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A study of female aggression as represented in Patty Jenkins' fiction film Monster

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2008-12-10T11:29:43Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5885

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CHAPTER III:

"Female aggression as represented in the film Monster".

> Most films about serial killers objectify them as demonic, leering madmen or romanticize them as Bonnie and Clyde-style vigilantes. Jenkins and Theron instead create a character with no precedent: a woman so detached from human contact that her every action is an awkward parody of common behaviour. (Mesh, 2004)

In this chapter, I will explore how *Monster* employs different characteristics of filmic trends representing aggressive women, in order to create a contemporary film, which is a product of the mainstream American cinema. I will also look at how Jenkins uses the figure of Lee to challenge a set of gendered assumptions in 'popular' films, as the character's representation undermines coherent gender distinctions and sexual differentiation. Furthermore, I will investigate how *Monster* interprets female aggression[31]. In order to do this I will analyze the various techniques and narrative strategies made use of by the film. Through this I will examine the compromises that the film has to make in negotiating between narrative and spectacle. In my investigation of how the film cinematically portrays the roots of aggression, I will focus on key theories of aggression. For this purpose, I will first consider the classic theory of Freud, then the Feminist rewrites on his hypothesis. I will also focus on contemporary theorists who analyze aggression. I will look at the evolution of the representation of female aggression as it has developed through film and related arts, as well as through the psychoanalytic tradition and its critiques and consider how these two traditions influence each other.

[31] Jenkins posits a causal relationship between childhood sexual violation and female aggression.

Aggression has conventionally been considered as a "typical characteristic of the male gender" (Campbell, 2001). Therefore, any expression of aggression in women has been viewed as abnormal and deviant. Violent women's place in the history of criminology, sociology and psychology, respectively, are liable for the stereotypical representation of aggressive women in the cinema. For this reason I will refer to Ann Campbell's article on women's aggressive behaviour where she outlines the clear distinction between the biologist and culturalist on this issue (Campbell, 2001). Campbell looks at the history of criminology and detects that "female criminality has been treated as a form of gender-role pathology, because of the assumption that crime is predominantly a masculine activity" (Campbell, 2001). Campbell refers to Cesare Lombroso (1895), one of the founders of criminology, who argued that women who are 'born criminals' are 'monsters' and "belong more to the male than the female sex" (Lombroso & Ferraro, 1895: 152-153). Campbell articulates the different views that Lombroso and Freud have on female aggression.

> Lombroso argued that the genetic basis of masculinization in women is accountable for their criminal behaviour. Freud (1933), on the other hand, attributed the etiology of the aggressive behaviour in certain women to an abnormal childhood behaviour. For Freud, male-typed interests and inspirations indicated a masculinity complex resulting from an unsuccessful resolution of penis envy (Campbell, 2001).

Female aggressiveness does not coincide with the ideal image of women within the patriarchal and bourgeois ideology of the American society. Therefore, the emergence of aggressive female characters in American films is a manifestation of 'social antagonism[32]' and "ideology's propensity for failure" (Neroni, 2005: 11). In her book *The violent woman*, Hilary Neroni (2005) argues that the images of violent women in

[32] In her analysis of the filmic representation of female violence, Neroni (2005) takes account of Marxist and psychoanalytical theories that "indicate the existence of a fundamental antagonism underlying society", as a result of "ideology's inability to explain everything and its incessant propensity for contradiction" (Neroni, 2005: 8)

film “can both elide and express antagonism” (Neroni, 2005: 11). Her analysis expresses the view that the very existence of violent female characters, whether it is narrativized[33] or not, reflects the inability of the American ideology to contain the image of the violent female. If aggression is an inherently male attitude, then its manifestation in women could be an indicator of the loss of clear gender characteristics. According to Neroni (2005):

> If gender difference becomes elided, then there is seemingly nothing to stop a woman from taking up violence as well, from being as violent as men. In a sense, the appearance of the filmic violent woman then is a cautionary tale about the elision of difference[34] (Neroni, 2005: 20)

Aggressive female characters have been present throughout the history of cinema. Their appearances in films were sporadically used at the beginning of the twentieth century and reached their eruption in the 1980s through to the present[35]. According to Neroni`s (2005) ‘survey of the various historical manifestations’ of female aggressiveness in films, the violent woman was predominantly a ‘generic figure’ limited to certain genres, such as: ‘Serial Queen Melodramas’ (1912s-1925s), ‘film noir’ (1930s-1940s), ‘horror and blaxploitation films’ (1970s-1980s) (Neroni, 2005: 19). The filmic representation of these aggressive characters involved the preservation of the traditional image of womanhood. In ‘film noir’, the violent actions of the femme fatale were assigned to her “badness” and in ‘horror films’; they were a response to the woman’s “victimization” (Neroni, 2005: 25; 33). Aggressive women were portrayed as over-sexualized women (*femme fatale*, blaxploitation heroines), psychotic monsters (horror films) or innocent girls (‘final girl’ in slasher films). In its essence, the filmic representation of violent women in film served both to express “society’s fantasy of the underside of femininity (and thus in the service of ideology)

[33] When the narrative offers an explanation of the female violence.
[34] There is an asymmetry: film makes a different kind of meaning out of feminised men.
[35] I acknowledge that violence has increased in films regardless of gender.

and also something more elusive (and thus undeniably threatening society)" (Neroni, 2005: 22). Although aggressive female characters were confined for decades to appear in genre and marginalized films, from the late 1980s up to the present day, there is a noticeable increase in their appearances. Not only do they 'cross generic boundaries', but their representation incorporates features of the previously generic images of aggressive female portrayal (Neroni, 2005: 19). Films like *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Basic Instinct* (1992) exemplify how films with a female aggressor as a main character can attract wide audiences and become cash-successes. These films illustrate how the contemporary manifestations of the aggressive female characters master the 'spectacle' effect of these images on the audience, one which ignores the shock, and the audience is fascinated by the violent filmic women that inherit characteristics of the *femme fatale* (beautiful, sexy and dangerous)[36].

As a contemporary filmmaker, Patty Jenkins was influenced by previous works involving the representation of violent women. Jenkins builds Lee's character as a combination of the vicious *femme fatale*, the psychotic monster from the horror films, but also the victimized woman from the same genre. The violent actions of Lee are represented as being as dreadful and horrifying as those found in the horror films. Lee is structured as an ambiguous figure through Jenkins' use of female stereotypes, which at the same time undercuts these stereotypes in order to confront them with parody and critique. Jenkins exploits the stereotypical image of the *femme fatale*, as well as the stylized setting and *mise-en-scène* from the film noir genre[37]. Lee inherits the 'badness' and cruelty of the *femme fatale*, as well as her inclination to use a gun in

[36] The Hitchcock heroines are also dominant and aggressive, but in a particular way.
[37] The scene, after the first killing, where Lee smokes a cigarette, surrounded by artificial smoke evokes similarities with the nonchalant *femme fatale*.

violent activities. Like the *femme fatale*, Lee lures men to engage in sex, playing upon her status of prostitute. Although Lee does not physically match the stereotype of the *femme fatale*, usually represented as the "glamorously beautiful" woman that wears "highly stylized clothes" (Neroni, 2005: 22), she is portrayed as a grotesque version of this category. In fact, Lee is depicted as sun-blotched, soft and puffy, with unfeminine gestures and unpleasant language. She is a degraded sex-object. There is nothing glamorous in her. Her seduction arises from the brutal factor that she performs the functions of a prostitute. However, the film plays upon the viewer's knowledge of the actual image of the actress performing Lee, who is a beautiful glamorous persona that matches the image of the *femme fatale*[38]. In the scene, where Lee commits her first crime from the serial-killing saga (not counting the self-defense killing of her rapist), Jenkins interweaves Lee's proficient ability to perform violent acts (as the *femme fatale*) with her vulnerable, emotional impulse for self-defense, provoked by previous traumas. The filming style of the scene is similar to the one used in previous scenes involving Lee's interactions with clients[39]. The camera is once again set outside the vehicle, putting the spectator in a voyeuristic position that enables her/him to observe the initial interactions between the characters. Jenkins uses the windscreen as a barrier between the spectator and the unfolding action, as if to facilitate a non-subjective reading. The opening lines of the man serve as an explicit indicator of his nature. "You've got a wet pussy? You like to fuck?" are guiding the spectator to take Lee's side, without being manipulated by the camera's point-of-views. His next demand: "Can you call me Daddy while we fuck?", as well as Lee's reply "Why? Do you like to fuck your kids" is used for its shock value, both for the character on screen, and for the audience. The character is caught off guard through

[38] I have intentionally slipped from discussing Lee's looks in the film, to Theron's looks out of the film. This approach is aimed to deepen the discussion of the use of 'spectacle' in the film.
[39] The scene with the young man from the opening sequence, as well as the scene of the rape.

Lee's unwillingness to engage in the sex-play that is commonplace in financial sexual exchanges. By including this particular interaction in the script, the filmmaker suggests the so-called 'family romance' of Freud's Oedipal logic. Curiously it positions the abuser, too, as a victim who might have been abused by his father. In a way the scene serves to schematize sexual acts as habitually pathological. The unnatural laugh of Lee and her consent to follow the demand, serve as relief for the spectator who fears her/his unsafe position as well as a possible outburst of aggression from the man. However, the pace of the scene changes its dimensions, after the man takes his glasses off and from a 'normal' man turns into a repulsive animal on heat, saying: "Suck it for me!". From a long shot, the camera gets closer to the action by cutting between close-ups of the characters. Lee's facial expression explicitly reveals her inner disquiet at the man's request and his revolting acts of self-excitement and stimulation. Her difficult, frequent breathing and her dilated pupils embody the emerging feelings of discomfort, humiliation and aggression. The first gun shot comes quickly and is unpredicted, as the camera cuts onto the man falling out of the car. This is the only instance within the scene where the camera presents a point-of-view from inside the closed space of the car, i.e. from the point-of-view of Lee. From a high angle, the viewer focuses on the victim who is breathing heavily with his upper body on the ground and his legs still in the car. The viewer is aware that the man has difficulty breathing, because of the wound. However, his breathing mimics an orgasm. By holding the shot on the man's body and positioning the camera from Lee's perspective, Jenkins guides the viewer to justify Lee's consecutive shooting. Subsequently, the camera takes a further position in order to reveal the scene from a broader angle. The viewer witnesses how Lee keeps shooting until her gun is empty. At that point, the camera focuses on the man's hand sticking through the open door of

the car. Jenkins' creative decision to hold the shot on the bleeding hand, shaking and progressively becoming still, is extremely disturbing and indicative of Jenkins' decision to incorporate elements from the horror films. Although these elements are used only sporadically throughout the film, their impact on the viewer becomes even greater because of their infrequent utilization.

In its essence this scene is filmed in the tradition of the film noir genre, as is the majority of the film. By using the famous *mise-en-scène* and lighting style, originated in the German Expressionist cinema, Jenkins creates a modern version of the film noir genre and its respective heroine: the femme fatale. As with film noir, *Monster* uses shadows in abundance in order to create a "a world of threat and danger, but also one where characters` motivations are hidden from one another and, by implication, from the viewer" (Rowe, 1999: 107) By using this style and approach, Jenkins aims to convey the idea that Lee, like the typical *femme fatale*, is ambiguous, unpredictable and not what she seems to be. Although the film attempts to reveal the inner motives of Lee in committing the crimes, Jenkins develops the idea that Lee's nature is as obscure as that of the *femme fatale*. Lee is neither the stereotypical prostitute, nor the stereotypical murderer. The last camera shot of the described scene is indicative of the intentional denaturalization of Lee after moments of turning to violence. Jenkins juxtaposes the realistic setting of the scene with the dramatized ending shots of Lee. The filmmaker takes the decision to position the character away from the action space, without any notifications for the spectator of how she got there. The viewer's attention is drawn to the character, standing in the woods, framed in a mid-close-up and smoking a cigarette with a blank expression on her face. A cloud of smoke, which allows for a metaphorical reading of the shot, surrounds Lee. The construction of the

latter is ambiguous and entails the subjective interpretation of the spectator. On the one hand, it is the typical shot of post-coital sexual pleasure. On the other hand, the portrayal of Lee in this shot as an emotionless and distant observer suggests the filmmaker's desire to mystify the violent woman, i.e. to dissociate her portrayal as that of a 'real' woman in order to "blur the antagonism that her violence engenders" (Neroni, 2005: 24). The stylistic interventions that Jenkins uses at the end of this scene, express her aspiration to diminish the traumatic impact that the female violence might have on the viewer. The filmmaker's ambition is to position the spectator into an unsafe and unconventional place, where s/he is neither manipulated to entirely identify with the character, nor completely alienated.

Jenkins' personal interpretation on the described scene is:

> When she kills the second john, it's so rich to me because you're simultaneously watching someone go over the line and say, I'm going to start killing innocent people, and at the same time you're seeing somebody who has been a victim for all of her life finally say, I'm not going to be a victim any more. It's weirdly heroic - and tragic. I was just trying to get the audience to feel it the way that she felt it, and actually say, 'Wow, I'm oddly uncomfortable, in this space where she's just killed an innocent man and I don't care.' (Aitkenhead, 2004).

The contradiction, which Jenkins insinuates, is implicit in the differentiation that psychological thriller and psychology assume towards the interpretation of blame in individuals. In the psychological thriller, the law needs to locate the blame in an individual. Psychology locates the blame in a system. In *Monster*, these different approaches are combined in an ambiguous synthesis that simultaneously confuses and attracts the viewer.

Conceptually, Jenkins constructs a contradictory representation of Lee's aggression. On the one hand, the portrayal of the violent woman in the film is conforming to ideology and on the other hand, it challenges gender identity and stereotypes

concerning the manifestation of female aggression. One of the instances where the representation of Lee coincides with the ideological depiction of female aggression refers to her portrayal as a victim. Jenkins perceives Lee's victimization not only as a result of the system (the patriarchal bourgeois society), but also as a consequence of her physical violation and torture by men. An explicit example of the stereotypical image of women as victims (horror films) is the scene of the rape. As in the horror film scenario, Lee's aggression arises after she endures continuous torture and sadism from the psychotic rapist (Lee Tergesen). As a consequence of her physical suffering, Lee is "entirely enraged" and "pushed into a state of total fright", as happens with the horror film heroines (Neroni, 2005: 32). The sadistic violation that the rapist enacts is portrayed cinematically in detail. The encounter with the rapist starts with the usual interaction between client and prostitute. The film establishes that Lee takes this client at the last minute, in an effort to afford a decent date with Selby. While the rapist drives deeper in the forest, he is extremely talkative and casual. The camera portrays them through the windscreen, a point of view that often recurs throughout the film. When the man stops the car, the camera changes the angle slightly to the right, having part of the front door in shot. Even though the door frame is out of focus, its presence overwhelms the camera shot. The composition of the shot suggests that the filmmaker aims to establish a barrier between the spectator and the characters. It serves as an additional effect to position the viewer as an observer, in other words it reinforces the spectacle-effect of the scene. Total identification is impossible. Despite the fact that the camera takes the man's point of view while he is declaring his mixed feelings of hate and love towards hookers, the viewer cannot identify with the character. Jenkins directs this scene with a great emphasis on details. As the man talks to Lee with a calm voice, he gently caresses her hair. By establishing contrasting statements and

gestures of tenderness and hate within the man's behaviour, Jenkins builds the tension in the scene. Even though the spectator anticipates a forthcoming distress, the aggression of the man comes so suddenly and forcefully that the spectator finds her/himself unprepared for the uncontrollable rage unfolding within the screen. While arguing whether or not Lee will give him a blow job, the man becomes enraged. The camera cuts to an extreme close-up on his furious expression. The pace of the scene becomes so rapid that when the man hits Lee, the viewer is not completely aware of what exactly has happened. The effect is reinforced by the fade to black dissolve. By cutting to Selby, who awaits Lee outside the roller skating rink, Jenkins links Selby to the rape scene. As a filmmaker, Jenkins also uses this approach as a tool to build up the tension within the spectator, who is unaware of what has happened to Lee. When the action goes back to the rape scene, the camera reveals Lee's bloodied face, as she struggles to open her eyes. The camera is positioned on the side of the passenger's front seat, framing Lee in a mid-shot. As the man comes into the back of the shot, the camera stays still. His kicking and screaming in her ear "Do you wanna die?" has a horrific resemblance to a horror film scene. The similarity gets greater, when the rapist pours a liquid on Lee that is some kind of chemical as it makes her scream from pain. Cutting between her tied up hands and her body that is shaking like a wounded animal emphasizes her anguish. As her face gets into a close-up, the viewer sees the blood coming out of her mouth. The action speeds up again, as Lee manages to take her hands out of the rope and grab a gun from a bag lying on the floor. She pulls the trigger as an act of self-defence. The fact that she shoots him multiple times is portrayed as an outburst of her rage, provoked by the pain and torture, but also as a result of the years of abuse and frustration. Even though the gun is empty, Lee violently hits the dead body with her hands, and then kicks the car, while screaming

with rage. The camera captures her outburst from a distance, framing her in a long shot. As I have mentioned earlier, Jenkins constructs this scene in the tradition of the horror films. She emphasizes the victimization of Lee, positioning her as the victim that resolved on violence as a means to protect herself.

The analysis of the sadomasochistic behaviour of the rapist is particularly important for this study, as the film suggests it is the main reason behind the unlocking of Lee's own sadistic behaviour[40]. Luce Irigaray`s (2000) analysis of man's sadomasochistic fantasies is that these are dictated by his desire to be reconnected to the mother. In "This sex which is not one", Irigaray (2000) interprets man's sexual aggression as "the desire to force entry, to penetrate, to appropriate for himself the mystery of this womb where he has been conceived, the secret of his begetting, of his origin" (Irigaray, 2000: 262). In the film, the rapist's physical aggressiveness towards Lee signifies his sexual frustration and desire to destroy her and see her dead. However, his aggression towards others is in fact a reflection of his own 'death instinct', as Freud (1950) concludes in his investigation of the roots of aggression in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The man's desire to violate Lee is a combination of his desire to reconnect with his 'origins', thereby to die himself. The longing for surrender is offset by the fear of a loss of control. In the construction of the narrative, Jenkins emphasizes the impact that the rape has on Lee. The serial-killing saga, undertaken by the character, is ascribed by the film as a consequence of the traumatic experience of the rape. However, Jenkins interweaves an additional implication concerning the motives for Lee's outrage: the rape unlocked the character's repressed feelings from

[40] However, as I have suggested in the 2nd chapter, the film also suggests that her craving for revenge comes alive only after a sequence of events, where she finds herself humiliated and intimidated by the bureaucratic and patriarchal social order.

her past. Hence, the film portrays Lee's abusive childhood and life as the prime cause for her destructive aggression towards men and the rape itself as the motive that unlocks the traumatic experiences accumulated within her unconscious. Therefore, I would explore the narrative techniques that Jenkins employs to portray how Lee's fixation on previous rape experiences determines her outburst of revenge. The filmmaker depicts this revenge as a projection of the character's unconscious traumas. This approach is aimed to justify the violent woman's actions, as it positions her as a victim. Nevertheless, the filmmaker does not deny the monstrosity of these actions, by emphasizing the fact that the men that Lee kills are not all guilty rapists, even though she projects them as such. The intentional duality of Lee's aggression is dictated by Jenkins desire to "get inside Lee's head" in order to "find the space between the man-hating lesbian serial killer and the feminist hero" (Fuchs, 2004).

Freud's analysis of sadism and masochism provides key conceptual tools. As a psychoanalytic theorist, Freud focuses mainly on the child's behaviour[41], as it enables him to draw conclusions about fundamental psychological principles. In "Female sexuality", Freud (2000) observes that when a child passively receives an impression, it has a tendency to produce an active reaction. "It tries to do itself what has just been done to it" (Freud, 2000: 26). Jenkins uses this simple principle to present an ultimate explanation of Lee's aggression towards a particular type of man, after she has been physically violated. The trauma of the rape unlocks the childhood memories of abuse and rape. Jenkins takes a creative decision to reveal Lee's childhood abuse only at a later stage within the film, coinciding with the climax of the serial-killing saga. The scene where Lee kills an ex-policeman has a crucial function from a narrative point of

[41] Freud uses the adult as the interpreter of childhood experiences.

view. In this particular scene, the representation of Lee suggests a turning point, as she gets transformed into a cold-blooded killer and ceases to be portrayed exclusively as a victim. The *mise-en-scène* of the scene differs from the majority of the film. It is set in open air, during the day, as opposed to the closed, dark spaces, used for the *mise-en-scène* throughout the film. Furthermore, Lee's behaviour is portrayed to be different while interacting with this client. She is depicted as in control and her assertive behaviour comes across through her upright posture and confident speech. The scene is predominantly shot through the use of long shots, as opposed to the mid and close-ups of the previous scenes involving killings. Leading the man deeper in the woods, Lee orders him to get undressed. While he is busy taking his pants off, standing apart, Lee starts provoking him:

> You married, right? You come here with some strange girls to do some dirty things with them, instead of just fucking your wife. Why man? So you can rape them? Fucking men! I fucking hate them!

The man is portrayed as embarrassed and uncomfortable. The camera cuts occasionally to him, just to reveal his anxious expression. Feeling threatened, the man starts putting his clothes on when Lee declares that she is not a hooker and that she doesn't fuck men. While he's looking for a way out, Lee unexpectedly starts telling him how her dad's friend used to rape her for years: "And when I told my dad, he would beat me up for it." Lee tells this traumatic childhood experience with a smile and irony[42]. Jenkins keeps Lee in the same position for the entire scene, calmly smoking a cigarette. She is no longer represented as the victim, but rather as the hunter and the man as a trapped animal that can't escape. Lee kills him with no remorse. She once again empties the gun, even though he begged her for mercy. This killing is clearly represented as 'instrumental', as she robs the victim (the ex-

[42] Although Jenkins has decided to include the childhood memories of abuse within this scene, she does not use them as an excuse for Lee to kill this man. It is rather the filmmaker's desire to make her position clear: previous experiences should not serve as an excuse for present actions.

policeman). However, the decision to introduce the childhood memory of the rape at this precise moment is unconventional and significant. Jenkins portrays Lee as no longer aware of reality. In this scene Lee projects previous traumatic experiences with violent men onto an innocent man. At this point, Lee is represented as monstrous, insensitive and cruel. Nevertheless, by including the rape memories, Jenkins insinuates that Lee's life-long victimization pushed her to violence and revenge. Therefore, while challenging the traditional representation of female aggression, Jenkins reaffirms it by justifying Lee's actions.

The analysis of the aggressive behaviour evident in the film consists in the investigation of the motives and the premise for such behaviour. Therefore it is necessary to define how the representation of female aggression that Patty Jenkins offers within the film *Monster* relates to the theoretical body of research concerning the interpretation of aggression. For this purpose, I will view different theories that discuss the antecedents of aggression. When referring to aggression, this paper will assume the definition of Berkowitz (1993) from his book *Aggression: its causes, consequences and control*, which defines aggression as "any form of behavior directed towards the goal of harming or injuring another living […]" being. (Berkowitz, 1993: 43)

There is considerable theoretical input on aggression. The theoretical body of research on aggression includes different perspectives regarding the roots of aggression. Freud's (1950) ideas on aggression underwent considerable change throughout the years. His hypothesis is about the dualism between 'life instincts' and 'death instincts' in relation to aggression and how they derive one from another. Freud sees aggression

as instinctive and inborn. For him, it is the ultimate drive that humans, as animals, use in order to survive. Freud's initial position on aggression is tied up with his professional conflict with Alfred Adler. Freud rejected Adler's "hypothesis of an autonomous 'aggressive instinct'", as he felt that this "would tend without justification to monopolise the essential character of all instinct in general" (Laplanch, Pontalis, 1985: 17). Although, Freud was aware of aggressiveness, he declined to attribute a special place for aggression, as he viewed it as part of "the familiar instincts of self-preservation and sex" (Laplanch, Pontalis, 1985: 17). After 1920, Freud changed his initial position and accepted the existence of an 'aggressive instinct' (Laplanch, Pontalis, 1985: 19). He located the origin of aggression as part of the 'death instinct' and emphasized that self-aggression is the "essence of all aggressiveness" (Laplanch, Pontalis, 1985: 19).

In the analysis of the antecedents of aggression and the different approaches to their differentiation, it is of great importance to acknowledge the frustration-aggression hypothesis. A group of psychologists, lead by Dollard and Miller (1939), published their research into the domain of aggression in the book *Frustration and Aggression*. The main thesis of the book states: "Aggression is always a consequence of frustration."(Dollard, Miller, 1939: 11). Even though the frustration-aggression hypothesis has its weak points, it will serve as a basic platform for the analysis of Lee. Although it can't be paradigmatically applied to the case study, the film suggests an evident 'one-to-one' relationship between the character's frustration with her failure to pursue her goals and her aggressiveness.

In his book *Aggression, hostility and violence,* Terry Maple (1973), as an editor, uses the term 'Nature' to group together those views of behavior which assume that aggressiveness is inborn rather then acquired and juxtaposes it with the 'Nurture' position, which refers to the external events that influence behavior. In essence, the first theory claims that aggressiveness is inherited and instinctive, as opposed to the social-learning theory, which states that an individual may learn aggression by observation and imitation of an aggressive role model. Regarding the above differentiation, *Monster* adopts the social-learning theory, but also acknowledges the role of inheritance and instincts. This is in part suggested by the psychological structure of the film. In the portrayal of Lee, Patty Jenkins emphasizes the immediate social environment and experiences of the woman, rather than heredity. The social-learning theorists advocate that individuals imitate and/or copy modeled behavior. The founder of this theory was Albert Bandura (1976), who believed that aggression is learned through a process called behavior modeling. He considered aggressive tendencies to be modeled after three principles, influenced by the reinforcement of family members (others), the environment and the media (Bandura, 1976: 206/207). Social learning theorists believe that aggression will produce reinforcements, such as: reduction of tension, gaining financial rewards, gaining the praise of others, or building self-esteem (Siegel, 1992: 171). The theory supports the view that aggressive behavior is stimulated by rewards, whether they are material, spiritual or emotional. The narrative structure of *Monster,* created by Jenkins, as well as its cinematic representation appears to mimic the proposed model of the social-learning theory for the activation of Lee's aggressive behavior. In terms of the observational learning and modeling of other aggressive behaviors, the film shows that Lee has an abundance of bad 'role models' that build in her the assurance that aggression is the only way to

obtain what she wants, as well as to protect herself. However, Jenkins emphasizes that the encounter with the rapist provokes in Lee the necessity to change her behavior. Although Lee is his victim and suffers physically from his sadistic actions, she inevitably copies his behavior. The film gives the viewer diverse cinematic indications for this phenomenon. After she kills him, Lee puts on his overall, as a symbolic acceptance of this new behavior. In her attempt to explore the reasons for Lee's aggressive actions, Jenkins goes as far as condemning media and government, as their policies reward violent behaviour. In the monologue where Lee explains to Selby that she is "good with the Lord", the violent female character stresses the fact that the government policy of in conducting wars while taking innocent lives is not more humane or justified than her own fight for survival[43]. Essentially, this statement confirms the social-learning theory, where the reinforcement factors play a crucial role in the activation of aggressive behaviour.

The social-learning and imitation theory suggests that people obtain competencies and new modes of behaviour through response consequences. (Dollard, Miller, 1941: 26-42). Following this set of thoughts, the fact that the first killing of Lee remained unpunished resulted in her confidence at the integrity of her actions. Jenkins reveals this particular aspect in a very subtle manner. After her disappointing quest of job hunting, Lee glances at a newspaper in a street rubbish bin, where she sees an article about the man that she had killed. At that point the viewer is not aware of what exactly the article says, as Jenkins decides to hold her/his suspense. The spectator only suspects the importance of the newspaper, as Lee puts it in her bag. Only later, after a series of killings, is there a confrontation with Selby. The viewer understands the significance of this. As neither Lee's first killing has any legal consequences, nor

[43] The American ideology of the "right to bear arms" is implicitly being critiqued here.

do the following ones, her conscience becomes aware of the divine retribution that she has invoked. Jenkins portrays Lee's criminal activities as a mixture of psychotic outburst and predetermined awareness of her actions. Within the progression of the narrative, the murder of her customers becomes more profitable and less harmful to herself. The cinematic portrayal of Lee's aggressive behaviour is achieved with meticulous interweaving between coercion and emotional insecurity. However, her insecurity diminishes within the development of her criminal offences.

At this point, it is necessary to define whether Lee's aggressive behaviour is represented as instrumental or emotional, as this differentiation will reflect on the reading that Jenkins envisaged giving to the portrayal of female aggression in *Monster*. In his book *The psychology of aggression,* Arnold Buss (1961) argues that the frustration - aggression hypothesis, with its emphasis on frustration has led to the neglect of the other large class of antecedents, such as the noxious stimuli and aggression as an instrumental response. The behaviorist approach, adopted by Buss (1961), has systematically evolved within Berkowitz `s theory (1993) that focuses on the degree to which the behavior is either consciously controlled or impulsive. In *Aggression: its causes, consequences and control*, Berkowitz (1993) distinguishes two major kinds of aggression: 'instrumental', where aggression is a means of achieving a goal and 'emotional', where aggression is unconscious and controlled by emotions. Within the representation of Lee's aggression, the conscious and unconscious desires to perform aggression interweave. In her development as a serial killer, Lee underwent a considerable change in her motives to express physical violence. The film explicitly explores the transition that Lee makes between emotional/expressive aggression and the occurrence of a more instrumental aggression at a later stage. The representation of Lee's two first killings conforms to

the stereotypical image of woman's aggression that entails an emotional outburst provoked by extreme circumstances. However, Jenkins` desire to create an objective portrayal of Lee's actions, (even though from Lee's subjective point of view) leads to the complex insinuation that the character progressively undertakes a more instrumental predisposition towards her violent actions. Jenkins` assumption that the female offender in the film uses aggressiveness intentionally, aiming at certain rewards, serves as a direct challenge of the established gender presumptions concerning the representation of aggression. In her book *Out of Control*, Ann Cambell (1993) explores the difference in the way the sexes understand and express aggression. In her analysis, she depicts a connection between aggression and control, as for women she considers it be a "failure of self-control", whilst for men "it is the imposing of control over others" (Cambell, 1993: 1). Cambell defines the gender differentiation towards an aggressive behaviour as exclusively expressive for women, as opposed to instrumental for men:

> For women, the threat comes from within; for men it comes from others. For women, the aim is a cataclysmic release of accumulated tension; for men, the reward is power over another person, a power that can be used to boost self-esteem or to gain social and material benefits. (Cambell, 1993: 7)

The representation of female aggression in *Monster*, through the character of Lee, aims to elide this ideologically imposed gender distinction in order to destabilize the existing presumptions about gender identity. The structure of the film suggests a connection between Lee's instrumental approach regarding the violent killings and her position as a breadwinner and provider for Selby, which in its essence is a male role within a relationship. The construction of the character of Lee and her criminal behavior follows the masculine hypothesis of female criminality. However, Patty

Jenkins emphasizes the sociological implications that determined the degree of 'masculinity' in Lee. Therefore, while analyzing the representation of the violent behavior of Lee, it is more appropriate to refer to Adler's thesis, which suggests a relation between female criminality and woman's entry into the workforce. Adler suggests that the more gender-blind opportunities afforded to women, the more they would adopt masculine traits and attitudes:

> The trend in the last two decades has been towards female adoption of male attributes, traits, vocations, prerogatives etc., as a means of raising their status also…Girls are involved in more drinking, stealing, gang activity, and fighting-behavior in keeping with their adoption of male roles. (Adler, 1975: 95; 106)

By establishing an alternative model to the dynamics of a traditional relationship, Jenkins emphasizes the connection between the socio-economic situation of women and their gender identification. She interweaves in the script Lee's pressure to assure a financial security for Selby (fulfilling a masculine role of provider), while escaping any further male submission and victimization. In the scene after the second killing, Selby's enthusiasm and glorifying reaction to the sight of the money that Lee throws on the bed, exemplifies the materialistic conception of the world that this child-looking woman has. Jenkins meticulously develops the romantic relationship between Selby and Lee in order to portray the dynamic interactions within a relationship. The narrative presents their daily exchanges in such a way that it enables the viewer to associate the events in the screen with her/his own experience. By casting Christina Ricci in the part of Selby, Jenkins wants to emphasize the power and assertiveness that an innocent and naïve person (in this case a woman, but it can also be a man) can have on her/his provider. As Jenkins justifies her choice:

> As Charleze was my number one choice so was Christina. I knew that what I needed out of the girlfriend¹s role was to be someone who instantly was

> understandably young, naïve, innocent but also incredibly wilful. Both of these characters had these wild extremes which had to be put together. The reason that I finally ended up saying that we have to cast the two best actresses and hope that this dynamic works is that Charleze and I met with several other actresses and so many of the women who were able to read the naïve part their energy just disappeared next to Charleze and I would look at them and I would say that I would never believe that that woman could make this woman do anything. Christina can look like a child but you don't want to fuck with her (Murphy, 2004).

Through the relationship between Selby and Lee, Jenkins cinematically portrays how Love can be a condition, but not a guarantee, for a successful relationship in any capitalist, money-driven society. Jenkins intentionally includes the surname of Selby within the script: Wall. This surname serves as a metaphor of `final resort', 'end of possibilities' (especially for Lee), but also suggests some character traits as: stubbornness, inflexibility and roughness.

Hence, the representation of female aggression in *Monster* has the binary implication of reinforcing stereotypical portrayals of women's outrage, while challenging fundamental views on the roots and expressions of such violent performances. Jenkins constructs Lee as an embodied image of antagonism of gender inequities, social order and psychological norms. Through Lee, Jenkins challenges stigmatized representations of female aggression; by creating a character that seems so 'alive' that it is impossible to dismiss the controversial impact that it has on the viewer.