

Master's Thesis

Feminism – Is the Leading Female Character Strong?
The American Representation of the Tough Woman in Action Movies

Aalborg University – English Department

31 of May 2018

Keystrokes:

170.421/192.000

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1. Introduction

The master's thesis aims to explore how the American action cinema constructs gender roles, particularly the portrayal of the female characters as action heroines. By using Laura Mulvey's theory about the cinematic male gaze, the project will examine how Western cinema constructs women as empowered female warriors and what makes them tough. The project will include the examples of four female protagonists - Ellen Ripley, Sarah Connor, Samantha Caine, and Jordan O'Neil - with the focus on identifying and examining the different representations of female empowerment. Mulvey will serve as the methodological framework, whereas the theory section will introduce the individual theoretical works of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler.

Feminist film studies have faced a long battle with the representation of women in American cinema. Hollywood is known to issue inaccurate and discriminating depictions of gender. Feminist film critics view women on the screen as victims of sexual objectification and voyeuristic fetishism. Others argue against that hypothesis by observing contemporary female protagonists as breaking free of the gender and sex binaries. The Western culture has a long tradition of characterizing women as damsels in distress and men as heroes. The role difference between male and female characters is a characteristic that has existed for a long time. Feminists were quick to detect a repetitive component. Every genre has had an extended and fixed tradition of portraying men as active and women as passive. Audiences learned to view women as weak and submissive, their emotionality and instinct to react hysterical their weaknesses. They had no essential purpose other than being the romantic partner for the male hero or the seductive villainess. Then, women outside the cinema began to seek alternative solutions, which came as a result of feminism. America is one of many countries in which feminism played a substantial role in changing the cinematic image of women. The visual aesthetics are what Mulvey regards as the audiences occupying two aspects negotiated through sexual difference: the voyeuristic-scopophilic gaze and narcissistic identification. Both perspectives are fundamental when clarifying the problem formulation.

The 1970s is a turning point for women in film. Sigourney Weaver's portrayal of Lieutenant Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979) marks the beginning of the new female heroine. The *Alien* franchise introduces a female protagonist who is strong, intelligent, and determined. Ripley becomes a famous icon for the new and improved powerful woman. Following Ripley's success is Linda Hamilton in her role as Sarah Connor in *The Terminator* (1984) and its sequel *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). Both showed audiences that the heroine did not need to appear as if she had

stepped out of a beauty parlor when battling foes. Each one shows that when leaving physical confrontations, covered in sweat, and blood, her eccentric personality and powerful image appealed to both sexes. Connor's transformation from a down to her luck waitress turned vigilante on the run from the patriarchal society with her son, relates to a physical and mental evolution of the tough woman. The timidity and fragility that characterized her as a damsel in distress changed to that of a buff-looking and aggressive fighter in the sequel. Connor's transformation explicates that women can compete with men as action-adventure heroes. They can also take up sports such as bodybuilding and weightlifting without feeling ashamed for having a 'masculinized' physique.

Ripley and Connor's successes led the way for a large number of tough female characters in the following years. Geena Davis's portrayal as Samantha Caine from *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (1996) and Demi Moore's role as Lieutenant Jordan O'Neil from *G.I. Jane* (1997) are two such heroines. Caine's portrayal as a stereotypical housewife, mother, and schoolteacher undergoes a gender transgression as she recovers from her amnesia and rediscovers her identity as a government assassin who is foul-mouthed, drinks, smokes, and self-consciously masculinizes her femininity. The film's depiction of the female protagonist as someone reinterpreting elements associated with men relates to Ripley and Connor's groundbreaking appearance. Caine demonstrates how acting out of the feminine and female categories is possible. Women can as easily curse up a storm or drink men under the table while speaking vulgarly. They possess the freedom and ability to be as masculine and masculinized as they desire. On the other hand, *G.I. Jane* positions the female protagonist as someone demonstrating a different case of gender transgression. Similar to Caine, O'Neil starts out as a 'true' woman. Her ensuing fight for achieving an equal status as the other military cadets and proving her worth as a soldier signifies women's achievement of gaining a place in the military. Caine and O'Neil's characters each demonstrate them as breaking out of gender constrictions and entering socio-cultural positions closed off to women.

The project will include a division detailing the significance of feminist film theory as well as the three waves of feminism and the influence both had for women's roles in the film. The analysis consists of five chapters, in which first chapter will provide a detailed insight into the American action genre as well as what identifies an action heroine as she is. The second and third chapter examines Ripley and Connor's character respectively. Each one provided new means for the heroine to act out on the screen. Chapter 4 is a compare and contrast between Caine and O'Neil. Because of them both exhibiting gender transgression, the distinction of their successes serve as a necessary reason for choosing to include them in the project. The final chapter of the analysis will

be an overview of all four heroines, as well as a description of a newer trend of action heroines labeled the teenage heroine. The adolescent hero is evident in series such as *The Hunger Games*. The trilogy will not contain as in-depth an analysis as the other films but will serve as references to the changes in the action genre and women's images. Jennifer Lawrence's portrayal as Katniss Everdeen from The Hunger Games franchise, classified as the starting point for the teenage heroine, is the primary example of a young woman battling the patriarchal society as well as gender, class, and race stereotypes.

To examine the presence of the male gaze, the theorists - Freud, Kristeva, and Butler - will stand adjacent to Mulvey's hypothesis. Freud's work is the primary framework for the majority of early feminist film critics. As a response to his contribution to psychology, Freud has influenced feminists to borrow some of his Freudian terms to study the roles of women critically. The terms cover his thesis on fetishism and voyeurism. Another of his essays is his thesis on the Uncanny and the Oedipal complex. Julia Kristeva borrows from the Uncanny and the oedipal structure to compose her theory on abjection. She examines the notion of the maternal and parental as well as the symbolic order in the familial construction. Bearing in mind Mulvey's notion of the male gaze, the thesis aims to explore how the female protagonists act when confronted in situations featuring the abject and uncanny. Judith Butler's theory of gender performance refers to gender as a constitution of identity culturally and socially instituted through repetitive stylized acts. These acts indicate bodily gestures, styles, movements, and language as well. The term repetition refers to how individuals continuously repeat the stylized acts because of history. The occurrence of repetition is relevant for the action heroine to see if she breaks free or continues her stylized. Just as in real life, the manner in which the action heroine acts and speaks in a gendered way is a repetition that the American cinema actively constitutes, replicates, and reinforces.

2. Feminism and Feminist Film Theory

2.1 Feminism: The Three Waves of Feminism

Defined as a movement that recognizes and criticizes gender-based supremacy, feminism is the understanding of seeking political, economic, and social equivalence of the sexes and the efforts to change suppressing policies for women. Feminism has never had one distinct set of beliefs or a unified position, yet the goals of altering the systematic disadvantages women had to endure have never been indistinguishable. Feminism stands for a philosophy that seeks to bring gender equality by demonstrating the importance of women and erase gender stereotypes that positions men as superior and women as subordinate (Gray, Mel & Boddy, Jennifer 368).

Feminists of the Western world have achieved many breakthroughs over the years, often referred to as the three waves of feminism. In their quest for attaining better living conditions, women have resolved issues such as employment discrimination, equal wages, affirmative action initiatives, and obtained the rights to property ownership and university education. Feminists have fought for the liberty to have their contribution to science and social politics announced. However, despite the many successes and “the changing attitudes toward women in society,” some women still face oppression and inequality “because of their gender, class, sexuality, race, and disability” (369). Male researchers, theorists, and politicians have often neglected to resolve those issues. Countries unaffected by Western feminists’ influence remain cornered in a heteropatriarchal society. Some areas still support the image of the ‘traditional’ life and speculations as to why can deviate depending on the nation's social culture and history.

The three waves define the origin and ‘continuing process’ of feminism. Some of earliest “mothers of social work” are Jane Addams, Mary Richmond, and Octavia Hill, but Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is some of the earliest works to appear during first-wave feminism (369).

First-wave feminism occurs in the nineteenth and early twentieth century European and North American, with the feminists characterized as early liberal and naturalistic. They mobilized to remedy the marriage laws, gain voting rights, open employment, and educational professions to women. The primary goals of first-wave feminists were to dismantle discriminatory laws and exclusionary social norms that suppressed women as property of men and not as human beings, denying women their legitimate place in social and political life (369).

Second-wave feminism emerged in the wake of World War II when women entered the labor force and began to raise consciousness about issues such as childcare, equal pay, employment, and educational opportunities, reproductive rights, and the safety of women and children. These concerns emerged from women starting to challenge their roles in the family, workplace, and society, all of which had to endure discriminating behaviors in the form of sexism and patriarchy. During the early stages of second-wave feminism, gender binaries are the principal focus whereas issues of race and class were secondary (369 & 374).

The second wave consists of various types of feminism with a few mentions such as liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism, socialist feminism, black feminism, lesbian feminism, and postmodern feminism. A noticeable difference to locate is the fact that second-wave feminism is not a concerted campaign. Each subgroup signifies the mixed opinions women had on what they thought needed to change. “Second-wave liberal feminists continued the work of their predecessors (374),” to carry on the fight for women’s liberation through rights and recognition. In what they termed as ‘the glass ceiling,’ which relates to women having no access to high-ranking positions in the government, business, and industry, they sought to give women the freedom of expression and choice. The goals of promoting women these rights were to protect them from exploitation, abuse, and sexual harassment. Their selection of strategies consisted of “democratic engagement, reasoned argument, and peaceful campaigning” so as not to tip the capitalist balance (374).

Critical second-wave feminism, also referred to as socialist and radical feminism, cultural feminism, social welfare feminism, postmodern feminism, and postcolonial feminism, dealt with concerns relating to work and employment within the capitalist status. Critical second-wave feminism gained substantial influence in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia for feminist social work practices. There are noticeable differences between radical and socialist feminism, in which radical feminism sought to promote women's health and take a stand against pornography and sexual violence, and socialist feminism chose to focus on patriarchal structures and women's personal experiences. Both radical and socialist feminists exercised a collective and revolutionary stance to remove the subordination, exploitation, and abuse women had to endure. They argue these concerns to be a result of patriarchy and capitalism, but each one approach the problems from different perspectives (374-375).

Notable European radical feminists are Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, and Helene Cixous whose works described them as being critical of Western-inspired thoughts and dualism of gender

binaries. They and many other radical feminists focused on the social relations as relating to male power and privilege. Sexism and sexual harassment are constant accusations thrown at men who use these aggressive methods to keep women oppressed. This type of oppression is what radical feminists focused on, firmly stating men and patriarchy as the primary causes of women's abuse in society (375).

Socialistic feminists view women's oppression to be stemming from their position in the family and the economy. They argue there be an increased emphasis on the private sphere (home) and not just the public sphere (work). Socialists believe women's inferior position to be a result of class-based capitalism and that there should be equal opportunities for women in the public sphere. Marxist feminism is another term of reference to socialist feminism, which is the understanding of capitalism being the reason for women's subjugation. In their point of view, the division of labor relates to gender role expectations, creating unfair conditions that benefitted both men and capitalism. Females were the mothers and nurturers, belonging in the private home whereas the males left to support the family, gaining free access to both the private and public sphere without issue. When compared, ordinary Marxists view the form of oppression as in the division of social classes, and many feminists state the problem to be in the roots of patriarchy, in which the problem is not a social but biological phenomenon (375-376).

Regarding lesbian and black feminism, both of which received minimal support from the white middle-class heterosexual feminists, they each endeavored to gain the same rights and privileges as any other woman. Lesbian feminists were critical of the white middle-class woman being the central figure of womanhood, arguing her image to be an attempt to exclude anyone not part of her category. Many of the early second-wave feminists took measures of distancing themselves from lesbian feminists, whom they considered an embarrassment, claiming that lesbian feminism forced its promotion of sexual politics onto the movement. Black feminists, on the other hand, had to struggle with male-dominated left-wing or civil rights movements, as well as overcome relations of dominating and white privileges. Their most substantial challenge is the freedom of expression and choice, labeling them without a voice to declare their intentions. Both lesbian feminism and black feminism had to struggle against the dominating white middle-class for different reasons each. Lesbian feminists sought out "heterosexual social workers to examine their own homophobia, move away from heterosexist assumptions, appreciate lesbian women's diversity, and critique the literature through a lesbian feminists lens." The goal was to establish a more positive representation of lesbian feminism, as well as erase the stiff binaries of sexuality and

gender. The black feminist movement had to include more problems in their fight for equality, with concerns such as racism taking much of the focus. Often Hollywood films that include or hint at narratives containing lesbianism incorporate explicit scenes denying any lesbian intent. Critics have pointed out that the lesbian subject is acceptable to all kinds of audiences because the eroticism of two female characters together feeds into traditional male voyeurism (377-378).

Still considered relatively new, third-wave feminism emerges in the early 1990s, appearing in Rebecca Walker's 1992 essay of claiming, "that motherhood was a form of servitude." Third-wave feminism has in recent years been received with mixed criticism from the 'modern' women with some incorporating or rejecting the movement in contemporary culture, which some characterize as postfeminist, neo-feminist, or antifeminist (Ruti, Mari 6). The women who classify themselves in any of the three cases are those who reject feminism, identifying themselves as those who view feminism as 'incompatible' with femininity. A repetitive dispute between second-wave feminists and the 1990s younger generation of postfeminist is the manner in which how to address and understand feminism. Whereas second-wave feminism dealt with being critical of traditional incarnations of femininity, young postfeminists want to continue the performance of self-objectification with "lipstick, nail polish, miniskirts, high heels, and push-up bras" (8), portraying them as being members of a culture that idealizes consumerism and self-iconography. The transformation into a consumerist culture, shaped by neoliberal social policies, has replaced "feminist emancipatory politics with lifestyle politics" and female individualism (Grey & Boddy 383).

The twenty-first-century contains echoes of the early sociological approach, which is the connection between women's experiences of sexual objectification in the real world and on screen. Mari Ruti notes on this cultural shift of female sexual objectification starting out as a problem, which has become the opposite in contemporary society. Women are delighting in self-objectifying their desirability and sexuality actively, which is visible in all types of media, especially music videos (Ruti 13 & 18). Additionally, many third-wave feminists do not consider all men an enemy, instead of as fellow companions who share an interest in "enriching the lives of both men and women." The enriching, as both feminists and Mari Ruti argues, can be an act of freeing society from the "coercive definitions of acceptable masculinity and femininity" that our social culture has traditionally required individuals to perform from a young age. In the contemporary American society, many feminists seek a solution to "deconstruct the binaristic models of gender" as the

norms of gender and sexuality have changed into a variety of genders, such as transgendered people and genderqueers (7).

Third-wave feminism also moves away from the focus on gender equality, disagreeing with that being the only issue relating to feminism, and chooses to direct attention to social oppression, which is the issue dealing with race, class, religion, sexual orientation, and gender in situations of unfair discrimination (8). Feminists of the third-way declare feminism as “a product of the popular media and academic, cultural studies programs (Gray & Boffy 382),” revisioning feminism from outdated and outmoded terms and norms.

2.2 Feminist Film Theory

As a social movement, feminism has had an enormous impact on film theory and criticism. Feminist film theory is the academic film criticism derived from feminist politics and feminist theory, which emerged in the political upheavals of the 1960s second-wave feminism. The achievements of second-wave feminists made reading their cultural environment critically possible for women to “better understand their socially, politically, and economically subordinate status” (Ruti 17).

There are several strategies that feminist film critics can apply to produce a cinematic analysis. Western feminists turned a critical eye towards classic cinema with Hollywood as the one receiving the most criticism. Feminists view the film to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity as well as men and masculinity, in which they regard these types of stereotypical representations as misleading and unrealistic, preferring to construct an ideological image of the woman. They argue that the “incessant repetition of negative female stereotypes bolstered the prejudices of male viewers,” which in turn strengthen the patriarchal status quo and assert the woman's inferiority (17). Therefore, the methodology behind feminist film theory relies heavily on the sociological studies feminists have obtained in observing the function of women characters in particular film narratives or genres. Of the feminist film critique, spectatorship and representation are central themes used to analyze stereotypes critically. An example, quoted by Mari Ruti, is Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1974). Haskell examined how women portrayed on screen relates to the broader historical context, the stereotypes depicted, the binary roles of men/active and women/passive, and the amount of screen time given to women (18).

A suggestion to resolve the issue is for a more positive depiction of women to appear in Hollywood, rather than the various roles meant to cast women as brainless bimbos, sexual femme fatale, faithful housewives, or self-sacrificing mothers (17). However, during the height of second-wave feminism, such an objective is challenging for more than one reason. The main problem is the film directors and producers of classic cinema were men. In their construction of a cinematic narrative, the display of women emerges from a male perspective, displaying them through a male gaze. Therefore, even though the presence of women in mainstream film is vital, she is only a decorative ornament that is not central to the narrative and thus relegating her character to the incidental. As early feminist film theorists began to realize that positive images were not enough to change underlying structures in film, they turned their attention to understand the pervasive power of patriarchal imagery with the help of structuralist theoretical frameworks. These academic discourses, which include semiotics and psychoanalysis, proved to be very productive in analyzing how traditional narrative encodes patterns of sexual difference. The Freudian-Lacanian model of psychotherapy turns out to be the most dominant paradigm in feminist film theory.

Feminists and cultural studies share an identical substantive interest in issues of popular culture, subjectivity, power, identities, consumption, and representation. Regarding the matters of representation and spectatorship, early feminist film critics turned their attention to the repetitive issues of the female spectator/look, female desire, female subjectivity, and female masquerade. The female spectator is the term Laura Mulvey seeks to structure because of the male gaze. According to Mulvey, Western visual culture in the early 1980s left little to no room for the female gaze. She suggests that the female spectator may not identify with the display of passive femininity and is more likely to enjoy adopting the masculine point of view. Mulvey elaborates on the notion by speculating female spectators as negotiating the masculinization of the spectatorial position in Hollywood cinema, as that could signify women's attempt of obtaining a pleasurable rediscovery of their sexual identity (Mulvey 837-838).

In her analysis of Hollywood woman's films of the 1970s and 1980s, Ann Kaplan argues that female characters can possess the look and even view the male as an object of her gaze. However, the feminine look and desire have no power when one is a woman. The lack of control has roots in the heteropatriarchal society in which patriarchy construct and constraints men and women into "suffocating gender-specific boxes." Some feminist critics view the terms of femininity/female and masculinity/male as evidence of a patriarchal system pressuring and limiting women and men's identities (Ruti 34-35).

The reference to female desire is a concept Kaja Silverman has approached. Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Silverman argues that within the symbolic castration each subject is structured. The idealized characters on the screen become loopholes for spectators to escape insufficiencies and offer viewers narcissistic gratification. Therefore, cinematic suture has the power to lure spectators into fantasy worlds, which relies on various archetypes such as gender stereotypes and conventional depictions of social norms and values. Silverman's concept of female desire with female spectatorship is a term that Teresa de Lauretis agrees upon in her examination of the structural representation of women in cinema (29-32).

Female subjectivity is, according to de Lauretis, an occurrence in cinema where "women must be cunningly seduced into femininity... if the heteropatriarchal social order is to survive." A cinematic mechanism employed to accomplish that task is the use of glamorous images of femininity on screen. However, the portrait of female characters often comes under oppression in the form of violence and rape, which is to ensure that the cinematic narration both reflect and sustain social structures (31-32).

Lastly, female masquerade signifies a term of the woman disguising their femininity, which is a notion Joan Riviere and Mary Ann Doane have explored in their work. Riviere, who was one of Freud's first female disciples, notices in her clinical observations that women wear a mask of femininity when in the presence of an authoritative male position. The exaggerated version of femininity is the woman's method of compensating for their lack of phallic power. Riviere refers to female masquerade as a defense mechanism that is common to locate in career women, who mask their femininity behind a flamboyant or flirtatious performance to avoid retaliation from the male coworkers (60-61). Doane elaborates on Riviere's notion of feminine masquerade by seeking to understand woman's relation to the image on the screen. She describes feminine masquerading not as cross-dressing, but as the construction of normative femininity, which creates distance between women and her screen vision. The image then becomes manipulative thus stirring Doane's criticism of how Hollywood constructs female identification and subjectivity. According to Doane, the female spectator experiences emotional processes such as masochism, paranoia, narcissism, and hysteria. However, Doane also refers to some women being capable of stepping out of being "passive recipients of hegemonic definitions of femininity [and they] could actively participate in the production of their femininity" (62-63).

Feminist film theory began to take form during the late 1960s, as this was a response to women's disagreement with the cinema's portrayal of female sexual objectification and identity.

The manner in which the cinematic culture portrays a woman's worth based on their appearance and sexual desirability demeaned the woman, and this issue is one reason “that female objectification was a central concern for feminist film theory of the 1970s and 1980s” (11). That, in turn, inspires the development of feminist film theory, which consists of two distinct eras. The first one spans from the 1970s and 1980s, influenced by second-wave feminism and the development of women's studies within the academy. Feminist scholars began to apply the new theories arising from these movements to analyzing film. Feminist film theory from the first era borrows from the

“then-burgeoning fields of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism to develop sophisticated vocabularies for investigating issues such as the social (and filmic) construction of masculinity and femininity, the masquerade of femininity, the male gaze, voyeurism, fetishism, female spectatorship, and cinematic suture” (13)

The ongoing second era still follows some of its predecessor's themes, but the primary focus is on “twenty-first-century concerns about neoliberalism, postfeminism, consumerism, female self-objectification, and the resurgence of ‘girliness’ as a new feminine ideal both in mainstream movies and in our culture at large” (Ruti 14).

There is no doubt the shift from second-wave to third-wave feminism has had an impact on both women and men. The newer generation of feminists and postfeminists view feminism and relating problems differently compared to their predecessors. Along with the change between the second -and third-wave feminism, there has been a move away from the issue of sexual difference to multiple perspectives, identities, and possible spectatorships. Regarded as still relatively new, some of the concepts are the increasing concern with questions of ethnicity, masculinity, and hybrid sexualities in feminist academics and film theory. Many more women filmmakers have increasingly entered Hollywood. Several have been able to maintain a consistent production in diverse genres such as comedy, romantic, drama, and action movies. The successful accomplishments achieved throughout the waves of feminism have given women the opportunity of viewing female characters with whom they can relate. Additionally, the polyphony of voices, multiple points of view, and cinematic styles and genres indicate women's prosperous struggles for self-representation on the screen.

Since its inception in the 1970s, feminist film theory has provided the impetus for some developments in film studies. The passionate commitment feminist film critics, such as Laura

Mulvey, have made to both film and feminism will help signify the purpose of choosing her theory of the male gaze. Apart from Claire Johnston, Mulvey offered a significant and substantial criticism of Hollywood cinema and pointed out several aspects that revealed how spectatorship and representation worked out in films.

3. Methodology

3.1 Laura Mulvey - The Cinematic Construction of the Male Gaze

The power of cinematic suture suggests spectators as consumers seeking to fill gaps within and finding pleasure in viewing fictional characters' displayed bodies. In the act of adoring a physical object, the screen image offers the viewer narcissistic and voyeuristic gratification. Feminist film theorists employ Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalysis to shed light on the ways the American cinema generates gendered messages. The concept of implicating the characters as active/male and passive/female illustrates them as being products "of a society organized around phallic power" (Ruti 32-33). The cinema has often undertaken the assumption of reflecting reality or constructing a particular, ideological view of reality. Classic Hollywood is no stranger to presenting the constructed illusion of 'woman' as natural, realistic, and attractive. A classic Hollywood narrative structure establishes the male character as active and influential: he is the controller of the narrative whom the dramatic action unfolds. In comparison, the female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s) and merely a hyper-polished adornment to push the narrative forward.

Viewed as one of the most notable feminist film critics, Mulvey argues that traditional Hollywood cinema portrays women as images used for the gratification of men. Women in the film industry had an exhibitionist role; they were there for the male directors to display and for the male audience to look at, casting them as visually erotic but inactive in behavior. Mulvey continues to discuss that many of the gender issues found in films originate from us living in a patriarchal society. Because of such a community, in which men set the majority of the rules, constructing social roles, conventions, and norms to reflect their hegemonic interests, the concern is that a passive audience will feel influenced by such a representation of reality. As a result, people will seek to imitate this reality, reproducing these images and assumptions into existence, thereby ensuring the reproduction of male dominance over women.

Titled *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey's article is one of "the most legendary pronouncements of feminist film theory" (Ruti 37). Published in 1975 and inspired by Freudian-Lacanian theory, Mulvey sought to define the function of the male gaze as an act of depicting women through a heterosexual point of view, presenting women in visual arts, as objects of male pleasure. For example, a scene may direct the focus on the curves of a woman's body. This

particular choice of focus invites the viewer to examine the scene through the eyes of a male. Deploying specific cinematic conversations such as slow motion, deliberate camera movements, and cutaways enhance the effect. Mulvey declares psychoanalytic theory to be an appropriate political weapon when deciphering “the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (36). Within the visual world of the cinema, women come to think of themselves as “enticing objects for male desire” and therefore, must “display themselves for the male gaze” (36-37). What makes *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema* crucially important to feminist film theory is the year Mulvey published her article. The early 1970s is the beginning of the second-wave feminist movement, which is an impactful time for women's cinema. Mulvey's highlights of society having to create a new radical feminist cinema are illustrative of the catalyst effect that her work has had on feminist film theory. The other significance is the primary example of traditional Hollywood cinema's display of gender roles illustrated in the article.

Mulvey uses psychoanalysis to understand the fascination of Hollywood cinema, in which she points towards scopophilia – the desire to see – as an example of understanding said fascination. A fundamental drive as according to Sigmund Freud who states that as a child, the boy experiences an overwhelming feeling of superiority and a fear of castration when he discovers the female's lack of a penis. The male fetishizes a woman or certain parts of her body to subdue the castration threat and the woman's desire to substitute for her missing phallus. In psychoanalytic terms, the female figure posing as the castrator can lead to undesirability, thus leaving the woman undesirable and dangerous from the male's perspective. Therefore, classic cinema stimulates the desire to look by integrating structures of voyeurism and narcissism into the story and the image, thus solving the issue of the female castrator being too powerful (Mulvey 833-834 & 840).

By projecting onto the erotic image symbolic replacements for the missing penis, the boy/man seeks to disavow that lack of difference. Regarding cinematic pleasure, the woman's lack of phallus power can emerge as objects relating to the female representation, such as a high heel shoe, a leather bustier, or any other fetishistic object that comes to represent a symbolic phallic adornment. The image of the woman, therefore, becomes fundamentally ambiguous as she combines attraction and seduction with an evocation of castration anxiety, which Mulvey provocatively says positions the story as one that demands sadism. The act of fetishizing the woman deflects attention from female ‘lack’ and changes her from a dangerous figure into a reassuring object of flawless beauty. As Mulvey quotes:

“In their traditional exhibitionist role, women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (837)

The male gaze denies women their autonomy and identity, consigning them to the status of objects, of interest only for their physical appearance. By objectifying the woman, the male gaze devalues the female character, removing their humanity and autonomy and labeling them as items for the male onlooker or voyeur to possess and enjoy. Furthermore, Mulvey argues that because of being consistently framed within the perspective of men, women also find themselves utilizing the male gaze. Often the issue is that women in the audience cannot watch a film from a secondary perspective without unconsciously adopting the male point of view. Hence, many women end up unwittingly reproducing hegemonic patriarchal behaviors. By establishing this sexual imbalance of the male as active, asserting their ‘gaze’ from the vantage point of the camera, and the female as passive, the women are under the control of the male gaze and exist for the man’s pleasure only. Mulvey states that this displays a female character through two functions. Women act as an erotic object for the characters within the narrative, and as an erotic object for the spectators to view, both of which reinforces the woman's passive identity (837-838). Mulvey concludes her argumentative essay “with the suggestion that women [have] little or nothing to mourn in the passing of the Hollywood cinema,” but one must keep in mind that popular contemporary cinema has changed since the time Mulvey published her article (Tasker, Yvonne 135).

Mulvey tackles the narcissistic visual pleasure with Jacques Lacan’s concepts of ego formation and the mirror stage. Lacan positions the child in a way in which he or she derives pleasure from the identification with a perfect mirror image and forms its ego ideal based on this idealized image. The mirror stage is analogous to the way in which the film spectator develops narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the perfected image of a human on the screen. In the cases of both the cinema and the mirror stage, identifications are not a lucid form of self-knowledge or awareness and become what Lacan calls ‘méconnaissance’ or translated as misrecognition. That means that the narcissistic forces that structure them in the first place blind the spectator. Scopophilic is another depiction of voyeurism and is, according to Freud, “one of the component instincts of sexuality,” which in the world of cinema is the “pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight.” Voyeurism occurs when examining scenes that appeal to both the male and female audience, but narcissism transpires from one point of view. Mulvey

argues the male gaze to be a reference to voyeuristic pleasure, and the female gaze indicates narcissistic desire. From a narcissistic perspective, the visual delight comes from the female identification spectators has with the image seen (835-837). While both formative structures focus on the displayed body, the difference between them is that the male gaze takes pleasure in looking and objectifying whereas the female gaze identifies with another female character.

Mulvey points out the voyeuristic-scopophilic consisting of three different looks that are crucial to traditional cinematic pleasure. The first one is the position of the camera, which physically films from the male character's point of view, thus positioning the audience as the active male gaze. The second look is the audience from which the viewer identifies with the male characters and views the woman as a spectacle. The third and last part is the characters within the cinematic narrative, which concerns the male character and his display of viewing and gazing at the women involved in the storyline (843). Mulvey marks with a clear argumentation that classic Hollywood cinema seamlessly organizes around the male gaze, leaving the female spectators with the two functions mentioned earlier. With the two choices of either adopting the male gaze and looking at women on the screen from a male perspective or chose to identify with the women on the screen, thereby accepting their status as passive objects of the gaze, women have no choice but to submit to the masochistic and voyeuristic gaze of the other. Overall, women viewing other women on the screen must give up their identity, which Mulvey claims is an unconscious method that secures patriarchal doctrines to remain, reminding both men and women of their roles in society.

If taking the case of Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), which Mulvey appoints in her article, the Hollywood cinema presents the issues relating to the male gaze. The film came out in the late 1950s where second-wave feminism is starting to take form, but women had yet to gain the rights they achieved in the early 1960s. *Vertigo* is the story of the former San Francisco detective John 'Scottie' Ferguson who receives the job to follow the wife, Madeline, of Gavin Elster. During his investigation, Scottie's obsession with the elusive Madeline reveals his deep infatuation for the woman. After witnessing Madeline jump to her death from a church bell tower, Scottie breaks down before going to a mental hospital. The audience then learns that Madeline's real identity is a woman named Judy whom Gavin Elster hired to impersonate his wife whom he had killed. Judy and Scottie encounter one another after the hospital releases him, but the detective is unaware of Judy's impersonation act. Nevertheless, Scottie feels a connection with the woman's faint resemblance to 'Madeline,' and he embarks on a mission of transforming Judy, fixated on his fantasy of the stylish and elegant Madeline. As for Judy, who is in love with Scottie, she attempts to protest against his

fixation, she “recognizes her impotence in comparison to the fantasy of polished femininity” that Scottie craves (Ruti 41-42). Hitchcock demonstrates Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze as much of Vertigo’s narrative is through Scottie’s perspective, marking him as the one in charge of the storyline and thus in control of the women Madeline/Judy. The voyeuristic atmosphere is in Scottie’s task of following ‘Madeline’ and his obsessive need to transform Judy into the perfect woman - controlling her appearance by deciding what clothes, makeup, and hairstyle to wear and her personality. The shopping, in which Scottie handpicks all of her outfits to transform Judy into Madeline, is an example of how through the male gaze “the degree to which masculine fantasy bypasses female subjectivity” (43). Women in the audience and on the screen must comply with the male fantasy of what makes them desirable in both looks and behavior.

The American cinema has changed drastically since the 1950s. The billboards, magazines, television shows, and Hollywood films of today’s contemporary society display men in a manner that are acceptable for the female gaze. Women have the freedom to “look at men, objectify them, desire them,” in the same behavior that the men of traditional Hollywood cinema performed on women (38). However, Ruti argues that despite the new female empowerment, expectations of women having to signal their desirability are still present. Some modern women are eager to participate in displaying their desirability by critically viewing other women and evaluating their feminine attributes “according to the criteria set by heteropatriarchy” (39). The same gender performance is visible in films, as women have begun to take over the screen and perform with muscles, guns, and violence. However, Mulvey’s theory is still consistent in analyzing the action heroine. There are action films that deploy scenes using camera movements and sound to display the female protagonist as more than just a hero in action does. These technological methods remind the audience and the actors of the roles they have to play and entertain spectators. Although Mulvey’s account of the male gaze became a structuring logic in western visual culture, her controversial and reductive article received criticism for omitting the question of female spectatorship (43). The criticism lies in her neglect to recognize the non-straight-male spectator, as her use of Freudian psychoanalysis positions the essay as one that accounts for male spectatorship only. Additionally, her writing suggests that the male spectator is heterosexual, which has left an abundance of space for queer theorists to interpret the cinematic gaze for queer spectatorship.

4. Theory

4.1. Reflections Upon Main Texts

The theoretical framework chosen to analyze the action heroine will be through the lenses of Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. As stated in the methodological chapter, feminist film theorists of the first era appointed French psychoanalysis to analyze the representation of women's roles in various films. The theorist feminist scholars and film critics choose other than Sigmund Freud was another French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist by the name of Jacques Lacan.

Although Sigmund Freud is secondary material, his work is the basic framework for Julia Kristeva's theoretical analysis of abjection and her theoretical work of the maternal and paternal authority within the oedipal complex. Judith Butler, on the other hand, uses Freud's notion of how a person's identity models regarding the normal, but Butler revises his notion of the concept's applicability to lesbianism and queer theory.

Several feminist researchers position Freud as someone whose work does not support women or feminism, yet his commitment to psychology has provided significant insight into gender and sexuality. He has contributed to several psychoanalytical terms such as the unconscious or subconscious, the Oedipus complex, and the structural theory of the mind known as the id, ego, and super-ego. Regarding his theory of the unconscious/subconscious, Freud theorizes that humans suppress memories from their conscious minds in their subconscious as a defense mechanism to escape forbidden wishes and unacceptable thoughts. The Oedipus complex can relate to the problem of humans escaping a distorted way through dreams. The term consists of a complex set of emotions, which occur between the child and its parents, but Freud focuses mostly on the relation between the boy and his parents. Named after the tragic figure of Sophocles's Greek drama, who - without knowing it - killed his father and married his mother, the Oedipus Complex is a psychoanalytic concept that analyzes the child's unconscious sexual desire for the opposite-sex parent and hatred for the same-sex parent. In the Oedipus complex occurs a structural figure to what Freud refers to as the id, ego, and super-ego. The id is the realm of uncoordinated and instinctual appetites, the super-ego is the critical and moralizing role, and lastly, the ego aims a balance between the two (Ruti 22-23).

As stated, Freud's view on women stirred controversy during his lifetime and to present day. Even though many feminist critics regarded concepts such as penis envy as misogynistic and

accused Freud of ignoring evidence that proposed some of his patients have been the victims of abuse, many other feminists used his theory to analyze the gender status quo in cinema. Freud's psychological discovery of women experiencing hysteria describes the mental illness as castration anxiety and penis envy. While he believed these to be some of his most significant accomplishments, these theories received heavy criticism by being described as distorted and condescending to women. Nevertheless, feminists film theorists still appointed several of Freud's theoretical and psychoanalytical terms, regardless of the negative critique that his work received, as the theories provide essential insight into women's sexuality and gender identification.

When relating Freud to the gender performance of action heroines, the concept of the phallic is relevant when examining the female protagonists. Each of them encounters an element that threatens the familiarity of their lives, forcing some to reopen their subconscious and others to take charge of phallic power. Furthermore, two essays written by Freud, *The Uncanny* and *Fetishism*, are relevant for the examination of action heroines as well. Each one will assist in how the female protagonists encounter elements of the Uncanny and what classifies her as an object of fetishism.

In the case of Julia Kristeva, her theory of abjection is relevant regarding analyzing the threats the action heroines encounter, such as when facing the undead (the corpse) or having to endure injuries resulting in bodily wastes (blood, urine). In the process of abjection of the corpse or cadaver, the border between life and death breaks, placing an individual in the position of witnessing a familiar object become the abject. Kristeva argues that since the abject is a violent revolt of being that repulses desire, she considers reactions such as vomiting, loathing, and gagging the individual's attempt at protecting themselves from what terrifies them. Kristeva's theory of abjection was a turning point in postmodern theory as she relocates the origin of psychoanalysis. She replicates that there are things in life that are repulsive and horrible, whose grotesqueness or formlessness inspire the individual to suppress the object that has become the abject in one's buried consciousness. Abjection occurs in the child's process to separate the maternal law from the Symbolic, also referred to as the law of the phallus. The child's impulse to expel the mother, who is reluctant and becomes the abject, the Symbolic intervenes between the mother and child. By rejecting the maternal body through rituals of cleanliness, the mother emerges as the image of something horrifying. The Law of the Father governs the Symbolic in which the phallus is the center around which all other elements exist. The men, fathers, are closer to the phallus than women as they can identify with or see themselves in the phallus. The Symbolic represented that which is logical and ordered, confirming the father as the one who has the authority and power. The child's

process of denying the mother is a method that denies the primal narcissistic identification with the mother. The process of splitting and expelling forms the 'I,' and sets borders and helps establish the child's 'self.'

The separation of the mother and father by the Symbolic is relevant for the image of the action heroine. Some of the females have demonstrated the role of the mother, the nurturer, and protector of children, but when confronted by the abject, the mother has to lose her objectivity to become as terrifying to protect the child. Similar to the abject, which steps outside the borders of what is the law; the female characters often step out of the gender and sex border, even if their reasons are for a good cause. The action heroine encounter moments with the abject in the form of the corpse and bodily wastes, and they must struggle and fight through the abject to reach the right border of the law. Furthermore, the notions of the Symbolic and the maternal body are fascinating concepts to apply to the action heroines. Some of the females stand without the law of the phallus and can either choose to adopt what they know of the male authority or continue the maternal law.

When turning the attention to Judith Butler, her theoretical work of the gender and sex binaries, placing them in contrast to the heroines' gender performance, will assist in determining if the female protagonists break away from heteropatriarchal norms or not. Another reason for choosing Butler is that her *Gender Trouble* (1990) has had a relevantly immense impact on feminist and queer studies. Her writing has influenced our understanding of feminism and gender identity. The idea of gender as performative implies that gender is not an innate quality linked to sex, but rather a series of fabrications constructed through social and cultural discursive institutions, positions one's gender performance as a procedure that occurs through repetitive performative gestures.

When comparing the different works of the three theorists to Laura Mulvey's *Male Gaze*, the purpose is to show how action heroines perform as according to Mulvey's theory. That means to keep a look out for when the female characters encounter the uncanny and abject, if their gender and sex performative identity displays as a voyeuristic and fetishistic object of desire, and how the audience receives the portrayal of women on screen. These three perspectives of what to look for will demonstrate the psychosocial properties of looking and being looked at, which are integral to cinematic viewing as according to Mulvey.

Before delving into the individual theorist and their respective work, there are three authors whose works are fundamental in analyzing and examining the action heroine and the action film, as they make references to Freud, Kristeva, Butler, and Mulvey. The first book, written by Yvonne

Tasker and titled *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema* (1993), consists of Tasker's analysis of the American contemporary action cinema in which she focuses on films such as Rambo, Thelma and Louise and Basic Instinct. Tasker argues that the mentioned action films have operated as notable points of cultural reference in recent years. Tasker proceeds to contemplate how popular action cinema remains neglected within contemporary film criticism, which highlights the author's intention to unravel the complexities and pleasures of the genre. According to Tasker, film critics often dismiss the action cinema for being 'obvious' in its narrative, repeating certain pleasures and politics that make the genre appear uninteresting. Tasker argues that the controversial films she has chosen for her analysis deserve a chance to be analyzed and understood within a cinematic and political context. The reason for this argumentation is that the contemporary action genre is a result of the shifts that took place during the 1980s, which includes the changes in gendered, sexual, and racial identities. Furthermore, Tasker positions the influence of the displayed body as having a definite symbolic meaning of the action cinema. She links the stardom of male actors during the 1980s to their experience of bodybuilding and the powerful masculine body on screen. The sports of bodybuilding and wrestling, commonly referred to as male-dominated sports, reflect the society of the 1980s when viewed in the action cinema. She demonstrates that argumentation in a comprehensive discussion of the homoeroticism surrounding the muscleman hero, the symbolic centrality of blackness within the crime narrative, and the changing status of women within the genre. All of the arguments mentioned above address the constitution of identities through the shifting categories of gender, class, race, sex, sexuality, and nation.

Sherrie A. Inness's *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture* (2004) lives up to the title by focusing on more contemporary examples of action heroines in pop culture, naming a few such as Xena, Buffy, Lara Croft, Witchblade, and La Femme Nikita. Inness includes in the book a collection of essays in which draws upon feminist and queer theories of criticism. Each author examines the line between the subversion of dominant notions of gender and the reinforcement of the same heterosexual and patriarchal norms that the construction of particular heroines seems to walk. Some of the opinions Inness has gathered is the notion of female friendship and heroism that highlights the heroines' gender and sexuality. Even though some of the essays focus on the display of toy female action figures or heroines from video games and comics, the authors each illustrate how an icon of popular culture can act out gender and identity performativity.

The last author, Jeffrey A. Brown's book *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (2011) spot a similar perspective, and he too addresses the conflicting meanings associated with the action heroine. Brown argues that since the action heroine has evolved in various media forms since the late 1980s, he discusses her immensely popular character type as an example of existing theories about gender as a performance identity. Brown focuses on the excessive sexual fetishization of the action heroines as a central theme throughout his analysis. Many elements from his book evoke interest. Some of the prominent elements are the many manifestations of the heroine's transgressive image is the dominatrix, the action heroine as a reflection of the shift in second-wave feminism to third-wave and postfeminist politics, and the heroine's construction as a form of patriarchal reaction that promotes the male fantasies of controlling a strong female character. Brown deciphers the action heroine as a representation of changing gender dynamics that balances the sexual objectification of women with progressive models of female strength. He refers to Freud's article *Fetishism*, describing the heroine as a figure who resembles a fetishistic object for the male gaze, and to Kristeva's notion of abjection and the parental authority of the mother and father.

4.2 Sigmund Freud - The Uncanny and Fetishism/Voyeurism

Austrian psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), considered one of the most controversial and influential thinkers of the 10th century played a significant role in the development of psychology and are the founding father of psychoanalysis. During Freud's time, men tended to view women as angelic creatures who possessed not sexual desire, but according to Freud, women suffered from penis envy, and he arguably found "plenty of evidence of female sexuality" in his practice. However, in the culture of Freud's time, the term "hysterical" once referred to women suffering from mental illnesses, has a derogatory undertone that implies women as excessively emotional. To study the formation of symptoms relating to sexual repression, Freud "came to believe that the excessive curtailment of female sexuality that characterized his society" was not the reason that women became ill. Although Freud's examination of female sexuality positions him as no feminists, his discoveries became the starting point for feminists to challenge heteropatriarchal definitions of gender and sexuality (Mari Ruti 20). Freud traces the problem to the process of socialization, in which not just women but men also must follow a strict line of cultural norms, customs, economies, governments, and education to adopt a proper social role (21).

Concerning sexuality, Freud outlines how society fashions the individual to fit into gender-normative heterosexuality. From an early age to adulthood, the infant experiences a case of disorganized erotic drives that over time grow to become organized. Freud's argumentation of the infant's rudimentary eroticism brings forth the most significant development from his clinical practice, which is the Oedipus complex (22). When examining these psychoanalytical discoveries to the feminist film theorists' use of Freud, coming to an explanation of why feminists would use psychoanalysis seems unexplainable. Feminist film critics sought to disavow the stereotypical representation of women in film and to work towards creating a more equally justified portrayal of the female characters. Many feminist critics appointed Freud's psychoanalysis because of his 'discoveries' being consistent in observing and examining how and why women in cinema had to look, act, and behave in a specific manner.

Taking the example of *Oedipus Rex*, an Athenian tragedy by Sophocles, Freud proposes that instead of the male child who sleeps with his mother and murders his father, social norms prevent the child from carrying out these abnormal threats by imposing the severe punishment in the form of castration. By introducing a disciplinary action, the young boy "agrees to forgo his mother as a love object in exchange for keeping his penis," preventing the murder of his father and instead encourages the boy to seek identification and idealization with the father, in hopes of becoming just like him. Freud refers to the Oedipus complex as a toll of socialization that produces normative masculinity and femininity, meaning that little boys and girls learn how to enact the social norms of gender and sexuality suitably. In another perspective, the man, who does not lack, appears as the active subject whereas the woman, who lacks, is the passive subject and requires completion by her active partner (22-23). The Oedipus complex in cinema is relevant when encountering films that display a family structure. In the action cinema, the Oedipus complex typically stops occurring when the father's authority disappears, or the maternal order takes over to either replace or substitute for the male symbolic. Therefore, the action heroine within the Oedipus can become an embodiment of both the father and the mother, but when taking over for the man, she has learned how to act the role appropriately.

Relating the Oedipus to the cinematic woman, the action heroine's lack of a penis can, according to some feminist film critics, make her appear as a fetishistic object or as someone unnaturally powerful whom the man has to subdue back into her appropriate function. However, the action heroine also challenges the social norms of gender and sexuality by acting out themes traditionally characterized as belonging to the man. Feminist film theorists employ "Freudian-

Lacanian psychoanalysis to illustrate the power of movies to suture us into their narrative,” which includes cinema that delivers cryptic messages about gender and sexuality. By using psychoanalysis, feminists sought to bring out the implications of masculinity and femininity not being biological givens, but as products organized around phallic power. As Freud notes, gender socialization starts from birth and even to this day, many parents inaugurate the same pattern by decorating nurseries and purchasing toys based on the gender of the child. Although the threat of castration is not efficient, children are aware of the consequences following disobedience, which can result in social ostracization and ridicule (32-33).

In 1919, Freud published his essay *The Uncanny*, which is a Freudian concept of an instance where something that is familiar becomes foreign and frightening. Freud's focus on the uncanny is art and literature, which, according to him, functions “as a realm for the production and experience of uncanny effects” (Tasker Yvonne 155-156). The word ‘uncanny’ comes from the German word ‘Unheimlich’ with ‘Heimlich’ it is opposite, which refers to what is familiar and native. Therefore, one can conclude that unheimlich is a reference to what is frightening. In simple terms, Heimlich is a description of what makes a person feel intimate or comfortable in their natural domestic home, whereas the Unheimlich appears whenever something has caused the familiar to become unfamiliar or strange (158). Freud illustrates the uncanny with an example of the short story *The Sandman* by E. T. A. Hoffmann. Freud sees the source of uncanny as the eerie character of the Sandman, the mythic figure who steals children's eyes, and argues that the unnatural links to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes. He continues to say that the loss of eyes in dreams and myths is a reference to the fear of castration. Freud also addresses to the term the doubling or doppelgänger in horror or supernatural fiction. Freud terms the double as a degree of development or as the narcissism of the child, which he describes as being when a child creates multiple projections of themselves, which the child overcomes as the ego develops, suppressing the narcissistic self into adulthood. The doubling emerges when the child as an adult encounters the repressed narcissistic ego, causing them to revert to that primitive state, which has transformed into negative or uncanny qualities. Feminists theorists have analyzed the doubling to occur between the viewer and the screen, changing a familiar object into something incredible but still unnatural (158).

In another essay, titled *Fetishism* (1927), Freud argues that voyeurism/scopophilia and fetishism are two ways of understanding a boy's unresolved castration anxiety. He points to the boy's attempt at forming a substitute for the woman's lack of a penis is to attain a voyeuristic fetish. In the original diagnosis, Freud theorizes fetishism as a glitch in some men's sexual functioning,

which is a result of the man being unable to overcome his castration fears and therefore, being unable to attain sexual satisfaction with a woman because of her 'wound' (Ruti, 59). Brown positions the empowered female body with an excessive sexual objectification as "a modern reworking of male insecurities about women's sexuality and increased agency," terming the action heroine as the phallic woman (59-60). For the man to overcome his fear of the castrating woman, he fetishes specific parts of her relating to femininity to conceal or divert attention from the female genitals.

Voyeurism is the act of taking pleasure in looking at other people and when the young boy witnesses the woman's lack, Freud proposes that the "fetishist seeks to phallicize women," to compensate for their perceived lack (60). Regarding women of the cinema, female characters are not just displaying the voyeuristic fantasies of spectators, but they pose for the male protagonists and female viewers. The angle of the camera and other cinematic effects expose female characters as feminine and women by focusing on specific parts such as eroticizing and idealizing specific body parts or associating the female body with erotic accouterments. These erotic images can as items that discredit the woman's body such as corsets, tight leather, or spandex or have them wear sexualized objects in the form of whips, stilettos, or thigh-high boots. These methods ensure the men and calm the fears of castration or the empowered phallic woman (60). Apart from the cinema, any visual media, such as the internet and television, is a gateway for people to exploit their voyeuristic tendencies. The individual viewer's position as the voyeur or unseen spectator of screen images is merely another description of voyeuristic fantasies. Often there is a case of sadism appearing out voyeurism as the male viewer's attempt at punishing the woman for whatever she is hiding or lacking. The male fixation connects to fetishism as the man's "attempt to neutralize the threat that femininity as an embodiment of lack poses for the male spectator" (Ruti 56-57). As with Mulvey, many feminist film critics have examined how the cinema continues to enact voyeurism and fetishism and that fetishism represents cinematic femininity as a heteropatriarchal invention, thus presenting women in real life as masquerading gender and sexuality from a patriarchal perspective (58-59).

As Mari Ruti remarks, the reason behind feminists film critics of the 1970s and 1980s choice to use psychoanalysis is hard to understand. Even in our current society, many contemporary feminist critics continue to apply Freud's insights (20). An answer to why feminist film critics chose Freud's theoretical thinking is that cinema and psychoanalysis emerged around the same

time. Similarly, the birth of cinema offered an encounter of the uncanny, as the images on screen were both familiar and somehow strange to viewers.

The reason for choosing to add Sigmund Freud to analyze action heroines is that each of his psychoanalytical terms can confirm whenever the female action heroes face a threat if that reinforces their femininity or not. Regarding the uncanny, the female protagonists each go against an enemy that is *Unheimlich*, and when their female masculinity becomes too powerful for the males to lose interest, the introduction of fetishism and voyeurism secures the women stay in their proper roles. Freud stands as the building framework of many feminist theorists' contribution to feminist film theory, and even though Freud's psychoanalysis might not have as frequent an appearance in today's academics, his work is the starting point for feminist film theory.

4.3 Julia Kristeva: The Abject Body

Julia Kristeva is a French-Bulgarian author whose work became influential in the international critical analysis, cultural studies, and feminism. One of her published works is *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1980) in which she examines the notion of abjection - a term referring to the repressed and frightening forces that linger inside a person's psyche. Kristeva describes the abject as a reference to the human anxiety caused by the possible loss of the distinction between subject/object or between self/other. Abjection is an occurrence in which the abjected "does not respect borders, positions, rules, [and] that which disturbs identity, system, order" (4). Throughout her critical analysis, Kristeva focuses her analysis primarily on religion and art with references to psychoanalysis and literature. Kristeva "develops her theory about the role of the abject in the construction of cultural norms that seek to define and delineate the borders between order and that which lies beyond acceptability" (Brown 68). In her extensive treatise on the subject, Kristeva draws on the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to examine the concepts of horror, marginalization, castration, the phallic signifier, the Oedipal Complex, and many others that can be appropriate to feminist criticism and queer theory.

The central element to Kristeva's theory is the contrast between maternal authority and the law of the father, in which she argues,

“that the semiotic process involved with an individual's contact with authority can be contrasted between the alignment of the abject with maternal authority and the association or proper social regulation with the paternal law” (68)

Abjection works by separating out the human from the non-human, and thereby the monstrous, within human society. Marxist feminist Barbara Creed focuses on the construction of abjection around the feminine body and the notion of the ‘border’ within horror and slasher films, with her main focus on the monstrous-feminine as embodying the concept of abjection. Borders vary from films to film; it may be the border between human and inhuman, normal and supernatural, or good and evil. The monstrous can be a production appearing at the crossing of the border, which separates those who choose their proper gender role from those who do not. All that threatens the stability of the symbolic order is abject. However, what is important to remember is that the symbolic order develops from a patriarchal and phallogocentric perspective, which is why the idea of abjection includes the female body and the maternal figure in particular. As Kristeva states:

“Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape” (72)

The child must separate itself from the mother to enter the social order. To recognize itself from its mother, the child has to establish a psychological distinction between itself and the mother, which is where the term of the maternal body occurs. Kristeva's observation of the separation between child and mother is a semiotic process involving an individual's contact with authority that contrasts “between the alignment of the abject with maternal authority and the association of proper social regulation with the paternal law” (Brown 68).

As mentioned at the beginning of the theoretical section, offers an intriguing notion of abjection to the action heroine. The action heroine “represents an exaggerated identification with the masculine domain of paternal laws” and that she “demonstrates for viewers the desirability of mastering the law of the father” (68). As the action heroine develops throughout the narrative and demonstrates her capability to defeat the enemy, she becomes a productive and active member of the law enforcement and social control. In her quest for obtaining that position, viewers can experience a rush of confidence and power from the heroine's display of skills and strengths.

However, as Brown states, even if the action heroine can achieve a position of authority and power, her role “does not secure a proper place within the Symbolic.” The action heroine's pursuit for justice is, according to Brown, a “literal example of countering the abject” as the heroine enforces the paternal law to reject the chaotic presence of the abject and secure the status of the Symbolic order (68). Therefore, the action narrative positions the action heroine as an agent of the paternal law and heteropatriarchal order. Whether she is a member of the law enforcement as Clarice Starling (*The Silence of the Lambs*), a zombie apocalypse survivor as Alice (*Resident Evil*) or as a skilled assassin (*La Femme Nikita*), they operate within the paternal law because of patriarchal influences. Even though there are action heroines who do not display an attachment to either the Symbolic or law enforcement, the female character's position often involves her being in direct conflict with the abject (69).

Kristeva points out how humans continually express a fear of the abject throughout their lives and that the abject can appear in many forms, all of which threatens the human's sense of cleanliness and propriety. Apart from bodily fluids or wastes and food loathing, Kristeva says that encountering the corpse is a repulsive encounter and is “the utmost of abjection” (4). The sight of death forces the individual to face an object that once was a person/subject cast out of the cultural world. The corpse reminds humans of their fragile existence and that they are of organic matter that will die and rot at some point in life.

4.4. Judith Butler: Gender Performance

In Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), her well-known quote of how “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman,” sums up what Judith Butler seeks to examine in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990). As Brown points out:

“Judith Butler investigates the performative nature of gender roles as they have been socially constructed within Western culture. Her goal is to provoke gender by denaturalizing traditional gender categories grounded in biological determinism” (24)

Gender is a, as according to Butler, repeated performance of preexisting blueprints of gendered comportment. Therefore, *Gender Trouble* became one of the founding literature to show

insight on the male-female binary and “quickly became the bible of both third-wave feminism and queer theory” (Ruti 63). Throughout the three chapters of *Gender Trouble*, Butler maintains her focus on a gradual critique of the feminine as having a concrete form. Butler focuses almost exclusively on questions surrounding the construction of feminine identity, rather than equally weighting this deconstruction with an analysis of feminist organizational tactics, political doctrines and so on. Her theory of gender sought to explain that “gendered identities are not a reflection of one’s authentic core self,” but is the result of being culturally coded into having that gender performance (24). Butler proposes that by refusing or misrepeating dominant codes of gender, “the society’s efforts to fix gender into a binaristic system [exposes] the artificial character of masculinity and femininity” (Ruti 63). Butler suggests that the distinction between sex as a natural given category and gender as an acquired cultural-social category. Therefore, gender identity is not a manifestation of an intrinsic essence but is the product of actions and behaviors that constructs an individual’s gender performance. That is to say, everyday actions, speech utterances, gestures and representations, dress codes and behaviors as well as prohibitions and taboos are what Butler argues works to produce a perceived masculine or feminine identity.

Chapter 1 opens with a review of the argument that ‘women’ as a strictly defined category are not the proper subject of feminism. Butler defines feminism as not having a concrete subject, which leads her into a discussion of the relationship between the sex and gender categories. Regarding the strict binary distinction between sex and gender, Butler points to there being a similar distinction between gender types. She argues that gender identity is complex in its relation to sex and that to appreciate these complexities, feminists must move away from the traditional Western philosophy. In a biological sense, the sex/body is “not a ‘being’ but a variable boundary, a surface whose permeability is politically regulated a signifying practice within a cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality” (139).

In Chapter 2, Butler dives in into the nature and origins of the concept of gender. She discusses the perspective structuralism on how the concreteness of gender exposes itself as absurd by masquerade. The chapter details Butler’s interest in a genealogy of gender identification, and Butler discusses the theories of Lacan, Riviere, and Freud in this regard. What she does not agree with is the idea that all power structures and cultural restrictions must have a less repressive mode of gender identification and argues that gender identification requires a social structure for it to be an achievement (xxxii-xxxiii). Butler introduces the complexity that surrounds the subject of patriarchy as a historical culture and modern universalizing concept. She notes on how the ideal

patriarchy “tends not only to serve culturally conservative aims but to constitute an exclusionary practice within feminism, precipitating precisely the kind of fragmentation that the ideal purports to overcome” (49).

Chapter 3 focuses on a critique of Julia Kristeva, a discussion of Foucault's publication of the journals of Alexina/Herculine Barbin, a 19th-century hermaphrodite, her critical review of Monique Wittig, and her view of gender identity subverted through masquerade and drag. In the chapter, Butler outlines the relationship between bodies and the societies that construct them, by pointing out the theorists' internal contradictions and therefore, use them to explore the boundaries of the categories body, gender, sex, and sexuality. Butler comments on the final section of the chapter the power of parody, in which she “considers the boundary and surface of bodies as politically constructed,” focusing on the work of Julia Kristeva and Mary Douglas (xxxiii-xxxiv).

Throughout her argument, Butler relies on Michel Foucault's theory of social power as presented in his work *The Subject and Power*, which challenges the relations of body and soul. According to Foucault, power is not something that some people exercise over others but is instead, “an invisible network of ideological conditioning that permeates the entire social fabric,” (Ruti 64). Butler adopts and genders Foucault's conception of power by explaining that gender is the predominant cultural agent, which operates on the body, hence constituting the concepts of masculinity/femininity and the identities of heterosexuality/homosexuality. The notion of power in relation to the action heroine is a consideration to investigate. The power relations between man and woman, the male hero and female hero, is a constant cycle of whom possesses the active and passive gaze.

For a woman to live “within the terms of a masculinist culture,” she must become “a source of mystery and unknowability” (Butler vii). Society defines women by confining them in the categories of gender and sex, thus placing the female in a location of passivity when compared to the male. Butler challenges us to look beyond the appearance of the body and instead focus on the reality of gender. Therefore, one should not judge gender as a product of genetics, but rather as a set of repeated behaviors or actions. As Butler states:

“gender is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced, and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence” (34)

Restricting gender comes from the male oppression in dictating rules that if women step out of the feminine category, society isolates and outcasts them for performing anomalous. If we identify an individual by gender or sex, we categorize them from a heterosexual viewpoint. That comes out as modeling the individual as the sexed body, which articulates to reproduce heterosexuality, therefore transforming identity into a gendered subject. If society views the body through the gendered appearance then what we assume to know about the body becomes a frontage. Butler makes a clear distinction between the sex and gender categories. She discusses gender as a social or cultural construction and sex as a biological or political construction (3). In the social construction is what she defines as femininity and masculinity, whereas the biological construction is what we define with the terms man and woman (17). From the moment a person is born, society designates the child as either a girl or a boy and therefore frames out from the sex category leading the child to perform a feminine or masculine gender then. Therefore:

“the internal coherence of gender and the binary framework for both sex and gender are considered throughout as regulatory fictions that consolidate and naturalize the convergent power regimes of masculine and heterosexist oppression” (33).

The sex/gender distinction implies within a hegemonic and heterosexual framework that “suggests a radical discontinuity between sex bodies and culturally constructed genders” (6). The construction enforces the hegemonic system as boundaries set within the gender/sex distinction, which men created and applied to establish an orderly system. In technical terms, Butler argues that gender is “radically independent of sex [and] gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice” (6). However, patriarchy society sought to fabricate and design gender identity through the “effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin” (ix). Children from an early age learn how to perform their designated biological gender through personal and public. The biological construction traditionally traps the social or cultural construction. One should instead refocus to the “acts, gestures, and desire” that are “performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained” (136). Butlers mean to argue that,

“Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (33).

The repeat of stylization of gender comes from the history of stylizing the body as male or female and gender as feminine or masculine. Physical appearance is part of the construction of identity and features as the penis, vagina, breasts, restricts gender in its body/sex identity. That element reappears in the concept of the action heroine, sometimes objectifying and sexualizing the strong woman for heterosexual purposes.

The use of the active female hero encourages women to pick up a more aggressive and dominating personal. Therefore, “no matter how traditionally feminine and beautiful they might appear [...] women are fighting to escape conventional gender role expectations that, in the past, have kept them from looking aggressive, whether in real or the media” (Inness 7). The remaining problem is that tough women “do not entirely escape traditional gender role expectations,” when looking at characters such as Ellen Ripley when she adopts a child or with Alice who has a genetically constructed child. Furthermore, while the action heroine “might be tougher than in the past [,] they also adhere to various stereotypes about how they are supposed to look and behave.” Otherwise, they might threaten the men. While some male audiences might find the tough woman image endearing, others “do not want women who are too violent, too tough, or too masculine” (8-9). The masquerade of femininity in films is still evident to locate. Action heroines operate within narratives as the male heroes, but their gender performance reveals heteropatriarchal elements regarding power structure.

5. Analysis

5.1 The American Action Cinema and Gender

Inness points out how the world has in recent years witnessed, “an explosion of tough women in the popular media - including films, television shows, comic books, and video games,” which is significantly evident in Western popular culture. The American television has seen many examples of strong female characters and has demonstrated whether the women are fighting in a supernatural, mythological, or patriarchal environment, she has achieved success in most cases. A few illustrations are the heroines from films such as *Charlie's Angels*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Crouching Tiger*, and the television shows *La Femme Nikita*, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Alias*, and *Dark Angel* (1). A large number of female warriors, detectives, and survivors have appeared on the screen whether in the cinema or on the computer. What the heroines mentioned above have in common is their function as "eye candy" for the male audiences. There is rarely a heroine who is not beautiful or whose sexualized appeal functions in heightening the male gaze (14). While true that contemporary action heroines continue to be visualized as sexualized and objectified icons of femininity, there has been a considerate change in how audiences view them since the classic Hollywood cinema. The same goes for the action genre and the narrative structure.

Nowadays the action genre has become a dominant form of entertainment worldwide. The type is mainstream in various media, which includes film, television, comic books, literature, and computer games. A way to describe the action cinema is by explaining the genre as a hybrid that combines the moral landscape of the western and the urban settings of film noir and police procedurals. The action film took shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The genre became a fully recognized and immensely popular cinematic form in the 1980s, as a response to stars such as Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger taking the stage with their displays as muscular and powerful men being a key factor. As a response to the action heroines of Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor who appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the 1990s saw the evolving nature of female heroes taking a central place in the action narrative (Brown 22).

Regarding the genre itself, there are a set of characteristics that are typical to locate in action films, which is spectacular physical action, a narrative emphasis on fights, chases, and explosions, and a combination of special effects and stunt-work. These components bring to light the genre as one whose primary feature is the centrality of violence. In a typical fashion, the action film

combines a setting of the hero embarking on a mission to rescue those considered 'inferior' to his masculinity, but the action film deals with and embodies various social and cultural themes, particular issues of gender, race, class, and justice. Apart from the spectacular visual display offered to the audiences, the body of the hero or heroine functions as a central term in the action narrative (Tasker 153).

Hollywood's obsession with displaying images of masculine identity "has evolved partly through the commodification of the male body," which has roots in the relationship between action and display of the muscular stars' bodies. The American cinema has had an active fixation on images of masculine identity, which has shown through the commodification of the male body. As told, some of the most prominent actors to represent the action genres were Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger, whose images of the muscular male figure "became an icon of American masculinity in the mid-1980s," which signaled "the evolution of a previously unseen cinematic articulation of masculinity." These two examples became the figureheads the 1980s fixation of the muscular male action hero and the "feminist gains" that they each supposedly represented. As such, the late 1980s and early 1990s came to represent "a series of movies featuring aggressive, gun-toting heroines [whose successes] serves to highlight the existence of a cinematic tradition which has placed women at the center of the action narrative" (2). Even though heroines such as Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor have become part of a new action tradition to which female stars are central, the male stars have demonstrated themselves being in command of most of the money and status within Hollywood cinema. The images of the action heroine in media transcribe the female body regarding masculinity. Tasker introduces the term 'musculinity,' which refers to the extent a physical definition of masculinity regarding a developed musculature" to the male body within the representation. She relates bodybuilding to Hollywood and the public's fascination in viewing musculature, describing the attraction as a culturally negative impact on both men and women. The ideal masculine identity presented becomes one where men have to obtain a 'perfect' body as the male superstars/bodybuilders. Women receive the assumption that only a man of a physically dominant appearance can give them satisfaction (1-3).

Some critics have observed physical actors as Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Chuck Norris as "grotesque figures" who represent a hero that is "out of control, framed by images of the monstrous and the deviant." The issue of the grotesque figure lies in the critically accompanied sport of bodybuilding, which casts masculine identity as something that is, as argued by Tasker, out of control. Within muscular mythology, the male body of the physical actor

illustrates an unrealistic and dangerous position, whereas, in a cinematic point of view, the actor's body becomes a pinup. The bodies of Stallone and Schwarzenegger, as prodigious as they may appear to the public, become "self-created works of art," that speaks of an alluring appeal to men and women. However, as Tasker notes, the male actors' bodies become pinups in another perspective in which their physical forms becomes self-created works of art. The same can be said about the action heroine's body as she too must continuously redefine her appearance and display new forms of physical attractiveness (9). Inness makes an intriguing notion of how tough women appear in more than just popular media. Real life women have emerged in the gymnasium, taking up sports typically characterized as too masculine, and in workplaces with positions often occupied by men. Similar to Tasker's reference to bodybuilding and women taking an interest in weightlifting and building up their bodies to appear identical to Linda Hamilton in her role as Sarah Conner in *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (3 & 6).

Comparing the traditional action hero against the heroine displays several differences, particularly within the biological and social gender identity. Men play active roles by leading the narrative, and they typically illustrated a stronger physically and mentally authority. They are the protectors, their characters usually appearing as dominant and aggressive. A difference between men and women in the cinema is that men can look or 'gaze' at women, whereas women are objects for the male and produced to gratify male viewers. Women play passive roles, placing them in positions as the bearers of children and in need of protection, making them not independent and dependent on male support. Taking Hollywood as an example, the cinema defined gender roles mimicking and enforcing social norms that established men and women into their proper social standings. The heroine embodies "a set of images of female desirability," in which she as a sexualized female emphasizes both physical strength and stature (Tasker 14). In the rise of the third wave of feminism, the action heroine represents a response to the changing political context of gendered identity. The increase in notice of gendered images called into questions through popular cultural forms suggests the connection to the waves of feminism. When characterizing the action heroine, some elements indicate she borrows established models from a persona such as a tomboy or a femme fatale. The female hero can be the sidekick, who has yet to accept the responsibilities of adult womanhood; she can be the romantic interest for the hero, a position that reestablishes her feminine qualities; or she can pose as the villainess who uses her visual and physical charm as a seductive weapon. Feminist critics often accuse the heroine's presence as an excuse to confirm the hero's heterosexuality and to deflect attention from the homoeroticism supposedly surrounding the

relationships between male characters. Placing the woman as the romantic interest is a practical and repetitive choice to ensure the narrative functions remains from the hero's perspective. Often her presence signifies the opposite of the male hero as in she symbolizes weakness and vulnerability (15-16).

As far as being role models, the empowered, confident female characters as aspirational figures encourage viewers to realize and understand that women can take action into their own hands, fighting and beating men, seeking revenge and usually winning. Some of the contemporary Western society's action heroines have succeeded in playing in big-budget Hollywood films. The action cinema has seen the likes of Uma Thurman (*Kill Bill* 2003 and 2004), Milla Jovovich (*Resident Evil*), Kate Beckinsale (*Underworld* 2003 and 2006), and Angelina Jolie (*Tomb Raider* 2003 and 2005). Each film has represented the actresses' character as someone who is independent, influential, intelligent, physically or emotionally adept, or capable of handling dire situations without the assistance of men.

Inness refers to the action heroine as someone who can appear both attractive, feminine, and heterosexually appealing as well as “challenge the patriarchal social structure by defending women and acting against the men who threaten them” (14). Typical characteristics of the stereotypical female heroine are that her “muscularity might be impressive for ‘a girl,’ but she is no challenge for the ‘boys’” (12). Otherwise, the heroine might unsettle the men and make them question their masculinity if her heroic position demonstrates as her having too much phallic power. Another feature is that the heroine can often appear as childish and if she does have a family then her aggressive and protective nature manifests as her desire to protect the child from any danger (12). If the action heroine is part of the domestic, she can still perform as independent and robust. If alone, the action heroine requires no support from patriarchy, except seeking assistance from other strongly independent women or influential female communities, creating stronger feminine bonds between women.

Brown describes the modern heroine has someone who has an impressive lineage, built upon the foundation of diverse precedents such as the

“female sleuths in the writings of Agatha Christie and Dorothy Sayers, the femme fatales of the 1930s and 1940s film noir, the spunky tomboys of 1950s teen films, and the leather-clad heroines of 1960s television programs like *The Avengers* and *Honey West*” (10)

She has played the role of the vengeful heroine, the sexualized dominatrix, the beautiful but intelligent female detective and many others. She has become someone who illustrates a phallic symbol as seen through her mastering the machine usually reserved for the man, and she has obtained notions of power, privilege, and individuality. Brown argues that even though the heroine is a familiar figure to locate in contemporary popular culture, she has not become an incontestable figure. Also, Brown refers the action heroine as someone who is still relatively new in entertainment, but he poses the interesting question of the female hero being a “harbinger of ass-kicking feminism” or her being another example of “how excessive violence has taken hold of every facet of popular culture.” The act of letting women enter the violent domain typically reserved for male heroes is a significant reference to the changes of women in the cinema (Brown 10). She has stepped out of the traditionally passive roles, which in turn gives her the freedom to make her own decisions, command the narrative, control her destiny, and let her fight her own battles. Similar to the male hero, she has become a new woman who is inquisitive and intelligent, physically and emotionally strong, displaying her as someone audience members can identify with and view as a heroic ideal. Nevertheless, as Brown notes, she perpetuates the idea of female beauty and sexuality, which is a cultural and social invention of how society views the value of women. The representation of women in cinema as conventionally beautiful, glamorous, and sexualized is a repetitive cycle from classic Hollywood cinema (12). Some female heroes have taken to demonstrate a muscular frame that also would be common to find amongst men. Women with muscles in action films have tended towards becoming equated as symbolic males or lesbians. The threat of action heroines displaying lesbian traits or becoming too muscularly male leads to “an increased emphasis on the sexuality of heroines” in films. A method for lessening the homophobic nature, as most mainstream audiences tend to illustrate towards images of homoeroticism or lesbianism, most narratives establishes the heterosexuality of action heroines through the use of a male love interest or linking the woman to notions of fierce maternal instinct (32).

Therefore, the modern media portrays the action heroine as someone who can equally dominate the action with the man, but there can be elements present to ensure viewers of the woman's gender and sexuality. Whether in a role is as the independent career woman, as the doting mother, or as the faithful wife, the heroine falls under the reception of the male gaze, as Mulvey describes to be an effect of the angle of the camera, mise-en-scene, and use of sound. These techniques manipulate and accentuate the heroine's appearance, enhancing her feminine

attractiveness. Even though the action heroine has replaced the images of women as dizzy blondes or mothers/nurturers, there is no escape from the male gaze although the female has evolved significantly. Regardless of her new intelligence, confidence, and empowerment that allows the heroine to stand next to the male hero, she and everyone else receives the reminder that she is still a woman. She is fierce and sexual, violent but desirable. Nevertheless, some of the feminine and womanly aspects can be assisting in displaying the female character's strength. Considering our depiction of women in the media grounds deeply in eroticism and objectification, viewing the heroine in different terms is difficult.

All three - Tasker, Inness, and Brown - agree that the action heroine is a direct affront to notions of gender acceptability, in which she requires audiences to view her as more than just a woman. Conversely, the cinema, and all other types of media, visually stresses her femininity and then she also forces the audiences to view her as more than just a woman taking on a male role. The main argument is that instead of demonstrating empowered femininity, the action heroine is enacting masculinity and being merely a puppet in performing her 'toughness' to the audiences.

5.2 Ellen Ripley: *Alien* (1979) & *Aliens* (1986)

The original *Alien* is one of those rare films where a series of specific iconic images maintain importance within the American action cinema. Apart from the special effects and the bizarre and distinctly inhuman appearance of the alien, the feature that stole the most of the spotlight was Lieutenant Ellen Ripley, the last survivor of the *Nostromo*. Often positioned as the prototype for the 1990s action heroine, Sigourney Weaver's portrayal of Ripley became the most vital aspect of the franchise. Director James Cameron never portrays Ripley as weak or powerless, but as someone who consistently takes on the role of a calm and collected leader. Scholars and the press have often referred Ripley's role to that of Rambo, dubbing her "Fembo" or "Rambolina" because of her striking image as a muscular, gun-wielding, and unfeminine heroine. The association of Ripley with Rambo emerges from the fact that *Aliens'* director and screenwriter James Cameron directed *Rambo: First Blood Part II* (1985). Both main characters were spotting almost identical features such as "a muscle shirt, loads of ammunition, an oversized machine gun, and sweat dampened hair" (Brown 27).

The *Alien* trilogy places Ripley, a robust and intelligent woman, within a homosocial setting, where her very femininity makes her alien and troublesome. The first three films position Ripley as

an action heroine who must not only fight the alien, “but with a conspiratorial company which has a ruthless disregard for human life” (Tasker 147). In *Alien*, Ripley emerges as someone who is capable of following orders, but when others, especially her male counterparts, go against protocols, she demonstrates emotional outbursts of disagreement. When the crewmembers investigating the unknown spaceship that contains the alien eggs return, Ripley initially denies them access to the *Nostromo* to follow proper quarantine protocol. The disagreement between Captain Dallas and Ripley is a reflection of the gender binary and oedipal complex present in *Alien*. The ship's central computer, referred to as ‘Mother,’ establishes the fact that the unemotional and technological women can give orders to men. Furthermore, despite Ripley's position as a lieutenant she is not the one in control, displaying women even in the far future cannot obtain a higher rank. Her struggles with the male members of the crew show in her encounters with Ash and with Parker and Brett when they drown out her words with steam. The hierarchical conflicts these scenes present demonstrate that despite the setting being in the far future, Ripley struggles to establish her authority despite her rank (148). Regarding the oedipal complex, Dallas is clearly in the position of the father, as when Ash says that ‘Mother wants to talk to you’ and Dallas replies ‘Yellow lights for my eyes only.’ Whenever the symbolic order faces a threat from its children, be they the dissatisfied sons Brett and Parker or the rebelling daughter Ripley, Dallas results to using his authority not just as the captain but as a man as well.

In the sequel to *Aliens* (1986), Ripley experiences an almost similar encounter when the Company, the agency responsible for the deaths of her former crewmates, tasks her with investigating the colony stationed on the same planet from *Alien* along with a squad of Marines. Despite her earlier statement before the mission, in which Ripley states that she is no soldier when refusing to accompany the marines on their mission, she nevertheless joins after company man Carter Burke tells she can come as an observer (Tasker 139). After being in hyper-sleep for fifty-seven years and despite the future still being the future, Ripley is a stranger in a world that thought her gone. There is the natural case of Ripley suffering from PTSD, but she also shows to have become indifferently cold or hysterical when the others will not listen to her warnings. The most significant development to in her character is when the team encounters Newt, a little girl, and the only surviving colonist. Ripley is quick to demonstrate a motherly appeal, being both protective and patient with the girl and treating Newt as if she is her daughter. Ripley even remarks to a soldier that Newt survived a long time without protection and resources to which the soldier, Private Hudson, sarcastically fires back that then Newt should be in charge. The addition of Newt is most

visible in *Aliens*' promotional photo that shows Ripley carrying the frightened girl, illustrating her significance to the narrative of the film. Even with the poster showing Ripley holding an oversized weapon, covered in dirt and sweat, and wearing masculinized clothes, the adding of Newt portrays a mother protecting her child. However, despite her role starting out as a civilian advisor, the inexperienced Marine Commander forces Ripley to take over. Her two most impressive moments occur after the aliens kidnap Newt, in which Ripley dramatically arms herself with oversized guns to battle the monstrous alien queen. When the first battle fails, Ripley proceeds to wear a mechanical exoskeleton to vanquish the queen mother (Brown 27).

Ripley also reinforces the character that Inness refers to as the sacrificial heroine. The deaths of action heroines tend to represent as a patriarchal reaction to political threat in which patriarchy criminalizes and then violently eliminates the feminine figure. Apart from their deaths signifying punishment on behalf of them becoming too dominant, other more optimistic interpretations place the sacrificial heroine as someone who resists patriarchy's incorporation. The motivation behind the heroines' decision to become martyrs differs, but the most common reasons swing towards "their guilt, abject self-hatred, and regressive sacrifice to the needs of a patriarchal community." When a woman begins to grow too powerful, the patriarchal community steps prevent the woman from becoming too influential by proving or strengthen its patriarchy's authority. A male-controlled community can assert its authority by branding strong women as criminals, seeking punishments for their acts, or push the women into becoming self-sacrificing victims. Either method is an attempt to punish the female protagonist(s) for endeavoring to deconstruct the gendered hierarchy of which patriarchy rests and create a passageway for a feminist community (153-154).

Alien 3 (1992) positions Ripley in another patriarchal society, which is a foundry facility and penal colony inhabited by male inmates. The prisoners all have double-Y chromosome syndrome, a genetic mutation present in some males in the 22nd century, which gives the afflicted individual a predisposition for brutal antisocial behavior such as rape and murder. Ripley's presence in the facility provokes some inmates to attack her, but another inmate; one considered the voice of reason and a leading figure amongst the colonists intervenes and helps her. The warden of the penitentiary continually rebukes Ripley's warnings until he too meets a gruesome death, resulting in the removal of the symbolic order. At the end of the film, after discovering she has the embryo of an alien queen growing inside her, she jumps into a furnace after learning that the Weyland-Yutani company hopes to turn the aliens into biological weapons. Her sacrifice ensures that the company will not achieve the alien, but also 'punishes' the female character for becoming too powerful as well as ensuring the

only survivor is the last remaining inmate. Ripley's character takes an even more drastic turn in *Alien Resurrection* (1997), in which she instigates a trend known as metahumanity after emerging as a cloned Ellen Ripley, in whom both human and acid alien blood commingle. Apart from being both stronger and mentally connected to the alien queen, the clone exhibits sexual supremacy when being seductive with some of the mercenaries, and her clothing has altered to a skintight outfit and hair is less curly. She has become a fetishistic object of desire through her physical appearance and personality.

Throughout the two first films, some scenes evoke Mulvey's concept of the male gaze concerning voyeurism and fetishism. In *Alien*, after finding out Ash has secretly communicated with the Company, ordering him to bring the alien back and deeming the crew expendable, Ripley confronts him, but he attempts to choke her to death. The scene resembles that of a rape attack, featuring Ripley's high groans and heavy breathing as Ash throws her around. Being an android one must assume he does not possess a physical form of the phallic power, which the male figure results to show through a rolled up magazine that he places over Ripley's mouth. Before Parker intervenes, Ripley displays high-pitched noises, a sweat-covered face, and body convulsions that Ash shows as well. The second that evokes the male gaze occurs near the end of the film. After believing the alien to be dead, Ripley prepares for stasis in which she strips down before the camera. The climactic action sequences of the film, to the point of Ripley's undressing scene before her final confrontation with the alien, "has generated a good deal of debate concerning the limits and possibilities of the cinematic representation of the action heroine" (Tasker 15). The film's conclusion is where Ripley is at her most vulnerable, wearing nothing but underwear and a sleeveless-tee, yet even in her exposed state, she still manages to conquer the monster and survive. After demonstrating her masculinized power by her physical form and handling of weapons, the fetishistic elements changes to voyeurism at the undressing scene. The scene the exposure of Ripley makes the fact that she is feminine and female to the audience apparent when compared to her previous androgynous appearance. The scene displays her feminine form in a way that crosses into the territory of the male gaze and brings up the notion of the "extreme images of bodily vulnerability and invulnerability" mobilized in the action cinema (150).

Aliens demonstrates moments in which Ripley exhibits the mastery of guns and reveals her as someone who has usurped a particularly phallic means of power. Feeling her position is unvalued amongst the military team, she gains more status with the men by offering to take on a manual task at which she is proficient, donning the loader used to transport stores. The exoskeleton gives her a

physical power that she uses skillfully, impressing the marines and later she uses the loader to battle the monstrous alien queen. Another scene is with one of the soldiers introducing her to a close friend, which turns out to be his “M-41A pulse rifle, 100mm, with over and under 30mm pump-action grenade launcher.” When Ripley asks about another of the weapon’s functions, the corporal replies that she should not mess with the grenade launcher and she replies, “You started this. Show me everything. I can handle myself” (Brown 30).

Both *Alien* and *Aliens* illustrate moments in which Ripley’s femininity or masculinity is more visible when she is in the company of other women. The comparison between Ripley and the other female member, Lambert, shows Ripley to be more levelheaded against Lambert’s weak and hysterical performance. At a more metaphoric level, the ship’s computer ‘Mother’ positions Ripley at a lower rank in which she has less influence (Tasker 148). *Aliens* presents one of two female Marines known as Private Vasquez (Jenette Goldstein) who “is a woman even more blatantly coded as masculine Ripley.” Her masculinity shows through her muscled physique and crew cut, but she faces a similar situation with the other Marines as when Ripley struggles to maintain her authority with her male crewmembers. One Marine jokingly asks if Vasquez has ever been mistaken for a man to which she replies, “No, have you?” as she high-fives another comrade. Brown notes on the message of the joke as to where “one’s ability to perform certain culturally recognizable traits” determines if one can perform masculinity and femininity separately. The excessive masculinization of Vasquez lessens the fear of another woman threatening the aspects of Ripley’s character, “whom Vasquez refers to as “Snow White” (32). Ripley’s comparison to a fairytale princess marks her, in the opinion of Vasquez, as someone who is dainty and fragile. Vasquez not only positions Ripley as someone out of the tough boys’ club but as a damsel or princess in distress who will probably be in need of a protector. The male gaze takes on a two-sided appearance of different woman: one as a masculinized female who is one of the boys and a feminine but still strong woman. The scene with Vasquez exercising shows her muscles, and throughout the film, her military profession positions her as someone capable of handling the violence. The audience will get the choice of Ripley and Vasquez, but ultimately the overly masculine Vasquez meets her demise and the more feminine Ripley survives. Tasker points out the climb Ripley makes through the ranks because of the inexperienced and bureaucratic officer. After the Marines have emerged from their hypersleep, they reassemble into a military team of which Ripley is not a part, but “her populist allegiance to the troops quickly becomes clear” when the group discovers the Company’s betrayal (148).

Throughout the *Alien* franchise, the alien takes on the appearance of the monstrous and uncanny abject that the team has never encountered before. In the first film, the creature is quick to turn the ship, which has become a second and familiar home to them, into an unfamiliar deathtrap. The team must eliminate the alien to survive to reverse the Unheimlich to its former Heimlich atmosphere, but conflicts between Dallas and Ripley of how to handle the situation causes tension. The same happens in *Aliens* despite Ripley's warnings, which results in the numerous deaths of the marines. The action repeats itself in the last two films as well, when an alien invades the prison facility or a horde of aliens escape the laboratory. Regarding Kristeva's theory of abjection, all four *Alien* films demonstrate that the parental/symbolic order is the one that is in control until the 'father' loses his leadership or dies. That is the moment where the maternal/feminine has to step up and take over.

5.3 Sarah Connor: *The Terminator* (1984) & *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991)

The heroines of the 1980s experienced a physical development by obtaining the hardbody (muscles) and hardware (guns), which displays the woman as someone who could take and give violence just as much as the male heroes. The hardbody heroine is a relatively recent phenomenon in a genre traditionally associated with the man. The woman, whose masculinized form rose questions of the naturalness of muscles, is the image of Sarah Connor's/Linda Hamilton's bulging biceps and striated shoulders in a black undershirt. The commandeering of muscles and guns from the male domain symbolizes a symbolic phallicization of the actress as she achieves "the hard flesh of the body and the hard barrel of the gun" (Brown 29-31).

In *The Terminator* (1984), Sarah Connor demonstrates the portrayal of a hysterical woman who is in need of rescue from the 'male' cyborg. In *Judgement Day* (1991), her role has changed to that of an empowered female capable of handling herself and who knows how to fight and use weapons. However, when in the presence of the cyborg responsible for her and her family's misery, she reverts to her former self of a frightened woman, becoming strong once her son reassures his mother that the terminator is on their side. She comes to resemble what Butler refers to as drag or masquerading femininity. The perception of an action heroine who battles her foes in drag is similar to Ripley's association with Rambo. Connor in *Judgement Day* identifies her with the archetypal Rambo persona through her symbolic cross-dressing and oversized guns. Hamilton's muscled body is a result of her workout schedule three months before filming *T2*. Brown notes on how

Entertainment Weekly reported Hamilton's training process consisting of running, biking, swimming, stair climbing, and weightlifting, as well as learning judo, military techniques, and weapons handling from an authentic Israeli commando. Hamilton had a personal trainer to oversee her process over six days a week (29). The workout to build a muscular physique represents the cinematic heroine and real-life women as embodying masculinity, which Hamilton shows via her aggressive role as Sarah Connor. The muscled woman is what Tasker refers to as the new cinematic butch-femme (142). She is the type of heroine who can step into domains stereotypically subjugated by men. Connor's transformation from a secondary character within the action narrative, to the central role of an action heroine, is the evolutionary change of a woman who commands the narrative. The strong action heroine is a new phenomenal figure strongly involved in the sport of bodybuilding, which pushes the development of shifting 'masculine' identities for women into motion (132). However, for Sarah Connor achieve her more masculine and violent nature in T2, she has to have a reason for erasing her femininity and becoming an action heroine.

In *The Terminator*, director James Cameron introduces Sarah Connor as a harassed waitress who can barely balance a checkbook and disrespected by costumers. The arrival of Kyle Reese reveals her destiny as a legendary figure to the rebellion of a future society. The reason behind her importance to the narrative is her biological role. There is no indication of her having any significance other than that she gives birth to the future revolutionary leader. The act of pregnancy and childbirth is a power historically identified as female, yet Connor demonstrates that despite her female body she is in close contact or right in the middle of the battlefield, "once marked as exclusively male and vehemently defended as such" (Inness 35). Through a man's support and guidance, she acquires military discipline and learns how to arm herself and be self-sufficient, which Cameron continues as a militaristic iconography in the sequel. Sarah is in constant need of Kyle's guidance and he continually drags her around while continually saving her from death. Kyle is the character with the knowledge and the one in control of the narrative until his death. Even though she learns to defend herself, she is dependent on the knowledge and skill of the male character and by the end, Sarah has become what Carol Clover describes as the final girl who, as in many slasher films, must make a stand when her protector has died. When Kyle is wounded, she must take control and addresses him as 'Soldier' when he is about to give up. Her character changes from a damsel into a commanding officer. After the loss of her lover and the threat towards her unborn son, Sarah undergoes her transformation into a female warrior because the male hero has vanished and she must now become the phallic female, handling guns and explosives to secure her

family's survival. The death of Kyle signifies Sarah being unable to function as the action heroine and not being in control of her adult sexuality (Tasker 138). As Mulvey argues, the male hero is the one in control of the narrative whereas the female character acts as either a distraction or love interest. As the primary idea of the male gaze is that women often become objectified and sexualized by male screenwriters and directors, Sarah is never a sex object until the motel scene. Sarah Connor's function as a passive sexualized object is when Kyle admits he has been in love with her since John Connor showed him a photo of her. The two proceed to have sex, initiating the Freudian concept of voyeuristic fetishism. The explicit but intimate moment of sexual intercourse reinforces the voyeuristic desires of watching someone have sex (porn). The fetishistic desire is the scene of seeing the uncovered couple's sweaty bodies and the audio. Throughout the second film, Sarah does not dress in a sexualized manner and the camera does not linger on her body or appearance.

The modified Sarah Connor in *Judgement Day* offers a unique visualization of the action heroine. Following the events of the first film, she has been incarcerated in a mental institution but continues to train herself mentally and physically in preparation for her second battle with the Terminator. She has constructed a makeshift gym out of her bed. When seen working out, the camera angles over her arm muscles and sweat-covered skin, giving a clear view of her attained masculinity. Those who have institutionalized her are figures of patriarchal authority such as the police and doctors who believe she is mentally unstable and delusional. Her imprisonment is an example of containment. After becoming a strong, independent woman, the patriarchal society must lock her up, but she maintains control of her body and surroundings. She proves to be resourceful and intelligent as shown when she almost escapes the hospital without any assistance. When the Terminator arrives with her son, the presence of android briefly relegates Sarah to her former persona of a damsel in distress. Although she proves to be good with conventional masculine weaponry and is determined to protect her son and the human race, she increasingly becomes reliant on the Terminator. Not only is he stronger and virtually indestructible, he unknowingly establishes himself as a surrogate father to her son. At the end of the film, where Sarah confronts the villain, the 'male' Terminator is the one who must finish the job when she runs out of bullets. Therefore, the action heroine's position as illustrated by Sarah Connor becomes less prominent. As a replacement, the male characters become increasingly important, and the narrative transfers focus from the heroine to the traditional perspective of the hero.

Another modification from the first film to *T2* is the cybernetic android assassin (Arnold Schwarzenegger) who has exchanged his role of a killing machine into the female character with the muscular Sarah assuming the masculine killer/protector. In the first film, the T800 is the uncanny abject, a technological product from the distant future where a war between man and machine rages. His transgression from the villain to a heroic, fatherly figure is an act of humanizing his character. The affectionate relationship between the Terminator and the young John Connor heightens the oedipal complex. Even though Sarah Connor's eyes, the Terminator becomes the ideal father to her son. Schwarzenegger's portrayal of the original terminator ensures the traditional narrative of the hero as the action man, father, and figure of authority. Even when his knowledge, physical power, and military discipline to follow orders makes him an ideal sidekick, his reprogramming commands him to obey the young John Connor and not the woman. The separation from her son, who has turned out to be a rebelling youth because of his mother's actions and father's death, complicates the oedipal complex. With the lack of the symbolic order, Terminator occupies the position of the paternal station. Even if the Terminator's character development appears feminine in some cases, his physical appearance, and behavior enable the son to form a familial bond with his replacement father. Schwarzenegger's portrayal of the ideal man/father stands against the feminized T1000. The updated machine possesses a metal alloy that allows it to change its physical appearance at will, which becomes a terrifying fluidity that challenges the gender/sex notion. Schwarzenegger's size and physical qualities challenge the "catlike" qualities of Robert Patrick's portrayal as the villainous terminator. Schwarzenegger's muscular solidity plays off against the instability of the T1000 and Connor's ichnographically unstable figure (Tasker 83).

Similar to Ripley taking control once the patriarchal figure has ceased to exist within the narrative or proves incompetent, Connor emerges as the action heroine once the male hero has taught her how to step out of the feminine binary. Although she has developed a masculinized identity, she indicates her emotional behavior to be a hindrance to the mission and her ten-year-old son even tells her to calm down and remain focused. Additionally, the maternal body invoked in *Aliens*, and *Judgement Day* both strengthens and weakens the heroine in ways that draw on the complicated history of 'women' as a term within the representation. The presence of children, especially if belonging to the female protagonist, gives the illusion that women can only become masculinized if the notion of family is threatened. From one perspective, the action heroine can show she is strong enough to rescue her child herself. On the other hand, the addition of a child within the narrative places the woman in a stereotypical setting of the wife or mother.

5.4 Samantha Caine vs. G.I. Jane: The Battle of Phallic Power

The Long Kiss Goodnight (1996) starred Geena Davis and Samuel L. Jackson. Davis' portrayal of Samantha Carine presents a woman who leads an ordinary life as a schoolteacher and single parent happily engaged to a sensitive man. Eight years before the narrative, she washed up on a beach, wounded and pregnant, and has no recollection of her past due to amnesia. A series of events cause some of the memories and skills of her former life to resurface, including the ability to handle knives effectively and dismantling a sniper rifle along with other weapons. Samantha goes on a mission to discover her former self with private investigator Mitch Hennessey (Jackson). They find out her past occupation as a CIA assassin named Charlene 'Charly' Baltimore. Unfortunately, their search catches the attention of enemies and colleagues who had believed her long dead and attempt to eliminate her. The duo must prevent her old enemies, allied with her former employer, from blowing up the bridge to Canada at Niagara Falls in a fake terrorist attack. The transformation of Samantha into Charly constitutes the central theme of gender and identity transgression. Structured along traditional gender binaries is the self-discovery that demonstrates a stripping of "the feminine masquerade embodied by Samantha in favor of the underlying masculine character of Charly" (Brown 43-44).

G.I. Jane (1997), on the other hand, differs on many levels such as storyline, characterization, and the display of traditional gender and sex binaries. Ridley Scotts, the director who directed the film, *Thelma & Louise* (1991), presents Demi Moore as Lieutenant Jordan O'Neil in the same masculinized display as the quintessential action heroine. The film tells the fictional story of topographical analyst Jordan O'Neil who undergoes training in U.S. Navy Special Warfare Group as the assembly's first woman member. The film capitalizes on real-life debates about women's expanding role in the military and represents the clash between the masculine and the feminine. Ridley purports the female protagonist to be a strong woman who defies stereotypes and grasps masculine power. Similarly, to *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, *G.I. Jane* visible documents the transformation of the female protagonist into a masculine proxy (44-45).

Both films exemplify the self-conscious masculinization of their female protagonists. Brown notes on how *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is taking pleasure in "juxtaposing Samantha's initial innocence and timidity with Charly's aggressive and violent personality" (44), whereas O'Neil demonstrates a strong willingness to give up her femininity to fit in with her male peers. Both of

them undergo a transformation in which they physically and mentally alter their femininity. In *The Long Kiss Goodnight*, a male character subjects Samantha to torture by submerging her in icy cold water, and as a result, Samantha remembers her past. The torture scene is a reflection of what Mulvey discusses as sadism, which is part of fetishistic and voyeuristic desires. As the voyeuristic involves a controlling gaze, Mulvey argues that this has associations with sadism, which links to the punishment or demystification of the female castrator. Her male tormentors seek to strengthen the phallocentrism as the source of power and meaning through humiliation. In the sadistic side of voyeurism is the visual appearance of Samantha in her see-through and wet undershirt, revealing her underwear and bra to the male torturer and audience. While the torture scene signifies Samantha as frail and weak, the fetishistic element disappears once she regains her memory. The distraction of the castration anxiety allows Charly to obtain phallic power, which is a gun she retrieves the gun from the crotch of a drowned male corpse and shoots her torturer. Brown refers to the torture scene as a “hyperbolically symbolic scenario” of Samantha's final remasculinization into Charly (45).

Apart from the torture scene, Samantha/Charly and O'Neil each experience a makeover that signifies their masculinization. After having regained her memory and rescued Mitch, Ridley presents the audience with a scene in which Samantha/Charly showers and changes her physical appearance. Once again, the voyeuristic of the male gaze is present in the way the camera shows her naked form. Her physical transformation shows her wearing harsh makeup, cutting, coloring her hair platinum blonde, and trading in the dress and sweaters for tight pants and a bullet-riddled leather jacket. The Freudian concept of fetishism is present in the manner that Charly handles her makeup supplies, reassuring the male gaze by distracting the audience from her previous show of phallic power. Her transformation is shocking to her male partner as Mitch watches Charly smoke, swear, and drink several shots of hard liquor. She shows to have become the master of her sexuality, which she shows through her new sexually aggression and her asking Mitch if he wants to sleep with her. The change from an ordinarily dull housewife and mother into a woman mastering phallic power who outshoots, outfights, and outthinks the villains is a central element in the film (Brown 45).

Compared to Samantha/Charly, O'Neil starts out as a character identified as feminine through both her physical and emotional behavior. The film displays her as a woman wearing ostentatious and unflattering pearl earrings and possessing long, thick hair. Throughout the narrative, O'Neil changes from her position as a supporting associate in military intelligence into becoming a hero who shows to have the skill of leadership. Nevertheless, for O'Neill to reach that final reward, she

must cast off all that implies her to be feminine, which means a complete change of clothes, not wearing jewelry, and shave her hair off. All of these changes are to ensure that O'Neil can physically conform to the appearance of her male colleagues. She is quick to demonstrate her mastery of masculinity by dominating skills such the obstacle course and weapons' assembly. Her skills and desire to prove her position as one of the men earn O'Neil the respect of her male peers and the Master Chief. Her achieved success comes to the ultimate test when she has to enter a real combat situation and rescue first her commanding officer and then her whole platoon (45). The challenges lie in reducing the feminine power of the power. Regardless of the obstacles thrown her way, O'Neil shows the skill to adapt to her new environment. She is unhesitant when moving into the male barracks or when using the male shower facilities. Even when the narrative reminds the audience of her womanhood seen in the shower scene, there is no mistake of O'Neil divesting her femininity progressively. The enigmatic Command Master Chief John James Urgayle (Viggo Mortensen) challenges that by reminding the audience that O'Neil retrains her breasts as part of her femininity by ostentatiously examining her.

Ridley has dispositioned two female characters to enhance O'Neil's femininity and masculinity, a similarity to Cameron placing Ripley's character against that of Lambert and Private Vasquez. G.I. Jane introduces to the audience Senator Lilian DeHaven (Anne Bancroft) as an influential and commanding female figure that is less stereotypically feminine compared to the other women present in the film. DeHaven shows to be aggressive, powerful, and in control of the men around her. Her argument against the Navy for not being gender-neutral sets in motion O'Neil's journey into becoming the first female member. DeHaven strikes a secret deal that involves if women compare favorably with men in a series of tests cases, the military will integrate women fully into all occupations of the Navy. The senator is also the one who personally handpicks O'Neil, but not because of her having any personal skills. She selects O'Neil because she is physically more feminine than the other candidates are. Although DeHaven's displaying presence of female empowerment and her decision to have women joining the Navy appears supportively feministic, the narrative later on reveals her to be manipulative and anti-feministic. The senator never intended for O'Neil to succeed and instead planned to use O'Neil as a bargaining chip to prevent military base closings in her home state Texas. DeHaven's efforts to foil the protagonist's success are photo evidence of O'Neil allegedly being lesbian and fraternizing with women. After finding out the truth, O'Neil threatens to expose the senator who then has the charges voided and O'Neil restored to the program. A second feature that undermines the power of Bancroft's character is her visual

representation throughout the film. Apart from being a woman of power, her sense of style and impeccable way of dressing always in skirts and high heels is a subtle way of reducing DeHaven's authority. By reminding the audience that she is feminine and a woman, viewers are unable to view her as anything but a decorated object of anti-feminism. Also, her deceive of planting alleged evidence discriminating O'Neil as lesbian reestablishes the muscled women as symbolic males or lesbians. When becoming too muscularly powerful, the narrative places an increased emphasis on the heroine's sexuality. In the case of O'Neil, lesbianism becomes a descriptive weapon that damages her reputation, designating lesbians in the military as unwelcome. As told, films that include scenes indicating or illustrating lesbianism underlines the male gaze. The entertainment of including lesbianism emphasizes the male voyeuristic desire of looking at two women together, whether their relationship is platonic or romantic. Therefore, the film does not only highlight the issue of women getting to join the military, but does with a sexuality defined as abnormal have problems with registering themselves in the services.

The second female character in the film is Lieutenant Blondell (Lucinda Jenney). Out of all three of them, she has the least screen time and is the least developed of the characters. Nevertheless, her role is an explicit representation of traditional femininity as she shows to be in a nurturing position, illustrated with her treating the wounds of O'Neil and the young men. Additionally, Blondell is a sympathetic confidant to the main character as much as she is an emotional and physical nurturer. Although there is an imprecise suggestion that Blondell may be a lesbian, she serves in the film as a sort of archetypal motherly figure. However, being a representative of motherhood serves no other power than to soothe and heal. One scene between Lt. Blondell and the protagonist is when O'Neil reveals to have ceased to menstruate. That piece of information is vital in regards to O'Neil's gender transgression. Even if she does retain her female secondary sexual characteristics, figures of patriarchal authority judge O'Neil by her primary feature as possessing the reproductive ability and childbirth. An example is the Master Chief referring to her as possessing a worthless womb. Even if her physical attributes, such as the breasts and vagina, signify her female sex, the intimation that O'Neill is incapable of childbirth marks her somehow less than a real woman.

The most iconic and triumphant moment for both Samantha/Charly and O'Neil is the apparent gender-transgressive challenge to "Suck my dick!" each woman gives to their male opponents. Charly has her moment when she is "speeding an eighteen-wheel truck at her enemies amidst the explosions of the film's climactic battle," shouting "Suck my Dick, every last one of you bastards!"

O'Neil demonstrates her situation when, "after being beaten and thrown to the ground in front of her fellow recruits during a mock training mission," she tells the Master Chief to "Suck my dick!" The scene signals both her resolve to continue and her obtaining phallic power through the catchphrase, which prompts her peers to cheer her bravado and taunt the chief with a group chant of her declare.

Compared to the action heroines of the past, in which the power of the phallus showed through male characteristics and symbolic accouterments such as guns, swords, and muscles, O'Neil and Charly go a step further by verbally declaring their appropriation and possession of the phallus. Their display of phallic power by shouting, "Suck my dick" not only further masculinizes themselves but feminize their adversaries. They openly reveal their position of assuming power and strength through the rhetoric of gendered terms. Brown has taken the quote said by Linda Williams in which she points out in her discussion of Demi Moore's body in *G.I. Jane* how one "does not have to be well versed in psychoanalysis to know that sick means power." By assuming male traits, the two gain access to a form of physical and social power systematically denied to women, while simultaneously demonstrating that the association of "maleness" with power is not innate "but culturally defined since anyone can mobilize even the most basic of male privileges" (Brown 45).

For them both to gain access to that phallic power, each one must go through an ordeal of painful humiliation and obstacles. The display of suffering is a standard feature to find in action heroes. The character of James Bond regularly has to endure torture when captured by the villain. When subjected to violence, Bond's body is brutalized because he can escape and defeat the villain. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *G.I. Jane* shows their female protagonists put through violently physical and mentally demanding tasks. Samantha is subjected to brutal abuse and torture before she regains her memory from where she can succeed over the villain. Like Samantha, she cannot withstand the pain or defeat the enemy, but when she reverts to Charly, she handles being beaten, shot, and tortured. The brutalization of female bodies often evokes disgust and displeasure when compared to viewing male bodies undergoing various acts of torture. O'Neil experiences an almost similar situation when the Master Chief binds her hands behind her back and beats her viciously. The beating is symbolic in the sense that the male power seeks to suppress the female and prove that if a woman cannot hold her ground in the military, she has no place amongst the male warriors. Despite having her arms immobilized, O'Neil proves to have possessed the art of fighting and viciousness seen classically in men. She lands several hits on the Master Chief and proves her worth despite covered in blood and bruises, both of which she wears with honor and pride.

G.I. Jane displays in its narrative a strong woman who defies stereotypes and grasps masculine power. The transformation of O'Neill's femininity into masculinity points towards women being unable to enjoy the level of success and power, unless she sacrifices some aspects of her identity as a woman. For every stereotypically feminine mannerism that she gives up, she acquires a corresponding stereotypically masculine trait. The ultimate message of the film appears to be that success and strength are optional for women, as long as they are willing to become men to obtain their goals. *The Long Kiss Goodnight* is similar in that manner. As Samantha, the action heroine cannot function without sacrificing her femininity, which includes her sense of motherhood and nurturing performance. If she is to succeed over the villain, the masculinized Charly has to come forward as she is the personality ordaining masculinity and other traits associated with the male. Even though the surface message of both films tells that women are capable of entering the military service or law enforcement and taking on the most masculine appearance, some implicit messages are that she can only achieve success by putting aside her femininity (Brown 44).

Looking aside from the theory of women enacting masculinity, Samantha/Charly and O'Neil breaks the stereotypes. Samantha shows viewers that a female character can portray as a blonde-haired woman without appearing as a dumb bimbo. Women can drink, smoke, and swear as much as the men do. She can be casual about intimate moments and be as sexually aggressive and free to express her desires, as a man would behave. O'Neil demonstrates a similar situation when she shaves her head and shows to be perfectly capable of handling military drill courses and assembling various types of weaponry. Inness refers to Nancy Hartsock's statement of "an important statement against women in combat was that war was men's business," and the presence of a woman threatens the male exclusiveness of his role as the soldier. Death and war are two elements exclusively associated in the male domain. Nevertheless, when O'Neil reveals to have stopped menstruating, the male identity feels less threatened and in need for exclusiveness when facing a female body that is no longer mysterious and powerful (33).

Breaking stereotypes allows both female protagonists to fight against the abject/uncanny. Although there are no monstrous beings present as those Ripley and Connor encounter, the concept of a patriarchal society standing against the women symbolizes a type of abject/uncanny. Samantha/Charly faces a complicated situation of the Freudian concept of Heimlich and Unheimlich. Losing her memories results in Charly forgetting her previous Heimlich environment and as Samantha, she creates a new Heimlich, which her slowly resurfacing memories cause the familiar settings to become unfamiliar and uncanny to her. With two personalities with each their

Heimlich atmosphere, the female protagonist must decide whether to erase one and keep the other or find a balance of harmony between the two. The presence of a child forces Charly to keep her personal as Samantha. O'Neil steps out of her Heimlich environment as a topographical analyst into the Unheimlich to become a soldier amongst men. The abject for them both becomes the symbolic order. Whet the patriarchal leader is in control of soldiers or terrorists; the female protagonist stands alone unless she can gain the support of other men.

5.5 The Modern Action Heroine

The action heroines of the 1970s have made clear that female protagonists of contemporary action films and television shows come from a long cinematic and literary tradition. In responding to feminism, film producers and screenwriters sought to present women as active and compelling images, which then mobilized already-existing types and conventions established in popular culture. The action cinema of the 21st century has seen many strong female characters take over the screen, but many have failed to live up to the images of Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor. Tasker, Inness, and Brown agree that the modern action heroine has a long heritage, constructed from various roles women have had to act out on the screen.

The action heroines, as illustrated in Ripley, Connor, Charly, and O'Neil, each experience similar obstacles in the form of patriarchy. The Oedipal complex of the maternal and parental order is visible in the first three mentioned lives. Ripley, Connor, and Caine all have a child they must protect. The child is the reason they pick up weapons and undergo a gender transformation.

The image of the action heroine as a mother emphasizes her womanhood, coming into conflict with images of the female fighting warrior. The male hero/father has to die for the female hero show her worth as an action heroine. The replacement of the motherly disguise into a character with increasingly violent abilities does not remove the stereotypic of Samantha's womanhood. Baltimore shows to be an active agent trained to be deadly, resourceful and adapt to any situation. However, her different issue as a mother puts aside some of Charly's toughness. In the case of Ripley and Connor, both of them have demonstrated their toughness, which then softens in the respective film sequels as Ripley becomes a surrogate mother and Connor reunites with her son. O'Neil is the one example of showing a woman who does not have a family or romantic partner to hold her back. As a replacement, she has to overcome skirmishes with both men (her peers and the Master Chief) and women (Senator DeHaven).

When each one displays muscularly or masculine power, the film directors and screenwriters appoint elements of the male gaze as fetishism and voyeurism. The action heroines' feminine vulnerability shows through Ripley's strip scene in *Alien* (1979) or her intimate sexual encounter in *Alien 3* (1992). Sarah Connor has the sex scene from the first *Terminator* film, and in its sequel, the audience sees her workout and sweat-covered body. Both O'Neil and Samantha/Charly contain a makeover and shower scene. The use of voyeuristic and fetishistic scenes eases the castration anxiety in the male audiences. Each film displays through voyeurism a case of objectification of the female characters, as well as a narcissistic one by exhibiting female audiences with an ideal version of the self. The action heroine each battle for the right to be active as the male, but they constantly face resistance from the patriarchy. When the women persist in fighting back, the film directors use sadism to punish the woman. In doing so, the heroines each grow stronger from their punishment. Therefore, even though the narratives of each film depict the concept of active/male and passive/female, the woman protagonists become active additionally. Whether the uncanny object emerges as aliens, robots, or patriarchal figures of power, the action heroine shows to be proficient of handling herself and protecting the values of family and children without the support of men. Despite the three waves of feminism have brought attention to the discriminating nature of gender in films and the feministic changes having affected Hollywood's representation of women, the modern action heroine barely escapes the gender binaries. The male gaze is no exception. Hollywood films show to contain a recurrence of woman as image and man as bearer of the look. Just as Butler states gender performance to be a sequence of repetitive acts and behaviors constructed into history, the cinema will continue to portray men and woman in their traditional roles even if women on screen have shown to be more active. That is evident in the considerably new type of heroine known as the teenage action heroine.

The cinema has seen the teenage heroine appear in the series *The Hunger Games*, *The Divergent*, and *Harry Potter*. American film producers often combine the action genre with other genres such as thriller, horror, comedy, and fantasy to deepen the violence and action. The teenage heroine symbolizes a change in age, demonstrating that an action heroine can be as young as a teenager and still stand against patriarchal societies or individual males. She is a rebel who stands up to patriarchal ideals. Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), the main character and action heroine of the *Hunger Games* trilogy, is an example of that. Even though she shows to be an adapted hunter and survivalist, what spurs her into joining the deadly games is for the sake of her little sister. Her ability to use the bow and arrow is a skill taught by her father, whereas her mother

is fragile and depicted as a healer. Even though the narrative tells the story of a strong, independent, and heroic female character, Katniss's presence serves mainly as entertainment for the wealthy citizens of Panem and as a reminder of the consequences of rebellion to the poorer districts.

Katniss's characterization allows the audience members to identify her in either a masculine or a feminine manner. As mentioned earlier, the majority of Katniss's qualities are more stereotypically male than female traits. She is a hunter who is capable of violence, and she has mastered weaponry, and she focuses on survival. The film has her portrayed typically as a stoic figure, and she does not rely on her femininity for power. Instead, she relies on the skills and strength she developed to provide for her family after her father's death. She is both the caregiver and the provider, allowing her to transcend conventional gender roles and the implications associated with them. Being one who participates in both the maternal and parental role allows Katniss to avoid unambiguously aligning herself with one gender's characteristics over the other. Her character, therefore, becomes one that can appeal to everyone in the audience. Women are likely to admire her strength and willpower whereas men can appreciate her ferocity and her success as the sole provider for her family. Thus, the dichotomy of Katniss makes her represent woman more than just passive objectified items. Katniss offers the audience a positive and empowering representation of the female in modern cinema through her active role in developing the narrative and as an overall powerful woman within the story. Even a film like *The Hunger Games* is under the influence of the male gaze and can exemplify how the male gaze still has power in film today.

Katniss experiences regular sessions of makeovers that reverts her masculinity to its former femininity. The cameras following her around give the viewer a strong case of voyeuristic impulses, which reinforces the objectification of Katniss and narcissistic identification with her as an ideal version for girls. When her popularity grows too powerful, the patriarchal figure uses voyeuristic sadism to subdue and control her. The fetishistic scopophilia shows in the makeovers she receives, in which the feminine fashion and makeup neutralize her masculinized self. Whenever Katniss demonstrates her empowered femininity, patriarchy steps in to stop her. The *Hunger Games* trilogy reinforces what Mulvey claims as Hollywood using a masculine and heterosexual point of view, which objectifies women and enforces a passive role on them. The entire premise of the games allows both the audience and the character to participate in Mulvey's concept of scopophilia. The Games forcefully remove Katniss and the other tributes from their homes and thrusts them into gladiatorial fights where cameras track, record, and broadcast their every action to all the people.

Considering that the Head Gamemaker, Seneca Crane, is a male figure in charge of the gameplay, the male gaze is entirely in control of the depiction of Katniss's role and actions. The audience within the film and those sitting in the cinema are watching the same content. They all become subjects to the male gaze.

Another example of modern Hollywood engaging in the male gaze is Mikaela Banes (Megan Fox) from *Transformers* (2007) and *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009). In both films, she continually dresses in revealing clothes such as short skirts and tight tops. Even though she is a strong character, which displays knowledge of car mechanics and fights alongside the male heroes, her sexual objectification shows in scenes where she leans over a car and then a motorbike in the sequel. The angle of the camera tilts up her body and shows the reaction of the male protagonist, Sam Witwicky (Shia LaBeouf), as he looks at her. The act of voyeuristic desire enforces the male gaze as the audience identifies with the male hero. Megan Fox's displayed body of female attractiveness will also enforce narcissistic desire in female audiences, as her physical appearance will suggest them to become like her.

Despite the changes that have emerged in American cinema as a response to feminism and the transformations Hollywood has undergone, the representation of women in Western films has remained piteously insufficient. The notion of male domination that tracks throughout popular culture traces back to Mulvey's psychoanalysis on the ways "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form" (833). Hollywood still objectifies women and enforces a passive role on them, subsequently allowing men to be the active participants in the film. As a result, spectators are inevitably subject to view the film through the gaze of the male protagonist, internalize this view, and thereby subconsciously identify with the male character. Women characters in popular culture become figures of erotic objectification as Mulvey argued to be the primary purpose for a female to appear in a film. Even if an action heroine can demonstrate masculine qualities that allow her to become the active participant in the plot, she cannot escape the influence of the male gaze within the film and audience. Therefore, Mulvey's argument on hierarchical power relations between gender roles in film and their reinforcement of patriarchal structures in society is still relevant today.

In conclusion, as a response to feminism and feminist film critics, American cinema has evolved in many areas of representing women's roles. There has undoubtedly been a development in the manner that American cinema represents female characters. Contemporary society has also allowed for female spectatorship and female audiences to achieve a female gaze. Socio-cultural

modifications in Western norms and values have permitted women to develop narcissistic and voyeuristic tendencies. They can be both the image and bearer of the gaze. As for the heroine, she can be a survivor and fighter in more than one genre such as thriller and horror. Some critics point out the heroine's excessively violent and sexually aggressive as being either empowering or oppressive towards women on screen. Feminism tends to avoid violence, characterizing it as patriarchal and oppressive, and seeing the female protagonist adopt violent methods reproduces male dominating. On the other hand, images that associate women with pacifism can assist to normalize the construction of women as victims and being unable to resist against male violence. The American action heroine of contemporary society has indeed evolved through gender performance. Although she may appoint feminine attributes, she has proven that with or without makeup or a stylish fashion, she can still empower femininity. The idea of the female action hero as symbolically male, as either an androgynous figure or phallic woman, or male-identified, does not mean she is enacting masculinity for nothing. As Brown notes, the action heroine offers an alternative interpretation of someone who personifies a unity of different gender traits and thereby rejecting the assumption that the heroine represents a man in drag. The contemporary action heroine is more than just a woman with a muscled physique and the skills to use weapons and violence. She is the new type of heroine who rejects traditional stereotypes of what a woman should be as according to patriarchy.

6. Discussion

Through a series of explorations of the changing figure of the action heroine in some contemporary action franchises, the project has endeavored to assess the significance of feminist film theory and women's roles in films. The project has examined how feminist film theory has struggled to address the woman's figure in a positive way, which is primarily due to its reliance on psychoanalytic theory. In adopting Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze to discuss and analyze treatments of women on film, the American cinema still appoint voyeuristic and fetishistic elements to empower the active/male and passive/female concept. On the other hand, feminism has encouraged Hollywood to portray women as being less weak and submissive compared to their predecessors.

There are several important points to note about the results presented in the analysis of the American action heroine. The first of these points involves the heroine's transformation into becoming a figurative icon of herself. The other is that the male gaze is still a consistent metaphor to locate in action films with strong female leads. The action heroines selected to illustrate the American cinema's portrayal of strong women reveal that heroines "reconfigure the logic of power, privilege, and narrative authority" (Brown 19). Rather than being the subject of a male gaze, most action heroines have assumed an active gaze of their own.

All of the examined franchises and individual films share the standard feature that they depict the development of characters over time. In the case of the Alien franchise, critics have argued that the representation of Ellen Ripley's character is a response to the successes of the feminist movement during the 1970s. The succeeding installments of the Alien series are similarly dependent on the cultural and social values in the year of their production and release. The Alien franchise presents a unique opportunity to view how cinema responds to the socio-cultural status of women, and how in a given society, a cinematic representation can be generally more indicative of broader cultural trends. The same occurs with Sarah Connor and her muscled physique. Women do not have to continue looking or acting the behavior of damsels. They can become warriors and compete in sports leagues with equally impressive muscles as the men.

As Butler had argued gender performance to be a repetitive cycle of acts and behaviors, the same sequence is visible in the action heroine's revolutionary transformation since the 1970s. What has changed is the spectators' perspective of what they classify as female and male, and feminine and masculine. As feminism opened up for the possibilities of developing and revealing secondary

forms of gender and sexuality, the action heroine has engaged in developing herself and becoming an independent role model for women. The audiences during the first-wave feminism and early second-wave feminism had to endure the gaze from a male point of view. With the accomplishments and new perspectives brought to light during the second-wave feminism, giving women new possibilities of viewing not just female characters on screen but themselves as well, the cinema opened up for new options of spectatorship and gender representation. However, as the analysis has concluded, Mulvey's concept of issues surrounding the male gaze is still present in today's action cinema. Tasker, Inness, and Brown have also shared the agreement that despite the action heroine's development since the 1970's, she can appear objectified to satisfy the audiences' narcissistic ideals and voyeuristic pleasures. As Kristeva and Freud have argued in their works, the Oedipus complex and symbolic order is regularly an obstacle the action heroine faces, which can be a reflection of on-going problems women of present time face.

To understand the roots of the aesthetic of cinema, one needs to recognize how second-wave feminism moved through American society and how women's accomplishments changed women's roles on all levels. Regarding the action heroine, she is a result of how feminism taught women to question the notion of how society labeled them as naturally not aggressive and incapable of handling the same challenges as men. Additionally, women questioning the social and cultural norms and values set by patriarchy, lead them to challenge the gender status quo. Therefore, apart from the change of women's representation in film, women emerged with the desire and opportunity to pursue positions typically occupied exclusively by men. Samantha/Charly and O'Neil illustrate that assumption by entering occupations such as law enforcement and military. As they did in their respective film, real-life women revealed their skills as being capable of being soldiers, police officers, firefighters, and construction workers, a job each considered too rough physically and mentally for them. Along with the opportunity to achieve physically demanding jobs, women also sought to obtain more authority and power in the workplace to prove that they could handle even the most stressful and demanding tasks. The sports area is another field in which women's roles changed due to feminism. Provided with the chance of competing in sports activities, female contestants could participate in football, bodybuilding, and wrestling that used to be off-limits and a male sport. The changes brought to life during second-wave feminism reflect in the evolution of women's action roles. As stated earlier, Sarah Connor's muscles is a representation of women entering physically demanding sports fields. However, just as women in real life face an ongoing conflict of gender issues, so does the contemporary action heroine.

The female hero does not entirely escape traditional gender role expectations, and the characters often adhere to gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, and class stereotypes. As illustrated in the films, the female protagonists are white, upper or middle class, attractive, feminine and heterosexually appealing. The freedom that these figures suggest frequently lie within a narrow set of prescribed social boundaries. There is a clear case of restrictions within the action cinema, which constricts women to be violent within specified parameters. Primarily prescribed by what men are willing to tolerate, these restrictions demonstrate that some male audiences do not find women who are too muscularly attractive and dangerous. Women within a cinematic narrative give up the control over their choices, as their characters exist at the whims of their creators. In the world of fiction, film producers strip the female characters of their agency. Often, the directors or screenwriters pose women victims of violence, rape, mind control, or forced to act out the role of the sidekick or romantic partner to the male character. The action genre limits several of the heroine's empowered masculine traits such as the elements of battle, injuries, and language. The films all depict their female leads as getting into fights that leave them bloody and bruised. Along with the American cinema maintaining some of the traditional gender binaries, the technologically advanced cultures are a noteworthy aspect when analyzing the contemporary heroine. Since the early 1970s and even further back, visual representations have been the most preferred sense of Western culture, "a circumstance enhanced by the abundance and expansion of modern imaging and surveillance technologies" (Inness 25). The concept of modern technology and advanced special effects is another academic field. Particularly, within the world of video gaming and computer games have the action heroine developed. The process of visualizing gender, action, and death involved in computer games has a strong role in the history of feminism as well. The representation of the female body and Mulvey's theory of the male gaze can be reliable in analyzing and comparing the action heroine visualized in film and games. That can also illuminate the aesthetics of women in films and games when being hit and kicked until they spit. Another feature to use for futuristic analysis is the depiction of violence on the screen, especially when presented as seductive and exciting, "which could potentially promote violence in real life as a young audience tends to reenact behavior seen on the screen" (39).

Overall, the analysis does illustrate limitations such as the action cinema is just one of many genres. Many of the terms applied to analyzing the action heroines will not provide the same result if analyzing a romantic or comedy. The concepts of voyeurism and fetishism can have different displays compared to that of the action genre. Therefore, the analysis does not explicitly include the

portrayal of all women. Furthermore, the masculinization of the female body and heroine's possession of male icons is also a limited aspect when examining women's roles. Many of the earlier female characters and heroines in other genres have failed to fully assume a phallic and knowledgeable gaze, whereas action heroines have succeeded and refuse to accept the masochistic implications of female looking.

In regards to the critical literature appointed for the analysis and the many others who have issued the statement, few critics have challenged the critical tendency to read the action heroine as a man in drag. Brown has done so by citing, in particular, Carol Clover's construction of the 'Final Girl' in slasher films and Peter Lehman's analysis of rape-revenge narratives (102). Brown argues that such binary, deterministic readings are overly "simplified, pessimistic, dualistic, and paranoid," overlooking the potential of these films to redefine our cultural understanding of what constitutes appropriate female behavior. Brown develops the argument made by Elizabeth Hills (1999) that the dominance of the psychoanalytical model within feminist film theory has made it difficult to conceptualize a female action hero except in performing masculinity (43). Clover, Lehman, and Hills each demonstrate the limitations some feminist film critics developed when arguing against violent and sexually aggressive female characters. That has caused limits into analyzing if the action heroine of both past and present are active in the sense of empowered femininity.

7. Conclusion

The evidence above shows that the action heroine of contemporary American cinema has evolved strongly. There is no doubt the changes feminists have achieved through the waves of feminism have affected the cinema's presentation of men and women's roles. First-wave feminism was the starting point that pushed the second-wave into a formation, but the latter's successes resulted in women gaining an equal representation on the screen. Where women once had to endure the male gaze, as there was no other pattern for them to watch female characters, contemporary women can openly take pleasure in viewing men and women. From a general perspective, the cinema has been the male hero's domain to display his patriarchal authority and power. Even though the contemporary action heroine is strongly visible, discussions of her identity as a strong woman-warrior is still present. The criticisms aim toward how the action genre portrays women. Some argue the heroine to be an empowered female role model, while others view them as highly sexualized chicks wearing leather and guns.

What can damage the image of the action heroine, as discovered in the analysis, is by illuminating her femininity to the point of lessening her empowered female self. As illustrated, the maternal role encourages the heroine to enact positions of motherhood, childbirth, and as the romantic partner/wife. These repetitive acts of feminine/female binaries reflect Judith Butler's theory of gender performance, which in return reflects Julia Kristeva's model of abjection. The decision of portraying the heroine as a mother enforces the symbolic/parental order to be in control, thus ensuring the success of the Oedipal complex.

In each their way, the characters of Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor have pushed the cultural conversation forward and continue to inspire adoration and arguments. They were each crucial to the standing of the actresses who played them. Sigourney Weaver's Lieutenant Ellen Ripley have portrayed her as the iconic and resourceful final girl. It is impossible to overestimate Ripley's influence as every action that has emerged since the early 1980s owes her a debt. She has reproduced countless imitators and inspired generations of filmmakers with her keen intelligence and survival instincts. One of the reasons Ripley has endured, and what has made her stand out from the following action heroines, is her surprising normalcy. Director Cameron has chosen to portray his female lead as a hero with average strength and as someone who is not an expert in the arts of war. Ripley is a relatively ordinary woman thrust into an abnormal situation. Her appearance

since the first Alien form sparked many critical arguments of her empowered femininity and as the New Woman who stood out amongst traditional women.

The feministic theory of spectatorship and representation provided a starting point to define the perceived problems early feminist film critics outlined. Many feminists have highlighted the shortcomings of psychoanalysis and binaristic models of gender in addressing the figure of the action heroine. The evolutionary changes brought to life by feminism ensured the American cinema to follow along. In one form or another, the action heroine will continue to challenge outdated cultural perceptions about gender-appropriate behavior and model new attitudes about female agency and strength. In conclusion, the action heroine has come to represent an iconic figure of female empowerment and masculinized femininity.

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9. Summary

The objective of the thesis was to analyze the representation of women as action heroines in the American cinema through a feminist/postfeminist perspective. The master's thesis focuses on the action heroines considered role models to contemporary female characters or as inspiration for women on screen to appear muscularly attractive and independent. Laura Mulvey's landmark 1975 essay *Visual Pleasures and Narrative Cinema* is a critical evaluation of the cinematic male gaze that establishes an explicit objectification of women on screen and the male audiences as voyeurs. Even after forty years since she published her article, Mulvey still receives high praise and positive criticism across a range of academic scholarship in film studies and beyond. The reinterpretation of Sigmund Freud's psychological aspect of fetishism and voyeurism is essential elements in analyzing the display of female characters. The figures of Ellen Ripley from the *Alien* franchise and Sarah Connor from *The Terminator* (1984) and *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* (1991) has been considered the first action heroines to show that women could handle violence, death, and battle independently. Their appearance in the American cinema displayed them as tough and plainly attractive, an opposite to fragile and highly sexualized damsel in distress. The aim of the assignment is to therefore to analyze the importance of these two iconic figures compared to some of the newer heroines who have appeared in the 1990s and forward. The newest trend of heroes that have appeared is the creation of the teenage heroine whose entrance has sparked numerous perspectives. Throughout the analysis, there will be a focus on the feminist and postfeminist traits within the film, which is to determine the degree to which Mulvey's work is still as strongly visible as back in the 1970s.

Divided into five subsections, the analysis starts out with an introductory chapter of the American action cinema and a descriptive feature of the action heroine. The chapter offers a description to the creation of the action heroine who has appeared through many different roles before becoming her own. The heroine consists of a significant number of feminine personalities, typically sexualized and objectified to captivate the audiences of both male and females. The next two chapters focus respectively on the characters of Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor in terms of what classified them as the icons of strong femininity. To reach a conclusive argument, the theories of Judith Butler, Julia Kristeva, and Sigmund are essential for that task. Butler's work of gender performativity, in which gender becomes an act of repetitive actions and behaviors, will assist in illustrating if the heroines' actions and behaviors throughout the action narrative are a display of

gender performativity. Kristeva's work on the abject, in which she focuses on the parental and maternal authority, often referred to as the Symbolic Order, displays the confrontations the heroines encounter and must overcome. Lastly, Freud's work features in the theorists' work as well as Mulvey and, his psychological terms is the framework to many feminist film critics' argumentations against the gender status in films. Mulvey has taken an interest in the Freudian concept of voyeurism and fetishism whereas Kristeva reinterprets the oedipal complex different. Another of his work is the Uncanny, whose purpose for being part of the analysis is to analyze how the heroes react when confronted in their familiar/Heimlich area by the unfamiliar/Unheimlich. The same approach of all three theorists will be towards the last two chapters. The first is an analysis of Renny Harlin's 1996 action film *The Long Kiss Goodnight* in which the female protagonist, Samantha Caine, will undergo the same analytical process as Ripley and Connor. The last chapter will include different action heroines such as Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* trilogy, Beatrice Prior from *The Divergent* trilogy, and *Snow White and the Huntsman* (2012).

The overall look at the films reveals Mulvey's critical evaluation to be still present in contemporary American cinema. What differ from the point of her published work are the social and cultural changes that occurred through the waves of feminism. The second-wave of feminism has produced the most of modifications to spectatorship and representation. Where once women had no other choice but to adopt the male gaze, the woman audiences can gaze upon male and female characters as they wishes.