



"FEAR" THE "WILD THINGS"

## HOW '90S-ERA HOLLYWOOD'S INSATIABLE OBSESSION WITH TEEN PSYCHOSEXUAL COMING-OF-AGE FILMS STILL RESONATES TODAY

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Nothing was as bankable (or steamier) at the box office than "Fatal Attraction" and "Basic Instinct" reimagined as erotic high school thrillers. But how problematic was this trend? What's more dangerous than a teenage girl?

Sexualizing one.



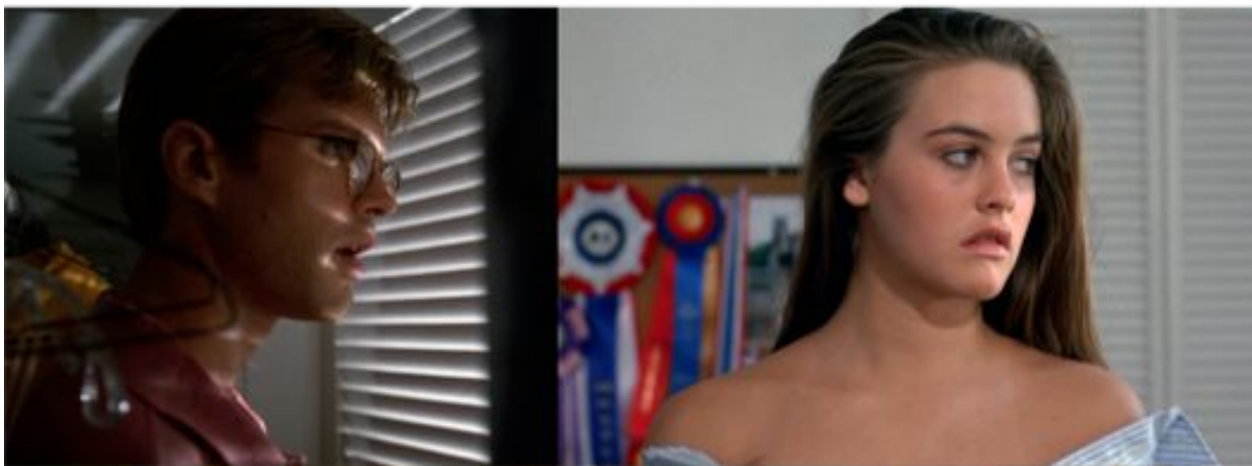
"The Crush" Warner Bros.

The fear of newfound sexual freedom, particularly the libidos of adolescent girls, were interrogated, explored, and – at times – exploited in '90s-era high school-set psychosexual thrillers. From the age of characters portrayed, actors' requests for body doubles, or the questionably problematic market for watching real-life teens undress onscreen, the eroticism of teens in the '90s still has resonance today.

Now, as Todd Haynes' "May December" shows the lasting psychological effects of the traumatic grooming of a male tween (Charles Melton), and Yorgos Lanthimos' "Poor Things" charts a sexual awakening from a developing child mind in an adult body (played by Emma Stone), it's only right to return to the trend of coming-of-age sexuality onscreen, most infamously weaponized by a niche genre trend of thrillers framed by teen female perpetrators.

Sex is back onscreen, but what did overt eroticism look like in films past? Hollywood in the '90s has been tainted in retrospect, as the culture has grappled with what the rise of Harvey Weinstein as a mega-producer really meant, along with studios pushing for more sex and more nudity from younger and younger stars. But were these teen films for high school theater-goers, or leering adults? And even worse, did studios even care so long as tickets were sold?

"The Crush," "Wild Things," "Cruel Intentions," and "Poison Ivy" each offered iconic portrayals of young femme fatales onscreen that marked the cornerstone of the erotic thriller trend for adolescents, whether intentional or not.



*"Why don't we see her tits?"*

*(Anonymous Warner Bros. executive screening dailies)*

The 1992 film "The Crush," starring a 15-year-old Alicia Silverstone, was told from the perspective of magazine writer Nick (Cary Elwes), who is renting a house from a couple whose 14-year-old daughter Adrian (Silverstone) attempts to seduce him – with sinister, obsessive consequences. Adrian sets out to ruin Nick's life, just as he falls for an (adult) colleague (Jennifer Rubin).

"The Crush" was written and directed by Alan Shapiro, who told IndieWire that his initial concept was thwarted by studio Warner Bros. "They thought, what I think a lot of people did, that it was a programmer," Shapiro said. "For me it was tongue-in-cheek. I saw her as a teenage Gloria Swanson in "Sunset Blvd." sort of character. Black comedy. I tried to do it as best I could, but they wanted a down-the-middle thriller with plenty of skin."

"The Crush" was marketed as the teen "Fatal Attraction" and, according to Shapiro, the studio pushed for more (underage) sexually suggestive scenes and nudity.

"There's a scene where Cary Elwes is in the closet looking out at her [Silverstone] getting dressed and she turns around and lets her shirt drop. I got a call the next day from the studio yelling, what is wrong with me? 'How come we don't see her tits?'" Shapiro said. "So I said, 'Well, I didn't really want to do that.' They insisted on hiring a model for Alicia to show her breasts. And we shot it. But I was able to cut it out. I called it the stunt butt. We see it twice I think. It was the best I could do and stay out of prison."

He continued, "It all revolved around sex. They wanted as much sex as possible from Alicia. Plus, we were in Canada, and those Canucks can be randy. I'm joking. Obviously, it wasn't a porno, but they wanted it as titillating as possible. And God love her, she went for it. Without the tits. This is 1992; pre-#MeToo. The law clearly prohibits filming a nude minor, but apparently they didn't check with legal."



Alicia Silverstone and Cary Elwes in "The Crush"

Shapiro credited the popularity of "Single White Female" and "The Hand That Rocks the Cradle" (also both from 1992) for pushing the genre of "teenage girl from Hell." In fact, the spec script for "The Crush" incited a bidding war between studios before landing at Warner Bros. Production was fast-tracked and the film was released in 1500 theaters less than a year after the script was bought. The film grossed \$13.6 million at the box office against a \$6 million budget.

Shapiro pointed to the marketing campaign envisioned by Warner Bros. for "The Crush": "My sense was they wanted a film that could be talked about and get people buzzing that it was super hot," he said. "Once Alicia was cast, they reacted to the dailies and thought she was hot. Then those calls from L.A. would come in. I thought they'd fire me."

Lead actress Silverstone told [Interview](#) in 1994 that she did not have a chaperone on set, saying that it "worked better for my character without one." Silverstone said that she "envied the power" her character Adrian wielded at age 14 in the film.

"I loved being able to walk on the set as Adrian and think that everyone there was hot for me. I would never feel that way in life," Silverstone said at the time. "I decided that if she's going to just be a tough girl, you can't love her. You can only want her physically. But I wanted to make her a real, whole human being."



I wish I could go back and do the movie again, because it isn't often that a young girl can be really aggressive and take over the whole movie."



Writer-director Shapiro said the "Lolita" element of "The Crush" led to him getting letters calling him a "pedophile" upon the film's release. Now, Shapiro is aware of the "cult following" for "The Crush," referencing how the newfound fandom decades later is closer to his initial pitch for the film.

"I certainly never intended it to be a down-the-middle scary movie because it's not scary at all. It's not even thrilling," Shapiro said. "I was trying for black comedy, which is hard to pull off. Clearly I failed. That said, it's still fun."

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