Author’s note: With respect to the intention and purpose of this discussion being to ultimately improve outcomes very every being born by increasing culturally conscious conception, the Baby’s perspective, effects on babies or potential effects on babies will be addressed last.
Because everyone reading this will have unique perspectives on key points in the story for discussion, **I am putting an \* where I see the direct influences of Unconscious Conception.**

Produced in 1982, the movie, *An Officer and a Gentleman* was billed as a romance. What I would guess is known by very few people is that the story, which is actually multiple stories that weave a complex social tapestry, was based on true accounts. Woven throughout the stories of the characters in the film, an astonishing number of pre- and perinatal trauma-related issues unfold. This review is intended to present the stories through the lens of pre- and perinatal psychology, with particular emphasis on cultural barriers to conscious conception in our society today. One of the relatively rare treasures of the film in this light is that the creators managed to honor the perspectives and experiences of the problems being addressed through subplots, equally respecting each characters position, even while each character’s position was counter another character’s position.

Here are the major pre- and perinatal trauma influences, in addition to an entire battery of choices around sexuality and the potential pregnancy that are throughout the film. While this review will not be addressing the majority of them in any depth, all of them are meaningful in the course of considerations for conscious conception. They are; abortion, abortion ideation, trauma of omission, transgenerational trauma, recapitulation, suicide, sexual manipulation and prostitution, healing symbols and repatterning.

Rather than walking through the sequence of the plot as it unfolds, I’m going to highlight the issues through the perceptions and experiences of each character.

**\*Zack Mayo** is the Naval Officer candidate on which the story is based. As the movie opens he is a pre-teen who has been jettisoned from life in the United States out to the Philippine Islands to live with his biological father, with whom he has had no previous relationship. The cause of the drastic change is Zack’s mother’s suicide. Her despair was fueled by the empty promises of Zack’s father that he would, eventually, return to the States and support his family, which he had promised repeatedly to do, but clearly never intended to. She eventually caved under the weight of reality and “just checked out,” as Zack put it.

Throughout the entire story, Zack treads precariously close to taking the exact same path as his father, who had reduced and resigned himself to acting out as “an alcoholic and a whore chaser,” by the time Zack met him. From the first impressions we get of Zack as a politely-mannered boy of 12 or 13, it is not hard to imagine that it was initial impresses of stability his mother offered him that contributed the unconscious seeds that made it possible for him to make choices different than his father at key turning points in his life. For example, at the time Zack enters the naval academy, we find out that throughout his high school and college years he has, “never had a Girl,” as in a steady girlfriend. His predominant exposure to relationships with women and sex have been steeped in the culture of, “the raunchiest whorehouse in the P. I.” So, their first night at the motel, when Paula begins to engage Zack in even the beginnings of a relationship beyond having sex, by offering understanding about the fight they just left in a bar parking lot, his automatic reaction is to treat her like a whore. Very fortunately, Paula—having enough self-respect and objectivity to act on knowing better—straightens him out on the distinction and the critical, deal-breaking error in judgement Zack has made. Her wake-up call opens his softer, polite eyes of his youth, Zack is able to make the shift and see sense in that moment; he sincerely apologizes.

 It is significant that both incidents where it becomes necessary for Paula to stand her ground in demanding respect from Zack in his behavior, Zack is acting out of being trigged in a direct recapitulation back to the loss of his mother, and the additional traumatic events resulting from his life in the Philippines. The first recapitulation is when Zack is ganged up on by the group of local men in the bar because they want to take from him what he has. In current time what Zack has that they want from him, “you rich college boy,” is Paula; in the original traumatic incident, the local Philippino boys gang up on Zack and rob him of his money. “Hey, big spender, give us the money!” The boys rob him of his cash after seriously bloodying and perhaps breaking Zack’s nose. Thus, the instant that the affronting man refused to take “no” for an answer and started the fight over the girls, Zack’s system reacted from the place of being back on that muddy street and he kick the man’s face in, just as had happened to him originally.

If one were to put a still shot of young Zack rolling up out of the mud with his bloodied nose, alongside a still shot of the man from the bar with the bloodied nose, astonishing similarities would be revealed. It is enough to make one wonder how much awareness and knowledge the creators and producers of this movie had about recapitulation of trauma.

The second time Zack gets triggered back to the experience of his mom’s death is, of course, when Sid commits suicide. As Zack and Paula go through the steps leading to discovering Sid, one could guess this is just about the most help he has ever asked for or accepted in an emotionally vulnerable situation. Already feeling vulnerable in his concern for his friend’s highly unusual behavior, the instant Zack realizes Sid is gone, his years of grief surface as he cradle’s Sid’s body on the floor of the bathroom. Here he is able to articulate in a heartfelt way what had “got to him the most” about his mother’s suicide. “You didn’t say good-bye to me.” In the emotional trigger response later on the beach he declares, “When will I learn . . . (not to get close to anyone) . . . Just like her all over again; just like her!” Coming from the place of not being safe to care for or trust anyone enough to *need them*, Zack immediately tries to cut himself loose from Paula by paying her to find her own way home, even while they have just shared this intense loss that has touched them both. “I don’t want you to love me! . . . I just want out!”

In addition to Paula succeeding at holding her own through Zack’s erroneous judgements about women more than once, the key influence in Zack’s story is his Drill Instructor throughout this officer candidate program, Gunnery Sargent Foley. In terms of healing trauma and repatterning, Sgt. Foley represented a place where Zack’s story was seen accurately. Sgt. Foley was a healing symbol and the father figure that Zack had needed throughout his life. Due to his years of experience recognizing troubled behavior, Sgt. Foley wastes no time speaking the truth to Zack, and all the candidates, about the shadows they have to face, as he sees them. He points out to Zack that despite his bravado of confidence, Zack is really not comfortable with people; Zack thrives most at tasks “he can do alone!” such as the Dilbert Dunker. Until going through naval officer training, Zack has no thought for being supportive to others. He doesn’t even consciously realize that is the attitude he has carried all of his life, “and every one of his classmates knows it.”

The repatterning of Zack’s past traumas and bringing the worst of his stories to a new ending kicked into high gear as Zack leaves Paula on the beach, pushing away from her, “I’ve loved you since I met you.” With pieces of almost all of his original wounding spiraling him back to trusting and needing no one, he charges back to the naval academy, living from the moment of his mother’s death and *everything* that came with it. He is ready to take on the whole world, represented through Sgt. Foley. This is an example of those most gracious junctures, where healing agents, consciously or unconsciously, have the presence to stand in for original woundings, making it just real enough to pierce the bubble of the core wound, with the chance to meet it full on in the truth and change repeating history of the past. In Zack’s case, the moment his body doubled over and hit the mat clutching his testicles, he met himself in undeniable vulnerability and humility that would change the course of his life. If Foley had not the presence to know the truth, if he had blithely accepted Zack’s “Drop-On-Request,” and if Foley had not been curious/confident enough to know how letting Zack get it all out on him would play, all of Zack’s drive to reach for something better, and all of his realized potential could have been lost.

\*Now we turn to Paula. The first hint of the cycle of transgenerational trauma generated by the clash of cultures between the naval academy and the, “poor girls that come across on the ferry every weekend,” is that it’s been happening, “ever since there’s been a naval base here.” But, it isn’t until late into the plot that we learn that Paula’s mother did not lie about getting pregnant to get Paula’s father to marry her; she did get pregnant, (intentionally or truly by accident we cannot tell) and the father would not marry her. So, Paula’s mother’s story was, in ways, exactly like Zack’s mother’s story. The only confirmed differences being that Zack’s mother hung her hopes for years on empty letters from Zack’s father. Paula’s mother raised Paula and bore siblings with a local man she settle for, whom she did not really love (so Paula surmised, at least compared to her dashing, officer *real father.*) And, of course, Zack and Paula were conceived in two different locations, but there is definite sense that the dynamics for their two unwed mothers are strikingly the same.

Just as Zack was precariously close to going down the same path as his father, Paula was equally close to repeating almost exactly the same path as her mother, even as she vehemently declared, “Every time I look at her, I know exactly what I don’t want.” (As is so true for most of us faced with breaking family of origin patterns.)

In the scene immediately following Sgt Foley’s warning to the officer candidates to look out for being sexually manipulated by “the Puget Sound Dev’s,” we meet Paula and Lynette, who represent the women dreaming of a better life, with their ticket out of poverty being just a ferry ride across the Sound. This scene, with Paula and Lynnette transforming themselves from factory workers into beautiful women, at the top of their social game, while they are driving to the ferry, immediately confirms Foley’s warning. Clearly, the rhythm of the week and their social calendars revolve around the naval candidate’s training schedule and opportunities to engage them. The first time Zack and Sid catch sight of Paula and Lynette, the girl’s conversation is overheard:

Lynette: “The officer’s off the Lexington ought to be getting in about now.”
Paula: “You’ve sure got the timetable down, Lynette.”
Lynette: “After three years, you learn all the tricks.”

And the guy’s first-impression perspective and focus at this point:

Sid: “Did you see that bodacious set of Ta-Tas!”

The prevalence of male attraction being powerfully supported by the visual cortex in the brain is
 just one influence that presents challenges to changing Western culture about sexual response and behavior. Equally, for this reason, among others, girls growing into women need to be taught all along the way that they are at the helm of how the carry their attractiveness, and the power it has in effect.

The characters of Paula and Lynette represent different approaches to “getting a guy to fall in love with ya,” as Lynette spells out on one ferry ride, mid story. While both women have dreams of, “marrying themselves a naval aviator,” as Sgt. Foley spells out in his warning to the candidates, Paula’s vision of her dream is broader than simply wanting to, “live her life overseas.” Paula’s ideal includes not only “getting the guy to fall in love,” but also *marrying a man she really loves,* as she spells out for Zack after he meets her family.

The breadth of Paula’s intentions makes her relating to Zack complex from the moment of their first conversation at the dance. Paula is passionately looking to build a better life for herself and the family she dreams of beyond what she perceives her mother has had. Thus, from the beginning, when Zack suggests, “I heard about these women who come to these things looking for a husband.” Paula decisively turns her eyes away from him as she lies, “Not me,” yet she then looks straight into his eyes as she declares honestly she is there to “improve herself.”

However, in the key consideration for this discussion – the potential for unplanned/unwanted conception, when push comes to shove emotionally, Paula is more willing to use pregnancy to keep Zack from, “running off” without her than she would consciously admit. In the heat of the moment that Paula is but a few choices away chasing down Zack, it is only the wisdom and support of her mother to make the choice to “let him go” without tricking him or trying to trap him. As Paula’s mother passionately intercedes to prevent her daughter from making the mistakes she made, we see the story of Paula’s conception flash across her mother’s face and body language. Painfully, Paula admits her mother was right; she would have been willing to say just about anything for a chance to stop Zack from leaving her behind.

Looking at the dynamics of unconscious conception from Lynette’s perspective, we see simple and hard-driven motivation to rise out of poverty. Lynette has far fewer limits on how she does it than Paula has. Where Paula knows she is looking to “marry a man she really loves,” Lynette’s primary focus is working the system such as to put herself in the position of exposure to the best opportunities. She has, “been looking to meet one of those Blue Angels since she can remember.” Like Paula, she is as quick as the guys to suggest opportunities for sex. She has gotten so good at playing the tune the young male cadets will get hooked by, she reels Sid right in declaring, “Don’t worry; I’ll respect you in the morning!” Little does either of these ill-fated lovers realize that Sid is actually falling in love with Lynette in spite of himself, at the same time Lynette has convinced herself, “Nine weeks just isn’t long enough to get a guy to fall in love with ya!”

Of course, it is also true, within the story line, that outside of the emotional crisis of believing Lynette to be pregnant with his child, he may have continued in his roles of “faking it” according to what was expected of him, and he may never have realized he loved Lynette, even for those fleeting moments.

Again, with respect to the focus on drivers to unconscious conception, it is particularly complex that at the initial outset of believing Lynette to be pregnant, Sid treats his assumption that she will have an abortion like it will be a bonding experience that they would share. Yet, after Lynette feigns refusal to abort the baby on the grounds that she is Catholic, then Sid is suddenly sincerely concerned that if he does not marry her, “there would still be a child in this world that would be mine, and I wouldn’t know where it was or its name or anything!” Another of the most confounding challenges humans face in grappling with issues of conscious conception is revealed in what Sid says next: “We have a responsibility to the people in our lives—it’s the only thing that separates us from the God Damn animals.” Yet, humans are among the only mammals and certainly the most likely to annihilate our own young.  *One has to wonder what will actually reach people with the personally felt sense that the significance he feel imagining the baby born is Equal when the baby is in the womb*. Of course, this is where APPPAHs efforts to teach about babies being sentient is so critical. Still, there must be some very illusive or individualized *something* about an approach that reaches people we’re teaching intimately, so they can feel where and how it effects them, personally.

As the movie comes to its close, even though we know only a scaffolding of Sid’s story, it’s not hard to imagine how the critical moment of Lynette matter-of-factly declining Sid’s proposal to marry, even without a baby could have plunged his psyche into being suicidal. Having seen the snapshot of Sid’s parents espousing ultimate moral and societal expectations over a shared meal, its easy to see that the roles of expectation have been dictated to him all his life. In the instant of Lynette’s clarity that there is no way she’s marrying him, suddenly Sid has squandered his entire savings on a woman his family does not know, and still facing a commitment to marry for life the woman his deceased brother loved.

From Zack’s perspective, Sid’s sudden suicide is a heart-wrenching direct recapitulation of the loss of his mother, especially in Sid’s not leaving a note, not “saying good-bye to me.” But, for the purposes of this discussion it is significant to note in this finality that with respect to the ways sex is used in emotional manipulations, that Zack’s mom was manipulated by a man; Sid was equally manipulated by a woman.

The key trauma here from the baby’s perspective: In every character example, from every angle conceptions took place or are at risk for occurring steeped in the Trauma of Omission for the babies or possible babies. William Emerson identifies trauma of omission as occurring when primary needs are completely missed, denied or left out of the slightest consideration by parents or responsible parties.

Working through the crux of the challenges to conscious conception will take men and women finding their way to self-responsibility, equally.