

“SEDUCED AND ABANDONED OVER AND OVER AND OVER”:

A FEMINIST SEMIOTIC NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

OF THE FILMS OF JAMES TOBACK

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DEDICATION

This thesis work is dedicated to each woman and man brave enough to join together in proclaiming, whether in a full-throated shout or a hushed whisper, “Me, too.” By naming the unnamable and speaking the unspeakable, you are changing the course of public discourse now and for the future. Thank you. I hear you. This is for you.

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In this thesis, feminist semiotic narrative methodology is applied to James Toback’s films *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*, in order to illuminate his construction of womanhood and women’s sexuality. In each film, Toback served as writer, director, and producer, giving him total creative and business control. Due to this lack of outside oversight, these four specific films are most likely to directly reflect Toback’s perspective as a filmmaker. This study employs narrative-based semiotic criticism, expanding the work of Walter Fisher and Teresa de Lauretis, to identify how Toback’s creation of world, gaze, object/subject, and desire, construct womanhood and women’s sexuality. Toback’s creation of illusory worlds emphasizes that while superficial beauty qualifies a woman as a sexual commodity for men, sex will ultimately be women’s downfall.

Catherine A. Dobris, Ph.D.

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Introduction

It was 1975 when Carmita Wood resigned from her job as an administrative assistant to the Director of Cornell University's Laboratory of Nuclear Sciences because he had repeatedly mimicked masturbation in front of her or touched her, and he once cornered her in an elevator and kissed her (Aron, N., 2017). When she was unable to find a new job, she applied for unemployment, which was denied by Cornell because she had cited "personal reasons" as the cause of her resignation (Aron, N., 2017). In 1975, there was no linguistic means of expressing her experience as such treatment by men¹ was expected within the workforce (Cohen, 2016). When Wood asked other women at Cornell to help her appeal, they held the first-ever public meeting on the issue of sexual harassment – a term they created (Aron, N., 2017). In the end, Wood lost her appeal, the women's group disbanded over differences between women of varying statuses on campus, and Wood's abuser donated ground to Cornell that is now a botanical garden park named in his honor (Aron, N., 2017). Perhaps the most enduring result of Wood's experience is that a phrase now exists by which women's experiences can be validated: sexual harassment.

Constructing this new phrase has implications in the world beyond this one case. Cognitive scientist Lera Boroditsky explains in a TED Talk that there is an interactive effect between how we use language and how we experience the world (Boroditsky, 2017). She demonstrates the difference in brain reactions to varying shades of blue between Russian-speaking subjects and English-speaking subjects (Boroditsky, 2017). To

¹ Within this study, the author acknowledges the changing common use of the terms "male," "female," "man," and "woman." The author will adopt the word choice of the various studies cited, but the overall usage will conform to "man" and "woman" since it is gender, rather than biological sex, being studied.

English speakers, blue is one category, but to Russian speakers, light blue and dark blue are entirely different categories and their brains react with surprise to being shown a new color when they cross a certain shade threshold (Boroditsky, 2017). Language, brain function, and lived experiences are linked. This being true, Wood's addition of "sexual harassment" to the English language has implications for how people think and how they act.

In film, language is not limited to merely the textual elements of the art piece. Semiotic study examines the kinds of coding used in film to send messages and shape perceptions. Every artistic decision from costume choice to lighting, camera angle and off-screen voices, shapes the way the film and its characters will be constructed between the filmmaker and the audience. The audience is key in film, not only as the source of theatrical sales income, but also as a co-constructor of reality. Traditionally, filmmakers who are men have assumed an audience of men. In fact, theorist Teresa de Lauretis cites Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 assertion that "humanity is male," while making the case that women have deferred to that masculine ontology which has yielded their own objectification and othering (de Lauretis, 1990). In de Lauretis' feminist semiotic theory, the language of cinema must be reframed to redefine women as subjects, rather than objects (de Lauretis, 1984). It is notable that feminist semiotics was developing as the country was just learning the new terminology of "sexual harassment" (Cohen, 2016) and the Supreme Court was deciding that such behavior was, indeed, illegal (Taylor, 1986). The media of the workplace and the movie screen may have been different, but the struggle toward being seen as a subject was the same.

As similar as these concerns were in the 1980s and 1990s, the work of feminists dealing with sexual harassment and the work of de Lauretis came into alignment in 2017 as Hollywood was affected by a sweeping sexual harassment scandal that began with accusations against Harvey Weinstein (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018). The affirmation with which the first accusations were met led to more and more accusations, and many important figures in filmmaking found themselves answering for their treatment of women. As the public language concerning the filmmakers changed, so did public interaction with their films and films that addressed harassment. In what seemed like an instant of cultural shift, language that had been accepted was called into question. Films that had been beloved were reframed and found problematic.

Amid all of this cultural change, one name was mentioned more than any other: James Toback. A filmmaker with few true successes by industry measures and largely unknown by the public, in 2017 Toback faced the largest number of accusations of anyone in Hollywood (Whipp, 2018). He is accused of harassment and assault of a scale that is hard to believe. As a filmmaker, he has worked steadily on what many critics determined were mediocre films for a few decades (“James Toback,” 2018a), but he positioned himself as a substantial power on four films, serving as writer, director, and producer. Toback was the beginning and the ending of all decisions concerning those films. He operated with virtually no oversight. The question is whether his films reflect who he is, allegedly, as a man. Do Toback’s films show women in ways that are objectifying, thus making permanent on film his effects on the construction of womanhood?

This question is where this project begins. In looking at the enduring work of a man who is said to have regularly harassed and assaulted actresses, is it likely that the films will construct womanhood in ways that fit with the beliefs of the man making all of the decisions? There is little that can be done to construct new meaning for the women Toback allegedly assaulted, but in deconstructing and reframing his films, it may be possible to shift the path of their ongoing damage by illuminating the methods he used and suggesting future directions for filmmakers and women, alike.

In this paper, a multimethodological approach to analysis will employ feminist semiotic narrative criticism to four films by James Toback, in order to identify how he uses gaze, world, audience, and desire to construct his illusion narrative of womanhood and women's sexuality. This chapter will further explain the rhetorical situation concerning the public discourse of sexual harassment from 2015-2017, the history of the #MeToo movement, and the allegations against Toback, before explaining the organization of the chapters that follow. Movies are made in a moment in history, and Toback's works are no exception. The key is reexamining them in light of a shifting cultural moment.

Rhetorical Situation: Public Discourse Concerning Sexual Harassment in 2015-2017

Sexual harassment is certainly not an issue that began in 2015, but the discourse surrounding it changed in quantity and depth starting in that year. Sexual harassment and assault are products of a patriarchal difference in power and, as such, reporting them is difficult since claims must go to agencies or individuals closer in power to the perpetrator than the victim (Jaffe, 2018). As a result, women have long relied on "whisper networks" to keep each other safe. A 2017 *Newsweek* article defines a whisper network as "an

informal chain of conversations among women about men who need to be watched because of rumors, allegations or known incidents of sexual misconduct, harassment or assault” (Meza, 2017). In late 2015, those whispers became full-voiced accusations, bringing to public discourse what had long been private and making the lived experiences of women more difficult to ignore.

It is challenging to identify one moment at which the shift in discourse began, but the case of comedian and actor Bill Cosby seems to be an event that caused more public conversation. On December 30, 2015, Andrea Constand became the first accuser, after 50 years of allegations against the entertainer to have her claims of sexual harassment by Cosby result in legal charges (Kim, Littlefield, & Etehad, 2017). For Constand and Cosby, 2016 was dominated by legal proceedings that set the stage for a summer 2017 court trial (Kim, Littlefield, & Etehad, 2017). As those 2016 proceedings were determining how Cosby would be prosecuted, Brock Turner was charged with sexual assault for the rape of an unconscious woman behind a dumpster at Stanford University (Bever, 2016). The Turner case became widely discussed due to the fact that the defendant was a successful college athlete who committed a gruesome crime in assaulting an unconscious woman who was in need of medical attention due to a blood alcohol level of three times the legal limit (Bever, 2016). The victim’s impact statement was detailed and pained, resulting in broad sharing via social media and an eventual reading in the United States House by 18 Representatives (Aguilera, 2016). This open dialogue about rape, rapists, and the role of alcohol marked an important shift in the nature of sexual assault discourse in the United States.

The United States' public dialogue about sexual harassment increased further in the fall of 2016 when an October 8 article in *The Washington Post* included audio of then-Presidential candidate Donald Trump telling *Access Hollywood* host Billy Bush that as a celebrity, women would not protest his non-consensual advances, even if he were to “grab them by the pussy” (Fahrentold, 2016). Trump dismissed the conversation as “locker room banter,” but many interpreted the audio as an admission of sexual assault (Rose & Guthrie, 2017). Trump's election and inauguration emboldened further public discourse concerning sexual harassment and sexual assault leading up to Cosby's trial in March 2017, which eventually ended in a mistrial on June 17, 2017 (Kim, Littlefield, & Etehad, 2017). While more discussion was taking place, perpetrators were routinely not being held accountable for their actions.

That lack of accountability changed on August 10, 2017 when popular music performer Taylor Swift testified in court about her sexual harassment by Colorado disc jockey, David Mueller (Dockterman, 2017). Mueller responded to Swift's accusation by suing her for defamation of character, a charge that Swift countered with a suit for a symbolic \$1 in damages (Dockterman, 2017). Her direct testimony was viewed as another important marker of increased public discourse on sexual harassment in 2017, and the resulting decision awarding her that symbolic \$1 in damages encouraged further public dialogue (Dockterman, 2017). Swift's testimony brought younger fans into the discussion that was taking place concerning sexual aggression. Her popular music persona was accessible to a broad audience and this extended the reach of discourse concerning her suit. While she was only awarded the \$1 she sought, it was important that

Mueller was held accountable because the court placed more value on Swift's bodily integrity than the disc jockey's reputation.

The accountability achieved in the Swift case was still being debated when the allegations that would prove to be the milestone marking the beginning of a widespread discursive shift were published (Bennett, 2017). On October 5, 2017 *The New York Times* published that filmmaker Harvey Weinstein had, for decades, been paying to silence women he had sexually harassed (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). Five days later, the *New Yorker* reported the results of a 10-month investigation during which 13 women accused Weinstein of sexual harassment or assault (Farrow, 2018). On October 15, 2017, actor Alyssa Milano encouraged followers on Twitter to share their stories of harassment and assault with the hashtag #MeToo inspired by the decade-long work of activist Tarana Burke; Milano woke the next morning to 30,000 people using the hashtag (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). In just under two years, discourse concerning sexual harassment and assault in the United States had transformed from hushed whispers to bold proclamations.

History of the #MeToo Movement

Within the first 48 hours, the #MeToo hashtag was used almost one million times on Twitter and more than 12 million posts used the marker on Facebook ("More than 12M 'Me Too' Facebook posts," 2017). An international team of researchers who have been studying online feminist engagement since 2014 are not surprised with the rapid adoption of the hashtag. In a February 2018 manuscript, the authors explain that the pattern of carefully rehearsed narratives shared in search of solidarity and validation of experience matches what they had observed throughout their work (Mendes, Ringrose, &

Keller, 2018). Even with backlash in the form of online abuse, the authors show that respondents found online engagement, as opposed to real-world engagement, to be a safe and easy way to involve themselves in activism (Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018). Ease was almost certainly one reason for the manner in which #MeToo resonated with women, but it was not the only one.

Sarah Jaffe, in a 2018 article for *Dissent*, calls #MeToo, “a watershed moment in contemporary feminism, one that has made sexual violence into big news” (Jaffe, 2018). Jaffe notes that – as is true of movements, in general – #MeToo is not the result of one moment, but rather of “a million injustices that pile up and pile up, and then, suddenly, spill over” (Jaffe, 2018). She points to precursors such as years of systemic failure to hold abusers accountable, Hillary Clinton’s loss in her presidential bid, and Donald Trump’s vulgar comments about women, in addition to the increase in high-profile accusations (Jaffe, 2018). Man-dominated court systems and boardrooms had proven unlikely to hold men accountable for sexual harassment and assault, so women started naming names to work around the system that was failing them (Jaffe, 2018). Still, the movement might not have endured were it not for the fact that accusations started resulting in consequences.

Three days before Milano’s tweet, Roy Price stepped down as the head of Amazon Studios in response to Isa Hackett’s accusation of sexual harassment (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018; Cooney, 2018). Three days after Milano’s tweet, Olympic gymnast McKayla Maroney accused team doctor Larry Nassar of sexually assaulting her (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018). In January 2018, Nassar was sentenced to 40-175 years in prison following the victim impact statements of 156 victims (Levenson, 2018). The final

statement was offered by Rachael Denhollander, who offered that, “Women and girls banded together to fight for themselves because no one else would do it” (Levenson, 2018). Actor Anthony Rapp made public accusations against Kevin Spacey on October 29, 2017 (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018; Cooney, 2018), and within a week Spacey was fired from *House of Cards* by Netflix and the production staff of the recently completed *All the Money in the World* was planning to remove him from the film and replace him with Christopher Plummer immediately (Legaspi, 2017). By the end of 2017, accusations of sexual harassment and assault had been made against politicians Roy Moore and Al Franken, media figures Matt Lauer and Garrison Keillor, and entertainers Mario Batali and Russell Simmons, all of whom were fired, stepped down, or failed re-election as a result (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018; Cooney, 2018). Women were speaking up and being validated, and this entrenched #MeToo in the culture, online and off.

Jaffe notes that something happened within #MeToo that expanded the newfound power beyond the famous victims and perpetrators. She credits a letter submitted to *Time* on behalf of 700,000 Latina farmworkers (Jaffe, 2018). To Jaffe, this letter identified the one commonality of women of all demographics who were sharing their #MeToo stories: risk at the hands of power (Jaffe, 2018). In the letter from *Time*'s November 10, 2017 issue, the writer empathizes with the celebrity women who have stepped forward, explaining, “Even though we work in very different environments, we share a common experience of being preyed upon by individuals who have the power to hire, fire, blacklist and otherwise threaten our economic, physical and emotional security” (“700,000 Female Farmworkers Stand Up,” 2017). By identifying that common power differential, emphasis was taken away from specific careers and individuals, and placed on the shared

experience of women (Jaffe, 2018). Women from vastly different backgrounds were shown to have much in common through these shared experiences of sexual harassment and assault.

That commonality is made clearer in the December 6, 2017 issue of *Time* in which the “Silence Breakers” were named Person of the Year (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). The article includes anecdotes from the November 2017 meeting arranged by the magazine for many women whose stories are told within the issue. Actor Ashley Judd, strawberry picker Isabel Pascual (a pseudonym), former Uber engineer Susan Fowler, and an anonymous small town hospital worker, are demographically very different, but they found solidarity as they told their stories and shared feelings of guilt and fear for their families (Zacharek, Dockterman, & Edwards, 2017). It is these common experiences of very different women, with each lending support to the other, that have added strength to the #MeToo movement.

The #MeToo movement continued beyond 2017. On January 1, 2018, 300 powerful women of Hollywood placed a full-page advertisement in *The New York Times* and *La Opinion* responding with support to the letter from the farmworkers’ letter in *Time* and announcing a new initiative, Time’s Up (Stevens, 2018). The goals of “Time’s Up,” include moving toward gender equality in Hollywood leadership by 2020, defining sexual harassment, offering support to women affected, setting up a legal defense fund to support women who experience workplace harassment or assault, and showing survivors as “a unified group of stakeholders, regardless of industry or income” (Stevens, 2018). Time’s Up does not overtake #MeToo, but it gives posters ways of taking action after contributing to the narrative.

After this addition of Time's Up to #MeToo, Cosby was retried and convicted, and Weinstein turned himself in to the New York Police Department to face trial for two of the allegations against him (Johnson & Hawbaker, 2018). # As the movement continues, scholars have begun to try to make sense of #MeToo from historical and feminist perspectives. In a December 2017 article for *FORUM*, Leigh Gilmore places #MeToo in a historical context, noting how survivor allegations are often reduced to a He Said/She Said narrative (Gilmore, 2017). Gilmore draws attention to how the hashtag has successfully given survivors a positive experience with sharing their stories and has created a large group of witnesses who then also examine their complicity in the previous treatment of women (Gilmore, 2017). The author questions whether there will be long-term effects of #MeToo, but acknowledges that the scale of the narrative has disrupted the He Said/She Said reduction (Gilmore, 2017). Gilmore also cautions that care must be taken to maintain an intersectional frame that includes women of color and other marginalized women in any progress that does happen as a result of the movement (Gilmore, 2017). Overall, Gilmore is hesitant to overstate the importance of an ongoing cultural moment, but she does acknowledge that some change has already taken place.

In an April 2018 paper, Jamie Abrams encourages feminists to utilize the momentum of the #MeToo movement to change the framing of sexual assault (Abrams, 2018). She describes the incongruity between the crisis language of rape – for example, the frequent choice to label resources as rape crisis hotlines, rape crisis centers, and rape crisis response teams – and the reality that rape is likely not considered a cultural crisis if nothing is being done to address it on a larger scale (Abrams, 2018). #MeToo has disrupted misconceptions that victims must be hysterical, that victims must report

immediately or else are not really victims, and that victims are all essentially the same (Abrams, 2018). These beliefs make reporting more difficult, especially for victims who fall outside of the expected demographics or behaviors (Abrams, 2018). The author makes the case that #MeToo has framed rape in context, rather than framing rape in crisis (Abrams, 2018). The result is new grounds to allow #MeToo to start affecting the patriarchic beliefs that lead to stereotypes and the harassment and assault of women, rather than reacting to them.

Some journals began to take note of #MeToo as a topic of scholarship, devoting entire issues to the topic. The entire March 2018 issue of *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, for example, was dedicated to “ecofeminism” (Giacomini, Turner, Isla, & Brownhill, 2018). In an introduction, the editors explain that capitalists exploit women and the environment, and ecofeminism is the means of standing against this exploitation (Giacomini, et al, 2018). They credit #MeToo, among other worldwide women’s movements, as a step toward ending capitalism and restoring the roles of women and the environment (Giacomini, et al, 2018). The journal *Women’s Studies in Communication* has called for articles related to #MeToo for a 2019 issue entirely devoted to a variety of communication concerns stemming from the movement (Hoerl & Corrigan, 2018). When the subject is as far-reaching as the treatment of women, there are implications for most fields. Scholars are beginning to study #MeToo, but the movement is only in its inception and there will likely be further material for study as it continues to grow.

Background on the Rhetor: James Toback

On October 22, 2017, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that 38 women had contacted them with allegations of sexual harassment against Hollywood

writer/director/producer James Toback, indicating further that 31 of them were willing to go on the record against him (Whipp, 2017a). On October 23, 2017, the paper published that 200 more women had come forward as a result of that first article (Whipp, 2017b). By early 2018, the 395th woman² reported Toback's sexual harassment to the *Times* (Whipp, 2018). As more and more women say that harassment is a common problem, the proportion of the Toback accusations sets itself apart as significant. Accusers included well-known performers like Selma Blair (Smith & Miller, 2017; Evans, 2018) and aspiring actors, such as Ashley McQueen (McQueen, 2018), as well as women outside of the film industry, including radio personality Anna Scott (Aron, H., 2017). Accusers come from all levels of power and prestige within the industry and the size and diversity of the accuser list is almost as confounding as the number, itself.

The breadth of the accuser pool is likely a result of Toback's method of harassment. For example, the accounts given to the *Times*' Glenn Whipp have some observable commonalities. Certainly, there are some variances among 395 accounts, but there is a pattern: Toback typically approached a woman on the street, in a park, or at the store and convinced her that he was a major filmmaker and that she would be perfect for his current project (Whipp, 2017a; Whipp, 2017b; Whipp, 2018). He would ask her to meet with him at his hotel and, once there, he would begin asking personal questions about her masturbatory habits or quantity of pubic hair (Whipp, 2017a; Whipp, 2017b; Whipp, 2018). He often asked the women to disrobe as an acting exercise that would help build their comfort with him for the movie (Whipp, 2017a; Whipp, 2017b; Whipp, 2018).

² Unfortunately, as of this summer 2018 writing - when more have added themselves via Twitter and other outlets - a definitive number of accusers is hard to identify and nearly impossible to verify.

He would then either masturbate in front of them or rub his genitals against their leg and ejaculate in his pants (Whipp, 2017a; Whipp, 2017b; Whipp, 2018). Often he would ask for eye contact and nipple play (Whipp, 2017a; Whipp, 2017b; Whipp, 2018). The pattern of commonalities within the hundreds of accounts is nearly as shocking as the number itself.

As rumors grew in the days before the first Whipp article went to press, *Rolling Stone* writer Hillel Aron reached out to Toback through his agent and Toback called Aron on October 17, 2017 (Aron, H., 2017). Aron asked Toback about the accusations because his wife, Anna Scott of Los Angeles radio station KCRW, had told him of her harassment by Toback (Aron, H., 2017). Toback asked that the interview be on the record and audio recorded, to which Aron agreed (Aron, H., 2017). In the interview, Toback flatly denies all allegations, calling them offensive to him as an artist and labeling each accuser as “a lying cocksucker or cunt or both” (Aron, 2017). The director relies on claims of artistic integrity to defend himself from the accusations and denies knowing any of the accusers (Aron, H., 2017). He attacks Aron’s journalistic integrity and blames the high number of accusers on copycat syndrome, saying “it’s all, you know, me too, me too, me too, me too, me too” (Aron, H., 2017). His denials, though vulgar and inconsistent, are constant and adamant.

Among the most troubling allegations are those from actor Selma Blair. She was among the nameless of the initial 38 accusers Whipp interviewed for the *Los Angeles Times*, but the increasing number of allegations inspired her to tell her story publicly within days of the initial report (Smith & Miller, 2017). She related the story of her 1999 assault by Toback to *Vanity Fair*, to which Toback gave no comment (Smith & Miller,

2017). According to Blair, she met with Toback in his hotel, where he asked her to disrobe to read lines and propositioned her before he demanded that in order to leave she allow him to masturbate to completion on her leg while she looked into his eyes and pinched his nipples (Smith & Miller, 2017). Additionally, Blair asserts that Toback said that he could have her father killed and indirectly threatened her life by saying that there was another girl who was going to talk about what he did to her and, if she did, “I have people who will pull up in a car, kidnap her, and throw her in the Hudson River with cement blocks on her feet” (Smith & Miller, 2017). Blair told her agent never to send another woman to Toback, but refused to speak publicly prior to October 2017 because she was still fearful that he would follow through on his threat (Smith & Miller, 2017). While toxic practices in Hollywood continue to become more public, Toback still stands out from the list of accused filmmakers due to the known scope of his abuses.

Organization of Chapters

This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue concerning the construction of womanhood in Hollywood films. Toward that goal, a feminist semiotic-driven narrative analysis will be conducted of four films produced, written, and directed by James Toback in order to understand how a filmmaker accused of repeated sexual abuses constructs womanhood and women’s sexuality, when he is in full control of the business and creative leadership of a film. Chapter 1 provided context of the rhetorical situation, including a summary of public discourse concerning sexual harassment from 2015-2017, the #MeToo movement, and the accusations against filmmaker James Toback. Chapter 2 includes a review of existing literature in the areas of objectification in film, constructions of womanhood in film, and constructions of women’s sexuality in film

before providing a rationale for the current study and establishing the two research questions that will be examined. Chapter 3 will provide descriptions for the four artifacts to be analyzed and describe the narrative criticism of Walter Fisher, feminist rhetorical theory, and the feminist semiotics of Teresa de Lauretis before arguing for a combined method. The chapter will then describe the method that will be used for that analysis and present thoughts concerning the appropriateness of this combination of theory, method, and artifact. Chapter 4 will apply the method by providing discussion of the research questions and how they disrupt the traditional roles of women, identifying the substance of the semiotic narrative units in each of the four films, evaluating the illusion narrative constructed with these semiotic narrative elements, and providing insights into Toback's constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality through this illusion narrative. Chapter 5 will provide reflections on the limitations of the current study, possible directions for further study, and discussion of the implications of key findings for filmmakers and women, alike.

Literature Review and Rationale

If early silent films typecast women far more than their men counterparts and if the earliest comedies relied on misogyny for punchlines, Molly Haskell suggests in her 2016 revision of *From Reverence to Rape* that these factors may have more to do with ambivalence toward women than animosity (Haskell, 2016). Film study is a relatively new field, and feminist film study began with the 1972 appearance of the journal *Women and Film* (Thornham, 2009). In the decades since then, the field has emerged with efforts toward building theory and application, but there are still significant gaps in both areas. The relative newness of the work, combined with a history of ambivalence in film and culture, reveal an area of study with much work yet to be done. This chapter will examine the existing body of knowledge of the objectification of women in film, the construction of womanhood in film, and the construction of women's sexuality in film. Further, the chapter will explain the rationale for the study, combining the rhetorical situation of the artifacts and the established gaps in the literature, and summarize the background that shapes this study.

Objectification in Film

Objectification Theory was first proposed as a way to understand “the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body” (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The authors suggest that women are taught to internalize the observer's view of them and that this can lead to a variety of disorders in physical, mental, and sexual health (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The theory was advanced in a series of 2010 studies that further connect sexual objectification to drug use, establish the idea of the sexually objectifying environment and discusses the effect they have on

women, and make suggestions to mental health professionals who assist objectified women (Szymanski, Moffitt, & Carr, 2010). Objectification theory is concerned with the effects of a culture of objectification, and films are part of this culture.

Objectification Theory is relatively new as of this writing; however, a number of studies have looked at the role of objectification in film as well as the influence of objectification on viewers. A 2017 study examined promotional posters and trailers for 200 top grossing Bollywood and Hollywood films and discovered strong objectifying trends across cultures (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2017). In the United States' sample, though each film had a central female character, 67.8% of the promotional items did not place the female in a central position, though 80.6% of women were both seen and heard in trailers (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2017). More than one in five central female characters were shown nude and nearly 50% were depicted in a sexually suggestive pose (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2017). More than half of the women were featured as the male protagonist's love interest (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2017). The standout difference from the Hindu films was that the United States' American women characters were far more likely to demonstrate aggression, with almost half of the included women showing at least one form of aggression within the promotional materials (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2017). Promotional materials are often the audience's first exposure to the film, and this study demonstrates that United States moviegoers are often introduced to women characters through objectifying means.

The duality of that representation of violence was examined in a 2015 experimental study in which audiences were shown *Spiderman* and *X-Men* and then surveyed about self-esteem, objectification, sexualization, and body competency (Pennell

& Behm-Morawitz, 2015). The results were mixed, with participants only showing a small variation on post-exposure self-esteem ratings when compared with a control group but reporting an increased sense of the importance of their own body competency (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). Male and female respondents, however, identified both the victimized female character in *Spiderman* and the female superhero in *X-Men* as sexualized (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). It is an interesting result that, though both were equally viewed as sexualized, the participants described the superhero as more physically strong, more competent, more violent, and more empowered than the victimized character (Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015). The results for this study focused on short-term effects of film sexual objectification, but it is also important to keep in mind that such media stimuli are repeated across films. L. Rowell Huesmann's Script Theory states that repeated behavioral exposures in youth create a change-resistant script for social behavior that lasts into adulthood (Huesmann, 1988). By considering the Pennell & Behm-Morawitz study in light of Script Theory, we can reason that repeated exposures to objectification could yield a guide for adult social behaviors.

A 2007 Dutch study, however, fails to support that cumulative effect (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). A survey of 745 adolescents in the Netherlands asked for responses about exposure to various sexual content, sexual behaviors, and views of objectification toward women (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Multiple regressions were run on the responses from 674 completed surveys, and the results supported a hierarchic effect of sexual exposure on objectifying views (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). The results suggest that respondents who consume sexual material tend to consume it in multiple formats and that an increase in how explicit the content is and an increase in the audiovisual stimuli of

the medium produces an increased view of women as objects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2007). Based on these results, any movie that is even semi-explicit has implications for how women are viewed by adolescents.

Another 2015 study looked at the effects of lesser-studied media, including romantic films, music videos, and reality television shows (Ward, Seabrook, Manago, & Reed, 2015). Participants self-reported which romantic films and reality shows they watched using a provided checklist and reported the number of hours they spent weekly watching music videos (Ward et al, 2015). They then completed assessments of their personal objectification awareness, enjoyment of sexualization, and sexual appeal (Ward et al, 2015). The results showed that there was a strong positive correlation between the consumption of reality television and romantic films and self-sexualization in women (Ward et al, 2015). For men, reality television and music video consumption showed a strong positive correlation with self-sexualization, but romantic films had no effect (Ward et al, 2015). The noted difference with this study is that it focused on regular life habits rather than experimental exposure as in the superhero study. This study, instead, conformed to the Objectification Theory assertion that exposure is progressive.

Of course, there are also minority reports within the literature. One rhetorical study asserts that parody films, such as those by Paolo Sorrentino, are intended to mock the man/woman dynamic through heightened portrayals that approach the ridiculous and, as such, the included objectification is a tool of comedy and does not count as an example of objectification (Simor & Sorfa, 2017). Comedy has, indeed, long been used to comment on and question social norms; however, again using Script Theory, any exposure adds to the cumulative reinforcement of objectifying behavior (Huesmann,

1988). A 2015 article by entertainment columnist Sara Stewart suggests that the comedy of *Sixteen Candles* is so sexist and racist by modern standards that it should be retired. She notes especially that there are ongoing jokes from Jake about raping his intoxicated girlfriend before he sends her, unconscious, home with another character to “have fun” (Stewart, 2015). In a 2018 article, Monica Hesse adds that shows like *The West Wing* and *Love, Actually*, viewed in a post-#MeToo culture, are problematic for their use of workplace harassment as comedy or romance. *Mad About You* and *There’s Something About Mary* are now viewed with greater acknowledgement that the male characters were stalking the women in which they were interested (Hesse, 2018). The genre of comedy may not have escaped critique because of its comedic nature.

A better feminist example of character interactions might be *The Silence of the Lambs*, which shows the central woman character working within the existing men’s structure to assert her own subject status, as well as that of the victim she is working to find (Garrett, 1994). Throughout the film, F.B.I. trainee Clarice Starling fights objectification and asserts her own personhood in the process. Upon their first meeting, the Director of the institute housing Hannibal Lecter harasses Starling, commenting on her appearance and propositioning her for later that evening (Garrett, 1994). She politely turns down his offers and he reacts by becoming oppositional with her throughout the rest of the film (Garrett, 1994). Starling does not only stand for her own personhood, but she resists the objectification of others, as well. She encourages repeated use of kidnapping victim Catherine Martin’s name so that she will remain an individual in serial killer Buffalo Bill’s eyes, and this might make murdering her more difficult (Garrett, 1994). Starling even reinforces the personhood of Lecter, calling him “Doctor” throughout the

film, an act that contrasts to the objectified treatment he receives from others (Garrett, 1994). The film version removes the network of men assistants the novel provides for Starling, thus showing her as more capable of standing on her own (Garrett, 1994). These choices by the writer and filmmakers make it possible for a film centered on the search for a serial killer who is building a suit of women's skins to rebuff the objectification of women.

The application of Objectification Theory in addition to examining films for the women's roles' subject or object status allows critics to examine the state of modern filmmaking for elements of the patriarchy. In identifying ways in which film reflects change or upholds the status quo regarding the objectification of women, critics are able to also identify ways in which these behaviors uphold the patriarchy in the world outside of film. Particularly when examining films by men who have a history of objectifying women in their daily lives, critics are able to see if art truly does reflect life.

Constructions of Womanhood and Women's Sexuality in Film

Objectification is one prominent element of the construction of womanhood in film, but more than 100 years of film history has yielded many other factors as well as a great deal of variation as film and culture changed. While each film exists in its own moment in history, it becomes part of our public discourse concerning the people and issues it portrays. It is a result of the constructions that happened before it, and it will likely shape constructions that are to come. In studying the films of a contemporary figure such as Toback, understanding the history of constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality provides a broader context for his work as well as a lens for appropriate reflection and critique.

1900-1910: Constructions of Womanhood

The invention of moving pictures almost immediately joined the cultural reframing of womanhood happening at the time. In “The Demise of the Cult of True Womanhood in Early American Film, 1900-1930,” Leslie Fishbein examines the shift away from the Victorian cult of true womanhood, defined as “purity, piety, passivity, and domesticity that would preserve their own chastity and the sanctity of the home” (Fishbein, 1984). While the early 20th Century marked a shift in women’s roles within and without the home, it is the unsustainable beliefs of the Victorian patriarchy that affected progress in women’s roles far more than flapper culture. First, the woman meeting the Victorian definition of true womanhood was too innocent and fragile to survive when challenged by a less noble man (Fishbein, 1984). The 1902 film *The Downward Path* illustrates this when a young innocent is seduced into playing a soubrette and then, when abandoned, commits suicide (Fishbein, 1984). 1910’s *The Road Divided* tells the story of an innocent rural girl who, seduced by a lying stranger, is pursued by an admirer who attempts to rescue her (Fishbein, 1984). She is killed in the gunfight that takes place, but manages to whisper, “I’m glad you came in time,” demonstrating that she prefers death to seduction (Fishbein, 1984). These women uphold the Victorian ideal to their death, which strikes an unexpected blow to the very tenets they embody.

The second internal struggle Fishbein (1984) notes is that the virgin/whore dichotomy popular in the Victorian Era literature failed to acknowledge that there was room for movement between those poles and that there were good and bad people within each construct. Versions of Dumas’ *Camille* from 1917 and 1918 emphasize the nobility

of the title character, in spite of her status as courtesan (Fishbein, 1984). It was likely difficult to argue with the worthiness of various women from the *Bible* who were written into screenplays in the 1920s, and Biblical imagery was used in films such as 1926's *The Scarlet Letter*, which uses blocking to compare adulteress Hester Prynne to Mary by showing Hester holding Dimmesdale's body as Mary held Jesus after the crucifixion (Fishbein, 1984). These intentional decisions to subvert the Victorian ideal were far more important than the more-credited flapper films because they reframed the very foundations of that ideal.

As the Victorian ideal was being deconstructed, filmmakers were creating pieces that reacted to changes in society. The movement for women's suffrage was used as fodder for farce as early as 1901's *Why Mr. Nation Wants a Divorce* (Rosen, 1973). In this film, the husband of women's rights leader Carry Nation is characterized as womanly, tending to the children and, eventually, being turned over his wife's knee to be spanked (Rosen, 1973). This reversal in accepted gender roles served to criticize both Nation and her husband. 1914's *Your Girl and Mine* took the other perspective on women voting by showing a sympathetic woman victimized by her husband as it addressed social status, property rights, and parenting rights (Rosen, 1973). In contrast to its 1901 predecessor, *Your Girl and Mine* showed audiences a woman as the victim of an unjust society. While films were commenting on the battle for women's rights, the films tended to rely on farce or melodrama, and this reduced the strength of either argument.

1900-1910: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The battle between Victorianism and progress was also present in the methods used to portray women's sexuality. D.W. Griffith – whose women leads were most often

diminutive, virginal, white, Victorian women – made the title character of *Judith of Bethulia* an outlier among them (Rosen, 1973). In the 1913 film, Judith saves people from Assyrian invasion by acting as a courtesan to gain access to and then behead the Assyrian general (Rosen, 1973). The main character eventually falls in love with the general, but that does not affect her strength, sexuality, or decision to follow through on the murderous plan (Rosen, 1973). Certainly Griffith is not to be considered a feminist filmmaker, as this film stands alone rather than serving as part of an overall pattern of strong, sexual, women. 1915's landmark *The Birth of a Nation* was more of Griffith's typical style, with melodramatically virginal white women and the only included non-virgin being a slave of mixed race whose sexuality is used as a weapon to seduce her owner as part of the Black Terror takeover (Rosen, 1973). The virginity of the white women is constructed as something to be protected by any means. When Little Sister is chased by Gus, a slave, she jumps off a cliff rather than fall victim to rape – notably by a Black man (Rosen, 1973). Griffith's construction of abstinence from sex as the ultimate attribute that defines white womanhood overwhelms his experimentation with freer women's sexuality.

1920s: Constructions of Womanhood

The 1920s was a time of change, and the films of the decade reflect an opposition between old-fashioned and new-fashioned women. Mary Pickford's typical role provided a Victorian norm for viewers to cling to amid these changes. She was beautiful, innocent, and virginal, playing a 12 year-old *Little Annie Rooney* at the age of thirty-two in 1925 (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). These "rural sweetheart" roles were plentiful throughout the decade (Haskell, 201). A hallmark of the 1920s, however, was the increased presence

of women in the work force, and this gave women money and new spending power (Rosen, 1973). This yielded an increased interest in fashion and brought about the new-fashioned character: the “It Girl” (Rosen 1973; Haskell, 2016). Flappers were only one subset of “It Girl,” a type defined by a desire to be fashionable and more independent, but also respectable and married (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). *In The Wild Party*, for example, Clara Bow plays a college girl who is more interested in social events than classes until she asserts her moral code in defense of a friend (Haskell, 2016). Even quintessential flappers were limited in how modern they could be in 1920s films, because they were the product of a shifting culture.

1920s: Constructions of Women’s Sexuality

A variety of filmmakers experimented with freer expressions of women’s sexuality in the 1920s (Haskell, 2016). The vamp films of Theda Bara, for example, depicted women’s sexuality as exotic and destructive in fantastical pieces like 1917’s *Cleopatra*, and this use of fantasy distanced her sexuality from that of real women enough to make it non-threatening (Fishbein, 1984; Haskell, 2016). The Clara Bow flapper films of the 1920’s changed that by showing a teasing sexuality that was more realistic than that of Bara (Fishbein, 1984). Films of men like Cecil B. De Mille further challenged the Victorian norms by asserting that sex was an important part of marriage in their domestic comedies (Fishbein, 1984). Unfortunately, the rest of that narrative was that men, not women, were free to seek sex outside of marriage if the wives were not keeping themselves attractive and readily willing to participate (Fishbein, 1984). In Griffith’s 1920 *Way Down East*, his principal woman – having been tricked into a false marriage that yielded a child – notes that the law used to punish her was not used to hold

the man who duped her to account (Fishbein, 1984). In this way, even the most traditional early filmmakers were beginning to question the way women's sexuality had been treated within society.

1930s: Constructions of Womanhood

The 1930s were divided by the advent of the Production Code Administration (PCA) between 1933 and 1934 (Black, 1989; Haskell, 2016). Though a censorship code had been in place since 1930, it had not been fully enforced until a Catholic-led drive yielded an agreement to create the PCA within the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (Black, 1989). According to film critic Molly Haskell, "It is the difference between Ginger Rogers having sex without children – *Gold Diggers of 1933*, *Upper World* (1934) – and Ginger Rogers having children without sex – *Bachelor Mother* (1939)" (Haskell, 2016, p. 91). Before the PCA, women were heroines like Mae West in *She Done Him Wrong*, who was accepted as a naturally sexual woman (Haskell, 2016). After the PCA, *She Done Him Wrong* was removed from circulation due to that same natural sexuality (Black, 1989). The PCA allowed for women of two stereotypes. First were the virginal-but-precocious child stars like Shirley Temple, whose non-threatening, non-sexual innocence was idealized (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Second were adult women in romantic comedies "in which love was disguised as antagonism and sexual readiness as repartee" (Haskell, 2016, p. 124). For example, Katherine Hepburn's spirited, abrasive Susan Vance in *Bringing Up Baby* attracted audiences with quick wit and flirty gamesmanship (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Though women were experiencing increased liberation in the 1930s (Haskell, 2016), the movies stopped reflecting that in the middle of the decade. The PCA had an immediate effect on the types

of movies that were made in Hollywood and the types of women who would appear in them.

1930s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The 1930s introduced the Blonde Bombshell archetype, and the overt sexuality of these women was able to be displayed prominently without being threatening to men (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Jean Harlow's character in 1931's *Platinum Blonde*, was a vulgar career girl whose affairs and crass word play emasculated her successful husband, but the audience is given to forgive her due to an assumption that she has to be unintelligent or rebellious to act that way (Rosen, 1973). In 1932's *Red-Headed Woman*, Harlow's character uses her physical sexuality to manipulate her husband and his friends (Rosen, 1973). Her sexuality cannot simply assert itself, but rather it must do so to the disadvantage – and eventual death – of her husband (Rosen, 1973). While this was not a concern of men viewers, the Bombshell archetype was used to shape the behaviors of women who were too sexual or not sexual enough (Haskell, 2016). With the Bombshell, a woman's sexuality is both desired and a source of danger.

1940s: Constructions of Womanhood

The return of war with the United States' 1941 entry into World War II brought on a split in the roles of women in film. Many films portrayed women as heroic members of the Women's Army Corps (WAC) or the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES), including 1943's *So Proudly We Hail*, which centered around three wartime nurses (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Women in these films were patriotic, selfless, and brave (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Additionally, Hollywood released a large number of "war widow" films, such as Bette Davis' 1943 *Watch on the Rhine*

(Rosen, 1973). Davis's widowed mother, who sent her son off to the same war that took her husband, is stoic and mature, rather than sorrowful and lacking control (Rosen, 1973). Women in films were not all nobly sacrificing for the war effort, however. The evolution of the femme fatale began with treating women who stayed at home during the war as selfish villains and developed to fully formed women monsters whose charms helped them defeat men (Jancovich, 2011). The femme fatale embodied the pessimism of the 1940s (Haskell, 2016) and took the form of man's fantasy and woman's fear (Jancovich, 2011). Barbara Stanwyck personifies the femme fatale in 1944's *Double Indemnity*, a film in which she plays an archetypal black widow character (Rosen, 1973; Jancovich, 2011; Haskell, 2016). Stanwyck's Phyllis Dietrich convinces an insurance agent to kill her husband, but ultimately meets her end as she and the agent shoot each other while embracing at the end of the film (Rosen, 1973; Jancovich, 2011; Haskell, 2016). Dietrich is far different from the war heroes and widows that also appeared in the 1940s, but it is the presence of both types of women characters that gave voice to the hopes and fears of a country again at war.

1940s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The war years allowed for more free representation of women's sexuality (Rosen, 1973). One key exemplar film of this pin-up era was *Gilda*. This 1946 Rita Hayworth film presents Gilda as controlled and victimized by her second husband until, out of desperation, she uses her very best weapon – her natural, intentional sexuality (Rosen, 1973). She has been a woman bought and sold by the men around her, so she uses her sexuality to demonstrate her whore status publicly. The film noir femme fatale characters that followed the war were seen contemporaneously as natural continuations of

these evil characters that had preceded them (Jancovich, 2011). Films such as *Killers*, *Laura*, and *Fallen Angel* were promoted as featuring siren characters who used sexuality to manipulate men in hopes of becoming a kept woman (Jancovich, 2011). Cora in *The Postman Always Rings Twice* serves as a counterpoint to those films in that she is portrayed as pitiful, rather than evil, though she uses many of the same tactics to achieve the same ends (Jancovich, 2011). Women's sexuality was becoming more represented, though only under the banners of evil or victimhood.

1950s: Constructions of Womanhood

The 1950s brought an awareness that women outnumbered men in population and resulted in a renewed focus on women trying to get married in film (Rosen, 1973). Perhaps oddly, in light of the demographic shift, there were not only fewer liberated women roles in the 1950s than had been seen in the 1930s or 1940s, but there were fewer films about women, in general (Haskell, 2016). Many of the most-respected films of the 1950s – such as *The Caine Mutiny*, *The Wild One*, and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* – lack any significant women's roles (Rosen, 1973). Those that did include important women were largely domestic comedies centered on weddings or finding a husband (Rosen, 1973). Titles such as *How to Marry a Millionaire*, *Father of the Bride*, and *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers* previewed the importance of marital bliss in the decade's films (Rosen, 1973). The few films that featured a stronger woman character, like *Sunset Boulevard* or *All About Eve*, were actually about women who used to be strong femme fatales and were now vain reflections of their former selves brought down by those very femme fatale characteristics (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). In contrast to expectation, in a

time when real women found themselves more represented in society, they found less of a reflection of that representation in film.

1950s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The Bombshell evolved into the sexpot in the 1950s (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). The 1950s sexpot is a breathy, voluptuous, fragile fantasy woman (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Marilyn Monroe is the most common example of the woman who is not certain what to do with her own sexuality, but she is not alone in that archetype. 1957's *The Girl Can't Help It* gives audiences cartoon sexuality in a Jayne Mansfield surrounded by sight gags such as a milkman's ice melting and milk bubbling as she jogs by while portraying a character who just wants to be a typical mother (Rosen, 1973; Haskell, 2016). Here Mansfield's sexuality is reduced to a punch line while her true aspiration is far more domestic. Women's sexuality was presented directly and talked about, but only for the gratification of men and as a source of comedy (Rosen, 1973). Even Bombshells were still not in control of their sexuality.

1960s: Constructions of Womanhood

The 1960s found the United States redefining itself and its cultural mores, and film followed suit. Paralleling the virgin/whore constructions that mark film history, the 1960s gave audiences Doris Day's unthreatening maintenance of an independent woman's virginity in 1959's *Pillow Talk*, 1961's "will she/won't she" film *Come September*, and 1968's *Sweet November*, in which Sandy Dennis heals a number of men by having sex with them (Rosen, 1973). Haskell reminds readers that the 1960s starlets were "less poignant than boring, a perfectly perfect, unchallenging sixties' woman" (Haskell, 2016, p. 343). She points to performances by Katherine Hepburn in *Guess*

Who's Coming to Dinner?, Anne Bancroft in *The Graduate*, and Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?* as performances of notable quality that characterized sexual women as oddities, rather than acknowledging the new liberation of real women (Haskell, 2016). As individuals attempted to negotiate the new knowledge of sex and their related reactions, Hollywood films attempted to reflect those varied perspectives. Women were virginal, tempted, or philanthropically sexual in turn, and the result is a decade in which women were portrayed in a number of dissonant ways in film.

1960s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The 1960s brought about filmmaking targeting a younger market and, as a result, what Rosen terms as *The Popcorn Venus*, a blend of safe sexuality and innocence that was broadly accepted in blockbuster films (Rosen, 1973). 1959's *A Summer Place* took Popcorn Venus Sandra Dee back to the beach with Troy Donahue, but changed the expected format of the teen film with an unintended pregnancy that ended in a sudden wedding (Rosen, 1973). The film was a success, portraying teen sexuality in a direct and realistic way as had never been done before (Rosen, 1973). The 1960s brought women in film a sexuality that was closer to viewers' lived experiences, but the reactions within the film were still dominated by the men around the central women.

1970s: Constructions of Womanhood

Culturally, the United States spent the 1970s negotiating fights for equality, especially in the areas of gay rights, disability rights, affirmative action, and women's rights (Friedman, 2007). By the end of the decade, women made up half of the workforce and saw significant increases in professions that had previously been seen as men's work (Friedman, 2007). At the same time, Hollywood films did not uniformly reflect that new

reality. Alan Pakula's 1971 film *Klute* is the narrative of a private investigator who protects a prostitute who displays the intellect, depth, sexuality, and modernity necessary to appear a liberated woman; however, on a deeper level, she is constructed primarily as a commodity for the men around her (Friedman, 2007). Prostitution was a theme in early 1970s film and played an important role in the "blaxploitation" films that objectified women at the intersection of race and sex (Friedman, 2007). The strengths of the title character in *Shaft* are his ability to fight organized crime and have sex with a large number of women (Friedman, 2007). These films included women who were less intelligent, witty, and strong than those of the comedies of the 1940s. As in the 1950s, the most-remembered films of the 1970s – *The French Connection* and *Dirty Harry* – only include women in small roles when necessary (Friedman, 2007). *Rocky* managed to demean all women with the trainer's assertion that "women weaken legs" and women of color, specifically, by identifying the boxer as "The Great White Hope" (Friedman, 2007, p. 164). Haskell sees these films that prize machismo as reactions against women's liberation, saying, "The closer women come to claiming their rights and achieving independence in real life, the more loudly and stridently films tell us it's a man's world" (Haskell, 2016, p. 363). The 1970s ended with the great success of progressive *Kramer vs. Kramer*, but even this feminist film centered on the man as lead (Haskell, 2016). Women's liberation, on screen as well as off, was incomplete.

1970s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

The 1960s' sexual revolution also yielded a number of films that experimented with sex in the 1970s. Several "sexploitation" films, including *The Bang Bang Girls* and *Swedish Fly Girls*, were released in 1971 (Friedman, 2007). While the films did reflect

the increased sexual expression of the time, they treated women in demeaning ways that prioritized the sex over the woman (Friedman, 2017). 1972's *Deep Throat* is a pornographic film that enjoyed broad popular success (Rosen, 1973). The open presentation of women's sexuality is, on its surface, good for women, however the facts remain that lead actor Linda Lovelace appears with a shaved pubic area that makes her appear child-like and that the very plot centers around a woman whose clitoris is in her throat, thus denying any importance of her genitalia and making fellatio her primary source of sexual satisfaction (Rosen, 1973). Even woman-dominated pornography is the result of patriarchic desire. In addition to pornographic film, the 1970s gave Hollywood filmgoers their first direct representations of sexual minority populations such as transpeople. Sex between women, while portrayed in films such as 1972's *X, Y, and Zee*, is most often used as a tool, rather than as a reflection of true life (Rosen, 1973). In *X, Y, and Zee*, Zee Blakely seduces Stella in order to regain her husband, rather than out of an honest desire to have sex with Stella (Rosen, 1973). 1972's *Women in Revolt* shows three cross dressing characters who experiment with both the frivolity and the angst-driven bitchiness of women's stereotypes (Rosen, 1973). Through all of these genres, women are depicted more broadly, but the depth is superficial and still driven by men's visions of women.

Horror films of the 1970s have proven to be productive areas of study for feminist film critics. Barbara Creed built off the psychological work of Sigmund Freud and the literary theory of Julia Kristeva to develop the concept of the monstrous feminine in horror films. Creed identifies that horror abjection takes place at the point that the entity before the viewer crosses or nears the division between human and inhuman, good and

evil, or man and woman (Creed, 2009). She further asserts that it is the least masculine elements of womanhood, such as menstruation and vaginas, that are constructed into the objects of horror (Creed, 2009). *Carrie* is one example of this in that the lead character is attacked with pig's blood at a moment of pleasure, which is similar to the scene in which her menstrual cycle begins as she is enjoying touching her body in the shower (Creed, 2009; Lindsey, 1991). The onset of Carrie's puberty is the source of her monstrosity; her telekinesis is driven by her increased sexuality (Lindsey, 1991). It is menstruation and sexuality that make Carrie a source of horror.

1980s: Constructions of Womanhood

The history of 1980s film is marked with a number of significant contributions to changing constructions of womanhood. *Coal Miner's Daughter* is the autobiographic tale of country singer Loretta Lynn, who leaves behind a life of poverty to pursue her musical career goals (Rapf, 2007). Throughout the film, Lynn asserts her own will, requires her husband to nurture the children so she can pursue a career, and grows together with her husband in mutual compromise (Rapf, 2007). While *Urban Cowboy* begins with a strong Sissy who enters the man-dominated world of mechanical bull riding and triggers a crisis of masculinity for romantic interest Bud, it does not end as powerfully, instead showing Sissy cleaning while Bud wins a championship (Rapf, 2007). The battle for equality in the workplace was addressed in *9 to 5*, in which three women office workers embody and then subvert stereotypes as they stand up to the employer who is sexually harassing and discriminating against them (Rapf, 2007). The 1980s also put women in positions to shape the narratives that were being seen on screen. *Terms of Endearment* and *The Turning Point* were both films that had women shaping the story and were among the

very few to focus on mother/daughter relationships (Haskell, 2016). Popular comedy *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* might be unlikely to consider as a feminist piece, but director Amy Heckerling adapted the man-written piece to include a scene about a first sexual encounter from the woman's perspective, shifting the gaze of the piece (Haskell, 2016). The decade was the beginning of a diversification of women portrayed in film and it included a number of strong women.

1980s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

Like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the films of the 1980s allowed women to take ownership of their sexuality. Films like *9 to 5* upended stereotypical expectations by choosing Bombshell Dolly Parton to play an intelligent wife devoted to her husband (Rapf, 2007). In films such as *Atlantic City*, women were shown without any need to pursue a man (Rapf, 2007). 1987's crime film *Street Smart* depicts prostitute Punchy leading inexperienced journalist Jonathan through sex, giving her ownership and dominance (Haskell, 2016). Femme fatale films returned to prominence with titles such as *Black Widow* and *Body Heat*, but – unlike their predecessors – the commodification of women required a form of penance for the men (Haskell, 2016). Women were less needing of men and more able to demand that their own needs be met.

1990s: Constructions of Womanhood

The films of the 1990s were marked by efforts to heighten the masculinity of the white men characters and, as such, they affected the ways in which women were portrayed. While films like *Terminator 2*, *Lethal Weapon 3* and *4*, *Mission Impossible*, and *Independence Day* were popular, they were mostly devoid of heroic women (Holmlund, 2008). Women action heroes were either shown in either a masculine

fashion, such as *G.I. Jane*, or as hypersexualized objects (Holmlund, 2008). *Jungle Fever* addressed the issues of racialized masculinity directly, but the most significant scene of women contributing to the discourse consisted almost entirely of cameo roles (Holmlund, 2008). This reduced the women of color involved into purveyors of truth who have no other role (Holmlund, 2008). Women are in the forefront in *Thelma & Louise*, a film in which masculine film tropes are renewed by regendering them through women's actions (Holmlund, 2008, p. 62). Toward the end of the decade, ironic "smart" films like *Happiness* and *Election* showed pedophilia and rape at the hands of middle-aged men with a "blank narration" that uses surprising juxtaposition and irony to show reprehensible behaviors without comment (Sconce, 2002). The positioning used for men to gain masculinity and subject status in the films of the 1990s meant that women would continue to be viewed through a men's lens.

1990s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

Portrayals of women's sexuality were no more progressive or clear in the 1990s. *Fried Green Tomatoes* focused on a lesbian relationship, but the lesbianism was treated with euphemism and never fully explored, thus treating it as taboo (Holmlund, 2008). The monstrous feminine reemerged through films such as *Basic Instinct*, in which Catherine used her physical attractiveness to seduce men she would then murder during sexual climax (Holmlund, 2008). At the same time that the character uses sex as part of a murder plot, she is still objectified by a camera that focuses on her body parts and seems to observe her from above (Holmlund, 2008). The decade was also marked by the sexualization of young girls. *Kids* shows teenage sex scenes with voyeuristically unsteady cameras and amplifications of body sounds, making the act more important than the

children involved (Holmlund, 2008). In *Election*, math teacher Dave Novotny says of student Tracy Flick, “Her pussy gets so wet you wouldn’t believe it,” setting aside teen movie tradition for statutory rape (Sconce, 2002). 1999 Best Picture *American Beauty* depicts Lester Burnham fantasizing about his teenage daughter’s friend, and that fantasy is argued by Kathleen Row Karlyn to be a displacement of his desire for incest (Karlyn, 2004). Overall, the decade included a problematic lack of women’s sexual agency as women and girls were sexualized for the benefit of middle-aged men.

2000s: Constructions of Womanhood

In the 2000s, films gave audiences more varied depictions of women, somewhat due to the brief rise of independent film. Small-budget films about women that gained mainstream success included mother/daughter film *Thirteen*, serial killer portrait *Monster*, and Sylvia Plath biopic *Sylvia* (Corrigan, 2012). Each of these films turned away from stereotypes or preconceived notions and focused on the complexity within the women shown (Corrigan, 2012). Women’s depictions were also more diverse in popular cinema. Of the nurses in war film *Pearl Harbor*, scholar Linda Ruth Williams says, “In a movie in which men do so much shouting, it is refreshing to see women being effective” (Corrigan, 2012, p. 48). The action film certainly still included women in a romantic context, but it also showed them being complex persons who were skilled in a variety of areas (Corrigan, 2012). Similarly, *The Princess Diaries* includes the romantic subplot but, in its case, the focus is on the relationships between the women (Corrigan, 2012). While *Legally Blonde*’s Elle Woods is successful at law school because her wealth secured her admission and her haircare knowledge assisted her in a case, the character breaks conventions by befriending a woman of lower socioeconomic status and helping

her leave an abusive husband as well as by befriending a rival (Corrigan, 2012). This complexity might actually advance women's issues by problematizing the polar opposition of femininity and feminism (Corrigan, 2012). Complex women who built relationships with each other highlighted the films of the 2000s and resulted in a more complete picture of womanhood.

2000s: Constructions of Women's Sexuality

Depictions of women's sexuality was problematic in the 2000s. *Crash* depicts a Black woman who has to trust a white police officer who sexually assaulted her (Corrigan, 2012). There are no traditional relationships at all in *Me and You and Everyone We Know*, a film that includes, among other sexual relationships, an erotic online chat between an adult woman and a six year-old boy (Corrigan, 2012). The *Twilight* series focused on an intentional, pained abstention from sex between outcast Bella and controlling vampire Edward (Corrigan, 2012). Each of these films showed women in troubling relationships with sex and their sexual agency.

The history of representation of women and women's sexuality in Hollywood films is one that is easy to problematize. Women have been underrepresented, and the representations that exist have often been stereotyped, tokenized, eroticized, exoticized, or made grotesque. Women in films are variations on long-held archetypes and lack agency. Films have opted for representations of women that have limited the reflection of a progressive reality in favor of idealized innocence or villainized complexity. Long-viewed as taboo, women's sexuality has found a place on screen, but it rarely reflects women's reality. Women are regularly objectified and treated as a means of men's pleasure. Women's own sexual desires are viewed as scary or comedic without an ability

to find a truth between those poles. Women's bodies are treated as props. Women still lack a personal sexual agency that allows them to experience the full truth of their desire and pleasure in a similar way to what men enjoy. These messages may be composed less of text and more of subtext or context in 2018, but they are still present.

Rationale for the Current Study

The breadth of sexual harassment and assault conversations that have taken place from 2017 to the time of this writing have acted as significant historical markers. What we have by which to examine Toback's constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality – other than the accusations and his denials – are his films. Motion pictures capture specific moments in time and are the result of a variety of decisions by filmmakers that reveal their views on every subject they address within them. Given the scope of the accusations against Toback and the significant cultural focus on Hollywood harassment in 2017 and 2018, this investigation is a step toward understanding Toback's enduring constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality through his films. In examining his films, we can examine how he tells the story of women when there is no oversight to reshape his decisions.

Therefore, in light of the review of literature on James Toback's accusations of sexual harassment, objectification in film, the construction of womanhood in film, and the construction of women's sexuality in film, the following research questions will be examined:

Research Question 1: How does James Toback construct womanhood in his films, *Love*

& Money, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*?

Research Question 2: How does James Toback construct women's sexuality in his films,
Love & Money, Exposed, Tyson, and Seduced and Abandoned?

Description of Artifacts and Methodology

This study will employ the method of narrative criticism as shaped by the feminist semiotics of Teresa de Lauretis. The semiotic theory proposed by de Lauretis reflects a centering of narrative that allows for the near-seamless combination of these two methods. Additionally, de Lauretis' feminist theories address broad and intersectional issues as well as theorist Sarah Hallenbeck's concerns about conflating "feminist" with "women's" and viewing only significant events as feminist rhetoric (Hallenbeck, 2012). The use of a de Lauretis angle on narrative criticism will allow for discussion of more elements appropriate to the film context and may allow for a discussion of the roles of the feminist issues illuminated in broader society. This chapter will explain the individual theoretical and practical elements of the study. First, the chapter will describe the four artifacts to be examined. Next, the chapter will describe Walter Fisher's narrative criticism, applicable feminist rhetorical theory, and the feminist semiotics of de Lauretis and make a case for the multimethodological approach. Then, the chapter will describe the method to be applied within the analysis. Finally, the chapter will discuss how this multi-methodological approach is appropriate for examining Toback's films.

Description of Artifacts

Before describing the four films individually, it is fitting to discuss the criteria applied in selecting them. Toback is a prolific filmmaker with 17 credits as writer, 12 as director, nine as actor, and six as producer ("James Toback," 2018b). In determining which artifacts to assess to best represent his construction of womanhood and women's sexuality, it was noted that four films credited Toback as playing all roles as writer, director, and producer. In each project, Toback is in a position of being in near-complete

artistic control of those films. The chain of command for reporting concerns started and ended with Toback. The oversight of his artistry was in his own hands. As a result, these four films are likely to most completely establish who Toback is as a filmmaker, and – with no one to voice other views in the hierarchy of creative leadership – they are likely to illustrate his views of womanhood and women’s sexuality. *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned* are examined in the current study because they share the placement of Toback in all positions of creative power.

Love & Money (1982)

Released in 1982, *Love & Money* is among Toback’s earlier films (“*Love and Money*,” 2016). The rated-R film has a domestic gross income of just \$14,009, which would translate into roughly \$43,700 today (“*Love and Money*,” 2018). Critical response was tepid, with *The New York Times* critic Vincent Canby labeling the piece as “wildly unpredictable” and saying that the plot is “so skimpy that one suspects that somebody - either Mr. Toback or someone not so fond of Mr. Toback’s overheated mannerisms - had ruthlessly chopped the print that’s now going into release” (Canby, 1982). That thin plot focuses on California banker Byron Levin who is propositioned by silver mogul Frederic Stockheinze with a deal for \$1million to intercede with a South American dictator with whom Byron used to live (Toback & Toback, 1982). To guarantee that the deal is accepted, Stockheinze places his younger, attractive wife, Catherine, outside of the meeting in position to seduce Levin (Toback & Toback, 1982). The seduction is successful and the affair becomes an important factor in the business agreement (Toback & Toback, 1982). When the group travels to Costa Salva, tensions over silver resources and probable assassination attempts rise and result in a confrontation in which Stockheinze

is double crossed and, as a result, sets up Levin for the murder of the would-be killer (Toback & Toback, 1982). The dictator frees his former friend who returns to the United States to move his grandfather to safety only to be approached by Catherine asking to join them (Toback & Toback, 1982). The film is one of international intrigue complicated by an unlikely sexual plot.

***Exposed* (1983)**

Exposed was released in April 1983 and is an R-rated drama (“*Exposed*,” 2017). Its domestic gross income was over \$1.8 million, which would translate into roughly \$5.6 million in today’s market (“*Exposed*,” 2018). While crediting the film as Toback’s best to that point, *The New York Times*’ Janet Maslin notes that it seems to set itself as superior to many traditional film techniques and, as a result, falls short (Maslin, 1983). *Variety* describes the film as “intelligent and illogical, beautiful and erratic” before questioning whether the casting was entirely based on appearance (“*Exposed*,” 1983). The film centers on pretty rural woman, Elizabeth Carlson, who is having an affair with her English professor – notably played by Toback (Toback & Toback, 1983). She ends their relationship and becomes a model in New York where, through some odd circumstances, she becomes involved with both a renowned violinist and a plot of international terrorism (Toback & Toback, 1983). This intrigue proves to be her ultimate downfall as she is ill equipped to thwart the terrorists (Toback & Toback, 1983). *Exposed* offers a twist on the “small town girl in the big city” trope that adds sex and terrorism to make the plot new.

***Tyson* (2008)**

Tyson is a 2008 R-rated documentary about boxer Mike Tyson (“*Tyson*,” 2017). Its limited release earned \$887,918 – a little less than \$1.1 million today – domestically

(“*Tyson*,” 2018). A.O. Scott of *The New York Times* expresses concern with the extreme violence depicted, but he calls it Toback’s best film and lauds its ability to seem honest while using an obviously unreliable narrator (Scott, 2009). The film consists largely of interview footage between Tyson and an unseen Toback at Tyson’s home interspersed with archival boxing and media footage (Toback & Toback, 2008). It begins with the boxer’s first fight and follows his rise and fall through boxing successes and life failures, such as biting Evander Holyfield’s ear and spending time in an Indiana prison for rape (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson flashes back to a childhood of hardship and bullying, and he often directs his statements of defense and justification to the camera (Toback & Toback, 2008). As would be likely with any film that is entirely first person narrative, the tale is contradictory and not at all objective.

Seduced and Abandoned (2013)

A 2013 film, *Seduced and Abandoned* is one of Toback’s most recent works (“*Seduced and Abandoned*,” 2017). It is a seeming documentary in which Toback and actor Alec Baldwin go to the Cannes Film Festival to attempt to secure funding for an updated version of *Last Tango in Paris* set in the waning days of the war in Iraq. Throughout their failed attempts and a reimagining of the proposed film, they encounter a number of powerful people in the film industry and discuss topics ranging from casting to death (Toback & Toback, 2013). Stephen Holden of *The New York Times* notes that the film is not clear as to the seriousness of its central idea, but also that it is enjoyable to him and gives the viewer the sense of an insider’s point of view (Holden, 2013). *Variety*’s Leslie Felperin, who reviewed the film about the 2012 Cannes Film Festival at the 2013 Festival, points out that the many plot threads are only somewhat connected in the film,

but concedes that the breadth of cameos and the dynamism of Toback and Baldwin as a team makes it pleasing for viewers (Felperin, 2013). Whether *Seduced and Abandoned* is a pure documentary or not, it provides insights into Cannes, Baldwin, and Toback.

Narrative Criticism

The narrative method of rhetorical criticism, posited by Walter Fisher, built on Kenneth Burke's theory of dramatism to build a new paradigm inspired by Alasdair MacIntyre's statement that "man is in his actions and in his practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal" (Fisher, 1984). For Fisher, narrative is "a theory of symbolic actions - words and/or deeds - that have sequences of meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (Fisher, 1984). This applies to communication, discursive or non-discursive, and stories, fiction or truth (Fisher, 1984). Fisher sets forward a framework for the new paradigm that acknowledges the commonplaces that humans are storytellers by nature, they make decisions based on good reasons, these reasons are shaped by the rhetorical situation in which the decisions are made, the rationality of the story is judged by the hearer's ear for probability - which judges coherence - and fidelity - which assesses seeming truth - and that the world is full of stories to be chosen among in an attempt to build a good life (Fisher, 1984). Fisher views his work as a paradigm, rather than a method, but that has not stopped rhetorical scholars from shaping the paradigm into an applicable method (Fisher, 1984). The narrative method is particularly useful in this study because of its focus on how a rhetor uses narrative elements toward world creation.

Feminist Rhetorical Theory

In order to better analyze the constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality, an additional frame of feminist theory is needed. While the advent of the journal *Women and Film* in 1972 provides a starting point for organized feminist criticism (Thornham, 2009), the field did not immediately coalesce. In an attempt to clarify the theoretical basis of feminist criticism, Sonja Foss and Cindy Griffin assert that applying men's methods is inherently faulty (Foss & Griffin, 1992). The authors deconstructed the rhetorical theory of Kenneth Burke through the lens of the theory of Wiccan feminist Starhawk to identify and challenge many of Burke's givens (Foss & Griffin, 1992). Limits to Burke's theory that are identified are that his rhetorical definition only applies to the rhetoric of domination, he does not allow for rhetors who want anything other than increased power, he allows rhetors to avoid responsibility for their missteps, and his work focuses on a non-realistic objectivity of detachment (Foss & Griffin, 1992). This work parallels the assertion of Audre Lorde that "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1983, p. 94). The scholarly structures built by men must be deconstructed to study women. This deconstruction laid the grounds for future work that prioritized feminist thought over men's theory and practice.

The interaction of narrative theory with feminist film theory is key, but the result does vary in some important ways from that of Fisher. First, the director is viewed as the "author" of the film (Smelik, 2001). This coincides with theorist Sarah Hallenbeck's concern that critics tend to conflate "feminist films" with "films by women" (Hallenbeck, 2012). If the director is the author of the film, it is possible for a feminist film to be directed by a man and for us to move away from the limitation that feminist

films must be made by women. Additionally, new narrative units are applied to the artifacts to better understand how the films interact with women's issues. In its earliest iterations, feminist narrative work examined how violence, gaze, and sexuality interacted with the narrative of the film (Smelik, 2001). This shift allows for the study of the women's narrative in addition to the overall narrative of the film.

Women's ability to maintain sexual agency is a central consideration in feminist film theory. Often heterosexual women's sexual desires are played as taboo while those of lesbians are treated in a comedic fashion (Smelik, 2001). Additionally, not discussing or naming items or issues of a sexual nature serves to push them to the margins and further treat them as taboo (Thornham, 2009). Both of these techniques serve to subvert women's agency in sexuality by treating sexuality as something to be avoided or scoffed (Smelik, 2001). When sexuality is portrayed in film, it is often phallogentric and erases agency in women's pleasure (Thornham, 2009). Moving women's sexuality from the margins and demonstrating sexual agency is a concern in feminist criticism.

The ideas of gaze and objectification often converge in film. Women are often underrepresented as assumed audience members, and the result is a lacking application of a women's camera viewpoint, or women's gaze (Thornham, 2009). Feminist films should use gaze to treat women's every day actions and objects with respect, and feminist critics can study those common elements of life to understand how they network together to construct a world with which women interact (Hallenbeck, 2012). By treating things that are common to women with attention and respect, films can take steps to move women into a position as subject, rather than object (Thornham, 2009). It is of additional importance to especially consider the intersectional concerns of women of color (hooks,

2010). Caucasian theorists and critics dominated early feminist study and, as such, the early works tended to universalize the white experience (hooks, 2010). This further marginalizes women of color as they are objectified due to both race and gender (hooks, 2010). It is important that feminist scholars continue to critique the work being done so as to avoid contributing to the power structures of objectification.

Feminist Semiotics

While Fisher's narratology is a good start for a method of analysis, its inability to directly address gender, the patriarchy, or inequality calls for an additional frame to mitigate those weaknesses. Also, while feminist theory provides the general direction for that reframing, a specific branch of theory will serve to provide focus for this study. The semiotic work of Teresa de Lauretis is designed to address a variety of issues discussed within modern feminism, and commonalities in units of analysis allow her work to merge with Fisher's. She identifies the construction of identity, self-definition, and the possibility of viewing oneself as subject as key concerns of feminist analysis (de Lauretis, 1985). She embraces the complexity of gender and upends the treatment of "masculine" and "feminine" as forces in binary opposition (de Lauretis, 1990). She challenges the existing views of feminism by focusing on the variety between women and, eventually, within the individual woman (de Lauretis, 1985). Women are not viewed as a monolith and they are able to achieve more equal status by embracing that diversity.

Toward a new paradigm for feminist film, de Lauretis identifies a number of traits therein. Suspense is built in small decisions rather than on a path to a grand event (de Lauretis, 1985). New attention is paid to the minutiae of women's lives and that attention shows respect (de Lauretis, 1985). Text is less important than the overall narrative, and

there is no assumption that the intended audience is men (de Lauretis, 1985). The question of audience is important to this new framing of feminism. Viewers must consider “who is making films, for whom, who is looking and speaking, how, where, and to whom” (de Lauretis, 1985, p. 164). In this view, the filmmaker, actors, and audience are all involved in how the film addresses gender issues. The open expression of women’s sexual fantasy and desire are key to developing a feminist film (de Lauretis, 1990; de Lauretis, 2007; de Lauretis 1987). To de Lauretis, feminist narratives cannot be accidental because they require a decided departure from the traditional men’s narratives. Additionally, de Lauretis built on the earlier semiotics work of Christian Metz in *Alice Doesn’t* (1984) as she examines the history of semiotics and discusses the method’s strengths and weaknesses in evaluating art pieces that come from the non-dominant voice. Especially drawing on Laura Mulvey, she eventually identifies six areas for semiotic study that seem to retain their usefulness in women’s film: gaze, world, object, illusion, desire, and subject (de Lauretis, 1984). It is the correlation between these elements of feminist semiotic language and Fisher’s narrative units that enable the two methods to blend for film analysis. This study will apply a combined semiotic narrative rhetorical analysis through a feminist lens in order to understand how James Toback uses gaze, world, object/subject, and desire to construct his illusory view of womanhood and women’s sexuality in his films *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*.

Application of Method

As Fisher stops short of establishing a method for his narrative theory, de Lauretis sets forth more of a framework than a theory. However, again similarly, it is possible to

extract practice from theory. De Lauretis' 1984 *Alice Doesn't* sets forth feminist film semiotics as a unique form of rhetorical study. In the text she begins by asserting that the first step of the argument of criticism is to "formulate questions that will redefine the context, displace the terms of the metaphors, and make up new ones" (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 3). She restates the semiotic idea that "language and other systems of signification (for example, visual or iconic systems) produce signs, whose meanings are established by specific codes" (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 4) and establishes the semiotic units of gaze, world, object/subject, illusion, and desire that these codes create (de Lauretis, 1984). de Lauretis notes a shift in semiosis from studying only the signs and symbols, themselves, to a post-structuralist semiosis that is concerned with "the work performed through them" (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 167). In this new semiotic frame, de Lauretis points toward the importance of subjectivity and the cultural role of social co-construction through the chosen signs (de Lauretis, 1984). She suggests that the questions of the "condition and presence" of imagery in cinema and of cinema in social imagery must go beyond the positive/negative or good/bad archetypal polarities that have been used throughout history (de Lauretis, 1984). Additionally, the questions of how these processes construct meaning and desire within the audience must be addressed (de Lauretis, 1984). These elements of de Lauretis' theory serve as the basis for the method employed in this analysis.

In further developing the multimethodological approach, these foundations of feminist semiotics are compared to the similar methodological grounds in Fisher's work. While Fisher asserts that "when narration is taken as the master metaphor, it subsumes the others" (Fisher, 1984, p. 6), he also notes that narrative man uses and misuses

symbols and signs to communicate these narrations (Fisher, 1984). He did not go so far as to identify narrative units himself, but other narrative theorists did. Gerald Prince identified such units of study as setting, character, audience, and theme (Prince, 1982), all of which serve as parallels to de Lauretis' units of semiotic study. Fisher explains that any critic, regardless of theoretical bases, attempts to address questions concerning an artifact's deconstruction, its rhetor, or its meaning for an audience (Fisher, 1989). Each of these fundamental pieces of narrative theory holds a connection with a parallel tenet of feminist semiotics, and these points of commonality allow for the multimethodological approach that will be used in this study.

In applying this multimethodological approach, I will, first, discuss the research questions to demonstrate how they disrupt the traditional roles of women in film in order to redefine the context of the artifacts and call into question the metaphors within. Second, I will identify the substance of the semiotic narrative elements of gaze, world, object/subject, and desire Toback uses in each film to develop his own illusion of womanhood and women's sexuality through the films *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*. I will then evaluate the illusion narrative Toback constructs in these films based on those semiotic elements. Finally, I will offer insights into how my analysis illuminates Toback's constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality, reflect on the limitations of this study, identify possible directions for future study, and discuss the implications of this study's findings.

In the introduction to *Alice Doesn't*, de Lauretis quotes Anthony Wilden from *System and Structure: Essays in Communication and Exchange* in suggesting, "Whoever defines the code or the context has control..." (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 3). In all four of the

films selected as artifacts, Toback defines both the code and the context of the film. He served as the producer who coded the business context, the writer who coded the words, and the director who decided how those words and all other coded languages of cinema would be filmed. In de Lauretis' terms, Toback had control. In fact, he had the broadest swath of control. The ultimate oversight in filmmaking is the producer, so Toback acted as his own supervisor. In attaining this rare position in control of the business and creative sides of the productions, Toback secured the role as controller of all of the semiotic and real-world contextual codes that would take place during the filmmaking process. Each decision was, ultimately, his.

Fisher and de Lauretis agree that the coding of narrative is the result of intent by the rhetor (Fisher, 1984; Fisher, 1989, de Lauretis, 1984). They also agree that the historical and human contexts of the artifact cannot be separated from the artifact itself (Fisher, 1984; Fisher, 1989, de Lauretis, 1984). Additionally, they note that the effect of a fictional narrative on the audience has implications outside of the narrative (Fisher, 1984; Fisher, 1989, de Lauretis, 1984). Applying these theoretical pillars to Toback's creation of these four movies points to a filmmaker whose every business and creative decision is purposeful, whose persona is not separate from the art pieces he makes, and whose choices have had and continue to have effects on audiences who view these films. Toback's constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality not only relate to the accusations against him outside of these four films, but they have a role in the continued co-constructive definitions of the same within modern culture. The agreement between the nature of Toback's films and rhetorical situation, the theories of Fisher and de

Lauretis, and the proposed combined methodology make the combination thereof a perfect manner of criticism for these pieces.

The rest of the Wilden quotation is also significant because it includes a challenge to scholars. It begins, “Whoever defines the code or the context, has control...” but it continues, “...and all answers which accept that context abdicate the responsibility of redefining it” (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 3). Accepting the illusion of womanhood and women’s sexuality presented by Toback makes a critic complicit in that illusion. It is only by deconstructing the components of his code and commenting on its rhetorical situation and effects on the audience that a critic can stretch beyond the simple analysis of Toback’s work to a reciprocal relationship in which the new understanding is allowed to transform the way the artifact is viewed and advance the cause of womanhood. The analysis that follows is a first step in that direction.

Results and Analysis

In this chapter, the multimethodological approach of feminist semiotic narrative criticism is applied to James Toback's films *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*. First, the research questions will be discussed to illustrate how they disrupt the traditional roles of women in film and allow for the recontextualization of the artifacts within the current rhetorical moment. Second, the semiotic narrative units of world, gaze, object/subject, and desire will be identified and discussed within the context of each film. Then the illusion narratives Toback constructs through these films will be established through the use of these semiotic narrative elements. Finally, the chapter will provide insights into how this study illuminates Toback's constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality through the illusory world he builds across the four films.

First, the research questions selected for this study serve to disrupt the traditional roles of women in film. These research questions are:

Research Question 1: How does James Toback construct womanhood in his films, *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*?

Research Question 2: How does James Toback construct women's sexuality in his films, *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*?

These were chosen because, while the context of cultural discourse concerning sexual assault has changed since the artifacts were released, the constructions within each film will remain unchanged. It is the duty, then, of feminist critics to disrupt these

constructions by questioning their relationship to women and problematizing them within the current context. By examining how Toback constructs the idea of womanhood in these four films, we can start to redefine womanhood within the current context and draw comparisons and contrasts between the film illusions and reality. In looking at his constructions of women's sexuality within these films, we can draw attention to sex as an important part of a woman's life instead of as something done for the man. This recontextualization is disruptive to the traditionally accepted constructions by forcing them to remain active and subject to critique within the current rhetorical situation, rather than relegating them to a position as historical artifacts, untouched by consideration. This allows for further progress for women as troubling constructions are exposed, deconstructed, and recontextualized. As Toback's alleged behaviors have problematized the director and as the director is the author of the film (Smelik, 2001), the illusions Toback builds within his films must be questioned within the current discursive moment. Pursuing answers to these two questions will open the way for the real woman to overtake the illusory film woman within the narratives of womanhood and women's sexuality.

The analysis of each film applies four semiotic narrative units. These units are world, gaze, object/subject, and desire. The world of the movie is a multi-faceted unit of analysis. It includes the setting and all of the items that construct it. This may include structures, weather, lighting, and personal property. World also may include messages that construct information about or attitudes toward the setting of the film. The unit of world establishes the physical context of the film for the characters. As they may shape the world, so may behaviors and attitudes be shaped by the world of the film. This unit is

analyzed first because it is the most constant and unchanging of the four. It affects the entire film, but world may not be subject to an ongoing reinforcement of its construction throughout.

Gaze is the second unit of analysis. It is more frequently changing than world, but it is also more constructing of subtext than the remaining two elements. Gaze is how the filmmaker presents the point of view of the film to the viewers. The most important element of gaze is the use of the camera. In film, the camera is the viewer's surrogate, deciding where to look, in what manner, and for how long. Analyzing gaze within a film may also include other factors that shape how the viewer sees the film – such as lighting, music, eye contact, and costume – if those factors offer information about what is being chosen for the viewer assumed viewer. Gaze can also define that assumed viewer, who has most traditionally been a man. Unlike world, gaze is often reinforced throughout the film.

The third unit of analysis is object/subject. Since this study is focused on women, the analysis of object/subject will examine whether women in the films are constructed as individuals with agency, subjects, or as beings intended to benefit the men, objects. Many factors, subtextual and textual, contribute to object or subject constructions. Gaze can be considered here in a different way than before. In analyzing for object/subject, gaze can contribute to the constructions of the characters being viewed. Additionally, the ways characters speak or are spoken about, behavior of the characters or of others toward the characters, and the presence of lack of agency to pursue personal objectives are all part of the construction of the object/subject status of a character. This is likely an ongoing

construction throughout the film as characters continue to change and interact with others.

The fourth unit of analysis is desire. This unit of analysis will examine how women's sexual desire is constructed through the film. Characters' words and actions are the most common constructors of desire; however, sometimes it is the absence of word or action that constructs desire in absence. Women's sexuality has traditionally belonged to men, so factors such as a woman taking sexual leadership, a woman's sexuality being treated as a normative factor of life, and a woman experiencing pleasure for herself would all subvert that narrative. Sexual agency contributes to subject status, as well, but will primarily be discussed in terms of reconstructing desire. Whether desire is constructed throughout a film or in smaller moments varies widely between these films, but it remains an important element of each.

In the analyses that follow, these four units of study will be applied to each film independently. At the conclusion of each individual film analysis, the illusion narrative of that specific film will be established and discussed in comparison with the previous films. Finally, the overall illusion narrative of Toback's constructions of world, gaze, object/subject, and desire will be established and used to illuminate his illusory constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality.

Love & Money

In *Love & Money*, Toback constructs an illusory world in which women are valued only if they are sexually desired and women's sexuality is commodified, allowing men to trade or demand sex to benefit their own desires while denying women true agency. Examinations of a world built with a distaste for women's possessions, a gaze

that assumes an audience of men sympathizing with the obsessive principle man character, ongoing objectification of women through a prioritization of obsession over relationship, and desire constructions that focus on the men to the neglect and abuse of the women reveal a film in which any attempt to experience the illusory world through the experiences of the women causes that world to fall apart. Women cannot be viewed as principles in this film because their subject status and personal objectives do not seem to be a consideration of their construction, thus creating many gaps that prevent a complete understanding of their behaviors. World, gaze, object/subject, and desire all contribute to these objectifying constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality.

The world constructed in *Love & Money* is inconsistent with theoretical expectation, but these inconsistencies contribute to Toback's construction of women. de Lauretis asserts that films show the items that are important and that showing these things demonstrates respect for them (de Lauretis, 1985). That may not hold true in *Love & Money* in part because there are so few items shown, overall, and items that are shown repeatedly are treated with distaste. Silver mogul Stockheinze is shown to always be busy with phone calls, notes, and newspapers, but he never really engages with these items in any way beyond the completely superficial. He is busy in a way a child at play would perform busyness at work. There are no stakes and he jumps from activity to activity and property to property with equal disregard for their import. Byron's office contains a few possessions, but they are not detailed or specific and he, too, never interacts with the items around him.

Byron's home is the only place in which the minutiae of life is shown with detail, and it is treated with disgust. He lives there with his aging grandfather and girlfriend,

Vicky. Vicky works as a book purchaser, and their home is filled with valuable editions. There are books on shelves, on the television, and in stacks on the floor. Vicky is seen building a bookshelf as the men are rocking in chairs one evening. She is devoted to her books and they are shown repeatedly. Contrary to what one would expect within a de Lauretis frame, however, these books are not given overall respect within the film. This is Byron's story, and he is wholly disinterested in the books, ignoring Vicky when she begins to talk about them. As the quantity of books seems to increase through the first half of the film, Byron appears more and more closed in and uncomfortable in his home. When he decides to accept Stockheinz's offer and begins to pack, he knocks over a few books with his bag. Vicky bursts into tears even before she discovers that the bindings are broken. When Byron returns from Costa Salva, Vicky is packing up the books and, when he wakes up the next day, she and the books are gone. The books had been so plentiful that the effect of their absence is that it seems as if the house is empty, though furniture remains. This illuminates that, within this film, the stuff of womanhood is a source of oppression and confusion. The books are something to negotiate and escape. They are not respected; they are reviled.

The role of the camera in establishing gaze in *Love & Money* is, at best, odd and assists in the objectification of women by assuming a man as viewer who is willing to sympathize with Byron's obsession. There is not a notable variety of camera angles in the film, so the audience is usually somewhat distanced from the action. A few moments, however, stand out from the established cinematographic norms of the film. After Byron kidnaps Catherine and they arrive at the hotel, they hold an introductory conversation that is only notable because it is shot so that they never make eye contact. Catherine is seated

on the bed and Byron is near the table behind her. Any attempted interpersonal connection between them is thwarted by the impersonal nature of this shot, and this type of scene repeats twice more. After Catherine's attempt to leave, they begin foreplay and the audience is clearly asked to identify with Byron as the camera never shows Catherine's face, and she is eventually out of the frame entirely as she begins to perform fellatio. The sex scenes are repetitive and the camera only shows her face when either mimicking Byron's position or directly over his shoulder. The other shots are of shadowy body parts. The result is a focus on Catherine as only body, thus further objectifying her.

No women in the film are treated as subjects, rather they are constructed repeatedly as objects needed for the men's success. While Melanie is not objectified in a sexualizing way, she is simply not considered important enough to establish a camera angle that shows her while she is speaking at the Embassy in Costa Salva. This is not a one-time event. She has several lines at the Embassy and is only shown while speaking one of them. Lorenzo jumps out of his Jeep in Costa Salva and grabs a girl he then carries into a vineyard for sex. She is not even shown coming back from the vineyard, so the grabbing and the sex are all that are important about her. Byron defends his secretary to an aggressive coworker by telling him to "use that voice on someone who can fire you, not her," but then immediately sits in his chair and waits for her to lean across him to answer the telephone (Toback & Toback, 1982). Vicky is objectified by Byron throughout the film. They are never intimate in any way. There are no moments of affection, so the relationship seems to be convenient rather than rooted in love. When Catherine asks if Byron lives alone, he answers, "I live with my grandfather (pause) and a girl" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Catherine asks if he loves the girl and he responds, "We

get along” (Toback & Toback, 1982). The soundtrack continues this construction with its repeated use of Dusty Springfield’s “I Don’t Want to Hear it Any More” which includes the lyric, “He don’t really love her” (Toback & Toback, 1982). At the same time, Byron gets jealous when Vicky receives a call from a man with whom she works. It seems that while Byron does not want to engage with Vicky as a partner, he also does not want to grant her the agency to sustain other relationships. The film makes no attempt to make these women subjects of their own stories. They are all props for the men around them.

The most objectified woman in the film is Catherine. She is the far younger, beautiful wife of a wealthy mogul, and this desirability affords her more value within the illusory world. She is exoticized with an international dialect³ and is an object within the film before her first entrance. In fact, the promotional poster shows a naked Catherine on a beach with her breasts covered by a man holding out a toy airplane, her vagina covered by two men exchanging pictures, and the tagline “She uses her body the way they use power...to seduce, betray, and destroy” (“Love & Money,” 2016). It is of note that this image is not actually used in the movie, so the staging of the promotional shot plays on this objectification for sales purposes. In the film, our first information about her comes more than three minutes before her first entrance as Stockheinz makes a call to put Catherine in place outside the hotel in case Byron should turn down his offer. When Byron does turn down the offer and exit, Catherine is pulling up in her car to attract him and begin the plot of seducing Byron to get him to accept.

After Catherine stands Byron up for a public meeting, he shows up at her hotel, throws her on the couch, and physically dominates her until she agrees to go with him.

³ The actor, Ornella Muti, is the daughter of an Italian and an Estonian, so her dialect is a mixture (“Ornella Muti,” 2018).

They drive overnight and arrive at a motel where she calls a taxi and tries to leave, but Byron grabs her violently and kisses her. While Catherine agrees to have sex with him, this is an agreement born of coercion both by her husband, who is using her as a business pawn, and Byron, who has kidnapped her out of a desire to dominate and possess her. It cannot be said that her agreement equates to a consent born of personal agency. Even after a significant number of sexual experiences together, Byron has sex with her while she is crying and then goes through her purse while she is out of the room. He clearly has not gained respect for Catherine. She is merely there for his pleasure.

Catherine continues to be treated as an object when they arrive in Costa Salva. Dictator Lorenzo comments only on her beauty. She is shown walking through the uneven terrain of a war-torn Latin American country wearing impractical white pants and high heels. Both Lorenzo and Byron stop the action of the film to watch her walk up the stairs into the United States Embassy. Once inside, the audience is given a glimpse of a physical altercation between Catherine and Stockheinz, which further defines that the mogul views his wife as an object he owns. It is in Costa Salva, however, that Catherine has her one moment of asserting herself as a decision maker, though that happens as she admits to Byron that their affair was a set-up and says, "I'll help Frederic in any way I can" (Toback & Toback, 1982). While she did make a choice, her choice to have sex with Byron in order to help Stockheinz make money was driven by her loyalty to a wealthy abuser rather than agency.

In the final moments of the film, Byron has packed up his car and is planning to leave with his grandfather. Catherine's voice is heard before she appears and the following exchange takes place:

Catherine: How uncomfortable does it get if there are three?
Byron: That depends on who the third person is.
Grandfather: What a vision of loveliness!
Catherine: Do you really think we have any chance of lasting together?
Byron: No.
Catherine: Neither do I (Toback & Toback, 1982).

Byron and Catherine then smile before the screen cuts to black. The first two lines are a repetition of an earlier conversation in *Costa Salva* in which Catherine flirtatiously hints that she would like to be invited along with Byron and Lorenzo. The final moment of the movie is one of mutual objectification, as both Catherine and Byron seem willing to run away together based on physical attractions that developed through kidnapping and a shared desire to escape the reach of Stockheinz. Neither thinks that the relationship will endure, thus each opting for a convenient, if disposable, short term solution by using the other person.

Sex is very important throughout the film, as it serves as the entire bases for Stockheinz's plot and Byron and Catherine's relationship, and so the theme of desire is centered. Desire, from this perspective, is a man's right and women who are desired are expected to acquiesce. As soon as Catherine appears, Byron desires her to a point that he becomes frightening. When he first sees her outside the hotel, he approaches her to introduce himself and asks her, "You're rotting your soul. Do you know that?" before grabbing her and threatening, "If you ever touch him again – or any other man – I'll kill

you” (Toback & Toback, 1982). He fantasizes about her that night, and when she does not attend a meeting she arranges, he does not sleep, rather calling her hotel and staring at the ceiling. The next morning, still bothered, he punches a wall at his office. The kidnapping takes place that evening, and his attack mimics rape, with him climbing on top of her and holding her down before she agrees to leave with him. She admits in the car that she had sex with her husband, so Byron pulls over to let her out. He then backs the car up because he still desires her, and tells her to get in the car because, “We’re going to fall in love” (Toback & Toback, 1982). While sexual desire is an essential element of the film, it is Byron’s desire that is given centrality even though it is violent and obsessive.

Once Byron and Catherine arrive at the hotel, sex becomes the primary focus of the film. Byron’s sexual frustration is demonstrated by his increased hand rubbing, which is amplified with a microphone to somewhat jarring effect. When Catherine tries to leave, he grabs her and begins to kiss her. Byron cannot achieve an erection when they return to the hotel room, and he asks that Catherine sing “The Star-Spangled Banner” to arouse him. She recites the lyrics and he takes over as she begins to perform fellatio. They have sex a number of times, broken up by further superficial conversations without eye contact. At one point, Byron performs impersonations for Catherine’s edification, but when he impersonates her and insinuates that she is only in a relationship with Stockheinz for financial reasons, she becomes upset. This does not stop her from having sex with him immediately, and she cries as, in the act, he asks her to say that she will never leave him. This moment borders on lacking consent and further demonstrates that Byron’s desire is the only desire of importance.

Desire remains central as the action moves to Costa Salva. On Stockheinze's private plane, Byron stares at Catherine as her husband sleeps. When he decides to go back to her, he asks, "Do you know what I'd like to do to you right now?" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Catherine suggests that he wants to kiss or have sex, but Byron responds with, "I'd like to break your neck" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Again, he is threatening when reminded that Catherine is married to Stockheinze. Toward the end of the flight, the mogul asks Catherine to massage him, and this quickly turns into foreplay, which makes Byron uncomfortable. Once in Costa Salva, Lorenzo notes the interactions between Byron and Catherine and asks Byron, "You can't stop yourself with her. Do you want to?" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Byron responds with a simple, "No" (Toback & Toback, 1982). When he goes to meet her at the Embassy at noon, he takes the steps two at a time to speed his progress. He again grabs her roughly and they kiss. As she tries to focus his attention on the job to be done, he argues that they are meant for, "Obsession...ecstasy...love" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Catherine lets the façade fall away, asking why Byron thinks he has a claim to her simply because she let him make love to her. After the lunch turns violent, Byron follows her to her room to pack for their escape and she admits that she called him that first night because, "I'll help Frederic in any way I can" (Toback & Toback, 1982). Byron asserts that she did not have sex with him for Frederic's benefit and Catherine responds that she did in the beginning. Somehow, through the plot and the threats, she had come to desire him, too.

In *Love & Money*, each of these semiotic narrative units contributes to Toback's construction of an illusory world in which woman's value is determined by a man's desire to have sex with her and her sexuality is his to trade or demand – violently, if

necessary. This is a world that centers men, and women's possessions are oppressive to men. The intended audience is comprised entirely of men and it is assumed that they will identify with Byron as he becomes more and more obsessive. The two main women with whom Byron interacts are both objects to him. He is not in love with Vicky, and treats her more as a roommate whose books are in the way than as a partner. He takes no interest in her things or her activities, and the audience never sees them touch even though they share a bed. Catherine is only really different from Vicky in that she has sex. Neither Byron nor Stockheinze shows any interest in Catherine's things or interests. Byron spends more time staring at her vagina under the covers than he spends holding a conversation with her that does not center himself. If, at any time, a woman had asserted her own will, the plot would have fallen apart because women's agency is not a consideration at any level in this world. Byron, as a man, is driven entirely by desire. When it is not present, he is passive. When it is present, he is obsessive to the point of violence. His pursuit of Catherine is marked by a desire to be her sole possessor, rather than anything approaching a mutual interest, respect, or love. At the end, Byron is prepared to leave her behind as he runs for safety, as she is not his concern when he is not immediately trying to have sex with her. Catherine, by contrast, is willing to have sex, but she never demonstrates desire other than desire to please her abusive husband. Women are valuable in the film if the men are trying to have sex with them and they are expendable if not. Womanhood and women's sexuality are explicitly connected and a woman's sexual desirability is her worth. Additionally, her sexuality is a commodity to be traded, and a man who is not freely receiving her sexual attention is expected to use violence. When he does, she will willingly acquiesce. For *Love & Money*, women are

objects to be used for men's pleasure, and interests, hobbies, and personalities would only get in the way.

Exposed

In *Exposed*, Toback uses world, gaze, object/subject, and desire to construct an illusory world in which women are manipulable and their sexuality is underdeveloped. The central character, Elizabeth, moves to various different settings within the world, and each one is a source of danger for her. The assumed gaze of the camera is not only that of a man, but it is voyeuristic, keeping a safe distance as it shows vulnerable moments and zooming in for the film's sole sex scene. The women are objectified by men who constantly insinuate themselves into the women's lives for sex or personal gain. Desire is a tool by which the men objectify the women, and the women seem to lack a full understanding of their own sexuality. In all, *Exposed* constructs a very troubling and dangerous world for women.

Exposed is, at best, inconsistent, and so is its world. The film begins on a college campus and then moves to a farm in rural Wisconsin before traveling to downtown Manhattan and, finally, spending its final act in metropolitan Paris. Though different, each setting is constructed with its own set of perils. Elizabeth's college life is boring and oppressive to her, and she seems to desire escape. The sexual relationship she has developed with her English professor, Leo Boscovitch – played by Toback – is unhealthy and also seems to constrict her, and he hits her when she tells him she is leaving school. This restrictive setting theme continues to develop as she returns home to Wisconsin to visit her parents' farm. The lack of opportunity in the small town is something she needs to escape, and so is the control of her father who gives her an ultimatum that she return to

school or sacrifice their support. Elizabeth decides to go to New York City to pursue a career in music, and her mother warns her about choosing a “cold, violent city like New York” (Toback & Toback, 1983). Once in the city, she is immediately mugged, and she discovers that even people who have lived in New York for their lives have nothing good to say about the city. For instance, the man running the desk at the hotel Elizabeth lives in tells her that she has an honest face and there are not a lot of honest faces in New York. Elizabeth goes to a record store searching for a job and a fight breaks out. The city is depicted as dirty and wet and all people with any power are brusque, if not actually mean and manipulative. When Elizabeth meets Greg, a fashion photographer who gives her a job and supports her as she begins a modeling career, she sees him as a sign of hope amid the despair of New York, saying, “If you’re half on the level, you’re half more than anyone else in this town” (Toback & Toback, 1983). The theme of danger as inherent to the setting persists as Elizabeth travels to Paris and finds herself caught up in an international terror plot. Street harassers and assassins are a few of the dangers that await her.

Similar to *Love & Money*, the world of *Exposed* includes few properties of importance to the characters. Elizabeth’s dorm room has personal items that seem to matter to her, though only her records are seen after she moves. These records, mentioned as a point of personal connection by Leo, seem to matter to her a great deal. She goes to New York to pursue music and tries to secure a job in a record store. Music is a key part of what makes Elizabeth comfortable. The apartment into which Elizabeth moves after starting her modeling career is nearly empty, but she has brought her music with her. The only other properties that are of importance in the film are those belonging to Daniel, a

musician and terrorist who stalks Elizabeth. His violin is a source of attraction and seduction for Elizabeth. While visiting his New York apartment, she sees his files of pictures and news clippings as well as his gun in a drawer, and these items eventually lead her to discovering his true identity as a revenge-obsessed son of Holocaust and terrorism victims. de Lauretis asserts that films focus on items that are important and that this focus gives them worth (de Lauretis, 1985). In the world of *Exposed* women are shown valuing items that bring intangible joy while men value possessions that matter on an international level. This difference in valuation is possibly subtle, but it contributes to the overall construction of a world in which Elizabeth is in peril and unevenly paired with the men who take advantage of her.

As in *Love & Money*, the camera gaze is a man's, but not used to great effect. There are three times in the film when the camera shots stand out, and the likely reasons are very clear. The first is in the English class at the start of the film. As Leo is introducing the Goethe novel, he repeatedly looks at Elizabeth, but she is distracted. He asserts that there are only two ways to escape the modern gloom: "art and romantic love" (Toback & Toback, 1983). He pointedly looks directly into the camera as he says "romantic love," and this is followed by a cut to Elizabeth, who is not paying attention. The camera gaze is constructed to mimic the perspective of Elizabeth, and the result is somewhat of an attack on the viewer. Through invading Elizabeth's space, Leo invades the audience's space by addressing them visually.

The second example of manipulating gaze in the film comes in Elizabeth's apartment after her first interaction with Daniel. The camera stays at a distance as Elizabeth dances to her albums. She is not just dancing for her own enjoyment, however.

She dances for her chair, a support pole, and her exercise bicycle, in turn, engaging with them as if they were live audience members. She eventually dances for her full-length mirror and then slides to the floor, touching her body as the scene ends. Though distance is kept and the shot is always of the whole apartment, the effect is that of voyeurism. In fact, that effect may be increased by the distance that is kept because the viewer is not close enough to interact with Elizabeth; rather the viewer is maintaining a safe distance in watching a moment of release. Elizabeth is dancing for an audience, but it is not the camera. This assumes a man's gaze and one that does not have any relationship to Elizabeth.

The final unique employment of gaze takes place in the sex scene between Elizabeth and Daniel. As he plays the violin, the focus is on her increasingly engaged reaction. After he completes the song, she asks, "What else do you play as beautifully?" (Toback & Toback, 1983). In response, he begins to bow her body. This is the only time in the film when the gaze is upon body parts, rather than the whole person. The camera stays close and circles the two, positioning the viewer more as participant than voyeur. The importance of the use of gaze in these three instances comes from how distinct they are from the more standard shots that dominate the rest of the film.

Exposed has as few women characters of import as *Love & Money*, but while they are also all objectified, the means of objectification are more varied. The very first action we see in the film makes the oppression and objectification of the film personal. A man emerges from a subway staircase and steps in between two women, far too close to either for comfort, and both women walk away. This also adds to the world-building theme of oppression, and men invade Elizabeth's space from this point forward. When she attends

English class, Leo is introducing *The Sorrows of Young Werther* by Johanne von Goethe and aims directly at Elizabeth his assertions that the main character's downfall is love and, therefore, the woman is "the angel of death" (Toback & Toback, 1983). Leo is not invading her physical space yet, but he is certainly insinuating himself into her intellectual space. When she does not respond as he summons her to confer after class, he shows up at her dormitory room to demand answers about their relationship. He chases her around her room, always stepping into her way, accusing her of provoking him in class. He ignores her repeated pleas that he leave and slaps her in the face when she restates that she is leaving school. When she tells him not to hit her, he responds with, "Don't you ever fucking come near me again, you cunt. You understand that?" (Toback & Toback, 1983). There is no deep connection between Elizabeth and Leo, and when she asserts her right to leave, he makes sure she knows that he is denying her personhood with physical and emotional violence. This continues later in the film when Leo makes a surprise appearance in New York and grabs Elizabeth on the street. He is punched and incapacitated by Daniel, but not before he again shows that possessing her is far more important than respecting her.

When Elizabeth goes home, it is clear that Leo is not the first man to have objectified her. Her father, Skip, suggests that she should have listened to Leo without having all of the information about the relationship. When her mother, Daisy, begins to interject, her father tells her that he was not talking to her. Daisy apologizes and offers to raise her hand the next time she wishes to speak. Even she, however, restricts the subject status of her daughter. When she and Elizabeth talk about the move to New York City, Daisy displays an infantilizing concern that her daughter will not be able to handle the

big city and will be taken advantage of. She tells Elizabeth that, “Any new force that appeals to you – you’ll enlarge it” (Toback & Toback, 1983). She eventually accepts her daughter’s choice but, given Skip’s promise to stop supporting Elizabeth financially if she goes, there is some finality to the weight of this moment. Elizabeth is moving and truly alone.

Once in New York City, even incidental characters are sources of objectification. When Elizabeth is mugged, it is by a team of two men. One robs her while the other distracts her by pretending to defend her from the first. The “good” man in this scenario continues the interaction beyond what is necessary because he likes how she looks, saying, “You got that fresh, cream, wholesome Midwest look I love” (Toback & Toback, 1983). Taking advantage of her agitation as a result of the mugging, he gets her to reveal her name, home state, and the hotel where she is staying. After she walks away, he laughs and says to himself, “I am a motherfucker” (Toback & Toback, 1983), congratulating himself for getting access to her. He never uses this information, so the scene serves no purpose other than to portray Elizabeth being objectified.

Elizabeth is also objectified in her role as model. As Greg attempts to recruit her to this job, he says, “Different clothes. Different looks. Different selves” (Toback & Toback, 1983), as if she is nothing but those clothes at all. He reduces her to her public image and body parts by saying, “Men invented fantasies about your eyes, your hair, your mouth, your skin. Dreaming of what it’s like to touch you. Women posing in front of mirrors wondering what it’s like to be you” (Toback & Toback, 1983). When filming in Paris is not going as he wants, Greg puts his hand up Elizabeth’s skirt to get her and her fellow actor to connect more physically. He encourages Elizabeth to seduce Tommy by

saying, “You know how. You’re a pro by birth” (Toback & Toback, 1983). He also encourages Tommy to “force her,” objectifying her to the point of sexual assault (Toback & Toback, 1983). It is also her modeling that draws the attention of terrorist Rivas, who says that something in her look that told him she was looking for something worth dying for. Daniel tells her that Rivas prefers using women in his terrorist attacks, and that proves true as he is recruiting Elizabeth. Each of the people in charge of carrying a bomb for the attack that Elizabeth sees planned is a woman. Rivas sees women, including Elizabeth, as useful tools for his plan and nothing else.

Desire is a dominant theme throughout the film and it has a significant role in the constructions of womanhood and sexuality that are built within. A key problem with how desire is presented is that the objectifying, possessive, and obsessive ways in which desire is shown are normalized within the plot. When Leo follows Elizabeth to her dormitory room, he tells her that, “Nothing’s going to separate us but death”; his desire is dangerous and threatening to her (Toback & Toback, 1983). That danger is realized when he appears in New York and grabs her. In the dormitory scene, it is made clear that their connection has been superficial, so this second appearance is an attempt to possess her, not an attempt to rebuild a relationship.

It is Daniel who defends Elizabeth from Leo, but Daniel is a source of dangerous desire, as well. Elizabeth first meets him at an art show. He approaches her and says, “You are very beautiful. You should never wear makeup, especially lipstick. Your lips are full and generous without it. Don’t call attention to what is already loud on its own” (Toback & Toback, 1983). He then disappears into the crowd. The next day, Daniel shows up behind Elizabeth on the street with a similar brief interaction followed by his

walking away. She is intrigued by his appearance in spite of the fact that he is stalking her. When he then breaks into her apartment, her reaction is incredulity, rather than the fear that might be expected. Rather than defend herself or call for help, she calmly talks with him and then accepts his offer to leave. She immediately locks her door, but then unlocks it to follow him out. As she approaches the elevator and calls for it, Daniel steps out from the neighboring closet in which he has been hiding. Outside of the film, this behavior is clearly cause for concern, but when Greg asks Elizabeth the next day if she knows what she is doing, she responds, “Yeah. Falling in love” (Toback & Toback, 1983). Daniel shows all of the signs of being dangerous and, in real life, a reasonable woman pursued in this manner would be justified in experiencing terror. His desire for her is obsessive and her desire for him supplants all reason, likely making it a challenge to empathize with her as a character.

Another way that desire is demonstrated in the film is through the terrorist plot. Desire, here, is not sexual; it is desire for revenge. Rivas desires to destroy the capitalistic norm through his careful terrorist attacks. He is creating mayhem to kill selected people and cause change. He tells Elizabeth, “Terror causes fear. Fear causes violence. Violence causes change” (Toback & Toback, 1983). He has sought Elizabeth, not from sexual desire, but from a desire to use a model looking for a cause to help destroy capitalism. In a similar way, Daniel’s desire for Elizabeth is rooted in his desire for revenge, rather than his desire for sex. Before admitting that he is Josef Tolov, he tells Elizabeth that Rivas has been a key figure in the murders of Tolov’s family members and, because of this, “Tolov is desperate to get revenge” (Toback & Toback, 1983). That is his driving force. When Daniel discovers Rivas’ plot to recruit Elizabeth, he decides to seduce her to secure

her loyalty first. When Elizabeth leaves Rivas as his plot fails and returns to Daniel, he tells her quickly not to come with him when he pursues Rivas. While he cares for Elizabeth, he clearly wants to kill Rivas even more. This may be non-sexual desire, but it is an equally destructive force.

The illusory world of *Exposed* is dangerous for women. The world is constructed as ugly and perilous, with women being particularly susceptible to its dangers. The gaze of the film is a factor in objectification, lurking from a safe distance and only zooming in to interact with characters in a sex scene. Women are objectified as tools in men's plans. Women are constructed as beings with vague goals leaving them open to manipulation. When women discover they have been manipulated, they may react with momentary disappointment, but there are no real stakes or sense of danger. The women simply resume the manipulated behavior. Actual violence, from Leo's slap to Daniel's forced entry into Elizabeth's home, is met by the woman with accepting indifference mixed with a slight bit of surprise. She does not seem to believe that there is anything really at risk in these moments. In fact, no women in the film – even those who cause death – seem to be capable of internalizing their own mortality. They are childlike in their indifference to real danger. Like Catherine in *Love & Money*, Elizabeth does not have agency to pursue specific goals outside of a man's guidance. Similarly, Bridget, Rivas' lead assassin, is still a cult-like follower of the terrorist without a real sense of her own purpose.

Women's sexuality is similarly without substance and this is because their desire is ill defined. Elizabeth is a sexual being, but her sexuality seems to be temporary and unimportant. She dances sexually for no one, and this display serves no purpose for her. When she has sex with Daniel, she wakes up alone next to a note from him. There is little

meaning to the act, itself. For Daniel, sex was part of his revenge plot. For Elizabeth, who steps away from him after she finds out his true identity, sex seems to be nothing more than a diversion. Looking at the scene from outside, it seems as if Toback thought bowing her body would be visually interesting, but the scene serves no purpose beyond itself. In *Exposed*, women are childlike and, as such, their sexuality is incomplete.

In comparing *Exposed* to *Love & Money*, there are several points of alignment. First, both Catherine and Elizabeth are physically abused by men and that abuse is treated as secondary. Catherine is hit by Stockheinz in a standalone shot that is never the subject of comment, and Elizabeth's abuse at the hands of Leo is also treated as an isolated event with no lasting effects. Also, both women are victimized by obsessive men, but those obsessions are treated in normalizing ways. Catherine is kidnapped by Byron and Elizabeth is stalked by Daniel, but both women seem to be immediately ready to ignore the method of pursuit in favor of sex. This is incredibly troubling as the message sent to women and men is that any means of pursuit is appropriate, no matter how illegal, as long as the result is sex. Both Catherine and Elizabeth employ unclear reasoning that does not function well in the real world and, as a result, it is hard for a woman viewer to relate to their decisions to maintain relationships with these men. These films, together, paint a troubling picture of women as willingly subject to the very dangerous whims of the men who desire them.

Tyson

Tyson marks a shift in this study as it is a documentary film, rather than a work of fiction. At the same time, Toback uses the same semiotic narrative units to construct an illusory world that is troubling for most women. In *Tyson*, world and gaze are almost

unimportant because there are only three women named in the film and they are mostly constructed through object/subject and desire. There is a large number of nameless, faceless women mentioned as sexual partners by the boxer, but they are not constructed with any importance. They join two of the three central women in being objectified using a variation of the traditional virgin/whore dichotomy that constructs the virgins as children. The archetypal whores appear objectified as vessels for Tyson's personal pleasure and the archetypal children seem held at a protective distance by the boxer. Desire in *Tyson* seems defined by the boxer and exists for the boxer. The desires of women are mentioned exactly once in the film, and in that moment Tyson dismisses them as not enough. There is one outlier in all of these objectifying constructions: Tyson's second wife, Monica. Viewers are invited to adopt her gaze and the boxer's construction of her is one of respect and individuality. Monica provides a point of identification for an audience of women.

World construction in *Tyson* is almost unimportant when considering setting. *Tyson* is a documentary composed entirely of boxer Mike Tyson narrating his life to the camera in his home, interspersed with archival footage of his fights and various news stories. Even though the bulk of the film is shot in his home, we see none of his possessions, save his reel-to-reel film projector on which he shows some boxing footage. In archival footage, the only item ever discussed is his heavyweight champion prize belt, which he says he wore constantly for weeks after achieving it. It is interesting that no other items are shown or described as valuable because the boxer repeatedly speaks of the role money plays in his life. However, he also speaks of wasting his earnings on partying and transient pleasures. What Tyson does consider valuable are the people around him.

Material objects appear to be of little permanent value Tyson. People, however, have had a great impact on his life, so it seems that he deems it appropriate to assign them levels of worth.

Gaze is another element of the film that is lacking in variety and weight. Because women are so scarce in the film, there is a dearth of images of them throughout. There are, of course, women fans and a few women in backgrounds of frames, but it is hard not to notice how dominant men are within the film. Though we see long-time mentor Constantine “Cus” D’Amato’s home and funeral, his wife is only seen as she is panned past to get a shot of Tyson. Women are only shown as background characters in the boxer’s life with the exceptions of first wife Robin Givens, rape victim Desiree Washington, and second wife Monica. The gaze cast upon Washington seems to mirror Tyson’s view of her. There are only two images given to viewers. First, there is archival footage from a dance rehearsal for the Miss Black America pageant in which she is sexualized when Tyson embraces her mid dance. Second, viewers are shown a courtroom drawing from the rape trial. Almost every other frame within the narration of the rape accusation is of Tyson. She is as much a non-entity among the images in the documentary as she seems to be among Tyson’s considerations. The narration, both visually and in words, focuses far more on him than on Washington.

Our first image of Givens is objectifying, as well, as the selected clip is a seduction scene from *A Rage in Harlem* that shows her wearing a form-fitting red silk dress as she crawls on a bed toward a man. The still frames used throughout the Givens narrative are largely of the pair attending events with Tyson as the dominant figure. This stands in contrast to the Barbara Walters interview that so confused Tyson and in which

he is silently off to the side of a dominant Givens. The divorce images are paparazzi pictures and videos in which both appear unhappy. It is interesting that the progression of audience gaze concerning Givens is that of sexualized to dominating to angry. This seems to mimic Tyson's views on his first wife, as well.

The first exposure to his second wife is entirely different. It is her laugh that the audience first experiences as they are shown home movie footage, shot by Monica, of Tyson and his daughter play boxing. This first moment the audience spends with Monica is the moment they spend as Monica, adopting her gaze. This is the only moment in the entire film that assumes a woman's gaze. Through her lens, the audience cheers on Rayna as she raises her hands in victory after Tyson mimes being knocked out and hears Monica proclaim her "Champion of the World" to the open-mouthed joy of the child (Toback & Toback, 2008). When she is finally shown, the picture of Monica is not sexualized, but is a candid still of her leaning against a door. The pictures of the couple together show them side by side, sharing the frame equally. She is shown playing with their children. Monica is shown visually with even more respect and subject status than Tyson gives her verbally because she is allowed to share her point of view. Even though the documentary does not offer an interview with her or even archival footage of her speaking at length, Monica clearly seems the most fully human woman in Tyson's eyes.

Monica is also an outlier when considering the objectification of women in *Tyson*. This objectification seems clear in the documentary even though there are only three women named in the film. In fact, the lack of significant women may demonstrate that women lack any important role in his life. As much as the film intersperses interview footage with archival footage, it also provides intervals in which no women are seen or

spoken of for several minutes alternating with episodes in which Tyson directly objectifies women for several minutes. The first woman about whom Tyson speaks is, understandably, his mother. Viewers are not given much information about her and Tyson does not seem to have any detailed memories of her. He begins his tale by relaying that he was often sick as a child and that he remembers his family sitting around his hospital bed. The first we hear of his mother is that, “My mother, I believe, was living with my father at the time. Might have been my father. Who I believed to be my father. I was told he was my father” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He goes on to briefly tell that his mother and father had been in a volatile relationship and that she had left his father and moved to a dangerous neighborhood with the children. He tells of robbing drug dealers and getting into fights in his youth, both of which he blames on the move. Later, he adds that he was interested in sex because, “I’d been in a household where my mother was very promiscuous and her friends was [*sic*] very promiscuous. The whole neighborhood I came from was very promiscuous” (Toback & Toback, 2008). When Tyson tells of meeting his mentor D’Amato, he points out that his training group became his family because he had not grown up with a traditional mother and father. From the few details that he shares with us, Tyson appears to view his mother as the archetypal whore and a primary cause of the criminal activities of his youth.

The dehumanizing of women who fit his whore archetype continues throughout the film as he blames women who have sex for several negative events in his life. Tyson’s first experience in jail resulted from his arrest for robbing a prostitute. He asserts that his friend robbed her, but she thought it was he and threw hot chocolate in his face, which led to his arrest. Tyson struggled in his November 22, 1986 fight against Trevor

Berbick because he had a fever from contracting gonorrhea. Tyson does not remember from whom he contracted the disease, but he says that she was “either a prostitute or a very filthy young lady” (Toback & Toback, 2008). In projecting this image of “dirty” on the woman, he attempts to cleanse himself. Women who have a lot of sex are “filthy,” but Tyson, who has a lot of sex, is not. He generalizes most of the women who he had sex with while boxing, saying “Being champion, you have women all over the world. All types of women. Models, actually. All types of women. Everybody wants to be next to the champ” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson says, “I had a tremendous amount of sexual activity, and it caught up with me” to account for the worsening of his fighting (Toback & Toback, 2008). While he admits enjoying this attention at the time, he describes the period in the film with, “I loved leeches. Leeches. I wanted them to suck my blood” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He is portrayed as the victim, uniformly taken advantage of by women.

The woman Tyson most blames for taking advantage of him is the woman who accused him of rape during the 1991 Miss Black America Pageant. The archival footage of their meeting shows Tyson attending a rehearsal and saying, “I’m in a dream day after day. Beautiful women touching the ray. What can I say?” and grunting before a voice off camera encourages him to “Play with them a little” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson agrees, saying “Yeah. Definitely. That sounds better,” before grabbing a giggling young woman mid-dance – a woman who would later file rape charges against him (Toback & Toback, 2008). The interview narration of this story begins with Tyson looking directly into the camera and saying, “When I was falsely accused of raping that wretched swine of a woman, Desiree Washington, it was the most horrible time of my life. I lost my

humanity. I lost my reputation. I lost everything that I worked so hard for” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson makes sure that he is specific in adding, “I may have took [*sic*] advantage of women before, but I never took advantage of her” (Toback & Toback, 2008). The rape trial, itself, is not addressed within the film and no details about the allegations are discussed, but even these reactions demonstrate an objectification. His treatment of the women at the pageant was entirely one of objectifying their attractiveness, and especially that of Washington. In admitting that he likely raped other women, Tyson further objectifies women by using the rape of others as a defense against this one charge. Additionally, he essentializes women by generalizing his distrust to all women, saying, “I never really even trust my wife because of my situation with that rape conviction” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson’s objectification appears clear within the film, even if his guilt in the rape case is not.

The fighter has been married twice, and the contrast in subjectivity between Tyson’s discussion of the two women is notable. His first wife was actress Robin Givens. He says that he first saw her on television and, “I had called somebody and say, ‘Get me in touch with that young lady’” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He left for England, but called his contact to repeat the request daily while traveling. In fact, Tyson refers to Givens as this or that “young lady” five times in fifteen seconds, which is an unusual distancing in language considering that they were married. As opposed to the whore construction of his mother and the women he had sex with while traveling, Givens’ initial construction uses infantilizing language. In fact, Tyson never mentions having sex with Givens, instead telling about his affairs while married to her, saying:

And then, of course, I was being a pig and I started having my extracurricular activities on the side and me not being the most cautious and the most – using the – the most skullduggery of tricks, I guess I got caught most of the time and she didn't like that very much. So we got into a great deal of fights and it didn't – it was pretty ugly. It was pretty ugly (Toback & Toback, 2008).

Here he seems to separate the extramarital affairs from the marriage itself and does not make the causal connection between his adultery and Givens' anger. He is incredulous in his reaction to the archival footage of their interview with Walters in which Givens relates to abused women because of Tyson's inability to control his anger and his tendency to verbally attack her. He says, "I can't believe Robin Givens was saying those lies about me right on worldwide television" (Toback & Toback, 2008). Referring to his ex-wife by her full name also serves as a distancing technique that affects how their relationship is seen. He wonders aloud what her intentions were and comes to the conclusion that she was trying to compromise his mental health. This construction of Tyson as victim stands in contrast to his assertion that the two watched coverage of their divorce every night in bed. He continues to describe Givens as a child and characterizes himself as such, as well, saying, "They judged us. I'm a bad guy. She's a bad girl. I'm an abusive husband. She's a gold digger. We just kids [*sic*]" (Toback & Toback, 2008). Throughout his narrative, Tyson seems to describe Givens as a child he barely knew, rather than as a partner. She does not appear special. She does not appear as an individual. She seems to be an attractive abstraction with whom he spent some time.

This contrasts greatly with the only woman in the film who is a well-rounded, complete subject: his second wife, Monica. The tone in Tyson's voice as he speaks of her is softer and higher, and his pace is slower. It is as if he is in awe throughout his narrative

construction of her. In contrast to Givens, he introduces Monica to viewers by only her first name, saying:

I met Monica perhaps twenty-one years ago. A mutual friend of ours introduced us to one another. We hooked up. I went to prison that year. She stood by my side for the whole three-year duration. We spent a great deal of time together. We eventually got married (Toback & Toback, 2008).

In comparison to the impersonal descriptions of sex that happen throughout, Tyson says of Monica that, “She had a young daughter for me named Rayna” (Toback & Toback, 2008). This framing of their child as a gift is quite a departure from the consumption-based leech comparisons elsewhere in the film. He says of Monica, “She is the greatest mother I ever seen [*sic*] in my life” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Perhaps even unknowingly, he compares her to his own mother, saying, “I never seen [*sic*] anything like that in my life” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He sees and respects Monica as an individual person with agency.

He, however, still engaged in adultery, which led to their divorce. He describes this differently than he describes his infidelity with Givens, though, saying:

And we were married for seven years, but I was gallivanting around with other strange women, hanging out on the streets, never coming home, never being a family man. And eventually we became estranged from one another and that led to a divorce (Toback & Toback, 2008).

Though it cannot be said that Tyson is taking complete responsibility for his actions here, he is acknowledging the connection between his actions and the failure of the relationship. Additionally, he holds up being “a family man” as what would have saved the relationship and his use of “estranged from one another” puts Monica on equal grounding with him. Tyson acknowledges his role at least to some degree because he acknowledges Monica as a subject.

Desire is an overwhelming theme in this documentary, and Tyson's relationship with sexual desire likely offers insight into his constructed reality, as well. As he tells about striving to emulate the greats he studied, he says:

And I used to read a lot of the time. I read about Errol Flynn. I read about Jack Dempsey. You read all about all of these great people and what you read about them and what they all have in common were their conquest of great women and famous women or whatever it may be. I always thought in order to be a great figure you have to have these women in your life and the more women you conquer the greater figure you may be. I never knew that conquering so many women takes so much from you more than it gives or adds so much to you (Toback & Toback, 2008).

This narrative is filled with messages constructing Tyson's views on desire. The obvious central theme here is that great people have a lot of sex with great women, but specific phrasing choices tell even more. First, the boxer uses violent terms such as "conquest" and "conquering" to describe desire, and these words evoke images of women being dominated and denied choice. Also, women generally seem denied the right to be human because Tyson assumes that "people" are men, and "people" is set in opposition to "women." Those are possibly two separate groups to Tyson. Additionally, in alignment with his previous narrative that his sexual partners were "leeches," here he shares that they have taken more from him than they have given. To Tyson, desire appears violent and consumptive.

In telling of one encounter in which desire played a significant role, Tyson says, "I've always been interested in women. I'm drawn to them. They have a magnetic force towards me" (Toback & Toback, 2008). The magnet metaphor likely means that he finds it difficult to resist his desire for women. He goes on to describe a party where he met a model and they had a good conversation. He says, "She went to the bathroom and I just – I was craving her so desperately. I went to the bathroom after her and I sat on the sink

and I just started performing fellatio on her” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Again, his sexual partner lacks specifics that would allow her subject status and he responds to that magnet-like draw with pursuit. It is also notable that he uses the term “fellatio” incorrectly.

Desire is so centered around men for Tyson that it seems he can only use the word for oral sex performed on a man.

What Tyson expresses that he seeks in a woman progresses into contradiction. He claims to want a strong partner, saying, “That’s why I like companions. I like talking” (Toback & Toback, 2008). The traits he says he desires in a woman are “protection, loyalty, companionship. Loyalty, friendship, companionship, ferociousness” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He says that he wants a woman who will protect him and fight on his behalf, “even if I’m winning. Even if she’s 90 pounds” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Tyson shares, “I like strong women. I like – say – a woman that runs a CEO corporation. I like a strong woman with confidence. Massive confidence...” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He continues, however, “and then I wanna dominate her sexually. I like to watch her like a tiger watches their prey after they wound them” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He continues using this seeming stalker imagery when he says, “I want her to keep her distance for at least 20 to 30 minutes before I devour them and take them to the point of ecstasy” (Toback & Toback, 2008). That sentence marks the point at which he shifts from talking about a woman to generalizing every woman by first using “her” and then “they.” Tyson turns from what he wants to what he likes. His desire cannot seem to stay focused on a specific future woman he hopes for without descending into the anonymous sex he claims he knows well.

Additionally, what Tyson says he enjoys during the sexual act appears more focused on his own assertion of will. He admits he likes to deny women what they want during sex, saying, “I love saying no all the time. While I am making love, I love saying no” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He further states, “Always no. So I may give them a little, but they have to give me a lot. Whatever they want. ‘Turn me around.’ No...I turn ‘em around when I wanna turn ‘em around. No” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He says that this is because, “What I want is extreme. Normally what they want is not as extreme” (Toback & Toback, 2008). He tries to reframe this practice when he says, “I don’t like being loved. I like loving. I don’t feel like being loved. I don’t like love. I like...I have too much love to give and none to accept” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Here he seems to recast his domination of women as generosity, but that fails in light of his refusal of the women’s right to equal desire. He concludes this description by saying, “That’s what I want. I want to ravish them. Completely” (Toback & Toback, 2008). Sexual desire for Tyson seems to be about domination and objectification through the removal of a woman’s agency within the sex act.

In examining the overall illusory world of the film, it is important to recall that *Tyson* is a documentary. The majority of the film consists of medium to tight shots of Tyson speaking to the camera. It would be simple to ignore the role of the filmmaker here and credit all construction found within the film to the fighter; however, that would be a mistake. In addition to the fact that Toback chose the subject of the documentary, he also chose the ways in which Tyson’s narrative is communicated. There are a number of times when it is clear that Tyson has repeated a story during filming and Toback layers those – sometimes varied – retellings together. There are several instances of two different stories

being commingled, and that is likely Toback's narrative decision as Tyson, when speaking uninterrupted to the camera, tends to address one story with nearly obsessive detail, rather than relating separate events. This is to say that, though the film is a non-fiction account of one person's life, it is not appropriate to attribute all of the constructions within to the subject and ignore the strong editorial hand of the filmmaker.

With that in mind, the overall illusory narrative of the film is largely the result of object/subject construction and desire. The construction of womanhood within the film falls into a variation of the archetypal virgin/whore dichotomy in which the virgins present are portrayed as children. In some cases, they are Tyson's actual children, but there is also the case of Givens' asexual, "young lady" narration. The archetypal children, even the one to whom Tyson was married, are distanced from Tyson's own life. He is careful to avoid speaking negatively of them. Even when he disagrees with Givens' description of their marriage, he seems more shocked than angry. His anger appears set aside for the archetypal whores. The audience hears stories about his mother twice, but her name and image are not ever shared. The majority of the women that Tyson has had sex with are nameless and faceless, as well. Washington receives the worst of the treatment as he seems to cast her as the archetypal whore in revenge for her allegations of rape. Women, to Tyson, are likely whores until they prove otherwise. His initial treatments of Givens appear to fall into this pattern, as well. It is that every woman in the film is seemingly put into one of these two generalizing, objectifying categories that makes Monica's presence so startling. Tyson seems somewhat surprised by her throughout her narration. This is likely because she is the first woman in the entire documentary who does not fit into those categories for Tyson. He likely sees her as an

individual, and this confuses him. This appears to show that Tyson is willing to allow women subject status, but it is probable that it will require a long relationship and will confuse the boxer when it happens.

Women's sexuality seems to be something cast upon them by Tyson within this film. Women's own desires are mentioned once and they are dismissed as not extreme enough to satisfy him. Most of the women appear to be shown as sexual items to be consumed. Their sexuality does not demonstrate object permanence; they seem only to exist as sexual objects for Tyson while he is present and women may even cease to exist at all for him once he has moved on. Sex is never discussed outside of the temporary relationships he shares. While he has sex with the women he cares about, he does not discuss it. Therefore, the sexuality of women he cares about seems secondary to their other traits while the sexuality of women he objectifies appears as their only trait. Sex for Tyson seems to be always violent and something a man does to a woman. Women lack the agency to define and practice their own sexuality in this film.

In considering *Tyson* alongside *Love & Money* and *Exposed*, Monica is a central point of contrast. Not only is she constructed as the subject of her own story, but by showing archival footage from her perspective, she is the only woman among these three movies who is granted gaze. Additionally, she is gazing at Tyson at that moment. She is subject enough to be given constructive abilities. In examining likely causes for this difference from Catherine or Elizabeth, two main possibilities exist. First, Monica, unlike the others, is a mother. Tyson repeatedly mentions her skills as a mother with seeming respect that borders on awe. While she, like Catherine and Elizabeth, has had sex, it is likely the process of becoming a mother that ennobles Monica in a way that

moves her from object to subject. At the same time, she is not the only woman to have mothered a child with Tyson, and the other women are not mentioned in the film at all. Thus, some other factor separates Monica from these unnamed others. The second trait that Tyson mentions repeatedly is her steadfast faithfulness. Monica started dating him before the rape trial, and she supported him throughout the trial and his sentence.

Catherine leaves Stockheinz for Byron, to whom she was also not faithful, and Elizabeth ends relationships with Leo and Daniel. These characters are not mothers, and they also lack faithfulness. This sets Monica apart as a seeming ideal within Toback's illusory world construction.

Seduced and Abandoned

Seduced and Abandoned is the clearest construction of an objectified and sexualized womanhood among these films. It is also the easiest to connect to Toback since he is shown on screen taking part in this objectification and sexualization. The world of the film is the 2012 Cannes Film Festival, which is constructed as objectifying and commodifying. The gaze largely unimportant to the constructions as most of the film, like *Tyson*, is interview footage or archival footage. Object/subject construction, however, is evidenced throughout as women actors are commodified based on their attractiveness and the film that Toback is seeking to remake, *Last Tango in Paris*, is an objectifying piece, in its own consideration. *Last Tango in Paris* is a film about desire portrayed through graphic, anonymous sexual encounters, and the proposed film consists of few details beyond the extensive sex scenes. The result is a womanhood that considers women interchangeable commodities and a women's sexuality that does not take women into consideration.

The world of *Seduced and Abandoned* blurs the genre lines of filmmaking. The film is set at the 2012 Cannes Film Festival and resides at the possible intersection of documentary and fiction. It is unclear how serious Toback is about the premise of the film, that he and actor Alec Baldwin are attending Cannes to secure funding for a George W. Bush-era remake of *Last Tango in Paris* starring Baldwin and actress Neve Campbell. Additionally, Toback and Baldwin branch out beyond that purpose to interview a variety of filmmakers in attendance about their work and, ultimately, death. The world of the film is unsteady and uncertain as both of the men at the focus seem willing to follow the lead of every person they encounter.

Additionally, Cannes is described as dichotomous and Toback places the film almost entirely on one side of the division. When Baldwin asks Toback what sets Cannes apart from the other film festivals, the director points to two answers: first, the important moments in film history that have occurred there and, second, the sales of films that take place in the marketplace. Nearly ignoring the actual film festival, *Seduced and Abandoned* takes place in the international film market, attempting to secure funding by talking with a variety of film producers and millionaires while crossing into the artistic side only when demanded by the financial aspect the trip. At the same time, Toback and Baldwin interview an impressive array of popular and successful directors and actors, including Jeffrey Katzenberg, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese. This allows the film to be as much of a conversation between art and money as the festival is constructed to be. In service of that conversation between art and money, Toback makes extensive use of carousel imagery as a metaphor for the up and down negotiations that take place at the festival. Various shots of a carousel are shown as financial discussions

happen, and the soundtrack for the film is by Shostakovich, suggested by Baldwin because of “the dark poetic beauty of the *Fifth* juxtaposed with the perversely playful waltzes” (Toback & Toback, 2013). The mixture of darkness with the typical carousel waltz helps build a world that is both joyful and dangerous.

Gaze is similar to that of *Tyson*, in that there are markedly few women in the film with a significant portion of the women appearing within archival footage. Women appear in some background shots at Cannes and Baldwin has a woman accompanying him on the red carpet, but she never speaks. Campbell is present on screen for less than one minute toward the beginning of the film and then is spoken about and shown in stills throughout the rest. While she is on the screen, she is shot with camera angles over the shoulders of the two men, so the audience adopts their gaze. Also, she speaks little and most of her lines are her affirming words about Toback as director. When the audience is first introduced to explicit sexual footage within *Last Tango in Paris*, they are also shown Toback and Baldwin, leaning in together and smiling, in a split screen. A woman from the *Hollywood Reporter* meets with the two at the festival, but she is unnamed and only shown from behind. Interviews with actors Bérénice Bejo, Diane Kruger, and Jessica Chastain stay focused tightly on their faces and are interspersed with footage of their films, most of which includes sexuality or violence. They interview writer and producer Diablo Cody alongside scenes of the title character of *Juno* finding out she’s pregnant and a same-sex exploration from *Jennifer’s Body*. Denise Rich, who is noted to have gotten a large divorce settlement, is shown for seconds from a respectful distance before she tells Toback and Baldwin that she does not fund films and then she is never shown again. Women are absent from *Seduced and Abandoned* until they are necessary for

funding, and then they are shown in visual context with men and sexualized or victimized in archival footage.

Where art meets finance, film is an objectifying force for Toback. There are, as a result, a number of examples of objectification within the film. The most notable is the ongoing reduction of Neve Campbell's subject status. At the onset of *Seduced and Abandoned*, Toback appears to have come to a preliminary agreement with Campbell concerning her acting role in the proposed remake. He says to her regarding the Cannes trip:

I just wish to fuck you were coming with us. I really do. I mean – what fun it would be, apart from everything else – but we would be faithful to you in trying to cast the movie and raise the money with the absolute given that either it's you or it's no movie (Toback & Toback, 2013).

While this sounds like Toback is willing to stake the film on Campbell's involvement, that commitment does not last once he is in Cannes. When financier Mark Damon tells Toback that Neve "doesn't have marquee value today" and suggests recasting with Chastain, Toback's response is compounded by Baldwin's additional comments:

Toback: Here's my feeling because I don't want to throw Neve under the bus. I love Neve. I did a movie with her. What I could do...is invent a role for Neve, another role...

Baldwin: Have her play the spy.

Toback: ...and, yes, we can use Jessica.

Baldwin: So we kill Neve.

Toback: We don't kill her. We wound her. We wound her and she makes an appearance.

Baldwin: I seduce Neve and then I murder her.

Toback: Put her arm in a sling.

Baldwin: Neve is in the movie and I'll kill her.

Unnamed producer 1: We'll murder Neve.

Unnamed producer 2: Which will make you an action star.

Baldwin: Yeah (Toback & Toback, 2013).

At the very first sign of resistance, the commitment to Neve's starring role is reduced to a possibility of a Neve appearance in the film, with the role intended for her given to a more popular actor. Neve is presumed less important than the money. This is an ongoing narrative throughout the film as other film financiers, like Avi Lerner, say that they like Neve, but they will not fund a film led by Neve. By the end of the film, Toback and Baldwin have given up on the original plan, with Baldwin saying, "You and me and Neve – what we've learned is that ain't gonna happen" and Toback agreeing (Toback & Toback, 2013). It seems that Neve is no longer valuable once she is no longer able to earn the men money.

This resistance to support the movie is also affected by questions about Baldwin's ability to drive ticket sales since he has been on television instead of in movies for several years. These conversations still objectify women while also objectifying Baldwin. Lerner suggests that he should adopt Gerard Butler's method of return and surround himself by four more marketable women. Baldwin remarks, "So you want my character to go to Iraq. You want me to fuck four women in a hotel" (Toback & Toback, 2013). Lerner replies, "Five, if possible, five" (Toback & Toback, 2013). Here the proposed film devolves into a means of putting enough women into the film with Baldwin to justify funding, and the specific women do not matter. Baldwin suggests Oscar nominee Bejo, and while he and Lerner agree that she is "gorgeous" and "heart-stopping," Lerner says, "...she is not a girl I can sell on here" (Toback & Toback, 2013). This infantilizes Bejo by calling her a "girl," while only focusing on her beauty and market value and ignoring her talent and skill.

Desire is essential to *Seduced and Abandoned* and is present in the film in two main ways. First, the proposed *Last Tango in Takrit* seems to have little plot established except for sex. In the first meeting with a financier, Toback tells Damon that the film will be a “political romantic adventure” (Toback & Toback, 2013). Either that first representation of the intended script is sanitized for Damon, or Toback and Baldwin decide quickly that more sex needs to be added to sell the script, because less than fifteen minutes later, Baldwin tells Lerner that, “It is something very polarizing. We’ve come together and we have these bizarre sexual encounters” (Toback & Toback, 2013). He further details the intent by describing the sex as “you know, just kind of exploratory. I’m not gonna say animal sex. Wild sex. Exploratory sex. New Sex. New frontiers sex in a hotel room” (Toback & Toback, 2013). Baldwin is further reductive of the plot when he summarizes the film to Kruger by saying, “So, basically we come together and it’s like, ‘The world is ending. Let’s fuck’” (Toback & Toback, 2013). In *Seduced and Abandoned*, the entire hypothetical movie plot is focused on sex, with little attention paid to any other element. While desire is, thus, central to the documentary, it is always treated as a means to get money.

The second way that desire is depicted in the film is through the ongoing use of sexual metaphors to describe the film industry. Baldwin sets up the master metaphor when he says:

The movie business is the worst lover you’ve ever had in terms of you go back again and again and again and you go back seeking to recreate this experience you want to have. You go back with another chance to do something that you want to do in movie making and movie going. You are seduced and abandoned over and over and over again (Toback & Toback, 2013).

When Toback and Baldwin arrive in France, the director asks the actor, “So, how does it feel to be an hour away from losing your Cannes Film Festival virginity?” (Toback & Toback, 2013). Baldwin answers in kind, saying, “I’m already excited about losing my French Riviera virginity” (Toback & Toback, 2013). When meeting with a financier, Toback describes his tactics by saying, “Put it this way. I’m a prostitute who would’ve done what I’m doing as a prostitute, anyway” (Toback & Toback, 2013). When he meets Ben Schneider, son of *Seduced and Abandoned* investor Neal Schneider, and the son tells of his desire to be an actor, Toback offers to write a role for him and says, “We should try to seduce your father into being a partner” (Toback & Toback, 2013). By describing filmmaking in sexual terms, both Toback and Baldwin demonstrate the passion and tawdriness of their involvement in film. Film, like sex, is a function of desire.

There are a number of controversial elements of the film’s rhetorical situation that may further affect the audience. Since this is somewhat of a documentary, it is not possible to separate the elements in the film from the reality surrounding them in the real world, and these additional aspects of the film’s rhetorical situation might further affect the audience. First, *Last Tango in Paris* is highly objectifying of women. The first exposure the audience has within *Seduced and Abandoned* features Marlon Brando’s unnamed character telling a naked Maria Schneider’s unnamed character, “I want you to put your fingers up my ass,” before describing to her, as she does – in grotesque detail – how he wants to make her have sex with a pig, eat the pig’s vomit, and “smell the dying fart of the pig” as it dies while having sex with her (Toback & Toback, 2013). When he asks if she will do that for him, she answers, “Yes and more than that. And worse. And worse than before” (Toback & Toback, 2013). Within the genre-bending documentary,

Last Tango in Paris is a source of sex used to demean women. The late Schneider knew that her character would be raped in the film, but the director Bernardo Bertolucci had withheld the detail that it would involve the use of butter as a lubricant (Murphy, 2016). In a 2007 interview, she said, “I felt a little raped, both by Marlon and by Bertolucci” (Murphy, 2016). In 2013, Bertolucci gave an interview in which he admitted, “I’ve been, in a way, horrible to Maria because I didn’t tell her what was going on, because I wanted her reaction as a girl, not as an actress. I wanted her to react humiliated” (Murphy, 2016). While Schneider made it clear that she was not raped, in a modern context it is likely that Brando committed sexual assault on camera by putting butter on Schneider’s genitalia without her consent (Murphy, 2016). The objectifying nature of *Last Tango in Paris*, on screen and off, may well affect how audience members view *Seduced and Abandoned*.

The documentary also features a number of filmmakers who have been accused of sexual assault or harassment. Producer and financier Lerner was named as a defendant in a sexual harassment case in 2017 (Maddaus, 2017). A former executive in the company alleges that women were referred to as “whores,” “cocksuckers,” and “mistresses” and that women were encouraged to wear revealing clothing with no undergarments to work (Maddaus, 2017). Additionally, actor Terry Crews has announced that he will not be involved in *The Expendables 4* because Lerner threatened him due to an unrelated harassment allegation by Crews (Chokshi, 2018). Director Roman Polanski is interviewed in the film, and since 1977 he has been avoiding arrest for raping multiple underage girls (Wakeman, 2017). He holds dual citizenship in France and Poland, both of which refuse to extradite him to face charges in the United States (Wakeman, 2017). Brett Ratner appears in the film as he introduces Toback to a millionaire who might be

willing to finance the proposed film. Ratner faces allegations of sexual misconduct ranging from harassment to rape from six women, including actresses Natasha Henstridge and Olivia Munn (Kaufman & Miller, 2017). In a January 2017 interview with *Variety*, Ratner claims Toback and Polaski among his best friends (Clement, 2017). This is a significant presence of alleged harassers and rapists in one film, and this cannot be ignored given the current rhetorical moment.

Though not included in that group and not appearing in the film, “Woody Allen is the perfect director,” according to Baldwin. Though Allen has been prolific, he has been equally controversial for decades. In 1992, actress Mia Farrow filed for divorce from him when she found that he had been having an affair with her adopted daughter, Soon Yi Previn (Isaac, 2018). Farrow’s daughter Dylan alleges that she was sexually assaulted by Allen when she was seven years old and a Connecticut state’s attorney claimed he had probable cause in 1993, but no charges have been filed in spite of repeated pleas by the younger Farrow (Farrow, 2017). The inclusion of these men in a film by Toback adds a layer of convergence between the world of the film and the real 2018 context surrounding the filmmaker. The presence on screen of men who have been accused of sex crimes in addition the idolization of Allen create a scenario in which sexual harassment and assault are normalized and not to be considered when considering a man’s greatness.

The overall illusory narrative in *Seduced and Abandoned* is, like *Tyson*, largely the result of objectification and desire. In *the film*, women are expendable and interchangeable commodities who are more valuable for their looks than their abilities. Toback makes certain assurances to Campbell before leaving for Cannes, but he is willing to ignore those promises once another woman would benefit him more. Even

women speak of themselves as commodities, as is exemplified by Bejo when she says, “The thing is I’m not 20 years old any more and I know today I’m on top of the wave. Tomorrow I won’t. Especially actresses and I know how it is” (Toback & Toback, 2013). She is aware, both, of the commodification of actors, in general, and the heightened value placed on youth for actresses. Toback talks with both Chastain and Kruger about the role because it does not matter which one accepts; it only matters that they make money. Yes, there is a possibility that Baldwin could be replaced, as well, but they only focus on Ryan Gosling because he is a singular draw for audiences. The specific woman is far less important and that is because the women are never treated as individuals.

Throughout *Seduced and Abandoned*, women’s sexuality is intended for the benefit of men. That is constructed as such directly in word and action. The only time a woman is shown seeking sexual pleasure is the brief scene from *Jennifer’s Body* and the focus on young, beautiful women experimenting with a same-sex experience is still likely to appeal to men. Throughout, it is assumed that any actress would take the role because of what a great art piece it will be, regardless of the sexual requirements. Women are shown in sexual situations through archival footage of previous films, and these continue that trend toward men’s pleasure. The additional rhetorical situation concerning men featured in the documentary adds to the overall sense of sexual objectification. Most notable is that the film selected for the honor of imitation is *Last Tango in Paris*, a controversial erotic film that includes many types of anonymous, non-normative sex scenes and a rape scene. The very inspiration for *Seduced and Abandoned* is a film that makes women tools for men’s erotic fantasies and removes agency from the sexual relationship.

Like *Tyson*, *Seduced and Abandoned* is a documentary and, as such, it is important to remember that Toback is still constructing the narrative of the film. Toback, however, appears in this film, making this factor far more obvious throughout. Neve Campbell, like Catherine, is a commodity to be traded for the benefit of the men. This is even more overt in *Seduced and Abandoned* as the audience in privy to Campbell's declining value to the men as they fail to secure funding using her as the tool. While all four films have demonstrated the objectification of women, the documentaries have illuminated that objectification most fully. Here, an audience can see Toback directly commodifying, sexualizing, and objectifying women in the film. While *Tyson's* objectification is clear, that of *Seduced and Abandoned* is even more stark and graphic. The final film is also lacking an equivalent for Monica; there is no ideal women to demonstrate subject status, thus making *Seduced and Abandoned* an example of uninterrupted sexualization and objectification.

Analysis

It is certain that films exist within the context of their creation, but they are also permanent art pieces that are re-contextualized and reevaluated with repeated viewings. Rapidly changing social contexts provide for changing interpretations of films and may serve to problematize elements of the films that were considered normal at the time of their creation. In the case of these four films by James Toback, the current public rhetoric concerning women and sexual harassment and assault serve this re-contextualizing purpose. In the 36 years that have passed between *Love & Money's* release and 2018, the roles of women in the United States have changed and progressed significantly. *Seduced and Abandoned* was released only five years ago, but it is still affected by changing

context, especially since the filmmaker is a key figure within the piece. In examining how Toback constructs womanhood and women's sexuality, the examinations of world, gaze, object/subject, and desire in each of the artifacts combine to produce a likely master illusion.

In examining worlds of the films, the results were mixed. One factor was the delineation between fictional films *Love & Money* and *Exposed* and documentaries *Tyson* and *Seduced and Abandoned*. While Toback was selecting specific locations within the parameters of the documentary locations, he still had to function within those parameters. While it might be entertaining that he and Baldwin interviewed Bernardo Bertolucci in the hotel suite named in their guest's honor, more often the interview locations were chosen by the person being interviewed. Mike Tyson, for instance, was mostly filmed on some comfortable seating around his house. That left few options for world construction in both documentaries, and the choices made had less impact than was true for the fictional movies. In situating *Love & Money* and *Exposed* at multiple locations, Toback was able to more carefully shape the Midwestern farm in contrast to the Parisian mosque. This allowed fictional plot dangers not present in the documentaries to interact with the dangers constructed in the movies' worlds. The terrain of fictional Costa Salva amplified the danger of the international negotiations taking place while the red carpet at Cannes merely reinforced that they were at a film festival. While this division exists, it is also true that Toback does not use world to great advantage in the two fictional films, either. The lack of personal possessions or interactions with the spaces make the locations seem like places the characters find themselves rather than a familiar place they negotiate regularly. This may be true of traveler Elizabeth, but it should not be true of Daniel in his

apartment. This lack of familiarity with the worlds of the films allows for reinforcement of the overall mood of the films – whether that is danger or glamour – but it prevents the worlds from having a large role in illusory constructions.

The lack of complexity and importance in the films' world constructions also serves to essentialize the settings in ways that mimic the filmmaker's essentialization of women. Worlds within the films are easily described in a few words and they do not change throughout the film. Costa Salva is war-torn. New York City is dangerous. Tyson's home is expensive. Cannes is objectifying. There is no allowance for variation within individual settings, and this tendency to construct each setting in only the most simplistic of ways reduces the effectiveness of world creation for an audience. This simplification of settings further reduces the audience's ability to deeply engage with the world of the film because the essentialized spaces do not resonate as real due to a lack of detail and relatable variation. For example, within midtown Manhattan, a primary setting in *Exposed*, the rhetor could have chosen from a plethora of cityscapes, living spaces, restaurants, and stores, but the filmmaker chooses only to show inexpensive businesses and abusive people. Because Toback's world constructions fail to acknowledge the detailed variations of life that, according to de Lauretis (de Lauretis, 1985), mark feminist films, the effect of his reductive world constructions is the reinforcement of the patriarchal tendency to essentialize the complex, furthering the cause of a man's perspective of narrative filmmaking.

Gaze contributes in some key ways, but its role in illusion construction is inconsistent. In *Love & Money*, gaze places the audience in alignment with Byron through camera angle and focus, and this makes the audience complicit in the

objectification and sexualization of Catherine. Specifically, the gaze during the hotel sex scenes lingers over Catherine's body on in part and focuses on her face only when the camera is either taking the place of Byron or is directly over his shoulder. This places the audience in position on top of Catherine during the sex acts. The voyeuristic gaze in *Exposed* seems to mimic the stalking eye of Daniel. The camera maintains a distance, as does Daniel, until he and Elizabeth have sex. During the seduction, the camera is close, circling the pair in an almost participatory manner. While the assumed man's gaze of the two fictional films contributes to the sexualization and objectification present in Toback's illusory narrative, gaze has less of an impact in the two documentaries, with one notable exception. Camera angles are largely journalistic in nature in *Tyson* and *Seduced and Abandoned*, perhaps because the focus is most often a man. The one exception is when the camera is operated by Monica in archival home footage used in *Tyson*. This one moment, out of all of the films, puts a woman in control of the camera and the audience sees what she is looking at – Tyson – in the way she chooses – playing lovingly with their daughter. Viewers know she has the camera because they hear her giggle. These factors combine to allow for an assumed woman's gaze for the only time among the four films. It points toward Monica as an ideal not to be objectified or sexualized.

Objectification, nonetheless, is persistent across the four films. Catherine is a commodified sexual object who exists to further her husband's career goals. She is never treated as if she has value beyond her sexual attractiveness. Elizabeth is childlike and easily manipulated to suit Daniel's desires, even after she leaves him. Women, except for subject Monica, are tools for sex in *Tyson*, and most of them do not have a name or face. *Seduced and Abandoned* may completely lack elements that are not directly the result of

or a reflection of the objectification of women. It seems that Neve Campbell may be a subject at the beginning, but it is quickly established that her value to Toback is equal only to the funding she can help him secure. The very inspiration for the documentary is an earlier erotic film that is only described in reference to its atypical and objectifying sex scenes. Women across the films are commodities to be used in any way to men's benefit, and this constructs all but one woman as an object.

In examining desire, the construction across films is aligned. Sexual desire is for men. Women's sexual desire serves no purpose for women, but rather exists exclusively to please or further the personal objectives of men. Catherine's sexuality is a weapon for her husband to use to secure Byron's assistance. Elizabeth's sexuality is a tool with which Daniel will secure her help in bringing down an enemy. The sexuality of each woman with whom Tyson has sex is his to demand or deny. Sexuality in *Seduced and Abandoned* is merely a tool for making money. In each film, men define the parameters of sexual desire and determine participation in the act of sex. Consent in all four films is somewhat blurred. Catherine and Elizabeth are both manipulated into having sex. Tyson is convicted of one rape and admits to having "took advantage of" other women. The women actors at Cannes are never asked about their willingness to take part in explicit scenes. Instead it is assumed they will because it is such a great film. Women's pleasure is only ever a focus in *Tyson*, and then the boxer centers himself as a great sexual partner. Instead, men across the films use sexual desire to further their own interests.

The examinations of these four semiotic narrative units, unify to illuminate master illusory constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality within these artifacts. Women are archetypal virgin children or whores. Women lack agency, and they are white

unless they exist within the story of a man of color. Additionally, Toback's women are commodified for the benefit of men. These factors are only true, however, when women exist at all. Women within this illusory world are generally unnecessary unless temporarily of use to a man. The illusion narrative of women's sexuality is equally troubling. Women's sexuality belongs entirely to men. Women have no agency to shape their own sexual experiences. Women's sexuality, while based on superficial beauty, will lead to a long-term devaluation and loss of agency. Given the great number of options available to him as filmmaker, Toback constructs an illusory world in which superficial beauty earns a woman the right to become an objectified sexual commodity for a man's benefit, but this sexual relationship will be her downfall.

For Toback, women are either archetypal children or whores. In *Love & Money*, Toback includes only one significant woman, and her entire role within the film is to have sex with the principle man. In *Exposed*, Elizabeth is a Midwestern innocent whose life is complicated by sex. Her affair with Leo is the beginning of her downfall and, though the reason is not clear, her sexual relationship with Daniel leads directly to her involvement with terrorists and eventually causes the deaths of most main characters. The title figure of *Tyson* constructs most women in his life, including his mother, as whores, but he attributes childlike qualities to the "young lady" he first married, Robin Givens. The outlier of all of the women in these four films is Tyson's second wife Monica, who is individualized and granted subject status within the film. In fact, her last name is never mentioned, and this makes the audience identify with her more personally. She is the only person other than Toback to control the audience's gaze in all four films and, as such, is the only woman to control that gaze. Though Monica does not fit into either archetype,

there are no women except whores in *Seduced and Abandoned*. The real women behind the actresses are not considered at all. Instead, the audience is given an objectified and hypersexualized character for a possible movie and all other women serve the purpose of fitting that particular whore mold. In a 2018 context, this illusion of bipolar realities fails to acknowledge a variety between women as well as the possibility that an individual woman can be multi-faceted. In 2018, being sexually active does not require being hypersexual and being childlike is not the only other option. This illusion contributes to the false narratives of “good girls” not having sex and women having any amount of sex disqualifies them from some level of worthiness.

Additionally, women in these films lack agency. They do not have a right to make decisions outside of the service of men. Catherine in *Love & Money* makes almost no decisions in the film, instead following the lead of her husband and, at his command, Byron. After *Exposed*'s Elizabeth decides to leave school for New York and is met with abuse by Leo and rejection by her father, she then proceeds to react to men, rather than act on her own, for the rest of the film. In *Tyson*, women who make decisions are a source of anger for the boxer. He is incredulous that Givens files for divorce and he is – understandably – vitriolic in reaction to Washington's claims of rape. It is notable that his divorce from Monica is not framed as a decision by either party, but it is rather described as something that happened. The women of *Seduced and Abandoned* are never shown making a decision with one exception: a wealthy philanthropist tells Toback and Baldwin no, and the moment in the film is immediately ended. This lack of agency shows audiences an illusory world in which women are subject to the will of men and lack the right to make their own decisions. This thinking is rooted in the historical patriarchy, but

– in a contemporary context – likely lacks resonance with the women of 2018. The #MeToo movement, itself, is a rejection of this lack of agency and a stand for women taking the right to make decisions for themselves.

When Toback is in complete control of the casting of the film, women are white. Catherine in *Love & Money* has a dialect that serves to make her more exotic, but she is still white. All of the women in *Exposed* are white. The women interviewed in *Seduced and Abandoned* are white. The only women of color who appear in these four films in any significant way appear in *Tyson*. This means that, for Toback, women of color only exist in connection with men of color. Without a Black man, there are no Black women. When this erasure is considered in light of how most of the women in *Tyson* are constructed, it is additionally problematic. With Tyson's sexual partners being the only representations of Black womanhood in any of Toback's films, Black women are uniformly objectified and treated as disposable sexual partners with the exception of Monica. When Toback thinks on his own of women, he thinks of white women. When womanhood is recontextualized by the presence of a Black man, Black women can exist; however, they are limited in role to that of nameless sexual partner. The intersection of Blackness and womanhood is a place of further objectification and erasure for Toback.

Women are also commodified in this films. They are objectified through this illusion that their worth can be bought and sold. In *Love & Money*, Catherine is as much of a commodity as the silver her husband desires. He commands her to seduce Byron in order to secure his services. Her body and time are her husband's to trade for his own benefit. *Exposed*'s Elizabeth is viewed by Daniel and Rivas – and by herself – as a thing of value that can be traded for information or safety. Even after personal or sexual

connections are made, her primary worth is as something to trade. *Tyson* directly describes women as things that are collected by great men. He wants to collect many women so that he will be seen as great. Women, with only one exception, are items that he wants, pursues, and throws aside once he has used them. In *Seduced and Abandoned* Toback holds conversations in which he tries to get more funding by substituting other women for Campbell. She is exchangeable and of a depreciating value. These constructions give the illusions that women have values that depend entirely on what they have to offer men. Their value is variable based on their age, attractiveness, and how much men desire them. This, too, is being challenged in 2018. The #TimesUp movement is pursuing equal pay in films between men and women. This serves to problematize Toback's assignment of varying monetary value based on superficial factors. This new context assumes that women have inherent worth that is equal to men's and that they have the right to demand that this worth is honored.

Perhaps the most problematic construction of women within these films is that they are not necessary. There are few women with speaking roles in the films and background shots do not often include women. The result is that women are not shown as a normal part of the world. In the two fictional films, the women who exist are interchangeable non-individuals who could be nearly anyone else. Catherine could be any beautiful woman. Elizabeth could be any young woman. They would all serve the same purpose for the men. In the two documentaries, women are almost absent outside of the discussion of sex. It is as if Tyson, Toback, and Baldwin rarely encounter women in their real lives. The number of women shown in each film is easily identified because they are so few. As troublesome as the other constructions of womanhood are, this one stands out

because it contributes to erasure of women, rather than mistreatment. Women for Toback are more often not thought of than thought of negatively. This erasure means that women are not included as part of the audience gaze because women are not considered, in general. Women are not considered in writing because women are not considered. Women are not considered in direction because women are not considered. Women are not considered for contractual equality because women are not considered. This erasure reinforces the patriarchy and allows for further mistreatment of women because they are not considered as equal, or even important, parts of the man's narrative. This is a foundational problem with Toback's illusion of womanhood.

The equally problematic construction of women's sexuality includes that women do not own their own sexuality; their sexuality belongs to men. In *Love & Money*, Catherine is commanded to have sex with Byron and then he controls the means of the sexual relationship that starts. She has no right to refuse or request what she would like because she does not own her sexuality. In *Exposed*, Elizabeth is hit when she ends her affair with Leo. When she has sex with Daniel, it is sensual and pleasing for her at the time, but he immediately reframes the act when he tells her the truths of who he is and what he wants from her. Tyson directly admits that he has raped women and brags about how refusing women what they want during sex is pleasing to him. The women of *Seduced and Abandoned* are never consulted about the sex scenes in which they would be acting. This is exacerbated by the off-screen factor that so many men who appear in the film have been accused of sexual harassment and assault as well as the problematic nature of *Last Tango in Paris*. In a 2018 context, this lack of sexual agency is especially troubling since that patriarchal view can be a contributing factor to many instances of

sexual harassment and assault. Holding the illusion that women do not control their own sexuality, a man can justify both his ownership of it and behaviors that result in a variety of sexual offenses. This illusion is problematic and addressing it is a key part of discourse contemporaneous to this study.

Women's sexuality is also superficial, but sex is constructed as yielding long-term reduction of agency. Women's sexuality is repeatedly connected to their physical beauty. Catherine is valued and complimented for her physical beauty in *Love & Money*.

Photographer Greg convinces *Exposed's* Elizabeth to model because men will fantasize about her appearance. In *Tyson*, the boxer comments on women's beauty and desire for their bodies whenever he talks about women. The only reason any woman is discussed for casting in *Seduced and Abandoned* is that she is attractive. Beauty is what qualifies a woman to be a sexual commodity for men, which is women's ultimate purpose. However, having sex will cause women's downfall. Catherine's willingness to have sex with Byron, though her husband ordered it, leads to fights with her husband and the eventuality that she leaves Stockheinz for what she believes will be a temporary affair with Byron.

Elizabeth's sexual relationship with Daniel leads to his death and the deaths of many others. The women with whom Tyson has sex are usually dismissed afterward and they are viewed as "filthy" by the very man who had sex with them. Such a construction is not easy to identify in *Seduced and Abandoned* since no sex happens in the documentary and the plot of the proposed film is not clear. The overall narrative illusion within these films, however, is that sex is superficial and dangerous. This narrative is problematic in 2018 because the belief that sex is superficial but somehow contaminates a woman contributes to a subversion of public discourse about women's sexuality. If women are shamed for

having sex, then openly addressing sexual assault and harassment has consequences for the women who make allegations. In the illusory world, being “filthy” is worse than committing rape, and that contributes to silencing.

The overall illusion of women presented in these four films is that for the benefit of men, but that sex will be the woman’s downfall. With a seemingly endless number of narrative options, this is the world Toback chooses to create over and over. It is perhaps telling that when Baldwin asks the director the purpose behind the proposed film in *Seduced and Abandoned*, Toback answers, “Ideally, it would be our analogous attempt to erase the line between role player and role to create something bold and dark for you” (Toback & Toback, 2013). Here he expresses a desire to conflate the on screen with the off – the film with life, and such for the gratification of Baldwin. It certainly cannot be said that Toback is guilty or innocent because of how he chooses to make a film, but it is reasonable to wonder how much his illusory constructions of womanhood and sexuality have in common with his off-screen views of the same.

Discussion

As Wilder wrote, “Whoever defines the code or the context, has control and all answers which accept that context abdicate the responsibility of redefining it” (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 3). It has been the purpose of this study to accept, not abdicate, that responsibility of redefining the code and context of Toback’s films. The application of feminist semiotic narrative criticism has generated evidence that answers the research questions and illuminates the illusory world the director constructs when he has almost total control. Examining this narrative world within the context of the #MeToo rhetorical moment disrupts the traditional interpretations of Toback’s narrative units and problematizes the constructions he presents. There is still much work to be done and this study serves as an early contribution in a changing world. Further reflection will allow for refinements in the multimethodological approach employed and suggest further areas of study. This chapter will provide that reflection by, first, summarizing key findings. Then, possible future directions for study will be suggested before discussing the limitations of the current study. Finally, concluding thoughts will situate the study within the real world of women and discuss implications for women and filmmakers, alike.

Summary

A multimethodological approach combining feminist semiotics with traditional narrative criticism was used to examine four films by James Toback: *Love & Money*, *Exposed*, *Tyson*, and *Seduced and Abandoned*. The results suggest that Toback builds an illusory world that objectifies women and constructs women’s sexuality through a man-dominated frame. In doing so, he upholds the patriarchal expectations of gender roles and reinforces damaging historical narratives about womanhood. Additionally, it casts

women's sexuality as a tool for men and not truly women's at all. These replications and reinforcements of damaging traditional narratives concerning womanhood and women's sexuality must be questioned in a 2018 world.

The analysis points to a perspective on womanhood that does not value them. Women are constructed in a child/whore dichotomy that infantilizes women until it condemns them for becoming sexual and, therefore, whores. Across the artifacts, every woman except one fits within this construction. Women have no agency and are not allowed to make decisions that benefit themselves. Every decision is to benefit a man. Women are white, with women of color only appearing when contextualized alongside a man of color. Even then, women of color are further objectified by their position at the intersection of race and gender. Women's ultimate duty is to serve as a commodity to be assigned value and traded by men. Perhaps most troubling, women are unnecessary – seemingly interchangeable – and therefore, are subject to erasure. In total, Toback seems to avoid considering women unless they are absolutely necessary.

Women's sexuality is reduced to even more basic constructions. First, women's sexuality does not belong to women; instead, men are in control of the women's sexuality. Women only gain the right to be sexually objectified by men when they reach a certain threshold of superficial attractiveness, but they never gain agency within the sex act. Sexuality is also dangerous to women. Sexual behaviors mark them, as Tyson said, "filthy" and may well lead to danger for the women, themselves, and others around them. Women's sexuality is not an innate part of their whole person because Toback does not seem to consider women whole people. Their sexuality is men's to demand, deny, and construct, and this long-term reduction in personal sexual agency offers a toxic

reinforcement of the very cultural narratives that engender sexual abuses and the silence around them.

The master narrative constructed by Toback is that superficial beauty qualifies women to be objectified sexual commodities for the benefit of men, but sex is women's downfall. This illusory world view is constant throughout all four films, and it interacts with the 2018 real world context in problematic ways. This narrative may not resonate with the lived experiences of women, but likely mimics the historical narratives used to shape women throughout history. It summarizes everything that the #MeToo movement seeks to dismantle and, as such, is a glaring example of men's objectification of women. Additionally, the allegations against Toback seem to contribute to the context of the films and the combination justifies the question of whether Toback's real life beliefs and behaviors are in alignment with the world illusion he has constructed for women and women's sexuality.

Future Implications

For the current study, constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality were examined. At the study's conclusion, it is possible that this method could yield valuable results concerning Toback's constructions of manhood and men's sexuality, as well. There are far more characters that were men than women, and so the narratives and semiotic cues are more plentiful toward those constructions. It is likely that traditional narratives about manhood and men's sexuality contribute as much to public discourse concerning sexual harassment and assault as the women's equivalents. This study would further accept the obligation of redefining the codes and contexts surrounding the films by illuminating the role of masculinity.

Toback has also given a number of interviews throughout his years in Hollywood, and those may serve as valuable sources of information concerning his real world views on womanhood and women's sexuality. While this multimethodological approach might prove sufficient for this study, it is likely not the best choice since it includes semiotic narrative units that are less useful when the gaze is journalistic in a television interview or the world is largely absent within a print article. Instead, fantasy-theme analysis would allow for construction and evaluation of the themes concerning womanhood and women's sexuality that Toback employs in his daily life. This method would be appropriate, regardless of the format of the interview, since it allows for close examination of text to determine the overall themes.

Application of feminist semiotic narrative criticism to other filmmakers accused of sexual harassment might be useful in assessing their constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality, as well. There is a seemingly ever-growing list of candidates for this study as more and more filmmakers are accused. Weinstein is a prolific filmmaker with an extensive list of producer credits, but 1986's *Playing for Keeps* is the only film that puts him in a similar position of control to Toback, serving as producer, writer, and director ("Harvey Weinstein," 2018). It is likely that a study examining films during which his accusers say they were harassed might provide a greater breadth of material to explore while still maintaining a reasonable focus. Other filmmakers mentioned within this study, such as Brett Ratner or Roman Polanski, might also provide insights into their constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality through their films.

It is important not to overlook victims of assault and harassment who are men. A November 2017 article in *USA Today* shares the stories of the 15 men who have accused

actor Kevin Spacey of sexual assault (Puente, 2017). Filmmaker Bryan Singer has faced two failed civil suits that claimed sexual harassment, and in December 2017 he was accused of raping a 17 year-old boy (Cooney, 2018). A study examining the real world narratives surrounding these and similar claims could illuminate the differences between discursive treatments of accusers who are men and accusers who are women. This could offer critique of possible cultural biases involving men victims and social expectations of men's sexuality.

Additionally, the method of semiotic narrative criticism might also be useful in another context by assessing world creation for specific directors, such as Baz Lurhmann or Christopher Nolan, who have unique and identifiable filmmaking styles. It is possible that their world construction is influenced by the other semiotic narrative units of gaze, subject/object, and desire. By examining the semiotic elements of their films with this multimethodological approach, it might be possible to better understand how they construct worlds that are, at once, entirely familiar and entirely alien.

Limitations

The multimethodological approach applied in this study reveals an overarching illusory narrative among the four films studied, but it also has limitations. Although the method assumes co-construction of semiotic codes between a filmmaker and an audience, it is impossible to assess an audience's construction without the addition of focus groups or the implementation of experimental design. The addition of these qualitative methods would allow for more complete understandings of the effects of the films among a contemporary audience, and this would further advance the understanding of the ways in which traditional narratives are redefined among changing rhetorical situations.

Since the coding was completed entirely by the author, all analysis and co-construction derive, at least in part, from her subjective understanding of key concepts in the application of the method. The question of what effect these films have on society or even one audience cannot be assessed in this manner. To address these questions, a future study would need to assess audience reactions utilizing qualitative methods in order to discover how real women are affected by the constructions of womanhood and women's sexuality within the films.

Additionally, the present method was challenging when shifting the focus of the study from narrative fiction to documentary films. The role of world within the film, for example, is vastly different when the setting is designed and built specifically for the film as opposed to being selected from options within a subject's home. Documentary filmmaking limits the choices for the filmmaker and, as a result of these reduced choices, it is quite possible that the world of the film is less significant because there were limited decisions allowed regarding setting. This also affected the analysis of gaze in the documentary films. Some shots were archival, from other films, or set up rapidly, so that there were fewer moments in which the director was making specific, pre-determined choices. While Toback was still making decisions, the impact of those decisions was likely diminished as he did not have the full scope of options that were available in his fictional films. While the method was still applicable within documentary films, coding had to be mediated by a shift in understandings due to more limited directorial choices.

Another limitation that emerged has been the selection of artifacts. Selecting films in which Toback served as producer, writer, and director created a 25-year gap between the narrative films and the documentary films. Since, 25 years of film history and

technological and craft development took place between *Exposed* and *Tyson*, there are inherent differences in what is acceptable to show in films, how women are portrayed, and how gaze serves the stories. The considerations of the four semiotic narrative units are not all equal among the artifacts, so there is more analysis to be performed on the later pieces due to historical and technological innovation. These advances are mitigated somewhat by the reduced directorial choice of the documentaries; however, the significant increase in factors such as explicit language made for a marked increase in analysis. To close the gap in years between artifacts, it would be appropriate to examine additional films, even if Toback served only as writer and director. This shift in criteria would include eight additional films and would allow for the study of a more complete timeline for the filmmaker. While a separate producer would provide some oversight, Toback would still maintain significant creative control as the writer and director of the additional films.

The public discourse concerning Toback and #MeToo at the time of this writing is dynamic, and constant change within the rhetorical landscape makes the inclusion of key elements of that discourse a challenge. The original intent of the paper included more connection between the allegations against Toback and his work, but that correlation is impossible to make with any certainty at a time when the charges remain allegations and not convictions. The filmmaker, himself, chose to blur the line between personal and professional – life and art – so it would be reasonable to compare the narrative constructions in his films with the narrative constructions in interviews with him to see if there are correlations there that are not possible amid legal proceedings. Additionally, while the study is timely as of submission, it will likely be contextually outdated as

additional allegations come to light, charges are filed, and the discursive culture of the United States continues to evolve.

Conclusion

The landscape of public sexual harassment and assault discourse is changing rapidly. As of this writing the latest addition is that actress Chloe Dykstra quietly published an unlisted essay on *Medium* detailing her emotional and sexual abuse by an ex-boyfriend who works in the entertainment industry (Dykstra, 2018). Though she did not name him in the piece, readers quickly reasoned that she was talking about Chris Hardwick (Patten & Hipes, 2018). This inference was confirmed when Hardwick released a denial 12 hours after the Dykstra post (Patten & Hipes, 2018). In a 2018 #MeToo environment, however, Dykstra is being believed and shown support while The Nerdist, a company cofounded by Hardwick, has removed his name from their site (Nerdist, 2018), AMC has cancelled his talk show and reassigned his Comic Con panels, and NBC has announced that they will assess the situation and consider his continued involvement with the game show *The Wall* (Ramos, 2018).

Dykstra's narrative is familiar. She was infantilized: "Sometimes he'd let me go play D&D, but I always had a curfew" (Dykstra, 2018). She was denied agency: "Our first convention together, San Diego Comic Con, he instructed me not to leave the hotel room" (Dykstra, 2018). She was commodified: "I was quickly pressured to take an on-camera job at his company I didn't want (I do *not* like to work for my significant others), because he insinuated I would be ungrateful not to accept it" (Dykstra, 2018). She was unnecessary: "I generally stopped speaking unless spoken to while with him, drifting through life like a ghost" (Dykstra, 2018). Her sexuality belonged to him: "...so I did

what he said, including letting him sexually assault me. Regularly. I was expected to be ready for him when he came home from work” (Dykstra, 2018). Her sexuality was her downfall: “Because of my leaving him for someone else, he made calls to several companies I received regular work from to get me fired by threatening to never work with them. He succeeded. I was blacklisted” (Dykstra, 2018). In fact, Dykstra shares that she almost attempted suicide.

It is true that the illusory constructions of womanhood and women’s sexuality that are developed within Toback’s work exist at one point in time, but they do not exist in that point in time alone or in isolation. These constructions are semiotic illusions because they are not reality, itself, but they do exist within reality. They commingle with the narratives of every woman Toback contacts and, in general, every woman. They are viewed through lenses of personal experience and changing culture. They are viewed by victims and perpetrators who assess those illusory narratives for fidelity and probability by aligning them with their own narrative constructions of the world. If they align with what the viewer finds to be true, then they are used to support that view. If they do not align for the viewer, they are rejected.

That is, historically, where this study lies. We are at a time in which perpetrators of sexual violence who defend their actions are finding their narratives rejected by a growing number of women. This rejection is yielding reactions that mimic Byron’s violent domination, Daniel’s casual dismissal, Tyson’s incredulity, or Toback’s joking. Still, the rejections continue. With every woman like Chloe Dykstra, who asserts her own narrative, they continue.

What does this mean for film? Filmmakers, if they want to remain relevant in changing social cultures, must consider changing power dynamics as they create their art. They cannot continue to write jokes at the expense of those with less power and hope that they will not be outdated soon. As *Doonesbury* comic artist Garry Trudeau asserts, “Ridiculing the non-privileged is almost never funny – it’s just mean” (Trudeau, 2015). Comedy, in that frame, can – and should – be a tool of dismantling inequality. Beyond comedy, filmmakers can consider the feminist semiotic units de Lauretis proposed. Are belongings shown that are important to women? Is there an assumption that there are women audience members? Are women given subject status? Are women in control of their own sexuality? Finally, what is the overall illusion narrative of the film for women? If each of these is pondered – and then considered again for other minority groups – films are less likely to uphold the power structures that objectify and erase those at the margins.

What does this mean for women? The answer is, perhaps, more difficult as it must be accepted that women are not a monolith. There is variety in the lived experiences, worldviews, and interest levels between women, and even individual women are sometimes complicated in their sense of subject status. It is possible to build toward some useful truth, however. While no film will heal a woman who has been hurt, it is possible for a film to repeat the harm and further marginalize a woman who is already surrounded by damaging narratives in her real life. If filmmakers were to consider the symbols they are encoding from a de Lauretis lens, it is likely that this additional damage can be avoided. Also, applying Script Theory, incremental exposures to subject narratives for women can be employed as rehearsed scripts later in life by men and women. This could

change how men behave towards women, but also how women react to that behavior and how women behave towards themselves.

This cultural moment is ripe for these types of changes in film culture. Actor Rose McGowan, a Weinstein accuser, says in her book *Brave*, “You may think that what happens in Hollywood doesn’t affect you. You’re wrong. My darlings, who do you think is curating your reality?” (McGowan, 2018). Film has real effects on real women by supporting or subverting the patriarchy and, in this rhetorical moment, there is an opportunity for redefining the traditional narratives. Scholar Leigh Gilmore questions whether this discursive moment can last (Gilmore, 2017). If there is no action, it will not. Women are demanding acknowledgement of their lived truths and accountability, in some form, for the men who harassed or assaulted them. This is a first step that has happened organically. It is necessary for the next steps to be choices. Filmmakers can increase the permanence of this shift by changing how they construct women in their art pieces. Film audiences can demand this change with their voices and with their financial backing. Other cultural arenas can do the same. Millions of women have done the difficult part and risked of themselves to share their truths. If this loud disruption of the patriarchy is not enough to cause action, then that patriarchy will be reaffirmed. We have to do better.

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Curriculum Vitae

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Education

Master of Arts	Applied Communication
Indiana University – Purdue University Indianapolis	Indianapolis, Indiana, 2018

Bachelor of Arts	Secondary Education
Franklin College	Franklin, Indiana, 1995

Honors and Awards

Department of Communication Studies Outstanding Graduate Paper Award

IUPUI, 2018

Department of Communication Studies Research Travel Grant

IUPUI, 2018

Top Five Paper, Graduate Student Division

Central States Communication Association, 2018

Paper Presentations

Davis, S.L. (2017, September). *“Will They Tell My Story?”: A Feminist Narrative*

Critique of Hamilton’s Chicago Production. Poster session presented at IUPUI

Communication Week, Indianapolis, IN.

Davis, S.L. (2018a, April). *“Will They Tell My Story?”: A Feminist Narrative Critique of Hamilton’s Chicago Production*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Milwaukee, WI.

Davis, S.L. (2018b, April). *“The Letters You Wrote to Me”: A Metaphor Critique of the Chicago Production of Hamilton*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the Central States Communication Association, Milwaukee, WI.

Davis, S.L. (2018c, April). *“Will They Tell My Story?”: A Feminist Narrative Critique of Hamilton’s Chicago Production*. Paper presented at the Student Achievement Night of the IUPUI Communication Department, Indianapolis, IN.

Professional Experience

Adjunct Faculty, Vincennes University Department of Communication

COMM142 Speech Instructor

Perry Meridian Early College

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Adjunct Faculty, Vincennes University Department of Theatre

THEA100 Theatre Appreciation Instructor

Perry Meridian Early College

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Advanced Placement Research, Public Speaking, Theatre, and English Instructor

Perry Meridian High School

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Director of Theatre

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