DISNEY’S GIRL NEXT DOOR:
EXPLORING THE STAR IMAGE OF ANNETTE FUNICELLO

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A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
May 2006

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the cultural significance of actress and former Mouseketeer Annette Funicello and the public perception that she embodies the social values of morality and chastity. The catalyst of this study is the question of the source of Funicello’s popularity. Compared to other stars, her acting is average and her singing flat, but her looks, personality, and careful marketing positioned her as one of Walt Disney Studio’s biggest stars in the 1950s. This study contends that examining cultural connotations of Funicello’s celebrity is the key to understanding the root of Funicello’s popularity.

Using Richard Dyer’s concept of the star image, this study deconstructs Funicello’s celebrity persona to uncover greater meaning in her cultural identity as a “girl next door.” An analysis of teen-oriented magazine coverage of Funicello reveals that of the three components of Dyer’s star image theory—success, ordinariness, and consumption—ordinariness is the most prominent in Funicello’s star image. Funicello’s depiction of the character Annette McCleod from the “Annette” serial stands as textual evidence of the calculated effort of Disney to commodify the girl-next-door persona. In the early 1960s Disney loaned Funicello to American International Pictures for a series of youth-oriented beach films in which Funicello played the only chaste girl on a beach of promiscuous college students. The significance of Funicello’s role in these films is analyzed through a historical lens that focuses on the influence that these more adult roles had on her star image. Finally this thesis discusses how the Disney Channel markets their modern day tween stars as the girl next door, using an extended comparison of actress Hilary Duff and Funicello.
This study finds that through the employment of the girl-next-door persona, Disney has capitalized on their viewers’ yearning to imagine that they could be the stars they watch and admire. Through textual analysis of her work on the 1950’s children’s show the Mickey Mouse Club, her singing career, and her work in the beach party films of the 1960s, this study locates Funicello as the personification of a larger Disney fantasy that is marketed and commodified through most, if not all, of Disney products.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to all those who helped me throughout the many stages of this project. I especially wish to acknowledge Kristen Moore, who reminded me that I could write about what I am passionate about; my advisor Dr. Becca Cragin, for her guidance; Pete Zois for his patience, and my family for their support.
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INTRODUCTION

On Christmas day 2004 I sat down with my family to watch the newly released *Walt Disney Treasures Mickey Mouse Club* DVD. The 2-disc special edition contained the complete first week of *Mickey Mouse Club* episodes that originally aired the first week of October 1955. My mom was just five years old when the series debuted and she was excited to relive the memories of “Anything Can Happen Day,” Jimmie Dodd’s Doddisms, and the numerous tap dance routines. While she reminisced about the afternoons she spent in front of her family’s first television, my sister and I laughed over the “quaintness” of the Mouseketeers. We giggled about Bobby’s wide smile and exaggerated dance moves, and marveled over the mechanical charm that even the youngest Mouseketeers, Karen and Cubby, had perfected. But Annette, the most famous Musketeers of all, was obscured from view in most scenes.

Because we knew Annette Funicello had always been a favorite Mouseketeer, my sister and I were surprised to find that in the first week’s episodes she was most often relegated to the back row of the few scenes in which she appeared. “She’s not even that cute,” my sister remarked. I agreed. Annette, then 12, was skinny with bushy brows and a short mop of black curls. We both wondered, “What’s the big deal with Annette?” She’s the one they always mention when someone brings up the *Mickey Mouse Club*. By large, she’s the only original Mouseketeer that our generation knows by name. “Oh Annette,” my mom responded. “She’s the best.” However why that was, was not clear after watching the first week of the *Mickey Mouse Club*.

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1 Karen Pendleton and Cubby O’Brien were the youngest in the most featured group of Mousketeers, the red team. Bronson Scott was actually the youngest of all the children and not quite eight years old when the series began.

2 In this thesis I have chosen to refer to Annette by her given name instead of her surname for the purpose of consistency.
While a research project on Annette or the *Mickey Mouse Club* had not even entered my mind yet, the mystery of Annette’s popularity stuck with me. Weeks later I was still thinking about Annette. Years before I had seen reruns of the “Annette” serial on the Disney Channel. The “Annette” serial, which originally ran as a segment on the second season of the *Mickey Mouse Club*, starred a more mature, ladylike Annette. According to legend, after just the first week of episodes, the same week that I had watched on DVD, Annette was receiving more fan mail than any of the other young stars (Funicello, Petersen 95). Within months she was receiving more mail than even Walt Disney himself. Disney responded to the demand and created more parts for Annette. First she appeared in the serial “Adventures in Dairyland,” then she was given a part as Spin’s girlfriend in the very popular serial “Adventures of Spin and Marty.” Soon *Mickey Mouse Club* merchandise followed including Annette cosmetic kits, jewelry kits, paper dolls, coloring books, and a board game. How did Annette go from a face in the back row to the standout star of the show?

Having seen some of the *Mickey Mouse Club*, a few of the beach party movies Annette did with Frankie Avalon in the 1960s, and many interviews in the mid-90s about the actress and her debilitating illness, multiple sclerosis, I began to research the popularity of Annette Funicello. I became convinced that like many other young stars an industry marketing machine had created Annette and the media hysteria that surrounded her in the mid-to-late 1950s. Like many young stars of her time, her television career morphed into singing and film careers. She graced countless magazine covers and did endless promotion for Disney. However, until she co-starred with Frankie Avalon in the 1963 film *Beach Party*, she had only minor or supporting roles in her previous films.
Critics often panned her acting as mechanical and stiff and her voice, which was “echoed” in the studio, got even worse reviews. Yet Annette was wildly popular. At the beginning of my research, pinpointing the source of Annette’s success was a mere guessing game. What was the greater significance of this girl with the perky sweaters, bubble gum voice, and impeccable manners?

As I began researching I was surprised to discover just how many theories regarding Annette’s success existed. Reportedly many of her fellow Mousketeers have gossiped over the years that Annette’s own extended family led a nationwide letter writing campaign to the Disney studios that resulted in Annette receiving a disproportionate amount of mail, and thus receiving more camera time on the show (Bowles 27). Others have simply pointed to Annette’s voluptuous curves. However her high volume of fan mail began pouring in well before her figure developed. Some believe the secret of her success lies in the appeal of her demure celebrity persona. To many fans of the generation who grew up with Annette, she imparted the fantasy of a girl who was perfect, yet real enough to almost be either your friend or your girlfriend.

Journalist Jerry Bowles writes in his 1976 book *Forever Hold Your Banner High!*

> What Annette Funicello had (and this is the basis of her peculiar magic) were the qualities of honesty, sweetness, spirituality, and alas, virginity that most typified the aspirations and presumed moral ambiance of that era. She was the absolute perfect embodiment of the 1950s ideal—the girl next door whom you would never try to get to go all the way because she was a good girl and you wanted to marry her someday and make babies (28).

All celebrities invoke fantasy, but Annette’s image speaks of a Utopian dream-world that exists just beyond reality. Her fantasy is that of the polite, modest, middle-class
American girl that would fit in everyone’s neighborhood. To the baby boom generation, this girl-next-door quality of Annette is no secret.

**Through a Historical Lens**

What is key in Bowles’ above description is not just the reference to Annette as representing the much-coveted “girl next door,” but the phrase “the 1950s ideal - the girl next door.” The 1950s is a time frequently remembered as a period of juke box innocence, flat top hair cuts, and good clean fun. When compared to the civil unrest and social issues that arose in the following decade, the 1950s it is often dismissed as a fluffy era dedicated to producing happy homemakers and breadwinning fathers. However important groundwork for 1960s was laid during the postwar years of the fifties. As Wini Breines writes, “this period is characterized by shifts from production to consumption, from saving to spending, from city to suburb, from blue-to white collar employment, and from an adult to a youth culture” (55). All of which set the stage for a new generation of young adults to emerge in the 1960s with a new brand of social values.

Spotting the values and norms of the 1950s in Annette’s celebrity persona is easy. (For my purposes Annette’s celebrity persona includes the characters she played on film and television, the songs she sang, and how her real personality was portrayed in the media and during public appearances.) Annette herself exemplified the thriving consumerism of the 1950s. Magazines showcased that she always wore the latest fashions, listened to the latest records, and loved her white Thunderbird convertible. Like a proper and wholesome young adult, Annette spoke often of her love for family, her obsession with Guy Williams of Zorro, and her faith in the Catholic religion. Yet, the
connection between Annette’s celebrity persona and the tides of the 1950s does not end with a quick evaluation of her moral image. In her youth Annette stood as the ultimate reflection of 1950’s standards of morality, beauty, and sanitized fun. Through her role in the 1960s beach party films Annette came to represent an attempt, in the midst of a changing social landscape, to cling to these values.

Disclaimers and Goals

The following chapters examine Annette’s celebrity persona as it is manifested in the fictional characters she played on television and in film (especially Annette McCleod of the “Annette” serial and Dee Dee from the beach party movies), the way she has been portrayed through media coverage such as magazine articles and comic books, and her own retrospectives from her autobiography and various television appearances and interviews. In his book on star scholarship *Stars*, Richard Dyer reminds the reader that a scholar can never claim to really know the true person behind the star as we study them primarily within media texts. Dyer writes that “the fact that [stars] are also real people is an important aspect of how they signify” (2). While for this project I am very much concerned with how the media and Annette herself have portrayed the starlet in real life, I am not pretending that this portrayal is entirely true to reality. When I refer to Annette’s real life as a text, I am referring to the media portrayal of her real life.

Similarly, when I refer to Annette’s greater cultural meaning or impact, I am not aspiring to measure or interpret it from the spectator’s point-of-view. This study will rely primarily on a textual analysis within a semiotic framework. While scholars like Jackie Stacey have yielded critical works on star scholarship using an audience-study approach,
my intention is to present the possibilities of meaning that Annette can hold on a social level with a structured polysemic context.

My definitive goal is to develop a complex, contextualized understanding of Annette’s Hollywood career as a fantastical extension of the greater Disney empire. Through my analysis of her celebrity persona as singer, actress, teen queen, and everyone’s dream girl, I aim to demonstrate how Annette is the personification of the Disney fantasy. She is the living, teen girl version of the animated Mickey Mouse and Cinderella and the embodiment of the magic of Disneyland, all in one clean, wholesome, almost attainable package.

In *Stars*, Dyer defines the star image as “a complex configuration of visual, verbal and aural signs…manifest not only in films but in all kinds of media texts” (34). I am concerned with Annette’s star image as the product of not just her roles in the *Mickey Mouse Club* and subsequent movies, but in all the media pertaining to the star. The first chapter will focus on the perception of Annette as a real person. After tracing Annette’s journey to stardom by way of mouse ears, I will apply Dyer’s conception of “star image” to analysis of teen magazine coverage of Annette off-stage. The following chapter will explore Annette’s girl-next-door image through a textual analysis of the plot and character within Annette’s television and film roles. In the third chapter, I will look at the moral and social implications of Annette’s portrayal of the undersexed Dee Dee in the beach party films of the early 1960s. In particular I will explore the significance of a character or star image that embodies ideals that are culturally threatened. The final chapter will seek to establish a model of continuation between Annette and contemporary actress Hilary Duff. I will identify similarities between their careers and elaborate on
Disney’s role in shaping their on and off-stage personas in the image of the Disney fantasy.
CHAPTER I: AN ORDINARY DREAM NEVER SOURS

“She hates doing dishes... she sometimes forgets to pick up her clothes... she’s wild about chocolate but knows what it does to her complexion... she answers the phone the minute it rings (it might be Paul)... and on Sundays she’s usually in church.” (Anderson 72)

[A passage from a 1959 Photoplay article about Annette.]

Annette maintains that before her rise to fame on the Mickey Mouse Club neither she nor her family had intended for her to go into show business (Funicello 4). A shy young pre-teen and daughter of first-generation Italian-Americans, she stumbled upon her career at age 12 when Walt Disney discovered her at a ballet recital. He was in the audience scouting for potential Mouseketeers at a children’s performance of “Swan Lake,” in which Annette played the lead role. She was then invited to audition for the twenty-fourth and final spot on the Mickey Mouse Club.

The original Mickey Mouse Club television show was an ensemble cast of ordinary, non-professional child performers. In 1954 the broadcast network ABC and Disney partnered to produce the highly successful Disneyland television series. The weekly show, Disney’s first foray into the young medium of television, primarily focused on promoting Disney’s pet project, Disneyland theme park, which was still under construction. The Disneyland program also featured popular serials, such as “Davy Crocket” and “Operation Undersea.” Following the success of Disneyland, ABC asked Disney to produce a children’s show. According to accounts, Walt Disney, a filmmaker at heart, was not fond of television and was hesitant to go forward with another show (Bowles 6, Petersen 27). Disney believed that television was best suited as a forum to promote the corporation’s other more primal endeavors, such as films and his theme park.
Disney only agreed to do another television show after ABC offered to finance the show and lend Disney a much needed $1.2 million for Disneyland. The new show, the *Mickey Mouse Club*, was to feature real-life children performing song and dance numbers, recycled Disney cartoon shorts from Disney’s extensive catalog, and fifteen-minute serial segments featuring professional child actors. This was, however, the second incarnation of the Mickey Mouse Club. In the 1930s Disney began the club as a grassroots marketing campaign aimed at creating an interactive atmosphere for viewings of Mickey Mouse cartoons in local theaters nationwide through giveaways, newsletters, and free refreshments (Petersen 26, Bowles 22). However the clubs died out during the early years of WWII.

When Disney decided to resurrect the Mickey Mouse Club in 1955, he returned to the concept of emphasizing interaction with real children. All viewers of the *Mickey Mouse Club* would automatically be members in the club, though the show would feature children portraying club members, called Mouseketeers, who were to be the foundation of the show. Open auditions were held, and over 3000 children were screened to wear the signature mouse ears. The audition guidelines specified that the children should be ages 9 to 13, with dancing and/or singing talent (Petersen 41). According to Paul Petersen, child actor and author, Disney said he was not looking for “those kids who tap dance or blow trumpets while they’re tap dancing or ski rope and have curly hair like Shirley Temple or nutty mothers…I just want ordinary kids” (37). Petersen notes that acting experience was not a factor in the search for Mouseketeers because they were primarily playing themselves (41). In the end, only a handful of the children chosen to be

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3 Different sources report differently the number of children who auditioned for the Mouseketeers. Bowles reports 4,000, Funicello 3,000, and various magazine articles from the time report 1,000 and 5,000.
Mouseketeers were professionals, though many came from families with show business
ties.

Annette, however, was not a professional, nor did her family have a background in entertainment. Her father was a mechanic and her mother a housewife. Her parents moved to Southern California on a whim, and left a large extended Italian-American family behind in Utica, New York. In interviews and in her autobiography, Annette always makes it clear that her parents were not looking for stardom when they moved to California, just warmer weather. (Funicello 5). Annette projects the innocence that many fans associate her with when she regularly mentions that her parents never planned for her to be a star—her success was purely accidental (Funicello 4). This contributes to the charm of Annette. Her ordinariness lets her fans imagine that they too could have been discovered and made a star. Yet at the same time, the fan never forgets that Annette was special enough to be the only Mouseketeer handpicked by Disney. She is the girl-next-door with a special something that cannot be pinpointed or identified. Annette appears to understand the value of her modest, innocent persona. She knows that key to her success has always been her fans’ perception that they can relate to Annette. She addresses it in her autobiography where she writes:

Fan and movie magazines portrayed me as the queen of teen, a girlfriend next door who just happened to be a famous, successful actress and recording star. Each story had a happy ending. Even in the magazines that favored a more risqué approach (as in the headline “My Hobby—Collecting Boys”), I was the notable exception among other young actresses who, at least allegedly, were conducting torrid love affairs and running away from home. I was just a happy, well-adjusted, normal teenager.

And it was all basically true! …Nowadays when writers profile me for magazines, they write something to the effect
that back in those days I “represented” wholesomeness. In fact, though, I lived it, and it wasn’t an act (80).

While acknowledging the appeal of her ordinary girl persona, Annette maintains her innocent nature by dismissing the notion that her “wholesomeness” was in anyway manufactured by Disney and the corporate forces that controlled and guided her career.

However, it was a corporate decision, made by Disney himself, for the Mouseketeers to behave like real children and not polished child actors (Petersen 39, Bowles 5). They were to be real children, not child actors pretending to be real children.

Annette writes about the popularity of the Mouseketeers:

We were just like the kids next door or down the street… But I truly believe that a large part of our appeal derived from the fact that children could watch us every afternoon on television and say to themselves, I could sing as well as Annette, or I bet I could dance just like her. We were all very good at what we did, but we were not significantly better than many other children (Funicello 28).

Disney had stumbled upon a marketing goldmine. The more regular and accessible the Mouseketeers appeared, the more the children watching at home would fantasize about wearing the mouse ears, and the more they would watch the show, and consume Disney products and entertainment.

Disney’s original intention was for none of the Mouseketeers to stand out as stars (Bowles 28). The children were ranked and placed into three separate groups based on talent and potential star quality, with the most prestigious red group participating in the daily roll call and receiving the best parts. However, all the roles and parts were interchangeable and within the red group all the children were showcased equally. Or at least in the beginning. After the first six months of the show, Annette was receiving more fan mail than anyone else at the studio, including Walt Disney (Petersen 95,
For the next season the show was retooled; ratings analysis had revealed that the serial was the most popular element of the show, and Annette was cast in three serials. Other than Darlene who played in the first season serial “Corky and the White Shadow,” Annette was the first Mouseketeer to make the cross-over to the serials, which were usually acted by professional actors. First Annette starred in the serial about children on a Wisconsin dairy farm, “Adventures in Dairyland.” Then she played Spin’s girlfriend in the second and third seasons of the dude ranch serial, “Spin and Marty.” She was also given her own serial, “Annette,” the story of an orphan girl who battles a snobby rich crowd when she is taken in by relatives and moves to a new town. Of all the serials featured on the *Mickey Mouse Club*, Annette was the only actress who played a character with her own name (Petersen 99). While the plots of the serials changed along with the characters she portrayed, she always acted each role with the same sweet, good-natured demeanor. When the show ended production in 1957, Annette was the only Mouseketeer whose option Disney renewed.

**Star Image**

While Annette maintains that her “wholesome” public persona was strongly rooted in genuine personality, Dyer reminds us that star images are “constructed personages in media texts” (97). Having established that Annette’s popularity stems from the accessible and relatable qualities of her star image, the next step is to go beyond the assumption that she is simply a nice down-to-earth person, and recognize the calculated execution of the Disney brand of promotion.

Dyer explains 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 his/her life. As it combines the spectacular with the everyday, the special with the ordinary, and is seen as an articulation of basic American/western value, there is no conflict here between the general lifestyle and the particularities of the star (35).

In magazine features on celebrities it is common for writers to document “a day in the life of” a star, or to attempt to unmask the real person behind the Hollywood star. In this section, in which I will specifically look at magazine articles from the late 1950s and early 1960s and their portrayal of Annette as a real person, I will explore the unusual way Annette’s star image balances “the special with the ordinary.” According to Dyer “the general image of stardom can be seen as a version of the American Dream, organized around the themes of consumption, success, and ordinariness” (35). All three of these themes appear in the magazine coverage of Annette, yet there is a pronounced emphasis on ordinariness, less on success, and the least on consumption. The dominance of ordinariness in Annette’s star image is not an accident. Ordinariness is the factor that combines with Annette’s beauty, charm, and success to create and communicate a complex fantasy of the ultimate girl-next-door.

Consumption

Compared to the conspicuous consumption of most celebrities, the documentation of Annette’s spending and collecting of expensive goods is minimal. Annette was rarely, if ever, documented as partaking in extravagant spending. Of course, she received the most coverage in magazines like ‘Teen, Photoplay, and Walt Disney Magazine in the late fifties, when Annette was still a minor and living with her parents. Unlike megastars like
Elvis Presley, who bought a $50,000 Rolls Royce in 1964 (Leaf 65), Annette only partook in regular teen indulgences such as clothes, cosmetics, and a car. In almost every detailed account of Annette’s everyday life, her 1957 Thunderbird convertible is mentioned. She received it for Christmas of 1958, and had it customized with 40 coats of purple paint (Funicello 84). However, we are constantly reminded that like most teenagers, she is not allowed to drive far from home.

Consumption in the star image is classified by a celebrity emphasis on “idols of consumption” rather than “idols of production,” (Dyer 39). The stars of the star images are famous just as much for the expensive possessions they buy and are given as they are for acting, singing, or their particular talent for which they first gained fame. However, for Annette, the documentation of her signature outfit: capri pants, a bulky sweater, flats, and a neck scarf, is more of an extension of the ordinary component of her star image than of consumption. Her taste in clothes and accessories aligned her with a middle-class teenage girl, and were not indicative of the high-rolling life of a wealthy star. Her teen interest in fashion is part of what makes her the epitome of the all-American girl.

However, it would be an oversimplification to dismiss the depiction of Annette’s consumption in teen magazines just because it did not reach the caliber that most celebrity spending reaches. Annette was often shown indulging in perfume and clothes. A photo of a teenage Annette in her autobiography shows her sitting at her bedroom vanity, the top covered with over 150 perfume bottles. She describes her teenage self: “A born clotheshorse, I kept a closet full of stylish clothes, including a rainbow of capri slacks to wear under oversized sweaters, dozens of pastel organza and chiffon party dresses, and frothy mountains of petticoats” (Funicello 83). Annette may have indulged
in ordinary teen vices like clothes and perfume, but the level of her indulgence was way beyond ordinary.

**Success**

While her acting and singing were often panned by critics, Annette was still very successful. Success in the star image relies on the projection of the myth that the star had broken the barriers of class, and that anyone can be successful if the right chain of events occur (Dyer 42). Countless articles mention Annette’s blue collar background as demonstrated by her father’s occupation of mechanic (Gray 7, Anderson 57). Annette’s discovery is also retold in most in-depth features on her in the 1950s and 60s. A 1957 article on Annette recalls:

> I really stumbled into this job. There were 5,000 other kids and Walt Disney selected only 24. I almost fell through the floor when he told me to report for work. I wanted to be a Mouseketeer, but I never thought I’d get there (Gray 7).

Annette’s success story of her rise from a shy amateur ballerina to an international star encapsulates the message that stardom is attainable by the average person, and that all they need is a few dance lessons and the luck to have an entertainment mogul like Disney in the audience at their annual dance recital.

Annette’s popularity as a 1950s icon has overshadowed her actual accomplishments. While at the height of her fame she was billed as a Disney teen queen, her film work was minimal. She had only a handful of lines in her first feature film *The Shaggy Dog*, and she had supporting roles in the TV movie *The Horsemasters* and the film *Babes in Toyland*. She played second fiddle to Tommy Kirk in *The Misadventures of Merlin Jones*, and the sequel, *The Monkey’s Uncle*. And she always shared the
spotlight with Frankie Avalon in the string of beach party movies from the mid-1960s. Her singing career was short-lived, and fizzled out by 1962. She was more famous for being loveable Annette than for her acting and singing. In a 1961 issue of ‘Teen magazine, 19-year-old Annette, who had an occasional column documenting her activities, writes that the “biggest night” of her life was accepting a special Oscar for another Disney actress, Hayley Mills, who was at home in England and unable to attend. Annette was particularly thrilled to meet the presenter of the award, former child actress Shirley Temple (Funicello 1961 70). Annette received a lot of publicity for the moment that was actually in celebration of another actress’s work. Annette reports that she was star-struck, a very non-star-like emotion.

Ordinariness

The thesis of this entire project rests on the public perception of Annette’s ordinariness. Annette functions as the embodiment of the fantastical Disney image because of the ability of her fan to imagine that Annette is just like them. At the height of Annette’s fame in the late 1950s, magazine articles focused on the picture-perfect, yet quintessential, qualities of Annette’s Southern California life. According to these copious articles, the Funicello family, descended from Italian immigrants, was living the American dream.

What is an Annette? What is any girl sixteen years old?

She’s the voice on one end of a telephone conversation, giggling, whispering, talking with her very best beau. She’s the eyes that peer intently into the dressing-table mirror, cautiously inspecting her face, wishing that she’d grow up to be an Ava Gardner. She’s dreams, ambitions, blushes” (Anderson 57).
So begins a 1959 article on Annette published in *Photoplay* magazine entitled, “What is an Annette? Who is she? How did she get that way?” The feature delves into the innermost sanctions of Annette’s mind. And what does it find? Boys, clothes, embarrassing moments, and Frankie Avalon records. Readers learn that while she may have an extraordinary job, she has ordinary interests. The author Nancy Anderson paints a detailed portrait of Annette’s preference. She writes:

She likes: hot fudge sundaes, football games, her T-bird (which she got for her birthday and which she can only drive within a few blocks of home), dancing, the way Fabian sings “Turn Me Loose,” beach parties, eye makeup (which mother lets her wear only on special occasions), the new house the Funicellos are getting so she and her brothers can have more room, the old bedroom she’s leaving decorated in pink and usually strewn with her clothes, books and souvenirs, the girls she met as a Mouseketeer, slumber parties” (57, 71).

Anderson also details Annette’s dislikes: “the color maroon, too much classical music, too tight shoes, washing dishes, impolite and loud people” (72). These lists of likes and dislikes could belong to any 1950’s teenager. We are further reminded of her ordinariness when the article goes on to detail her most embarrassing moment, when at a dance with first boyfriend, fellow Mouseketeer Lonnie Burr, her dress rips, causing her slip to show “in the worst place possible” (72). The only reference to Annette’s superstar status is the description of her romance with fellow singer Paul Anka, who writes her love letters from his travels across the globe. However, even that fairytale story is grounded when Anderson mentions that Annette’s parents only allow her to date on Friday and Saturday, just like all teenagers (72).

Also like all teenage girls, Annette loves slumber parties. The *Photoplay* article and another one also published in 1959, in ‘*Teen* magazine, chronicle a sleepover hosted
by Annette complete with her childhood friends, Mouseketeer friends, and other girls from the entertainment industry. Most likely both authors, who describe the event first hand, were invited, probably with other press, to the same staged sleepover.\(^4\) The two articles were published one month apart and have many overlapping details, including the guest list, party activities, and mention of Annette’s eavesdropping brothers. The Anderson article sets the stage for any American family home. Annette and her friends experiment with make-up and hairdos in the modest Funicello living room. When Annette reaches for fudge, her mother tells her, “Better not have any more of that.” She advised, “You know what it does to your skin” (71). The ‘Teen magazine article, “It’s the Most Fun Night of the Year when Annette throws a… Swingin’ Slumber Party!” takes a more instructional approach. The article holds Annette up as an exemplary hostess that readers should try to emulate. The text reads:

Annette says if you wanna have a slumber party that’s the living end in the knocked-out department, alert about eight of your atomic-powered chums, gals you can count on to be true insomniacs, and invite them over, with pajamas, of course (Farmer 14).

A full-picture spread portrays the eight girls having a raucous time with make-up, balloon games, record playing, string games, feeding frenzies, and giggly pajama gossip sessions. While the guest list included stars like Shelley Fabares, Roberta Shore, and former Mouseketeer Cheryl Holdridge, the activities could have taken place with any group of bubbly teenage girls.

The content of a TV Guide article on Annette from 1958 resonates with the rest of the coverage on the young star. The article reads,

\(^4\) The articles were most likely part of a publicity campaign to promote the upcoming movie The Shaggy Dog. Roberta Shore, a slumber party guest, also starred in the movie.
Today, despite her busy schedule and her fame, Annette evidently retains large amounts of normalcy. She has a best girl friend, Debbie Blum, who lives across the street; and she occasionally dates an 11th grade student, Steve Elkins (29).

Even the briefest of stories on Annette highlight her regular qualities. This author also cannot resist a mention of Annette’s physical build. “She is a vivacious, 103-pound, 5-foot-3-inch lass with dark hair and dark eyes, and her main problem at the moment is convincing her mother to let her buy a car when she turns 16” (28). Like the all the other fan-centered pieces on Annette, this article reminds the reader that Annette may have the perfect life, but it is the perfect life of the ordinary American girl, not the perfect life of the fabulous Hollywood star.

In a *Walt Disney Magazine* feature on Annette, “Young Star, the Story of Annette Funicello,” readers get a look into Annette’s daily routine. Much of the article focuses on her home life with her close, churchgoing, Catholic family. Annette is shown cooking her family a pancake breakfast, talking on the phone with friends on a stuffed animal-laden bed, and writing in her diary. While the feature includes many details about life on the set, there are constant reminders that her life outside of work is just like that of all teenage girls. The reader learns that her “teacher reports Annette is an A student but that sometimes she gets a B,” (Gray 6). This shows the reader that while she is a good student, Annette is not perfect; just like her legions of fans she occasionally gets a B. Annette’s school subjects are detailed; she is taking Spanish, literature, world affairs, biology, geometry, will soon take drivers education (6). She loves the radio, and among her favorite TV shows are *Zorro*, *Father Knows Best*, and *Ozzie and Harriet* (8). The article describes a favorite pastime of teenage girls, prank calling boys. Annette and her best friend Debbie “call up a boy and not tell him who they are. While he’s still guessing
they’ll ask, ‘What do you think of Annette? What do you think of Debbie?’ So far they’ve been pretty pleased with the answers” (8). This passage not only describes a relatable teenage girl activity of calling boys and asking if they like you, but it sells the fantasy of being liked by all the boys as well. Also normal and down-to-earth is the description of Annette’s ideal date, “dinner and a show, or dinner and a football game. Her perfect meal would consist of a T-bone steak, baked potato with lots of butter, garlic bread and maybe chocolate cake for dessert” (9). Most important, not only does Annette behave like a normal teenager, she thinks of herself as one. The article reads, “because of her own shyness and a sincere belief that she ‘really isn’t very important after all,’ some people in her own neighborhood don’t know who she is” (9).

Always modest, Annette’s ordinariness is complemented with constant references to her shy, down-to-earth persona. A 1962 piece on Annette, written in a slow moment in her career, attributes her success to her personality. It reads:

> The truth behind Annette’s growth in the world of entertainment is a very pretty one. From her initial debut as a fresh-faced happy youngster on the *Mickey Mouse Club* there has been little change in her personality. Though there’s been an amazing change in her physical appearance, Annette is still a sweet girl with her feet planted firmly on the ground (Benner 21).

The one constant throughout the ups and downs of Annette’s career has been her public persona, her star image that she is the sweetest, nicest, ordinary star there ever was.

**Paradox?**

In his investigation of the relationship between the three themes of the star image Dyer asks, “Are [stars] just like you or me, or do consumption and success transform
them into (or reflect) something different?” (43). Can the big spending and wild success of a star be promoted without diluting the public perception of a star as an ordinary person? This paradox, or conflict, between the public image of a star as simultaneously ordinary and special is not as problematic in Annette’s star image as in other stars. As demonstrated by the above sections on success and consumption, both take a back seat to ordinariness in magazine coverage of Annette. Even the details of her clothing fetish and her rise to fame create the impression of an ordinary, regular teenage girl. Nothing is unique about the depiction of Annette as ordinary in media coverage. This was and is a common angle taken by those who write about stars. However, a thorough review of Annette’s star image reveals an uncommon balance between the three components of ordinariness, success, and consumption, with the former taking an overwhelming lead in the composition of Annette’s public persona.

Today Annette, now completely retired from show business, occasionally reappears in the media. The focus is still on her ordinariness, her humanness. Most coverage pertains to her battle with multiple sclerosis. Even in the less than perfect moments of her life—including her divorce and illness—Annette maintains the epitome of the human experience. Dyer mentions a common occurrence in the Western star system—the dream soured. Stardom is not just about success, but also tragic demise (43). However, unlike Elvis, Marilyn Monroe, and Judy Garland, Annette’s hardships were not the result of self destruction. In her media coverage, she has not lived beyond the bounds of everyday society.
CHAPTER II: THE INTERCHANGEABLE ANNETTES

Who’s the little lady who’s as dainty as a dream?
Who’s the one you can’t forget?
I’ll give you just three guesses:
Annette! Annette! Annette!

When she dances on her toes,
She dances in your heart,
With her pretty pirouette,
Each little move expresses,
Annette! Annette! Annette!

Though she’s just a cute preteener,
And her father’s pride and mother’s joy,
There will come the day
They’ll give Annette away
To the world’s luckiest boy.

Ask the birds and ask the bees,
And ask the stars above
Who’s their favorite sweet brunette:
You know, each one confesses:
Annette! Annette! Annette!

[Jimmie Dodd, the Disney songwriter known as the biggest Mouseketeer, wrote and sang this song for Annette on the Mickey Mouse Club. The song is also the theme for the “Annette” serial.]

Disney’s decision to have Annette keep her real name in the “Further Adventures of Spin and Marty” and “Annette” serials was not a coincidence. The line between the public perception of Annette as a real-life person and the characters she played for Disney productions was intentionally blurred by the studio. Annette was billed in many projects by just her first name. Annette the Mouseketeer, Annette McCleod the country bumpkin, Annette the camper from “Spin and Marty,” Annette the singer, and Annette Funicello all-American teen, are all interchangeable personas.
Annette’s real life was even the subject of a Disney Dell Comic Book in 1960, entitled “Annette’s Life Story.” The cartoon periodical chronicles Annette’s life following her from birth in Utica, New York, to her family’s move out West, Walt Disney’s discovery of her, singing her number one hit “Tall Paul” on American Band Stand, and to her home life during her downtime with her family. In fact, the details of her home life include many of the same details of the earlier Walt Disney Magazine feature on Annette, and the Photoplay slumber party account mentioned in the previous chapter. This comic book was part of a long line of Walt Disney Comic Books that primarily featured fictional content, such as the comic versions of the “Annette” serial, “Spin and Marty,” and The Horsemasters. While this comic book was about the non-fictional life of Annette, and mirrored many of the magazines articles publishes about her elsewhere, it reads just like the fictional narratives (for example “Zorro” and “Spin and Marty” also featured in the Walt Disney Comic Book series. This proves that the Disney Corporation viewed Annette’s star image, the public perception of Annette as a real person, as a commodity text. As the previous chapter explored this text through the promotion of Annette’s star image through teen magazines, the remainder of this chapter will explore the many incarnations of the Annette persona in fictional Disney productions.

Annette in the Serials

Chronologically, the first time Annette played a “fictional” version of herself (besides as a Mouseketeer on the Mickey Mouse Club program) was as Annette, the girl
that both Spin and Marty wanted. As footage of the “Spin and Marty” serials, of which there are three separate seasons, has only been re-released in limited capacities, this analysis refers to the written account of the “Further Adventures of Spin and Marty” published in the 1957 *Walt Disney Mickey Mouse Club Annual*.

Set at the Triple-R Ranch, a Western cowboy-style summer camp for boys, the serial focuses on the once-rivals and now friends, Spin Evans (Tim Considine) and Marty Markham (David Stollery). Spin is a regular teenage boy, ready for any challenge, and popular with a large ego. At the beginning of the first installment of the serial, Marty is a snooty rich kid without any riding experience, who brings his own servant with him to camp. After locking horns for a few episodes, the two become friends by the end of the first season of “The Adventures of Spin and Marty.” In the second season, “The Further Adventures of Spin and Marty,” the boys meet Annette, a camper at the Circle H, the new girls’ camp across the lake. Initially, Marty is very interested in Annette; however Spin has no time for girls. Annette appears to be more interested in Spin, although as a proper young woman she does not chase boys. While Marty tries to build up courage to ask Annette to the upcoming 4th of July dance, Spin decides girls may be worth his while and secretly takes dance lessons. Marty has a bee mishap, and Spin ends up taking Annette to the dance, making Marty jealous. The boys fight over Annette, they make up, and both promise to avoid girls.

Annette’s primary function as a supporting role in the serial is to arouse the boys. At one point she appears at the ranch looking for Spin, hoping he will come with her to a wienie roast; however he is away taking secret dance lessons. Disappointed that Spin is

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5 “The Adventures of Spin and Marty” was based upon the novel *Marty Markham*, written by Lawrence Edward Watkin.
not there, she “frowns prettily” (Reilly 114). After watching a video of Spin’s victory at the previous summer’s rodeo competition, Annette turns to Spin,

her eyes sparkling, “Oh Spin—you were great!” The boy squirmed, embarrassed. The girl’s voice softened. “You’re cute, too!” Spin looked at her and grinned. On Annette’s other side, Marty tried to smile with a face that felt as stiff as leather (Reilly 115).

Later the other boys on the ranch remark how Annette has a funny effect over boys. One boy says, “You know, Spec—it’s a funny thing. Guys go minding their business, an’ then suddenly—something like Annette comes along, and boom! They’re girl crazy.” Another boy comments, “I’ll say one thing for Marty—that Annette’s a knockout” (Reilly 115). The character of Annette plays to the fantasies of young men. Not only does life at the Triple-R Ranch provide testosterone competition and opportunity for Western conquest, there are beautiful women to dote over the boys, and for the boys to compete over.

Annette’s most prominent role in a Mickey Mouse Club serial was in her own serial, “Annette.” The story was adapted from the novel, Margaret by Janette Sebring Lowery. After the success of the serial about Annette McCleod, a country orphan who moves to the city, the story was reprinted in Walt Disney Magazine and made into an illustrated comic book, and Annette McCleod was made the sleuthing heroine of a series of Nancy Drew-style mystery books. While the plot of “Spin and Marty” unfolds around summers in the rough and tumble wild west, Annette McCleod’s world centers around picnics, piano sing-a-long parties in posh suburban homes, and school program committees.

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6 McCleod is spelled several different ways in different Disney publications. In the “Annette” mystery book series it is most often spelled McCleod, however in The Desert in Mystery the spelling alternates between McCleod and MacCleod. In Mystery at Medicine Wheel the surname is spelled McLeod. In Annette’s autobiography she spells it MacLeod. Other publications spell it McCloud.
Even though Annette McCleod is straight off a farm in Beaver Junction, Nebraska, where she did not even wear dresses, her beauty and presence create a stir among the wealthy kids of Ashford. The reprinting of the serial in Walt Disney Magazine reads, “The trouble with Annette was that she just didn’t have any right to look the way she did. Not when she was fresh off a farm in some wide place in the road called Beaver Junction, Nebraska” (Hayward 22). However, her looks seem to be her best feature; when she arrives in a new dress at a party in Ashford, everyone is bowled over. “She wasn’t smart and clever like Laura, and she wasn’t terribly sure of herself—she was just lovely. She had black curly hair and black sparkly eyes, and the formal was divine” (Hayward 23). Like the real-life Annette, and the “Spin and Marty” Annette, Annette McCleod’s beauty is disarming.

However Annette McCleod’s new life in Ashford is not perfect. Her country ways clash with those of sophisticated Laura (Roberta Shore), a socialite visiting Ashford for the school term. Laura and others make fun of Annette after she sings the homely song “How Will I Know My Love” at a party. Later, Laura’s necklace disappears from the same party, and she accuses Annette. Before the mystery of the necklace is solved, a big fight erupts, and Annette runs away from home. A boy from school tracks Annette down, convinces her to stay and they return to the site of the original party, where the missing necklace is recovered from inside the piano. Laura apologizes, and asks Annette if it is not too late to be friends. Without hesitation, Annette replies, “Of course not, Laura, I’ve always wanted to be friendly!” (“Annette” np).

Annette McCleod always sees the best in people and looks beyond class status. While her Aunt and Uncle, who take her in, encourage her to socialize with the children
of the more affluent Ashford residents, Annette prefers the company of fellow farm girl Jet Maypen. When others criticize Jet, Annette defends her, “She is not cheap and crude,” Annette snapped back at her. “She’s wonderful! And she’s my best friend and she’s smart as can be” (Hayward 25).

In her autobiography, Annette the real person attributes the popularity of the “Annette” serial to Annette McCleod’s down-to-earth manners. Annette writes,

Life wasn’t easy for Annette MacLeod, and I think that was one of the reasons viewers responded so enthusiastically to the series… I suppose because Annette MacLeod was an outsider, kids saw something of themselves in her as she struggled to be understood and accepted while doing what her heart told her was right” (Funicello 58).

In both the television serial and the books, Annette McCleod struggles between her extended family’s urging to hang out with the wealthy kids in town and her natural inclination to befriend the poorer children, who were often from the wrong side of the tracks.

**Annette in books**

The mystery book series consisted of five novels, one published every year from 1960 to 1964. The first four (Annette: Sierra Summer, Annette: The Desert Inn Mystery, Annette and the Mystery at Moonstone Bay, and Annette and the Mystery at Smuggler’s Cove) were written by Doris Schroeder, and the final installment in the series (Annette: Mystery at Medicine Wheel) was penned by Barlow Meyers. Each book followed the same basic formula: Annette goes with a friend, or goes to visit a friend, in a distant exotic location. Her best girl friend usually likes a boy, whom Annette, who always instinctively knows everyone’s true nature, dislikes. In many cases the same boy likes
Annette, to the chagrin of Annette’s girl friend. Annette hangs out with a fun, youthful crowd who, during the course of each novel, plans at least one picnic in a remote nature setting, and love any occasion to dress up in costume. The mystery always unfolds in front of Annette by chance. She never does any actual sleuthing, though she always stumbles onto the truth. Most of the plots involve characters who are prospectors, including those who deal in oil, gold and silver ore.

The subscript on the title page of each book reads, “Featuring ANNETTE, star of motion pictures and television.” While it is based upon the serial, many characteristics of the book are borrowed from Annette’s real life. Annette McCleod still lives with her spinster Aunt Lila and her bachelor brother Uncle Archie, though, like the Funicellos, they now call the Hollywood Hills home instead of Ashford. They are a well-to-do family that owns a beach house in Laguna Beach, California, where they usually summer. Annette the star and Annette McCleod both have trouble with overprotective elders. (The fans learns from teen magazines that Annette’s parents are overprotective.)

_Sierra Summer_ mentions Annette’s struggle with her overprotective aunt and uncle.

She’d had that problem for a long time. She was tiny, and it seemed to make everyone feel like protecting her.

That was what had driven her to learn to be in expert in several athletic skills, to prove that even if she were small, she could keep up with the tall ones. She had become an expert swimmer, a good tennis player, the best archer in her gang. Sometimes, it was all she could do to avoid winning, too often she played against a couple of boys she especially liked!”

(Schroeder 1960 19).

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7 Neither the “Annette” serial nor the novels identify the state in which Ashford is located.
And like the real Annette, the young heroine of the books drives a white convertible. In the mystery book series, Annette has lost many of her embarrassing country ways—like the time when she did not know what to do with a grapefruit spoon. However she still looks past money and appearances in the book series, where as many of the characters in the books cannot.

In the *Sierra Summer* mystery, Annette’s cousin Tonia is charmed by the bravado of the rich Johnny Abbott, son of a local stockbroker. Annette’s natural instinct kicks in as soon as she meets the arrogant Johnny. The book reads: “So that’s the fabulous Johnny!” Annette thought. “Sulking worse than a seven-year old because he hadn’t gotten his way. He was good looking, but unless she was very much mistaken, he knew it!” (Schroeder 1960 55). Annette also finds good in local poor boy, Stanley Turner. However, he is the son of a convict and Annette’s extended family and her gang of friends do not approve of their friendship. In the end Johnny is revealed to be a goon and Stanley’s father is exonerated.

Annette’s intuition works overtime in *The Desert Inn Mystery*, where while visiting a desert town she mistrusts a businessman that everyone else finds charming and trustworthy. She is proven correct when everyone learns he is a conman trying to swindle Annette’s friends. In the next installment, *Mystery at Moonstone Bay*, Lila is put off by the arrival of family friend Sandy and her exorbitant makeup and showy clothes. However Annette sees past the façade, and realizes that Lila is just an insecure girl. While Lila offends Sandy by staring, Annette melts the ice by impulsively welcoming Sandy with a funny anecdote (Schroeder 1962 29).

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8 Annette Funicello’s convertible was originally white, but eventually she had it repainted in her favorite color purple.
The relocation of the McCleods to sunny Southern California, the place where Americans (like the Funicellos) would move in search of realizing the American Dream, is interesting. Southern California, home of Disneyland and the beach, is a fantastical place to locate the all-American, Annette McCleod. This speaks to the fantasy element of Annette’s persona. While the key to her success was her ordinary seeming demeanor, home life, and values, and the fact that her talent was just beyond average, the fantastical parts of her life were what brought her legions of fans.

The Annette Sound

While countless magazines told us Annette was an average girl, she was a television and film star, beautiful, and a pop singer. Her music career began when Annette McCleod sang “How Will I Know My Love,” first at the infamous party where the necklace disappeared and later on a hayride. Before this, Annette had no singing experience except for singing with the other Mouseketeers. After fans wrote Disney asking to buy a recording of Annette singing “How Will I Know My Love,” Disney decided Annette would record the song as an album. Annette did not like the idea, but had no choice in the matter (Funicello 62). And so began Annette’s singing career. She became an American Bandstand Regular and performed across the country with other 1950s pop singers like Frankie Avalon, Bobby Darin, and Connie Francis. Disney songwriters, brothers Richard and Robert Sherman, famous for writing the songs of the Jungle Book and Mary Poppins, wrote most of Annette’s songs.

The biggest obstacle for Disney in manufacturing Annette’s singing career was masking her flat singing voice. Annette often says publicly that she has only a “three-
note range” (Funicello 74). The solution to Annette’s weak voice was an echo effect created in the studio. Annette’s first, and biggest hit, “Tall Paul” was the first track where after singing the song once along with the instrumental track, Annette sang the song again along to a playback of her own voice. Annette says this added “a distinct presence—wide-eyed, energetic, unerringly sweet—the so-called ‘Annette-sound’ was born” (Funicello 79).

Just as Annette’s serial roles shared her name, many of her album titles contained the name Annette. Her first five album names were “Annette,” “Annette Sings Anka,” “Hawaiianette,” “Italianette,” and “Dance Annette.” Her songs were about the typical girl problem of the 1950—boys. Many of the songs contained factual references to Annette’s real life even though they were sometimes altered to fit the lyrics. In the song “Hawaiianette,” Annette sings about an island boy who sings sweet nothings in Italian in her ear. Annette worries that he thinks she is Hawaiian and understands the language. At the end of the song, she overcomes the language barrier when he says “I think that you’re much cuter than the day we met in Utica and you were in the second grade with me.” This is a reference to Annette’s hometown, which she actually moved away from when she was four. For the most part in her songs Annette sings as herself. In the song “Tall Paul,” which was not written for Annette originally, she sings about a boyfriend who is the captain of the football team. This fits in with Annette’s widely publicized relationship with a local high school football player.

Annette’s singing career, which produced fifteen LP albums and dozens of single releases, was strongest from 1958 to 1960. She experienced resurgence with the success of the beach party movies in 1963, but retired shortly after her marriage in 1965. In
typical Annette fashion, she attributes her success not to the genius of the Disney recording studio, but to a demand for wholesome Americana. She says in her autobiography, “Given the times, my recording career probably struck those at Disney as a logical step. After all, except for Connie Francis and a couple of other girls, there were few young female rock stars. In my own way, I suppose, I was the girl version of a teen idol; wholesome, perky, a good girl. Of course, I’m sure this makes it all sound very calculated, but I assure you it was not” (77). Believing this statement is hard, if not impossible. Annette may have been just being herself when she sang “Tall Paul.” Annette may not have been acting when she portrayed the also perky and wholesome Annette McCleod, and the Annette of Spin and Marty’s dreams. Yet, it would be a mistake to dismiss the calculating efforts of the Walt Disney Company in the grooming, promotion, and ultimate creation of the Annette superstar. As stated in the next chapter, Walt Disney carefully guarded Annette’s career and image. The degree of Funicello’s talent is questionable—none of her performances in films, on television, or musically, were critically acclaimed—yet Disney was very aware of the magnitude of Annette’s star power.
CHAPTER III: BEACH PARTY PRUDE

The “plot” usually involves a rather tepid romantic involvement between Frankie Avalon, a swarthy Philadelphia-born rock ‘n’ roll singer, and Annette Funicello, a buxom starlet. Miss Funicello is always cast as the guardian of Morality—the girl who can’t say yes. At some stage in the picture they are set upon by the villains who ride motorcycles, smoke cigars and are always led by an actor named Harvey Lembeck. But the “good guys,” who neither smoke nor drink, prevail in the end, and virtue rewarded, everyone heads back to the surf.

[From “Hollywood Beach Bonanza” New York Times commentary on beach party films.]

According to Joel Foreman, the 1950s is often oversimplified in historical accounts. He writes that it was a decade in which there was a “gradual ‘unmaking’ and dismantling of obsolete systems of normative control as a culture in transition cultivated radical changes in desegregation, the economic enfranchisement of young people, the emancipation of both men and women from the confines of normative gender categories, and a near breakthrough in the superpower conflict” (6). The social landscape was evolving, and while most consciously recognize the 1960s as the foreground for the changes in the areas of civil rights and the 2nd wave of the women’s liberation movement, the seeds of change were planted in the 1950s.

Annette rose to fame during an era when stars like Marilyn Monroe, Sandra Dee, and Jane Mansfield dominated the Hollywood box office. All three starlets were a mix of busty sex appeal and feminine innocence. The 1950s are often remembered as a time of wholesome fun and virtuous virginity; however it was also the decade that brought us
Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy*. It was a time of sexual awakening in which the first stirs of the violent winds that would challenge the status quo in the 1960s were felt.

Pinpointing exactly where Annette fits into this climate is a challenge. On the surface it appears that Annette represents wholesomeness and chastity, but her sex appeal is undeniable. Like Monroe, Dee, and Mansfield, her star image encompasses a combination of sex and youthful innocence, though her sex appeal is watered down and diluted for a younger Disney audience. In her 1950’s roles and early 1960’s roles, the only hint of sex in Annette is her hard-to-cover-up curves. As Bowles, a writer who had a crush on Annette in the 1950s, wrote, “She was the absolute perfect embodiment of the 1950s ideal—the girl next door whom you would never try to get to go all the way because she was a good girl and you wanted to marry her someday and make babies” (28). In her autobiography Annette discusses the good girl image that typified her Disney projects in this passage about her movie *The Misadventures of Merlin Jones* in which she played Jennifer.

In a scene typical not only of *The Misadventures of Merlin Jones* but of my whole teen-queen film persona, Merlin asks Jennifer to participate in a scientific experiment to determine how kissing affects brainwaves, using a bizarre brain-scanning contraption Merlin has built on top of a football helmet. “Kiss me,” Merlin implores, to which Jennifer replies indignantly, “Not here in the science building.” Merlin finally wears down her defenses, and she reluctantly concedes, “If it’s part of a scientific experiment, I guess it’s alright.” First he tries it on himself, and while kissing Jennifer the machine practically explodes. When the helmet’s on the other head—or Aqua Net-plastered bouffant, in my case—Merlin’s kiss inspires no reaction but a chaste flat line (136).

This film marks an interesting moment in Annette’s sexual film persona. In real life Annette was engaged at this point and dreaming of a domestic married life. She had
already begun making the beach party movies, and for the first time Annette’s on screen
counterpart faced the temptations of youthful indulgence. Yet, here she was back at
Disney, portraying a college co-ed, for whom romance was realized, but only for the sake
of science, and without any pleasure, as indicated by the flat line. This is as sexually
awakened as Annette’s persona ever gets. In fact, as Annette went on to make four more
beach party films and one shoot-off, *Pajama Party*, the films got even less risqué, and the
innuendo became less pronounced. Annette would always be the good girl who waited
for marriage.

Prior to the beach party films Annette’s film career was rather forgettable.
Annette only did two films that were released domestically before she went to work for
American International Pictures (AIP). Her first film role was a small role in *The Shaggy
Dog*, starring Fred MacMurray, Tommy Kirk, and Roberta Shore. Annette played the
most popular girl in town, Alison, who is upstaged when the exotic Franceska moves to
the neighborhood. Annette only appeared in a few scenes, but she was billed as a star in
much of the film’s publicity. Following that role she co-starred in *The Horsemasters*, a
film about a British riding school that was released in theaters in Europe, but only played
on television in the United States on the weekly program, *The Wonderful World of
Disney*. Next she did *Babes in Toyland* and other *Wonderful World of Disney* projects,
*The Golden Horseshoe Revue*, and *Escapade in Florence*. In between movie parts, she
made occasional appearances, including a recurring role as an Italian exchange student on
Danny Thomas’ sitcom *Make Room for Daddy*. In between making beach party films
Annette filmed *The Misadventures of Merlin Jones*, and the sequel, *The Monkey’s Uncle,*
both Disney productions. However, taken alone, none of Annette’s film roles, except for the beach party movies, had a defining emphasis in her career.

The five beach party films that she starred in from 1963 to 1965 were not Disney productions, but produced by AIP, a less reputable outfit known for low-budget horror films. Despite this, Annette was still under contract with Disney and was still a Disney product at that time. Disney even capitalized on the music of the first few beach party films when AIP failed to produce soundtracks. Under the Buena Vista Records label, Disney produced many albums of Annette singing songs from the beach movies.

When Annette left the sanitized world of Disney for the sinful sands of AIP, she found herself in a rougher, more sexualized world. Now in her 20s, Annette’s screen persona could no longer ignore the existence of sex. Now instead of playing another interchangeable Annette, she took on a role with its own name, the role of prudent Dolores (renamed Dee Dee in later films) opposite Frankie Avalon. This chapter will explore the sexual undertones in Annette’s beach party film roles, the connection they had to the social climate of the time, and the overall significance the roles have to the theory that Annette is the embodiment of the Disney fantasy.

**The Beach Movie**

Beach and surfing movie scholar Thomas Lisanti writes that the “heyday” of the genre took place between 1963 and 1965 (7). Not coincidentally, it was during those years that the popular beach party films were made and released. The genre of teenage surfing films was pioneered by *Gidget*, a 1959 Columbia film starring blond starlet Sandra Dee. The film was based upon the popular novel by Frederick Kohner. The original book was
a fictional story based upon his daughter’s surfing escapades in the mid-1950s. *Gidget*, named for the lead character’s moniker, because she was small and petite—a girl midget—bore two sequels, and a 1965 television sitcom. The next substantial movie in the genre was the first spring break flick, the 1961 MGM production *Where the Boys Are*. Credited with starting the annual college student migration to Florida each spring, (Lisanti 39) the film chronicled the misadventures of a group of college-coeds and their encounters with the opposite sex on a trip to Fort Lauderdale, Florida. In the early 1960s surfing music ruled the airways. Songs like the Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ Safari” and Jan and Dean’s “Surf City” were popular nationwide. Hoping to cash in on the surfing music craze and the previous surfing film successes, AIP set out to make a picture that combined the best of *Gidget* and *Where the Boys Are* in a pop musical format (Lisanti 11). The product was the 1963 movie *Beach Party*. The film was a surprise hit and made $2.3 million at the box office (Lisanti 71).

AIP worked quickly to capitalize on the chemistry of Frankie and Annette. The next year two sequels were released, *Muscle Beach Party* and *Bikini Beach*, and a similar project, *Pajama Party*, in which Annette starred opposite her old Disney co-star, Tommy Kirk. The following year, 1965, Annette and Frankie reunited for *Beach Blanket Bingo*, hailed by many as the strongest of the beach party films (Lisanti 171). That year also brought the final film in the series, *How to Stuff a Wild Bikini*. In the last film Frankie was replaced with Dwayne Hickman, who did not have onscreen chemistry with Annette, and the filmed faired poorly (Lisanti 217). Despite the film’s title, newly married Annette was several months pregnant, and never even wears a bathing suit in the film.
While *Beach Party* shows surfers drinking and smoking, the sequels are stripped of any risqué activities, to ensure that the films acquired parental approval. Lisanti writes that the beach party films,

> were tailored squarely for that audience, combining their love of rock music with their hormonal thirst for titillation (e.g., scantily clad boys and girls twitching and singing about love and heartache on the shores of Malibu) without straying from the moral attitudes of the time. The surf and beach party movies created a carefree environment where good kids don’t have a care in the world and enjoy an easygoing, parentless lifestyle of surfing, dancing, rock’n’roll and romance, which was unconnected with reality. It was an escapist fantasy look at the American youth culture—an innocent ideal that most teenagers of the time embraced” (13).

The films were a perfect vehicle for Annette, as her success at Disney was the result of the commodification of ideals to her young fans more than her actual acting and singing talent.

Though Walt Disney occasionally loaned Annette out to other studios, he maintained final script approval rights over all her roles. Annette has often stated publicly that Disney requested Annette not wear a two-piece suit in the beach party films, and that she not bare her naval (Funicello 138). Lisanti reports that “Walt Disney hit the roof when he learned of the deal. He called AIP and pleaded to have her dropped from the project. He was over-protective of her image and labeled the 20-year-old Funicello his ‘little girl’” (77). According to Lisanti, Disney only agreed to loan Annette to AIP on the condition that she not wear a bikini or show her naval. Annette contends that even after Disney’s death in 1966, she honored his wishes. For the most part, Annette wears 1950’s style full-coverage suits that shaped her voluptuous chest into cone-shaped torpedoes in the movies. All the other girls in the films have surf-board skinny figures,
and wear skimp string and bandeau-style bikinis. Interestingly, while she is always wearing the most conservative suit on the beach in the films, in both *Beach Party* and the opening scene of *Muscle Beach Party* Annette can be seen wearing a bikini with her naval visible. Annette is also shown wearing a two-piece suit in publicity posters for most of the beach party films.

However, Annette’s Dolores/Dee Dee character is by far the most conservative, undersexed girl on the beach. Frankie Avalon plays Frankie, the college-aged surfer boy who is constantly vying for romantic alone time with girlfriend Dolores. In the first scene of the first film, *Beach Party*, Frankie and Dolores arrive at a beach house for vacation. Frankie is excited to be staying in a secluded house with Dolores all to himself. However, when they arrive he finds that Dolores has invited the entire gang to join them in the house. Angry that Dolores spoiled his plans, Frankie decides to make Dolores jealous by showing interest in Ava, the Hungarian waitress with Gabor-sister looks. Dolores confides in her friend that she intentionally ruined Frankie’s plans because she wants a proposal before things went any further between them. While Frankie succeeds in making Dolores jealous, she develops a crush on an anthropologist who is at the beach to study the sexual habits of teenagers, Dr. Sutwell (Bob Cummings). Craziness ensues, including multiple run-ins with an inept gang of bikers, and plenty of musical interludes featuring the music of Dick Dale and the Del-Tones. Finally Frankie and Dolores make up and all ends happily.

The character of Dolores and her chaste ways contrasts nicely with the other looser girls in the films. The viewer is constantly reminded that Annette, with her stiff
bouffant and conservative suit, does not fit in with the hang-loose surf culture\(^9\). In an early scene in the first movie, Dolores and her friend Rhonda sit on the beach while scores of boys surf the waves. Rhonda is stretching seductively in a skimpy bikini, while Annette sits properly by her side.

**Dolores**: Rhonda, what are you doing?  
**Rhonda**: Watch. They become all unhinged. (Boys begin to notice her from the water.) See it works every time. (One by one all the boys wipe out.)  
**Dolores**: Did it ever occur to you that there’s something else besides getting a boy?  
**Rhonda**: Like what?  
**Dolores**: Love.  
**Rhonda**: What’s the problem? Frankie giving you the cold treatment or something?  
**Dolores**: Deep freeze is more like it  
**Rhonda**: You can’t really blame him. He got you down here alone, and you turn the place into a teenage flop house.  
**Dolores**: Well at the last minute I got cold feet  
**Rhonda**: If somebody had wild plans for me, why stop them?  
**Dolores**: Rhonda, I want Frankie to think of me as more than just a girl,  
**Rhonda**: There’s something else?  
**Dolores**: Yes. A wife.  
**Rhonda**: But you’re not even a woman!  
**Dolores**: But I’m close, and I’m not getting any closer until I’m a wife!

Dolores’ values are clear from the beginning. She may be immersed in the rock n roll antics of the surfing youth, but she sticks to her principles, and at least for this scene, to her one-piece bathing suit. Throughout the movies Annette models the behavior and good sense that every parent would want for their daughter, while still looking fashionable, glamorous, and singing fun pop tunes.

While her sex life is dull, Dolores/Dee Dee is not a one-dimensional good girl. She is determined, feisty, and witty. In many of the movies she battles for Frankie with an exotic bad girl, who is usually blond, foreign and willing to put out. In *Muscle Beach Party*, Dee Dee comes across Italian Contessa Juliana, who goes by Julie, seducing

\(^9\) Reportedly, Annette hated the beach because she hated getting her hair wet (Lisanti 378).
Frankie on the beach. At this point of the movie, Dee Dee and Frankie have already fought over the differences in their expectations for their relationship. Frankie wants action and Dee Dee wants marriage. Frankie tries to make up with Dee Dee, but then Julie charms him into thinking she could give him a singing career. Dee Dee, however, can see through Julie, and sees the contessa’s real intentions. She confronts Julie when she finds her trying to kiss Frankie:

**Dee Dee:** What’s the matter did you run out of muscle men?
**Julie:** Oh no, it’s just he looked so sad, like a lost puppy.
**Dee Dee:** Then maybe you didn’t notice his license.
**Julie:** I didn’t even notice his leash.
**Dee Dee:** I have just one question, did you kiss him because he’s loveable or just the only man on the beach?
**Julie:** Because he looked hungry, his last meal obviously didn’t satisfy him.
**Dee Dee:** Oh it’s a good thing you happened along I’m sure you could cater supper for an entire army.
**Frankie:** Now that’s in bad taste.
**Julie:** Oh no, one man at a time, I like to be a devoted chef.
**Dee Dee:** But right now you’re serving a lot of free meals, sort of a one-woman breadline.
**Frankie:** Ooo that smarts.
**Julie:** I can afford it.
**Dee Dee:** Then he must be one of your charity cases.

In this classic conversation, Dee Dee spars with the promiscuous vixen, and wins, while Frankie bumbles in the background. Frankie tries to assert his independence by resisting the chains of marriage, but he always ends up back in his monogamous and chaste relationship with the smarter Dee Dee. While the beach party movies explore themes of sex, partying, with an exotic paradise backdrop, old-fashioned morality always prevails.

In the film *Beach Blanket Bingo*, Dee Dee continues to dish out the one liners, while Frankie avoids commitment. They stroll along the beach and sing “I Think, You Think” a popular duet about their different approaches to their relationship. In the chorus, Frankie sings “I think, you think love means a wedding ring.” Dee Dee responds,
“I think, you think love’s just a runaround.” The waves of communication between the two are only temporary, and they are soon fighting again. In his latest attempt to assert his independence, Frankie decides to try skydiving. Dee Dee, not wanting to be left out, insists on training to jump too. Frankie does not think women should skydive, and she tells him: “women have a few rights today, we can even vote.” He responds that women belong in the kitchen and tells her, “When the time comes I’ll do the jumping, you do the watching.” At the skydiving school Frankie meets Bonnie, who immediately starts flirting with him. Consequently, Bonnie’s boyfriend attempts to make her jealous by moving in on Dee Dee. All ends well, as in the other beach party movies, but not before both Frankie and Dee Dee jump.

**Embodying Values**

While the beach party movies were surprisingly popular, and spawned many copycats, it would be misleading to ignore that they were not accepted well critically. A New York Times movie reviewed published when Beach Blanket Bingo was released, spends only a paragraph on the film, dismissing it with the claim, “We simply can’t believe, no matter what the reports say, that the teenagers buy such junk. It’s for morons” (Thompson 24).

However, the lowbrow beach movies were not marketed for a New York Times audience. They were geared toward capturing the teenage fancy. The teenage fan can fantasize both about the magical, carefree life of a surfer, and about the everyday perfection of Annette. The Midwest movie-goer can vicariously live the thrills of the ocean lifestyle and late night weenie roasts, and also feel validated by Dee Dee’s
conservative values. The beach party movies offer the best of two worlds—the fun and excitement of an exotic world only enjoyed by a coastal few, and the comfort in the reinforcement of the prevailing cultural norms.

This chapter has established that Annette’s portrayal of the sexless Dee Dee amidst a throng of sex-crazed adolescents is an extension of Annette’s earlier sanitized roles and her overall star image as a good girl. But what is the greater cultural significance? If Annette is embodying certain values, does it simply mean that Annette’s popularity stems from a public acceptance of the values Annette embodies? Is this an oversimplification?

One of the first to identify the concept that stars embody cultural values is Orrin E. Klapp. In *Collective Search for Identity*, he categorizes the relationships between stars and societal norms into three types: reinforcement, seduction, and transcendence. Dyer questions this categorization, asserting that according to Klapp’s theory, reinforcement only occurs when the hero embodies dominant values (Dyer 25). Dyer cites the work of William R. Brown and Charles Eckert, who he says address what Klapp fails to resolve. In Brown’s scholarship on Will Rogers and Eckert’s on Shirley Temple, they establish that heroes often embody values that are “to some degree in crisis” (25).

Was Annette popular because she represented values that were dominant, and reflected the status quo? Or because she embodied the values that her fans felt were slipping away from them? These veins of theory are not exclusive of each other. Klapp, Brown, and Eckert’s ideas seem to apply to Annette. Dyer explains that ideology plays a bigger role in Brown and Eckert’s theories than in Klapp’s. According to Dyer, Klapp identifies the connection between the celebrity and the values they embody as
coincidental (Dyer 25). Dyer doubts that these stars just happened to embody certain values. He suggests that certain ideology was injected into the stars to garner an audience ready and eager to receive a certain message. In her autobiography, Annette clearly states that while she does embody certain values, the qualities of the good girl in her star image were genuine and not manufactured (77). Believing Annette is difficult. While she seems sincere in her beliefs, it is hard to forget that Disney has been the puppet master guiding her every move. Annette is still today a Disney commodity, and just because she believes in her own perception of reality does not mean it was not cultivated by Disney.

“Frankie and Annette” not “Frankie and Dee Dee”

The beach party did not end in the 1960s for Annette and Frankie. In 1978, Dick Clark produced a failed pilot that reunites the couple. In the television incarnation, called “Frankie & Annette, The Second Time Around,” the Dee Dee character is now Annette, solidifying the public perception that Annette is always playing herself and that Dee Dee really was not a fictional character, but just an alter ego of Annette. In this version, Frankie and Annette have lost touch since Frankie left the beach for an ill-fated career in show business. Now Frankie is a struggling night club singer and Annette is a widowed prim and proper housemother at a college dormitory in Malibu. In the pilot Frankie attempts to reunite with Annette, and the series was to follow their rekindled romance. However this pilot was never shown publicly, and did not contribute to Annette’s public persona or beach party career.
Beach party fans did get to see Frankie and Annette together again in the 1987 movie *Back to the Beach*. Like in the television pilot, Dee Dee is now called Annette. In the film, for which Annette and Frankie served as executive producers, Annette and Frankie have traded in their raucous beach antics for a simple life as a married couple with two children, living in Ohio. Their life could not be more stereotypical of the beachless, mundane American existence. Frankie is a used car salesmen, and Annette a bored housewife, who chases around her children with jars of Skippy peanut butter (which Annette promoted in a series of commercials in the 1970s and 80s). Like the other movies, *Back to the Beach* asks if it is possible to be moral, have family values, and live a colorful beach life.

The beach party pictures were not popular just because of Annette’s teetotaling presence, or just because of the wild antics of her surfer friends. Annette and Frankie, neither of whom even attempted to learn to surf (Lisanti 379), were the star power of the movie, the familiar names that brought in fans. While they promised security to viewers, the fun-loving coastal backdrop promised an exotic adventure. The cultural norms in the early 1960s were shifting, especially in regards to sexual behavior. Yet, such transitions are never complete or clear cut. The beach party films could simultaneously capitalize on the surfing music craze and the new distinctive youth culture, yet sanitize it for those intimidated by a new moral compass often associated with youth culture.
CHAPTER IV: GROWING UP, A LOOK AT A NEW GIRL NEXT DOOR

Dressed in a demure long-sleeve black sweater and jeans, her honey-colored hair pushed back with a peach ribbon that’s fashioned to function like a headband, Hilary Duff, 18, looks like the ultimate girl next door. But don’t let her wholesome beauty fool you: She’s all grown up (Malcolm 41).

[The first paragraph from the cover story of a 2006 issue of Cosmopolitan Magazine.]

While Annette’s screen presence and star image are remarkable, her story is not unique, especially at the Walt Disney Company. In the 1950s and 60s she appeared alongside Roberta Shore, Hayley Mills, and Tim Considine in a wealth of public relations material, such as double date spreads in magazines. And like many other young stars, she was a performer who was pushed into acting (as illustrated by her move from Mouseketeer to serial star), and then forced into singing (when she was made to record “How Will I Know My Love.”) Countless other stars like Paul Petersen, Shelley Fabares, and Hayley Mills were also encouraged to record albums. Annette’s rise to fame is not just similar to the other young stars of her time; today Disney continues to promote and cultivate starlets.

The New Disney Kids

The Mickey Mouse Club has been remade two times. In 1977, the show was revived with a new young cast of unknowns and a disco-style version of the opening song. Of the new cast, which was more ethnically and racially diverse than its predecessor, the only alum who became famous in showbiz was Lisa Whelchel, co-star on the 1980’s sitcom Facts of Life. By in large the 1970’s version has been forgotten.
The more memorable reincarnation, made in the 1990s, featured a handful of future stars, including pop stars Britney Spears, Justin Timberlake, J.C. Chavez and Christina Aguilera. However even the success of the 1990’s remake was minimal, and unlike the lasting impression Annette left as a Mouseketeer, the more recent success of the most famous new Mouseketeers has overshadowed their mouse-ear beginnings. Except for a Disney soundtrack for the animated film *Mulan* that Christina recorded, the careers of Britney, Justin, J.C., and Christina have not been at Disney. However in many ways Disney is still manufacturing young stars, and capitalizing on the resulting calculated “ordinary but perfect” star images. One star whose career draws many parallels to that of Annette is Hilary Duff. In fact in 2002, less than two years after the debut of Hilary’s show *Lizzie McGuire*, a *New York Daily News* television writer declared that Hilary “is a 2002 version of Annette Funicello” (Huff 41). The similarities between Annette and Hilary are remarkable. Both Disney starlets found themselves in the limelight after the overnight success of their hit Disney television programs, and in many ways Disney crafted both of their celebrity personas, which marketed a fantasy that they were almost as ordinary as the fans who loved them.

Hilary rose to fame as the star of the most popular Disney Channel show ever, *Lizzie McGuire*. The show first aired on the cable network in January of 2001 and starting in September of that year was featured on the Saturday morning lineup on the Disney-owned ABC network. For three seasons the show followed the social mishaps and coming-of-age tribulations of klutzy middle-school student Lizzie McGuire and her best friends Miranda and Gordo. Hilary not only played Lizzie, but also the voice of her
cartoon psyche, who appeared throughout each episode to narrate Lizzie’s innermost thoughts in Greek-chorus style.

While the show has been out of production for almost four years, the channel continues to air the 65 episodes and make money off of an empire of Lizzie merchandise. Just as Disney promoted Annette the Mouseketeer coloring books, paper dolls, and cosmetic kits, many lines of Lizzie products were developed and sold worldwide, including two series of Lizzie books, DVDs, board games, videogames, dolls and other toys, clothes and even a set of bedroom furniture at Sears. *Fortune* magazine estimated in 2003 that "Lizzie McGuire" merchandise had earned the Walt Disney Co. nearly $100 million (Boorstin 110).

**A New Annette?**

Hilary, a 5’4” perky blond and blue-eyed Texas native, has wholesome, unassuming, yet very attractive features. Her blond hair may be the opposite of Annette’s dark locks, yet they both have a humble appeal coupled with a pleasing personality that lends them to be perceived not only as attractive, but as the “girl next door.” A biography of Hilary notes that the producers of *Lizzie McGuire* hired Hilary because “they wanted someone who stood out from crowd—but was still able to be the all-American every girl” (Krulik 19). This combination is a seeming paradox, but the ability of both Annette and Hilary to stand out, yet represent the ordinary girl, is what fuels their popularity.

Like Annette, Hilary’s star image has been constructed with a heavy emphasis on the ordinary and consumption components. Her 2003 biography may be titled *Hilary Duff: A Not-So-Typical Teen*, but the promotional-style book does little but convince the
reader that Hilary may be famous and the star of a popular television show, but she had a
normal teen life with a close family, homework, and crushes on boys. The first chapter of her biography begins,

As far as Hilary Duff is concerned, she’s just like any other teenager. “You know something, I think I’m a regular kid,” she told one chat audience. “I hang out, do chores, do homework, and occasionally get grounded.”

On the surface it sure looks like Hilary’s a typical teen. Consider what she was up to during the spring and summer of 2003—when she was fifteen year’s old. Most of the time Hilary was busy with the usual teen activities. She never went anywhere with out cell phone in her purse, and she worried about looking bad in photographs. The biggest thing in her life was prepping for her driving test (Krulik 1).

The author Nancy Krulik attempts to construct the narrative of Hilary’s life around the theme that Hilary appears normal, but she really has a fantastic star life. Krulik actually succeeds in conveying the opposite. The reader, most likely already a fan of Hilary, knows about her celebrity status. What they are reading the book for is the details of her real life, which the book explains is “ordinary.” The first chapter of her biography ends by reassuring the reader that, “that kind of fame could change a girl. But it hasn’t changed Hilary. She’s still the sweet girl she’s always been” (6). Like Annette, Hilary is portrayed as humble, modest, and unaffected by stardom. Though Hilary does have two vices, the same vices that Annette was shown to have in the 1950s magazines discussed in chapter one, shopping and fashion. Hilary is a consumer, and her shopping habits are an emphasized component of her star image. While she loves designer clothes, this only reinforces the public perception that she is a normal girl. Her biography describes her shopping fetish:
Like other teenagers, Hilary spends a lot of time at the mall. She admits to having a control issue when it comes to shopping. “I love clothes. I have a huge fetish for shoes, clothes, and makeup,” she told one fan magazine. “I’m the kind of person who doesn’t like to wear things over and over again.” (2).

Just as Annette collected bulky sweaters and capri pants in the 1950s, Hilary indulges in purses, shoes, and MAC and Stila makeup. Chapter one of this project also established that Annette was portrayed in many magazines as a regular girl with regular problems and activities. Hilary receives similar media attention. A 2003 interview with Hilary in *Newsweek* discusses her schoolwork, her distaste for algebra and an annoyance with Holden Caulfield of the *Catcher and the Rye* (Stroup 56). Like Annette, Hilary’s normalcy is also communicated through mention of an impending driver’s license and the reassurance that she is “sweet and well-adjusted” (Stroup 56).

A comparison of Annette’s serial character Annette McCleod and Lizzie McGuire also reveals many corresponding traits. As identified in chapter two, Annette McCleod is a selfless high school student struggling to fit in with a new crowd. She prefers the company of the kind and humble students to that of the wealthier snobby crowd. Annette McCleod is beautiful, yet she doesn’t know it. Similarly, Lizzie McGuire is a teenager desperate to fit in at school, yet she detests snobby cheerleaders Kate and Claire. Both Annette McCleod and Lizzie strive for independence from what they perceive to be over-controlling guardians. When Annette McCleod’s aunt and uncle won’t give her an advance in her allowance in *Mystery at Medicine Wheel*, she goes to a ranch to work for the summer. In one episode of Lizzie McGuire, her parents refuse to raise her allowance, and she decides to work as a busboy at the local hangout for extra money.
Not only are Annette and Hilary alike because of their girl next door qualities, the emphasis of the ordinary and consumption in their star images, and the demeanors of characters they have played, but their Disney star vehicles have many similarities. Just as the Mickey Mouse Club used real children with dance-recital-level talent mixed with serial adventures, Lizzie McGuire tapped into a fruitful market by casting unknown child stars to enable viewers to imagine that the characters could be real students at their own middle school (Krulik 21). While the Mickey Mouse Club broke ground by mixing song and dance entertainment, educational segments about nature and government operations, cartoons, and soap operas about young folk, Lizzie McGuire was innovative for its mixed-media approach, mixing a real life cast with the cartoon psyche of the main character.

When Lizzie McGuire stopped production in 2002 it was not due to low ratings. All original Disney Channel series cease after 65 shows as standard practice (Boorstin 110). However, while the show ended and Lizzie wrapped up her third and final year of middle school Disney did not intend to say goodbye to Lizzie. A movie was filmed starring Hilary and it aired in the spring of 2003, shortly after the airing of the final episode of the series. The Lizzie McGuire Movie began with Lizzie’s middle school graduation and followed her overseas on a summer trip to Rome. Lizzie sings a song in a concert as she pretends to be an European pop star. Hilary—who had released her first album, a collection of Christmas songs, the winter before—recorded the top 40 song “Why Not” for the movie’s soundtrack. Disney planned on filming a sequel to the movie and starting a second Lizzie series to air in primetime on ABC. The studio’s plans were never realized. Recognizing her value to Disney, Hilary sought a substantial pay raise
and was not able to settle with Disney when negotiations ended in May 2003. In another interesting parallel, at the height of her pop star fame, Annette took Disney to court and won a new contract with higher pay in 1959. Unlike Annette who stayed on with Disney, Hilary left. Though she continues to have a recording contract with Disney’s Buena Vista Record label, the same label Annette recorded with, Disney does not profit off of Hilary’s other ventures anymore. Unlike Annette, Hilary has taken control of her empire. Last fall, when she became 18, she became the CEO of her own fashion and lifestyle company, which includes her existing Stuff by Hilary Duff line, new junior clothing lines to be sold at Macy’s and Dillard’s, and a fragrance manufactured by Elizabeth Arden. By 2008 Hilary hopes to have labels in 20 countries worldwide (Naughton 27). Reportedly, Hilary is getting help directing her empire from the man who engineered the ventures that brought the Olsens their billion dollar empire, attorney Robert Thorne (Naughton 26).

**Transitioning from Tween star to Megastar**

In the 1950s Disney recognized a need for after school entertainment for the grammar school gang, while in 2001 Disney identified the opportunity to capitalize on the tween boom. Tweens are a newly-identified demographic referring to preteens, primarily female, that do not have the independence or taste of teenagers, but are outgrowing the kiddy-oriented realm of children’s programming and merchandise. Tweens are interested in make-up, clothes, and celebrities. They are the teeny-boppers of the 21st century, and they are younger than ever.

While the tween market is becoming increasingly lucrative, its products are particularly susceptible to backlash. From the gurus of tween straight-to-video
productions, Mary-Kate and Ashley Olsen, to Nickelodeon stars like Amanda Bynes, tween Hollywood is prone to criticism, and a general consensus among older teens is that they are uncool and manufactured. The stars of tween cinema and television must reinvent themselves in order to sustain their entertainment careers beyond the genre of tween entertainment. The quickest, most surefire path to reinvention for these stars, including the Olsens, Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, and Amanda Bynes, is a sexy makeover. Shortly before their 18th birthday, and on the eve of the release of their first theater-released film *New York Minute*, the Olsens emerged as high-fashion sex icons. They become the fodder of men’s magazines and locker room banter as they transitioned their career from children’s videos to all-ages cinema. It’s hard to determine if the makeover worked for the Olsens. While the film did poorly, their celebrity status soared. In July 2005 *Forbes* magazine declared them “Top Kid Stars,” and they reportedly made $28 million that fiscal year (Badenhausen 107). They are larger-than-life celebrities, yet they are still labeled “kid stars.” Britney’s and Lindsay’s growing bust lines were charted by the tabloids as they both grew out of their kiddy-oriented careers. Britney transitioned from bubblegum pop star to saucy songstress, while Lindsay, the reigning queen of Disney remakes, has upcoming roles in more serious films—a film about John Lennon and another about the assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy.

At present it is not clear whether Hilary, now 18, has made the transition from tween queen to serious actor. She has had two public makeovers, both of which were conveniently timed with the release of a new CD. While she is dating a 26-year-old alternative music star, has made many movies for companies other than Disney, and released music with a decided rock edge, she is still fighting to step out of the shadow of
her alter ego Lizzie. Hilary’s star power and paycheck continue to grow. Her rank on the 
*Forbes* Celebrity 100 list jumped from number 72 in 2004 to number 58 in 2005 (Kafka 
83, Badenhausen 107). Since a makeover last summer, after which she emerged with 
new teeth that altered her smile, and a slimmer body, Hilary has garnered more attention 
than ever. Yet her growing success cannot be attributed only to her post-Lizzie work. 
She may have left the series behind, but Disney continues to air the series nightly and still 
sells millions of dollars of Lizzie McGuire merchandise. While early in her career 
Disney publicists devoted themselves to convincing fans that Hilary/Lizzie was just like 
them, now Hilary is trying to prove to the world that she is in fact a glamorous, red carpet 
star worthy of a lavish lifestyle and fast-track career.

**The Next Hilary**

Since the demise of *Lizzie McGuire* Disney has signed and promoted many Hilary 
Duff clones, tween stars with long blond hair and Hilary’s signature blond bangs. Miley 
Cyrus, daughter of country singer Billy Ray Cyrus, plays the latest clone in the new 
Disney Channel program *Hannah Montana*. She plays a teenager who transforms into a 
Hilary Duff clone when she is performing as her secret pop star alter ego. According to 
the Disney Channel Website:

Hannah Montana AKA, Miley Stewart, is the hippest 14-year-old transfer from Tennessee to Malibu! With her best 
friends Lily and Oliver, they weave and navigate the 
tangled web of school life. As awkward as Miley 
sometimes feels as a teenager, she undergoes a 
transformation when performing on stage. Miley’s 
classmates are totally out of the know when it comes to her 
double life as a pop singer, Hannah Montana. Miley lives a 
life that any kid dreams to have. While the glamour and 
fame does have its perks—limousines, cool clothes and
hanging out with celebrities, Miley most wants to be treated like any other teenager and experience the typical life led by her peeps (Disneychannel.com).

As Miley, she has brown hair and sweet but average looks; as Hannah, she has long blond Hilary hair. Disney has essentially produced a show that combines the allure of Hilary’s star image with the popular ordinary teen themes of surviving school that dominated *Lizzie McGuire*. The Disney Channel has moved on from Hilary, but they haven’t let go of the formula that made her a superstar.

The *Mickey Mouse Club* has not aired in recent years on the Disney Channel. However, since around 2001, the Disney Channel’s programming has followed a formula that operates like a 24-hour modern version of the *Mickey Mouse Club*. The 22-minute programs include episodic shows like *Lizzie McGuire, Even Stevens* and *That’s So Raven*, and animated series like *Lloyd in Space* and *Kim Possible*. The episodic shows and cartoons are the modern version of the 15-minute serials and cartoons that aired on the *Mickey Mouse Club*. In place of the musical entertainment of the series, the Disney Channel airs music videos featuring the stars of the episodic shows (including Hilary Duff) and songs from Disney production soundtracks. Just as the *Mickey Mouse Club* exhibited the experiences of real children from around the world, the Disney Channel airs featurettes about real life kids around the globe, their hobbies, and other human interest angles. For the last three years the Disney Channel has also aired a series of promotional spots featuring its child stars doing ordinary things, before displaying the tagline “Disney Channel Stars Are Just Like You.” The stars in the spots have changed as those under contract have come and gone over the last few years. Yet the message has stayed the
same; the stars of the Disney Channel are special because they are regular kids—they are your friends.
CONCLUSION

One could argue that Annette, whose height of popularity was during and shortly after the *Mickey Mouse Club*, never fully transitioned out of children’s entertainment. Disney had trouble developing Annette’s film career. After her records stopped selling well in the late 1950s, she struggled to revive her film career. It wasn’t until Disney agreed to lend Annette out to AIP for the beach party films, which catered to an older youth market, that Annette found box office success. This was a transition for her film career as these were decidedly sexier films, but not a transition for her star image. Annette was able to find work as an adult without abandoning her moral roots only because audiences enjoyed watching her in an exotic and suggestive setting. As discussed in the previous chapter, Annette remained pure and unadulterated through the chaste character of Dee Dee.

When writing books on the *Mickey Mouse Club*, writers Bowles and Petersen both separately visited Annette at home as an adult in the late 1970s. She was then a housewife and mother, and still according to both men, extremely alluring. Petersen writes, “Her personality, while not dynamic, ebbs and flows in an exotic blend that is half girl, half woman and completely captivating” (201). In a similar declaration of admiration Bowles comments that Annette is:

an artistic union of Botticelli and Walter Keane. The innocence has returned. American International nearly destroyed that forever with those beach party pictures in which Annette came across as a fat, disingenuous little creature with horribly teased Freda’s Beauty Shoppe hair and skin that never tanned. What we have here is an older, more mature Annette, who, at thirty-two, seems to have
regained that peculiar charm that dazzled fourteen million kids daily on the *Mickey Mouse Club*. (25).

Bowles’ comments are extreme and come from a deeply personal place that most journalists avoid visiting. He takes personal offense at Annette’s participation in the beach party films and whatever toll it might have taken on her “innocence.” Annette has reached an iconic status, but what her icon represents is complex. As Bowles reminds us, to many she is the ultimate guardian of morality and the social innocence of the 1950s. However it is also important to consider the significance of her beach party stint within the context of the changing social values of the 1960s. Annette is iconic because she is the personification of the fantasy that Disney sells with its theme parks, Cinderella stories, and animated films. Annette is also one of the first subjects of Disney synergy, a promotional tactic that has made Disney millions over the years and gone hand in hand with the promotion of the Disney fantasy.

The marketability of Annette’s name has not faded over the years. On any given day dozens of E-bay auction listings hawk Annette Funicello memorabilia. She remains more famous today than her arguably more talented Disney counterparts like Darlene Gillespie, Tim Considine, and Tommy Kirk. Over the years the nature of the interest in Annette has shifted from teenybopper craze to that of a baby boomer’s nostalgia. While her career and that of the rest of the original Mouseketeers did experience a backlash following the demise of the show, Annette has remained loyal to her Uncle Walt. While many child stars speak badly of their showbiz experience as adults, Annette has preserved the sanctity of the perception of her childhood and stardom as idyllic by refusing to speak badly of Disney or any moment of her career. The perception has comforted a generation. Yet, both Annettes—the modern 1950s gloved-girl, and today’s nostalgic-
laced memory of wholesome Annette—are illusions, safety nets for fans clinging to a reality of perfection that never existed.


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Reilly, Frank A. “Further Adventures of Spin and Marty.” Walt Disney’s Mickey Mouse Club Annual. Racine, Wis.: Whitman, 1956. 112+.


*Walt Disney’s Annette [Walt Disney Comics and Stories] #905 (1958), Dell Publishing Co.*

*Walt Disney’s The Horsemasters [Walt Disney Comics and Stories] #1260 (Dec.-Feb. 1962), Dell Publishing Co.*

“Win A Phone Call From Annette.” *Walt Disney’s Magazine* 3.2: 29.
APPENDIX: SELECTED FILM AND TELEVISION ROLES

The Mickey Mouse Club (1955) (TV Series) Annette

The Shaggy Dog (1959) Disney, Allison D'Allessio

Zorro (1959) (TV Series) Anita Cabrillo

Make Room For Daddy (1959) (TV Series) Gina

The Horsemasters (1961) (Europe, domestic TV movie) Disney, Dinah Wilcox

Babes in Toyland (1961) Disney, Mary Contrary

Escapade in Florence (1962) (Europe, domestic TV movie) Disney, Annette Aliotto

Beach Party (1963) AIP, Dolores

The Misadventures of Merlin Jones (1964) Disney, Jennifer

Muscle Beach Party (1964) AIP, Dee Dee

Bikini Beach (1964) AIP, Dee Dee

Pajama Party (1964) AIP, Connie

Beach Blanket Bingo (1965) AIP, Dee Dee

The Monkey's Uncle (1965) Disney, Jennifer

Ski Party (1965) AIP, Prof. Sonya Roberts

How to Stuff a Wild Bikini (1965) AIP, Dee Dee

Dr. Goldfoot and the Bikini Machine (1965) AIP, girl in dungeon

Fireball 500 (1966) AIP, Jane

Thunder Alley (1967) AIP, Francie Madsen

Head (1968) Columbia, Minnie

Back to the Beach (1987) Paramount, Annette

Troop Beverly Hills (1989) Columbia