

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kurstin Finch for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies presented on September 16, 1999. Title: When She Was Bad: Framing Female Killers in Contemporary Film.

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This thesis presents an analysis of seventeen contemporary blockbuster films in which women kill people. The purpose of the analysis is to discover the “frames” with which film producers, directors, scriptwriters and actors portray women in film. The thesis first establishes the model in use in the analysis: Entman’s model of frame analysis. Frame analysis posits that rhetors use frames, or lenses, through which they create, explain and solve problems, especially in a news cast. These frames are accepted, consciously or subconsciously, by the audience. Entman’s model is integrated with Naylor’s six categories of popular news portrayal of female killers, which suggests that the news portrays these women as witches, non-women, unmotherly, etc. Next, the thesis reviews previous literature on feminist film analysis, framing theory, and historical empirical and anecdotal evidence on female killers. This foundation, along with Entman’s model, is then used to analyze seventeen films, chosen by gross, date and storyline, in which female characters kill. The conclusions are that the news and films portray women similarly, with one exception. Films allow for an extra category: the heroine. Further research should include a comparison of female and male killers in film and an historical review of female killers in film throughout the twentieth century to investigate transitions in frames.

When She Was Bad: Framing Female Killers in Contemporary Film

By

Kurstin Finch

A Thesis Submitted
To
Oregon State University

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Degree of

Master of Arts Interdisciplinary Studies

Presented on September 16, 1999
Commencement June 2000

Master of Interdisciplinary Studies
thesis of Kurstin Finch presented on September 16, 1999

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When She Was Bad: Framing Female Killers in Film

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) kills Michael Meyers in *Halloween 20*. Xenia Anatop makes her name as an international terrorist by crushing men between her thighs in *Goldeneye*. Sidney (Neve Campbell) shoots one set of serial killers in *Scream* and a second set in *Scream 2*. Claire pushes the evil nanny, Payton (Rebecca De Mornay), out a window in *The Hand That Rocks the Cradle*. Samantha/Charlie (Geena Davis) shoots, stabs, runs over, and blows up anti-government operatives in *Long Kiss Goodnight*. And Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Surrandon) execute a rapist in *Thelma and Louise*. Eight films, nine women, more than a dozen deaths. But fewer than 15% of arrestees for homicide in the U.S. are females (Goetting 1995) and fewer than 2% of the 3,400 people on death row are women (McGraw 1998). In other words, most “real life” killers are men.

Female killers have fascinated Western society for as long as women have been killing. Women have been killing, and have been punished for killing, as far back as we have records. Records for infanticide (a traditionally female crime) can be found as long ago as the Black Plague (Dobash et al 1995). Jones (1994) notes that old English law contains rules for prosecuting the woman who kills her husband or lord. Jones (1980) and Mann (1996) review crumbling Puritan legal texts that graphically and disapprovingly describe women accused of killing their

babies (usually conceived out of wedlock). Birch notes that the first popular trial for female killers occurred in 1933: two sisters, servants in the same house, allegedly killed their mistress and her baby. Jacques Lacan, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Simone de Beauvoir all wrote essays responding to this crime and unpacking notions of femininity in the face of such transgressions. And with a band and a gruesome elementary school chant (“Lizzie Borden grabbed an axe and gave her father forty whacks”) named in her honor, no one will forget Lizzie Borden, acquitted though she was. We see male killers, “bad guys,” kill in movies all the time. Why do we see so few female criminals kill on the screen? It does seem to be true that women in “real life” kill less frequently than men. Is the small percentage of women killers in films designed to represent real life?

However, male criminal killers (“bad guys,” or people we would socially consider criminal) are not the only images of male killers in film. Big-budget movies have portrayed male killers as heroes as often as they have portrayed male killers as criminals. Reflect on the hundreds of killings committed by Bruce Willis, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and the various James Bonds in their serial action films; they are “good guys” who kill hundreds of people per movie. While the absence of real life female killers may partially explain their absence in Hollywood, it only begins to shed light on the story. Birch (1994) argues that despite the relative paucity of inspirational, “real-life” models, the rampaging female has become a Hollywood favorite in the 1990s. Although films may currently be more preoccupied with female killers than usual, the seventeen blockbuster (grossing \$50 million or more) films of the 1990s that feature women killers compose a trivial portion of films and film revenues. When we ask why criminal female killers are ignored in films, we must also ask where are the female,

machine-gun-carrying action heroes? In my research, I watched a number of action films which featured both male and female leads to find female killers, only to discover none. In these films (specifically, *X-Files*, *Eraser*, *Jackie Brown*, *Batman Forever*) the female leads, presented as the heroines, often defended themselves but, in the end, were unable to take the final, lethal step. The male leads, who were willing to kill, rescue them.

Personal Perspective

“Given classical cinema’s obsession with sexual hierarchy, feminist film critics could choose the somewhat obvious task of amassing more and more evidence of women’s exclusion and victimization, or they could undertake the more complex and challenging project of examining the contradictions . . . that is, what is repressed or unresolved, and potentially threatening to the patriarchal status quo” (Mayne 1995, p 50).

As a woman engaged with the social structure I am attempting to explain, I will begin my description of this project by defining my standpoint. My education in women’s issues generated my interest in this project. Every book I read, every lecture I attended, and every news program I viewed framed women as people under constant threat of victimization. In the quote above, Mayne shows that feminist film critics have had similar experiences, finding that chronicling all examples of objectification, torture, disempowerment and killing of women in film can be an infinite and ultimately fruitless task. We become weighted down and lethargic when we focus only on the tragedy of women in film. Dyer (1993) states this clearly in his analysis of homosexual images in film: “Much image analysis seems to demonstrate that everything is the same and it’s awful” (p. 1). Therefore, while I consider myself humanitarian, a part of me applauded

when I watched *Goldeneye* for the first time. Xenia Anatop, the “bad girl” and Natalia, the “good girl,” were capable and even adept at killing people, with or without Bond’s participation. I conducted an analysis of James Bond films and found that “Bond girls,” although beautiful and often inert, could become violent and even lethal. I found similar patterns in even the most misogynist of films, with a little subversive reading. Led in part by Camille Paglia’s Vamps and Tramps (1994) and Sexual Personae (1990) and her search for powerful female models in history and pop culture, I began to appreciate the strength of women who could kill, especially those who kill for justice or retribution. I began to read books on women’s history, searching for more records of lethal women. Where I found them, I found a vindication of every woman who ever lost a struggle. It seemed almost fair, as if these women were saying, “So *there!*” to every victimizer who ever killed a woman.

In late 1997, I stumbled upon a small article in the *Oregonian* about Kathy Kiel, the Director of Outreach Services at the Marion County Jail. Ms Kiel, a specialist on and legal advocate for victims of domestic violence, was engineering the second clemency appeal for four women convicted of killing their batterers. I researched the narratives of women convicted for killing batterers, usually husbands or lovers, and found that these women 1) had little or no criminal record, yet 2) were convicted more often than men who killed their partners, and 3) received longer sentences than men who were convicted (see also Radford 1994). Wykes (1996) adds that there are also unsubstantiated rhetorical differences in the ways society, specifically the media, responds to male and female killers of intimate partners. Women get more bad press, they are often identified by sex-laden (the “murderess” or “the mother of three”) or negative terms, and they are more

likely to be publicly castigated because of their gender than men. Additionally, women with children who do not act to protect their children from the batterer can be arrested for neglect or abuse, but can also be arrested for assault or murder if they do act to protect their children and kill the batterer (Radford 1994). Finally, Frigon (1996) notes that female convicts are fifteen times more likely to be sentenced to psychiatric treatment than male convicts, despite a lack of obvious psychological distinctions. Jones (1996) notes that, in Iowa, a woman may be sentenced for more than five years for a crime for which a man receives a one-year sentence. She also notes that at least fourteen other states “provide indeterminate sentences for women which result in their being held longer than men convicted of the same offenses. Several states provide by statute that women must be sentenced to the maximum term for their crimes while men may be given lighter sentences” (9). I realized that the crime itself was not at issue here; these women were not legal outlaws – they were gender outlaws. This excessive management of female killers exposes contradictions in popular gender ideology. Despite the best efforts of feminists, we continue to fetishize women’s gentleness, weakness, and tenderness. If these beliefs are fundamentally true, why do (and how *could*) women kill? And if these beliefs are socially or biologically false, why are women punished more severely and to more public acclaim than men? Is it the signified or the signifier that is incorrect?

The Research Problem

In this paper, I will explore the issue of female killers in film. I find this issue only partially resolved in any literature on “real life” female killers and/or female killers

in film, although many theorists seem to agree on one point: female killers somehow represent a greater socio-symbolic threat than male killers (Dijkstra 1996, Jayamanne 1995, Dobash, Dobash and Noaks 1995, Birch 1994). Therefore, I will ask two questions. First, what is it about female killers that makes them so rare as film characters? Second, how does film frame female killers in ways that construct, reconcile and dismantle their power? To answer these questions, I will integrate feminist film theory, framing theory, criminology, and the content of popular films to create a cohesive view of Western society's fear of women, especially powerful women. In this chapter, I will first explore the relevance of film analysis to descriptions of social phenomena and briefly describe my theoretical framework (I will elaborate further in Chapter Three). Second, I will provide a synopsis of the subsequent chapters.

Film and Social Norms

As I mentioned above, few real female killers exist. And there are few female killers in film. This may be coincidental, or it may be causal. However, gender theorists and feminist film theorists suggest that there is merit in the creation and analysis of film. They also identify gender as a salient unit of analysis within film.

Scream 2, while providing a career vehicle for Neve Campbell and Courtney Cox, also offers an informal metatextual analysis of horror film. In the first half-hour of the film, we learn that Mickey and Randy, two college students and friends of Campbell's character Sidney, major in film theory. Their dialogue provides the structure for an on-going dissection of horror film narrative. At the climax, before Sidney shoots Mickey

(one of the killers), Mickey expresses what we have long suspected about contemporary film. He wants to get caught, he says. He wants a big trial . . . people love a big trial. And then he acknowledges his motive – he’s a victim of television violence, he claims, he’s simply following the rules set by twenty years of film-watching. If the film character him/herself draws attention to the social concerns about film, it behooves us to take a closer look. In this section, I will argue that late 20th century cinema provides a valuable field for analysis of society. I will first trace theorists’ concerns about the cultural and psychological interactions between the spectator and the text. Next, I will investigate the category of gender as a useful film category for analysis.

In her book Popcorn Venus, Marjorie Rosen (1973) presents the struggle between “real life” and cinema as a simple dualism. “Is life art? . . . Is art life?” she asks in the introduction. Her answer to both questions is yes. She claims that “Hollywood’s values have influenced a gullible Public [sic],” and that “More than any other art form, films have been a mirror held up to society’s porous face.” Carson et al (1994) agree with Rosen that “Film [has] power as an instrument whose audiovisual and narrative capabilities profoundly affect public attitudes and beliefs” (p.3). Rosen, writing in the early 1970’s, oversimplifies film’s power. However, I will use this tautology to introduce my justification for this paper because, in itself, it offers grounds. Even if one half of this opposition (“life mimics film” or “film mimics life”) is false, the other half still provides sufficient justification to argue that analysis of film will offer insight into social and cultural norms. If film resembles life, analysis will expose real cultural stereotypes, specifically about women killers. We may then take action to correct these stereotypes, to reject the assumptions that influence legal decisions about women killers. If life

resembles film, analysis will disclose the ways in which cinema's narrative and generic structures and writer/director/producer prejudices construct and activate legal and social injustice against target groups. So, "life mimics film" and "film mimics life" both demonstrate the utility of film criticism as a framework for understanding society.

In the late 1970's, theorists began to re-evaluate the interaction between film spectator and the film itself, asserting that the metaphor of film as socio-cultural mirror was incomplete. While it is true that film text is not free-floating (Dyer 1993) and therefore must be grounded in some socio-cultural structure, its creation of meaning extends beyond mere "reflection." For example, regarding film's vision of women, few people would argue that female film characters are a clear presentation of real women. Nor would they argue that real women candidly imitate female characters. And although Spike Lee states that he documents life "as is" (hooks 1996), hooks contends that "[g]iving audiences what is real is precisely what movies do not do" (p. 1).

Although meaning in film is more sophisticated than Rosen suggests, many scholars agree that these images have power. "Lots of us, myself included, go to movies to learn stuff," hooks admits. "If we resisted, films would lose their magic" (1996, p. 3-4). An examination of teenage fashion, music, slang, and forms of entertainment demonstrates this immediately. Cinematic power goes deeper, although. "Unchallenged, mainstream film code[s] the erotic into the language of the dominant culture" (Mulvey 1975, p. 30). Beyond inciting consumerism, films influence our ways of knowing ourselves and our world. Contemporary film criticism begins with this premise.

Currently, many theorists work to decipher the gap between the audience and the text. For we are not so easily led, as I contended above. We encounter movie images

through our own filters (Dyer 1993; hooks 1996), we are able to mediate between film images and reality. We *choose* to give ourselves over (hooks 1996, p. 3) to film, and so we choose what images we see and don't see. This choice in itself mediates between spectators and film representation. This moment of mediation between spectator and text creates meaning the moment our perceptions meet the images and text of the film. Erens (1990) clarifies: "In the moment of reception [of images by the spectator] cinematic signifiers become at one level objects of exchange and at another elements in a process of meaning construction" (p. 42).

Nowhere is this gap more acute than between film and women. Scholars attempt to explain the displacement of women as subjects in film and the creation of meaning between female characters and female spectators. Why should we compartmentalize one social category, gender, for analysis? As Dyer (1993), speaking for film images of homosexuality, states,

How social groups are treated in cultural representation is part and parcel of how they are treated in real life . . . poverty, harassment, self-hate and discrimination . . . are shored up and instituted by representation . . . How a group is represented, presented over again in cultural forms, how an image of that group is taken as representative of that group . . . these all have to do with how members of groups see themselves (p. 1).

In other words, we may isolate purportedly "fictive" images of one group and record them to uncover social prejudices. Carson et al (1994) notes that all gender studies assume gender as a salient category (1). They go on to state that "[t]he marketing of 'women' and feminism – through publications, media products, bookstore departments, and a variety of consumer items – and the political effects of women's organized opposition of patriarchy attest to a widely shared view of women as a

meaningful category” (2). Hollywood too recognizes gender as a salient concept, and generates films marketed to appeal to women: the “chick flick,” the “date movie,” and the “female buddy movie” and yet neglects women in almost any other film genre.

Most importantly, although, Hollywood has produced stock character roles for men and women. These categories, accidentally or purposefully, determine the centrality of the female character to the film. The prototypical female character has an aesthetic/erotic role but rarely any real dynamic contribution to the plot. Female characters, while integral to the plot, rarely advance the action of the film. A few films, *Aliens*, *G.I. Jane*, *Tank Girl*, *Steel Magnolias*, *The First Wives Club*, *Boys on the Side*, and *Single White Female*, situate women as central to the film’s movement, but these movies are the minority. Of a list of the 168 top-grossing movies ever, the films listed above are the only movies in which women, and women *being* women (and not an extension or imitation of man) are pivotal to the plot. And yet, despite their relative alienation from plot action, women spend billions of dollars on movies each year.

I’ve demonstrated the limitations that cinema places on women. Haskell (1974) notes that “we are insulted with the most abused, neglected and dehumanized screen heroines in film history” (69). Examining films with an eye to feminist film criticism, which seeks to identify and magnify women’s power on the screen, impacts both the social construction of the gender category “woman” and subverts the controlling power of the dominant culture on cultural representations of women. We do not even have to examine only “the women’s film” (Kuhn 1982) but can examine any film text subversively in a search for positive and strong models. For example, Ann Kaplan (1978) analyzes women in *film noir*, a film genre perhaps more condemning of women

than any other. She suggests that instead of lamenting woman's inherent depravity (a theme around which most *film noir* is created) women may be inspired by images that are "culturally encoded as negative," but display women's "incandescent power" (p. 2). If women can experience a negative image and instead read it positively, a gap must exist between the film and the female spectator. We create meaning in this gap. I must stress that the category "woman" is not the only salient analytical category with which to understand the lives of all women. We can further fragment this category into race and ethnicity, class, wealth, age, religion, physical ability and sexual preference. I must address these analyses, however, in another paper. Here I am concerned with exploring the break between dominant culture and gender roles in relation to killing.

This paper will investigate this gap. While this interaction is personal to the spectator, when multiple spectators draw similar conclusions and behave in similar ways toward an image of a line of narration, we must explore both the text and the "ways of seeing." What cultural, psychological, and historical assumptions about female killers do we tend to bring to the "moment of reception"? How do these assumptions appear magnified on the screen? Current cinematic theory models lack consistency and socio-historical background, and criminal behavior models (based on real female killers) fail to examine the pop culture film representation of female killers. My framework will bring the two together using framing theory, an analytical model commonly used to examine media texts.

Theoretical Framework

Communication – Television shows, radio broadcasts, books, newspapers, magazine articles, speeches, etc. – is “framed” to magnify certain elements and hide others. Semantic and visual cues indicate to the audience which parts of the narrative are salient and which are unimportant. For example, the media could describe war as a “noble crusade” or “naked aggression” (Edelman 1993). Both are valid descriptions of an event, yet spring from very different ideologies and emphasize different aspects of war. For instance, Iyengar (1990) explains that physicians and patients were more comfortable with the idea of cancer surgery when surgery was expressed in terms of survival rather than mortality (20), a simple result of “framing” the information differently. Framing theory, initially outlined by Goffman and expounded by Gamson (1998), almost exclusively investigates news media. However, the idea of framing issues and influencing public opinion lends itself to my analysis of films, so I have reconstructed framing theory by grafting it with female criminology theory, which I will also describe more extensively in Chapter Two. Communication and sociology theorists use framing theory to understand and critique the ways in which dominant ideologies create compliance among masses. Additionally, Naylor (1995), Wykes (1995), Brooks (1995) and other theorists have used methodologies similar to framing theory to investigate the patterns in journalists’ retelling of female killers’ histories. Although their work was not conducted from a “framing” paradigm, I will reconceptualize their findings and apply them to film. Their research examines six different prototypes in which the media situates real

female killers. I will use this work to inform my studies of female killers in film, to initially set up tenable frames.

The Analysis

The next four chapters will proceed as follows. In Chapter Two, I will review the literature regarding 1) framing theory; 2) female killers and criminologists' approaches to them; and 3) film theory and women. I will also describe some basic "female killer" prototypes that originate from these theories. In Chapter Three, I will describe my theoretical foundation for this research, examining traditional framing theory and incorporating it with criminologist's analyses of news stories about female killers. I will also expand upon my methodology. In Chapter Four, I will use framing theory and Naylor's categories to describe the ways in which film frames female killers to construct, reconcile and dismantle their power. In Chapter Five, I will review these findings and evaluate the utility of this analysis to film, framing, and pop culture theory.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

In her essay *Passion, Marriage and Murder*, Wykes (1995) argues that murder is the ideal story for the popular press. In presumably stable relationships, she says, anything that breaks the “consenting, affectionate and stable calm” reaffirms the “consensual morality of the society” and allows for the devil, symbolically and literally, to be cast out (52). Additionally, while fulfilling what Wykes (1995) calls the “news values” of violent, deviant and sudden, these stories also provide the arena for sexual and romantic speculation. As Young (1990) states, “The discourse of the press is an important subject for analysis in the inquiry into the consideration of definitions of deviance and their representation because of its pervasive, non-specialist and everyday nature” (Young viii). Naylor (1995) adds that previous work has demonstrated the ways in which the media constructs and maintains dominant institutions and ideologies. Specifically, the media upholds the consensual and hegemonic definitions of deviance. In this chapter, I will review the literary foundation for my analysis. I will first explore framing theory. Next, I will examine criminologists’ approaches to female deviance and killing specifically, and finally, I will present film theory in general and the feminist approach to film. The information here will ground my methodology, which involves the amalgamation of these three areas of investigation.

Framing Theory

As Anderson (1970) notes, the cultural perspective on information presentation is as old as rhetoric itself. Aristotle stressed that the choice of rhetorical tools should be influenced by “common conception of the good;” in other words, we choose what we say by examining the culture in which we say it. The choices then become “hardened into conventions or standard argument forms” (Anderson 360). Framing theory exposes some of these conventions. Goffman, a prominent sociologist writing in the late twentieth century, developed framing theory in Framing Analysis (1974). Framing theory evolves from the idea that we find ways to categorize the information we receive into categories or “packages” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). The narratives we already understand construct these categories. In other words, we have cognitive story-lines which we have developed from birth (or before, according to cognitive psychologists). We insert new information into these old story-lines. This packaging helps us not only to control and filter the information, it also helps us to understand and interpret the information, establishing causes and responsibilities for each event or issue. With each piece of data, we strengthen these categories. While there are benefits to this packaging, theorists note that compartmentalizing can also encourage us to 1) ignore information that fails to fit into the pre-existing narratives, or 2) re-evaluate and potentially distort information in an effort to make it fit. Scholars approach framing from two perspectives. Some believe that the news media forms these categories and then uses them to influence policy. Others believe that we have these categories initially and that the news media simply feeds them. Both camps agree that framing results in the highlighting of some ideologies and the exclusion of others (Gamson 1989). “Which considerations [of policy or

solutions] will be taken into account and which will be ignored depends on their relative accessibility, that is, the ease with which they come to mind” (Iyengar 1990). I will now explain framing theory’s general principles by exploring various perspectives on framing theory and discuss the variety of artifacts to which they have been applied.

Operations of Framing Theory

Our perceptions of the world are complex and chaotic, too much so for the perceptual capacity of most. Our senses take in millions of messages at once, and we must have a way to organize and understand these messages. Edelman says, “What we know about the nature of the social world depends upon how we frame and interpret the cues we receive about that world” (231). News associations compete to present the most synthesized and simplified version of the day’s events. However, the presentation of news does not just entail presenting “what happened.” Because of limited time slots and public interest, anchors and producers must choose between events, spokespeople, interviews, images, and facts to furnish cohesive, comprehensible stories (Pan and Kosicki 1992, Tankard et al 1991, Tuchman 1978, Gamson 1972). Different theories explain how this choice takes place. Ryan and Sim (1990) suggest that reporters select “strips” from the stream of activity and events at a given time and present these strips in an understandable format. These strips have also been called “frames” (Tankard et al 1991, Iyengar 1990, Gamson 1989, Carragee and Jarrell 1987, Cutbirth et al 1983, Knight 1982, Tuchman 1978), “representations” (Hallin and Mancini 1994), and “packages” (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

“Frames” appears the most common and succinct term. Iyengar (1990) defines framing as “the specific concepts and terms used to present choice or decision options [that] have been found to exert powerful effects on judgement and choice.” Specifically, according to Entman (1993),

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem, definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, or treatment recommendation for the item described . . . frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe (52).

Reporters use a “limited number of frames” (Iyengar 1990) and may use more than one frame (Tankard et al 1991, Gamson and Modigliani 1989, Cutbirth et al 1983) to explain or present a single event or to connect two or more disparate events together. Iyengar’s (1990) work suggests that there are two major types of frames: thematic frames, with which rhetors present abstract information of general trends, and episodic frames, with which rhetors present personal experiences and particular instances. For example, a news story on homelessness in several major metropolitan cities would employ a thematic frame, while a human interest story about a single family homeless on the streets of Portland would employ an episodic frame. A researcher would watch or read each story and isolate the framing devices, which may use several rhetorical devices: metaphors, catchphrases, visual images, or moral appeals. The utility of each of these devices changes with cultural trends and the specific events (Gamson and Modigliani 1989).

Several theorists seek to explain the differences between events/reality and the media. The rhetorical devices that create and identify frames to do not exist in a vacuum. News has been described as a mirror, a reflection of events as they happen. We are encouraged to believe that the news presents a single interpretation of events, unquestionable and often dualistic (Hallin and Mancini 1994, Gamson and Modigliani 1989). We are dependent upon these messages for information, especially in national and global issues (Iyengar 1990, Knight 1982) and made more complicit by the fact that the media simultaneously represents itself as a emissary to the common man and as a voice of the state authority (Hallin and Mancini 1994). Despite the Western cultural perception that news is objective, simply showing and telling what happened, most framing theorists disagree (Hallin and Mancini 1994, Graber 1989, Gamson 1989, Knight 1982, Schudson 1982). Several relate news to a “fun-house mirror,” distorted by the reflections of cultural, political and social structure (Hallin and Mancini 1994). As Gamson (1989) states, “[News] content does not lie entirely in these political, economic and organizational factors [of the event or information]; part of it must be explained at the cultural level through shared cultural narratives and myth” (161), as well as stories, myths, and folk tales that are part of the heritage (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). As a result, news stories are a “significant form of cultural production” (Carragee and Jarrell 1987) at the very least, as Knight’s (1982) analysis of labor protests suggests, by uncritically accepting information from biased and hegemonic sources.

Hallin and Mancini (1994), Edelman (1993), Entman (1993), and Iyengar (1990) agree whoever constructs these categories and stories holds immense amounts of power

to shape the public's choice in political and personal matters. Iyengar extends this argument in her exploration of the depiction of poverty, contending that media framing influences the audience's approach to public policy. The reconstructed message is "vivid and morally explicit. There is no question about who are heroes and who are villains, which actions are ethical and which are not" (Edelman 1993, p. 241). Carragee and Jarrell (1987) state it most clearly: "American news media's definition of social and political controversies perpetuates hegemonic ideology; that is, news media content supports the political status quo, delegitimizes political opposition and, consequently, limits the range of ideas open for public discourse" (7). The media puts these ideas and events into symbols with which we relate, inciting emotions and familiar lines of reasoning. This, of course, encourages viewer interest. Wilkie's (1981) study of the rhetorical scapegoating of the Lindbergh child's kidnapper shows that careful wording can not only condemn a suspect but can indict society as a whole for a single crime while simultaneously creating their need for vindication (109).

Moreover, the media *makes* the news in several ways. "Reality is brought into existence, is produced by communication; that is, by the construction, apprehension and utilization of [certain] symbolic forms" (Carey 1975) which are chosen by the news media. Edelman's (1993) analysis of the media coverage of the Persian Gulf War shows that the labels chosen by journalists construct the ways in which the country reacts to the war. Not only do the media use persuasive symbols and rhetorical classifications (Katz et al 1992) to describe issues and events and make them meaningful, they prioritize stories because of cultural importance and time/space limits. Tuchman (1978) and Cutbirth et al (1989) show that the public ranks as important the stories to which the news gives

priority (2). They exclude certain issues (Maher 1994); therefore, we ignore them.

Liebler and Bendix's (1994) discussion of public understanding of environmental issues conversely shows that when the media highlight issues, we manifest a quantitative interest in them.

We do not come to these encounters as sponges, simply absorbing what we see and hear. Pan and Kosicki (1992) and Gamson and Modigliani (1989) work reveals that audiences interpret these reports actively, bringing life history, social interactions and psychological predisposition to the process of constructing meaning. "They approach an issue with some anticipatory schema, albeit sometimes with a very tentative one" (see also Maher 1994). For example, ideas of cause and treatment of problems are informed by the ways we think about responsibility (Iyengar 1990) which are played upon then by the media. Audiences rely on journalism at different levels. When an audience member has relevant experience, they rely less on the news. When they do not, they become more sponge-like, with no previous information to act as a filter (Wilkie 1980). However, scholars argue that despite differing levels of interpretation, audiences tend to perceive roughly similar messages and attribute responsibility in similar ways (Iyengar 1990). Cutbirth et al (1993) suggests that news techniques may be designed to present news in comprehensible packages which allow the information to be interpreted in a single way.

The influence may come from the participants in the event, especially if the event is political or a product of enterprise in some way. This is often called "agenda-setting" (Maher 1994) or "gatekeeping" (Maher 1994). Gamson and Modigliani refer to these advocates as "sponsors" who may write speeches, schedule interviews with journalists, advertise with articles and pamphlets, file legal briefs, or supply reporters with

catchphrases which are then repeated in the report. In this sense, news may be seen as having collective agendas or multiple senders (Gamson 1989) who encourage the media to help them further interests or neutralize opponents. Schudson's (1982) analysis abstracts some of Gamson's research about political power behind frame use, suggesting that frames may change as powerful ideologies are accepted or rejected.

Theorists blame alternately the media (Pan and Kosicki 1993, Gamson 1989, Darton 1975) and the government (Bennett 1990) for framing news stories. Carragee and Jarrell's (1987) analysis of the Western European peace movement, for example, suggests that American media defines social movements concurrently with American foreign policy, while Bennett indicates that journalists offer free reign to government sources. The central issue is that various ideas are grounded in preconceived narrative situations, and that this grounding structures the ways in which we think about polemic issues. Knight (1982) refers to this as intertextuality, which means that the dominant theme grew out of and fed back into the cultural body of knowledge, the social order (Williams 1981) or popular culture (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). In sum, no one in particular is at fault. The social order creates power and reifies it through the media, which strengthens it more. Framing may then be the result of cyclic cultural meaning creation (Maher 1994).

Framing Visual Images

One area of framing that has been largely ignored is the use of visual images in framing. Gamson (1989) suggests that images are often simply filler or constraints to the

interpretation of the story (see also Altheide 1987) . Hallin and Mancini (1989), however, note that images are used to contrast and represent ideas, story order, and morality. Herbener et al (1979) summarizes the theory of the placement of images in a frame, observing a connection between image framing and semantic values; that is, where in the frame the image is placed may imply messages of powerfulness/ powerlessness, weak/strength, etc. His work looks to develop a scale that will measure these semantic connections. While Herbener et al moves image analysis ahead, Tuchman (1978) moves it into the frame of action film, briefly addressing the placement of images in a moving text or narrative, as in television or movies.

Framing the Movies

Theorists rarely apply framing theory to fictional messages, such as film or novels, although it explains the messages encoded in these media. Film contains messages about good and bad, about who is at fault for society's ills. Film about women who kill is especially laden with evaluations of innocence and evil and show "who is deserving and those who are threats and about which policies will bring desirable results and which will be painful, unfair, or disastrous" (Edelman 1993, p. 231) as much as news does. News too is a social creation of representation, a stylized narrative, created to involve the viewers emotionally, to generate and maintain viewer attention. News, as Hallin and Mancini (1994) state, is "essentially cinematic"(839). As long as film narrative is based on simple, familiar ideas and norms, and as long as it continues to affect the ways in which we view the world, framing theory is a useful methodology for

understanding the problems, interpretations and evaluations of people and ideas represented in film. Especially in the case of female killers, films evaluate behaviors and motives, establish causes, and condone or condemn major characters and agendas. Entman agrees that the “research paradigm” of framing can be applied to multiple disciplines, including class, gender and race research in cultural studies. Moreover, Park (1925) suggests that newspapers are actually a reincarnation of the short story, just another kind of popular literature.

Tuchman (1978) provides perhaps the best justification for using framing theory in film criticism. “My approach to news classifies it with other stories and assumes that stories are the product of cultural resources and active negotiations” (5). She notes that both news and stories have introductory lines of narration that signal the beginning of the “story.” “Once upon a time” begins fairy tales, suggesting that the information to come is myth or cultural legend. News stories begin with lines such as “Egyptian planes bombed and strafed a Libyan air base today, a military spokesman here announced,” which, to viewers familiar with news “stories,” indicates that what is to follow may be considered a factual account (5). She ultimately states,

[B]oth the fairy tales and the news account are stories, to be passed on, commented upon, and recalled as individually appreciated public resources. Both have a public character in that both are available to all, part and parcel of our cultural equipment. Both draw on the culture for their derivation . . . [b]oth take social and cultural resources and transform them into public property . . . [b]oth draw on cultural conventions (5-6).

Theoretical Approaches to Female Deviants

In their analysis of gender stereotyping of deviants, Phillips and DeFleur (1982) state of their study:

We choose to study public perceptions for several reasons . . . [A]lthough social control agents may have a more observable effect on rates and trends of deviance, it is usually the general public that call deviants to the attention of official control agents . . . [Also] official control agents are members of the general population . . . Such public stereotypes are further believed to affect reactions to and treatment of deviants within community settings (p. 432).

As culture defines representations of deviance, it simultaneously uses these representations to guide institutional responses to these representations. These images impact our perception of female deviants. For these reasons, I will now examine contemporary theoretical explanations and approaches to understanding female deviants/criminals, approaches that are often vastly different than approaches to male deviants/criminals. While all female deviance does not involve killing, many of the images of deviant women and female killers are similar. Through an exploration of explanations of and approaches to female deviance, we can understand the public images of female deviants.

Classifying cultural representations, often stereotypical, provides insight into the way we deal with deviant women. Phillip and DeFleur (1982) describe the dimensions of female deviant stereotyping: defining the offender, identifying motivation for behavior, assessment of potential threat, and recommended lines of action (p. 433). These dimensions appear again in film portrayals of female deviants who kill. For example, if we believe that women become deviant because of poor childhood experiences (abuse, neglect, etc.), our approach to female deviants reflects an effort to control child abuse and

increase therapy during incarceration. If a society tends to lock women up and throw away the key, we can infer from this treatment that the society believes that women 1) are inherently evil or criminal; 2) become this way because of an uncontrollable and unresolvable stimulus; or 3) are not rehabilitatable. While this type of investigation certainly does not expose clear-cut causal relationships between public perceptions and treatments of deviant women, it does shed some light on female deviant stereotypes. In this section, I will first outline some contemporary (late 20th century) theoretical approaches to female deviance. Next, I will examine historical research on female deviance, and finally, I will explore socio-cultural images of women as deviant. Only through an understanding of social response to female deviance can we plausibly interpret the screen images of female killers.

The body of research on male criminology (or research that, while not purposefully androcentric, neglects female deviants) is massive. Few texts examine the utility of male criminology theory on women or construct new theory (Belknap et al 1997; Chesney-Lind 1992; Heidensohn 1995; Jones 1996; Leonard 1982; Mann 1996; Simons, Miller and Aigner 1980; Smith and Paternoster 1987). Many oversimplify. Naffine (1996) provides an in-depth analysis of the ways in which empirical criminology has systematically mis-appropriated female deviance and the ways in which feminist theory, including standpoint, post-structuralist, and literary theorists, have attempted to shift female deviance to the center of criminology. Simon (1975) explains: "One group perceives women who commit crimes as poor, benighted creatures who are victims of male oppression and society's indifference and disinterest. The other group perceives women offenders as being more cunning and more crafty than men" (p. 84). Phillips and

DeFleur (1982) identify some traditional premises of female deviant behavior: 1) women have different motivations for crimes; 2) only men have characteristics that result in criminal activities; 3) mentally healthy women are satisfied with traditional female traits, which preclude criminal behavior; and 4) women who do commit crimes are exhibiting masculine characteristics and must be mentally unhealthy.

Several theorists argue that the available male theories cannot be applied to female deviants (Harris 1977; Klein 1973; Smart 1977), while others argue gender-specific theories are superficial and unnecessary (Simons, Miller, Aigner 1980; Mears, Ploeger and Warr 1998). Naffine (1996) notes that even when women are included in criminological theories, instead of being lauded for being more socially responsible (as suggested by their low rates of crime) they are identified as the aberrant group.

“Criminologists have rarely seen fit to ask the sorts of questions they have asked about law-abiding men (such as what makes them more socially healthy, or even more moral, than the criminal group)” (p. 8). As a result, we are left with an insufficient and conflicted (Kruttschnitt 1982; Naffine 1996; Smith and Paternoster 1987) theoretical base. Some scholars, however, have broken new ground in female criminology, often using standard sociological theories. I will now review the more prominent theories.

Female Deviance and Opportunity/Social Control Theory

One such generalized hypothesis is that women commit less crime than men because they have fewer occasions in which to do so. This proposal, based on Opportunity Theory (Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Gibbs 1995; Simon and Landis 1991), has

spawned several sub-theories, each of which first identifies areas in which women have traditionally experienced limited opportunities and then attributes recent high rates of female deviance to expanded opportunity in this arena. “In other words, given a chance to commit a crime, women’s motivations are not different from those of men”

(Kruttschnitt 1982, p. 509; also see Simon 1975). Smith and Paternoster’s (1987) study of marijuana use among girls and boys suggests that exposure to deviance, which increases with social interaction, may be the most conclusive explanation for women’s lower crime rates. Interestingly, Mears, Ploeger and Warr’s (1998) study shows that female delinquency may be the result of interaction with male delinquents. Women are still posited as puppets of evil men (and occasionally evil women), committing crimes because of their influence or at their insistence (Birch 1994).

A slightly different approach to the same set of ideas is “social control theory” (Smith and Paternoster 1987; Wykes 1995) or “social disorganization theory” (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Gibbs 1995) which suggests that people commit crime when social controls – commitment, attachment, involvement and beliefs – fail (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960; Smith and Paternoster 1987). Several studies show no gender differences in the association between social attachments and deviance (Hindelang 1973; Smith and Paternoster 1987); several show that women are more controlled by these social attachments (Austin 1978; Datesman and Scarpitti 1975; Morris 1964); and several show men are affected more by social attachments (Krohn and Massey 1980; Canter 1982; Mears, Ploeger and Warr 1998).

Dependency

To explained women's increased participation in crime, some theorists have tried to isolate one gender-related variable in women's lives and explain it as the key social control that traditionally kept women from committing crimes but now has disintegrated. Kruttschnitt (1982) notes that one such variable is women's historical (and continuing) economic dependency on men, which allows society to exercise an informal social control on women's behavior. She and other scholars (Adler 1975, Simon 1975 Aldridge 1977) note an increase in female arrest rates since WWII, the point at which a large portion of the female population, both in the U.S. and in Europe, entered the work force. "The assumption made is that women will both increase their activities and diversify their participation in illegal conduct during periods of increasing employment opportunity" (Kruttschnitt 509; see also Simon and Landis 1991). Kruttschnitt (1982) ultimately determines that legal response to female deviance may hang upon the perception of the woman as financially independent: the more financially independent (and therefore the less informal social control she experiences) the more severe the sentence. "Dependency ranks second only to women's employment status in predicting the severity of her disposition" (503). In other words, the courts prefer to relinquish control of women to the men/families upon whom they are dependent, if they may, and establish some institutional boundaries around otherwise independent women. Therefore, according to dependency/social control theory, deviant women are those who have forsaken or never achieved traditional familial bonds.

Women's Liberation

Jones (1996) states that the feminist movement and the fear of women go hand-in-hand: the first incites society's fear of the second (3). Several studies show that crime rates for women have increased in the past three decades, years which also encompass the rise of the most recent wave of Western feminism (Simon and Landis 1991). Simon and Landis (1991) present arrest rates for men and women in for Type I crimes: criminal homicide, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson; and Type II crimes: other assaults, forgery, fraud, embezzlement, stolen property, vandalism, weapons, prostitution, sex offenses, narcotics, gambling, offenses against family and children, driving under the influence, liquor law violations, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, vagrancy, and all other offenses. Female crime rates for serious offenses have increased from 1:6 (one female arrest per six male arrests) to 1:3.9 in two and a half decades (p. 44).

"The role changes that occurred for females in the 1960s, whether through pressure from the women's movement or from other social forces, might have been sufficiently extensive to reduce the ability of society to limit the ambitions of some women" (Austin 1982, p. 409; see also Simons, Miller and Aigner 1980). Otherwise said, some theorists posit that women's liberation allows women to enter social realms in which crime may be more viable. As they do, they "begin to assert themselves in typically male ways – that is, they become aggressive, pushy and hardheaded. Moreover, they learn to use crime as a shortcut to success and financial well-being" (Simon and Landis 1991, p. 2; see also Cameron and Frazer 1987, Skrapek 1994). Another explanation for female deviance grounded in Opportunity Theory, then, is the idea that

female crime rates reflect the amount of freedom women experience. While theorists disagree on the date on which the movement began (Austin 1982; Simon 1975), several analyses do show a recent increase in female crime rates (Adler 1975; Deming 1977) commensurate with roughly the same period. Deming (1977) and Adler (1975) describe a direct causal role of female “emancipation” (Austin 1982) in female crime rates.

Austin’s findings are more equivocal than these previous studies, yet he notes that “the 1966 founding of NOW [National Organization of Women] closely precedes the takeoffs of . . . female contribution to the crime rate . . . [T]here is also the suggestion that the movement may partly account for the increase in female criminality” (p. 426). Holmlund (1994) further hypothesizes that the penal system’s severity in sentencing a deviant woman may reflect the strength of the woman’s movement at the time.

However, studies also indicate that female offenders “tend to be even more traditional in their life-styles and in their beliefs about sex roles than the average woman” (Ogle et al 1995; Bunch et al 1983; Widom 1979). Simon and Landis (1991) discuss further complications with women’s liberation theory. Since the beginning of the movement, women’s participation in employment-related crimes, or white collar crimes (those available in the workplace, the central realm to which women have been admitted), have not increased. Women continue to participate in traditionally “female” crimes. Jones’ study presents several pictures of women who firmly deny their participation or belief in the women’s movement and yet are accused by the press, lawyers, judges and jurors of being feminists. One reporter states (of a woman on trial for murder),

The Alice Crimmins case . . . was perceived as frightening because the women’s movement was just coming into existence when the case broke, and the implications – a housewife grown rebellious and out of control – terrified those who felt at stake in maintaining the status quo (Jones 279).

Female Deviants and Strain Theory

A second approach to female criminology also stems from a theory constructed to explain male deviance. Robert Merton developed a model of social strain that contends that society sets up goals that only a few have the resources to obtain. "Some social structures exert a definite pressure upon certain persons in the society to engage in non-conforming rather than conforming conduct" (Merton 1985). Resourceless individuals, still controlled by these goals, must find deviant ways to meet these goals. This strain may also take the form of limiting hegemonic regulations or tensions (such as abuse) (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960), also referred to as cognitive, behavioral and emotional (Agnew 1992) and "failure to achieve goals, loss of positively valued stimuli, presentation of negative stimuli" (Broidy and Agnew 1997). Criminologists have used each of these strains to explain female criminology (Berger 1989; Bernard 1995; Cloward and Piven 1979), although strain theory often fails to adequately explain some of the inconsistencies in female deviance (Broidy and Agnew 1997; Agnew 1995).

Older strain theories posit that women (who have always exhibited lower crime rates) exist under less strain than men do, "that their role is less demanding than the male role and that they thus do not experience pressures causing them to deviate" (Naffine 1987). This, they supposed, was because males are more concerned with material success or achievements (Gilligan 1982; Jordan 1995; J. Miller 1986; A. Morris 1987). Newer studies, however, suggest that women experience as much as or more stress than men (Barnett and Baruch 1987; Bush and Simmons 1987; Peterson 1988; Broidy and Agnew 1997), including failure to achieve economic and relational goals, failure to be

treated fairly, loss of romantic partners or friends, the loss of the right to behave freely, or victimization through verbal, sexual and physical abuse (Broidy and Agnew 1997).

Different Stressors

Despite this variety of stressors (issues that cause anxiety), men and women have different crime rates. Some theorists assert that different types of strains (i.e. men respond to material stressors, women respond to emotional or relational stressors) result in substantially different deviant responses (Aneshensel, Rutter and Lachenbruch 1991), which in turn causes men and women to commit different types of crimes (Chesney-Lind and Shelden 1992, Morris 1987). For example, Chesney-Lind (1986), Chesney-Lind and Shelden (1992), and Belknap et al (1997) note that physical, sexual and emotional abuse play a more central role in women's lives than in men's lives and generate strain-specific behaviors. Bush and Simmons (1987) and Gove and Herb (1974), as well as feminist scholars (de Beauvoir 1952; Fischer 1989; Friedan 1983; hooks 1984; MacKinnon 1987) add that women also experience the stress of having behaviors socially restricted, being unable to act in ways that they value.

Because women are responding to more internal types of stress, they may forsake violent, public crimes and anger for self-destruction and depression, or minor crimes, such as drug use or small property crimes (Dornfield and Kruttschnitt 1992; Frost and Averill 1982). Mirowsky and Ross (1995) extend this further, suggesting that women experiencing anger in response to stress suffer from anxiety, hurt feelings, shame, guilt, sadness, eating disorders or drug use (Broidy and Agnew 1997) and crying. Broidy and

Agnew (1997) propose that this is because women are more likely to internalize failure (to consider it their fault) while men are likely to externalize it (blame it on others). However, Battered Women's Syndrome, which, in severe situations occasionally (but rarely) leads women to kill their batterers (Holmlund 1994; Ogle et al 1995), suggests that flaws may exist in internalization theory, stemming from cases in which women do express stress outwardly and violently. Other scholars contend that women have better social and emotional support than men and are more invested in these networks, and so less willing to engage in behaviors that might threaten the well-being of this structure (Rosenthal and Gesten 1986; Stark et al 1989). Finally, Lerner (1980) suggests that women do not engage in external displays of anger because they are socially constrained from doing so (see also Skrapec 1994).

On the other hand, several scholars suggest that coping strategies may determine the results of social stress. Bush and Simmons (1987), Kobasa (1987) and Thoits (1987) propose that men have better coping strategies that prevent them from self-destructive behaviors yet drive them to more dangerous and serious crimes. Women's relational or social networks, however, may strengthen women's "weaker" coping strategies and prohibit them from turning to illegitimate coping strategies. These networks favor cognitive or emotional coping strategies (as opposed to male behavioral strategies). Conversely, other theorists have also found that familial discord results in depression for boys and delinquency for girls (Dornfeld and Kruttschnitt 1992). They also contend that coping strategies may be becoming more similar over time.

Abuse

While strain theorists discuss abuse as a possible strain or stressor, the amount of literature on abuse as an antecedent to female deviance necessitates a section in this literature review on abuse. Belknap, Holsinger and Dunn (1997) call this the “pathways” approach; Dornfeld and Kruttschnitt (1992) call it the “risk factors approach.” Theorists have found alternately either 1) that girls are more affected by family situations (Elliott et al 1979; Hagan et al 1979) or 2) that reactions to family life do not differ by gender (Canter 1982; Cernkovich and Giordano 1987). Wilson (1989) finds that abused and neglected girls are no more likely to become delinquents, and yet other studies (Belknap et al 1997; Riviera and Widom 1990; Poe-Yamagata and Butts 1996) contradict these findings. In her content analysis of murder trial press-coverage, Wykes (1995) contends that women who kill have often been beaten, threatened and tortured over long periods of time by their victims. Conversely, men generally claim to have been provoked to kill “in the heat of the moment” or by nagging or suspicions of promiscuity (Wykes 54; Lees 1992). Holmlund’s (1994) work concedes that abuse can lead to murder but contends that juries may be more likely to acquit battered women.

Female Deviance and Deterrence Theory

According to Gibbs (1995), deterrence theory arose out of a study of death penalty cases in which theorists concluded that legal punishments do not deter crimes. They assert that deterrence works only when 1) the individual realizes that a punishment for the deviant activity exists and 2) the individual fears the punishment. Women often

face greater risk, socially and legally, when they commit crimes; this may result in lower female crime rates (Hagan, Gillis and Simpson 1985; Sistrunk and McDavid 1971). However, other studies have found no gender-specific effects (Jensen, Erickson and Gibbs 1978; Burkett and Jensen 1975; Smith 1979; Smith and Paternoster 1987).

Female Deviance and Essentialism (or the Double Standard)

While each of these theories revolves around notions of femininity, there is a body of literature, primarily presented by feminist scholars, that critiques social and legal structures for especially unfair expectations of, and behaviors toward, women. These structures revolve around obsolescent typologies of female behavior and they, rather than the women themselves, are to blame for female crime rates. Ogle et al (1995) claim that “widespread cultural messages imply that males are rational, moral, mature, independent, and assertive and that females are irrational, immoral, emotional, dependent, and submissive” (177; see also Simon and Landis 1991). For example, as Simon and Landis (1991) note, judges are likely to convict women for “transgressing against his expectations of womanly behavior” (58) as well as for the crime itself (Birch 1994). According to Phillips and DeFleur’s (1987) hypothesis, we are less frightened of female offenders, who we view as less dangerous and easily re-socialized. Crime statistics certainly bear out the assumption that women are not dangerous. But when a woman does commit a dangerous crime, such as murder, we believe that she has not only stepped outside of her social role but outside her gender-role expectancies as well, thus “deserving of harsh treatment” (p. 435) or identified as mentally ill (Dornfeld and

Kruttschnitt 1992; Heidensohn 1975). Phillips and DeFleur (1987) refer to this theory as “gender type-scripts,” which posits that when gender roles conflict with deviant stereotypes, society responds with certain penalties. They find in defining innocence and guilt, these gender type-scripts are crucial, if only in the case of female deviants (Heidensohn 1995). In specific offenses, however, type of offense may be more significant.

Heidensohn (1995) notes that female deviants disrupt society’s behavioral standards for drinking, property and violence, and so are alienated in the male-created and oriented justice system (Birch 1994). She organizes her approach into four phenomena, all of which presume the appeal of gender type-scripts and provide an appropriate framework for essentialist approaches to female deviants:

1) “The courts operate a ‘double standard’ with respect to . . . behaviour, controlling and punishing girls, but not boys, for premature and for promiscuous . . . activities” (Heidensohn 1995). Girls are often treated more harshly in the juvenile system and are more likely to be institutionalized (Chesney-Lind 1973; Jones 1996; Terry 1970) for their own “protection” (Biron 1981). Heidensohn (1995) points to several biographical studies (Parker et al 1981; Cook and Kirk 1983) that present evidence that girls were purposefully frightened and misguided by the legal system while in court while boys were encouraged to ask questions, stand up for themselves, and be brave.

2) The courts – and probation officers and social workers – ‘sexualize’ normal female delinquency and thus over-dramatize the offence and the risk (see also Campbell 1981). This may have occurred because of the 19th century concerns with a specific type of female deviance – prostitution. In later studies, Frigon (1995) traces the suffragists’

sexualization, described as “oversexed, undersexed or in need of a man” (40). Jones (1996) extends this argument with her description of Alice Crimmins, the “Sexpot on Trial” for killing her daughter, convicted with one tranquilizer-popping witness who surfaced eighteen months after the crime. As Jones notes, although the daughter was not raped or sexually molested, nor were there reports of sexual abuse or adultery in the household, Crimmins was sexualized by the press, (and not even consistently). Newspapers referred to her as a “shapely blond” one minute and a “sllekly [sic] attractive redhead” (Jones 275) the next, identifying her as a promiscuous cocktail waitress (although she was an executive secretary), describing her as curvy, comely, or shapely. One juror was quoted calling Crimmins a “tramp.” Verhoeven (1994) further argues that the label “lesbian” is applied to cases in which sexuality had no issue at all, as an explication of or enticement to the facts of the crime.

3) While Heidensohn touches only briefly on her third point, it is important. ‘Wayward’ girls can come into care and thence into stigmatizing institutions without ever having committed an actual offence. Jones (1996) notes that girls are often punished for non-criminal sexual behavior.

4) Deviant women who deviate *as women* – women who do not conform to accepted standards of monogamous heterosexual stability with children -- are over-represented amongst women in prison because the courts are excessively punitive to them (Heidensohn 1995, p. 48). “If she’s a good mother, we don’t want to take her away. If she’s not a good mother it doesn’t really matter” (Carlen 1983). Lacan sees women as object of fantasy, elevated to the place of Other. As Other, they are transformed to the symbol of “truth” or God – when she fails to represent God, she becomes diametrically

opposed to God, the ultimate evil (Wood 1994). This may occur because of competing images of modern woman: as occupant of the public sphere, and therefore potential criminal versus loving, tranquil mother (Birch 1994; Chesney-Lind 1980; Simon 1975). Jouve (1994) contends that the act of killing symbolically transforms woman into man.

Other theorists describe the “chivalry” approach to female deviants (Pollack 1950), most with no real conviction in this presumption (Birch 1994; Holmlund 1994; Morris and Wilczynski 1994). Older criminology theorists insisted that low crimes rates for women exist because of the patriarchal legal system’s attempt to save women from tough legal penalties and time in pre-trial custody (Simon and Landis 1991), a practice which may have, at best, been selective and practiced only in cases of upper-class white women committing vaguely improper behavior (Klein 1979). However, as Jones (1996) states, the “chivalry” theory allows the legal system to crack down on female criminals and then justify this over-attention by claiming to provide the “equality” for which women have been clamoring.

Historical Explanations and Approaches to Female Deviance

These paradigms do not spontaneously appear, however. They have two bases: first, they build on some of the ground-breaking theories of criminology produced in the 18th and 19th centuries, and second, they are inspired by informal images of female deviance, images which often have no scientific basis yet become codified into social norms. As Dijkstra (1996) states,

[W]hen, toward mid-century, in the after-math of WWII, the biologists finally got around to discarding some of their own formerly

‘incontrovertible truths’ [upon which much of criminology is founded], the media had already turned those mistakes into cultural commonplaces – into ‘natural laws’ of the entertainment industry . . . [which provide] a genealogy for the cat women, tiger women, praying mantises, snake-fanciers and man-eating tarantulas still prowling about our movie theaters . . . (with a few impossibly buxom, barely-thonged female sword-fighters and monster-bashers thrown into the mix to satisfy contemporary adolescent taste) (5).

In this section, I will examine older criminological explanations for deviant women and review some of the proverbial representations of women that gain leverage from these theories. With each of these explorations, we unpack further the female killer’s reputation and representation. “The movies helped turn the metaphors of fin-de-siècle art and science into the psychological realities of twentieth-century gender and race prejudice” (Dijkstra 1996, p. 316).

Inaugural Theories of Deviant Women

I will begin with a chronology of approaches to and images of deviant women. Few scholars have traced the history of deviant women, and so sources are limited. The historians in this section, however, provide extensive backing for their work.

Early American Approaches

Jones (1996) points out that England originally established the New World as a deposit for criminals. In 1717, Parliament passed “an act for the further preventing robbery, burglary, and other felonies, and for the more effectual transportation of felons” (17). Subsequent boat shipments (1719-1723) to the colonies then brought more than 400

convicts to the colonies, and a third of them were women; a 1723 shipment brought 33 women; a 1730 shipment brought more than 20; shipments in 1731 and 1732 brought more than 60 women, all of them convicts. Jones notes that these women were actually safer in the colonies – in England, public hangings and burnings of women were “regular and festive occasions” (Jones 19). Those who escaped often died in the prisons. In the first few years of the United States, Jones continues, female crimes were most often murders of intimate partners, masters/mistresses (by servants, often shipped to the country against their will) or infanticides, in which women seduced or raped by men killed their babies soon after birth to spare themselves the social repercussions of illegitimate children. In the early days of the colonies, when women were scarce, they were rarely punished and often simply remarried. The code changed, however, as more women came to the colonies. White women often escaped the worst punishment; servant women or women of color were whipped, hanged and burned, even while pregnant. As Jones says of white, married, deviant women,

No longer a responsible individual [as the polemic systematically commodified the female body as women became less scarce], possessed of civil rights and accountable legally and morally for her offenses and her soul, ‘the female’ became a non-entity, a mere appendage . . . a name that had to be protected at all costs . . . (62)

and could not be prosecuted, admitted into court, or punished by public law. Jones attributes this change to the disengagement of secular thinking and the perfection of Enlightenment philosophy.

19th Century Prisons and Deviant Women

The New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism described the women's quarters of the Bellevue Penitentiary as "one great school of vagrants, lunatics, thieves, and those of less heinous character" (Freedman 1981). This group, composed entirely of women, decided that what was needed in the prison was a feminine influence.

Freedman's work outlines the history of female prisons through the early 20th century, recording the presumptions of the reformers about female prisoners. Surprisingly liberal, 19th century women's prison reformers (also primarily female) assumed that although women and men committed different crimes, both men and women abused liberties; women just had fewer to abuse. Freedman traces their philosophy to the transformation of social structures from family to market economy, when lives became "economically marginal and geographically mobile," and traditional female restraints, such as home and church, lost some of their power. Women, she asserts, with limited opportunities and lower wages in the industrial marketplace, made the most of low-wage jobs and marginal economic positions. Many became prostitutes. In fact, although the crime rate for women rose during the second half of the 19th century, most female offenses were against female sensibilities – drunkenness, vagrancy, street walking and petty larceny (Freedman 14).

19th Century Deviant Women and Their Justifications

However, Freedman's work fails to enumerate the dozens of arsenic poisonings (by women, usually of men) that occurred at this time. When the woman was white, she

was rarely convicted: social codes prohibited the discussion of topics such as blood and death in front of women, and pervasive portrayals of women were incommensurable with murder (Jones 102). Lizzie Borden, beautiful and wealthy, was acquitted through these loopholes. Her lawyer states, “. . . [A] woman, one of that sex that all high-minded men revere, that all generous men love, that all wise men acknowledge their indebtedness to. It is hard, it is hard to *conceive* that woman can be guilty of crime [italics in original]” (Jones 231). These women, however, were few and lucky. A thriving dime store novel trade sprung up describing the horrors of female murderers who seduced and killed men for money, killed their children and husbands (“if marriage is her career, it might as well be her business” [Jones 130]) for insurance, maintained cellars full of skeletons. These fictional women often dressed in men’s clothes and always renounced the devious life in the end (Jones 112). Poisoning, compatible with common perceptions of women’s physical weakness and duplicity, was often the implement of choice.

Women of color, working class, or any woman committing lesser crimes, were labeled as “fallen women.” These fallen women, pathologized, were institutionalized into male prisons, where sexual exploitation, abuse, illness, starvation, and poor hospital care for newborns was rampant. Margaret Fuller (1844) attributed female deviance to both biological and social causes, none of them the result of the individual’s behavior. She blamed deviance on bad families, bad inherited traits, childhood neglect, and bad environments. She questioned whether “fallen women” were hopeless, the predominant theory of the time. Instead of social castigation and proscription, she recommended education and transitional housing. A few months later, the Female Department of Prisons opened a transition house.

Here in Freedman's history we see a coalescence of biological essentialist and social casual interpretation of fallen women: female reformers argued that female deviants were not "designing temptresses" but women under the power of male seduction. Yet they believed that female deviant reform required a "refeminization" of women, an emphasis on sisterhood and a transcendence of class barriers. In other words, female deviants had ceased to be women, and by returning them to womanhood through behavioral conditioning reformers could eradicate deviance and simultaneously emphasize the importance of traditional female values.

According to Freedman, in the late 19th century another major transition occurred in reformer's views of female deviance, from individual and biological causation to a blame on society for women's crimes, in part because of Susan B. Anthony's writings. She claimed that men commit crimes because of a love of vice, while women commit crimes because of a lack of resources. She attributed crimes to a woman's "worthless husband," "brutal husband," "seduction by a coachman," the "wickedness of men," "prostitution by bad, intemperate men," and victimization by "masculine wills" (Freedman 53). Jones (1996) comments on the young women who were seduced and abandoned, who often turned to crime; however, she also records some of the victorious attempts by these women to avenge their situations. As a result of Anthony's efforts, women's prisons began to look more like homes, in which women were taught to sew, cook, do laundry and chores, and pray, in hopes of reaching the "true woman within" (Freedman 55).

The Father of Female Criminology and Responses to His Theory

In her work, Freedman examines the treatments of female deviance and the definitions of deviance these treatments imply. Writing during the latter half of the 19th century, where Freedman's history ends, Ceasar Lombroso was the first criminologist to systematically examine female deviance and is often (ironically) considered the father of female criminology (Jones 1996).

Anatomical Causes and Evidence of Deviance

In his 1898 work, *The Female Offender*, Lombroso builds on normative anatomical and anthropological theories to empirically identify the female criminal, measuring and weighing the brain and the body of female Russian criminals (his home country, Italy refused to let him examine the prisoners [Lombroso 1898]), as well as their hair type, facial structure, tattoos, moles, and teeth. He ultimately constructs a prototype (suggestively fetishistic) of the female offender: small cranial capacity, big or canine teeth, large jaw, dark, thick hair, "enormous nasal spine" and "rudimentary" breasts and hips. The prototype differs slightly depending on the crime. For example, women who kill their children ("infanticides" [p. 47]) and "murderesses" are lighter and shorter than non-criminal women, while prostitutes tend to be heavier and have larger thighs. Lombroso claims that, with enough study, he could map the biological characteristics of criminals. The following three categories summarize his findings.

Deviant Women as Atavistic

Lombroso, arguing from his positivist and essentialist ideology, establishes a catalogue of explanations for female deviance beyond his quantitative approaches to biological determinism. The first two are quasi-archetypal and contradictory. To begin with, Dijkstra (1996) maintains that 19th century sociologists, sexologists and anthropologists considered a society with a high level of differentiation between men and women an advanced or civilized society. The closer men and women become (in appearance, education, morals, strength, sexuality, or civil rights), the further down society slides on the civilization continuum. Ultimate social destruction is the complete reversal to primitive or “atavistic” (Lombroso 1898; Dijkstra 1996) society, which Lombroso and his contemporaries considered to be an abstraction of African or matrilineal society in which the woman is powerful, polygamous and dangerous. Lombroso posits that female deviants are signifiers of, or the beginning of a backslide to, atavistic culture. He notes that many female deviants physically resemble “Hottentot” (Lombroso 114) women, precocious and obese. Dijkstra (1996) elaborates, noting that “At the turn of the [19th] century . . . Woman, the feminine principle of nature, was the thief of progress” (26), best characterized by the African seductress who controls Kurtz, the symbol of masculinity and civilization in Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness*. Moreover, women who were purportedly returning to a more primitive, natural law reminded 19th century naturalists of praying mantises and black widows, both of which eat their mates after conception (Dijkstra 50). Dijkstra argues that this suggestion of life-sucking females created the modern, ultra-seductive cinematic female vampire or “vamp.”

Deviant Women as In-human

Second, Lombroso argues that the deviant female is super-human or, perhaps better said, in-human (Birch 1994; Frigon 1995). He claims that deviant women live longer than men and non-criminal women, they look better before death, they are stronger, they are immune to disease (siting studies of Parisian prostitutes) and their sexuality is more fierce and fundamental. This strength, without the female weakness and gentleness to temper it, gives rise to criminal behavior. Lombroso describes, in his narratives about female criminals he has studied (or heard of, which transgresses his effort to remain scientific), female criminals' unfeminine cruelty, depravity, lack of maternal feeling, sensuality and perverse eroticism, selfishness, desire for vengeance, violence, material greed, masculine dress, intelligence and stubbornness often characterized by the *vagina dentata*, or archetypal vagina with teeth (Dijkstra 64; Fischer 1989). Frigon suggests that this inhuman representation is half of the "mad or bad" dichotomy into which deviant women are placed, generated by the penal system (see also Birch 1994).

Deviant Women and Environmental Stimuli

Lombroso does, at least rhetorically, suggest that environmental stimuli, especially negative childhood experiences, may instigate female criminal behavior. This represents a break from the eugenisistic empiricism of the time. First, he anecdotally reports that several of his subjects have had cruel or abusive fathers, husbands or lovers who led them to either kill the men or obtain an abortion (an offense at the time of this

writing) (see also Jones 1996 for a discussion of the 19th century feminists' role in prosecuting seducers and statutory rapists). Second, he notes that some women turn to crime because of unfair educational or employment restraints, which leads them occasionally to theft or prostitution, or vagrancy. Third, he suggests that many women are led into crime as a result of the influence of a male (and very occasionally, female) lover or acquaintance, who teaches them to beg, prostitute, steal or kill. However, while each of these notations may have been developed into serviceable theory, Lombroso abandons them at the level of description. He even fails to make the connection between hysteria and environmental causes, despite his illustrations of women abused by male figures or "the system" who then become "hysterical" and kill people (p. 232). This is the "mad" half of Frigon's dichotomy.

Popular Representations of Deviant Women

Spinning off from scientific and criminology theories of women, 19th century society, often led by the media and pop-scholars, spontaneously produced its own images of deviant women. These images are still visible in the treatments of deviant women today.

Hysteria and Deviance

The "hysteria" theory of female behavior, revitalized the 19th century blossoming of psychology, became a convention (Mellencamp 1995). "Hysteria," drawn from the

Greek word for uterus, was the classical medical term for the phenomenon of the “wandering womb,” a disease in which the womb became detached and wandered around the body (Showalter 1997). Hysteria was said to cause choking, coughing, loss of voice, pains, tics and twitches, paralyses, deafness, blindness, fits of crying, convulsive seizures and sexual longings” (15). In the 19th century, the term began to signify other physical/emotional problems: limps, headaches, speech disturbances, depression, insomnia, exhaustion, eating disorders (Showalter 14). And while women were continually “diagnosed” as weaker because of this condition, social theorists and pop psychologists suggested that this was also a power – any biological condition that had so much control over the individual and was so hard to pin down and cure must indeed have tremendous power. It was enough to keep women from obtaining a truly “moral character.”

Consistent with these fears, physicians and psychologists began to comment on the “horrors” of menstruation (Benn 1994; Dalton 1989; Edwards 1984; Fischer 1989; Frigon 1995; Jones 1996), which could cause “neuralgia, migraine, epilepsy, and chorea as well as impulses toward kleptomania, pyromania, dipsomania” (Jones 1996; see also Verhoeven 1994). T.S. Clouston notes that “the organic instinct of reproduction becomes transmitted morbidly into instinctive impulses to kill, steal, etc,” as well as compulsions to eat dirt or hairbrushes (Jones 162). Jones notes that women, because of their physiological make-up, are almost by definition insane.

Murder Through Sexual Activity

Ultimately, according to Dijkstra (1996), theorists determined that women's weakness arose from the womb's lack of semen, a substance produced from the male's body's refinement of blood's essence. Therefore, women's overactive sexual drive was not sexual at all but survivalist in nature. Women desired sex to get semen, which gave men their strength and vitality. Men, on the other hand, should struggle against sexual temptation to keep their semen, because to contribute too much would mean certain death for the man (Dijkstra 189-196). While most murder is eroticized (Cameron and Frazer 1987; Skrapek 1994), the "semen depletion" hypothesis posits that normal intercourse itself is the cause or method. This theory was supported by the pre-eminent physicians of the time, including Havelock Ellis, the first widely published sexologist, and a series of testes and semen donation centers were organized. The message was sent that every woman, especially sexual women, were conspiring to kill men by hijacking their semen. In other words, women were deadly by virtue of being women. Any crimes committed in addition to this one indicated a hyper-criminal or very dangerous individual, a vampire-like woman. This woman, while deviant, was also beautiful and seductive, much like the *femme fatale* or fatal woman, the woman so seductive that she moves man to defy the patriarchy and ruin himself – for example, Helen of Troy (Maxfield 1996). Dijkstra's work takes this one step further, suggesting that a racist (or race-preserving) principle was in process here . . . ethnic women, specifically Asian or African, were more dangerous, not only because of loss of semen but because of the dilution of Aryan supremacy. As a result, women of color were doubly incriminated.

Women as Mad

Frigon's (1995) work *A Genealogy of Women's Madness* compiles the images of women as mad from the 15th century through the most recent suffragist movements. She argues that positioning women as mad reifies the essence of Otherness, allows the hegemony to justify the placement and neglect of women (Birch 1994). The same social control that regulated powerful women in the 15th and 16th centuries (the threat of being burned as a witch) re-emerged in contemporary criminology theories as women's madness. Deviant women, she asserts, are not seen as rational agents. The penal structures favor the psychiatric institution of women two to one over men, especially when women are arrested for political engagement. We continue to see representations of the witch the symbol of female madness in contemporary media (Wood 1994).

Deviant Women as Seducers of Men

Jones (1996) suggests that deviant women have also been used as scapegoats for the deviance of men. She cites the story of Ruth Snyder, a young woman who was convicted of killing her husband with the help of her lover, Judd Gray. Snyder, an attractive but "unfeminine" woman, was juxtaposed with Gray, portrayed as a nice if rather incompetent man swayed to evil under the influence of Snyder. The evil, seductive powers of women are lethal not only to the men they kill but to the men they seduce and use. As Jones notes, even if they had not killed, Snyder would still have been an evil woman (for cuckolding her husband) yet Gray would have been a regular guy. Both Snyder and Gray were executed, Snyder (according to the press) a "wreck," hysterical,

collapsed and epileptic, Gray calm, murmuring prayers and cautioning young men to stay away from liquor and bad women. This image parallels the *femme fatale* figure in film (Maxfield 1996; see below), the woman whom destructively manipulates men using her seductive wiles. Men, standing as the rational, powerful creators and directors of society, were then in moral and mortal danger from their Achilles' heel, beautiful women. Women's seductive powers then made them dangerous and uncontrollable and inherently, irredeemably deviant. This created a lose/lose situation for women – they were ostracized for being unattractive or penalized for being beautiful.

Women and Film

The final section of this literature review has two divisions. First, I will discuss the feminist approach to film criticism. Second, I will summarize scholars' findings on dangerous or deviant women in film. The "Women and Film" portion of this paper will ground the film analysis in the fourth chapter. Because I will not use traditional feminist film theory as my primary model for my analysis, in this section I will focus on the broad theories of feminist film criticism and limit my discussion to the general framework rather than individual and explicit analyses. Although I do not use a strict feminist film framework, the theory nevertheless informs my analysis.

"Hegemony describes the negotiations between socioeconomic, ideological and political forces through which power is maintained and contested. The culture industries [such as film] play a part in this negotiations" (Gledhill 1994, p. 119). Subversive readings of popular films is a practice generated by thirty years of feminist film theory.

In her introduction to her book *From Reel to Real: Race, Sex and Class at the Movies*, bell hooks (1996) states, “Even although many traditional academic film critics are convinced that popular art can never be subversive and revolutionary, the introduction of contemporary discourses of race, sex and class into films has created a space for critical intervention in mainstream cinema” (3). She also notes, in her essay “Who’s Pussy is This?” (published in the same book), however, that there is a growing body of contemporary film that claims to privilege the telling of women’s stories while fundamentally maintaining the white male’s narrative. These are the standpoints of feminist film criticism: to locate positive readings of women in hegemonic films, and to find instances of hegemony in films that are marketed as counter-cultural or progressive. Gledhill (1994) suggests that film constructs an ideology of its own, situated in social and culture institutions and discourses. The investigations of these ideologies show us the power of film in determining cultural truths, and the ways in which film can deconstruct those truths.

Feminist Investigations in Classical Cinema

Mayne (1994) suggests that a single influence on the investigation on women and film, the women’s movement, prompted an exploration of the contradictions in classical cinema. These contradictions reveal inconsistencies in the sexual hierarchy. Additional work posits two possibilities: that the purpose of classical film, and the male characters within, is to reveal these inconsistencies (Fischer 1996; Petro 1994) and, conversely, that

these characters and films are structured to repress these inconsistencies (Petro 1994; Williams 1994).

A strain of feminist film criticism developed from the interest in re-thinking classical cinema: the investigation of film in history. Petro (1994) explains that this study focuses on a distinction between the study of production and the study of reception. In the study of production, scholars work to disclose the ways that classical cinema challenged the institutional norms. This methodology has been to review classical cinema and to locate positive women's ventures in historical film. Scholars most often mention Germaine Dulac, an independent French filmmaker from the 1920's, and Dorothy Arzner, a screenwriter from the 1920s through the 1940s (Dozoretz 1982; Petro 1994). "Arzner's films have been seen as films that critique Hollywood's cinematic conventions from within" (Mayne 58), denouncing and problematizing identification and patriarchal norms. According to Mayne (1994) the first contemporary independent women's films (films made by women) began in the early 1920s with a break-through into documentary film (59). These films continue to challenge the contradictions inherent in the gap between spectacle and narrative, the inevitable objectifying gaze caused by the existence of the viewers, aestheticism and the camera. The investigation has shifted to an examination of female authorship in film (Islam 1995; Petro 1994).

Scholars investigating the production of classical film have also exposed the contradictions in gender norms and assumptions within the narrative, images, and semantic choices. The most popular and ground-breaking books, *Popcorn Venus*, by Marjorie Rosen (1973), and *From Reverence to Rape*, by Molly Haskell (1974), while considered sweeping and teleological (Petro 1994), have generated a significant

following and set the stage for additional analyses. Haskell's analysis, while vaguely heterocentric (Petro 1994), moves film criticism into the realm of cultural critique, juxtaposing the image of "the mirror," often reproved for its uncritical suggestion that films mirror reality, with the premise that films refract real cultural experiences and fetishize and destruct images of positive female roles.

The Gendered Image

In this section, I will summarize the theoretical approaches to representations of women in film. This section will be brief, because I am more concerned with images of deviant women than women in general, and will therefore comment further in the second section of the film theory review. The image of woman in film has often been seen as a replication of the images of women in life (the fallacy of the "mirror" metaphor [Cartwright and Fonoroff 1983]) and yet scholars have explored the cinematic image of woman (Gledhill 1994). The woman is often theorized as absent (Walker 1981) or as an absence-of-phallus (Mulvey 1985). Mulvey (1981) adds that, because of problematic (or non-existent) definitions of women's sexuality, female characters must identify with the male character's sexuality (masculinity), relegating them to a position of instability or permanent deficiency. Plaza (1982) adds to this theory, positing that women are not literally or even virtually absent, but defined out of the picture by notions of sexual identity: men embody what is meant by person, leaving women, left with the inferior qualities, loses existence. Walker (1981) provides the catalyst for further investigation into this issue when she says, "[F]eminist theoretical work that provides a reprise of the

repressive textual function in relation to the position of the woman seems intuitively to account for textual operations. But . . . isn't the feminist theorist undercutting both possibilities for experimentation with the film medium and alternatives in critical discourse?"

Analysis of the female image goes beyond these platitudes. Theorists have investigated women's dress (Basinger 1993; Birch 1993; Fischer 1989; Islam 1995; Jayamanne 1995; Rosen 1973), women's static and dynamic role in narrative (Birch 1993; Cowie 1997; Islam 1995; Kuhn 1992; Rosen 1973; Verhoeven 1993), fetishizing (Islam 1995; Kuhn 1992; Stern 1995), femininity (Holmlund 1993; Wood 1993), mythical status, as nymphs, Amazons, etc. (Fischer 1989), parental status (Fischer 1996; Valdivia 1998) and ethnicity (Dittmar 1994; Freydborg 1994; Oshana 1985; Stubbs and Freydborg 1994; Wood 1993). While each of these is important, an exhaustive review of the literature will not add to this paper's analysis. However, specific research regarding images of deviant women is essential and will be addressed below.

The Gendered Viewer

In the 1970s, film criticism began to decipher the role of the spectator in film analysis. The metapsychology (Petro 1994) of spectator analysis is most easily understood in three parts: the male gaze, envisioned first by Mulvey (1975), the female gaze (Mayne 1994), and the spectator-text. In the first chapter, I addressed the importance of the spectator, or viewer, in the creation of film's meaning. Here, I will address various inquiries into the viewer's position in the film.

The Male Gaze

Contemporary film theory is constructed by three epistemologies: psychoanalysis, semiotics and Marxism (see Gledhill 1994 for a discussion of Marxism vs. psychoanalysis). Some feminist theorists renounce these models as hegemonic remnants (Mellencamp 1995). Laura Mulvey is often credited with bringing the first, psychoanalysis, into feminist film criticism (Byars 1991; Mayne 1994; Walker 1981). Psychoanalytic criticism of films centers primarily on the plane of the viewer in relation to the message of the film. This theory examines the position of the subject, structured through speech acts and in constant flux, re-negotiated with every discursive act. The idea of a “speaking subject” necessitates an object – the “I”/“you,” or better stated, “I”/“it” dichotomy. Mulvey’s essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” establishes the concept of the “gaze” or the “erotic ways of looking” (28) of traditional, phallus-centered film. She states, “Woman . . . stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not making of meaning”(29).

Using Freudian writings on sexuality and Lacan’s theory of the structure of the “look,” Mulvey sets out two principles of cinema: scocophilia, or the pleasure of looking (while sealed off from reality and in the dark), and recognition/misrecognition, the pleasure of recognizing the familiar image on the screen, expanded and glamorized. Identification can also occur when the spectator positions him/her-self in the position of the camera as the missing subject or character in the scene (Metx 1975). Within the issue of scocophilia, Mulvey establishes the subject/object dualism of the looker and the

looked-at. Man is the looker, the controller of semantic choices. The woman is the looked-at, the inert, erotic presence, both for the characters in the scene and the viewers in the audience. In this split, man can enjoy both the central position of “looker” and the recognition of the powerful, dynamic image on the screen, the pivotal male character, who also looks at the woman. Through his identification with and recognition of the male character, male spectators may also possess the woman (35; see also Doane 1991). Byars’ (1991) work challenges the use of Freud and Lacan as the bases for psychoanalytic feminist film criticism, instead positing Gilligan and Chodorow, creators of new, gynocentered psychoanalytic models. Chodorow suggests that the patterns that create womanhood lie, not only in psychological structures but also in the social orders of family and ideology. Jayamanne (1995) rejects psychoanalysis altogether.

Theorists have revealed dilemmas within the process of identification, however. Walker (1981) points out that the male spectator may “misrecognize,” or see the powerful male screen-image as a representation of his weaknesses or flaws, leaving him open to the pitfalls of Freudianesque psycho-social development. Within the privileged position of spectator-subject, men must negotiate the Freudian oedipal and castration structures that threaten to over-throw the patriarchal configuration of the film (Mulvey 1975). When the woman (object) appears, the pleasure of looking is so powerful that it stops the narrative, positing the woman in a rather unsettling position of mastery. The image of woman is so powerful that it evokes Oedipal and castration fears as it resembles the castrating mother and moves the male subject/spectator to obsession and vulnerability (Fischer 1989). Ultimately, men are motivated to fear any woman, regardless of whether they identify with her or objectify her. Objectification itself is a threat.

The Female Gaze

The conception of the female gaze arose from the skepticism about universal meaning creation in cinema. Theorists were concerned that “the assumption of a transhistorical, indeed primordial, desire for cinematic viewing pleasure neglected to consider pleasures and subjectivities that were historically produced as well as sexually inflected” (Petro 1994, p. 74). Doane (1991) suggests that scholarship about female spectatorship is rare. Mayne’s (1994) essay “Feminist Film Criticism and Film” addresses the issue of the female viewer, which she calls a “contradiction in terms” (55); to be a viewer requires a subjectivity and autonomy unavailable to women. One approach to the female spectator is “the woman’s film” of the 1940s and 1950s (Kuhn 1982), which was theoretically designed with a female plot and centered on a female audience. Yet, the women in these films rarely totally transcended the traditional roles of women in film, except that their characters were more central to the plot, telling us nothing about the female audience to which these films were purportedly addressed.

Another approach investigates the split between woman as spectator and woman as image. De Laurentis (1985) adds that women’s cinema must work to address the woman as spectator as well as the woman as image. Doane (1984) proposes that the fetishized image of woman onscreen maintains a disturbing cognitive proximity to women in the audience, that the identification between screen-woman and spectator-woman is immediate and pervasive. She (the woman spectator) has two options: she may remain passive or she may desire the images as a man does, which generates a form of narcissism and assimilation. “The female look is a becoming,” (Doane 1991, p. 22-23),

leaving the female spectator with no autonomous desire. On the other hand, Bernstein (1996) conducts an extensive analysis of the lesbian spectator as spectator-in-drag, threatening to overturn the conventional psychoanalytic approach to female spectator.

The Spectator-Text

Theorists seek to understand the relationship between spectator, the viewer, and the text, the photographic, narrative, and dialogue of the film (de Laurentis 1985; Fischer 1989; Mulvey 1975; Metz 1975), while Doane (1991) contends that “relationship” is misidentifying the issue; what should be studied are the ways in which the woman spectator *is* the image (22). This inquiry is led by an integration of semiotic theory, the study of the structure of signs and the ways they are operationalized in a culture to produce meaning, psychoanalytic theory, discussed above, and feminist standpoint theory. While the film writers, producers, directors, photographers, and actors create a meaning, perhaps even a preferred meaning, in their film, spectators reconstruct the images, or signs, during the film to create their own meaning. The subject is simultaneously created, and this subject is male. However, Mulvey investigates the position of woman as spectator in this construct. She suggests that women may indeed function as the subject, but only in two ways. First, women may use male structures of identification with the figure on the screen, in essence, de-feminizing in order to relate, and second, women may stand ideologically, semantically and psychologically alienated from the film, and therefore be able to form a critical perspective on the film

unobtainable by the male spectator. Rich (1994) calls her the ultimate dialectician, the exile, able to “work out” the cultural oppositions of meaning within a single body.

Deviant and Deadly Women in Film

In the previous section, I discussed the theoretical grounding for the analysis of women in film. More important, however, is the work scholars have completed on the images of bad women, dangerous women, sexual women, violent women, and powerful women in film, which is the foundation for this paper. In this section, I will review the literature that deciphers some film representations of deviant women. These representations are not mutually exclusive – some may co-exist with other representations, while some may be presented as symptomatic of others. For example, a film may identify a deadly woman as lesbian and suggest that lesbianism is a symptom of overall psychological illness. This woman may feel abused or degraded by society or certain individuals because of her sexuality and may kill these individuals in revenge. Thus, the tropes ‘lesbian,’ ‘insanity’ and ‘avenging victim’ might occur simultaneously.

The Untouchables: Cinematic Lesbians

Scholars have been reporting the existence, although often abstracted and fetishized, of images of lesbians in popular film (Austin 1996). *The Children’s Hour*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *Rebecca*, *Ghost*, *Manhattan*, *Silkwood*, *The Night of the Iguana*, *The Color Purple*, *Boys on the Side*, *Basic Instinct*, *Chasing Amy*, *Wild Things*,

Cruel Intentions, *Go Fish*, *Girls in Prison*, *Goldfinger* -- each of these portray lesbians, yet very few present even vaguely positive images of lesbians. The early films, *The Children's Hour*, *The Killing of Sister George*, *Rebecca*, *Goldfinger*, and *The Night of the Iguana*, position the lesbians as the evil characters, the antagonists of the film, designed to abandon lesbianism by the end of the film or be destroyed. Dyer's (1993) work on the representations of homosexuality suggests that these images of homosexuality draw on the generic darkness of *film noir*. In the newer films, *The Color Purple*, *Basic Instinct*, *Chasing Amy*, *Wild Things*, *Cruel Intentions*, and *Girls in Prison*, lesbianism is situated as a justifiable and pleasurable choice yet is superceded by heterosexual relationships throughout and at the finales of the films.

Weiss's (1992) book Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in Film frames film analyses of lesbians in film. She postulates that the omission of positive images of lesbianism in movies fulfills two functions. First, omitting lesbians invalidates lesbianism, or intimate women's relationships; moreover, the images of lesbians become evil, unnatural, dangerous and yet seductive. Second, without the powerful and sexually autonomous images of lesbians, women's sexuality (hetero- and homosexual) is situated as male-oriented, passive, masochistic and passionless. "The absence or repression of lesbian images works to create and maintain the heterosexual 'sex/gender system' and the economic, social and political system it makes possible" (Weiss 1992, p. 52). Vito Russo's book and subsequent movie *Celluloid Closet* finds drag queens, 'lipstick' lesbians, and a few legitimate and sensitive portrayals of lesbians and gay men in historical Hollywood. And yet the preponderance of messages hint that lesbians are evil, unnatural, predatory and conflicted (Bernstein 1996; Hart 1994). De Laurentis (1994)

argues that the screen lesbian is not even a woman, as the signifier “woman” evokes specific social and sexual codes not signified by “lesbian.” And frequently, lesbianism is extended as the source for deviant behavior (Hart 1994; Straayer 1996; Weiss 1992) -- most notoriously, in *Basic Instinct*, the explanation for murder.

Femme Fatale

The *femme fatale*, or fatal woman, has been an instrumental fixture in film for the past few decades. The *femme fatale* is any attractive woman who uses her looks (and occasionally wealth and power) to seduce men and lead them to downfall – poverty, social ostracism, or death (Birch 1994; Doane 1991; Dyer 1993; Fischer 1989; Holmlund 1994; Maxfield 1996). The *femme fatale* is often juxtaposed with a good woman: a virtuous, loyal wife, an innocent daughter, a passive, asexual friend, or a kind, selfless mother. Ultimately, the *femme fatale* is occasionally victorious (e.g. *Dangerous Lives*), but more often than not is punished for her destructive power (Doane 1991). Doane’s (1991) work suggests that the *femme fatale* exists as an emblem, a “hieroglyphic,” of turmoil for the re-negotiation of sexuality and industrialization in the late 19th century. Maxfield (1996) contends that it is not the actual crime (such as murder) that stigmatizes the *femme fatale* but the symbolic subversion of the patriarchy. Women are the catalyst in an unstable controversy; men ultimately destroy themselves.

Deadly Woman as Avenging Victim

Films do often present women as social or familial victims, often as the recipient of physical or sexual abuse (Verhoeven 1994). Innocent and victimized, the avenging victim is often confined to the thriller or horror film (Holmlund 1994). The other version of this image is the woman as feminist resistance to norms circumscribing in her body, gender and role. The use of powerful images (e.g. woman loading gun, woman straddling body with ice pick) situates women's power within dominant and obstructive ideologies (Islam 1995). Fischer's (1989) work on the film *A Question of Silence* (1981) indicates that Andrea, one of the plot's three female killers, kills the man because she has been used and ignored by the powerful men in her life. Clover (1992) argues that an entire sub-genre of horror films, the "rape-revenge" films, are predicated on scenes in which women are raped or almost-raped. The women then kill to punish their rapists. Stephen King's *Carrie*, she states, allows Carrie to kill only after the school kids play a horrific prank on her. Important in this category is first the notion that women must respond instead of instigate, that women must gain inertia or motion from the initial action of a man. Second, this category suggests that for a woman to justifiably defend herself, she must maintain regressive sexual standards; that is, a woman with non-normative sexual history does not deserve defense or justice.

Deadly Woman as Vamp

Verhoeven (1994) asserts that deviant women are often positioned in films as vampires, especially as lesbian vampires, a metaphor for the most marginalized of film

figures (Islam 1995). Fischer (1989) notes that in some films, the “vampire” quality may not be actual vampirism, but the slow draining of life from a woman’s victim, as in *The Dark Mirror* (1946) in which a woman steals her sister’s boyfriend and attempts to drive her sister to suicide. Dijkstra (1996) traces the “vamp” from the early days of cinema, positing that seductive female vampires/killers (by definition) represent the fears of masculine society that women will adopt power, draining both life and masculinity. Additionally, he suggests that female vampires (usually from Eastern Europe or servant class), draining life from the white, upper class, represent the takeover or strengthening of the lower class. Bernstein (1995) extends this metaphorical content of “the vampire” further by identifying its conflation of male and female qualities with queer identification – the vampire, in his/her unusual method of gratification and killing, represents retaliating queer sexuality.

Deadly Woman as Tramp/Virgin

While women’s overt sexuality rarely causes a killing in a film, it often serves as an explanation of her character. If her character is such that she “sleeps around,” it is not a stretch to imagine that she might kill someone. Clover’s (1992) work on the “Final Girl” (the girl in horror films who outlives everyone else and kills the killer) suggests that women cannot overpower evil unless they are virgins, or at least sexually unavailable. Implicit in this notion is the idea that sexually active women deserve evil treatment or are evil personified, which allows us to neglect or sacrifice non-chaste female film characters

as if they have no narrative or social value. “Deadly woman as Tramp/Virgin” corresponds closely with “Avenging Victim” and “Femme Fatale” categories.

Deadly Woman as Man

Sufficient demonstration of an individual’s gender moves beyond simple aesthetic qualities. Women and men must play out their gender role. For men, this provides a somewhat limited landscape. For women, the landscape is extremely limited one that necessarily excludes murder as a valid, active and defining behavior. Movies about women killers often use the murder as the beginning or ending scene of the movie and focus the rest of the movie around images of heterosexuality and femininity, flowers, romance, children and love, images constructed by close-ups on hair, make-up, soft clothing, and skin (Holmlund 1994). These women often become symbolic men (Fischer 1989), however, through shots of guns, knives, masculine clothes (Clover 1992; Holmlund 1994, p. 148; Islam 1995). Islam (1995) in her analysis of Jamie Lee Curtis’ character (a rookie cop) in *Blue Steel*, observes that the assimilation is not always complete or effortless and that the transformation allows ambiguous theoretical territory in which notions of male and female as well as the issues of transvestitism and desire may be negotiated. Clover (1992) suggests that female killers even adopt male names. It also provides a way in which male spectators can identify with female characters. Dijkstra (1996) suggests that deadly women “grow penises” by arming themselves with guns or knives, thus over-coming their castration anxieties.

Deadly Woman as Insane

Powerful, lethal women in film are often depicted as crazy (Doane 1987; Fischer 1989). Fischer's (1989) work on *Violette* (1978) suggests that the young female killer, who kills her step-father and attempts to kill her mother, does so because of an advanced case of the Elektra complex (Freud's axiom that young women want to bear their father's child and eliminate the rival, their mother). The Elektra complex is a symptom of unresolved stages of development, which may lead to psychosis (Fischer 276) and serves as an explanation for the murder and punishment.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

Theorists have clearly investigated extensively the images of deviant women. Because, until recently, women in film have not been killers, little research has focused specifically on these specific images of women. Using the literature as a foundation, I will explain my methodology for this study.

Framing the Movies

Although the sender(s) may be more complex than in a news story, the fact remains that movies utilize cultural frames, myths, and public conceptions of blame placement to engage the viewer and influence his or her perception of the action. Movie viewers may absorb more of the hegemonic message of film simply because they believe that they are not, and so conscious cultural restraints are relaxed. After all, how often have you said to yourself, “It’s just a movie”?

Theoretical Model for Framing

Entman (1993) provides the most comprehensible model for framing theory, although it does not have the structure of most rhetorical models. I will conduct my analysis using the strategy he describes in “Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured

Paradigm.” Entman states that framing is about salience and selection, making certain issues more palatable than others to the targeted population by arranging them around “culturally familiar symbols . . . or clusters of ideas” (p. 53). Framing involves four tasks: identifying and investigating a particular problem’s definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation or treatment recommendation. Each task presents a series of challenges, especially when using the model to analyze visual images and fiction. The first task, defining problems, entails an investigation of the problem’s causal agent and its benefits and detriments. The second task, diagnosing problems, requires the scholar to identify the forces behind the problem. The third task, moral evaluation, requires an evaluation of causal agents and their effects. Finally, the fourth task, suggesting remedies, requires the scholar to identify the justifications for potential solutions. What does the framer see as the treatment for the problem? A framing analysis directs our attention, through these tasks, to “the details of just how a communicated text creates its power” (56). We must also direct our attention to what is *not* there: the omissions of problem definitions, ideas, alternatives, explanations. For example, a movie about women who kill may neglect their histories or personal life, showing us only the actual kill itself. This framing may suggest that the woman is crazy, evil, scheming, or power-hungry, while insight into the character’s history may show causes – abuse, for example, or persecution by the person she kills, which changes infinitely the dominant meaning of the crime and the woman.

Framing and the Single Rhetor

Framing analysis requires that the scholar analyze (to some degree) the intent of the rhetor – the writer of the article, the producer of the news broadcast. Applying framing analysis to films may introduce the question, “Who is the film’s rhetor?” suggesting that we must identify a single rhetor for the film, as we might for an article or news broadcast. This is impossible. Films require the efforts of dozens, if not hundreds of people, to communicate a message; therefore, each cameraperson, writer, editor, director, actor or actress and producer is a rhetor. Does this problematize the use of framing theory for film? No more than it complicates the model’s use for news media – we oversimplify the news when we suggest that one person is responsible for a given article. Not only are reporters/anchors influenced by thousands of rhetors before they present the story, any story also reflects the prejudice of editors, camerapeople, scriptwriters, producers and sponsors. Therefore, the issue of the single rhetor is no more complex in film than in news media. I contend that any complete framing analysis must address the complications of multiple rhetors.

Constraints

Entman also offers caution to the scholar using framing theory. First, he says that just any interpretation of a message’s frame is useless. The frame established by the scholar must fit the “dominant meaning,” which “consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed and accepted by the most people” (56). We cannot just posit “fugitive”

(Entman 56) components as the salient frame. Next, Entman notes that this model necessitates a content analysis. However, a content analysis of framing theory “would avoid treating all negative or positive terms or utterances as equally salient and influential” (56). While the scholar is looking for empirical proof of frames, the investigation cannot be quantitative. In other words, the scholar cannot count up the negative symbols and positive symbols and describe the frame based on these numbers. Finally, the scholar cannot pretend to determine true public opinion, primarily because public opinion is a frame itself.

Theoretical Models for Female Killers

While the purpose of this paper is not to fully explore the connections between female killers in film and in real life, my purpose here is to draw some initial connections. I will draw the frames I explore in Chapter Four from the films themselves. However, because several feminist analyses have provided some initial structure about the media framing of female killers, I will use one of these approaches to structure my own exploration of film frames of female killers. In the next section, I will explain and justify this model and clarify the ways in which I will use it.

In her essay, “Women’s crime and media coverage: Making Explanations” (1995) Naylor notes, “Finding explanations for offending behavior is central to the task of labeling the behaviour as criminal, of attributing responsibility . . . A number of routine explanations for women’s crime can be identified” (77). Drawing on newspapers and several court cases, Naylor describes six “common sense” (81) explanations made by the

journalists for women's violence. Each of these explanations is a frame: each defines the problem, diagnoses it, and provides a moral evaluation inherent to the category itself (none of the categories affirm the morality of the behavior). I will use Naylor's research to inform the frames I identify in film about women who kill, because I see many of her explanations used in the film narrative.

Naylor identifies six frames used by the media to explain female violence. These are: 1) Madonna/whore; 2) Sexual passion/love as an excuse for the crime; 3) Reproduction and madness; 4) The figure of evil – the witch – the monster; 5) The criminal woman as 'not-woman'; 6) The female as devious and manipulative. Each of these frames is rooted in medical, psychological or sexual lore of the 18th and 19th century, which I will explore further in the third chapter. For now, I will elaborate on each of these frames.

The purpose of the "Madonna/whore" frame is to call into question the killer woman's sexuality, whether or not it had anything to do with the kill. As the whore, the woman is discredited and her side of the story trivialized or rejected altogether. As the Madonna, or the proper mother, her credibility is magnified. A woman who commits a crime cannot be a Madonna, however, eliminating the first half of the binary from a woman's options. Also, we have a tendency to sexualize any murder, ensuring that the woman's virtue will be in question from the outset of the investigation. Once virtue is socially questioned, it rarely recovers.

The "sexual passion/love" as an excuse frames woman's emotional frailty and need for love as central to the murder. They may commit crime to gain love or to revenge a betrayal of love, referencing the 1987 movie *Fatal Attraction*. Society is

especially fascinated with this typology if it involves two women battling it out for one man: the “cat-fight.” In some cases, committing crimes for love or to avenge betrayal is condoned or excused because it reinforces woman’s weakness. So while she is acquitted, she will be stigmatized the rest of her life (and make the rest of us look bad too).

Naylor presents the third frame, “reproduction and madness,” as a variation on the theme of emotional fragility. Evolving from 18th and 19th century medical theories that diagnosed women’s behavior (all of it) as a pathology stemming from her possession of a womb. From this we get “hysteria,” which means “wandering womb.” Because of their biology, Naylor states, offenders may get sympathetic treatment from the media but will therefore be denied individual agency. Within this frame, women may use Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS), Premenstrual Syndrome (PMS) or Munchausen by Proxy Syndrome (MBPS) to explain their crime, especially if the victim is a child. The implication, then, is that she couldn’t help herself.

The fourth frame, woman as “the figure of evil – the witch – the monster” is an umbrella for all of the badness the female may symbolize. It stems from the supernatural and evil powers attributed to witches in Western culture. Naylor explains this frame through the stories of Beverley Allitt and Maria Rossi, two women indicted for murder. Allitt was called the “Angel of Death” and Rossi “The Devil Girl.” To free Rossi from the implications of this title, Rossi’s lawyer brought to evidence Rossi’s mother, an alcoholic, and Rossi’s history of drug and alcohol abuse.

The “criminal woman as ‘not-woman’” perhaps sheds the most light on film narrative, in which we often see the female killer changing into male clothing before committing the crime. The logic is that real women don’t commit crimes, so a woman

who does must be “masculine” or deviate from traditional heterosexual womanhood in some way. She is defective, so we do not have to feel sorry for her. Often, tears or a dress may counter this image, but these too can fail. Called into question as evidence of “not-woman” is appearance, victims, job (is she a nurse? a mother?) the planning that went into the crime, and emotional condition.

Finally, we often see the woman as “devious or vindictive,” a typology that extends as far as the Creation myth and further. The *femme fatale* and *film noir* in general is based on this cliché. The woman in question masks her deviance under beauty or the guise of goodness. She is often glamorous or sexual, and her sex life may become the stuff of the trial. Interestingly, this model can occasionally be integrated (or confused) with the sexual passion/love frame, in which a woman kills for revenge or jealousy. The crucial difference between the *femme fatale* and the sexual passion/love women is that the *femme fatale* is beautiful and tempting to the public at large.

Naylor’s work builds on several of the theoretical approaches I discussed in Chapter Two. She combines most of the themes explored in other work and collapses them into cohesive and broad typologies, which manifest clear definitions, diagnoses and repercussions for each frame. These categories provide grounding for the further development of these themes. I am convinced that the same categories, and maybe others, that appear in the press regarding real female killers both inform and are informed by film narratives. While these are not the only frames I will identify in the seventeen movies I investigate, these frames provide a strong basis for this research.

Approaches to Choosing Movies

Cultural interpretation of gender roles is in constant evolution. Movies, a publicly-accessible and entertaining forum for this negotiation, have been popular for over a century, and thousands of movies have been produced. For the in-depth analysis of movie frames I will conduct, I am unable to analyze every film produced in which a woman kills another person. Therefore, I have narrowed my selection of artifacts by following two primary guidelines. First, I am interested only in the pop cultural (recent) representations of female killers, and so I will investigate films produced between 1990 and 1998 in the United States (to limit the number of cultural interpretations available). Second, I am investigating *popular* cultural representations, and so I chose the “blockbuster” films that generated the most revenues in this time period. Using the Wall Street Journal website, I printed a list of every movie in the United States during the 1990s with a net gain of \$50 million or more; this produced a list of more than two hundred films. Of these films, I identified the films in which women kill people on-screen, using my own knowledge of movies and, in movies with which I was not familiar, plot summaries provided by the production company website. When still in doubt, I watched the film. Using this process, I narrowed my list to seventeen films, a list sufficient enough to furnish significant findings and limited enough to conduct an in-depth analysis of each film. My seventeen popular films (in no particular order) are: *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, *H2O*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *Natural Born Killers*, *Single White Female*, *Thelma and Louise*, *The Point of No Return*, *Malice*, *Terminator Two*, *Scream*, *Scream 2*, *Mission: Impossible*, *True Lies*, *The Silence of the Lambs*,

Tomorrow Never Dies, Basic Instinct, Goldeneye, and Sleeping with the Enemy. In these films, women kill as follows:

Hand That Rocks the Cradle: Claire (Annabella Sciorra), newly pregnant, is sexually assaulted by her doctor, who shoots himself to avoid prosecution. His widow, Payton, sees Claire's picture on the news and vows to avenge her husband's death by tearing apart Claire's family. Payton (Rebecca De Mornay) kills Maureen (Julianne Moore); Claire kills Payton.

Halloween H20: Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) has been followed by her psychopathic brother for twenty years. In this final film, he returns and she tries to keep him from killing her friends and son. Laurie kills Michael.

The Long Kiss Goodnight: Samantha (Geena Davis) has had amnesia for eight years. During this time, she gives birth to a daughter and becomes engaged. Suddenly, after a car accident, her real self – a secret government agent – begins to reappear and the government tries to kill her to hide Cold War dealings. Samantha/Charlie kills several government spies, including Timothy and One-Eyed Jack

Natural Born Killers: Mallory (Juliette Lewis), a teenage girl trapped in a physically and emotionally abusive childhood, runs away with Mickey. They begin a killing spree across the country, idolized by other teenagers and chased by the police. They are eventually caught but fight their way out of the prison in the climax. Mallory (with Mickey's (Woody Carlson) help) kills her parents, a gasoline station attendant, several truckers, and prison guards.

Single White Female: Ally (Bridget Fonda) breaks up with her live-in boyfriend Sam and finds a new roommate, Heddy (Jennifer Jason Leigh). Heddy becomes obsessed

with Ally and kills anyone who claims Ally's attention, finally threatening to kill Ally herself. Heddy kills Sam (and a puppy); Ally kills Heddy.

Thelma and Louise: Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Surrandon) are trapped in loveless relationships and decide to go on a road trip. Thelma is almost raped and Louise (who has been raped herself) shoots the rapist. The two women are pursued across the country by the police, eventually driving off the Grand Canyon. Louise kills Thelma's potential rapist.

Point of No Return: Maggie (Bridget Fonda), a young drug addict, is captured by the police who train her to be a top secret agent. Maggie hates the job and hates having to keep secrets from her boyfriend and so eventually fakes her own death to escape. Maggie kills several people unidentified except that they were a threat to the American government

Malice: Tracy (Nicole Kidman) marries Alex (Bill Putnam) in a grand insurance fraud scheme. She deliberately loses a baby and her ovaries and tries to collect insurance for it. Alex tries to unravel the plot. Tracy kills Jedd (Alec Baldwin).

Terminator Two: Sarah (Linda Hamilton) is confined to a psychological hospital for killing police officers in *Terminator One*. She escapes in T2 and she, her son, and T1000 attempt to stop WWIII. Sarah kills police officers.

Scream: Sidney (Neve Campbell) is being pursued by masked men who kill her friends throughout the film. She finally receives help from Gail (Courtney Cox), an irritating news reporter. We discover that the masked men are Sidney's boyfriend (Skeet Ulrich) and his best friend (Matthew Lillard). Sidney kills Stu; Gail kills Billy.

Scream II: Sidney is again being pursued, this time at college. Once again, the masked men kill her friends and boyfriend and Sidney eventually hunts them down.

Sidney kills Mickey (Tymothy Olyphant); Debbie may kill, but, because the killer always wears a mask, we never know.

Mission: Impossible: Ethan Hawke (Tom Cruise), a secret government agent, becomes the target of a mole hunt in the government and is framed as an information leak. He fights to regain his position and freedom. Claire (Emmanuelle Beart), another agent, kills Hannah, a third agent.

Silence of the Lambs: Clarise (Jodie Foster) is an FBI agent searching for Buffalo Bill (Scott Glenn), a mass killer. Clarise kills Buffalo Bill.

Tomorrow Never Dies: Wai Lin (Michelle Yeoh), a Chinese secret agent, teams up with James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) to stop Raymond Carver (Jonathon pryce), a media magnet who creates the news by manipulating governments and facts. Wai Lin kills several unidentified minions of Carver.

Basic Instinct: Katherine (Susan Stone) is a beautiful mystery writer who is arrested for killing a lover. Nick (Michael Douglas), while putting together the case against her, falls in love with her despite her live-in girlfriend Roxy. Finally, another woman is blamed for the murders though the audience knows that Katherine is the true guilty party. Katherine kills an older, wealthy lover.

Goldeneye: James Bond (Pierce Brosnan) searches for lost nuclear weapons in the former Soviet Union. The nuclear weapons have been stolen by Xenia Anatop (Famke Janssen) and her colleagues. Bond teams up with Natalya (Izabella Scorupco), a

Russian computer programmer, to find the weapons and kill Xenia. Xenia kills a wealthy lover and several unidentified men

Sleeping with the Enemy: Laura (Julia Roberts) is trapped in an abusive marriage and eventually escapes to the Midwest, her husband in pursuit. She meets a new man, Ben (Kevin Anderson), who persuades her to love again. Laura's husband (Patrick Bergin) shows up and Laura is forced to kill her husband.

I established a few secondary criteria after the major selection was complete.

These criteria further ensure a consistent sample:

- 1) The killing must be on-screen (not occurring before the movie starts, after it ends, or in a hypothetical scene). That is, the killing could not just be referenced by another character; the audience had to see the killing. Otherwise, the killing cannot be investigated as a visual rhetorical symbol (see Tuchman 1978 for importance of visual imagery in framing analysis).
- 2) The victim must be human (using physiological characteristics and geography as definitions of humanity). This eliminates all of the *Alien* movies. While Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) has been lauded as a pioneer exploration into powerful, heroic film heroines, I felt that the multi-cultural implications of extraterrestrial death would be too complicated to analyze in this paper.
- 3) The victim must actually die. This eliminates two types of films. First, a young, female character bites people in *Interview with a Vampire*. These victims become vampires. And while cultural responses to vampires are key in understanding social perspectives on dangerous women (Dijkstra 1996), the "undead" is a different symbol,

requiring another framework, than the “dead.” Therefore, vampire attacks and “killings” are omitted. Second, in several movies, we see women shoot at people, we see blood, but we never see individuals die. The rhetorical imagery of suggestion and implication is an interesting field for study, but not consistent with the objectives of this paper. Therefore, movies in which women commit violent acts but death is never certified are also omitted.

After watching each film several times and taking detailed notes, I then applied Naylor’s categories. For example, within each of the definitions of the problem, I asked if these definitions reflect the Madonna/whore frame, the sexual passion frame, the reproduction and madness frame, etc. If a specific category failed to fit any of these frames, I then formulated a new frame in which this category fit. Once I identified each frame, I drew some connections between both the frame and its historical framework and between the frame and tentative “real life” implications or manifestations. Most important to this paper, however, is the initial investigation of films for contemporary, powerful frames. When we understand why certain images are comfortable and salient in popular culture, we can begin to explore the ways in which these frames affect policy decisions.

CHAPTER FOUR ANALYSIS

As hooks (1996) states,

A film may have incredibly revolutionary standpoints merged with conservative ones. This mingling of standpoints is often what makes it hard for audiences to critically 'read' the overall filmic narrative . . . The fact that some folks may attend films as 'resisting spectators' does not really change the reality that most of us, no matter how sophisticated our strategies of critique and intervention, are usually seduced, at least for a time, by the images we see on the screen (3).

We read movies at many levels, often without being aware of it. The previous chapters have established the power of both films and news media. Using Entmann's model and Naylor's contributions to media analysis, I will investigate the ways in which film messages frame, and therefore create, our prototypes of female killers. In this chapter, I will use Entmann's model as a four-part organizational framework, investigating (in order) the definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations and treatment recommendations for the female killers in my selection of films. For each section, I will look to Naylor's prototypes for rudimentary frames. However, Naylor constructed her six prototypes to explain media coverage of real female killers. Therefore, in an analysis of fictional female killers, we cannot uncritically appeal to her analysis. As a result, although I will use Naylor's work to inform the frames I locate, I will include additional analytical categories to deal with film prototypes that fail to fit into Naylor's categories.

Problems

To understand this frame more clearly, we must observe the two acting levels of narrative and audience. Each film contains two narratives: the one the audience understands and the one the characters understand. Therefore, there are two audiences for a given action or plot twist: the theater audience and the film characters. Because the audience often sees scenes to which the characters are not privileged and, conversely, the characters have knowledge that has supposedly occurred in scenes to which the audience is not privileged, the audience and the characters may come to different conclusions about who commits evil actions and who commits good actions. For example, someone whom we know to be a hero may appear to the characters in the film to be a villain or social threat. This occurs in films such as *Terminator Two*, in which Sarah is imprisoned for murder, although she committed this crime with a noble motive – to save the world from artificial intelligence. My descriptions of narrative and character problems involve those identified by the characters in the film and by the theatre audience.

Character Problems

Frame analysis requires that the scholar analyze the overall text. However, because of my focus on the female killer in each movie and the ways in which film portrays them, I will investigate specifically the character problems presented in each female killer. These problems, like the narrative problems, are presented through the actions and words of the female killer as well as the action and words of other characters in response to the female killer. On occasion, as suggested above, the audience and the characters may perceive the female killer differently; I will include both perspectives in

this section of the analysis. I have established six separate components to the character aspect of the “problem” frame. They are: brutality, lack of mothering, captivity, instability, deception, promiscuity, and preservation. Many women manifest more than one “problem.” Many of these themes, especially brutality, lack of mothering, deception, and promiscuity, hint at society’s need to control women, often at the cost of these women’s lives. That these women are insurgent is usually established at the beginning of the film and drives the actions of the other characters.

Brutality

Each female killer is guilty of (of course) killing. Each woman kills someone during the film and each film attempts to justify or explain this killing. However, in certain characters, the killing becomes a character problem or flaw, while in others, represents strength, courage and autonomy. In five films, *Single White Female*, *Goldeneye*, *Basic Instinct*, *Terminator Two* and *Natural Born Killers*, the killing is the prominent feature in the female killer’s character, and encourages us to reject her perspective as sadistic. Brutality describes bloody, violent and non-defensible killing. In *Single White Female*, Heddy’s violent and obsessive character is established slowly. She first becomes angry when Ally, her new roommate, doesn’t come home one night. She then kills Buddy, her puppy, to indict her rival Sam, Ally’s boyfriend. She threatens the life of Ally’s client when he tries to rape her, she assaults Ally’s best friend, and she finally kills Sam. This pattern identifies Heddy as a violent young woman for whom we feel little sympathy. In *Goldeneye*, Xenia Anatop acts as the henchwoman for the

Russian mafia, and so her propensity and ability to kill define her entire character. The killing is immoral (as opposed to forgivable, as in the case of self-defense) primarily because she kills for the wrong ideology – for former Soviets and in conflict with Bond, the representative of righteousness. We rarely see her outside of this role – she appears only when someone is to be seduced and killed. In *Basic Instinct* and *Natural Born Killers*, with killers Katherine and Mallory, their position in respect to the law suggests that the killing is unjustifiable and that Katherine and Mallory are evil. In fact, a Native American man proclaims that he saw evil in a dream and it was Mallory (and Mickey). Mallory and Katherine are condemned throughout the films by the other characters. In *Terminator Two*, while the audience knows that Sarah kills to save the universe from a futuristic threat, the characters representing public authority (doctors, police, etc.) believe that she is dangerous – she has killed police officers and stabbed her psychologist with a pen. She is imprisoned/hospitalized in the introduction, and, once she escapes, these authority figures try to stop her. The characters believe that Sarah's killing is gratuitous, violent and non-defensible and therefore, brutal. If they did not feel the killing was brutal, chasing Sarah across the country is irrelevant.

Lack of Mothering

In several films, the female killer's character is problematized by her disinterest in mothering. How do we know that lack of mothering is indeed a problem? Intense moments in these films are often punctuated by statements or actions by the female killers that threaten or reject children. And each film climaxes with an investigation of

and resolution to the mothering issue. Sarah (*Terminator Two*) has a twelve-year-old son, John, whose father is a time traveler from the future. John lives in a foster home while Sarah is in a psychiatric hospital for killing police officers. When we meet John, he is skipping school, stealing money, and disrespecting his foster parents. He's been taught how to steal by Sarah, who (in his words) is "a complete psycho, a total loser." When he and 101 (Arnold Schwarzenegger) liberate her, she attacks John. "That was stupid. You're too important. You can't risk your life." When they finally find somewhere safe to hide and rest, she drives off without John, presumably because she doesn't want to risk his life. He interprets it as another rejection. This quality is highlighted twice: first, by the presentation of mother-like characters – a frustrated but concerned foster mother and the family of a scientist, and second, by a scene in which Sarah watches herself (in curly hair and a flowered dress, playing with children) in a park. We see her split image, and then watch the mother-image explode into flames, signaling Sarah's surrender of the traditional mother role. Only toward the end of the film, during the violent climax, does she tell John that she loves him, and they drive away together. Samantha, in *Long Kiss Goodnight*, is a loving and involved mother until she transgresses to Charlie, a smoking, drinking, cursing, self-involved government agent who rejects her daughter. The mother in Samantha is compromised when she tries to teach her daughter to skate. The daughter falls and breaks her wrist. Samantha growls, "You will get up and you will skate across the lake. Stop being such a baby. Life is pain." At the climax of the film, however, we see her protect and subsequently return home with her daughter, to her more feminine, controllable side. She is finally pictured in a long, flowing, flowered covered dress with long, wavy hair, laughing in the sunset with her boyfriend and daughter, suggesting that

she has returned to her feminine role and that the problem has been resolved, the unfeminine (and unmotherly) has been made feminine and motherly. And in *Malice*, we first believe that Tracy is a loving young wife who works in a nursery and is eager to have children of her own. However, she sacrifices her ovaries and an unborn child in an insurance fraud scheme. We see a transformation in her character that climaxes in the end, when she tries to kill the child next door, a “little troll who is fucking up my life!” It is only with this crime that she is caught. Her criminal self, then, centers around the rejection of the mother-role.

Captivity

In several films, the female killers strain against physical and psychological captivity. Their character problems revolve around the need to escape or accept their captivity. Laura, in *Sleeping with the Enemy*, is confined by her abusive, sadistic, stalking, voyeuristic husband, Martin. She struggles against his physical abuse (he hits to keep her from leaving the house) and emotional abuse. While she lives with him, our impression of her captivity is further emphasized by the primary camera angle – we *are* Laura, we see the world at her level and at her inclination, which means that we are always looking *up* at Martin, we are threatened as he looks down at us. When she does escape, it is as if from a jail – she plans the escape, takes one bag, wears a wig, changes her name, erases traces of her departure, and refuses to become emotionally involved with anyone. Her world literally changes color during her escape: Martin’s house is blue and gray, often filmed in shadow, much like a jail scene. The place to which she escapes,

a small town in Iowa, is well-lit in yellows, reds and greens, a move from cool, impersonal colors to warm colors. However, although she is exonerated from her physical captivity, she continues to fight her emotional captivity throughout the film. Her fear of her husband follows her until she kills him in the final moments, finally gaining her freedom.

Laurie, in *Halloween 20*, faces the same type of captivity. In the previous *Halloween* films, Laurie has battled against her psychopathic younger brother Michael. Following the traditional patterns of the horror genre, she “kills” Michael at the end of each film, and he always returns for the sequel. Laurie is pursued in the same way Laura is – she (believes that she) has escaped from Michael, and yet is haunted by dreams and visions of him, which interfere with her personal life. She tries to escape with medicine, therapy and alcohol and tries to control the danger by placing tight restrictions on her son’s behavior. However, she cannot rest, she cannot escape until she kills Michael more permanently by decapitating him in the final moments. This ax blow is liberating, and ends the film and the series.

Maggie (*Point of No Return*) faces a more physical captivity, controlled as she is by the government which has made her an involuntary secret agent. They threaten to kill her if she leaves. Maggie’s missions are violent and gruesome enough to convince her that the threat is not an idle one, and so she remains in her job, unable to disappear and unable to connect meaningfully with anyone. To escape, she must fake her own death and abandon the man she loves. And Thelma and Louise (*Thelma and Louise*) both live in emotional and physical captivity, constrained by an abusive husband and an unresolved rape. They escape in several ways – they physically remove themselves by

driving away from the source, emotionally remove themselves by killing another potential rapist, and literally remove themselves by sacrificing themselves. Materially they cannot escape from their limitations and yet symbolically (as the car flies off the edge of the Grand Canyon) they find ultimate release.

In *Long Kiss Goodnight*, Samantha lives an enigmatic existence, held captive by her amnesia and ensuing lack of identity. She embarks on a pursuit for her true existence, which is not resolved when she discovers who she was – a secret agent. In fact, when she discovers her other self, Charlie, she remains captive, held there by her lack of resolution between negative self (the bullets, the CIA form, the guns, and the knife shown in photo negative during the credits) and positive self; between the material, represented by her daughter, her home and her man, and the incorporeal, represented by the flashbacks she has to her former life. The truth (and Samantha's existential captivity) is uncovered only at the end of the movie, when she rejects her previous existence and returns to her daughter and boyfriend, suggesting that her real and only identity is as mother and wife.

Finally, in *Scream I*, Sidney is held captive by her mother's memory and death, and searches for a way to release/escape these fears and memories. Sidney's mother (Sidney thinks) was raped and killed the year before, and Sidney testified at the trial that put Cotton Mather, the suspect, in jail. Because of this trauma, Sidney cannot tolerate a sexual relationship with her boyfriend and feels fearful and threatened every day. She works informally toward resolving these issues until the murders begin, at which point she pulls back. She eventually kills her boyfriend, the murderer, whom she discovers had also killed her mother. This leads (in *Scream II*) to her continuing insecurity and guardedness, emphasized by her dark clothes and juxtaposition with gregarious and

brightly dressed sorority girls. She relates poorly to her new boyfriend, she is uncomfortable at college parties, and she continues to fear for her life. Just when we think she has ceased searching for an escape and begun to bond emotionally with her boyfriend and roommate, they're both killed, and Sidney begins a new formula – instead of running from the killer, she begins to search for him/her, thus resolving the 'escape' component.

Instability

While the "captivity" component suggests that the female killers face a limitation placed on them by others, the characters who fight emotional instability fight aspects of themselves. Four female killers fit the "instability" component. Laura searches for a positive emotional relationship after her abusive husband. We see her connect with Ben, a gentle young man who lives next door, and then reject him when he asks too many questions. She re-establishes a connection at a town parade, and rejects him when he begins to kiss her. She rejects him, accepts him, rejects him, and finally accepts him during the final scene, symbolically and literally abolishing her unstable relationship with Martin and creating (what we believe will be) a stable relationship with Ben.

Mickey and Mallory each experience an unstable childhood, which we see in a series of clips. In a sit-com-esque scene, complete with laugh track, we meet Mallory's sexually and emotionally abusive father and insubstantial mother. In a separate black-and-white clip, we see Mickey's father abuse his wife and neglect his son and finally commit suicide. The abused Mallory and the neglected Mickey escape together and

create a bizarre and strangely romantic relationship, consecrating it with a blood rite over a bridge. While the sadistic murder spree may not represent normative stability, it creates a sufficient stability for Mickey and Mallory. Still searching for stability in the last scene, however, Mallory tells the camera that they just want to be left alone, they want to have children, her first real plea for traditional safety. Mallory's instability motivates her search for stability, and this search leads her to kill. Instability, then, is a driving problem in the film.

In *Single White Female*, Heddy's unstable psychological state leads her to create an emotional, psychosexual attachment to Ally, a beautiful young businesswoman with an apartment and a fiancé. Ally rejects the friendship when Heddy becomes her voyeur, her imitator, and finally assumes Ally's identity, which leads to Heddy's lethal attack on Ally's boyfriend Sam. Throughout the film, Heddy's progressive psychosis suggests a need to become a part of someone else, a need to subsume another's stability. Ally kills Heddy when Heddy tries to control and possess Ally completely by killing her.

Ally, however, is also unstable – she has no “backbone.” Early in the film, we find that Sam is cheating on Ally with his ex-wife. Ally breaks off the relationship and takes steps to assure autonomy – she refuses to speak with him when he calls, moves his possessions out, and acquires a roommate. However, when she finally speaks to him, she relinquishes her resolve and asks him to move back. Throughout the rest of the film, Ally struggles with trust issues about Sam but never discusses them with him; we know only because we see her face when Sam talks to Heddy. She is clearly jealous or concerned. Heddy eventually uses this insecurity to trap Ally.

At the end of *Scream II*, we find that one of the killers is Debbie, the mother of one of *Scream I*'s killers. By her own testimony during the film's climax, upset by her son's death and searching for revenge, she tracks and tries to kill Sidney, who killed her son. This instability hints at Naylor's category of reproductive instability, wherein the child itself, and the way in which the mother relates to the child, causes psychosis. Grief we can understand, but arranging a complex and long-term project designed to kill someone else's child we cannot. Additionally, her logic is blurred by her relationship to her son. She has blocked out the fact that Billy killed five or six innocent people in the first movie and intended to kill more; her inability to recognize reality too suggests that she is mentally unstable.

Finally, in *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, Payton demonstrates mental instability – after losing her husband and child, she seeks revenge for their deaths by insinuating herself into Claire's (the woman bringing sexual assault charges against Payton's husband) life. While this action suggests a need for vengeance, as the film progresses, Payton demonstrates a schizophrenic personality. She is usually gentle, but has moments of anger and violence. She becomes mean and angry when confronted with people who irritate her or get in her way. For example, Solomon, the handyman, accidentally gets some paint on her cuff. Solomon is gentle and friendly and apologizes immediately and yet Payton pins him with a glare that would quell the toughest handyman. She kills Maureen, Claire's sister-in-law, after Maureen discovers Payton's true identity. She tries to kill Michael and Claire. But most tellingly, she calls their children "hers," suggesting that she has lost touch with reality, that she truly thinks she is the parent. These actions, as a whole, suggest that instability is Payton's problem.

Deception

In four films, the female killer's character problem is her deceitfulness, her deception of other, righteous characters. However, as Naylor suggests, in being the ultimate, seductive woman, the woman maintains an inherent flaw, a flaw that initiates and drives the movie, *a la* Eve. Tracy (*Malice*) uses her husband's trust and honesty to steal millions of dollars from an insurance company. We learn, when Andy visits her mother (who Tracy has said is dead), that Tracy has fabricated her entire existence, her personality, her love and her motives. Not only is she then established as an antagonist, she destroys her husband's ingenuousness, transforming him into an untrusting and strategizing character. Tracy's deceit leads her to fraud and eventually murder, whereupon the police arrest her.

Payton (*Hand that Rocks the Cradle*) loses her husband and child. She fights a personal demon, a sense of loss and need for revenge, making her emotionally unstable. She passes herself off as a nanny to undermine Claire, the lead defendant in a sexual assault case against Payton's late husband. She lies about her history, her experience and her motives to gain a position in Claire's house, and then uses her leverage to befriend Claire's daughter and try to seduce Claire's husband Michael. She attempts finally to secure Claire's identity, to become the mother in the house. Payton eventually tries to leave with the children, claiming they're hers. She has underestimated her domination, however, and Claire regains her family by killing Payton.

In *Mission: Impossible*, Claire (part of Ethan's secret agent team and the beautiful wife of his corrupt supervisor) convinces Ethan that she is also a victim of the

government's scheme to sell information to foreign terrorists. Seduced by her apparent sincerity and beauty, Ethan accepts her into his plan to regain his security until he guesses that she was part of the initial plot, a partner in the terrorist sales. Her husband betrays her and kills her in the final moments of the film.

Basic Instinct provides a variable to these patterns. Katherine (Sharon Stone) is beautiful and sexy and appears available. However, she intentionally lies and misleads the police, especially Nick, on a number of occasions. She lies about her personal history (which hints at involvement with several mysterious deaths), she manipulates Nick by identifying his demons (drinking and a cocaine problem) and then emotionally blackmailing him with them, and she sexually intimidates the police, subtly encouraging them to direct the investigation away from her. The police recognize that she is manipulating them – Nick's best friend advises Nick to stay away from her – and yet she maintains a hypnotic power over them. She retains her intrigue as a subject because of her deceitfulness.

Promiscuity/Sexuality

In many of these films, the female killer uses her sexuality to gain and retain control over other characters. However, in two specific films, the female killer's sexuality is a fully developed problem, subversive and pervasive enough to become a weapon in the killing itself. First, in *Goldeneye*, Xenia Anatop, a corrupt Russian officer, squeezes men to death with her thighs. An unusual weapon, yes, but also a reflection on her perverse sexuality. She seduces men with her fast cars, her overt sexuality, and her

military power, and then, in the middle of rough sex, she suffocates them – the realization of 19th century fears about female sexuality. Xenia uses the word “pleasure” several times, looking through her eyelashes and letting the word roll off her tongue, each time in reference to her ability to squeeze men to death, creating (at least) a semantic connection between her sexuality and death.

Basic Instinct presents a similar connection in the female killer’s character. In the opening scene, a candle-lit bedroom, a man and a woman are involved in rough intercourse. We see the woman tie the man’s hands to the bedposts with a white scarf, and then stab him repeatedly with an ice pick. The scene then changes to the following morning, with police officers investigating the murder. Nick draws a connection between the killer and Katherine, a writer whose latest work included killing a man with an ice pick. Immediately, Katherine’s sexuality becomes synonymous with murder, and any flirtation suggests potential death. That this is the central problem in *Basic Instinct* is underlined by the most famous scene, often (unfortunately) dubbed the “beaver” scene. In a scene highlighted by gray and white, Katherine is posed in the interrogation room surrounded by ten male detectives. She is on the stage, they are in chairs (amphitheater style), so they sit literally above her and also outnumber her. However, she sleekly avoids answering questions by crossing and uncrossing her legs, betraying her lack of underwear. The male detectives, contemptuous when she is absent, sit dumbfounded and sweating in the room as Katherine ends the interrogation and leaves. Because Katherine is very sexual (and has at least two lovers), her entire character is problematized.

In several other films, the female killer’s sexuality is problematic in itself – the female killers are presented as homosexual or asexual. Although Heddy (*Single White*

Female) and Katherine (*Basic Instinct*) have heterosexual encounters during the film, both also have scenes that suggest homosexuality – Heddy undresses several times in front of Ally, and spies on Ally in bed with Sam; subsequently Ally catches her masturbating loudly with the door open. Ally is upset by this, and is clearly uncomfortable with Heddy's erotic attention. Katherine flaunts her girlfriend Roxy, which compromises her situation with Nick, her heterosexual lover. We watch Nick watch Katherine and Roxy and feel his desire and anger at being thwarted. In fact, he pursues Katherine more desperately each time he sees her with Roxy, and this sexuality is what holds the power over Nick and provides an erotic drive for the film. He eventually exonerates Katherine, not because he believes her innocent but because she represents the (Eden) apple for him, her bisexuality holding a challenge to or mastery over him.

The first few shots of Sarah (*Terminator Two*) emphasize her unfeminine biceps, her thin hips, her lack of make-up, her unstyled hair. Later in the film, she dons a black t-shirt, black pants and a well-supplied ammunition belt. These appearance cues suggest a non-woman, a woman who looks like a man, a woman who kills like a man, a woman who mothers like a man. Charlie (*Long Kiss Goodnight*) cuts off her hair, wipes off her soft, feminine make-up, exchanges her dress for black pants and a jacket, and discards her purse for a machine gun, again suggesting the elimination of the woman's gender characteristics in favor of a man's courage and strength. The photo montage during the film's opening credits strengthens this suggestion, as we watch tubes of lipstick on a dressing table transform themselves into bullets.

Preservation

The central problem for several female killers is simple physical jeopardy. In other words, the women have the need to protect or preserve life. They kill to do so. These women include Laura (*Sleeping with the Enemy*), Claire (*Hand That Rocks the Cradle*), Sidney (*Scream I, II*), Gail (*Scream I*), Laurie (*Halloween 20*), Ally (*Single White Female*), Samantha (*Long Kiss Goodnight*), Clarise (*Silence of the Lambs*), and Sarah (*Terminator Two*). In each of these scenarios, the woman's life or the life of someone else is in danger and she kills the person who threatens the life. In each, this struggle drives the plot.

Causes

Entman's model next requires an investigation of causes; in other words, the text suggests causality for the problems described above, the scholar must identify and describe these causes. In this section, following the organization set out above, I will describe the causes of these problems as suggested by the text. I will examine the female killers' causes.

Causes

Following the pattern established above, I will describe the causes behind the problems posed by the female killers. Because film plots are complex, and because the characters are also complex, each female killer's problem may have more than one cause.

These causes may also be subtle or cryptic, suggested by a single line, camera angle or lighting arrangement.

Brutality

What causes (or motivates) brutal actions by these film characters? In the brutality component of the frame, films establish seven causes: psychosis, jealousy, abnormal sexuality, greed, heroism, abuse, and media. *Single White Female* suggests two causes for Heddy's brutality. The first is simple mental illness. Heddy, a voyeur, a dog killer, an obsessive compulsive, seems to be crazy, and we learn that the craziness stems from Heddy's belief that she killed her twin sister when she was ten. However, the film suggests a more subtle cause. Ally and Heddy represent a duality – Ally is the pretty, successful, easy-going one, Heddy is the dark, moody, ineffectual one. This is a fairly common pattern for films with two women; if not the Madonna and the whore, at least the “good” witch and the “bad” witch. In this pattern, the dark woman craves what the pretty woman has, often setting up a pattern of jealousy and nefarious attempts by one to obtain what the other has . . . Disney's *Snow White* is an excellent example. *Single White Female* alludes to this; Heddy covets not only Ally's clothes, job, personality and apartment, but Ally herself, going so far as to eliminate any rival for Ally's affection. This need to possess Ally is portrayed not as a mental illness but as a pitiable social illness – jealousy -- which happens when little girls turn out *not* to be Cinderella. They must deviate to gain the social advantages held by attractive women.

Because Xenia Anatop's (*Goldeneye*) character is not thoroughly developed, the film spends little time suggesting a cause for her brutal actions. However, because she uses the word "pleasure" several times in reference to killing, uses her sexuality to lure men to places where she can kill them, and often kills them during sexual encounters, the film implies that her tendency to brutality stems from a sexual fetish, necrophilia.

In *Basic Instinct*, the police assume throughout the movie that Katherine is the "ice pick" killer, and supply us with two possible motives or causes. The first is greed – Nick discovers that her life has a tendency to follow her novels, and her most recent book depicts a woman who kills a man with an ice pick. Nick therefore assumes that Katherine kills to gather research for her popular novels. However, because the movie does focus on Katherine's aberrant sexuality, especially her obsession with using white silk scarves to immobilize her sexual partners, the film does imply that Katherine's sexuality has a necrophiliac angle, that she kills during orgasm to heighten the sensation. These motives are never really resolved.

As the film's audience, we know that Sarah (*Terminator Two*) kills for two reasons. First, she kills people that obstruct her mission, to stop machines from initiating World War III. Second, she kills people (and machines) that stalk her son, the future leader of rebel forces in the machines' takeover. However, as I mentioned above, often the film's characters perceive problems differently than the audience does. Therefore, while the audience sees Sarah's motivation as above, the film's characters (especially the doctors and the police) believe that Sarah kills because she is delusional, imagining an absurd futuristic war and machines that chase her son. Her psychiatrist says as much,

refusing to release her although she has learned to say that her “delusions” are dreams.

He mutters facetiously into the camera, “Model citizen.”

Finally, *Natural Born Killers* establishes several, interdependent causes for her brutal behavior. While several quick images, along with Mickey’s statement, “I’m just a natural born killer!” posit determinism, or an inborn evil (secularly defined as psychosis), as the cause for brutality, the film as a whole suggests that the causes of Mallory’s brutality are more abstract. Inborn evil is insufficient. First, and most poignant, Mallory is traumatized by verbal, physical and sexual abuse in her childhood. In a farcical sitcom scene, complete with soundtrack, we watch Mallory’s father hit her mother, call her a stupid bitch, and order Mallory to go take a shower; he’ll be up later (laugh track laughter). Mallory’s mother then says that the only reason Mallory has a younger brother is that her father drunkenly stumbled into Mom’s room instead of Mallory’s (laugh track laughter). The laugh track further intensifies the horror and isolation Mallory feels. Her first acts of brutality, then, are against her mother and father, which arguably free her and feed her need for retribution. However, the film does not suggest that trauma and neglect are the sole cause of Mallory’s brutality. Mallory does not commit these first acts alone – she acts only when Mickey arrives (covered in a bloody butcher’s apron) and suggests that they run away together, so Mickey’s influence is the second cause. In other words, Mallory kills because Mickey has corrupted her. Third, *Natural Born Killers* condemns the media as the cause of violence. Violent images, especially those of old Westerns, flash behind Mickey and Mallory throughout the film, intimating that film and television images subconsciously drive the pair. Further encouragement (to brutality) arises from the contemporary media, who follow Mickey and Mallory’s journey across the country,

pursued by fans with t-shirts that read “Murder Me, Mickey!” and magazines with Mickey and Mallory posed seductively on the covers with machine guns.

Lack of Mothering

Three films show female killers as unmotherly. While none suggest that these women lack the nurturing instinct, each implies that the unmotherly tendency has been superceded by another need. In other words, the cause of the unmotherly behavior is the women’s valuation of something that necessitates that they reject children. There are five causes for lack of mothering: preservation, rejection of normative femininity, and fixation on job, greed and fear.

Sarah (*Terminator Two*) rejects her son John and his emotional approaches. The audience sees Sarah in the hospital, where she asks for release because her son is in danger. This suggests that she does care about him. And yet, she continues to avoid emotional contact. The film establishes two causes for this repudiation. First, because we know about Sarah’s fears of the future and her concern for John’s place in it (as the rebel leader), we can assume that she avoids him to keep him safe. She is an escaped criminal, pursued by the law, and so in an unsafe position to act as a traditional mother. Second, she seems to be more concerned about John as a figurehead, a political figure, and less about him as her child. Therefore, the second cause for her lack of mothering is that she fails to relate to him mother-to-son and instead relates to him as a body guard. Nurturing is then sublimated to preservation, and she is more concerned for the future than she is for her son’s emotional development.

Second, Samantha/Charlie rejects her daughter Kate. While Samantha, she is loving and nurturing. She rejects Kate only when she has become Charlie, the secret agent. Kate was conceived while Charlie was scoping out the enemy, an accident. When Kate was born, Charlie had become Samantha, who then built her life around Kate. One cause of her lack of mothering, then, is Charlie's preoccupation with her job. Kate, as an accident, has no place in Charlie's globe-trotting life. Second, Charlie's personality as a whole is incommensurable with feminine characteristics, including nurturing children. Charlie rejects normative femininity entirely – she carries and uses a gun, wears short hair and very little make-up, she rescues herself, she is sexually aggressive, she enjoys blowing things up. Nurturing tendencies would be anomalous to her personality. Only when Charlie adopts some of Samantha's nurturing characteristics does she risk her life to save Kate. These two factors cause Charlie/Samantha to reject mothering.

Finally, in *Malice*, Tracy pretends to want children, and further pretends to be devastated when a medical problem and subsequent mistake force her to have her ovaries removed, although she was five weeks pregnant. However, we find that Tracy dislikes children, has no intention of having any, and is willing to sacrifice her unborn child for an insurance scheme. The most obvious cause is greed; her mother's testimony substantiates this. Tracy is so concerned with financial gain that she is willing to renounce motherhood for money. Second, she is willing to kill a child, the greatest sin for a woman (Naylor 1995), to hide her scheme. Therefore, the second cause of Tracy's lack of mothering behavior is fear. She is willing to kill a child (albeit, this time, not hers) to avoid getting caught.

Captivity

Several female killers' problems revolve around issues of material or emotional captivity. Their need to free themselves from captivity has six causes.

Laura is held emotionally and physically captive in her marriage. The film suggests two causes for this captivity. The first cause is the abusive nature of her husband. He limits her activity and her environment, controls her friends and companions, and physically punishes her when he perceives that she has over-stepped her boundaries. The second cause of her captivity is fear – her fear of and love for her husband. Like many battered women, she continues to love her husband despite the abuse. Even after she escapes the confines of the apartment, her fear of her husband continues to limit her activities, forcing her to monitor her surroundings, her friends, her love life, and her mother. She lives in fear of any sign of her husband, even checking her cupboards for indications that he has been there and rearranged her food. This captivity is almost as destructive as her physical captivity. However, there is a social element to her captivity, an endemic and injurious belief that wives stay with husbands, that husbands love wives. If this belief didn't exist, and if resources for women weren't arranged around this principle, Laura would not be captive at all.

Laurie (*Halloween 20*) is equally captive, but more by memory and fear. There are two causes for her captivity. First, she has tried to kill her psychotic brother several times (in previous movies) and he continues to return and kill her loved ones. The memory of her continued failure forces her to relive the previous movies in her dreams and in hallucinations she has throughout the film. This memory is integrated with fear, which is the second cause of her captivity. The fear forces Laurie into literal captivity;

she changes her name, her home, and her occupation to get away from Michael. She too monitors her environment, her son and her friends to ensure continued safety or reasonable warning should Michael return.

The government holds Maggie (*Point of No Return*) captive, simply by locking her in and threatening her life. The cause of Maggie's captivity is three-fold. First, she is put into physical captivity (a prison-like training camp for secret agents) because she committed a crime – taking drugs, along with being involved in the deaths of several officers – and, instead of killing her, the government controls her and uses her as an agent. The second cause of her captivity is fear. The government, via several people who work on her, threatens her with death should she ever escape. This threat controls her identity, her occupation, her location, her friends and her behavior, much as it does Laurie and Laura. Finally, Maggie's captivity is caused by loyalty. One government instructor (for lack of a better word) treats Maggie kindly, and she understands that he has vouched for her and is responsible for her actions. She maintains her captivity for his sake, only abandoning her new identity when she can escape without endangering his job or freedom.

Samantha faces a psychological captivity with two causes. The first is her amnesia, her lack of conscious identity. While she does not know who she is, she must live in a limited existence, establishing her life around the seven years she can remember. Second, her captivity is enforced by her inability to resolve the conceptual conflict between her new life (as mother and girlfriend, small-town community supporter) and the images of her old life, which force her to disavow her normative femininity and, most importantly, her daughter. These images include dreams about herself smoking on a dark

cliff, flashbacks to herself with knives and guns, compulsions to verbally abuse her daughter, and a sudden ability to break a deer's neck with her bare hands.

Sidney's emotional captivity has three causes. The first is grief – she is unable to respond to men sexually because of her mother's rape. This sexual captivity resounds throughout both *Scream I* and *Scream II*. The second is betrayal. She is unable to trust people, especially men to whom she relates romantically, because her high school boyfriend Billy was one of the killers in *Scream I*; he betrayed her trust. As she builds a relationship with her college boyfriends and friends, we see her suspicion. For example, in *Scream II*, her boyfriend Derrick chases “the Mask” into a house. Sidney finds him minutes later on the floor with a superficial wound on his arm. Because Billy faked a similar injury in *Scream II*, Sidney immediately withdraws from Derrick, asking him to stay away from her. Finally, Sidney's captivity is caused by simple fear, manifesting itself in two ways. First, in both movies, Sidney is unable to verify friends versus threats, and segregates herself from most of her friends, to save herself and to save them (if the killer were to come after her). Second, she lives by constantly pursuing an end, a solution, which restrains her from living at all. In both *Scream I* and *Scream II*, we see Sidney's life put on hold while the killers are on the loose. For example, in *Scream II*, she considers dropping out of the school play (where, ironically enough, she plays Troy's Cassandra, the prophetess who knew too much about impending danger) because of the killers.

Instability

While Naylor's study shows that women are often considered inherently unstable (because of menstruation, congenital hyper-emotionality, etc), the female killers in these films exhibit unstable behavior because of a clear-cut cause. We never doubt their reasons for acting crazy, nor do we ever believe that they were "born that way." Laura, Mallory, Heddy, Debbie, and Payton make a strong case for strain or social learning theory. At the beginning of each movie, we witness a chaotic moment – a scene, a flashback, or a single picture that suggests that the woman has lived through a negative experience. However, at this point, the audience must do a little interpretation. Using amateur psychology (picked up, I suspect, from pop psychology books and other television shows and films) the film encourages the audience to make the connection between the traumatic experience or lifestyle and the apparent instability, arguably removing from these women complete responsibility and liability for the killings they later commit. In the beginning of *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *Natural Born Killers*, Laura and Mallory experience emotional, physical and sexual abuse at the hands of their husband and father (respectively). The first film suggests that Laura's only killing (her husband) is motivated, then, by revenge or fear of future abuse. The film suggests that Mallory's gateway killing (her father) is motivated, also, by revenge or fear of future abuse. *Natural Born Killers* brings in an additional MO for Mallory, one we see again in *Single White Female*, *Scream II*, and *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*. *Natural Born Killers* establishes a more abstract causality for instability: previous trauma that leads to a degree of psychosis which motivates women to kill others. Often, these three causes – revenge, fear or trauma-induced psychosis – interact to explain female killers' instability. *Single*

White Female begins with a black and white shot of two young girls, twins, in a bathroom. Music plays in the background. We later find that Heddy's twin, the "pretty one," drowned the summer she was nine, which leads her to connect obsessively with other women to the point of killing them to maintain the connection. In *Scream I*, Sidney kills Debbie's son, one of the killers. This motivates Debbie to seek revenge in *Scream II*. However, her determination, her wild eyes, and her complex strategizing suggest a psychosis caused (as Debbie admits in the final scene) by her son's violent death. And at the beginning of *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, Payton's husband, convicted of sexual assault, kills himself, leaving Payton pregnant and without resources. We have an expectation of appropriate behavior: anger, grief and eventually adjustment. Instead, Payton seeks revenge, a decision motivated by her psychosis. In fact, when Claire and Michael understand the threat and ask Payton to leave, we see the psychosis overtly surface – she says, "I'll just get my baby and go," referring to Michael and Claire's son. In other words, she is unstable enough to believe that the children, for whom she has been caring, are hers. This too suggests reproductive madness – somehow losing her own child unsettled her mentally so much that she becomes criminally insane.

Deception

The category "instability" removes some culpability from the female killers, suggesting that they have no control, that they do not make a rational choice to kill. Deception, on the other hand, implicates women completely. The films suggest two causes for deception, neither of we may consider a traditional feminine trait, or even one

women should possess. Three films, *Malice*, *Mission: Impossible*, and *Basic Instinct* portray women as deceitful because of greed; that is, the female killers deceive in order to gain something else (usually money/success), just as it's originator Eve deceived Adam to gain knowledge. The fourth film, *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, suggests a different cause for deception. While Payton stands to make some cursory gains through deception, her chief motivation is revenge. After Claire testifies against Payton's husband in a sexual assault trial, Payton deceives Claire and Michael into believing she is a nanny who lost her husband and child to an accident. She uses this position to infiltrate their lives and to attempt to kill Claire.

Promiscuity/Sexuality

In these films, women's sexuality is problematic because it is perverted, according to social standards. Either women are overly sexual (more sexual than we think women should be) or they express a sexuality with which we are not comfortable; most often, they exhibit asexual or homosexual tendencies. While psychology continues to unravel female sexuality, these films provide unscientific causes.

At least one of these causes borders on the presumption that death and sexuality are intimately connected, a phenomenon we have detected in the years since Ted Bundy. Bundy's testimony provided initial evidence that killing may have a sexual or arousing function. Because we socially consider unusual female sexuality suspect anyway, women who allegedly kill people are assumed to have unusual sexual tendencies. After all, "sex crime" sells more newspapers (and tickets) than "crime." As a result, women

who are deviant in one way must be deviant in the other. One must stem from the other or both stem from the same cause. Within these films, we have several options as the “cause” of perverted sexuality.

First, as discussed above, two women conflate sexual arousal and killing. Anatop in *Goldeneye* and (allegedly) Katherine in *Basic Instinct* kill during sexual acts. So sexual arousal causes the urge to kill, or the possibility of killing turns them on, or the two are intertwined. Neither film provides any conclusive analysis to credit one or the other. However, because “normal” people do not kill or manifest a perverted sexuality, we could surmise that both are caused by a warped social instinct or a traumatic childhood event. Both women are reminiscent of Dijkstra’s thesis, that sexual involvement with beautiful, erotic women sucks the life out of man.

Hyper-sexuality seems to be one characteristic commensurate with killing; that is, women who kill during sexuality have many partners. The multiple partners, as well as the need to kill during the sex act, make the sexuality perverted. While several characters present problematic lesbian or masculine sexual tendencies, these tendencies do not necessarily appear at the same time as killing, and so we cannot assume that lesbianism or masculine sexuality have similar causes. In fact, it is difficult to identify any common cause for lesbianism or masculinism. In *Single White Female*, Heddy’s obsession with Ally borders on eroticism – she undresses in front of her, guards their time together like a lover, discusses their future together as if they were married. The film implies that Heddy’s instability and her lesbian eroticism stem from the same source, the loss of her twin sister when they were younger. In *Basic Instinct*, the film fails to overtly explain Katherine’s affection for her protective girlfriend Roxy, although it is clear that Roxy

causes a problem. The film situates Katherine's lesbianism as a problem by juxtaposing Nick's erotic relationship with Katherine and Roxy's erotic relationship with Katherine. The problem is caused by an understanding of appropriate psycho-sexual mores. Nick represents "normal" eroticism and Roxy represents "abnormal" eroticism; therefore, the tensions occur when "abnormal" eroticism attempts to subvert "normal" eroticism.

Two women express an abnormal sexuality through their clothing. Several scholars have noted that women who kill in film often demonstrate cross-dressing; they wear male clothes, have masculine names, or have short hair. In *Terminator Two* and *Long Kiss Goodnight*, Sarah and Charlie wear dark, close-fitting uniform/guerilla-type clothing, eschew long, flowing hair and have deep, abrupt voices. Personal choice and need cause the transvestitism. Both women choose tough, violent, masculine lifestyles, and these clothes are more thematically appropriate than more feminine clothing – masculine lifestyles equal masculine clothing. Moreover, these lifestyles require tough, dark, unrestrictive clothing. When Sarah or Charlie runs, jumps into moving cars, dives to the ground to avoid bullets, or hides from the antagonists, she needs clothes that allow her freedom of movement. The film does not suggest a deeper psychological or erotic cause for cross-dressing.

Preservation

Ironically, the category that covers most films remains the simplest to explain. The women who face the problem of preservation do so because someone is trying to kill them or someone whose welfare they protect, often someone they love. On one level, the

cause of the problem, then, is another dangerous person. However, behind each fight for preservation is another level of social, environmental or psychological stress that is the *true* cause of the problem. In *Sleeping with the Enemy*, *Single White Female*, *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, *Halloween H20*, and *Scream I and II*, the cause of the “need for preservation” is two-fold. First, each woman is pursued by an intimate acquaintance who has become dangerous because of 1) a psychological instability and 2) the personal relationship between the pursuer and the target. Second, the pursuit has become dangerous because of society’s inability to control certain people. For example, Laura (*Sleeping With the Enemy*) is in danger because society (the police) are unable or unwilling to interfere with romantic relationships. In *Single White Female*, Ally has to fight Heddy because Heddy has succeeded in evading or baffling the police.

In several films, the woman must fight against a corrupt system. In *Terminator Two*, *Long Kiss Goodnight*, and *Point of No Return*, Sarah, Samantha, and Maggie struggle to outrun computers and governmental agencies. The cause of the problems is corrupt institutions; that is, in *Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Point of No Return*, the institutions that should save Charlie and Maggie and the ones who are trying to kill them. In *Terminator Two*, Sarah fights against computers that were originally designed to help people but instead turn against them. This corruption drives her struggle.

Moral Evaluation

The third section of Entman’s framing model requires the researcher to uncover the inherent moral evaluations involved in the film’s problems. At the end of films, we

have feelings or inclinations toward a character or characters. We know who the “good guys” from the “bad guys” and we know this because of the way the film judges each character. These judgements often (but not always) become evident at the film’s conclusion when a character prevails or fails. A character that fails has been judged as unfavorable or bad. Following the pattern above, I will describe the moral judgements of each frame.

Brutality

Brutality seems to have an immediate, inherent moral evaluation. Physical violence is bad, illegal and socially undesirable. However, looking at movies such as *Diehard* and *Rambo*, there are situations in which movie-goers may forgive brutality in deference to a higher moral code or positive, desirable outcome. In these films, brutality is forgiven (evaluated positively) when the “bad guy” dies at the hands of the “good guy.” Brutality is evaluated negatively when the brutal character hurts or kills a “good guy.” And, perhaps most importantly, brutality receives a positive moral evaluation when used to promote a cause we consider just – freedom, public safety, national sovereignty, individual autonomy, or security of loved ones. For example, in *Diehard* and *Rambo*, the protagonists kill to ensure public safety and freedom, and so their killing is morally justified.

In *Single White Female* and *Goldeneye*, brutality is negatively morally evaluated. Each woman brutally kills, or tries to kill, several people. These women are the “bad guys.” We know that because the people they attack are the “good guys,” the

protagonists in the film, the characters searching for a socially-positive end to the plot problems. In *Single White Female*, Heddy attacks Ally, Sam and Ally's best friend Graham, three people who commit no morally reprehensible act in the film, three people who are just trying to exist, fall in love, and be successful. Heddy's brutality, as the symbolic barrier to these goals, is seen as negative. It is even seen as the outcome of insanity, an individual facet (while not Heddy's fault) also judged negative by the audience. Heddy outmaneuvers the police, the barers of social justice, her parents, who are portrayed as good, honest, worried people, and to an extent, Ally, the protagonist. She is stopped by the protagonist, the character representing "good," and her death, depicted as justice, is the final moral evaluation. *Goldeneye* outlines the moral evaluation of Xenia's brutality more succinctly. Xenia, beautiful and manipulative, works for the "bad guys," the ex-Soviets (who are predictably the "bad guys" in James Bond films). We know, from media and government rhetoric, as well as from previous James Bond-type films, that the Soviets are bad, so Xenia must be bad. However, Bond films have a history of excusing immoral or dangerous behavior in Soviet women when the women are beautiful. Often, these women are portrayed as the puppets of Soviet agencies or men and so are exonerated in the end. Xenia's immorality (negative moral evaluation) arises from her joy in brutality. She acts independently, she seeks out brutal acts, and she suggests that she really enjoys the brutality, even equates it to sexual pleasure. Justice is done when Bond and his partner kill Xenia.

In two films, brutality is positively evaluated. Brutal women in *Single White Female* and *Terminator Two* kill for the abstract causes mentioned above – to ensure safety of loved ones and individual and national autonomy and security. In *Single White*

Female, Ally kills Heddy after Heddy kills Ally's boyfriend and her best friend and attacks Ally herself. Sarah (*Terminator Two*) kills several police officers and brutally attacks T1000. While the attacks on the police officers retain sketchy moral value, Sarah's brutality is positively evaluated because she does it to save the world from impending threat of artificially-intelligent machine armies. In both cases, the women are alive and have been morally justified in their actions (they have not been arrested, killed, or forced into hiding).

One film suggests that moral evaluation of brutality is not always cut-and-dry. In *Natural Born Killers*, Mallory brutalizes dozens of characters, most of whom are not a threat to herself, her boyfriend, or the safety of the free world. Mallory is eventually captured and imprisoned. This would suggest that her brutality has been evaluated negatively. Collectively, we do not justify or excuse random acts of violence. However, Mallory emerges as a heroine by the end of the film – she escapes the prison, becomes a popular icon to teenagers, and with Mickey makes a statement against the tyranny of the media. As a result, her brutality is essentially validated. We “forgive” her for two reasons. First, we see images of her childhood: she is verbally and sexually abused by her father. She retaliates by killing him, her first murder. We accept that childhood abuse can generate violent activity, and so we blame the subsequent murders not on her but on her father. Second, Stone produced *Natural Born Killers* at a time in which American society was becoming increasingly apprehensive about violence in the media. We were worried because initial studies suggested that children who witness violence on television may be led to imitate it. During *Natural Born Killers*, violent television and movie images flash on the screen behind the scene's primary action, implying that these

images maintain a powerful place in Mickey and Mallory's psyches and influence their behaviors. So Mallory's brutality is justified also by the predominance of violent television in her life. Again, she is induced to brutalize, not because of a personal choice, but because of negative powers (over which she has no control) that manipulate and govern her behavior.

Lack of Mothering

While the moral evaluation of brutality is complex, the moral evaluation of lack of mothering is simple. In these films, no woman is ever justified in not exhibiting mothering instincts. Wood (1994) sums this up when she says (regarding Lindy Chamberlain, whose child was allegedly killed by dingoes in Australia) "[M]other-love, up to and including the point of (self-) sacrifice, is the most natural thing in the world. Here, the category natural stands in for fixed or immutable. A woman who doesn't love . . . [children] . . . must be mad and/or sick" (69). Wood argues that patriarchy does not allow for a fluid definition of women in regard to children; that is, women have one possible relationship with children, and when this is violated, the woman loses her standing as a woman and as a moral figure.

In *Malice*, Tracy's moral evaluation is linked implicitly to her relationship with children. She sacrifices her ability to have children to win an insurance settlement and, when this settlement is in jeopardy, she attempts to kill another child to hide her culpability. As she sneaks into the child's house, the police arrest her. *Malice's* conclusion suggests that not only is Tracy a criminal, she is almost inhuman. She gets

caught because she does not present the protective instincts toward children that most women have. Instead of valuing children and life above all, she willingly discards both in search of money. Rarely does an audience validate the pursuit of money over anything else, but audiences condemn characters especially when children or lives must be sacrificed in the pursuit of other goals. Tracy's duplicity extends even to the murder of children, the "last straw" so to speak. We evaluate negatively her lack of mothering behavior.

Samantha/Charlie's character (*Long Kiss Goodnight*) is a little more complicated. Samantha is a great mother, but when she becomes Charlie, she becomes cold and independent – she rejects her daughter, who was conceived by accident during an agency assignment. Charlie eventually kills the antagonists, stops a major government plot and uncovers her true identity, all of which would have resolved the plot problems, and yet the film does not conclude until Samantha/Charlie reconnects with her daughter and returns home to her "mother" role. The moral evaluation, then, is that Samantha/Charlie's life is not complete, correct or honorable until she accepts her true role (mother) and rejects her other lifestyle (secret government agent). Sarah (*Terminator Two*) faces a similar evaluation. Although she does sacrifice her life and freedom for her son's life, she does not relate to him like a mother. And although she successfully aborts the takeover of the world, we cannot accept her as a heroine until she begins to act like a mother and tells her son she loves him. The need to resurrect "mother" qualities suggests that her lack of mothering qualities is also found morally insufficient. We applaud the abstraction they each value over mothering – freedom – but still cannot overcome the negative valuation of mothering they exhibit. While Sarah and

Charlie maintain their positions as protagonist (that is, we still want them to triumph) while neglecting their mothering role, the fact that these inclinations must be subverted before their characters can be complete and triumphant proves that we evaluate a woman's worth based on her ability and willingness to mother.

Captivity

Laura (*Sleeping with the Enemy*), Laurie (*Halloween H20*), Maggie (*Point of No Return*), Samantha (*Long Kiss Goodnight*), Thelma and Louise (*Thelma and Louise*) and Sidney (*Scream I and II*) all face emotional or physical captivity, and in each case, the captivity is evaluated negatively. We are never told that the captivity is necessary or positive or that the woman has no right to try to flee the captivity. We are never told that the captivity signifies or upholds moralist values, or even that the captor is sane. In two cases, with Samantha and Maggie, a case can be made that the women brought the captivity on themselves – Samantha (as Charlie) chose the life of a career secret government operative and then chose to forget this part of her life, generating the stifling amnesia. Maggie ostensibly chose to take drugs and to get involved in a gang and, when the government compels her to work as a government-sponsored domestic terrorist in exchange for suspending her death sentence, we could argue that she deserves the outcome. Yet, the films both support the heroines' attempts to undermine their captivity and captors. The "happy ending" occurs when the women are free. Therefore, even their captivity has a negative moral evaluation.

Instability

Types of instability cannot be evaluated. Chronic or inherited mental illness, to which intention or choice cannot be assigned, is amoral. And yet, films and film characters do evaluate the actions that may be the outcome of instability. Other types of instability – those that come from free choice or individual failure – have clear moral evaluations.

The first standard for judging the moral evaluation of instability is intention or fault; the second is severity. For example, we ask first, as we do for captivity, did the unstable person do anything voluntarily that caused the instability? Did they use drugs, drink too much alcohol, become too greedy, allow themselves to be exploited, or commit any other action leading to instability in which they were wholly or partly culpable? And if the person is unstable through no fault of their own (hereditary mental illness, abuse, terror wrought by an outside source, etc), do they allow the instability to cause harm to others? While hereditary mental illness, for instance, may cause instability for which the individual is not directly responsible (freeing him or her from negative moral evaluation), the individual may still indulge in destructive, dangerous behavior for which we do hold them responsible. This would then result in a negative moral evaluation.

Two films fall into the first category, in which the character's instability occurs through no fault of her own and causes harm to no one but herself. Laura (*Sleeping with the Enemy*) and Sidney (*Scream I and II*) both exist in a state of emotional instability, afraid of their environment, their companions, and the future. Laura's sadistic husband causes her instability; the psychopathic killers brutalizing her friends cause Sidney's

instability. Neither woman is liable for her instability, which then vindicates her attempt to free it (i.e., Laura finally kills her husband to escape him and Sidney kills her stalkers).

Two films meet the second part of the criteria: the female killers are unstable through no fault of their own, yet their actions are so severe that they may still generate negative moral evaluations. Mallory (*Natural Born Killers*) and Heddy (*Single White Female*) suffer trauma-induced instability, which would suggest that they are not culpable for the actions instigated by the instability. However, Mallory kills dozens of people and Heddy kills one and terrorizes several more. Mallory is eventually captured; Heddy is killed. Despite our empathy for their problems, we cannot condone the behavior or the manifestation of the trauma. Therefore, Heddy's and Mallory's instability receives a negative moral evaluation.

Finally, in *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, we cannot understand or sanction Payton's behavior. While she does face trauma (her husband is convicted of sexual assault and kills himself), it does not seem to be insurmountable. And while the movie traces Payton's althought process through her decision to infiltrate Claire's life, and portrays a logical succession of ideas, it does not provide a defensible rationale. And we see her process into irrationality as a choice . . . other women have experienced fundamental betrayal and loss and have not chosen to kill. While the trauma is necessary to cause instability, it is not sufficient. Her instability, then, is evaluated negatively.

Deception

Deception is, inherently, a negative quality. We associate it with a rejection of basic values, such as honesty and benevolence. And for women, who should be unassuming and self-sacrificing, deception is archetypally antithetical. In each film in which a woman is deceptive, the woman carries three similar traits, all of which seem to be linked to deception and all of which are damning. First, each deceptive woman is beautiful, and tries to use this beauty to her advantage, notably by coercing men to violate social or legal codes for them. Second, each deceptive woman has materialistic concerns which override their passion or concern for the people in their lives; that is, these women care more for money or themselves than they care for the people who care for them. For example, while Nick cares for Katherine, Katherine cares more for her career, ultimately jettisoning Nick. Third, these women are always destroyed; they either lose things (or people) that are important to them or they lose their lives. In other words, these women are punished for using deception to augment or override the power (or lack of power) found in the traditional gender roles available to them. In this punishment lies the moral evaluation – this deception is bad; moreover, it is at the heart of the Judeo-Christian teachings suggesting that women are untrustworthy. Women have always been evaluated negatively for being deceptive. These women, too, receive a negative evaluation.

Promiscuity/Sexuality

For the five female killers who display promiscuity or an abnormal sexuality, the films provide little vindication. Xenia (*Goldeneye*) and Katherine (*Basic Instinct*) both

find their sexuality conflated with killing; that is, their promiscuity augments or assists their killing. Xenia kills men in the middle of sexual intercourse by squeezing them to death with their thighs. Katherine stabs men with ice picks at the moment of climax. The moral message is clear – promiscuous women are dangerous and this uncontrolled sexuality leads to the demise and annihilation of men. In both films, other characters indulge in surreptitious remarks, disgusted glances, and back-handed comments about these women, providing the women with no chance to retaliate and with no champions. Again, we see a clear moral message – any woman who is promiscuous deserves no second chance and no defense. Male characters especially seem to begrudge the power they know Xenia and Katherine have, as if their sexuality is antagonistic.

Sarah (*Terminator Two*), Heddy (*Single White Female*) and Charlie (*Long Kiss Goodnight*) display, primarily through their dress, a masculine sexuality. Their clothes are dark, inconspicuous, and particularly un-sexy and unfeminine. Heddy further evinces homosexual traits, seemingly falling in love and becoming obsessed with Ally, her roommate. Several theorists note the tendency of female killers in films to undergo a transformation in appearance. They “cross-dress,” as if the female self cannot kill but the transformed male self can. Charlie, in fact, is a mother and girlfriend when dressed in female clothes but is an international spy when dressed in male clothes. The films make moral evaluations of these clothes and the transgressive sexuality. In short, masculine clothes, when the characters’ actions reflect a positive purpose, can be forgiven.

Although Sarah’s clothes do not become more feminine, the camera ceases to specifically frame her appearance as she becomes a more complete symbol of motherhood. For example, during the first half of the film, the camera would provide close-ups, without

action or dialogue, on her pants, her colloquial “wife-beater” t-shirts, and her boots. As she begins to relate more affectionately to her son John, these close-ups disappear.

The film evaluates Heddy negatively. As her motives become more and more suspicious, we see a strange gender inconsistency. Heddy seems to take on female gender characteristics (and clothing) only when she is absorbing Ally's identity. When she is playing the romantic corollary to Ally, she seems more masculine and again adopts the dark, shapeless clothing. The transvestitism, then, is in reverse, which we do not accept any more than we take a male character seriously dressed in women's clothes. And as Heddy's romantic/obsessive interest in Ally becomes manifest, Heddy seems to fall more deeply into narcissism and schizophrenia, as lesbian characters often do. Ultimately, Heddy is evaluated and punished for her transvestitism and lesbianism – Ally kills her.

Preservation

Normative gender roles, as the bulk of criminality and film theory shows, allow women to virtuously kill in one scenario – women may kill to protect their children or loved ones and, occasionally, themselves. Claire (*Hand That Rocks the Cradle*), Sidney (*Scream I and II*), Laurie (*Halloween H20*), Ally (*Single White Female*), Samantha (*Long Kiss Goodnight*), Clarise (*Silence of the Lambs*) and Sarah (*Terminator Two*) all kill to protect themselves, their children, their families, or (in the case of Clarise) to protect society. Interestingly, these women do not plot to kill, and never kill for abstract, ideological principles – because the antagonist is a bad person, because they are involved

with the “wrong side,” etc. Even when the antagonist has killed friends and family, these women kill them only when the danger is immediate, which fulfills the legal definition of self-defense and mitigates any negative moral evaluation of their actions. Even when FBI agent Clarise kills serial killer Buffalo Bill, she does not enter his house with the intention to kill. She only kills him when he attacks her. And Sarah, who ostensibly is fighting to save the free world (an abstract principle), states again and again that she is trying to save her son. Each of these women is rewarded at the end of the film, either by their lives returning to normal, their families again secure, or a promotion. They are never evaluated negatively.

Treatment Recommendations

The final component to Entman’s model requires the scholar to identify the treatment suggestions for each problem. Because filmmakers are not in the business of analyzing solutions to problems, I identify treatment recommendations based on the conclusion of the film. With the exceptions of *theatre of the absurd* and the occasional French film, most popular films seek to resolve the problems in the most conclusive way possible, to wrap-up all of the loose ends presented in the plot. And they rarely take epilogue time to investigate the outcomes of solutions. So treatment suggestions, then, are whatever is done to conclude or resolve the plot problems successfully. In this section, I will describe the treatment recommendations for each problem.

Brutality

In the films in which brutality is the female killer's central problem, the plot line provides three ways to treat brutality. The first suggests that some women cannot be rehabilitated, that they are so cruel that elimination is the only way to deal with them. The protagonists eventually execute Xenia (Goldeneye) and Heddy (Single White Female), which successfully resolves the problems these women cause. The second suggests that some brutal female killers may have a moral imperative that drives them; these women do not necessarily need to be executed, just removed from society. In *Terminator Two* and *Natural Born Killers*, social response, represented by the police, vacillates between arresting and executing the women. However, at times films present a treatment that does not work. In doing so, they suggest other treatments that might have worked. In *Terminator Two* and *Natural Born Killers*, the women escape from prison and continue to kill. For Mallory (*Natural Born Killers*), this suggests that execution would have been a better treatment. For Sarah, however, we are left in that curious gap between what the characters in the film perceive and what the audience perceives. Because we know that Sarah is fighting for the survival of the race, we disagree with the treatment recommendation suggested by the film's characters. Therefore, the film suggests that the best treatment option is to believe the madmen and children, so to speak. We know that Sarah's brutality would end if the police believed her and assisted her in her fight, and so this is the best treatment. The third treatment recommendation appears in *Basic Instinct*, where the film suggests that locking up the brutal woman is necessary. Katherine seductively persuades Nick not to arrest her and, as we see in the final scene, this leaves a killer free to kill as she pleases. Although the film's characters fail to

correctly treat the problem of brutality, the film leaves no doubt as to what treatment would be effective.

Lack of Mothering

The lack of mothering problem presents two possible directions for resolution. First, *Malice* suggests that there is no correction for lack of mothering. The woman who refuses to mother can never be converted or corrected by socialization, force or therapy; she must ultimately be arrested and convicted before she does any additional damage or further slips into her gender contradictions. Therefore, the treatment recommendation is simply to lock up the offending woman. Second, *Terminator Two* and *Long Kiss Goodnight* suggest that, if lack of mothering can be changed, the woman's child is the only power that will impel the change. Continual contact with the child will eventually force the woman to recognize and attain the appropriate mothering instincts. Sarah's son and Samantha's daughter appeal to the women to love them, to come home, to be a mother. The two women, at the conclusion of the film, regain their mothering abilities. After the woman generate this attachment, the children reinforce it by saving their mothers' lives.

Captivity

The treatment recommendations for captivity are two-fold. The women facing the captivity problem are held captive by three forces: other people, large-scale corruption,

and personal dilemmas, specifically amnesia. First, the women must undergo a process of self-actualization, during which they establish that they are indeed held captive. Second, they go through a metamorphosis, during which they excise the captor or the restricting force. During this second phase, we see a variety of treatment options, usually tried as a process or series of three steps. First, she tries to reason with her captor to stop the captivity (stopping beating her, tell her who she is, etc.) Second, she tries to escape, to literally or figuratively run away. Figuratively, because Samantha cannot “escape” her amnesia, but she can try to forget about it. Third, the woman turns on her captor, eliminating the captor to eliminate the captivity. In one case, a woman is able to stop after the second step. Maggie (*Point of No Return*) “disappears” herself, or fakes her own death, to free herself from the government’s control. But in every other case, the women are forced to kill their captors. The treatment recommendation for captivity, then, is to first try to explain and/or escape. However, these films clearly show that the most effective treatment for captivity is to kill your captor(s). *Halloween H20* shows this most clearly: in the first handful of *Halloween* films, Laurie tries to run away from Michael, her psychopathic younger brother. He always returns, so in this film Laurie finally decapitates him. We know he will not return, and Laurie is free.

Instability

The treatment recommendations for instability are more implicit. First, as we see the outcomes of allowing unstable people (i.e. Heddy, Martin, Mallory, Mickey and Debbie, and Payton) freedom, the film implies that, to resolve the problems, unstable

people should be removed from society. However, characters in films rarely have his type of foresight. In lieu of this, unstable people (and people who cause instability in others' lives) must be stopped – either arrested or killed. And in the cases in which unstable people are arrested, we are told, they escape. This leaves us with one really reliable treatment recommendation – killing the unstable person or killing the person who causes the instability. For example, in *Single White Female*, the only way to dispatch Heddy is to kill her; *Scream I and II*, *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, and *Natural Born Killers* possess the same treatment recommendation. In *Sleeping with the Enemy*, Martin makes Laura's life tenuous, and the only way to resolve this, too, is to kill Martin.

Deception

Deception, as a plot problem, relies on Judeo-Christian notions of woman as deceptive and scheming and, therefore, immoral. In men, the same characteristic might be considered “clever” and be seen as an asset. By founding this characteristic on gender archetypes, films must base the treatment recommendation on archetypes as well. If women are deceptive (and this is a problem) then they can be treated (or stopped) by more clever men or by virtuous women, women who manage to be non-deceptive. While the deceptive woman is usually committing illegal actions, she is never ultimately stopped by the police but instead revealed by men or chaste, virtuous women who uncover and stop their deception. The treatment recommendation for deception, then, is to bring “good” against “evil”; to match her with her controlling complement – a man or a virtuous woman.

Promiscuity/Sexuality

The promiscuity piece stems from a religious background as well. And, presented as a problem, it requires similar treatment. In the five films that present promiscuity or sexuality as a problem, filmmakers provide two possible solutions. First, when the promiscuity is so prominent that it becomes a danger to others, the only possible solution is to eliminate the woman, suggesting that the sexual woman is an uncontrollable, socially-threatening force. Xenia (*Goldeneye*) must be killed by Bond, after even Bond's powerful sexuality fails to control her. Heddy (*Single White Female*) must be killed by Ally when her homosexual interest in Ally borders on violent obsession. Faced with Katherine (*Basic Instinct*), whose sexuality helps her kill men, Nick eliminates Katherine by engaging her with his own sexuality; in other words, he draws her into a monogamous sexual relationship which inhibits her from using her sexuality dangerously on anyone but him. We are led to believe that Nick is *so* good in bed that she chooses not to kill him, as we see in the last scene when they are in bed and Katherine leans over the bed to grab the ice pick lying there. She decides against it and rolls back into Nick's arms. Second, problematic sexuality (signified here by transvestitism) can be treated with an opposing force as well. Sarah (*Terminator Two*) and Charlie (*Long Kiss Goodnight*), manifesting masculine tendencies, can be controlled by their children. Presented with children, these women melt – we suddenly see tears, fear, and concern in women who did not seem to fear anything. Charlie makes the ultimate “recovery” when she saves her daughter and returns to her long, flowing dresses and maternal life. Treatment, then, for

women who exhibit masculine sexuality is to present them with feminine . . . things.

They will be overcome with female instincts and will change.

Preservation

Describing the treatment for preservation problems in these films may be skewed: as I have chosen films in which women kill, it is not surprising that the treatment recommendations is to kill the threatening person. Laura, Claire, Sidney and Gail, Laurie, Ally, Samantha, Clarise and Sarah all kill the person threatening their safety. That, however, is not the end of the story. In each of these cases, when the woman kills the person threatening her, she then becomes a vaguely uncontrollable threat. If she gains the power to control her environment, who will control her? She is then guilty of brutality, instability, and perhaps deception and abnormal gender characteristics. So after the woman resolves the preservation problem, someone must then control her. Part Two of the treatment then involves bringing in a social force, usually the police, to recontrol the situation. In *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, *Scream I and II*, *Halloween H20*, *Long Kiss Goodnight*, *Silence of the Lambs*, and *Terminator Two*, immediately after the woman kills whomever is threatening her or her family, the camera begins to pull upward and, as the scene expands, we see the woman walking away and the police pulling up, as if the police must have control for the treatment to be complete. In *Sleeping with the Enemy* and *Single White Female*, we understand that the police are on their way to finish up. We may certainly read this as the reinstitution of a patriarchal force on a woman-dominated scene.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described each section of Entman's model and discussed the ways in which the problems, the causes, the moral evaluations and the treatments are posited in each film. In Chapter Five, with this comprehensive base, I will conclude my investigation by analyzing the significance of these findings and comparing them to feminist film and criminology theory and to Naylor's findings in media stories. I will finally draw some conclusions about the images of women who kill in film.

CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION

In Chapter Four, I have described each of the female killers using Entman's model. In this chapter, I will discuss some of the patterns that have appeared in this analysis and draw some conclusions about the images of female killers in film and how these images relate to "real life." I will also evaluate the use of Framing models to investigate non-news media texts.

Patterns

To investigate the patterns that appear in this analysis, I return here to Naylor's model of images of female killers in the media. Here, I want to compare some of the patterns in these films to Naylor's patterns. What are the implications of these images?

Naylor provides six images of female killers that she gathers from news stories. We do certainly see evidence of Naylor's forms in these film frames. Three films, including *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, *Goldeneye*, and *Single White Female*, certainly utilize the "Madonna/whore dichotomy" (p. 81), positioning a pretty, celibate or faithful woman (in one case, a mother) against a sexual, dark, glib, autonomous, often solitary woman. The Madonna character (Claire, Natalya, and Ally), while not virginal, is chaste, having sex only with her husband/fiancé. The whore character (Payton, Xenia, and Heddy), exhibits promiscuous or unusual sexuality, which I discussed in the

Promiscuity/Sexuality frames. In all three films that use this dichotomy, the “whore,” the bad woman, dies.

However, there are differences between what Naylor describes from news media and what we find in these films. We historically think of the Madonna as peaceful and passive, confronting and thwarting evil with her faith and goodness. Her virtue is itself enough to triumph. While Claire, Natalya, and Ally represent the Madonna character, Claire and Ally adopt some of the anger, violence and strength usually characterized in the “whore”. In other words, in these films, the Madonna must kill to maintain her powerful normative role. While this may simply represent the changing times (even good women must fight, or at least fight back, sometimes) it may also signify a difference between genres. While television news and newspapers have two minutes or a few columns in which to engagingly describe an issue or tell a story, a movie has 120 minutes. In that 120 minutes, filmmakers must establish interesting, multi-dimensional characters, characters who battle against more than dichotomous good or evil. Additionally, films have more time in which to persuade the audience to identify with the protagonist, and more of a vested interest in doing so. Because even the best women among us experience anger and feelings of violence, we no longer identify with the peaceful, passive heroine who screams until she is rescued. In other words, we may still interpret as “Madonna” female characters who fight, and even kill, the “whore.” “Madonna” itself is emerging as a new type of female character.

The Madonna, however, retains some distinctly patriarchal overtones, and herein we find the “preservation” frame. The traditional Madonna is passive; these Madonnas are active. If they can kill once, who is to say that they will not kill again? They pose a

social threat, even if they only use their powers for good. The films control the Madonnas in two ways. First, as mentioned above, as soon as Madonna kills the whore, the police arrive. The camera pulls back as the flashing lights and sirens appear, as the police busily jump out of their cars and rush to secure the crime scene. The Madonna swoons, slowly walks away, or, as in *Hand That Rocks the Cradle*, reclaims her passive and non-threatening Madonna status by picking up her two children and going downstairs to greet the police. The police, symbolizing masculine hegemony, reclaim the scene and with it, the Madonna's power, re-positioning her in her traditional role. Second, the Madonna is never a freedom fighter or Robin Hood, killing for an abstract cause – i.e. justice, nationalism, civil rights, etc. – or high moral imperative. The Madonna displays her power once, and that is only in preservation. The Madonna can be dangerous only when she must protect herself, her children or other loved ones who are in immediate danger. This pattern helps to assimilate the modern film Madonna into the ranks of the traditional Madonna and exorcises her of any potential threat to the patriarchal power structure: while good women do not kill, they do protect those they love. Therefore, the Madonna who kills in order to preserve life may retain her position as Madonna. Her killing is validated.

While films and news stories spend time verifying the chaste nature of the Madonna (for example, in *Scream I*, Sidney, the Madonna character, undergoes a lot of teasing about being a virgin. Throughout the film, we know where her sexuality is). The whore, on the other hand, maintains a similar life in the news and in the films. The whore, who appears in the film frame “promiscuity/sexuality” is the woman whose sexuality calls her into question, especially when contrasted with the Madonna. In many

cases, both in the news and in films, the whore is not an overly-sexual woman but is a woman whose sexuality is uncontrollable – she is not faithful to a single man, she chooses partners at random, or she is gay or asexual.

Naylor finds that female killers are often implicated in news stories for having reproductive madness. We have also seen evidence of Naylor's "reproductive madness" category in these film frames. Both Debbie (*Scream II*) and Payton (*Hand That Rocks the Cradle*) become dangerous after losing their children. The implication, then, is that a woman's mental stability is attached to the well-being of her child. When she loses her child, she becomes emotionally unstable and violent. Therefore, the rhetoric suggests, in their ability to bear children women harbor an inherent Achilles' heel. They become too involved in the physical or material world, too reliant on the here-and-now, and too emotionally volatile. This creates a skewed moral compass – while men (supposedly) make decisions on principle, women's values and behavior rely not on principle but on material foundations. While they may maintain the Madonna-like virtues described above while they have children, the loss of these children precipitates amoral or immoral behavior in which they seek, not justice, but revenge. Importantly, as we have seen, reproductive madness is a fatal disease. Not only do women exist on the precipice of morality and sanity, once they fall they may not be rehabilitated. Although the protagonists try to reason with Debbie and Payton, Debbie and Payton's reign of violence ends only when protagonists kill the women. These two films, along with Naylor's "reproductive madness" analysis, present an ironic condition. If bearing children fulfills the condition of womanhood, can we not have womanhood without risking a dangerous destruction of social law? That is, while we encourage women to give birth, do we not

open the door for potential destruction as well? Films and news media seem to suggest this.

Strangely enough, however, we do see a tremendous importance placed on the ability and willingness to mother, which problematizes the “mother” role. As the analysis has shown, there is a fine line between enough mothering and too much mothering, and each extreme can be damning to a character. We do respond differently to each extreme. Mothers who mother too much elicit a strange sort of pity – somehow, over-mothering is understandable and even forgivable, if it does not affect others. In fact, both women who fall victim to reproductive madness are portrayed as crazy, with perverted senses of reality and responsibility. The word “victim” is key here. These women are victims of their own biological systems and therefore (this implies) not responsible for their actions. Naylor speaks of a “biological-type [legal] defense” (88) in which women, crazy by virtue of their own biology, are exonerated of their crimes. Women who refuse to mother, although, we cannot forgive. Not only are they drawn into question about their mothering instincts, their femininity itself is in question. The women we see who will not mother are portrayed as masculine, greedy, and cold and thoughtless, as if, without children, this is the only route for women to go. They change all of that maternal energy to deviant causes. This moves us into Naylor’s category of “criminal woman as not-woman.”

In these films, “criminal as not-woman” manifested itself in several ways. Although Naylor does not provide any analysis to this end, we must remember that the category “not-woman” exists only inasmuch as we recognize and define normative gender patterns. “Not-woman” exists as the antithesis of “true woman” and only in this

dichotomy can “not-woman” have meaning. So an audience that does not share an cultural definition of “woman,” will not recognize this category. Naylor provides three examples of ways in which killer females in the news are portrayed as “not-women,” all three of which appear in these films. These are non-maternal, lack of feminine appearance, and lack of feminine value – reluctance to show emotion, for example. The implication is that, because real women would never kill, female killers must not be women at all. Jouve (1994) goes on to suggest that, in the act of killing, women become men, appealing to a “nobler, revolutionary, poetic self.” First, in regard to the discussion above, women who will not mother are often portrayed as “not-woman,” as we see in *Terminator Two* and *Long Kiss Goodnight*. Sarah and Samantha lose most feminine attributes when they refuse to mother, as if motherhood is the fundamental characteristic of femininity. For Sarah, this is conclusive – even when she does begin acting like a traditional mother (as much as traditional mothers have to face the overthrow of the free world by machines), she still does not regain her femininity. In fact, during one dream sequence, we watch the feminine mother-version of Sarah explode in flame (see page 77) as if she has made a choice to reject normative femininity in favor of strength, power and courage. For Samantha, this rejection of motherhood and therefore femininity is not conclusive. Samantha, after she regains her identity, does become a mother again. But when she returns to motherhood, her masculine tendencies disappear and she is back in the long flowing dresses and long hair. Motherhood and femininity, then, are inextricably linked in these films, providing a narrow and prescriptive role for women. Tracy, however, displays an inability or unwillingness to mother, and yet her femininity

is never in question. Tracy, although she does not mother, falls more appropriately into another of Naylor's news story frames. I will address this below.

Female killers may also fit into the "not-woman" category by virtue of their appearance. Here Jouve's quotation takes ground. These women do not become men during the killing, but we have evidence to suggest that they become men before the killing, through a transvestite transformation. In these scenes, the camera focuses on dark clothes, the big black boots, the short hair, the make-up-less faces, the thick belt with the gun holster, the reduced appearance of breasts, the t-shirt, the nail-polishless fingers. Sarah and Charlie exhibit masculine dress, reinforcing their position as "not-woman." However, to problematize this simple explanation, Heddy (*Single White Female*) also appears in masculine dress, contrasting with Ally, who appears as an elegant, professional woman at all times. However, when Heddy is killing, she is dressed like Ally. Her appearance at this time reminds us of drag – she looks like she is dressing up, and she is especially trying to imitate Ally, who she says "has it all." This transvestitism appears one more time in *Point of No Return*, in which Maggie first appears dressed as a man; in fact, one of the most powerful scenes in the movie is when we first look at her face and realize that this street urchin is a woman. Dressed like this, she is relatively harmless, only moaning for her next fix. She becomes lethal only after the government cleans her up, teaches her how to dress and act like a lady. In fact, her first killing is done while she is out to an expensive dinner and dressed in a short black dress with heels and make-up. For Heddy and Maggie, this female dress is more of a costume than the male dress of Samantha and Sarah. What is important is the act of transformation, rejecting that which appears weak and helpless for a stronger self. These women are not

who they are when killing; they have become the Other. In each of these characters (and this may have been the filmmaker's objective) all members of the audience may identify with while simultaneously objectifying the female leads. News also seeks to find a character with which the audience can identify, but the news finds this character in the victim, not in the killer.

Each of the non-mothering characters fail to display feminine values – worry, emotion, fear, etc. – but these values are integrated into my discussion of mothering above.

Naylor finds that news stories often portray the female killer as a witch, a monster, or a figure of evil. This suggests that the women have some sort of higher power backing their killing, some “inexplicable badness” (Naylor 88). Naylor uses as an example an Australian teenager convicted of murder, whom the papers described as the “Angel of Death.” Because I limited my sample to non-supernatural women, I eliminated creatures such as female vampires or female aliens, who may be said to have a supernatural power or are inherently evil. Each of my female killers is very human, and while most are described as psychopathic or perverted, they are almost never described using mythical, religious, paranormal or metaphysical terms. However, there is one exception. During *Natural Born Killers*, Mallory (who we believe to be just a screwed-up kid, the natural result of an abusive upbringing) enters the tent of a Native American holy man. The holy man, who has visions, explains to his grandson that Mallory is evil itself, and that she has come to kill him. This is the only example of a possible paranormal female killer in this sample, and yet we do not ever really believe that Mallory has Satan backing her or that she has supernatural power. The “evil” that the

holy man sees is simply a reflection of the evil that has been done to Mallory, not a diagnosis about Mallory herself. As a result, while Naylor claims that this category appears in news stories of female killers, it does not appear in this sample of films about the same.

Finally, Naylor describes the category of “female as devious and manipulative.” This frame punishes women, Naylor says, for being women, who, according to myth, are scheming, unreliable, unprincipled people. This frame fits directly into my analysis of above of devious women: Tracy (*Malice*) for betraying her husband; Katherine (*Basic Instinct*) for lying to Nick and outskunking the police; Payton (*Hand That Rocks the Cradle*) for insinuating herself into a perfectly nice family, turning wife against husband and then trying to kill them all; and Claire (*Mission: Impossible*) for leading Ethan into a trap between ex-Soviets and corrupted American agencies. Each woman, just like Eve, uses her beauty and sexuality to get what she wants. The message here is clear, just as it is in news stories – these women are not smart or cunning enough to avoid justice. They will always be caught by smarter men and will be punished.

Naylor does describe a sixth frame, the “Sexual passion/love as an excuse” frame. I failed to discuss it because it does not appear in the film frames. While “promiscuity/sexuality” does border on the issue of sex, “sexual passion/love as an excuse” describes women who killed for love, women who kill to get the man or woman they desire. While the “catfight” (the fight between two women over a man) is an ever popular theme, it does not appear in any of these films. It may be an old story line, it may be that *Fatal Attraction* (1987) – the quintessential catfight film – said everything

there was to say about two women killing each other over a man. Regardless of the reason, this frame does not manifest itself here.

The frames Naylor identifies in news stories of female killers and the frames I identify in films about female killers are almost parallel. We see the same emphasis on sexuality, femininity, motherhood, and manipulation, the same grinding focus on the “womanness” of the female killer. And we see the same vague joy that comes when the female killer is punished. It is clear that, to some extent, an audience is an audience, regardless of the media, and the audience wants to see certain themes played out. The rhetor then patterns his or her rhetoric to fill these tastes.

However, news story frames do not include two film frames that are of utmost importance in this analysis for two reasons. First, they show a side of female killers that exists as an antithesis to the misogynistic, androcentric frames discussed above, and second, they contain the most films; that is, more female killers fall into these frames than any of the above frames. At the beginning of this paper, I asked, “Where are the female heroes? Where are the women who rescue the weak and banish the ‘bad guys’? Where are the women who stand up for themselves?” I believe that I found these women in my last two frames – captivity and preservation. The female killers who wrestle with emotional or physical captivity or with the need to save their own lives and the lives of their loved ones are the heroes. These women are not condemned as crazy, man-hating, over-sexed, atavistic killers bent on dooming men, they are virtuous and victorious. They escape their captivity (Laura, Sidney, Laurie, Thelma and Louise) by whatever means necessary. They stop the psychopathic bad guys (Sidney, Laurie, Clarise, Claire, Ally, Samantha) bravely, using courage, cunning, and the occasional Magnum 357. These are

heroines, women we can be proud of, women who will lead the girls who watch these movies into a powerful, autonomous future. And while conflating killing with power is wrong, conflating self-preservation with power is accurate.

Most importantly, these heroines are accurate. Most women do not kill secret Russian spies or nearby police officers. Most women do not go out on murderous rampages, hunt down and kill female roommates, or manipulate their way into private homes with the intent of stealing the children and killing the parents. Most real-life female killers kill when they have no other option, when they or loved ones are in immediate danger, or when they are trying to escape emotional or physical captivity. While these female killers make up almost a third of female killers in movies, why do we not see evidence of them in news story frames, which are supposed to reflect the truth?

Utility of Framing and Additional Study

No paper is able to cover each and every issue it raises. In this section, I will first examine the utility of framing theory in the investigation of fiction. Next, I will identify several areas that require further study.

Framing the Movies

During my analysis, I discovered two problems using framing theory in fictional texts. The first problem is that framing theory is often used to identify the agenda of the rhetor, to expose his or her assumptions and to diagnose the ways in which these

assumptions color the rhetoric. However, as I discussed in Chapter Three, identifying a rhetor or even a group or rhetors whose agenda colors the film is difficult. The rhetors are anyone from the director and producer down to the make-up artist. Everyone has a vision about the story and the characters, and everyone's input shapes the ways in which we perceive the film. As a result, the framing scholar has no one on which to hang the "blame," so to speak, for inaccurate or unappealing portrayals of a story or characters. He or she is left with blaming cultural codes or pop culture norms, which is unsatisfying and nebulous. Exposing a problem suggests the need to respond to or fix the problem, and without a target, this is impossible.

Second, framing theory requires a tremendous amount of detail to be gleaned from the text. For short newspaper articles, this is a wonderful model. For seventeen two-hour-long films, in which the scholar must analyze not only words but visual images, camera angles, dozens of characters and plot lines, this task becomes rather daunting. With so much data, organizing and describing research findings is nearly impossible.

However, I continue to believe that framing theory is useful in analyzing fiction. Using the model I described, I was able to identify patterns in the film and focus my research on the characters themselves, instead of tackling each movie as a block of text. More work needs to be done on the framing of visual images – theorists have described some basic semantic issues with regard to where the image is within a frame, but have not yet completed a full body of work on choosing pieces of an image to analyze or use as frames. Are visual framing and text framing two different levels of analysis or may they be used in conjunction with each other? Are images the character can see and images the characters cannot see to be analyzed differently? How do we examine the

issues of light and sound? Each of these questions must be answered to make framing a coherently useful model in investigating television or film rhetoric.

Additional Work on Images of Female Killers in Film

With more time (and a larger paper) I would have liked to examine several different issues. The sample I chose was relatively small. Expanding the sample in one of several ways would provide different and useful information about the images of female killers in film. First, I took my sample from a relatively short time frame. Additional study on how these images have changed over time would eliminate some of the mystery about how society has changed its view of female deviants and would enable researchers to investigate various changes in the position of women – getting the vote, working out of the house, the beginning of the second wave of American feminism, etc. -- have changed our views of female killers, an issue that strain theorists have begun to unravel. Second, choosing a sample based on a comparison between “true story” films and totally fictitious films would allow further contrasts between “real life” female killers and the ones we imagine. Third, expanding the sample to include paranormal female killers (vampires, aliens, genetic mutants, etc.) would also be interesting and would simply allow for another level of analysis between what we view as fiction with no boundaries and fiction that must bear some resemblance to real life.

However, there are two additional studies that I believe are crucial to a complete understanding of this issue. First and foremost, we must do a comparison between female killers in film and male killers. Because of spatial and time constraints, I was able

to only briefly touch on the subject of male killers in film, and we really must compare the two. Only in this comparison will we be able to start to make changes in the images of women in film, to really identify the injustice between powerful male characters and quasi-powerful female characters. Second, but crucial, we must verify that Naylor's frames are the only and most accurate frames used by the media to describe real life female killers. I was able to compare the frames briefly, but a true in-depth analysis is necessary to really draw lines between real female killers and film characters, lines that I have tentatively drawn but need further proof.

Conclusion

Over the years, female deviants have received a bad, and unsubstantiated, rap. If, as Birch says, female killers are more interesting than male killers because they are so rare, why is the media, both news and television/film, so disposed to eliminate any shred of dignity or heroism from their few stories? What is it about female killers that inspires greater fear than male killers? Are we indeed still using nineteenth century science to invigorate twentieth century entertainment? In this analysis, I have argued that news stories and films about female killers are similar, and that both are unjust and inaccurate in the ways in which they portray female killers. However, in my analysis, I have discovered that films do provide a fair number of heroines, women who kill for the right reason – self-defense. Studies show that over 90% of real female killers kill for this reason too. And yet, films (and news stories) continue to show the over-sexed, masculine, lesbian, psychopathic female killer as the majority. As I write this chapter, a

Lane County, Oregon woman is being arraigned on charges of felony murder of her husband. The news anchor mentions that she has no history of criminal behavior and that the police initially responded to a report of domestic violence in the home. Precedent suggests that she killed her husband in self-defense when the police failed to respond quickly to an immediately dangerous situation, and yet the only picture we see is a bare-faced, tired-looking woman in prison blues. No one mentions self-defense. No one mentions any justification or explanation at all.

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