 documentary mini-series *Allen v. Farrow* (HBO, 2021), which goes to lengths to trouble Allen's *onscreen* persona in addition to its more obvious confrontations of the well-known sexual abuse allegations made against the filmmaker.

Perhaps inescapably as a result of its intertextual relationship to *Annie Hall*, *Appropriate Behavior* has become a new touchstone for the sadness of goodbye in a funny movie. But irrespective of the extent to which Akhavan's work bears formal comparison to that of Woody Allen, which in the case of *Appropriate Behavior* it manifestly does, arguably it matters little who or what set the genre precedent for narrating a romantic break-up using a flashback structure. As a film that candidly articulates the graduated experience of a slowly unfolding heartbreak for a queer woman, in the sad aftermath of a failed relationship, with emotional honesty, quick wit, contextually specific humour, and endearing flaws, *Appropriate Behavior* sets its own precedent. It is one of the most basic tenets of critical media and cultural studies understandings of the concept of representation that to exist in represented form is to have a form of social power. For queer women of colour in Anglophone nations to experience "the sadness of goodbye in a funny movie" in anything more than the abstract has required the production of a film like *Appropriate Behavior*. But for all its welcome and worthy intersections and interventions, the extent to which it lends itself so readily to comparisons with *Annie Hall*, shines a clear light on the felt need by both reviewers and the filmmaker herself ("It's a gay *Annie Hall*") to translate the queer and minority ethnic character experiences that define the film in ways that are legible, comprehensible and acceptable to white hetero-patriarchy and to masculinist film culture. Specifically, by emphasising and insisting on (albeit easy) comparisons with the work of a white male auteur long established in the canon of American film history.

Akhavan has of course been complicit at times in fostering these comparisons. But as a queer filmmaker operating at the margins of the mainstream for her debut feature, packaging her work in a normatively comprehensible way that presented itself as accessible to (white male) audiences and critics was also a strategy of survival. And especially so in the contexts of a film industry that routinely abuses women (Cobb and Horeck 2018) and a film culture that is rife with what Stefania Marghitu calls "auteur apologism" which as, she explains it, constitutes arguments that advocate for "the separation of the art from the artist, underpinned by the claim that a problematic identity is a prerequisite for creative genius" (2018, 491). The applicability of this phenomenon to Woody Allen and his work is noteworthy and striking, and unsurprisingly, Allen is one of the filmmakers specifically singled out by Marghitu as a decades long beneficiary of such "auteur apologism." Debates continue to be heated about the persistence of discourses of "auteur apologism" and the presence of misogyny (and misogynists) in the film canon (Harrison 2018). I do not advocate the erasure of anything or anyone from film history. I do think we should remember *Annie Hall*, but I also think we should move on from it. Feel the sadness of goodbye if we must. But there is a whole range of emotions to be experienced from engaging with the work of the countless relatively unsung women filmmakers to have been structurally disenfranchised from film industries and left behind by film history, which will allow us to do this, and so much more besides.

Notes

[1] Shelley Cobb and Diane Negra correspondingly argue that output of Hollywood films in the so-called "chick flick" genre has noticeably slowed since peaking in the 1990s (2017).

[2] Interestingly, the 2017 second season of *Master of None* seems to textually and thematically anticipate what has quickly become an iconic moment in another narrative of failed romance, Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me By Your Name* (2017). In the same way that Guadagnino's film ends with a long protracted close up lasting several minutes of Elio's (Timothee Chalamet) face as he experiences a spectrum of emotions, seemingly including mournful melancholia, following a telephone call with his lost love Oliver (Armie Hammer), so the *Master of None* episode "The Dinner Party" ends in a similar way. As Francesca exits the taxi she has shared with Dev, the camera remains on him alone for several more minutes thereafter as it likewise records the range of emotions on his face as he contemplates her imminent departure from New York (and his life) and comes to terms with the feelings of romantic love that by this point he knows he has for her.

[3] It is noteworthy that the creative lead on this television adaptation of *Modern Love* is John Carney, the filmmaker who directed the aforementioned *Begin Again.*

[4] Sourcing reviews from online databases Movie Review Query Engine [MRQE] and NexisUK I conducted a basic content analysis to determine what proportion of the articles that comprised the corpus made direct nominal reference to *Annie Hall* as part of a review of *Appropriate Behavior* that was written and published either following a film festival screening, or upon its release in cinemas in 2014 and 2015 (depending on the country), or as part of a profile of Akhavan. MRQE was selected as the starting point for data gathering due to its (self-proclaimed) status as the largest online index of film reviews. However, this yielded only 30 English language reviews of the film toward the corpus. Data gathered from MRQE was therefore supplemented by further reviews and point of release profiles sourced using the online news archive NexisUK. A search was conducted using the terms "Appropriate Behavior" *and* "Desiree Akhavan." This search yielded a starting corpus of 637 articles, from which 27 were selected for

inclusion in the final corpus of 57. Only articles for which full text access was available have been included in the corpus. In addition, reports concerning the film's production or distribution were eliminated from the NexisUK corpus, as were articles which make named reference to *Appropriate Behavior*, but which are more substantively concerned with Akhavan's subsequent output, such as her next film *The Miseducation of Cameron Post* (2018) and her sit-com *The Bisexual*. Reviews of 300 words or shorter were also excluded on the grounds that the principal function of pieces of this length is to provide bald synopsis making for minimal discussion and evaluation, and that there is thus little scope for the pieces in question to engage with the film's relationship to wider film culture, or for the authors to engage with the film's content beyond the succinct reiteration of details of the narrative premise and central characters. Teaser and listings articles were eliminated for similar reasons. Naturally, any reviews that had already been counted and included in the MRQE corpus were disregarded when dealing with the NexisUK corpus, so duplication of entries was avoided. As a result, most of the articles that comprise the final corpus constitute reviews of the film published following its January 2014 premiere at the Sundance Film Festival, those published upon its general release in cinemas later that year and upon its release on DVD and streaming services in 2015, and also promotional pieces and profiles of the filmmaker, generally from the same period (2014–2016).

[5] According to the critical discourse about *Appropriate Behavior* that comprises the sample, the film has "episodic flashback overtones of *Annie Hall*" (Kermode 2015); it is "structured much like *Annie Hall*" (Barker 2014); it "borrows the flashback structure of *Annie Hall*" (Kang 2015); it is "a kind of Iranian American-bisexual *Annie Hall*… as we see in a slew of non-linear flashbacks" (Goldstein 2015); it "will certainly draw comparisons to *Annie Hall*" on account of its "cuts back and forth between Shirin's present-day transition and key moments from her life

with Maxine" (Waltz 2015); "Shirin and Maxine's relationship is charted through flashbacks inserted between the present-day scenes, a structure borrowed from Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, as Akhavan herself acknowledges" (Bourne 2015); "The movie's fractured chronology is so evocative of *Annie Hall*" (Ehrlich 2015); "The film flips between Shirin's present-day attempts to regain Maxine's affections, and flashbacks that illuminate key moments in their relationship… filching directly from *Annie Hall*" (Erbland 2015); the film "owes" its "structure … to *Annie Hall*" (Hassenger 2015); "No one has yet compared *Appropriate Behavior* with *Annie Hall* [a ridiculous claim: many critics had in fact already made this comparison, as had Akhavan herself], which, with its relationship-told-in-retrospect structure, clearly inspired Akhavan" (Freeman 2015); "The flashbacks actually remind [one] of *Annie Hall*" (Hermsmeier 2015); the film has "*Annie Hall*-style flashbacks" (Lubitz 2015); "The film in its current form is intricately structured with flashbacks, which was influenced by the structure of the classic New York rom com *Annie Hall*" (Walsh 2014); Akhavan is "cleaving to the classic structure of *Annie Hall*" (The Scotsman 2015); it is "cut together with flashbacks in the style of *Annie Hall*" (Kachka 2015); "The film employs an *Annie Hall*-esque structure as it flashes back through the relationship" (Elphick 2015); "*Appropriate Behavior* is more Woody Allen than Lena Dunham [on account of its being] …structured like *Annie Hall*" (O'Falt 2014).

[6] Film scholars working in the field of genre studies have long debated the genre status (or not) of *Annie Hall* as a romantic comedy, with others viewing it more contextually in relation to industry culture as part of a historically contingent cycle. I will not restage the debate here. For more on this see, for example, Krutnik (1990), Neale and Krutnik (1990), Neale (1992), Shumway (2003), Jeffers McDonald (2007), Grindon (2011), Gehring (2016) and Jermyn (2017).

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