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**THE POLITICAL AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF
GENDER, CLASS AND RACE IN HOLLYWOOD FILM:
HOLDING OUT FOR A FEMALE HERO**

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**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in
partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in
Philosophy of Education**

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ABSTRACT

The Politics of Gender, Class and Race in Hollywood Film: Holding Out For a Female Hero

**Alanna Lewis, M.A.
McGill University, 1998**

This thesis examines the articulations of gender, class, and race in a specific sample of films from the 1930's to the 1990's. The tendency in these films is to depict women as passive, rather than heroic. Because this has been the common practice, I chose to outline it through fourteen films that exemplified an inherent bias when dealing with women as subject matter. Brief summaries of several recently produced progressive films are provided to show that it is possible to improve the image of women in film, hence we may finally witness justice on the big screen.

In this discursive analysis, I trace specific themes from the feminist and film literature to provide a critical overview of the chosen films, with a view to establishing educational possibilities for the complex issues dealt with in this study.

RESUME

Cette thèse porte sur les modèles liés aux rôles sexuels, la race et la classe sociale, tel que véhiculés à travers le cinéma hollywoodien pendant les années 1930 à 1990. Les films réalisés durant cette période ont tendance à représenter les femmes comme étant passives, plutôt qu'héroïques. Compte tenu de cette politique de rigueur, j'ai sélectionné quatorze films à travers lesquels je présenterai des exemples de biais inhérents envers les femmes, lorsqu'elles en font l'objet. Une brève discussion de quelques récentes réalisations progressistes démontrera la possibilité d'améliorer l'image de la femme dans le cinéma, ce qui laisserait croire que l'on pourrait enfin voir une juste représentation de la femme sur le grand écran.

Dans cette analyse discursive, je reprendrai des thèmes spécifiques de la littérature féministe et du cinéma pour formuler une critique globale sur les films sélectionnés, dans l'intention de produire un outil éducatif qui permettrait de traiter des aspects complexes discutés au cours de cette étude.

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***This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Frances Farmer.**

INTRODUCTION

The Political and Educational Implications of Gender, Sex and Race in Hollywood Film: Holding Out For A Female Hero

Alanna Lewis, M.A.
McGill University, 1997

In this thesis I will attempt to show that with some exceptions, for example biographical films, the Hollywood movie-making machine in films that have dominated popular cinema has and continues to produce one-dimensional, degrading stereotypes of women. To do so, I will use Joseph's Campbell archetypal definition of the hero. It is my belief that even though it appears that feminist culture has penetrated the film world, it has done so marginally; the power still resides predominantly with males. Too often in film women are relegated to the role of vengeful manipulator or they are passive objects in settings that demonstrate active, righteous men. If they perform any heroic deeds, they often pay with their lives. The films that break these conventions tend to be, for the most part, alternative or foreign films. Often in films woman signifies the 'Other', and is then objectified, while the male stands as subject. If the woman contests her role in this social order, her fate can be as extreme as death, as in the 1994 film *Thelma and Louise*. In 1997, MGM home video released a short promo which aired prior to specific video rentals. It was a fast paced barrage of spliced together images of famous Hollywood leading men, for example, Mel Gibson and Harrison Ford, in a variety of film roles performing a multitude of courageous deeds. All the while Bonnie Tyler's song *Holding Out for a Hero* is playing:

*I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night*

*He's gotta be strong
And he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight
I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light
He's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And he's gotta be larger than life (chorus)*

In the film and the song, the hero is male.

In this study I have chosen to analyze fourteen North American films produced between the 1930's and the 1990's to support my contention that, in Hollywood, simply put, females are not heroes. I will concentrate primarily on film content, however since content and production often overlap, I will draw on both to support this thesis. In the majority of films I have chosen women follow a destiny that is mapped out for them by male directors. Their derogatory portrayals reinforce the notion that women are the inferior sex. These roles are detrimental, I will argue, to the development of positive role models for young girls and boys who, instead, should be made critically aware so as not to perpetuate a social order that may be sexist, elitist, and racist. Feminist Dorothy Allison writes:

Class, race, sexuality, gender, all the categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other need to be examined from the inside. The horror of class stratification, racism, and prejudice is that some people begin to believe that the security of their families and community depends on the oppression of others, that for some to have good lives others must have lives that are mean and horrible. It is a belief that dominates this culture; it is what made the poor whites of the South so determinedly racist and the middle class so contemptuous of the poor. (Allison, 1993, p. 155)

I believe that if an audience tolerates damaging stereotypes of individuals on screen, then

society is capable of the same in everyday life, for the lines between art and life blur all too easily in our post-modern, media dominated times.

I address four problems in my study. The first is the lack of women heroes in Hollywood/ big-budget mainstream films. The second is the fact that women's images are created and sustained by a patriarchal vision, the third is the question of the various ways in which this is manifested. The fourth is the apparent hierarchy in the feminist movement itself regarding class and race, whereby white middle-class women occupy the top position and all others rank below.

For a period in the 30's and 40's, when women filmmakers strove to reflect their reality on camera, they were excluded from the mainstream culture, as well as ridiculed; their efforts and successes were often linked to their husbands' notoriety. Moreover, Hollywood directors have created a "type-cast" by directing a stream of starlets; the most famous was probably Marilyn Monroe whose seemingly empty-headed nature was inextricably linked to her blonde hair. This spawned the tradition of female who is static and passive in film, more a nuisance and hindrance than anything.

Women are not allowed to be heroes, but they can be manipulative vamps. Who often lead to the demise of "good" men. This is reinforced in films, from biblical tales such as *Samson and Delilah* (1950), to civil war epics as in *Gone With the Wind* (1939). It is also evident in the 80's 'femme fatale' films such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Body of Evidence* (1992), and *Basic Instinct* (1992).

Another problem lies in the fact that, for the most part, Gay women's reality is neglected in Hollywood film. In general, the only time that an audience witnesses two women in a sexual act is to excite men, both within the context of the film, as well as for the pleasure of viewers of the film.

I will also argue that the majority of films that would seem to spawn female heroes are in effect constructing a very different role for them. Linda Hamilton, of Terminator I and II, for example, starts off as central hero suddenly, however, there is a shift. Ultimately her son is the true hero, as he must slay the evil cyborg.

Finally, Women of Color are portrayed, in general, as either idiots, reliant on their white counterparts to complete them, or the exotic focus of white male fantasy.

It is crucial that the above areas be researched so as to sensitize the public to the discrepancies between global realities and Hollywood's interpretation of them as the two rarely correspond. North American culture, for the most part, has been exposed to a very subjective view since its early cinematic experiences. After many years of conditioning we have become a culture that lacks voice or we are victims of what Noam Chomsky would refer to as a consumer society in his film *Manufacturing and Consent*.

This study aims to open up a discourse among individuals in the pedagogical system whom perhaps may not have taken a critical look at many of the big-budget films that their money readily supports. It is time to acknowledge that the marginalized of our society have a voice that is in need of being expressed in order to avoid yet another level

of consciousness that is only shaped by the elite. This is only one perspective challenging conventional opinions that often govern our sense of self. Hopefully this work is just a precursor to discussion in the educational facilities on topics such as I have chosen for this thesis. At the minimum, perhaps it will spark positive change or give way to questions that will lead to more research.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

As early as the 1940's, when women artists and filmmakers congregated to form an alliance and create their own subject matter, their vision was undermined by the patriarchy in place at the time. It was inconceivable that women had the intellectual capacity to establish their own meaningful social order. In her book, Women, Power and Politics in the New York Avant-Garde Cinema, 1943-71, (1991), Lauren Rabinovitz discusses the treatment of female artists:

Each woman worked under constant social and psychological constraints because of her status as a woman. For example, male art critics from Wieland's hometown of Toronto angrily dismissed Wieland's explicit psychosexual art because they felt women should not publicly address sexual pleasure. Deren's male peers made fun of a woman having intellectual theories regarding film as an art form. Clarke's business associates only invested in her films when she found male producers. The social relations that shaped the women's lives encouraged their trivialization or marginalization as artists as a means for containing them within dominant ideology. (p. 10)

Some of these early women filmmakers' ties to their celebrated husbands only served to reinforce mainstream notions that women could not function creatively without the assistance of a male-counterpart. Bebe Barron's career started off a collaborative effort with her husband, composer Louis Barron. Film activist Marcia Vogel initially also collaborated with Amos Vogel. Even Shirley Clarke, whose filmmaking craft was acquired separately from her husband and who exercised financial and professional independence, relied on her marriage as it gave her psychological support regarding her artistic endeavors. Rabinovitz (1991), states:

The stereotypical woman artist whose success depends upon her relationship to a male artist has a historical basis. Women have been so systematically denied access to the social institutions necessary for an arts career that they have to depend more regularly upon familial relationships to overcome institutional restraints. Modern art histories have implicitly perpetuated the stereotype by either omitting the existence of working women artists or dismissing as insignificant those they do acknowledge. (p. 4)

Women's efforts to exert themselves as independent creators remained in vain, as they engaged in an ongoing struggle against the standard patriarchal norms set aside for them. In other words, woman as artist remained on the periphery of the larger culture, which lay down a silent code that inhibited their growth. The voice of women articulated a viewpoint that was unique as it emerged from a another sexual and economic perspective. The potential for success for women constructing meaning in film through their female subject matter or through the placing of women as subject, was limited. This was due to lack of access to the macrocosmic power that, once established, is able to suppress any ideologies perceived as unconventional. Rabinovitz explains how this works at an institutional level:

Women occupy particular positions – economic , social, and ideological - within patriarchy, positions marked by unequal relations to the structures of power. As Parker and Pollack note, “ Power is not only a matter of coercive forces. It operates through exclusions from access to those institutions and practices through which dominance is exercised. One of these is language, by which we mean positions from which to speak”. (1991, p. 5)

Early Marxist Theory (1960's) is linked to the feminist dilemma, as both deal with the social structures that sustain an oppressive hierarchy. Marxist Theory, much like Feminist ideology, deals with fundamentals such as image and voice. Both ask the question, “How does a group of individuals contest their situation if they do not have the

means by which to make themselves heard, a voice which is necessary in order to evoke any real change in a given system?" Those in control of the media can determine the norm, in film, for example, though they do not necessarily serve a broad range of individual needs.

In Multiple Voices Feminist Film Criticism (Carson, Dittmar and Welsch, 1994),

Christine Gledhill shows how dominance works. In her article entitled "Image and Voice: Approaches to Sexist-Feminist Film Criticism", Gledhill states:

But Marx had pointed out that the class that rules because it owns the means of production controls not only that society's wealth but also the production of its ideas. The established ideas of bourgeois society misrepresent class relations, making the dominance of the ruling class appear natural: hence the concept of dominant ideology and its corollary, false consciousness, whereby the working class accepts inequality as of the natural order. (p. 109)

Three of the main women artists of the New York Avant-garde, Deren, Clarke, and Wieland continued to support one another from the 40's to the 60's. Unfortunately their films failed publicly as their work was controlled by the pre-established male power structure. Their efforts were not all in vain, however, for their "struggles demonstrated that relationships among women's sexuality, power, and economics were important both to independent cinema's position as a subversive program of American cinema, and to independent cinema's institutional implantation in dominant arts organizations" (Rabinovitz, 1991, p. 9).

Since today there exists a general lack of awareness, on the part of audiences, of the systematic stereotyping and undermining of women in film, changes in pedagogy that

aim at enlightening boys and girls about gender, class and racial inequality may increase awareness of how our society internalizes the package sold by the media. This may lead to a questioning by viewers of the values or ethics of a film, instead of its mere consumption. Because the media has become so omnipotent and omnipresent, it is important that we examine its contents with a critical eye. Perhaps if we are consciously aware of its bias, limitations, and politics we will be more apprehensive of incorporating its multi-faceted messages into our psyche and will find its enforcement of offensive stereotypes intolerable. I will also argue that it is crucial that the process of active protest, fundamental to the feminist movement, continue. As Lorraine Code Argues:

Contemporary feminism, which came into being with the student and civil rights movements of radical protest in the 1960's is an active, evolving, politically engaged movement. Feminism is also a theoretical project whose purposes are to understand the oppressive social practices that disadvantage women and to think innovatively about women's possibilities. British feminist Juliet Mitchell observes that feminism is an ideological offspring of certain economic and social conditions. Its radicalism reflects the fact that it comes to prominence at points of critical change. It both abates this change and envisages it with an imagination that goes beyond it. (1988, p. 18)

Feminist theorists aim is to differentiate the access to power and privilege between men and women in a society so they may understand how the oppression of women by men is similar to other forms of oppression. This will hopefully lead to the eventual dissipation of the oppression of women. Theorists feel that if they study the plight of women, they can work towards changing it. In her article "Feminist Theory" In Changing Patterns: Women in Canada, Lorraine Code (1988) states:

In particular, feminists endeavor to understand how the social structuring of production, reproduction, sexuality, and socialization in their shifting manifestations, have determined women's condition throughout history and across cultural, class, and racial barriers. (p. 19)

Feminist theory is a crucial element in our social fabric, hence it should be an integral part of any critical pedagogy. Feminism as a practice thrives through its theoretical counterpart as practice works towards changing social conditions, and theory informs that practice. "Theory is constantly modified by what proves to be effective in practice, and practice is shaped by theory" (Code, 1988, p. 19).

Film can play a crucial part in defining gender roles; their various depictions of female and male characters in their text and cinematography send its viewers subtle and overt messages that tend to reinforce damaging racist and gender stereotypes. The film medium tends to dichotomize male or female relations by attributing certain behavioral patterns as distinctively male or female. The qualities that are redeemed and revered in society, such as heroic ones, are usually reserved for male characters, while the less prestigious qualities such as screaming and inactivity are usually relegated to female characters. Though there have been some inevitable changes in Hollywood, many plots still relegate men and women into dominant and subordinate molds; their relationship is one rooted in power rather than equality. Code (1988) points out:

Patriarchal societies are those in which men have more power than women, readier access than women to what is valued in the society, and, in consequence, are in control over many if not most aspects of women's lives. Most known societies are patriarchal to a greater or lesser degree, exhibiting only specific variations in the ways power is manifested. (p. 19)

The male hero is almost always in possession of this power, while women are portrayed as weak, feeble, delicate, and undeniably passive. Changes in these female definitions only occur when it is convenient to the dominant male power structure, hence even in

roles where women appear to be empowered, often they remain pawns that are shaped and shifted to cater to the male psyche. Unfortunately these sexist overtones are cloaked in the guise of liberation, enabling them to appeal to a female audience, many of whom have come to see the patriarchal hierarchy as natural.

Women are the group most victimized by sexist oppression. As with other forms of group oppression, sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo. (hooks, 1984 p. 43)

If a woman is depicted as intelligent, then she is often also seen as conniving, manipulative and psychotic; the “bitch”, the “whore” and the “temptress” have been common female stereotypes since the birth of film to present day. The use of women as fodder in film for the purpose of male sexual fantasy has led society to not only ascribe to, but to embrace a genre born of a degrading, exploitative mentality.

Regarding issues of racial equality, if white women in film are given secondary status, then women of color are completely marginalized; if they appear at all, they are either the “exotic,” “the entertainment” or the doting empty-headed matriarchal figure as first embodied in the “mammy” characters of Hollywood’s classic films.

In her book Where The Girls Are, Susan J. Douglas (1995) discusses the effects of the media’s double-edged sword on the construction of the American women’s personality:

American women today are a bundle of contradictions because much of the imagery we grew up with was itself filled with mixed messages about what women should and should not do, what women should and should not do, what women could and could not be. This

was true in the 1980's, and it's true today. The media, of course urged us to be pliant, cute, sexually available, thin, blond, poreless, wrinkle, free, and deferential to men. But it is easy to forget that the media also suggested we could be rebellious, tough, enterprising, and shrewd. The jigsaw pieces of our inner selves have moved around in relation to the jigsaw imagery of the media, and it is the ongoing rearrangement of these shards on the public screens of America and the private screens of our minds, that is the forgotten story of American culture over the past thirty five years. (p. 9)

Since the media clearly plays a role in reflecting and shaping views, and in so doing to enhance or create socially restrictive barriers regarding gender, it is crucial to dissect the Hollywood paradigm of the male hero and its implications for female characters and examine possibilities for alternative pedagogies.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework and Methodology: Towards a Critical Pedagogy

Theorist Paulo Freire coined the term the “culture of silence” to refer to the state of dispossessed, whose “ignorance and lethargy were the direct product of the economic, social and political domination of which they were victims” (Freire, 1973, p. 10). Freire viewed education and access to it as a liberating force, as once an individual is equipped with knowledge they can respond to the concrete reality of their world. It became clear to him that the whole educational system was one of the major instruments for the oppression of individuals. Rather than being encouraged and equipped to respond to the realities of their world, the masses were kept “submerged in a situation in which such critical awareness and response were practically impossible” (Freire, 1973, p.10) . Friere found that the greater atrocity occurred when individuals who had the knowledge to protest or demand a voice resided in the “culture of silence”, conforming without argument to the same cultural norms that had kept the masses ignorant. To Freire, education was the vehicle through which mass change could be perceived and realized. The voice, history and freedom of the masses are all crucial to change.

In fact, those who, in learning to read and write, come to a new awareness of selfhood and begin to look critically at the social institution in which they find themselves, often take the initiative in acting to transform the society that has denied them this opportunity of participation. Education is once again a subversive force. (Freire, 1973, p. 9)

Education then serves as a precursor to self-awareness and, with that, self-awareness can come positive change. People are then liberated and may rise up against the very

institutions which previously denied them access, hence individuals are given greater access to social mobility through pedagogy. That is pedagogy that is critical and open-ended. The process whereby students are expected to merely regurgitate information does not allow for personal analysis and philosophical reflection on the materials. Rather it encourages a passive, acquiescent, gullible nature that the film industry, like many others, relies on in order to sell its product to the masses and hence to reap financial gains. Freire states:

Dialogue is thus an existential necessity. And since dialogue is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized, this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it be a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants. (Freire, 1973, p. 77)

Therefore, we may gather that true dialogue is never born of a power situation; one in which one individual aims to control or dominate the other. Too often, access to knowledge is dictated by financial gains, which is analogous to the situation with Hollywood film compared to marginal film. The more progressive messages disseminated by marginal films reach less people as they do not have the financial backing that would give them the exposure of their cinematic counterparts.

In his book, Fugitive Cultures Race, Violence and Youth (1996), Henry Giroux describes a progressive pedagogy in which students have more input in their curriculum:

For pedagogy to work as an empowering practice, students must become visible to themselves and to each other and valued in their differences. This would mean giving students the opportunity to de-center the curriculum by structuring, in part, how the class should be organized and how popular films can be addressed without putting any one student's identity on

trial. Using films means recognizing the complexity of mobilizing student's desires as part of a pedagogical project that directly addresses representations affecting their lives, and also means acknowledging the emotional tensions that will emerge in such teachings. (p. 46)

Films try to capture a large segment of the viewing population, which constitutes modern youth culture, so it makes sense to use film within a learning context. Students can learn how to decipher the images that convey them and all other members of society. This will help them to see a bias that has become inherent in the media as well as many of its contradictory points. In this way, issues such as gender, class and racial equality, which are often distorted for financial gain in the film media, may be examined from a critical perspective. Giroux (1996), also states that:

What educators need to do is to make the pedagogical more political by addressing both the conditions through which they teach and the question of what it means to learn from this generation. It is a generation that is experiencing life in a way vastly different from the modernist versions of schooling. (p. 47)

It would seem that it is not just crucial to educate the masses, but to explore the manner in which this education is disseminated to the individuals who are to benefit from it. Our epistemology is constantly undergoing changes that should be reflected in a critical pedagogy. With the inundation of multi-media, today's youth may have a pedagogical agenda with needs different from those of the baby-boomer generation. Pedagogy must address issues of culture and sexual stereotyping if our society is to understand and redress the position of those who reside in the category 'Other'. Such is not a simple task, however; many aspects must be considered.

Critical educators cannot subscribe neither to an apocalyptic emptiness that adopts the worst form of relativism nor to a politics of refusal that celebrates the abandonment of authority. They cannot embrace the immediacy of experience over the more

profound dynamic of social memory and moral outrage forged within and against conditions of exploitation, oppression, and the abuse of power. The intersection of cultural studies and critical pedagogy offers the possibility for educators to confront history as more than simulacra and ethics as something other than the casualty of endless language games. Educators need to assert a politics that makes the relationship among authority, ethics, and power central to a pedagogy that expands rather than closes down the possibilities of a radical democratic society. (Giroux , 1996, p. 53)

Democratic society is one in which individuals are purportedly free to practice their beliefs even when these beliefs are different from those established by the status quo.

As such, topics such as class, race and sexual inequality could be dealt with by educators and students since as Freire and Giroux have argued, formal traditional education does not always reflect the realities of the world we live in. Media images have become an integral part of our socialization, antiquated ideologies are re-packaged and sold by corporations to a new generation making the unacceptable once again acceptable. In essence it is partially the responsibility of pedagogy to teach those who live with media such as film to scrutinize its contents. In so doing, viewers become less vulnerable to the damaging messages therein which, ultimately, may contribute to their ongoing oppression.

Methodology

This thesis is primarily a theoretical study supplemented with the analysis of selected films from the 20th century. This is not an exhaustive study. Rather, I identified fourteen North American films which support my contention that, in Hollywood/big-budget productions, women are rarely depicted as heroes, but are instead are often used as a means to an end. The films are as follows: *Waterworld* (1995), *Samson and Delilah* (1950), *Gone With the Wind* (1939), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Body of Evidence* (1992), *Batman Returns* (1989), *Indecent Proposal* (1994), *Pretty Woman* (1990), *Terminator* (1984), *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *Angel Heart* (1987), and finally *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986). Other films of relevance to each topic were also selected and will be briefly discussed.

The films I have chosen span different genres, from drama to action, but all serve to illustrate the ways in which the status of woman is undermined in Hollywood film. Moreover, I selected films that supported problems articulated in feminist and film research. The theoretical analysis of the literature review is supported through the themes which demonstrate ways in which women are portrayed negatively in film.

Though the films considered cover a broad range, situated namely between the 1930's and the 1990's, they are all bound by a commonality; they all serve in some way to reinforce the points outlined in my introduction. I chose films in which women do not measure up to the vision of the hero defined by Joseph Campbell (1973; 1988).

In terms of the presentation of the research, each theme is accorded one chapter in order to address the fundamental questions posed by this thesis. Chapter Three is entitled The Hero, Chapter Four: The Muse, The Maiden, The Victim and the Damsel in Distress – The Making of a Passive Persona, Chapter Five: Frail Female to Hollywood Heroine - From Diminutive to Distaff (A Stride Forward?), Chapter Six: The ‘Temptress’, the ‘Bitch’ and the ‘Whore’ – Liberation or Lynching?, Chapter Seven: The “Idiot”, the “Entertainer”, the, “Exotic” and the “Invisible” – Maintaining the Margins for Women of Color and finally Chapter Eight: Conclusions and Implications for the Future of Film and Education.

The concept of ‘hero’ is derived primarily from the works of Joseph Campbell, namely The Power of Myth and The Hero With a Thousand Faces. The subtitles chosen to categorize the films are not from any literary source, but are rather the result of my own synthesis that I constructed over a seven year period. I viewed the majority of the films once and observations were subsequently made on a continual basis over the mentioned seven year period; 1991 – 1997.

CHAPTER THREE

The Hero

*I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the end of the night
He's gotta be strong
And he's gotta be fast
And he's gotta be fresh from the fight
I need a hero
I'm holding out for a hero 'til the morning light
He's gotta be sure
And it's gotta be soon
And he's gotta be larger than life*

-Holding out for a Hero, a song by Bonnie Tyler

In The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell (1988) discusses the adventure of the hero which, he argues, is the journey of the internal self. The path of the hero may lead him or her to transcend, as the true hero lies within us all, and it is we who make the choice to embark upon that quest.

Furthermore, we have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to slay another, we shall find ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own existence. And where we had thought to be alone we will be with all the world. (Campbell, 1998, p. 123)

In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell defines the archetypal hero and their relevance to both mythology and our continually evolving epistemology. The hero undergoes a journey against the dark forces that leads to self-discovery and redeems society through his courageous, self-less acts. The hero acts from a strength that already

lies within; “he” must just recognize it in order to utilize its potential. An example of this would be the modern day hero Luke Skywalker, the protagonist from *Star Wars*; whom Campbell refers to in The Power of Myth. Skywalker uses the ‘force’ (his internal energy) to help him overcome his nemesis, the evil Darth Vader. Campbell (1988) explains to journalist Bill Moyers that *Star Wars* director, George Lucas has “put the newest and most powerful spin to the classic story of the hero...It’s what Goethe said on Faust but which Lucas has dressed in modern idiom - the message that technology is not going to save us: our computers, our tools, our machines are not enough. We have to rely on intuition, our true being” (xiv). In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell states that the hero’s journey “is a journey not of discovery, but of rediscovery. The godly powers sought and dangerously won are revealed to have been within the heart of the hero all the time” (p. 39). The hero must undergo a “separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power and a life enhancing return” (Campbell, 1973, p.35). In the hero there is something of us all yet, like a Shaman, the hero is able to transcend earthly ties to seek resolve with a greater truth; so we love the hero for both his humanity and becomes ours. In a world where individuals often feel powerless to effect change, the hero is an inspiration god-like nature. In life it appears that, more often than not, when we are in a cinema if we suspend our disbelief, it is the ‘good guy’ or the underdog dog that we empathize with, and their triumph.

Campbell discusses the hero in mythology, as shown above, drawing a parallel with the plight of the modern day hero. In The Power of Myth, Campbell and journalist Bill Moyers discuss the Western as a film genre which constructs a similar hero, one

embodied in iconographic figures such as John Wayne. The Western *Shane*, for example, starring Alan Ladd, and its more recent rendition *Pale Rider*, with Clint Eastwood, seem to encompass not only Campbell's definition of hero, but also what we as a North American society have come to expect as quintessential "hero" behaviour. In both films a lone, pensive, man rides in with a mysterious past which he does not disclose or impose on others; "the silences of his personal despair." (The Hero With A Thousand Faces, Campbell, 1973, p. 387). Both heroes live with a family where all become attached to them; a little boy looks up to the hero more so than to his father, and the wife becomes slightly attracted to the hero. Then, without indication, he vanishes. The hero later re-surfaces, having dealt with his inner turmoil, riding in on a horse in time to rescue the family. He does battle with that which threatens them, and then rides off alone in the same manner in which he first entered the screen. It as if the hero must not be allowed to reside in one place too long, his transitory restless nature makes him the perpetual wanderer, always finding those in need of salvation. The underlying principles for the hero are the same though the situation and time period may differ, the horse becomes the metaphor for Robinhood's swinging rope, or James Bond's gadget-filled car. In the following section, we will see that the very common glamorized Hollywood hero does not always disappear into the lone hills, but often obtains the object of his desire, the beautiful woman.

Gender and the Hero

In "The Politics of Recognition", Charles Taylor discusses the impact upon a people who are seldom reflected positively in the media or society at large. In his article, "The Politics of Recognition", Charles Taylor states:

The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. (Taylor, 1994, p. 27)

In keeping with Taylor's view, it is important for women to see female heroes on screen to validate their experiences. 'Languaging', as this is sometimes referred to, requires that the experiences and realities of women must:

be seen, heard and acknowledged...Languaging our existence /our experience , becomes an engagement in response to patriarchal dogma. Languaging our representations , re-presents us, on our own terms. Languaging releases the lopsided cultural positions by this society, by giving voice to all the 'deep voices' pushing up through the crevices. (Asimakos, 1991 p. 33)

The hero, whether masculine or feminine, is crucial to our mythic imagination and represents our hope for the forces of good to overcome those of evil. The woman, then, is allowed to be the object of heroics, but rarely is she herself the center stage hero. Since the audience is rarely accorded a female hero, women have often become synonymous with the "other" parts essential to create plot dynamics. In yet other films, women can destroy and men can salvage. In these films, women are the vamps, tramps, muses, idiots and goddesses; any attempt at heroics, however, comes with high consequences. The message seems to be women bring about destruction, whether conscious or not, and men redeem society and bring about salvation. This will be discussed and demonstrated more

specifically in the analyses that will take place (of specific films) in the following chapters.

I have observed that in cinema, when we think hero, we think male. It is the masculine hero that seems to be etched into our cinematic consciousness. If one delves into the Webster's New 20th Century Dictionary 2nd edition, under "Hero" this is what they will find:

1. in mythology and legend a **man** of great strength and courage favored by the gods and in part descended from them, often regarded as a half-god and worshipped after his death ; as Aenas and Hector were heroes to the ancients.
2. any **man** admired for his courage, nobility, or exploits, especially in war; as, Washington is a national *hero*.
3. any person admired for his qualities or achievements and regarded as an ideal or model.
4. the central **male** character in a novel, play, poem, etc., with whom the reader or audience is supposed to sympathize; protagonist: often opposed to villain.
5. the central **figure** in any important event or period, honored for outstanding qualities.

Heroine: 1. a **woman** of a brave spirit.

2. the principal **female** character, or the one with whom the **hero** is in love, in a poem, play, romance, story; or the like. (p. 852).

(Italics added for emphasis in above definitions.)

The concept of equating male with hero, beginning with the Webster's dictionary has permeated and been reflected through our cultural norms. The definition of hero is confined to the male species and is detailed extensively. The definitions for heroine are concise and even include a passive role – "the one with whom the hero is in love". I will argue; in this thesis, that that many films have mirrored and sustained these barriers.

James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart and James Dean are the stuff “legends” are made of, and these men of few words and necessary action are ingrained in the North American psyche as heroes; the tough guys. On the other hand, the women in these films of their time are remembered not for strength, but for their sex appeal, beauty, and grace, or for their stupidity. Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, and Ingrid Bergman have played roles which are remembered along such lines.

Consider the film *The Public Enemy* and its reception for example. In his book, The Tough Guys (1976) James Parish states:

It is so easy to understand why Cagney (James) is still a popular household name. Few actors so personify a colorful era as jus-chinned James and few made on camera mayhem so delightful a pleasure for audiences everywhere. Perhaps only feminists have a gripe against the ex-movie Star. They may not be able to forgive him for pushing that Trademark grapefruit into Mae Clarke's face some forty-five years ago (p. 12).

This is the scene in question:

Tommy: (Cagney): *Got a drink in the house?*

Kitty: (Clarke): *Not before breakfast dear.*

Tommy: *I didn't ask ya' for any lip I asked ya' if ya' had a drink!*

Kitty: *I know, Tom, but...well, gee, I wish...*

Tommy: *There ya' go with that wishin stuff again! I wish you was a Wishin' well – so*

that I could tie a bucket t'ya' and sink ya'!

Kitty: *Maybe you found someone you like better?*

At that, Cagney's Tommy takes half a grapefruit and grinds it into his mistress' face) (p. 23).

Parish continues:

The year the film was released Time Magazine reported '*The Public Enemy*' is well told: "and in its intensity is relieved by scenes of the central characters slugging bartenders and slapping their women across the face. U.S audience, long trained by the press to glorify thugs, last week laughed loudly at such comedy and sat spell bound through the serious parts. Mayhem looked like such fun, that hating him was virtually impossible". (p. 24)

This film raises several points that are directly related to women's roles in film. First of all, Parish states that "perhaps only feminists have a gripe against the ex-movie star." He seems to assume that any woman who contests a scene of random violence is just an angry feminist. As such, he confines women who object to the scene into a stereotypical category, and in this way diminishes their power.

It is interesting to consider the fact that, upon release, the film received wide acclaim. Time magazine cited: "U.S. audience, long trained by the press to glorify thugs..." (Parish, 1976, p.25). This clearly illustrates the fact that the struggle to change women from object to subject in film is not a simple one, as women have also been socially conditioned to be the 'second sex' (a term coined by humanist and feminist Simone de Beauvoir 1908-1986; de Beauvoir's characterization of women as 'the second sex,' thus designated by virtue of their creation as Other, with reference to the masculine norm). It is seemingly easier for women to accept the impositions of a world filled with double standards than to risk constant judgement by trying to locate themselves above the oppressive structures that have long been in operation. This behaviour is explained by Frye:

One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind-situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation. For example,

it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure. (Frye, 1983, p. 3)

These examples illustrate a dynamic of diametrically opposed pressures, such that whatever course of action the individual pursues, they cannot win. For woman, a glaring example is sexuality: sexual activity and inactivity are both used against them.

It is common in the United states that women, especially younger, are in a bind where neither sexual activity nor inactivity is all right. if she is heterosexually active, a woman is open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled or a whore. On the other hand, if she refrains from heterosexual activity, she is fairly constantly harassed by men who try to persuade her into it and pressure her to "relax" and "let her hair down." The same parents who would be disapproving of her sexual activity may be worried by her inactivity because it suggests she is not or will not be popular, or is not sexually normal. (Frye, 1983, p. 5)

This demonstrates one example of the fact that limitations are placed on women's freedoms in many ways.

Some new cinema, and more frequently high budget films, are trying to change the way we depict men and women on the screen by allowing women to empower themselves in ways considered by many to be conventionally male. The films I have chosen illustrate clearly, however, that in the world of Hollywood fiction film, historically, the words "male" and "hero" have been synonymous and interchangeable.

Chapter FOUR

The Muse, The Maiden, The Victim and the Damsel in Distress - The Making of a Passive Persona

Generally, we see the world in its conventional rubrics. We see someone and identify the person as a woman because she has the hair, curves, voice, and gait of women in general. We look at her long enough to assign her to some categories – e.g. pretty or ugly, willing or unwilling. – And then look at her no more.

-Sidney M Jourard

The Western

The Hollywood movie- making machine, I suggest, has systematically produced one-dimensional, simplistic roles for women. As such, it has served as a tool to concretize the existing patriarchal hegemony. Since the introduction of genres such as the “Western” and the “Romance”, women have either occupied a background position, playing second fiddle to swaggering, gun-toting saviors and Robinhoods, or they have been the object of unflattering courtship and desire; the muse rather than the master of their domain. In John Ford’s classic Westerns, for example, portrayed by actors such as John Wayne, men were tough and valiant for example, John Wayne, while women remained pretty on their pedestals, or shuffling about on the home front making light commentary and recoiling in fear from any threat of impending doom.

(...) since Hollywood Cinema, easily the largest and most influential such system of representation, has been massively and continually devoted to perpetuating myths of phallic potency - in, for example, its portrayal of he-men from John Wayne to Sylvester Stallone. (Modleski , 1991, p. 91)

In countless films when women are confronted with guns, they shake, tremble and are often unable to use the firearm effectively, ultimately submitting to the power object at

hand. The 1940's western *Stagecoach*, starring John Wayne depicted brave cowboys protecting timid, out of control women from 'savage' Indians. These scenarios suggest that women cannot and should not function in a man's domain when faced with a gun, which can be seen as a metaphor for male sexual anatomy. Once again the woman becomes the subordinate.

Horror Films

Horror films past and present thrive on the screaming, defenseless female scenario.

These women do not try to aid the male main character in their fight with demon spirits, but rather begin shrieking uncontrollably.

Abject fear is coded as feminine as, in movie after movie female victims with terrified expressions - wide eyes and gaping mouths - are stalked with evil intent by male aggressors. (Cook, and Dodd, 1993, p. 134)

Paradoxically, horror films are also one of the only genres that occasionally utilize role reversals effectively. In these cases, the victim masters her situation by turning on the aggressor, beating him at his game, hence rendering him the victim. The villain, typically a male slasher or rapist, is maimed or killed by the protagonist. This act of defense is achieved, and violently so, with hand-held implements such as knives or axes. The woman is literally and symbolically taking back her esteem through her act of vengeance. A perfect example of this would be Wes Craven's 1997 Horror/Parody, *Scream*. There, the protagonist is a young female, who kicks, jumps, runs, and fights like crazy to avoid the fate that the film has laid down for her. In the end, it is not her boyfriend but a female journalist, by whom she felt betrayed, who actually comes to her aid. The two save what

is left of the town and smile at each other in solidarity, showing what can happen when women empower themselves.

The Beauty Myth

Whereas in horror films a woman's agility and wit can be her salvation, physical beauty has been, for the most part, the necessary character trait needed to access a higher status within society. Indeed, the mythological cornerstones reveal the origins of this trend. The muse had to have the "essential" virtue of esoteric beauty before reaching the pinnacle. In order to achieve the elevated status of concubine to the gods, the muse needed to undergo the internal meeting with the Goddess. Simply put, acceptance of her own sexual nature.

This notion of elevated secondary status for the muse has been evident since at least the time of the pharaohs. Joseph Campbell points out in The Hero With A Thousand Faces:

The meeting with the goddess (who is incarnate in every woman) is the final test of the hero to win the boon of love (charity: *amor fati*), which is life itself enjoyed as the encasement of eternity. And when the adventurer, in this context, is not a youth but a maid, she is the one who, by her qualities, her beauty, or her yearning, is fit to become the consort of an immortal. Then the heavenly husband descends to her and conducts her to his bed—whether she will or no. And if she has shunned him, the scales will fall from her eyes; if she has sought him, her desire finds its peace. (Campbell, 1973, p. 57)

Due to the patriarchal nature of many religions and cultures, worldwide folklore is steeped with this male oriented dogma. The subservient female as role model abounds in

today's media and advertising. From deities to diets this ideal that only by serving the current god or trend can one salvage oneself through beauty to earn the prize of male acceptance.

Woman, to fit the male defined standards, became a biological abnormality. Throughout history, woman distorted her body and her mind to satisfy male criteria. The implications of these behavioral modifications became symptomatic of mainstream culture. Woman learnt to see herself as incomplete and inferior. Society, and the dominant culture, developed a pathological attitude towards anyone who did not fit the prescribed 'norm'. (Askimakos, 1991 p. 25)

Television Programs such as *Entertainment Tonight* delve into the lives of film stars and, through their coverage, set an unattainable standard of glamour for the average woman to attain. Women with pre-pubescent bodies flaunt designer clothes with the excesses of Hollywood Babylon. An eating disorder poster at a local university shows the ankle of a famous super model and that of a victim of hunger; both are of equal proportion. Anorexia has moved from a sickness to a goal. Many women are led to believe that they have to look like a Cover Girl, while failing to realize the starvation, air- brushing, and sometimes even cocaine abuse that goes into the construction of such images.

Moreover, to give men credit, not all of them desire such struggle, wherein being a woman becomes a contrived act rather than a natural state.

Today, the "women's mysteries" surrounding beauty as sexuality, seem, biological and changeless. They too are cloaked in flattery that manipulates women while they seem to give men the better sexual deal. They too burden women with obligations while keeping men through peer pressure,

far from a source of joy. A man today must face ridicule from other men if he joins his partner beyond the beauty myth. At the moment ,the jokes' on both of them. But that too can change.
(Wolf, 1991, p. 32)

In popular 1960's cinema, Marilyn Monroe was the archetypal embodiment of the masculine vision of womanhood: blonde, curvaceous and possessing very little reflective and intellectual capabilities. She is the woman who thrives on men's recognition of her. It is no wonder that her legacy has been so well preserved. Women in many films hang from men's arms like luggage or an appendage; their function is to render the man's collection of status symbols complete, as they themselves remain fragmented in the film by undeveloped characterizations. Julia Roberts'role in *Pretty Woman* (1990)and Demi Moore's performance in *Indecent Proposal* (1994) typify this. It is a frequent occurrence in film for women to be conceived as either a victim of their own vanity or stupidity, or as the victim of some phobia-related complex as the case with Vivian Leigh's Scarlet O'Hara and the myth of Delilah.

Film Analysis: *Waterworld*

Waterworld (1995) is a recent example of the "women as victim" theme and of the common bias of the male hero. If we analyze this film from a feminist perspective, we can witness an abusive tale amidst the mutant / Mariner (Kevin Costner), the "Smokers", and the adventurous quest for "dryland".

This film is centered around the journey the Mariner undergoes with Helen (the woman) and Enola (the female child), her adoptive child, who initially save him so that he may help them find “dryland”. The Mariner is strong, aggressive, easily agitated, strong headed, skilled, abusive, willful, thoughtless, and he makes all pertinent decisions for the three of them; he is the provider as he finds the food, and he is the macho hero. Despite his evident personality flaws, he is continually redeemed in the film for his bravery; it is hinted that deep down he’s just a sensitive American guy with strong values. Helen on the other hand, is depicted as weak, submissive, hysterical when in danger, and unconditional in her support of the Mariner, though she is often on the receiving end of his ill tempered outbursts.

The relationship between the Mariner and Helen is comparable to the classic scenario of a woman with an abusive or alcoholic partner. Despite the Mariner’s abusive disposition and demeaning conduct towards Helen throughout the film, she rarely protests. She symbolizes the girlfriend, or wife who is going to make a difference, if she surrenders enough of her identity, he will change and she will be the reason. This exemplifies Hollywood’s ambivalence regarding female characters; on one hand they are saved and rescued by men, on the other they must be the maternal savior, the eternal martyr, yet without the stature of hero. Helen understands that the Mariner’s anger is a result of him being a mutant, which is both his virtue and his Achilles’ heel.

The Mariner’s mutant nature serves as both safety net and as justification for his truly unacceptable behavior. When the Mariner finally shifts from tyrant to well intentioned

“good guy”, the transition goes unnoticed. Helen expresses no rage or resentment over his past treatment of her, rather she seems excessively grateful for the turnaround. The Mariner never offers an apology, as one is never demanded. Since he is invincible, there is a constant disavowal of antagonistic behavior. Helen’s silence is almost absurd in light of the fact that he has already pushed her and Enola overboard and almost traded her sexual favors to some lunatic for paper. The Mariner manipulates his abusive position to psychologically intimidate Helen in order to control her. In one scene, the Mariner even takes it upon himself to cut off most of Helen and Enola’s hair (a reversed case of the “Samson and Delilah” syndrome? In the film *Samson and Delilah*, however, the woman, Delilah cuts the man’s hair, which is his source of strength). This act establishes the Mariner’s authority as supreme, while dehumanizing Helen and Enola, rendering them not unlike prisoners of war. Walsh (1984) echoes the assertion that popular culture is *intricately* linked to the production of social relations of power.

Popular culture - from production through reception, constitutes itself through social relations of power and resistance, of subordinate versus dominant, of subculture and mainstream. (Walsh, 1984 p. 19)

Waterworld, with its degrading, archaic portrayal of a woman in a 90’s film, reinforces barriers that have helped maintain gender inequality. By placing the male character in the power position and the female as dependent, it vehicles and even reinforces the message that this is an acceptable even desirable situation.

CHAPTER FIVE

Frail Female to Hollywood Heroine - From Diminutive to Distaff (A Stride Forward?)

One is not born, but rather becomes a woman.

-Simone de Beauvoir

In Hollywood films it is extremely rare for a plot to rely solely on the sustaining force of a female character.

As the history of feminist film theory so clearly demonstrates, the very attempt to “find” a female subject has led to a paralyzing situation in some feminist film histories, which tend to affirm a socially constructed feminine identity or to reject any attempt at self-naming at all. (Carson, Dittmar, and Welsch, 1994, p. 67)

In fact, for the most part the films that revolve around the female as *hero* or exemplary individual tend to be autobiographical or biographical by nature, if not complete documentaries. This can be seen in *Silkwood* (1983), in which Meryl Streep portrays a real life woman, Karen Silkwood, who courageously battles her local nuclear plant. The film *Norma Rae* (1979) is similar, in that Sally Field's character is also based on a real woman whose tenacity created better working conditions for employees of a huge mill. Again this phenomenon can be witnessed in the film *Frances* (1982). There, Jessica Lange portrays Frances Farmer, a strong willed actress of the 30's and 40's, who refused to succumb to the standards for women of her time, and was consequently arrested and involuntarily committed to a mental institution. She is eventually given a lobotomy. This film, based on a factual account of an actual life is, in my view, both a realistic and sensitive depiction of social constraints and pressures that have harnessed women for

centuries. Notwithstanding, a reviewer in the is VideoHound's Golden Movie Retriever 1995 writes that Farmer is "driven to a mental breakdown by bad luck (an over-simplification), drug and alcohol abuse, a neurotic, domineering mother, despicable mental health care, and *her own stubbornness*" (p. 407).

It is ironic to note, as in the above, that women are purposely constructed as victims when it serves Hollywood, yet when a woman is victimized by industry, blame must be reflected back onto her. "Her own stubbornness" implies that all conflict and subsequent problems could have been avoided had Frances conformed to the norms, rather than exercising her right to question convention.

Women who are both strong and resilient are very rare in the Hollywood fiction film archives. Notwithstanding, the film *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992) is a unique satire that effectively reverses the male/female roles with respect to conventional heroes. Buffy (Kristy Swanson) is, in essence, the archetypal heroine; when her school prom is invaded by vampires she is center stage, smoothly handling all obstacles as anarchy threatens to ensue. Early in the film, she undergoes a transformation from mall socialite/cheerleader, which she later regards as benign, to martial arts expert/vampire slayer. This shows that women have the ability to go through the maturation and growth processes that are usually reserved for males.

Donald Sutherland lends his expertise as Buffy's trainer and reminds her that her destiny is that of vampire slayer, it is her lineage. Buffy is tough, unwavering and charismatic,

but most importantly, female. She drives a motorcycle with her date, Luke Perry, on the back, and even catches him when he faints. She is always in the forefront and her male love interest never upstages her abilities with macho dramatics. On the down side, Buffy is still physically desirable and flawless enough to satisfy any male audience.

Nonetheless, this film may provide young women with an alternative perspective which may serve to model their own personal empowerment.

The Films *The Terminator* and *Terminator 2*

Other recent action films, such as *The Terminator* (1984) and its sequel *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991), have seemingly given rise to the female hero. At the onset, Linda Hamilton, the protagonist, resembles Clint Eastwood in a “spaghetti western”, she walks boldly and is cautiously smooth, her facial expressions fixed like stone, giving away no inner emotions. Her arms are muscular and she sports army gear and machine gun. She talks from experience, and appears as a force to be reckoned with. Yet again, there are points of contention and contradiction that should be of concern to a discriminating public; Hamilton is muscular, but not to the point that it detracts from her female appeal, her hair is long in *Terminator* as opposed to cropped, which affords her a level of sexual identification and appeal. These films reveal that Hamilton’s main purpose is to function as “breeder” that is to say a modern version of Mother Mary. Her son is to be the world’s salvation. This reinforces the notion that men, not women, enact true deeds of greatness.

In Feminism and Film Theory, Laura Mulvey (1988) claims that:

Women stand in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out

his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning. (p. 58)

In the case of *Terminator*, Arnold Schwarzenegger is the central figure as the futuristic cyborg, whose mission it is to kill the woman, Linda Hamilton, who will conceive the grand liberator and archenemy of the earth's future ruler. In *T2*, Schwarzenegger resurfaces as a "good" cyborg, who is now in charge of protecting the boy who will be "mankind's post-nuke resistance leader". As a villain is essential to the plot, the T-1000, a machine programmed to kill, and with the ability to change form, is now in pursuit of the boy. All this testosterone does not leave much room for Hamilton's character now that she has performed the maternal deed of conception, so in this sequel her role is greatly reduced. Her legacy, however, lingers.

At best, Hamilton was constructed as a male version of what a heroine would be, as well as child-bearer. In this way she appeals to the women in the audience, who see her as hero/role model/nurturer, as well as to the men, who do not feel threatened by her encroachment on "their" territory, as her role is defined through male mechanisms, and since she becomes secondary to her son and the cyborg. The Hollywood narrative succeeds in its manipulative fulfillment and deception of both the female and male viewer. Once again the female is reduced to secondary status and dismissed when her presence is no longer needed.

In Laura Mulvey's book, Visual and Other Pleasures (1989), she states:

To summarize briefly: the function of a woman in forming the patriarchal unconscious is twofold: she firstly symbolizes the

castration threat by her real lack of a penis and secondly thereby raises her child into the symbolic. Once this has been achieved, her meaning in the process is at an end. It does not last into the world of law and language except as a memory, which oscillates between memory of maternal plentitude and memory of lack. Both are posited on nature (or on anatomy in Freud's famous phrase). Woman's desire is subjugated to her image as bearer of the bleeding wound; she can exist only in relation to castration and cannot transcend it. (p. 14)

Fortunately, this masquerade cannot be sustained; with a culture saturated with impending nuclear threats and environmental hazards, it is increasingly difficult to tolerate the prototype of the mousy housewife.

Thelma and Louise

In 1991, director Ridley Scott gave women new hope when his fictional characters *Thelma and Louise* broke down previous stereotypes as well as sales records worldwide. This opened the road to more innovations previously unimaginable. *Thelma and Louise* were two regular women, one a waitress and the other a housewife, who became outlaws and folk - heroes through an act of self-defense. The simple lifestyles of the characters made it all the easier for viewers to empathize. Women viewers were awakened to the reality that they need not passively accept being on the receiving end of abuse; physical or otherwise. This was another first, a film where the woman was allowed to not just defend herself, but also to take control and deflate the all too common situation of a lewd truck driver/ construction worker. As our women 'on the run' deflated the tires, the crowds cheered and wished at one point or another that they had done the same.

On many levels this film was a triumph for women all over. It is critical to note, however, that *Thelma and Louise* paid a high consequence for their brave deeds. One of the women, Louise, was a former rape victim. The other, her friend Thelma would have been sexually violated, had Louise was not arrived on time to shoot the aggressor. Due to Louise's prior experience in which she was raped, she is aware that the judicial system would not accept the truth of their situation and, with this in mind she and Louise decide to head to Mexico. Along the way they are robbed and end up holding up a store for money; every action of theirs compounds their situation. All the men, except one (agent Harvey Keitel) betray the women. Although he tries to convince them to turn themselves in, they know that justice will not serve them. In an explosive climax Thelma and Louise teeter at the edge of the Grand Canyon, encircled by police cars, special agents and helicopters. The agent (Keitel) is running and screaming not to fire at them but at this point his position is mute. The two women back up, look at each other in a decisive moment and decide to go 'all the way'. Louise drives the car back, dust consumes the area, and she careens forward at full speed over the canyon. As she and Thelma hold hands, the ultimate price for their heroics is death.

The passive female persona may be slightly sidestepped in such films as *Volcano*, *Independence Day*, and *Twister* but, in general, the new breed of woman is designed slicker than the latest hair gel. They are a template, a prototype, an experiment. The French European movie *La Femme Nikita*, about a renegade kidnapped by an agency and forced to be an assassin, spawned an American version entitled *Point of No Return* with Bridget Fonda, and a Canadian sitcom, *Nikita*. In *La Femme Nikita*, Nikita is actually a

prisoner, who becomes a convenient killing machine for the male order. She has no other options than to follow the agenda set out for her or she will face her own death. In reality, hence, she is just another mannequin whose function is created straight from the male psyche.

Most recently, Geena Davis and Samuel L. Jackson star in the movie *The Long Kiss Goodbye* (1997). Davis portrays a character who is a “regular” housewife who gets into an accident and begins to remember a past forgotten. It turns out that she was a highly trained assassin for a covert government agency. This uncannily resembles the *La Femme Nikita* storyline. Even though these women are “take control characters”, it would seem that their cool beyond belief attitudes come at a price; loss of any nurturing female qualities.

It would appear that only by being one extreme or the other can these women be successful and credible. An interesting question emerges: Why can a woman not be a mother and a hero all at once whereas men may be depicted as fathers and heroes simultaneously?

CHAPTER SIX

The 'Temptress', the 'Bitch' and the 'Whore'- Liberation Or Lynching?

And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a women, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

-Genesis, the Holy Bible

The mystical marriage with the queen goddess of the world represents the heroes total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero is knower and master.
(Campbell, 1973, p. 393)

Since Hollywood's Golden era, women have been depicted as cunning and manipulative, using any form of intelligence strictly as a vehicle of greed and self-fulfillment in order to bring about the male downfall. Variations on the Biblical account of "Adam and Eve" are embedded and woven throughout cinema. In the popular tale, notorious Eve lures Adam to taste the forbidden fruit, resulting in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and provoking the wrath of their God. All humankind must suffer for their dive (induced by Eve) into original sin; redemption can only be gained through purity and transcendence of all evil, or else one risks hellfire and eternal damnation.

The overall potency of this story, where the female represents temptation and doom, has been kept alive in many forms. This use of the female seductress as barrier to be overcome and finally mastered, symbolically modeled the proper order of society and salvation. Film is a medium that clearly reflects this; the faces may change but the structure of the enticee and the enticed remains intact.

But when it suddenly dawns on us, or is forced to our attention, that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then, not uncommonly,

there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, women in particular as the great symbol of life, become intolerable to the pure, the pure, pure soul. (Campbell, 1973, p. 402)

Samson and Delilah

In 1950, prominent director, Cecil B. Demile brought his version of another classic biblical duo, *Samson and Delilah*, to the screen. In this film, like its written counterpart, Samson is a visionary of his God, he represents hope for his people suffering under tyranny and oppression. He is industrious, strong, excessively masculine and virtuous; basically the hero next door. Samson's descent ineluctably begins when he forgoes marriage to a sweet, generous, "simple" woman from his village and chooses to marry the woman he loves, who is incidentally part of the ruling class. Her sister Delilah, pursues Samson with a fury and, upon his rejection of her, she proceeds to deceptively plan her revenge. In scene after scene, Delilah is seen pitting men against one another, dressing and acting the part of a total seductress. After Delilah incites a rebellion leading to her sister's death, in which Samson is implicated, he becomes a sought-after culprit. Delilah then marries a Roman leader to gain access to power and riches. With cruel wit, she notifies her husband that she can deliver to him Samson, a thorn in his brutal enslaving operations. She quickly establishes herself in a dwelling on the outskirts of Samson's village. As Samson and Delilah spend more time together, her rage over his initial rejection of her seems to dissipate and even collapse into genuine warm feelings. This serves to reinforce the implied duality of female nature; she is in control, yet at once extremely vulnerable. In Women and Film - A Sight and Sound Reader, Amy Taubin (1993) remarks on this duality:

It would seem, then, that for some directors, femininity is two-faced, embodying both suffering passivity and monstrous destructive power (p. 137)

The film centers a disproportionate amount of time around Samson's vulnerability and heart, as he falls deeply in love with Delilah and at "her" probing, divulges his secret that his strength is in his hair. This act is the ultimate betrayal of his people and his god. Delilah shears his long hair in his sleep and Samson loses all his extra physical strength. The penance for being lead astray by a woman is a heavy one, as his captors also blind Samson. He is sentenced to harsh labor, pushing a concrete wheel that he is chained to, with no food and little water, while his enemies abuse and belittle him with vicious mockery. Upon seeing him in this state, Delilah is shocked and immediately realizes that this is not how she envisioned possessing the man she now loves, hence massive guilt haunts her conscience. Her character is allowed some humanity, but mostly so that she can realize the error of "her ways" and the consequences that have resulted from *her* actions. She approaches Samson with sincerity and asks for his trust one last time, he asks her to guide him to the two pillars that support the stadium, where prisoners are beaten and tried for sport, and tells her to flee from the area. Yet, after all this, he still loves her. Having learned the hard way, Samson begs his god for forgiveness and strength for the last time. In his final act of righteousness, Samson brings down the entire structure and, in so doing, liberates his people.

Gone With the Wind

The highly acclaimed epic civil war drama *Gone With The Wind* (1939) is another example in which women play a dual role, in this case as temptresses and insidious “bitches”. The film focuses on an extended southern family and their pre and post civil war experience. Scarlett O’Hara (Vivien Leigh), is the meddling, southern belle, whose boredom and mischievous spirit cause her to become part of a desperate love triangle. She is enamored with Rhett Butler (Clark Gable), a dashing bachelor who maintains an appealing distance from her. Meanwhile her suitor, a man of a genuine compassionate nature, trails after her in hopes of securing her hand in marriage. Typically Scarlett, insatiable in her desire for monetary resources and romance, ends up married to Rhett and conceives their child. Throughout the saga, Scarlett manages to ruin two men and bring about her own destitution. Her character is that of the model femme fatale, whose beauty and greed contaminate men like a plague.

The Femme Fatale

Fatal Attraction

In the 80’s, mainstream cinema popularized the psychosexual, erotic thriller. On the surface, these films seem to liberate women from the passive mold that has encased them for so long, as these thrillers tend to portray women as confident, domineering, sexually open, permissive and even defiant. In addition, many of these characters are rich, astute, business women. In The “Fatal Femme” in Contemporary Hollywood Film Noir: Reforming Gender, Violence, and Power, Julianne Pidduck (1993) argues that these films empower women rather than depicting them as passive victims of male violence. “In the

face of women's predominantly passive role in popular representation, the hyperbolic figure of the female serial killer practically leaps off the screen at the viewer and the critic." (p. 147). It is true that these women have some of the stronger characteristics usually attributed to men in films, however these characters have one binding tie and flaw that must not be overlooked. They all suffer from severely twisted, psychotic, personality disorders. The social status and mobility these women possess is then undermined by their dysfunctional traits and their erotic, seductive posturing. These films clearly depict women as stalkers, potential murderers, and objectified outlets for male heterosexual desire.

One example of this is *Fatal Attraction* (1987), a film about a married New York lawyer, Michael Douglas, who is "seduced" into having an affair with his bold, blonde associate, Glenn Close. Things commence on a light note with the two laughing and engaging in primordial, cathartic sex, in a kitchen. Problems only begin once Douglas tries to end this little extra-marital fling. It seems to me as though the director is insinuating that a woman can reside in a man's world but cannot play the game with his politics and win. Of course, the female is the one who becomes fixated and attached, not the male. Glenn Close's character resorts to threats against Douglas's family, thus she begins committing violent acts, proving once again that strong qualities are only attributed to women when they are to be used in a negative context. Close excels as the "woman from hell" as she stalks Douglas, and terrorizes his family. One of the ironies in this film is that though Douglas willingly took part in the affair, his character is created in such a way as to evoke sympathy from the audience. The "sure he cheated, but no one should have to pay that price" commentaries were in an abundance at the time of the film's release. *Fatal*

Attraction also appealed to women, who felt that this film could serve as a repellent for infidelity in their mate. Also, the film's stylistic cutting and suspenseful montages drew praise from critics who, incidentally, are predominantly male. This film created such an impact on its audience, that to this day, many young men and women, refer to someone who is encompassing or persistent as a Glenn Close, example, "she's a total Glenn Close", or "I was paranoid she would pull a Glenn Close". Unfortunately the commentaries are endless, while quality roles for female actors are less abundant.

Basic Instinct

In 1992, *Basic Instinct* carried on the tradition of the cold, calculating, potentially dangerous blonde, while incorporating voyeuristic techniques into its plot. In this thriller, Sharon Stone plays Catherine Trumell, a beautiful, statuesque, reclusive novelist who also happens to be a suspect in a murder committed with an ice pick. Michael Douglas is back, this time playing a tough, unsavory, yet vulnerable detective, Nick Curran, whose job it is to investigate Catherine thoroughly.

He is not the only one scrutinizing all Catherine's activities. The camera tracks her movements in such a way as to make her a voyeuristic spectacle so that the audience is given the sense that they are involved in a privileged taboo pass-time. In one scene, Nick and fellow officers interrogate Catherine; she is sitting casually and seductively on a chair with legs crossed. All the males remain on one side of the room and regard her in fascination and awe, the way one would a caged panther. With a smooth maneuver, Catherine crosses her legs and for a brief moment, the detectives and audience are given a glimpse of her vagina. Although this film uses shocking sex tactics to sell itself,

Catherine is the only one who exposes herself at various points. It is interesting to note that in Hollywood films men rarely expose their genitals; anything below the waist, except random shots of a rear end, is a faux pas for men. Even though erotic thrillers expose more male flesh than any other genre, women most often are the ones to strip and expose their vulnerability to the audience. Pidduck (1993) observes that Catherine's character is often given more cinematic coverage than her male counterparts.

The visual dominance of the Catherine Tramell character is one of the most striking visual motifs in *Basic Instinct*. From the moment of her introduction into the plot, Catherine's face and body, her powerful returned gaze, are the central visual and narrative elements of every scene she inhabits. The interrogation scene is one pronounced example of this trend where, from her entry into the room, Catherine's face and body literally crowd the men out to the edges of the film frame. (p. 49)

I believe that Catherine's visual predominance is used to promote her as an object of sexuality, while at the same time reinforcing voyeuristic tendencies on the part of the audience. While it appears as though Catherine is wielding the power, I would suggest that this is an illusion. Her sexuality, rather than her wit, appears to be her weapon.

I would suggest that these merely erotic thrillers incorporate a murder-mystery plot to add credibility to their real agenda, which is to supply the viewer with as much explicit on-screen sex as possible. In the last scene of *Basic Instinct*, Nick and Catherine are engaging in lush sex, when her arm comes out grasping an ice pick. This implies that Nick, blind with lust, was duped by this sexual dynamo, and the consequence could result in his death. Once again a woman cannot be trusted. Sex in these films is both the solution and the problem for women, who basically fill the role of designer sex toys.

Sharon Stone's character's appear to be the focal point of a drama when in actuality the

film she stars in is high gloss pornography. A cheap plot is thrown together so that the true agenda of selling sex is slightly undermined. Exposure of skin, not storyline takes precedence.

Lesbianism is also at center stage in many erotic thrillers, though it is a male-shared lesbianism. Lesbianism in its true form is rarely represented on the screen. We are somehow held back from witnessing another valid reality such as passionate love between two women who share the type of live-in relationship that is notorious with different sex partners. Rather, lesbianism is occasionally used skillfully to entice the audience rather than educate them. What is not shown, for example, is that in the real world real lesbians are lovers and not just figures in low grade pornographic films who use their sexuality with another woman to turn on a man. Gay women have been relegated to this position only when it works as a means to a male end, their true stories remain coveted, almost too 'abnormal and sinful' to be dealt with in a realistic context. So, once again, myths and stereotypes become fabricated around two women engaging in a sexual encounter. Hollywood upholds many of society's conventions, since true, passionate love between two women is not considered the norm. Thus, it makes sense that Hollywood has, for the most part, ignored lesbianism. Acknowledging lesbians rather than labeling them as deviant would be like giving women total control over their sexuality. Some gay women just go through the rituals imposed on them by the straight world in effect, to avoid the social repercussions brought on by their identity. In her article, "Pleasure and Danger: Toward a Politics of Sexuality", Carole S. Vance (1984) discusses the sexual hierarchy:

Privileged forms of sexuality, for example heterosexuality, marriage, and procreation, are protected and rewarded by the

state and subsidized through social and economic incentives. Those engaging in privileged acts, or pretending to do so, enjoy good name and good fortune. Less privileged forms of sexuality are regulated and interdicted by the state, religion, medicine, and public opinion. Those practicing less privileged forms of sexuality suffer from stigma and invisibility, although they do resist. The system of sexual hierarchy functions smoothly only if sexual nonconformity is kept invisible, hence the interpersonal tension when sexual difference surfaces. For dominant sexual groups, the appearance of the sexual lower orders produces anxiety, discomfort, the threat of pollution, and a challenge to their hegemony. (p. 19)

To witness lesbian sex is part of the ultimate male fantasy, yet in day to day life, lesbians are considered by many to be anomalies. Film tends to depict lesbian sex in a trite non-threatening manner. Dorothy Allison, whose tragic life story is documented in the movie and book Bastard Out of Carolina deals with class and finding one's place in a world that ostracizes anyone seen as 'other'. In her article, "A Question of Class", she writes:

I have had to fight broad generalizations from every possible theoretical viewpoint. Traditional feminist theory has had a limited understanding of class differences or of how sexuality and self are shaped by both desire and denial...It is only as the child of my class and my unique family background that I have been able to put together what is for me a meaningful politics, gained a sense of why I believe in activism, why self-revelation is so important for lesbians, reexamining the way we see ourselves. For me the bottom line has simply become the need to resist the omnipresent fear, that urge to hide and disappear, to disguise my life, my desires and the truth about how little any of us understand-even as we try to make the world a more just human place for us all. (Allison, 1993, p. 155)

In the film, Catherine has a girlfriend, whom she uses to enthrall Nick; to turn him on and draw him into her world. Lesbianism then becomes nothing more than a Penthouse styled ploy intended to satisfy the male heterosexual fantasy of watching or taking part in sex between two women. Catherine's girlfriend seems to hold little value in her world, as

she is quickly discarded for Nick. This film, as such, is not about female but male fulfillment.

As I suggested previously, domination and voyeurism are paramount in these films. In her article, "Visual and Other Pleasures" (1989), Laura Mulvey discusses spectatorship and Psychoanalytic Theory:

The cinema offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia (pleasure in looking.) Freud isolated scopophilia as one of the components instincts of sexuality which exists as drives quite independently of the erotogenic zones. At this point he associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze...At the extreme, it can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching in an active controlling sense, an objectified other (p. 17).

If the cinema provides an outlet for voyeurism the argument is two-fold. Perhaps there will be less sex crimes perpetuated against women or the notion of women as 'other' to be objectified will continue to proliferate, both in film and life. There is a strong possibility based on women's past use for male visual stimuli that the latter will be the case. Film therefore needs to deviate from type-casting women in roles where they are in a position to be controlled. To be the subject of a film that does not invade her space, yet showcases her merits as an actor is an achievement since in too many films if woman is the subject, her sexuality is an open book. Her role should consist of her not that which is sacred to her alone.

Body of Evidence

The same year as *Basic Instinct* 1992, *Body of Evidence*, strikingly similar to *Basic Instinct*, was released. This time Madonna was cast in the role of a defendant, while Willem Dafoe played her lawyer. Sex was the weapon implicated in a murder trial. This film pushes further the boundaries explored in *Basic Instinct* and adds a heavier sado-masochistic element. As expected, Dafoe, the hardened, jaded and married lawyer, and Madonna, who just happens to be blonde and resembles Stone, partake in all sorts of 'kinky' sex. Everything from candle wax to masturbation is used as a sexual stimulant. We view both bodies intertwined in rough and inventive sex repeatedly. This film fits the classification for low-medium grade pornography. The man is destroyed, but the women are exploited. Madonna's character reveals her psychotic tendencies, hence she is put on trial, shot and then drowned. This was basically the recreation of the notorious 'witch hunt'. The villain is put to death and justice is served. The question that should plague us, however, is "whose justice?" As Wolf observes:

Discussions of obscenity, or nakedness, or community do not address the harm done to women by this development: the way in which "beauty" joins pornographic conventions in advertising, fashion photography, cable T.V. and even comic books to affect women and children. Men can choose to enter an adult bookstore; women and children cannot chose to avoid sexually violent or beauty-pornographic imagery that follows them home. (Wolf, 1991, p. 34)

Batman Returns

Another example of film which relies on women in degrading roles is *Batman Returns* (1989). There, Michelle Pfeiffer plays Catwoman, a villain and long term rival of Batman's. She embodies low level pornography that is packaged and sold to both

children and adults. She has two personas: that of a mousy, blonde, squeamish secretary during the day, and a vindictive cat person at night who lives for the thrill of the chase. She is clumsy, spectacled woman in day hours and prowler at night. As Catwoman, Pfeiffer is outfitted in a tight black, latex suit that emphasizes her every curve. She is the Dominatrix. The woman here is literally the cat, which is a term associated with bitchy women, 'catty'. 'Pussy', which is another term for those friendly felines, is also a slang term used to refer to the female genitalia. Pfeiffer's dual personality recalls the creations of "Penthouse Forum"; the fantasy of the quiet secretary who, underneath the facade, is a sexual fire waiting to be ignited. She is tough and scheming, yet sensitive, as she both hates and loves Batman. When Batman, played by Michael Keaton puts his guard down, Catwoman scratches him, once again reaffirming the idea that women cannot be trusted as they so often turn on the man in his weakest moments.

Pretty Woman and Indecent Proposal

Pretty Woman (1990), and *Indecent Proposal* (1994), are clear examples of the use of women as commodities in film. *Pretty Woman*, the ultimate crowd-pleaser, was the story of a businessman who hires a prostitute for a short period and ends up falling in love with her. This Cinderella tale of love launched Julia Roberts' career in Hollywood. While she advanced, however, some women cringed under this film's regressive force. None of the realities that prostitutes face on a daily basis, for example, rape, Aids, or death, are even touched upon in this film which instead glorifies and romanticizes the profession. Vivian Ward, played by Roberts, looks like a model who has never known a rigorous day's work. Nonetheless, she is treated like an object to be bartered. Surprisingly, for a 'street

smart' woman, Vivian quickly becomes emotionally dependent on Richard Gere's character, Edward Lewis. She is like an expensive suitcase that he carries around, and he makes sure to remind her of the obvious, that she is a whore. This film is not only unrealistic, but also insulting to any women's intelligence. The film's huge success, however, may show that deep down many people hold those Western fairy tales such as Cinderella close to their hearts like sacred cows.

Indecent Proposal (1993) evolves around a couple undergoing a financial crisis, and the man who can salvage them. Like everything, there is a price for favors rendered. The millionaire, played by Robert Redford, makes a proposition to the couple for one night with Woody Harrelson's wife, Demi Moore. He will pay them one million dollars cash. As the couple's relationship is in temporary crisis, and because their finances are dwindling, 'they' decide to take Redford up on his offer. Demi Moore is lent out like a lawn mower to Redford, who treats her like a very high-class call girl. Once the night has passed, Demi's hubby's male pride is damaged and he becomes a sulking child administering blame to her for their decision. In defense, she claims that she did it for their marriage, and with his consent, he served as surrogate 'pimp'. Demi's character never stands on her own, rather she relies on the men in the film to dictate her moral intent and decisions. Disturbingly, this film was directed by a woman, Adrian Lyne. Her experience in bringing complacent female characters to the screen has been steady since *Nine and a Half Weeks*. It is unfortunate that Lyne has not used her big-budget film to help elevate the status of women. Instead, she has played into reproducing and so perpetuating the myths about women constructed by a patriarchal society.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The “Idiot”, the “Entertainer”, the “Exotic” and the “Invisible” -

Maintaining the Margins for Women of Color

The Black Woman suffers from the twin burden of being Black and Female. Her life is shaped by the subjugated statuses which are assigned to being a woman and being Black, both of which carry with them a double jeopardy.

-Joyce A Ladner

The common adage that, ‘*The more things change, the more they stay the same*’ can be said of Hollywood film’s treatment of non-white women. In film, like life, black has come to be associated with evil, sinister, primitive and satanic imagery, while white denotes purity, salvation, goodness and the angelic. This constant color dichotomy has dictated racial representations and relations in films for decades. The hierarchical color scheme, with whiteness at the top and every other color falling somewhere below, and with blackness on the bottom, has been common in mainstream film from its early days to the 1990’s. From its technical aspects to its plot formations, the movie-making machine is consistent in its propagation of racist ideologies. In Women in Film, Richard Dyer discusses the equation of whiteness with moral virtue:

By the 20’s the norm for correct lighting in Hollywood was what was known as North” lighting from the land of white people. The tendency for fair hair to look dark (too dark) in black -and -white photography was overcome by using back lighting... The association of whiteness and light -of white light- with moral values goes far back. In classical Greek art, female figures are paler than male, as befits those whose proper place is in the home, a notion taken to angelic extremes in Victorian domestic ideology and imagery. Christian has long emphasized the radiance of the pure white bodies of Christ, the Virgin, the saints and angels. Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy stressed the intrinsic transcendent superiority of the colour white, notions that were grafted on to nineteenth-century biological accounts of racial difference. (Cook and Dodd, 1993, p. 2)

Initially when “blacks” appeared in Hollywood films they were actually white actors made up with black faces. Their roles lacked nobility, and constituted insulting and

condescending caricatures. In the late 20's, when authentic blacks appeared on screen, there was no change in their portrayal. First, only dark skinned actors were hired in hopes that they would never be found attractive by white audiences. Second, if the actor's skin was not sufficiently dark, it would be darkened by make-up and or lighting. Finally, black actors were given minimal film time. In addition, for their brief on screen appearances, they were made to widen and roll their eyes and provide laughter at their expense for the audience by belittling themselves with simplistic anecdotes and childish commentary. The 'Uncle Tom' and 'Mammy' personas exemplify this notion, and they are images that have remained an integral part of American culture: Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben.

The smiling face of indentured servitude is one that has been used to connote blacks as passive, inferior, docile paternal and maternal figures, which are not given the respect that usually comes with authoritative positioning. These are clearly more reflections of Hollywood's ambivalent treatment of people of color. Black women in Hollywood have served to reinforce the superiority of their white counterparts. They are forever the white mistress' trusted confidante, seemingly devoid of personal identity or interests.

***Gone With the Wind* – A Case for Stereotyping**

In *Gone With the Wind*, (1939) two clear examples of typecasting the black woman can be seen. The first appears as the simplistic, scatterbrained fool, and the second is the overtly attentive, comical “mammy”.

Butterfly McQueen was the embodiment of the classic ‘pickaninny’ in film. Her gestures were exaggerated, her voice shrill, excited and annoying. She is a young servant, who is made to respond to situations like an out of control child, thus justifying the treatment of her as such. When the Yankees penetrate the southern boundaries and are on their way to invade Tara, the plantation owned by the O’Hara family, Butterfly McQueen, in a scene that has become memorable, runs down the long drive at Tara screaming frantically ‘the Yankees are coming’, all the while rolling her eyes. She is obviously fearful and distraught in this scene, one of several in the film where she becomes unraveled. At other moments she looks as if she could be in a psychiatric institute, locked far away into a vacant headspace. She serves as comic relief and amusement for the white audience. The film insinuates that the people whom the Yankees are coming to liberate are, in fact, less than human and barely aware of their captive situation.

The second instance of a black female character in the film is Scarlet O’Hara’s loyal main female servant, played by Hattie Mc Daniel. This actor subsequently became inextricably linked with the “mammy” figure, as those were the only parts she was

offered to play. In *Women and Film*, Stephen Bourne discusses the introduction of the “mammy” in Western culture:

The mammy caricature found its first representation in the popular fiction, poetry and music of the nineteenth century. Aunt Chloe, the mammy in Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), described as having a round black, shining face... Her whole plump countenance beams with satisfaction and contentment from under her well - starched turban... Bossy and cantankerous as she may be, her loyalty is never questioned. (Cook and Dodd, 1993, p. 30)

The “mammy”, then, can be compared to a dog; a dependable companion who has little choice in the matter and who occasionally barks in order to feel included. McDaniel tried her best to transcend the limitations of her characters by infusing them with as much life and spirit as possible. However, despite her efforts, Mc Daniel's Mammy is a shameful burden to bear for those blacks who have struggled so tenaciously to elevate their race. What is important here is that Mc Daniel was a victim of the film industry, and as an actor her fate was sealed from day one.

Many black nationalists feel that if blacks refused to accept any work of a defamatory nature in film, their cultural legacy would benefit greatly. This may be so, as film has undoubtedly enhanced derogatory notions of blacks put into motion by slavery. On the other hand, a woman like Hattie Mc Daniel was able to save herself from financial destitution by taking on the parts that she did. If there is blame to place, it should be on an industry that lacks humanity and wisdom, rather than a black woman trying to cope in a white world. For her role in *Gone With the Wind*, Hattie Mc Daniel became the first black woman awarded an Oscar, an accolade awarded to actors by Hollywood for outstanding performances. This should not be seen as a historical, monumental, triumph for woman of color, however, since Mc Daniel was a token whose role was merely

conceived of and awarded by Hollywood to keep their myths alive and intact. In addition, the award simultaneously placated blacks, who might have seen the gesture as a step forward. Ironically, it was over fifty years before another black actress won an Oscar, and it was no other than the modern, black, female actor Whoopi Goldberg.

Women of Color:

Whoopi Goldberg

When one thinks of Women of Color and Hollywood, the image of Whoopi Goldberg inevitably comes to mind: the two are now synonymous. Goldberg is the only black woman to appear repeatedly as a main character in the context of predominantly white films. Goldberg started as a comedian and has incorporated various elements of the “entertainer” (loveable, black buffoon) in her roles. Even though Goldberg has achieved status, and has managed to carve out a distinct niche in Hollywood, she must still battle stereotypes and the barriers that are forged around color and the beauty aesthetic. She has rarely sported conventional attire or “feminine” garb. Rather she gravitates towards flamboyant, loose, street clothes, making it difficult for audiences to forget her comedic history. In *Jumpin' Jack Flash* (1986), Goldberg played a computer programmer, Terry Doolittle. The occupation was progressive, yet the allegorical name Doolittle was suggestive, as Terry goes through the streets of New York doing little except becoming her own parody.

According to black film critic Donald Bogle, the makers of *Jumpin' Jack Flash* saw Goldberg as ‘an asexual creature from another universe’ and they weren’t alone. When she took the role of Celie in Spielberg’s version of Alice Walker’s *The Color Purple* (1985), one critic went so far as to compare her to E.T. (Andrea Stuart; Cook and Dodd, 1993, p. 42)

Because Goldberg is surrounded by few other black actors in a given film and is, in a sense, devoid of cultural attachments, she is rarely permitted to develop love interests or sexual relationships with men. Since her characters seem to defy gender categorization, she is construed as asexual, and hence is less threatening and to white America. In *Fatal Beauty* (1987), a director finally took the initiative and not only placed Whoopi's character with a lover, but with a white one, co-star Sam Elliot. Fears of miscegenation quickly surfaced in the preview audiences, resulting in the removal of all the interracial love scenes. More recently, in *Boys on the Side* (1995), Goldberg played a lesbian who actually expresses a desire for one of her female co-stars but, even in this film, there is no sexual experimentation.

In the film *Moonlight and Valentino* (1995), Whoopi is shown as both a mother and a wife, who lies next to her white husband in one scene, and they even embrace on occasion. This was definitely a departure from the asexual being that she has come to be seen as. Initially it was strange to see Goldberg in an unfamiliar environment but as the film progresses, this becomes more acceptable.

Whoopi Goldberg has reaped both praise and criticism from blacks and whites alike, from directors, critics, audiences, from the fashion conscious to the politically motivated. Regardless, she maintains her precarious position, claiming her place in pop-culture. If Goldberg perseveres, perhaps she will bring about some positive changes in the way black woman are depicted in film, adding more depth and dimension to their characters.

On the other hand, the politics of race may not be on her agenda, in which case she will be content to remain just another Hollywood token.

Women of Color: Other Examples

When Women of Color are finally acknowledged as sexual beings, it is often in a way that trivializes their emotions and debases them, as film often swings to the extremes in its dealings with ethnicity. These women are the exotic, the other, the sexually consumed uninhibited and impassionate wild ones, the sexy, forbidden savage that must be experienced. These women are the abstract as opposed to the concrete individual, they are never the regular girlfriend or the wife. Rather it is alluded to that they will perform the “dirty deeds” that no respectable woman would. Renowned artist Paul Gauguin (1848-1903), perpetuated woman as the exotic other, his ‘myth of primitivism’ contributed to the notion of ethnic women as sexual outlet for the white male. The real struggles that women in countries like Tahiti experienced were glossed over by a false, romantic, undignified view of them. Women of color were bent like spoons to concur with the popular European fiction of the day; one minute they were painted draped in fashionable ensembles, ‘the noble savage’, the next they were shown in loin clothes or full blown nudity to express their ‘primitive’ nature.

Oddly enough, there do not seem to be the same heavy objections when white men have sex with women of color on screen in these fantasy scenarios, compared to the sexual exchange between a ‘black’ man and white woman. The ‘mulatto sexpot’ is a favorite, featured in many films, especially those set in New Orleans. *Angel Heart* (1987), for

example, is one wherein voodoo child Lisa Bonet and Mickey Rourke copulate in ritualistic fashion. A common role for these women is that of Vampire, an insatiable creature whose hormones and drive for blood are paralleled. In *Vampire's Kiss* (1988), Jennifer Beales, formerly of *Flashdance* fame, plays a 'night creature', who engages in unhindered sex with Nicolas Cage. In *Vamp* (1986), Grace Jones and Robert Russler have such frenzied sex that he barely notices when she bites him with her fangs; it is all part of the pleasure. These films seem to suggest that if you spend too much time with these women, they will go for the jugular.

Over the years, the James Bond Films have presented an array of women scattered about for sexual conquest. Bond could never be considered racist; like Captain Kirk his sexual partners have been diverse in color. There are also the rare times we glimpse Asian and East Indian women in mainstream film, although they are invisible in most productions, almost as if lack of recognition will annihilate their presence in society. Indian born director Mira Nair's *Mississippi Masala* (1991), the story of a relationship between a black man and an East Indian woman set in the Southern states, managed to somehow move a little closer to the mainstream cinemas. *Eat Drink Man Women* (1994), director Ang Lee's film about three Chinese sisters and their individual relationships with their changing culture, men, one another and their father, is similar in that it was able to gain rare popularity through its repertoire showings and its video rentals. These films briefly enlightened Hollywood with their representations of different perspectives. It is unfortunate, however that women of color still are often forced to reside in the margins and when they do emerge too often it is to be squeezed into an erotic, transitory part.

Even though these women seem to be dominant, their power does not exceed the bedroom; the men in most of these films maintain the real control. Black actor Angela Bassett's role in *Strange Days* (1995) is an exceptional and novel occurrence as her character was strong, bold, intelligent and resourceful.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusions and Implications for the Future of Film and Education

I am and will always remain a prisoner of hope.

-Actor, Rita Moreno

An important way in which women's identity can be strengthened is through the concept of 'Sisterhood', key to a holistic vision of feminism. All women must feel that they are carving out their place in the definition of 'woman' without judgment from others who call themselves by the same name. Black feminist bell hooks writes about 'Sisterhood':

We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another. We have learned these lessons well. We must unlearn them if we are to build a sustained feminist movement. We must learn to live and work in solidarity. We must learn the true meaning of Sisterhood... The vision of Sisterhood evoked by women's liberationists was based on the idea of common oppression. Needless to say, it was primarily bourgeois white women, both liberal and radical in perspective, who professed belief in the notion of common oppression. The idea of 'common oppression' was a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality. Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices. Sustained woman bonding can occur only when these divisions are confronted and the necessary steps are taken to eliminate them. (hooks, 1984, p. 43)

Precedence should be given to women to form a true sisterhood as they have been fragmented like shards of glass and are in need of reconstructing lost, identities. Not just white middle income women also, but women of colour, poor women and gay women.

As I have stated before, men need to be an integral part of an expanding pedagogy for holistic awareness and transformative change to occur. Moreover, this must extend beyond the liberal theory sense of the past shown in the above film analysis. There the needs of men were accommodated at the expense of women, therefore negating the entire purpose. Lorraine Code (1988) discusses Liberal theory:

Liberal theory works with a model of society in which feminist change would merely require men to move over within existing social structures to make room for women. But those structures are defined and constructed to promote masculine well-being, understood according to a narrowly stereotyped conception of masculinity. (p. 36)

Men are required, rather, to participate in a movement that recognizes the inequalities that are proliferated at the very core of our society, through film, for example. Liberal lip service from men will not help further advance the Feminist movement; awareness is the best defense against ignorance.

Critical awareness on the part of the public is crucial if the inconsistencies and stereotypes in mainstream big budget film productions are to be reduced or avoided. The educational facilities need to not only impart knowledge to their students, but also should strive to instill or encourage a process of questioning diverse subject matter from various standpoints. In her article "Feminist Theory", Lorraine Code (1988) states that:

It is important to develop a "double vision" so that we can both challenge a particular patriarchal practice and stand outside the structure to see how that practice fits into the whole. We have to see what else needs to be tackled for any practice really to be changed, and how changing one practice might affect the whole social structure. (p. 21)

Critical literacy should be an integral part of any curriculum that wishes to be expansive and interactive, as opposed to limited. Educators must promote and help legitimate a transformative pedagogy that is at once more critical and political, allowing for a range of ideas to emerge instead of imposing specific ones on students; otherwise literacy will continue to be what Henry Giroux terms "a pedagogy of chauvinism dressed up in the lingo of the Great books" (1988, p. 61). Education must allow the oppressed to reclaim their voice. If we are aware of Hollywood's failures in areas of equality and do not demand that such representations cease, then we are also guilty of perpetuating a dangerous conformity that Paulo Friere termed the "culture of silence" (1973, p. 10). This inability to critique and question structure, format and content has resulted in a society that swallows the opiate provided for them by the entertainment industry. It has also spawned female and ethnic male directors who are guilty of perpetuating the same sexist and racist film ethic established by the white, middle class male. As Gunew notes, these inequalities become part of society's fibre:

Radical feminists argue that the oppression of women is built into the very structure of our society. The division between the sexes, based on the patriarchal family, is seen as fundamental to social organization. Other hierarchical, oppressive structures are developments that came out of patriarchy. This branch of feminism sees equality for women within the present system as impossible and calls for a restructuring of society, involving the elimination of patriarchy and along with it all other hierarchical structures. (Gunew, 1991 p. 50)

Some female directors may unintentionally maintain male plot structures with female substitute characters. If we wish to avoid the repetition of restrictive film patterns, we must recognize and confront that "piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" (Lorde, 1984, p. 123). We must not forget that most women have grown up with the same limited, socially prevalent norms and pop-cultural fabric regarding gender

as men. That is a standard tapestry riddled with heavily constructed, overt and subtle messages that have shaped and distorted reality; it is important to keep in mind that the media's subtle messages are often its most damaging. On one level or another, we may all be victims of the media, we must be cognizant in order to break the symbolic iconographic chains that binds us. Fortunately, feminist critique has provided women with an outlet for their unique, previously muffled voices, providing inspiration and purpose to other women engaging in filmmaking. Their insights, as expressed through their films, offer us hope for an egalitarian future. Pam Cook discusses the women filmmakers included in a chapter of the book she co-edited:

The 90's filmmakers included in "Women Direct" are influenced by feminist debates without being in the least inhibited by them. The overriding impression is of remarkable creative diversity. Each of the women directors featured has distinct concerns arising out of their different contexts. Yet they share common ground. They are all motivated by an iconoclastic desire to break with traditional cinematic forms and subject matter. They all speak from a position outside their cultures and hold fast to their renegade status. Yet they all see women as central figures in the transformation of society. They speak for themselves and not necessarily for all women; but they insist on their right to speak differently, and for that difference to be recognized. (Cook, Dodd, 1993, p. 20)

If the overriding paradigm derived from white, male middle-class is not deconstructed and analyzed, the majority of directors will continue to advance scripts that, while perhaps appearing different on the surface, will essentially employ the same formula. Students and teachers, men and women alike, should be critical of the images depicted in the media, so these may be questioned, challenged, and eventually replaced with ones that encompass a broad range of human experience. In Technopoly, (1992), Neil Postman states:

Once a technology is admitted, it plays out its hand; it does what it is designed to do. Our task is to understand what

that design is – that is to say, when we admit a new technology to the culture, we must do so with our eyes wide open. (p. 10)

We do not have to disregard all styles employed by past and present mainstream filmmakers. We can, however, redefine and expand on them, and include alternate, unconventional roles. Education can lay the ground- work for critical values. This would cultivate an open-ended process where there is an exchange involving teacher and student. Children can be taught that a hero comes in many forms, shapes, and sizes, not just with a cape and a fast car; that a hero does not have to be defined by gender, race, or class. For it is the spirit of the action that makes a hero and nothing else. In The Power of Myth, Joseph Campbell (1988) states that “A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself” (p. 123). In Reflections on the Art of Living A Joseph Campbell Companion (1991), Campbell is quoted:

The goal of the hero trip down to the jewel point is to find those levels in the psyche that open, open, and finally open to the mystery of your Self being Buddha consciousness or the Christ. That’s the journey. (p. 23)

In order to redress the imbalances discussed in this study, we need films that are expansive not restrictive, inclusive as opposed to exclusive; ones that represent diverse social voices, not just the dominant ones. We must not have films that promote women as spectacles and commodities, but rather films that depict them as positive role models. In a culture saturated with visual imagery, the deciphering lines between life and art blur; the artistic illusion can for many become larger than the reality it misrepresents, hence the need for cinema that is reflexive and multi-dimensional, and not static. While marginal, low budget films are often an amalgamation and representation of the transitory

and myriad nature of life that manifests in society; mainstream film has, with minor exceptions has secured itself in stagnant ground as something to be revered with sentimentality rather than confront transforming global realities.

The alternative cinema provides a space for the birth of a cinema which is radical in both a political and aesthetic sense and challenges the basic assumptions of the mainstream film.
(Mulvey, 1989, p. 17)

The films that I have analyzed present women as weak, dependent on men, and as feeble screamers. The realities of women, the Suffragettes or the women who worked in the factories and ran the economy during World War One and Two are seemingly absent. Moreover, the realities of economically disadvantaged women and Women of Color tend also to be invisible in these films. Through its fiction, Hollywood has created the archetypal female whose inadequacies are abundant compared to those of her male co-star. The films in this paper, with the exception of three, provide examples of the ways in which mainstream film has maintained and portrayed restrictive social roles and norms regarding women. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1992), *Strange Days* (1995), and *Scream* (1997), were rarities; the female characters were strong, heroic, and came through the films alive. The other films mirror and in so doing, reinforce the cultural belief that men, not women, are heroes.

Fortunately, however, this trend may be beginning to change. In 1998, Disney produced an animated film *Mulan*, about a young, Chinese girl who embarks upon a quest for honor to save her father. The film manages to remain within the confines of Chinese tradition, while at the same time presenting the audience with a successful female hero, one who is as competent as any male. The film has been widely acclaimed, and serves, I

believe, to teach children of both sexes that girls can also be heroes.

The Replacement Killers (1998), is director John Woo's latest slick, action, thriller. Even though actor Mira Sorvino co-stars with a male karate expert, her character is never over-shadowed. She is resourceful, attractive, and strong without ever screaming or hovering meekly in a corner.

'*Ever After*' (1998), the modern adaptation of the Cinderella story opened recently to great reviews. In this rendition Cinderella, played by Drew Barrymore, has a mean left hook, lots of attitude and enough courage to save the prince. She is tough but human, demonstrating that both qualities can co-exist in a woman.

The much talked about film *Halloween H20*, starring actor Jamie Lee Curtis, who also starred in other *Halloween* films will soon be released at theatres throughout the country. Apparently those who have attended the film's exclusive screening reacted in a favorable manner when, in one pivotal moment, instead of running, Curtis's character turns and faces her stalker. She would rather confront Jason, the psycho-killer, and the possibility of her death, than flee. This critical scene evoked the most applause from the audience. Given my discussion of the above films in which women have active roles, and given the public's favorable response to them, it one might expect that there will be more of them to come.

When I began this study in 1996, films that celebrated or empowered women were few. As this thesis has shown, mainstream film still has far to go if it is to change the

negative stereotypes that inhabit the North American psyche today. As this study has also shown, however, change is possible. It is important that educational institutions, through critical pedagogy, reflect a changing world so that students learn to be aware of the type of oppression evident in the films examined, rather than participating unknowingly in its perpetuation.

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