

**Cinematic Constructions of the Female Serial Killer:
A Psychosocial Audience Study**

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Summary

This project explores the ways in which film viewers engage with and respond to cinematic constructions of the female serial killer, focusing closely upon the story of Aileen Wuornos, who was executed in 2002 for the murders of seven men. Three key film texts - *Monster* (Patty Jenkins, 2003), *Aileen: The Selling of A Serial Killer* (Nick Broomfield, 1992) and *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (Nick Broomfield, 2003) - are used as the basis for this study.

Arguing that the psychodynamic complexities of the spectatorial encounter are inadequately theorised by many existing Screen theory and cultural studies accounts, I conduct a series of in-depth free-association narrative/biographical interpretive interviews (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, Wengraf 2001) with fourteen participants. In doing so, I demonstrate how individuals are psychosocially and biographically motivated to “invest” in the three film texts on both conscious and unconscious levels. Drawing upon object-relations psychoanalysis (and Kleinian theory, in particular), I explore the unconscious anxieties, conflicts and phantasies that also bear significantly upon my participants’ filmic investments. I find that these investments are made meaningful in relation to dominant cultural ideologies and “norms”, but that they are also powerfully informed by participants’ own biographical experiences. This thesis therefore makes a valuable contribution to the field of audience studies, by providing a more nuanced understanding of the film-viewing process.

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1: Introduction

Contacted shortly after her arrest by a Hollywood producer keen to make a film about her, Aileen Wuornos - labelled America's first female serial killer - is said to have pleaded 'Please don't make me a monster' (MacNamara 1991: 101). Focusing closely upon three films that were based upon Wuornos' story¹, the aim of this project is to explore the ways in which the female serial killer is constructed within contemporary cinema and, further, to examine audience interpretations of and responses to such constructions.

The figure of the serial killer is considered within contemporary culture to be simultaneously fascinating and terrifying, sub- and superhuman and 'strikingly deviant', and is said to 'powerfully evoke not only our deepest fears and taboos, but also our most repressed fantasies and desires' (Picart and Greek 2003: 39). Indeed, as Tranter observes:

It would seem that serial killer narratives are not about serial killers at all. Instead, they are perhaps a fascination with the darker sides of ourselves, the unexplored or unacknowledged areas of our culture, offering an opportunity to explore and deconstruct popular conceptions of race, gender, class and sexuality (Tranter 2005:3).

This project will address some of the controversial and complex issues raised here. As I will show, my research makes a valuable contribution to the existing body of work on audience studies in both the film theory and cultural studies traditions because it enables a far richer understanding of how and why individuals' *own biographical experiences* - and the narratives of self that they construct over their life course - bear so significantly upon their

¹ Full details of these films are provided on page 4, and a rationale for their inclusion in this project is provided on pages 10-14.

psychosocial engagements with, and “investments”² in, a given film text. Further, where existing studies typically “define” the audiences that they analyse along various axes of identity (e.g. class, race, gender), this thesis will take a different approach by showing how such elements are made specifically meaningful for individuals in relation to their own biographies. In this introductory chapter, I provide an outline of the key theoretical arguments that inform my research, explaining how and why this thesis will make an innovative contribution to the field. I also offer summaries of each subsequent chapter, setting out their thematic structures and key debates. These summaries provide a broad overview of how each chapter addresses the findings drawn from my analysis and interpretation of interview data, and introduces the suggestions for the further development of this study that I will elaborate upon in my conclusion.

I will begin this chapter by considering the ways in which serial killers are typically represented within popular culture. Tranter identifies two contrasting representational strategies here: one, he suggests, ‘gives voice to the ambiguous, poorly defined conceptual areas of society that are shrouded in fears and anxieties of misunderstanding’ (Tranter 2005: 2), whilst the other ‘defies or confounds expectation through conformity, rather than rebellion, to conventional norms and values’ (2005: 2). Such representations have, of course, been widely explored from several different perspectives within media and cultural studies. Some writers have sought to account for the increased cultural interest in the phenomenon of serial killing, conceptualising this as, for example, a reflection of wider social anxieties

² The concept of “investment” mobilised throughout this project is drawn from Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000a) study. See my more detailed discussion of this on pages 58-59.

(Grixti 1989), or as indicative of a public fascination with visual spectacle (Tithecott 1997). Other work in the field has tended to focus upon either factual stories involving the figure of the serial killer (Jenkins 1994, Simpson 2003, Metvier 2009) or fictional serial killer characters (Simpson 2000). Feminist research, meanwhile, has drawn attention to the complex questions of power, gender and sexuality that pertain to these representational strategies (Caputi 1987, Cameron and Frazer 1987, Newitz 1999), and particular emphasis has been given to the themes of “otherness” and monstrosity that seem to pervade mediated representations of the serial killer (Deleyto 1997, Picart and Greek 2003, Jenkins 1994). Much of the work outlined here, however, is concerned primarily with the male serial killer, whilst considerably fewer studies have explored the ways in which *female* serial killers are represented within the media. Moreover, literature dealing with women who commit serial murder is produced most notably from a feminist perspective (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Schilt 2000, Birch 1993, Chesler 1993), focuses on explaining how and why women kill (Kelleher and Kelleher 1999, Holmes et al 1991, Skrapec 1993, Myers 2005, Schurman-Kauflin 2000, Holmes 1998, Wilson and Hilton 1998, Pearson 1997), and relies heavily upon textual analysis as a means of addressing these issues. Interestingly, then, despite the canonisation of the horror film text within contemporary audience studies (e.g. Cherry 2001, Hills 2005b, Chibnall and Petley 2001, Pinedo 1997, Weaver and Tamborini 1996) the role of the actual viewer in (specific) relation to representations of the female serial killer remains relatively unexplored. The objective of this project is thus not to construct a comparative study of the ways in which the female serial killer is

represented across a diverse selection of film texts, but rather to pursue a closer and more detailed analysis of these representations; and of the audience responses they arouse. I suggest that this can best be accomplished by selecting one specific set of films as a case study and, further, that the (“true”) story of Aileen Wuornos lends itself especially well to such an analysis.

Charged with the murders of seven men, Wuornos was executed on October 9th 2002 after spending eleven years on death row. I have chosen three key films (a mainstream Hollywood movie and two documentaries) based upon her story as the textual focus for this project - these are: *Monster* (2003), *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003) and *Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1993)³. On pages 8 to 14 of this chapter, I provide a more detailed discussion of Wuornos’ story, and evaluate the ways in which this has already been represented within the media and theorised academically, although it is useful first of all to contextualise my own interest in the case. Whilst my passion for film and cinema is life-long, my academic curiosity towards mediated representations of female criminality and, more specifically, female criminal agency, developed during the course of my master’s degree in Forensic Linguistics. My dissertation - which focused closely upon the Wuornos story - involved a critical discourse analysis of the first of Nick Broomfield’s documentaries about her: *Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1993), and explored the extent to which the film attributed blame and responsibility to Wuornos for her criminal actions. Despite its ostensibly cross-disciplinary usefulness (documentary films have rarely been closely

³ A detailed rationale for this selection of films is provided on pages 10 to 14.

studied within the field of forensic linguistic analysis), the project was, on reflection, limited by the constructionist orientation of its theoretical and methodological approaches⁴, and by its privileging of the film text itself as the dominant site of meaning production.

Prior to this, my undergraduate degree in Film Studies had led to a fascination with psychoanalysis: specifically as this can be used to theorise the cinematic construction of identity. These interests formed the basis of my BA dissertation - also a textually-based study - entitled: *I Think, Therefore Who Am I?: Re-Discovering the Freudian Human Self in Contemporary Cinema*. On completion of my MA, however, I felt strongly that neither of the projects described here enabled me to adequately theorise (or understand) some of the most powerful *spectatorial* experiences that I have encountered in my own life, especially those - sometimes overwhelmingly emotional - experiences that I have found it so difficult to articulate discursively in communications with others. It was therefore partly with a view to more fully exploring some of these epistemological and ontological discordances that I approached my PhD research. My motivations for pursuing a further exploration of the mediated representation of female criminality (and criminal agency), meanwhile, are in many ways linked to my master's study, during which I repeatedly confronted a number of key feminist arguments in the field that I identified as being particularly problematic. Such arguments insist that women who kill are routinely "denied" agency and/or blame for their actions (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Naffine 1987, Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989) within media representations, are constructed as either "victims" or "vamps"

⁴ See Chapter 2 (pages 38 to 44), where I set out a critique of the constructionist paradigm as it relates to this thesis.

(Benedict 1992), mad or deviant (Jewkes 2004, Wilczynski 1997), and are often masculinised (Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006) and/or monsterised (Creed 1993, Chesney-Lind 1999, Berrington and Honkatukia 2002). Whilst these debates remain pervasive and compelling across much feminist literature⁵, they consistently failed to correspond with my own readings of, and engagements with, mediated representations of female killers, attesting to the importance of considering how meanings may be both textually *and* interpretively constructed as a part of the film/viewer encounter.

In this project, then, I seek to contribute to the existing body of audience studies work within film theory and cultural studies by offering a more nuanced theorisation of film/viewer engagements: not only by conceptualising such engagements as psychosocial in nature, but also by speaking to actual viewers about their experiences⁶. It is important to note here, of course, that recent audience research has begun to theorise the spectatorial experience in psychosocial terms⁷, exploring the ways in which viewers are positioned (and position themselves) in relation to the shared (social) and individual (psychical) elements of their identities (e.g. Hills 2005a, Kavalier-Adler 2009, Kuhn 2010, Bainbridge and Yates 2005, 2010, Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Redman and Whitehouse-Hart 2007)⁸. My approach to this project is similarly aligned, and acknowledges that film/viewer

⁵ A full critical evaluation of these feminist arguments is provided in Chapter 2.

⁶ Full details of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that will be used to achieve this are provided in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively.

⁷ Walkerdine's 1986 paper, whilst not specifically framed as an "audience study" in disciplinary terms, is still considered to be a 'cutting-edge text for those... interested in the vexing questions of subjectivity, popular culture and the unconscious' (Yates 2010: 1), and has influenced the recent audience research outlined here quite substantially. The continuing relevance of Walkerdine's paper within the field is widely acknowledged (2010: 5), and so I will draw upon it throughout this project.

⁸ Such studies tend to draw primarily upon Winnicottian frameworks. See my discussion of this in Chapter 4 (pages 150-198), where I clarify the position of my own research in relation to this work.

engagements are defined and mediated not only in accordance with cultural ideologies and dominant normative discourses, but also by viewers' own anxieties, desires and phantasies: processes which operate at both conscious and unconscious levels.

Thus far, I have explained how and why my research makes a significant and innovative contribution to the existing body of audience studies work. I have also provided a personal rationale for the choice of films selected for inclusion in this project, by contextualising the development of my interest in both mediated representations of women who kill and audience responses to these representations. Mention must also be made here of the spectatorial context in which the three films selected for inclusion in the project were screened. These were not shown in a cinema theatre, but were watched by participants on DVD⁹, and most screenings took place either at my home or theirs, where the two of us watched the films together. On a few occasions, screenings were arranged in a small university lecture theatre, where I watched the films with two participants at the same time¹⁰. Whilst my study refers, then, to contemporary *cinematic* constructions of the female serial killer, I suggest - and will show in later chapters of data analysis - that the theoretical frameworks conventionally used to study theatrically screened films are also valuable for exploring and understanding these rather different modes of filmic engagement¹¹ (e.g. Klinger 2006, Bennett and Brown 2008,

⁹ Of Broomfield's documentaries, only the second (*Life and Death of a Serial Killer*, 2003) was given a theatrical release. As I note on page 12, this coincided with the release of *Monster* that same year, and the films were often screened (and, later) packaged together on DVD.

¹⁰ See my discussion in Chapter 3 (pages 119-120) of the methodological considerations for this.

¹¹ My work also differs in this respect from more ethnographically oriented studies (e.g. Walkerdine 1986) in which the televisual film screenings studied constitute a 'backdrop to domestic routines' (1986: 179). The screenings carried out for this project were carefully arranged to be as free from distraction as possible for my participants, thereby enabling them to focus closely on the films.

Barker and Mathijs 2008). Following Klinger, I therefore argue that the spectatorial practices of home and theatrical film engagement are 'not radically discontinuous [because] their relationship is richly and unavoidably interdependent' (Klinger 2006: 4). A more detailed discussion of these specific issues is provided in my concluding chapter, attesting to the 'importance of considering the private acts of consumption in relation to the "ideas and institutions" that animate the encounters between viewers and films' (Klinger 2006: 243). In the section that follows, I offer a fuller theoretical and methodological justification for the selection of movies made for my project, in which I identify the wider corpus of film texts from which they were selected. I begin here, however, by providing a more detailed summary of the Aileen Wuornos story, and by considering some of the ways in which this has already been theorised and understood.

Aileen Wuornos

As a Florida prostitute, Wuornos' murder case provoked particular controversy because she insisted throughout her trial that she was raped and/or abused (or, crucially, was *threatened* with rape/abuse) by all seven of her victims, that she killed them in self-defence and, moreover, that she had a right to do so, regardless of her gender and/or occupation (Morrissey 2003: 38). Both the case itself and its widely publicised media representation have been extensively discussed within contemporary feminist research (e.g. Horeck 2007, Morrissey 2003, Basilio 1996, Hart 1994), and it has been argued that Wuornos' consistent refusal to express remorse for the murders that she committed was interpreted by prosecutors as indicative of a cold-blooded and malevolent disposition (Keitner 2002). Her lesbian sexuality is

considered to have been used as further evidence of such a disposition, mirroring existing tendencies within contemporary media culture to criminalise homosexuality (Basilio 1996) and to “masculinise” lesbian women (Streib 1994), portraying them as aggressive (often predatory) criminals (Chesney-Lind 1999, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006:29). Feminist Lynda Hart argues that, as a woman, Wuornos’ actions have ‘produced something like a double negative...[w]hereas male serial killers are “naturally unnatural”...Wuornos has committed *unnatural unnatural* acts’ (Hart 1994: 142). She suggests, quite simply, that ‘women like Aileen Wuornos are not supposed to exist’ (1994: 152).

I therefore argue that this well publicised and highly contentious story befits my project, which seeks to consider the way(s) in which the female serial killer is cinematically constructed, and to explore how these constructions are negotiated by viewers. I suggest that the three film texts that I have selected lend themselves especially well to these research objectives¹²: this is so because they allow for an approach in which constructions of this kind might be compared and contrasted, enabling audiences to draw together fictional and factual representations of the female serial killer (with a specific focus upon female criminal agency), thus facilitating a richer understanding of how meanings are constructed via processes of textual construction *and* audience reception. Moreover, where *Monster* serves as an example of how agency and subjectivity are constructed for Wuornos by others (i.e. as a character “created” by director Patty Jenkins and “performed” by actress Charlize Theron), the two

¹² The three films themselves are listed on page 4.

documentary film texts provide a space in which Wuornos constructs these for herself.

In considering the wider corpus of film texts from which these movies were selected, it is observed that serial killer movies based upon male perpetrators are both numerous and much renowned. These include fictional texts such as *Peeping Tom* (1960), *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Copycat* (1995) and *American Psycho* (2000), as well as more “factually based” films e.g. *Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer* (1986), *Dahmer* (2002), *The Manson Family* (2005), *Ted Bundy* (2002), and *In the Light of the Moon* (2000): all of which are widely available on DVD. It is of course important to note that whilst these latter movies are ostensibly based upon actual events, they also often incorporate fictional elements. A fuller discussion of such issues and the questions of accuracy and “truth” to which they give rise (especially as these matters pertain to the documentary genre) (e.g. *Corner* 1996, *Nichols* 1991, *Winston* 2000, *Cousins and MacDonald* 2006) is provided in Chapter 2. There are also a considerable number of documentary texts about male serial killers, which include *Charles Manson Superstar* (1989), *Ted Bundy: Natural Porn Killer* (2006), *Serial Killers: The Real Life Hannibal Lecters* (2001), and *Serial Killers: Profiling the Criminal Mind* (1999), and programmes made for television, e.g. the *Great Crimes and Trials* (1992-1995) series, broadcast on the History Channel. Films dealing exclusively with the female serial killer in either fictional or factual form are more difficult to locate. Significant texts from the fictional category are *Phenomena* (1986), *Basic Instinct* (1992) and *Serial Mom* (1994), whilst factually based movies include *Monster* (2003), *Bathory* (2009) and *Belle*

(2010). More prevalent are fictional and fact-based films involving serial killer (heterosexual) couples, such as *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *Karla* (2006), *Mum and Dad* (2008) and *See No Evil: The Moors Murderers* (2006). Also deserving of mention here are those (fictional) film texts featuring female serial killers that might be considered to belong to the 'rape/revenge' genre (Read 2000, Clover 1993a, Creed 1993), for example *Baise-Moi* (2002), *Thelma and Louise* (1991) and *Butterfly Kiss* (1995). It is interesting, however, that documentary film texts about female serial killers are notable by their scarcity. Indeed, aside from *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003) and *Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1993), examples are seemingly limited to a few television series such as *Most Evil* (2006) and *Martina Cole's Ladykillers* (2008).

Whilst additional or alternative films might of course have been used for this project, I argue that the three examples I have chosen can be said to (re)combine constructions of agency and subjectivity - and elements of fact and fiction - for the female serial killer in a manner which distinguishes them from other possible textual choices, making them especially appropriate within the context of my own work. Indeed, as Horeck observes, '[f]rom documentary to drama and back again, [the "real" Wuornos story] is now *inseparably intertwined* with the representative images found in the[...] official filmic depictions of reality' (2007: 143, my italics). Arguably, then, these three films offer an ideal means of exploring the extent to which 'the boundaries between fiction and real life [are] often blurred to the point of non-existence' (Jenkins 1994: 81) within media coverage of serial murder. Michlin (2006), meanwhile, draws attention to the importance of the link between

Monster as a mainstream film text and Broomfield's second documentary about Wuornos, *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003). It is significant, she argues, that both were packaged together as a single DVD release, because this encourages audiences to explore how *Monster* 'excessively *reframes* the real story' (2006: 17), whilst Broomfield's film 'denounces all the ways in which [Wuornos] was exploited... which *Monster* does not show' (2006: 17). It has been argued, similarly, that the 'cross-promotion' (Horeck 2007: 142) between documentary and drama in *Monster* and *Life and Death of A Serial Killer* is 'overt' (2007: 142), such that it creates a 'corporate synergy...[in which] spectators are invited to watch and interpret the documentary and the drama together' (2007: 142). For Horeck, then, it is crucial for '...the documentary and dramatic versions of the Wuornos story to be considered each in the context of the other, given their commingling and close ties' (2007: 142), and she goes on to argue that 'interpretation of both films [is] reliant not only on how they relate to actuality but also how they relate to each other' (2007: 142). As I will show throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6¹³, the (con)textual inter-relationship of the film texts does inform my participants' engagements with them quite significantly.

Michlin also identifies in *Monster* a 'transtextual gap between fiction and reality' (Michlin 2006: 1), and emphasises 'the problems raised by the director's deliberate references to the "real story"' (2006: 1). Interestingly, whilst this latter point does form a meaningful element of some of my participants' readings of the films, their responses do not consequently '...swing only between sympathy and revulsion, pity and horror' (2006: 4).

¹³ See pages 18-25 for a summaries of the thematic structures of each of these main discussion chapters.

Rather - as I will show - participants engage with all three films in far more diverse and complex psychodynamic ways than those advanced by either Horeck or Michlin. Nevertheless, *Monster's* 'humanisation, rather than the demonisation, of the female killer' (Michlin 2006: 1) is recognised by some participants, several of whom comment upon the ways in which Wuornos' criminal agency is disparately constructed by the film texts in both factual and (fact-based) fictional terms¹⁴. Schilt (2000), meanwhile, argues that Broomfield's two documentaries about Wuornos tend to 'reify rather than explore the discourses of class, gender and sexuality that frame [her] story' (2000: 154) and thus do 'not provide viewers with the tools to critique the gender, sexual, and class biases embedded in dominant media images of Wuornos' (2000:57). As I will demonstrate, however, participants do identify, and are sometimes critical of, such biases as part of their investments in the films. Whilst this section has thus far offered personal and theoretical rationales for the small sample of film texts chosen for my research, this choice can be further justified in terms of my project's methodological approach, which uses psychosocially oriented in-depth narrative interviews¹⁵. Given the time-consuming task of carrying out (and transcribing) these interviews, and the temporal constraints of the thesis itself, it was necessary to produce a quantity of textual data deemed manageable in this context. The "case-study" approach that I take here, then- focusing on one specific story and its representation within three particular film texts - helped to ensure that my methodological aims and objectives were fully achievable.

¹⁴ See, especially, my discussions of Harry (pages 282-291) and Daniel (pages 267-281) in Chapter 6.

¹⁵ My interview model is based upon Hollway and Jefferson's (2000a) Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) and Wengraf's (2001) Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM). A detailed rationale for - and account of - this model is provided in Chapter 3.

Case-study approaches have of course been widely (and effectively) mobilised within much psychosocial research (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2005, Clarke and Hoggett 2009, Frosh 2003, 2010), reaffirming their suitability for the theoretical and methodological objectives of my own work.

This project seeks to construct a close and detailed analysis of the ways in which the figure of the female serial killer is cinematically represented, exploring how and why viewers respond to these representations in a certain way. Emphasising the construction of (female) criminal agency in this context, my research will also consider how representations of the serial killer in contemporary culture function more broadly to ‘communicate[...] new understandings of the self’ (King 2006: 111, Seltzer 1998). As I will show in the analysis and discussion of interview data undertaken in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, whilst it is ‘still necessary to explain why [serial killer texts] place so much emphasis on stimulating and manipulating the fears of the audience’ (Jenkins 1994:106), we also ‘need to take account of the complex ways in which gender, sexual orientation and criminal behaviour are socially constructed in a world that is saturated by [media] images’ (Storrs 2004: 25). The aim of this project is to provide a more nuanced understanding of these psychodynamic complexities as they are experienced by actual viewers as a part of the spectatorial encounter.

In this introductory chapter, I have provided an account of the ways in which mediated representations of the female serial killer have already been theorised by existing research on the topic. I have offered a rationale for the “case study” approach taken by my project, and have justified the selection of the three key films that constitute the textual basis of the study itself:

situating these within the wider corpus of film texts that might also be considered relevant in this context. A summary of Aileen Wuornos' story has been provided, and consideration has been given to how this has already been academically studied; identifying and evaluating some of these key arguments. The remainder of this introduction provides a chapter-by-chapter summary for the project as a whole, outlining the key themes addressed and arguments advanced.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In Part 1, I construct the cross-disciplinary theoretical framework that this thesis uses to study how the female serial killer is represented within contemporary media culture, and to explore the ways in which viewers engage with these representations. Drawing upon key concepts from psychosocial studies (e.g. Clarke 2006, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) supplemented with ideas from structuration theory (e.g. Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991) and the feminist notion of "resistance" (e.g. McNay 1999, Mills 1997, de Lauretis 2007, Lloyd, Few and Allen 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009) I show how this framework will be mobilised in order to address the complex questions of subjectivity, agency and female criminality that inform my project. I also draw here upon the discipline of psychosocial criminology (Gadd and Jefferson 2007a, 2007b, Jefferson 2002), exploring its relevance to my research. Part 2, meanwhile, provides a critical evaluation of the key audience studies' arguments - from film theory and cultural studies - upon which this project will build (especially e.g. Walkerdine 1986, Stacey 1994,

Kuhn 1984, 2002) as a means of theorising my participants' cinematic investments. Chapter 2 also explains how and why my work will make an original contribution to the existing body of audience studies literature, that is, as I have explained on pages 1 and 6, by recognising the film/viewer engagement not only as psychically and socio-culturally constructed, but also as being consciously and unconsciously motivated and, further, significantly informed by viewers' individual biographical experiences. Moreover, *contra* the tendency within much audience research to "define" audiences a priori in relation to particular aspects of their identities, e.g. class, gender, or race, I conceptualise these elements as meaningful in specifically biographical ways for my participants, and as consequently motivating their cinematic investments.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological framework that I use to explore the link between individuals' biographical experience(s) and their understandings/interpretations of the cinematic construction of the female serial killer. In doing so, I engage critically with some of the key issues and debates advanced within existing literature on psychosocial research methods, identifying my own methodological starting point(s) as the 'transparent self problem' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 3) and the 'transparent account problem', (2000a: 3), that is, the assumption within much qualitative research that respondents' accounts give direct access to authentic aspects of their experiences and lives (2000a: 3). Here, I explain how I will draw extensively upon Hollway and Jefferson's work (2000a, 2001, 2005) in formulating an approach suited to the aims and objectives of my

study. Consideration is also given in this chapter to the ways in which my own subjectivity - not only my own feelings, emotions, anxieties and phantasies, but also my role as researcher (Kvale 1999: 101) - will be emphasised throughout the project, recognising this as a meaningful element of the research process itself that can, in turn, be used as a *feature* of the same (Walkerdine 1997: 59).

Chapter 3 sets out the model of research interview designed for my project, explaining that this is based upon both the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) (Wengraf 2001) and the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI) (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a). Here, I consider the deep level of emotional engagement demanded of both researcher and participant by these interview methods (Beedell 2009, Clarke 2002, Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003, Savin-Baden 2004, Gabb 2008a, 2008b, Brannen 1988). I acknowledge that the application of these interview methods within the context of my project is distinct from their use within clinical settings, evaluating some of the problems associated with psychoanalytically oriented psychosocial methodologies, for example, concerns about the possible 'over-interpretation' (Roseneil 2006: 865) or 'wild analysis' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009:18) of interview data. Also provided is a rationale for my use of a small number of individual case studies for this project, in which I defend the value of in-depth case-study methods within psychosocial research (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 19, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 107). Lastly, I provide a detailed description of the four separate interview "stages" - and the film screenings - carried out with my participants, and explain how confidentiality and participant consent have been achieved

and managed for the project¹⁶ (Wiles, Crow, Charles and Heath 2007, Yow 1994). I include here short “profiles” for each individual participant which offer a brief biographical portrait, details of their existing relationships (if any) to me¹⁷, and an account of how and why each was selected for inclusion in the study.

Main Thematic Discussion Chapters 4, 5 and 6

The main body of my thesis is comprised of three discussion chapters, each of which addresses one of the key themes observed in my interview data. Extracts from the data are used to illustrate my analysis and interpretation¹⁸. The objective of all three chapters is to build upon and challenge (where appropriate) existing Screen theory and cultural studies’ accounts of the spectatorial experience¹⁹, by conceptualising film/viewer engagements as psychosocial and biographical in nature. Taking a reflexive (e.g. Walkerdine 1986, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001: 85) approach to my theorisation of this data, I also give careful consideration to the ways in which my analysis and interpretation is consciously and unconsciously motivated by my own feelings (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a), my investment in the subject position of researcher (Nicholls 2009: 186) and, importantly, by my own biographical experiences.

¹⁶ A sample copy of the consent form that was completed by all fourteen participants is attached at Appendix C.

¹⁷ See pages 132-133, where I emphasise that, whilst I was acquainted (usually through mutual friends) with some participants prior to their inclusion in the project, I had no pre-existing close relationships with any of them.

¹⁸ It should be noted that the grammatical content of all data extracts cited throughout the project are reproduced verbatim from the interview transcripts.

¹⁹ See pages 6-7 and 15-16 for clarification of my own epistemological/theoretical orientation, and for full details of the existing studies upon which I will build.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 explores the ways in which gender is shown to be meaningful for my participants in their readings of the films, and argues that this is in fact for more complex psychodynamic reasons than those usually advanced by audience research in both the Screen theory and cultural studies traditions²⁰. In this chapter, I use the term *cultural ideologies of self* to describe the ways in which selfhood is not only socially and psychically constructed, but also situated and performed within a particular socio-cultural context (e.g. Elliott 2001, Kirschner 2010, Markus and Kitayama 2001). Gendered subjectivity is thus conceptualised in psychosocial terms, that is, understood as being both intersubjectively and intrapsychically accomplished (Layton 2004, Frosh 1994) as well as psychosexually emergent: and I explore some of the links - and differences - between classical (Freudian) and relational (Kleinian) accounts (Gyler 2010, Britton 1992) that relate to this developmental process. Drawing upon both postmodern ideas and (relational) psychoanalytic theory²¹, I explore how my participants invest unconsciously in certain gendered subject positions (Hollway and Jefferson 2005, Frosh, Phoenix et al 2003, Wetherell and Edley 1999) throughout their biographical narratives, and show how their film-viewing experiences are motivated by these investments. Interestingly, I note that neither these biographical investments nor the spectatorial engagements that they inform are exclusively organised around the questions of gender polarity (the masculine/feminine binary) with which many feminist accounts are so

²⁰ A critical evaluation of these existing accounts is provided in Chapter 2 (pages 71-97), where I also refine my own position on Screen and film theory, and explain how my project will contribute to this body of work.

²¹ On page 156 I provide a full discussion of the ways in which these theoretical frameworks are often 'falsely polarised' (Layton 2004: 25).

concerned (e.g. Flax 1990, Benjamin 1998, Buhle 1998, Goldner 1991, Mitchell 2004). Further - *contra* many feminist accounts - I show that, in their readings of the films, my participants are not markedly concerned with the extent to which Wuornos' murderous actions constituted a transgression of heteronormative gender identities (Keitner 2002, Hart 1994, Austin 2008), or posed a threat to hetero-patriarchal social structures (Morrissey 2003, Faith 1993).

In audience studies terms, this chapter builds upon accounts which have successfully mobilised Gramscian-based hegemony theory (e.g. Harris 1992; Tudor 1999, Lewis 1991, Morley 1992, O'Shaughnessy 1990) as a means of offering a more nuanced conceptualisation of cultural and ideological power (Hills 2005a: 35). Nevertheless, in my discussion, I demonstrate that whilst questions of "resistance" are significant within the film-viewer encounter (e.g. Waters 2011, Huffer 2007, Gorton 2009, Buikema and van Der Tuin 2009, Krunen, Alvares and van Bauwel 2011, Sarikakis, Rush, Grubb-Swetham and Lane 2009, McRobbie 2009), my participants' gendered responses to the films cannot be theorised exclusively as forms of resistance (or conformity) to dominant (patriarchal) representational "norms" (e.g. Durham 1999, Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985, Hobson 1982). Critiquing such arguments, I seek to further develop those studies in which meaning is recognised to be both textually and interpretively constructed as part of the film/viewer encounter (e.g. Kuhn 1995, 2009, Stacey 1994, Walkerdine 1986), by also exploring the "lived" (Skeggs 1997) elements of this experience.

A critique is made, meanwhile, of the universalistic and phallogentric (Kuhn 2009) models of gendered spectatorship advanced by many feminist Screen theory accounts²² (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Modleski 1988), in which film/viewer engagements are typically explained in terms of sexuality, desire, erotic instinct, and castration anxiety²³. I argue that the reliance of much psychoanalytically-oriented audience research upon Freudian or Lacanian paradigms restricts the ways in which gender can be considered (Layton 2004: 120) as part of the viewing experience. This is so, I suggest, because such studies tend to emphasise questions of fragmentation (Mulvey 1975) and “lack” (Silverman 1988, Modleski 1988, de Lauretis 1984), whilst neglecting the processes of phantasy, introjection and internal object relations (Klein 1926, 1928) that often constitute a significant part of viewers’ cinematic investments. In Chapter 4 I also show that whilst some recent studies have used Winnicottian frameworks²⁴ to provide valuable psychosocial accounts of the film/viewer relationship (Crème 1994, Kavalier-Adler 2009, Kuhn 2008, 2010, forthcoming, Bainbridge and Yates 2005, 2010, Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Redman and Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Zittoun and Grossen forthcoming), the Kleinian perspective that I take here enables a better understanding of how my participants’ film readings are “gendered” in that they are motivated by the specific unconscious anxieties, conflicts and phantasies (Hollway and Jefferson 2008) that inform their own individual biographies.

²² On pages 76-79, I distinguish these accounts from other (apparatical and metapsychological) models of film theory.

²³ In Chapter 5, I note that gender tends to be inextricably linked to narcissism within such accounts. I observe, however that, according to the responses provided by my participants, this is not necessarily the case.

²⁴ See my critical evaluation of these studies on pages 157-159. See also Winnicott (1965, 1971) on transitional objects/transitional phenomena.

Chapter 5

In Chapter 5, I provide a critique of existing Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts of spectatorial "identification", (re)conceptualising this process as one of 'investment' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 15). Building upon the arguments set out in Chapter 4, I show that such investments cannot be theorised solely in terms of hegemonic resistance and/or compliance (Huffer 2007, Krunen et al 2011, Gorton 2009, McRobbie 2009, Waters 2011), that they are not primarily organised around an erotic cinematic gaze (e.g. Mulvey 1975) and, further, are not exclusively motivated by unconscious desire or "lack" (e.g. Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983). Chapter 5 also challenges the idea of single or stable readings of film texts advanced within some cultural studies' accounts (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980), by showing that my participants' readings are in fact often unstable, conflicted and shifting. I observe here that participants seem to read the films - and Wuornos - through their own selves: a phenomenon that I describe as one of *self-primacy*. This, I theorise using the concept of narcissism, which I conceptualise as a process (and not merely a state) (Klein 1975, Alford 1988) that is both interpersonally and intrapsychically meaningful (Britton 1998, Stacey 1994, Parker 1997a, 1997b, Frosh 2010, Giddens 1991) and is inextricably linked to the socio-cultural environment in which we live (Lasch 1979, Hall, Winlow and Ancrum 2008, Tyler 2007).

In my discussion, I also draw upon the psychoanalytic notions of projection (Grant and Crawley 2002: 18) and phantasy (Glover 2009: 47/48), suggesting that these enable a richer understanding of the complex film-

viewing experiences described by my participants, and thus facilitate a more careful consideration of how and why anxiety and ambivalence often bear as significantly upon the process of spectatorial engagement as do the elements of desire and pleasure that are more usually foregrounded in this context. In Chapter 5, I therefore posit that the three film texts used for my project can best be understood as 'neutrosemic' (Sandvoss 2005: 26), that is to say that, as a consequence of their textual indeterminism (King 2008) they themselves carry no inherent meaning (Geraghty 2008). With this in mind, I offer a critique of much feminist film research, in which the spectatorial experience is conceptualised as being textually determined, pivotal upon processes of narcissistic identification with an idealised screen image (Mulvey 1975), inextricably linked to feelings of pleasure and desire, and thus structured in terms of sexual difference (e.g. Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Penley 1988, Kaplan 1983). As I have argued in Chapter 4, my participants' responses indicate that gender is usually more *implicitly* significant in their readings of the films and, moreover, is often unconsciously linked to specific biographical experiences. Chapter 5 therefore demonstrates that, whilst film/viewer engagements may indeed be narcissistic, they are not explicitly organised around questions of gender and sexuality (e.g. Ellis 1982, Radway 1984, Doane 1982, 1987, Brown 1990, 1994, Brunsdon 1986, Hobson 1982, Ang 1995), and neither do they inevitably involve an erosion or collapse of self/other boundaries. Rather, as I demonstrate here, participants seem to "struggle" continually with these boundaries: a process more comprehensively discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 explores the ways in which my participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their readings of the films. In this chapter, I argue that such processes form part of the everyday construction of our identities (Elliott 2001, Rose 1989) which are, in turn, comprised of both active and passive elements (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 10) and intricately linked to the dominant socio-cultural frames (Markus and Kitayama 2001: 120) in which our identities are enacted. Following Hollway and Jefferson (2001), I theorise these ideas psychosocially, enabling a more nuanced consideration of the powerful tensions that exist between our inner and outer realities (Freud 1930, Greenberg and Mitchell 1983) and of the unconscious defences that we mobilise as a means of defending against (and thus coping with) the anxieties that these tensions bring about (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a).

Building upon the arguments introduced in Chapter 4, I also observe that participants' engagements with the films are not primarily structured in terms of the active/passive binary (Bailey 2005: 15) nor the gendered active-male/passive-female oppositions (Mulvey 1975, Williams 1995: 221) often used to theorise audience/film relations: rather, that participants work to manage the tensions that exist *between* the viewing positions that are available to them (Silverstone 1994, Hills 2007d). I therefore argue that the psychodynamically complex film-viewing experiences they describe exemplify neither the models of passive spectatorship²⁵ advanced within Screen theory (e.g. Pribram 2005, Heath 1978, Moores 1993) nor those of

²⁵ See also my discussion of this on pages 85-97 in relation to Kuhn's (1984) distinction between "spectator-in-the-text" and "social audience", in which I also clarify my own position in relation to these categories.

the “active audience” (e.g. Morley 1980, 1992, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992, Lewis 1991, Hayward 2009, Wilson 2009, Jin 2012) offered by cultural studies’ accounts. This chapter thus recognises these spectatorial investments as a part of participants’ “lived” experience (e.g. Kuhn 1995, Stacey 1994, Walkerdine 1986, Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, Skeggs 1997), and seeks to (re)conceptualise them as being biographically informed, consciously and unconsciously motivated, and culturally and symbolically significant (Zittoun 2006).

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Conclusion

In my concluding chapter, I provide a summary of findings from the analysis of interview data undertaken in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Consideration is given here to the ways in which each chapter might perhaps have been structured differently, by drawing attention to some of the additional themes observable in the data selected for discussion. Given the vast quantity of rich data successfully gathered for the project, I also make mention of the participants who, owing to restrictions of time and space, were *not* included in these main chapters. I reflect upon how their readings of the films might have been theorised, commenting upon some of the observations made during my interpretation and analysis of the entire corpus of interview transcripts produced²⁶.

In this discussion, I also critically evaluate my choice of themes for the TQUINs²⁷ that form part of my interview model. Whilst a rationale for this

²⁶ All interview transcripts are reproduced in full at Appendix F (CD).

²⁷ *Topic Questions Aimed At Inducing Narrative* (Wengraf 2001: 120). The five topics (themes) included in my interviews were cinema, crime, gender, sexuality and class. See Chapter 3 (page 123) for a more comprehensive discussion of this.

choice is provided in Chapter 3, I offer some further thoughts here as to why ethnicity was not included as a topic, suggesting that this is partly a consequence of this particular theme having been deemed less directly relevant to the content of the films themselves²⁸. Further, my conclusion chapter considers whether - and to what extent - the lack of emphasis given throughout my data analysis to questions of class²⁹ can perhaps be explained partly in terms of my own counter-transference (Walkerdine et al 2001, Jervis 2009, Hollway 2006): not only as this relates to my own feelings and biographical experiences, but also to the subject position in which I invest as an academic researcher (Hills 2005b) for the purposes of this project.

This final chapter also offers a critical evaluation of my thesis as a whole, by identifying its strengths, weaknesses and limitations, and considering how some of the problems encountered during the research process itself might have been managed differently. I conclude by emphasising that, whilst my research makes a contribution to the existing body of audience studies work within the fields of film theory and cultural studies, it also calls for further development. I therefore make suggestions for possible future research which might build upon the ideas and arguments that I have introduced here: these include using my “transferable” methodological framework as a means of studying other forms of cultural engagement such as audience experiences of theatre or popular music, for example³⁰. Given the focus of this project upon mediated representations of (female) criminality and female

²⁸ See pages 129-130. Also see my discussion of this in Chapter 7 (page 317).

²⁹ Interestingly, this is despite the inclusion of a TQUIN on class. See pages 316-317 for a more comprehensive discussion of this.

³⁰ See Chapter 7 (pages 327-328).

criminal agency, I suggest that the interview model designed for this thesis might also usefully be mobilised within criminological contexts by building upon recent work within the field of psychosocial criminology (Jefferson 2002, Gadd and Jefferson 2007). In relation specifically to film/viewer engagements, meanwhile, and mindful of audience research currently being undertaken (e.g. Orning 2010, Furuya 2011, Aaltonen 2011, Ince 2011, Skeggs and Wood 2012), I suggest that the methodological framework used here could perhaps be further developed in order to explore the affective and phenomenological aspects of the spectatorial experience which, arguably, are often neglected within film/audience studies and are deserving of closer attention. Skeggs and Wood's recent study of the embodied elements of audience reactions to reality television (Skeggs and Wood 2012), provides a useful way forward in this respect. In my conclusion, I also show how the successful completion of this project - with its rich and fascinating findings - attests to the importance and value of cross-disciplinary work, summarising how this approach has been useful for my research.

This introductory chapter has sought to clarify the aims and objectives of my project. I have provided an outline of the key theoretical concepts and arguments that inform this study, and have offered a summary of each individual chapter. In doing so, I have clarified my own epistemological position by situating my own work within the existing body of audience studies research. I have also shown how and why my research will make a valuable (and innovative) contribution to the field. In my main discussion chapters, I will challenge and/or critique certain key debates within the field, using others as foundations upon which to build and/or develop more fully.

Chapter 4 will, using the term *cultural ideologies of self*, set out a critique of existing Screen theory and cultural studies accounts of gendered spectatorship (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Modleski 1988, Durham 1999, Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985), by arguing that my participants' gendered filmic investments are psychosocially and biographically motivated. In Chapter 5, meanwhile, I will critique existing theories of spectatorial "identification" (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983, Brown 1994, Brunsdon 1986, Ang 1995, Hall 1980, Morley 1980), observing that my participants read the films through their own selves: a phenomenon I describe as *self-primacy*. Chapter 6 explores the ways in which my participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their filmic engagements, challenging the active/passive binary typically used to theorise film/audience relations (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Williams 1995, Pribram 2005, Morley 1992, Jenkins 1992, Lewis 1991) by demonstrating that it is in fact the tensions between these active and passive positions that is especially significant for my participants (Silverstone 1994, Hills 2007d). In the following chapter, I present a review of the existing literature that is relevant to my thesis, and set out the theoretical framework that will be used throughout the project.

2 - Literature Review

This project seeks to explore the ways in which the female serial killer is represented within contemporary media culture and, further, to examine viewers' responses to and engagements with such representations. The aim of this chapter is to construct a theoretical framework that can be used to address these issues in sufficient detail, and it is duly organised into two parts. As I will show, this framework is, necessarily, a cross-disciplinary one, which draws upon key concepts from psychosocial studies (e.g. Clarke 2006, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012), supplementing these with ideas from structuration theory (Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991) and the feminist notion of "resistance" (McNay 1999, de Lauretis 2007, Mills 1997, Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009) as a means of exploring the complex questions of subjectivity and (female criminal) agency that are relevant to my study. The framework that I propose here is set out in Part 1 of this chapter. In Part 2, meanwhile, I introduce and evaluate the key audience studies arguments that I will use to theorise the complexities of the film-viewing experience, which is understood for the purposes of this project to be both socio-culturally and psychically constructed, consciously and unconsciously motivated and, crucially, powerfully informed by viewers' individual biographical experiences. Drawn from film theory and cultural studies, these arguments enable a fuller consideration of the ways in which meaning is produced by texts *and* viewers as a part of the spectatorial process, and is also produced disparately in relation to the two types of texts (mainstream

film and documentary)¹ upon which I focus in my research. In this chapter, then, I will engage critically with some of the key concepts drawn from these bodies of work, demonstrating how my own research might make a valuable contribution to the field by enabling a more nuanced understanding of the film/viewer engagement.

1: Subjectivity, Agency and the Female Serial Killer

As I have explained in Chapter 1, it is argued that, within media representations of female criminality, women who kill are routinely “denied” agency and/or blame for their actions (e.g. Naffine 1987, Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989), and so questions of agency are therefore especially salient within the context of this project. The aim of this first section is to provide an outline of the specific field(s) of research within which my own study will be situated, and to critically evaluate some of the key arguments within these fields. In doing so, I will clarify the contribution that my research seeks to make to the existing body of literature, thereby establishing the validity of my work.

As I will show, many of the studies that deal with female criminality have been produced from a feminist point-of-view and, as such, are often organised primarily around questions of gender and sexuality. These studies also tend to rely upon processes of textual analysis in order to explain how representations of violent women are made meaningful, whilst under-emphasising the role and significance of audiences and viewers themselves in the construction of meaning. Such matters are the specific focus of this

¹ Full details of the film texts selected for this project are provided on page 4, and a rationale for their selection is set out on pages 10-14 in my introductory chapter.

section and, as I will argue, they can best be explored using a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework. Further, given that my approach to this project is a psychosocial one, agency is conceptualised here as significant in relation to both our inner (psychical, individual) and outer (social, shared) worlds, and as operative at both conscious and unconscious levels. For the purposes of my research, then, agency is understood not as originating solely “within” the self; but as being inextricably linked to the social dimensions of our everyday lives although, crucially, *without being reducible to either*. From this perspective, the human individual can perhaps best be described as:

...neither an actor possessed of agency, nor a passive product or puppet of cultural forces; agency is produced in the course of practices under a whole variety of more or less onerous, explicit, punitive or seductive disciplinary... constraints and relations of force. Our own “agency”, then, is the resultant of the ontology we have folded into ourselves in the course of our own history and our practices (Rose 1996:189).

I suggest that there are three key areas of work whose concepts are useful for theorising these ideas: the (feminist) notion of “resistance” (e.g. McNay 1999, Mills 1997, Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009), structuration theory (e.g. Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991) and psychosocial studies (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012). In this section, I will introduce the appropriate accounts, showing how and why each is valuable within the context of my research, which seeks to better understand not only the ways

in which (female) criminal agency is constructed within media representations, but also how such representations are read and understood by viewers. Whilst I do not describe my own approach to this project as an exclusively feminist one, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that feminist theory is both relevant and useful here. This is so not only in terms of its capacity for mobilising the complex questions about subjectivity with which this project is so concerned, but also because of its emphasis upon identifying and interrogating the conditions of possibility for agency (Fegan 1999: 320, Benton 2001). For the purposes of my thesis, then, I will draw upon the feminist notion of resistance (e.g. McNay 1999, de Lauretis 2007, Mills 1997, Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009), recognising this as a form of agency - and power - that involves the construction and negotiation of (gendered) subjectivity. These ideas will be used to inform my subsequent engagement with structuration theory and psychosocial studies, facilitating an approach that is sensitive to questions of gender in relation to both the social and psychical elements of agency and identity but, importantly, one that is not resolutely female-specific in this respect (e.g. Gilligan 1982, 1991, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule 1986). Drawing upon these ideas alongside key concepts from Screen theory, cultural studies, psychoanalysis, social theory and psychosocial criminology², this chapter aims to construct a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework adequate to the task of addressing the questions of subjectivity and agency which are central to my research. In the discussion that follows, I will demonstrate how an approach of this kind might enable a better understanding of audience responses to cinematic

² These disciplines - and the key arguments from each that are relevant to my research - are discussed more fully in subsequent sections of this chapter.

constructions of the female serial killer, and I begin here with a critical consideration of the existing work on cultural and media representations of violent criminal women; specifically women who kill.

The Female (Serial) Killer

Building upon the ideas introduced in Chapter 1, I begin this section by noting that violent acts committed by women are considered to be uniquely problematic in terms of cultural representation (Pearson 2007): and so the figure of the female serial killer can therefore be expected to prove particularly controversial in this respect. According to existing research on the topic, aggressive criminality is widely understood to be essentially masculine in origin (Skrapec 1993: 242), such that violent women - especially women who kill - constitute an irreconcilable threat to the feminine subjectivities and moral codes deemed acceptable within hetero-patriarchal society (Morrissey 2003: 38). It is also noted that women are generally represented in socio-cultural terms as victims rather than perpetrators of crime (Surette 1998, Hermes 2005, Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008) and often constructed as submissive and vulnerable (Frei, Völlm, Graf, and Dittmann 2006), whilst routinely being characterised and categorised in terms of their physical appearance (Morris 1987). Accordingly, perhaps, violent crimes committed by women are perceived to be both more fascinating and more terrifying than those committed by men (Keitner 2002), largely because of the extent to which they symbolise a woman's failure to conform to heteronormative feminine conventions, which hold that women are expected to be sensitive and compassionate (Naylor 1995), as well as

virtuous and self-sacrificing (Worrall 1990). As a consequence, violent female behaviour is often defined and described in terms of its deviance from these “norms”, and therefore remains inadequately explained and understood (Morrissey 2003). Existing research also indicates that violent women are often pathologised within media representations (Allen 1987, Armstrong 1999). In line with traditional binary oppositions of good versus evil, then, female killers are constructed as either “victims” or “vamps” (Benedict 1992) or as (sexually) deviant or insane (Jewkes 2004, Wilczynski 1997), as well as often being masculinised (Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006) and/or monsterised (Creed 1993, Chesney-Lind 1999, Berrington and Honkatukia 2002). Meanwhile, where representations of male killers commonly give emphasis to individual (rather than social) characteristics (Morrissey 2003), and tend to focus upon questions of independence and autonomy (Biressi 2001:165), the woman who kills is believed to threaten the very structures of the society in which she exists, to the extent that she must therefore be “contained” (Faith 1993). Such containment is achieved within cultural and media representations by denying agency and/or blame to the female killer for her actions (e.g. Naffine 1987, Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989) and, further, by the reliance of these representations upon stereotypical “stock” narratives, which serve as ‘a means of patrolling, controlling and reinforcing the boundaries of behaviour considered appropriate for all women’ (Morris and Wilczynski 1993: 214) thereby reinscribing conventional (patriarchal) ideologies and stereotypes, rather than seeking to challenge or to re-conceptualise these (Morrissey 2003,

Chambers and Millar 1987, Heidensohn 1987, Taslitz 1999, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006).

For the woman who kills, agency is therefore denied within media and cultural representations not for the criminal acts committed per se, but for her capacity to commit those crimes *as a woman* (Austin 2008). Moreover, as Morrissey observes, the persistent emphasis on female victimisation within many of the studies outlined in this section means that issues of agency, accountability and intentionality - as they pertain to female criminality - are often neglected altogether (Morrissey 2003). By considering the cinematic representations offered by the three key film texts that I have selected for inclusion in my study, and analysing the ways in which viewers engage with these representations, this thesis seeks to explore the arguments introduced here in greater depth. In the sections that follow, I will use the feminist concept of “resistance” to enable a conceptualisation of agency that is appropriate to this task, and will show how these ideas can be drawn together with structuration theory and psychosocial studies.

Feminist Theory and “Resistance”

As I have already suggested, feminist theory is valuable within the context of this project since it is ‘sensitive to contradictions and avoidances... [and to] exploring similarities and differences...’ (Hollway 1989: 41, Sarikakis et al 2009) and, further, because it seeks to ‘open up a window on the worlds of deviance, conformity, and social control that traditional masculinist theories of crime and justice do not’ (Daly and Maher 1998: 13). Work in the feminist tradition has, arguably, ‘provided the compass points for working-through the

relationship between the personal and the political' (Parker and Hook 2008: 93), and it is certainly the case that feminist approaches are useful here for their recognition of 'the complexity of human mental life... the importance of inner conflicts, tensions and feelings, often unconscious, and... the role they can play in human thought and action' (Busfield 1996: 186). Arguably, as I will show, these are precisely the kinds of complexities that demand careful consideration in exploring viewers' engagements with media constructions of the female serial killer. As I have argued on page 15, the feminist notion of resistance (e.g. McNay 1999, de Lauretis 2007, Mills 1997, Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009) provides a useful way forward in establishing a theoretical framework adequate to such a task: one that might 'work across discursive and disciplinary boundaries... analysing "real people" and "texts"' (Daly and Maher 1998: 2).

It is the mobilisation of the concept of resistance within cultural studies based audience research that is of particular interest for the purposes of my own work, although it is important to distinguish feminist conceptualisations of these ideas from other cultural studies' accounts of resistance, most notably those that use the Gramscian concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971) to explore "resistant readings" of media messages (e.g. Fiske 1987, Fiske and Hartley 1978). Gramscian resistance - or counter-hegemony (Gramsci 1971) - is the term used to describe the processes via which individuals critique, confront or oppose the legitimacy of existing hegemonic power structures. Such notions have been widely appropriated within the field of audience studies (e.g. Harris 1992, Tudor, 1999, Lewis 1991, Morley 1992, O'Shaughnessy 1990, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, Hills 2005a), and

are discussed more fully in Chapter 4. From a feminist perspective, meanwhile, the concept of resistance has been used to theorise women's struggle to resist, subvert or contest patriarchal "norms" and gender inequalities, focusing upon the personal dimensions of political power, and thereby emphasising questions of gender (e.g. Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009). Presupposing that media and cultural representations of the feminine function to 'sustain gender inequities and sexual subordination' (Durham 1999: 214), feminist research of this kind thus explores the ways in which women work to challenge or oppose heteronormative ideologies in their engagements with media texts (e.g. Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Huffer 2007, Waters 2011, Buikema and Van Der Tuin 2009, Gorton 2009, Krunen, Alvares and van Bauwel 2011, Sarikakis et al 2009, Click, Stevens Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz 2010, McRobbie 2009).

Such studies can be understood partly as a response to the 'universalising tendencies' (Yates 2010: 3) of Lacanian Screen theory³ with its 'apparent rendering of [the] audience as essentially passive "dupes", with little inclination toward political resistance' (2010: 3), and it is in this respect that they are relevant to my project⁴. This body of work has also successfully drawn attention to the pleasure(s) that women experience in their engagement with (televisual) texts, despite the powerfully patriarchal content of the texts themselves, which rely heavily upon stereotypical images of femininity (Ang 1985, Hobson 1982, McCabe and Akass 2006, Thornham and Weissmann forthcoming, Jermyn 2011). Moreover, given their emphasis

³ See also my discussion on pages 76-79.

⁴ See my discussions of this throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6, in which I argue that, whilst questions of "resistance" are significant within participants' readings of the films, the cinematic "investments" that they make are not reducible to mere processes of resistance (or conformity) to hegemonic norms.

upon 'how the construction of meaning through the interaction between text and audience contributes to the subversion, negotiation or maintenance of hegemonic gender discourse' (van Zoonen 1994: 117, Vares 2002) the studies outlined in this section are useful for considering how and why gender forms a meaningful part of the film-viewing process. In Chapter 4, I use these arguments to explore the ways in which gender is significant for my participants in their readings of the three films used for this project. The research introduced here also raises important questions about the spectatorial experience, asking, for instance, whether spectators alternate continually between positive and critical viewing positions (van Zoonen 1994: 118, Betterton 1985, Seiter, Borchers, Kreutzner and Warth 1989, Brown 1994, Wood 2009, Ross 2011), and contemplating how such processes might involve the construction of alternative subjectivities (McKinley 1997: 65, Bosworth 1999, Ryle 2011, Wood 2009) within the conversational "networks" constructed around the texts. Feminist work in this tradition thus enables a consideration of how (female) viewers might take pleasure in 'break[ing] patriarchal rules about what counts as important and valuable'(McKinley 1997: 43), whilst also drawing attention to the strategies used by readers to resist or reject those representations that they find less enjoyable (Shields and Heinecken 2001). These latter issues are discussed more comprehensively in relation in Chapter 6⁵.

Whilst such approaches are valuable in that they facilitate a closer consideration of 'how we resist provided subjectivities in relation to the regulative power of modern social apparatuses' (Walkerdine 1986: 194), it is

⁵ See especially my discussion of Daniel on pages 267-281.

nevertheless the case, as Walkerdine observes, that in ‘concentrating [exclusively] on the dynamics within regimes of representation, we risk ending up with a sense of the determined and passive subject we had hoped to avoid’ (1986: 188). Given the psychosocial objectives of my research, I therefore suggest that although feminist conceptualisations of resistance are certainly useful here, many draw rather too heavily upon constructionist - particularly Foucauldian - frameworks (e.g. Diamond and Quinby 1988, McLaren 2002, Allen 1999), and I am critical of their constructionist vision of a passive subject existing merely ‘at the mercy of... competing discourses’ (Baxter 2003: 31): a matter discussed further on pages 42 to 44 in this chapter⁶. The human individual envisaged by Baxter does constitute a useful response to these constructionist accounts. Where Baxter’s subjects are agentive in as much as they are able to ‘adopt multiple positions or multiple voices that interact with their conscious and unconscious desires, pleasures and tensions, as well as changes of discursive context and social relationship’ (2002: 830), however, she gives consideration in her study only to *how* these processes work, whilst the question of *why* it is that subjects take up particular discursive positions and not others remains unexplored. Nevertheless, Baxter’s (feminist) conceptualisation of the individual as being socially (discursively) constructed *as well as* ‘exist[ing] as a thinking, feeling

⁶ It should be noted that, whilst I do draw upon Walkerdine’s work throughout my project, our approaches differ on this particular point. Walkerdine (1986, 1996, 2007) has drawn upon Foucault, Althusser and Lacan in her valuable exploration of how individuals are discursively positioned, and how modes of signification inform our identities (1986: 188). For the purposes of this project, however, I find the ‘extreme relativism’ (Demaine 2001: 56, Campbell 2001) of the Foucauldian position problematic, and draw instead upon the disciplines of psychosocial studies, structuration theory and postmodern theory as a means of drawing the “psychical” and “social” elements of subjectivity more closely together.

subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices' (Weedon 1987: 125) is helpful. Where Baxter merely *alludes* to - and does not adequately explore - the psychical dimensions of subjectivity (and agency), my own work acknowledges that agentive potential can be contingent upon discursive relations, but does not imply that human agency is merely an effect of discourse (Butler 1995: 137). Following Frosh, then, I will argue that:

subjects are produced by and in power; that is, they are constituted by social forces which lie outside them, in the workings of the world. But this does not mean that subjects have no agency; rather, their agentic statuses what they *are produced with*, and it enables them to take hold of power and use it (2002: 4).

Aiming to conceive of agency in more active and creative terms (McNay 1999: 176), I therefore draw in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 upon the feminist notion of resistance, especially in my consideration of the extent to which (and the ways in which):

the [multiple] practices which position us may often be mutually contradictory. They are also sites of contestation and struggle. We never quite fit the "positions" provided for us by regulatory practices (Walkerdine 1986: 194).

These issues, as I will show, are significant for my participants in their readings of the films. In the following section, I seek to build upon and further develop the ideas outlined here, conceptualising text/viewer engagements in psychosocial and biographical terms, acknowledging that these engagements are always necessarily socio-culturally situated and, as such,

cannot adequately be understood in abstraction from the context(s) of their production, nor the specific sites and practices (Walkerdine 2007: 10) within which they are made meaningful.

Constructing the (Agentive) Psychosocial Subject

Given the objectives of my project (as already outlined in this chapter and in Chapter 1), I suggest that to understand human agency merely as the effect of discursive practice is to invoke a deterministic and over simplistic (Calhoun 1994, Williams 2000: 77) account: one which risks producing 'subjects without intersubjectivity' (2000: 78). It is however important to acknowledge that the constructionist "trap" which, according to Clarke, is 'unable to recognise the limits of its own discipline... and rejects or ejects threatening knowledge' (Clarke 2006: 1159, Craib 1997) can sometimes prove difficult to circumvent. McKinley's (1997) study of gendered agency and identity addresses some of these issues, although it attests, ultimately, to this very same difficulty and, to this end, I provide a critique of her work in the discussion that follows.

Despite acknowledging that constructionist theories of human agency are inherently problematic, McKinley presupposes that our inner life is '...shaped by the ways we have to express it, and by the communities that give it meaning' (1997: 48), rejecting (Western) conceptualisations of an '... inner self that is the author of our private thoughts and feelings' (1997: 48). Invoking Gergen's claim that '[t]o write or speak is not... to express an interior world, but to borrow from the available things people write and say and to reproduce them for another audience' (Gergen 1991:105), then, McKinley goes on to argue that agency can be best explored by 'moving it to

a discursive level, where it can be empirically studied' (1997: 7). I am thus critical of this suggestion which, rather than "reconciling" the problems of identity and agency that it seeks to address, seems reluctant to actually engage with them at all. Her decision to set aside issues of what respondents "really" think, and to focus solely upon how they discursively construct themselves and others in various situations and contexts (1997: 51) is thus perhaps a case in point. Although McKinley's work alludes to the ontological and epistemological dilemmas that are relevant to my study by suggesting that identity 'does not flow from an internal well, an inviolate inner self, *despite the fact that we habitually speak as if it did*' (1997: 51, my italics), my research endeavours to explore these issues far more comprehensively, developing her ideas further in order to provide a more nuanced account of how and why individuals are motivated to take up certain available discursive positions and not others. McKinley's approach, meanwhile, can be situated within the broader field of discursive psychology: a discipline in which psychological processes are 'respecified as discourse practices' (Wetherall, Watson and Gallois 2007: 7). Since this project seeks to explore questions of identity and agency in terms of their significance and meaning *beyond discourse* (acknowledging the role of the unconscious), and to carefully explore the potentially contradictory and conflicting elements of viewers' engagements with cinematic representations of the female serial killer, I will argue that a psychosocial framework - as opposed to a discursive psychological one - is more appropriate here.

As I will show, this is because, rather than treating discourse as a 'pathway to individuals' inner lives, (cognitive processes or other "mental

stuff”’ (Edwards and Potter 1992: 126) discursive psychology maintains that the psychological dimensions of subjectivity are ‘constructed and deployed in the discourse itself’ (1992: 127). In doing so, it “brackets off” cognitive processes (Potter and Wetherell 1987) in order to ‘start somewhere different’ (Potter and Hepburn 2007: 165): focusing on talk and texts in social practices instead of ‘trying to get inside people’s heads’ (2007: 160-161). Aiming to ‘avoid psychological theorising in favour of analysis based in the pragmatics of social actions’ (Edwards 2005: 260), discursive psychology therefore conceives of discourse not as an ‘expression of speakers’ underlying cognitive states’ (Edwards and Potter 1992: 2/3), but as situated, context-specific and action-oriented. From this perspective, agency is theorised as ‘a discursive resource rather than a state or an essence’ (Wetherell 2005: 170). Whilst I acknowledge that representations of the female serial killer - and viewers’ engagements with these representations - are always necessarily socio-culturally situated and constructed, I argue that it is crucial to explore the complex psychodynamics that are involved in such processes. Nevertheless, by acknowledging that the “real” is ‘always mediated and worked through discourse’ (Wetherell 2005: 170), this project will give consideration to the ways in which human experiences are discursively represented, but recognises that this ‘is not the same as the claim that they amount only to words’ (Frosh 2002: 16).

It is helpful here to draw upon McNay’s conceptualisation of symbolic and psychical realms as mutually interactional and inherent (McNay 2000:20), in order to provide a ‘more precise and varied account’ (2000: 4) of agency. Combining feminist theory with the psychoanalytic concept of the ‘social

imaginary' (Castoriadis 1987), McNay is also critical of those constructionist (especially Foucauldian) accounts of human agency (e.g. Mills 2003, Ramazanoglu 1993) that radically underemphasise the 'differing motivations and the ways in which individuals struggle over, appropriate and transform cultural meanings and resources' (McNay 2000: 4): processes with which this project is especially concerned. Following Frosh, I therefore seek throughout my project to 'restore agency to the subject' (Frosh 2002: 139, Giddens 1991), in order to raise questions about 'why and how specific formations of subjecthood come about... what purposes they serve, what anxieties are actively being defended against, what aspirations fulfilled' (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2003: 41). Whilst, as McNay correctly observes, these issues have been addressed within psychoanalytic feminist theory, the stubborn adherence of many such studies to the various forms of 'discursive determinism' (McNay 2000: 20) outlined in this section precludes them from adequately negotiating the "dualism" between social and psychical. The reliance of these accounts upon conventional (especially Lacanian) psychoanalytic paradigms is similarly problematic in this respect: primarily because their 'overenthusiastic dismantling of subjecthood' (Frosh 2002: 139) evokes an 'empty subject' (2002: 139): one that is merely 'structured in and by discursive relations' (Frosh et al 2003: 40/41). McNay's efforts to "move beyond" questions of talk or text are thus valuable in relation to this thesis, as is the emphasis that she gives to both social *and* psychical elements of agency.

This chapter is arguing for a theoretical approach which might facilitate a more adequate explanation (and a better understanding) of the ways in

which representations of female criminality are constructed and interpreted, paying particular attention to the significance of agency in this context. As such, it is important that the problematic “duality” of social and psyche is carefully addressed here. This matter has been widely explored within structuration theory and psychosocial studies, and is discussed more fully in the following section. As I will show, whilst my project will draw most extensively upon the key concepts and arguments within psychosocial studies, these can usefully be supplemented with ideas drawn from structuration theory, in order to construct a suitably nuanced theoretical framework. It is to a discussion of these ideas that I will now turn.

Structuration Theory

According to Giddens, ‘to be a human being is to know, virtually all of the time, in terms of some description or another, both what one is doing and why one is doing it’ (1991: 35). Whilst I am interested in Giddens’ call for a “reworking” of existing conceptions of human agency as a means of evaluating both its epistemological and ontological dimensions (Outhwaite 1990: 64, Giddens 1984: xx), however, I argue that his sociological account tends to oversimplify both elements: especially, perhaps, as these might pertain to the figure of the female serial killer, and the ways in which she is represented. Nevertheless, Giddens’ attempt to ‘overcome the theoretical impasse of sociology by reformulating the subject/object and agency/structure dualities’ (Tucker 1998: 65) is useful for the purposes of my own work, which seeks, similarly, to establish a theoretical means of moving beyond some of these deeply entrenched binary oppositions. Also helpful is

his vision of agency as being closely interwoven with social power relations, which enables a fuller consideration of the ways in which our actions are at once conscious, unconscious, cognitive, emotive and discursively informed (Giddens 1979)⁷. Criticisms have however been made of Giddens' efforts to transcend the dualism between action and structure, psychical and social by reconceptualising this as a "duality", in which action and structure, psychical and social complement rather than counteract one another (Thompson 1989: 58), and it has been suggested that his attempts to reduce social structure to social action amount to little more than a 'failed resolution' (Hollway and Jefferson 2005: 148, Craib 1998). Further critiques draw attention to the broader oversimplifications that seem to persist throughout much of Giddens' work. Archer, for instance, concedes that his notion of duality is useful because it attempts to transcend object/subject and agent/structure dichotomies by conceiving of these as mutually constitutive, and yet she considers his structuration model to be so tightly wound that it forecloses the possibility of exploring the interplay *between* the various elements (1990: 83). As I will argue, the complex dynamics involved here can perhaps be more adequately explored by approaching them from a *psychosocial* perspective: a fuller discussion of this is provided in the next section. In my later discussion chapters, meanwhile (most notably in Chapter 6), I will show how my participants' struggles with this "interplay" - which I conceptualise in relation to Silverstone's notion of 'essential tensions' (1994: x) - form a significant part of their readings of the films.

⁷ In Chapter 5 (pages 205-207), I also draw upon Giddens' (1991) conceptualisation of narcissism. This is useful for my project because of the extent to which it is understood to be inherently linked to personal agency.

Giddens' account of subjectivity in which the unconscious 'can only be explored in relation to the conscious: to the reflexive monitoring and rationalisation of conduct, grounded in practical consciousness' (1979: 58) is however relevant to my work. Defining practical consciousness as 'what actors know (believe) about social conditions, including especially the conditions of their own action, but *cannot express discursively*' (1984: 375, my italics), Giddens argues that there is a tension between the reasons we (as social actors) provide discursively for our conduct, and the rationalisation of action embodied in our stream of agentive conduct (1979: 57). As I have already suggested, it is precisely these kinds of "tensions" with which my project is concerned and, as such, Giddens' work is perhaps best evaluated here as part of a psychosocial framework, as I will demonstrate in the following section. Archer's view of human subjectivity and agency as inherently "conflicted" is also valuable in this respect, as is her suggestion that it is an unavoidable part of everyday life to 'feel both free and enchained, capable of shaping our own future and yet confronted by towering, seemingly impersonal, constraints' (Archer 1996: 65). As I will show, such questions are perhaps especially salient in my exploration of the ways in which the complexities of female criminality are represented and interpreted. Following Archer, I am thus critical of Giddens' 'oversocialised view of man' (1996:121) on the grounds that this 'ultimately denies personal psychology' (1996: 121). Moreover, where both Giddens and Archer address the issues outlined here in a wholly theoretical way, I will show how, by supplementing their ideas with psychosocial ones, they might be empirically grounded: this is of course important since my research seeks to examine "real" data from "real"

subjects. The approach that I take here is not, therefore, 'entirely phenomenological' (Layder 1990:111), but seeks to 'engage with the concrete social world... in a permanent rather than transitory, glancing manner' (Gregson 1989: 237).

In this section, I have argued that mediated representations of the female serial killer - and audience engagements with these representations - can be most adequately explored by emphasising both the psychical and social elements that these processes involve. Endeavouring to 'go beyond a set of distinctions between psychological and social, between what's inside and outside' (Walkerdine 2007: 2), I have nevertheless sought to avoid a theoretical "collapse" of these two categories, and have suggested that particular attention should be paid to the interplay (or "tensions") between them. I have also indicated that structuration theory can usefully be supplemented with some of the key ideas from psychosocial studies as a means of acknowledging the 'not fittingness' (Hoggett 2008: 383) and the - often antagonistic - 'mutual suspicion' (Burman 2008: 376/377) of psychoanalytic and sociological approaches. It is to a fuller discussion of psychosocial studies⁸, including its resurgence within contemporary criminology, that this chapter will now turn.

Psychosocial Studies

This project will explore the complex psychodynamics inherent in processes of representation and interpretation as these pertain to the mediated construction of the female serial killer. I argue that these complexities might

⁸ A more comprehensive discussion of psychosocial *method* (and recent debates about this within the field of psychosocial studies) is provided in Chapter 3, pages 100-105.

best be addressed by conceiving of identity as a *psychosocial* achievement (Williams 2000: 95), i.e. by acknowledging that our identities:

lie[...] at the boundary between the individual Self and the social Self... a reservoir of experiential memories and of affectively charged representations that guide, often unconsciously, our discourse on Self, Alter, and society (Zavalloni 2001: 285).

I approach this project, then, with the view that:

Although it is not possible to get inside people's unconscious... there is something going on... that sustains the psychic and material construction of the subject (Fusco 2006: 5).

A similar theoretical persuasion can be observed in recent criminological research, which endeavours to mobilise - and (re)conceptualise - more conventional psychoanalytic ideas within a psychosocial framework (Jefferson 2002, Gadd and Jefferson 2007a, 2007b). Given that my own work is similarly aligned, these ideas are specifically relevant here and are more comprehensively explored in the discussion that follows. Firstly, however, I will provide a more detailed account of the ways in which subjectivity can be theorised from a psychosocial perspective.

From this theoretical position, questions of self and the social are understood to be intimately connected and mutually constitutive, such that "the social" is neither external to, independent of nor opposed to the individual, and functions as far more than a 'backdrop' to processes of interaction and communication (Gaskell 2001: 232). With this in mind, Deaux and Philogène explore the link between individuals and the social world by using social psychology to 'generate a dialogue connecting the

epistemological dimensions of a sociologically defined theory to those of a more psychological nature' (2001: 4). I would however argue that Deaux and Philogène's apparent search for a 'synthesis' (2001: 3) between these elements ultimately, if unintentionally, undermines their account of the dialogic relationship that is so crucial here. Their call for a reinsertion of social representation processes into psychological cognitive paradigms of identity and subjectivity is however of merit, as is their observation of the fact that such paradigms tend to be dismissive of the role played by cultural, social and ideological factors (Lorenzi-Cioldi 2001: 225). It is therefore necessary for the purposes of this project to conceive of a "bridge" between the individual and their social context (Deaux and Philogène 2001: 5) in a way that allows the two elements to stand at a sufficient critical distance from one another, rather than simply 'clamp[ing] [them] together in a conceptual vice' (Archer 1996: 87, Burman 2008). Such an approach facilitates closer consideration of the space *between* the psychical and socio-cultural realms which, I suggest, is important in terms of exploring the processes of textual representation and audience interpretation in which this project is interested. The issues outlined here might alternatively of course have been approached from a discursive psychological perspective⁹ and so, in the discussion that follows, I will develop the points raised on pages 38-43 of this chapter, in order to explain how and why a *psychosocial* framework is better suited to the aims and objectives of my work. I begin by clarifying the contradistinctions between these two theoretical disciplines and, in doing so,

⁹ See my critique of discursive psychological paradigms on pages 42-44.

will substantiate the importance of my own research, situating it within the field of existing studies, and defending its relevance therein.

Firstly, where discursive psychology ‘reads the text for the identity positions that are constructed for the person talking and the audience listening, and for the broader cultural discourses and subject positions it draws on in these constructions’ (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 353), (psychoanalytically informed) psychosocial approaches endeavour to go “behind” the text, conceiving of the psychic realm as ‘informed by actual events and therefore social structures, but...located “in” and primarily constituted through unconscious processes’ (2008: 353). In line with the critique of constructionist approaches that I have already provided in this chapter¹⁰, I agree with Edwards and Potter (1992) that language ought not to be over-privileged as the “unit of analysis”, since doing so risks ‘los[ing] sight of the person’ (McAvoy 2007: 56), and tends to foreground social and external factors at the expense of personal ones. Moreover, such approaches fail to account for the differences and contradictions - as well as the emotional elements - that exist within various discourses (McAvoy 2007, Frosh 1999). Following Hoggett, then, I argue that communicative processes are both affective and discursive in their very nature, ‘precisely *because* of the inherent limitations of language in expressing experience’ (2008: 381). Indeed, as Frosh observes:

talking is not quite the same as being, and one of the deepest impulses and aggravations of human subjectivity is the feeling that it is not quite possible to put reality into words. Language acts, does, produces, makes meanings; but it also, at the edges, fails (2002: 16).

¹⁰ See my discussion on pages 38-44.

Frosh's incorporation of postmodernist theory is perhaps useful here in pointing to the '*insufficiency* of language as a means of embracing experience' (2002: 81), that is, 'the way something always slips out from the margins of what is symbolised, something left behind yet with the power to excite and destroy' (2002: 89). Thus, whilst sociology:

can give us very real insights into the structures of modern (or postmodern) life... a psychoanalytic sociology or psycho-social studies can help us understand the powerful affective forces... of these phenomena - the mad, often crazy side of our lives (Clarke 2006: 1161).

Given the focus of this project upon the representation and interpretation of *criminal* identity and agency, then, it is perhaps especially important here to acknowledge the fragility - as well as the inadequacy - of the discursive accounts of self and experience that we are able to provide (Hills 2002: 43), recognising that:

... there is a point where discourse fails, where language is characterised by its insufficiency rather than its expressive capacity, where what is known in and by a person lies quite simply outside symbolisation (Frosh 2002: 135).

Such issues have been addressed within contemporary criminological research, and some of the key arguments that inform this body of work are discussed more fully on pages 60-61. Meanwhile, Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) conceptualise the 'relation of person and society in a way that makes light of neither social life nor the world of the psyche' (1998: 28). This account is especially useful for its rejection of the 'dichotomy

between the sociological and the psychological' (1998: 27)¹¹. Parker provides a particularly good summary of the tensions that exist between discursive psychological and psychosocial approaches, noting that whilst it is necessary to confront the conventional constructionist argument 'against the existence of cognitive machinery... and [its] refusal to speculate about what is going on inside the mind as if it were a kind of closed box' (Parker 1997b:14), traditional psychoanalytic explanations which try to "look inside" the subject are often troublingly essentialist. For Parker, these latter explanations acknowledge only the 'underlying fixed qualities that operate independently of social relations' (Parker 2002: 135) and are therefore no less problematic than those which reduce everything to language. Where discursive psychology endeavours to simply 'reframe questions about the inside and the outside of the individual' (Parker 1997b: 14), then, I argue that the issues outlined here can be more adequately and comprehensively addressed with recourse to psychosocial theory, especially the body of existing work which encourages the (re)introduction of psychoanalytic ideas into more traditional psychological approaches (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000a/2005, Hollway 1984, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Frosh et al 2003).

Following Frosh once again, I argue that psychoanalysis is valuable for its exploration of 'the eccentric, the erratic and the excessive ... all that is "out of step" with the apparent rationality of social circumstances' (Frosh 2002: 123). In seeking to explore in this thesis 'the gap between what people have and what they experience' (2002: 123), then, I suggest that it is helpful to draw

¹¹ See also Walkerdine (2007) who, in seeking to move away from the dichotomy between ideological and personal meaning, maintains that 'The meanings subjects make and the meanings in which subjects are inscribed need to be thought of as part of one and the same process' (2007: 10).

upon the language and set of concepts that psychoanalysis has developed as a means of 'do[ing] justice to the complexity of the "inside" of the psyche, to the mental contents that constitute each of us as subjects in the dual sense of "agents" of our actions and "subject to" the workings of the unconscious' (2002: 123). For Hollway, psychoanalysis provides a "key" to psychosocial studies, and I agree with her suggestion that 'no other body of theory...so illuminates experience, action, and subjectivity in ways that enrich otherwise reductively social accounts' (Hollway 2008: 386). I therefore maintain that psychoanalytic interpretive strategies are enormously helpful in 'account[ing] for the complexity of specific subject positions as they emerge and are negotiated in interactive contexts' (Frosh and Emerson 2005: 308), and so my own work will build upon these frameworks¹².

It is however important to note that the theoretical appropriations of psychoanalysis outlined here have been strongly criticised. Particular concern has been expressed regarding the utilisation of psychoanalytic concepts outside of the clinical environment for which they were designed (e.g. Kvale 2003, Frosh et al 2003, Wetherell 2003). Spears (2005), for instance, cautions against over-emphasising the importance of unconscious processes and conflicts when making psychodynamic interpretations¹³. These, he adds, must be properly justified in order to establish whether such processes are being uncovered *within* a person, or are merely 'involved at the boundary of dialogue (disclosure, confession)' (2005: 167). Other criticisms are similarly aligned: Frosh and Baraitser, for example, argue that

¹² On pages 100-105, a fuller discussion of psychosocial method is provided, in which I situate my own epistemological position in relation to current debates in the field of psychosocial studies, and provide a rationale for my approach.

¹³ Further consideration is given to these issues in Chapter 3.

psychosocial attempts to examine the interplay of social and psychical formations as a means of 'explain[ing] 'how the "out-there" gets "in-here" and vice versa, especially through concepts such as projection, internalisation and identification' (2008: 347) can remain too open to interpretation. Such critiques also problematise psychoanalytic assumptions about "innerness" (Frosh and Baraitser 2008), challenging the ways in which psychoanalysis is often presented within contemporary research as 'an expert system that has access to this inner world and knows what it is like, and posits it as something that exists in and of itself' (2008: 352). Thus, as I have already acknowledged, the "drawing together" of psychoanalysis and sociology advocated here must be mindful of the epistemological and ontological boundaries involved. Rather than seeking to abolish these boundaries, then, I will draw careful attention to the '*tension between outer and inner worlds, between social structure and society*' (Clarke 2006: 1160, Craib 1989, Clarke 2003, my italics). I therefore agree with Clarke that, whilst neither psychoanalytic nor sociological frameworks necessarily offer a better explanation of the world than the other, a psychosocial approach 'provides glimpses and insights into our internal world' (Clarke 2006: 1166) and that, where used by researchers to engage with "real" subjects, it might add a deeper "layer" to our understandings about the social world. Clarke's observations are helpful here, although he fails, ultimately, to offer any suggestion as to how psychosocial theory might *actually be applied* in an empirical context (2006: 1166). This is a methodological dilemma far more proficiently managed by Hollway and Jefferson, who provide a useful critique of the ways in which existing research has tended to 'revolv[e] round the

presumed passivity or activity of the individual in the face of their social circumstances' (2005: 148): a matter more fully addressed in Chapter 3. Hollway and Jefferson's work is acclaimed for its innovative contributions, not least for:

having the courage to move beyond the linguistic turn... and to confront issues of material "reality"... both external and psychological, to embrace analytical depth beyond the surface discourse, while maintaining a critical approach (Spears 2005: 165).

Their insistence that 'people cannot be totally known' (Hollway and Jefferson 2001: 108) is perhaps an especially valuable one within the context of this thesis, as is their acknowledgement that it is crucial 'not to iron out inconsistencies, contradictions and puzzles [because] [t]o grasp a person through the "whole" of what we know about them does not imply that he or she is consistent, coherent or rational' (2001: 111). Building upon these ideas for the purposes of my project, I will endeavour to 'open up [the] questions of motivation, affect and unconscious conflict' (Hollway 2006: 544) that are significant for my participants. Any contradictions observed in doing so will be '[recognised as] important indicators of mental conflict - unconscious as well as conscious - rather than trying to smooth them out' (Hollway and Jefferson 2001:120). I therefore argue that Hollway and Jefferson's work offers a useful basis for the theoretical framework that I am formulating here. As such, I will draw upon their ideas in my own approach to the constructions and representations of (criminal) subjectivity and agency with which this project is concerned, acknowledging that 'the effects of unconscious conflict on choice and agency' (Hollway and Jefferson 2005:

147) are especially salient in this context. My work will draw most extensively upon the psychoanalytically-oriented psychosocial studies evaluated in this section. This body of work is, I suggest, most relevant to my own because, in contrast to both constructionist and discursive-psychological accounts, it draws attention to the relations *between* various discursive subject positions, enabling a fuller consideration of the internal worlds and the (often distorted) 'internal representations of the external social world' (McAvoy 2007: 57) via which we make sense of our everyday experiences.

Recent work within the field of psychosocial criminology (e.g. Jefferson 2002, Gadd and Jefferson 2007), meanwhile, takes a similarly nuanced approach to the study of deviant and transgressive identities and behaviours: issues which are, arguably, specifically relevant to the objectives of this project, given its focus upon representations and interpretations of female criminal agency. A fuller discussion of these studies is provided on pages 60-61, although it is helpful to note here that Jefferson makes an important observation via his emphasis upon the psychoanalytic concept of ambivalence which, he suggests, enables a clearer insight into individuals' experiences of contradictory feelings: particularly the ways in which unwanted parts of the self are "split off" when anxieties become too uncomfortable to manage (Jefferson 2002: 155). As I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, my participants often engage in such processes in their readings of the three films. Whilst anxiety and ambivalence are affects that can therefore be considered salient in relation to viewers' engagements with representations of the female serial killer, such feelings are also perhaps deeply intertwined with our sense of self. It is from this latter perspective that

Hollway and Jefferson approach their work (2000a, 2001, 2005), elaborating these ideas in their notion of a 'divided psychosocial subject of unconscious conflict; a subject located in social realities mediated not only by social discourses but by psychic defences' (2005: 147).

Throughout this project, I will draw extensively upon Hollway and Jefferson's model of subjectivity, incorporating this into my theoretical and methodological frameworks as a means of remaining 'attentive to the co-presences of the psychic and social dimensions of human behaviour, in a resolutely non-reductive fashion' (Hollway and Jefferson 2005: 147). Further, I will show how these ideas can be used to theorise viewers' engagements with representations of the female serial killer, which seem to lend themselves so readily to a consideration of the complexities of criminal agency. Following Hollway and Jefferson, then, I acknowledge that individuals are both consciously and unconsciously motivated to take up certain available positions in discourse rather than others (Hollway 2006: 544, Jefferson 2002): processes which are described as 'investments' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000: 15), and which constitute 'the psychosocial link between "inner" and "outer" worlds' (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 84).

It is also important to note here that Hollway and Jefferson posit a '*defended*, rather than unitary, rational subject' (2001: 103): one that is fundamentally "decentred" through the concept of the unconscious. In doing so, they draw upon Kleinian psychoanalysis in their presupposition that anxiety is 'inherent in the human condition [where]... defences against [it] are mobilised at a largely unconscious level' (2001: 107). I build further upon the ideas outlined in this section in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, where I will show how

the concept of “investment” can be used to theorise my participants’ engagements with the three film texts selected for this project, exploring ‘how unconscious defences designed to protect oneself from feeling anxious, vulnerable and out of control are implicated in our discursive “choices”’ (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 84).

I am therefore arguing that the processes of representation and interpretation with which my research is concerned can be most adequately approached from a psychosocial perspective, as opposed to a discursive-psychological one, precisely because I seek to interrogate the very problems that are ‘hard for discourse analysis, especially of the Foucauldian variety, to manage’ (Frosh and Emerson 2005: 311, Willig 2003). Following Frosh, I suggest that where discursive psychology accounts competently for the *effects* of discursive positioning (e.g. Edley and Wetherell 1997), it does not ‘offer plausible reasons for *why* specific individuals end up where they do’ (Frosh et al 2003: 39, my italics), and is thus limited in its ability to shed light on what produces the ‘specific “choice” of location a particular individual makes amongst the available identity positions’ (2003: 40). In view of this, I maintain that constructions and interpretations of the female serial killer can be most effectively explored via a ‘move which goes “beyond” or “beneath” discourse’ (2003: 52). In the discussion that follows, I will show how such an exploration can be successfully mobilised by also drawing upon ideas from psychosocial criminology, enabling an approach that might adequately ‘carve out spaces in which we dare to talk about agency, confusion, power [and] desire’ (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 75).

Psychosocial Criminology

According to Jefferson (2002), subjectivity has been inadequately understood - and criminal behaviour insufficiently explained - within much criminological research, largely because such work tends to draw so heavily upon either Freudian or constructionist paradigms. Psychosocial approaches are becoming increasingly popular within criminology, and the discipline is said to have witnessed a 'revival of interest in offender's biographies and inner emotional experiences, and a stress on the importance of self-understanding for an understanding of crime' (Smith 2006: 361). Since my own theoretical approach is similarly aligned, I argue that these ideas are not only valuable for the purposes of this project, but that they also contribute to its contemporary relevance within the field of existing research.

For Gadd and Jefferson, then, traditional criminology presupposes a vision of the individual offender (as a subject) that is:

woefully inadequate, unrecognisable as the complex and contradictory human being operating in often difficult and cross-pressured social circumstances we know to be the reality of all our lives (2007: 1).

They continue thus:

In place of messily complex human subjects shot through with anxiety and self-doubt, conflictual feelings and unruly desires, we are offered [by traditional criminology] depleted caricatures (2007: 1).

These are complexities that, Gadd and Jefferson suggest, can be more comprehensively understood by approaching them from a psychosocial perspective: emphasising in doing so the 'importance of emotion as a source

of action' (Smith 2006: 361), and thereby opening up important questions of motivation and agency in studying criminal behaviour. As I will show, their work is also relevant to my own because it problematises conventional conceptualisations of "othering", which tend to be organised in terms of binary opposition (e.g. Hall 1997, Said 1978). Thus, observing how, 'those we do not understand we can more readily demonise' (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 2), Gadd and Jefferson suggest that:

all crime, including the most apparently bizarre, is normal in the sense that it can be understood in relation to the same psychosocial processes that affect us all... We are all more or less neurotic and life, given certain psychosocial exigencies, can make psychotics of any one of us (2007: 2).

Drawing upon these ideas alongside the other psychosocial studies accounts outlined in this section, then, I agree that '[j]ust as we need a theory of how "otherness" enters what is usually taken as the "self", so we need concepts which will address the ways in which what is "subjective" is also found out there' (Frosh 2003: 1555). I therefore argue that the psychosocial conceptualisations of "self" and "other" described here can usefully be appropriated within my own work, since they enable a more nuanced - and theoretically innovative - approach to my study of the ways in which female criminal identity is made meaningful via textual representation and audience interpretation. In Chapter 6, for instance, I show how participants sometimes struggle with notions of criminal otherness in their readings of the films, and explore how this is powerfully motivated by their own unconscious conflicts, anxieties and phantasies which are, in turn, linked to specific biographical

experiences. My discussions of Harry and Alice are of particular interest in this respect¹⁴.

Part 1 of this chapter has sought to construct a framework suitable for theorising questions of agency and subjectivity as these relate to viewers' engagements with mediated constructions of the female serial killer. I have argued that this might best be achieved by taking a cross-disciplinary approach: one that draws most extensively upon the discipline of psychosocial studies, supplementing this with key ideas from structuration theory (e.g. Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991) and the feminist notion of resistance (e.g. de Lauretis 2007, Mills 1997, Lloyd, Few and Allen 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009), including the mobilisation of these latter ideas within the field of audience research (e.g. Huffer 2007, Waters 2011, Buikema and Van Der Tuin 2009, Gorton 2009, Krunen, Alvares and van Bauwel 2011, Sarikakis et al 2009, Click, Stevens Aubrey and Behm-Morawitz 2010). In doing so, I have endeavoured to formulate an audience studies approach that is sensitive to questions of gender in relation to both the social and psychical elements of agency and identity but, importantly, one that is not resolutely *female-specific* in this respect (e.g. Gilligan 1982, 1991, Belenky et al 1986). I have also shown how recent work on psychosocial criminology might be incorporated into this framework, providing a specific link to the issues of (female) criminal behaviour with which my own research is concerned. Since many of the studies within psychosocial criminology are also empirically grounded, they can be

¹⁴ See Chapter 6: Harry is reflexive about (and unsettled by) his ambivalent feelings towards Wuornos given her criminal actions, whilst Alice is anxious and ambivalent about her own agentic capacity, especially the extent to which we have '... all got it in us to do something like that' (4: 1915).

considered to offer a valuable foundation upon which to build for the purposes of my project, which seeks to explore not only how meaning is textually produced, but also the ways in which meanings are constructed by *actual* viewers as they engage with the films themselves.

This thesis is concerned with studying mediated representations of the female serial killer (and audience responses to those representations) as they are constructed within both mainstream and documentary film: emphasising the questions of criminal agency that are involved. It also aims to better understand the motivations for these processes, asking not just how, but *why* they occur as they do. In Part 2 of this chapter, I will introduce and critically evaluate the existing audience studies literature that is relevant to my research, drawing upon key arguments from film theory and cultural studies. Since my project will examine a mainstream film and two documentaries, consideration will also be given to the ways in which these different types of (mediated) text have been theorised within both disciplines. Part 2 will discuss such matters more comprehensively, paying attention to existing work on documentary (as film form and genre), and showing how and why such research is relevant to my own.

2: Film Texts and Film Audiences

It is argued that cinema and television entail different regimes of representation, vision and reception (Ellis 1982), thereby constructing different patterns of audience engagement (Ang 1986: 257, Morley 1980, 1986, 1988, 1989: 28, Bennett and Brown 2008)¹⁵. For Silverstone, televisual texts must be understood not solely in terms of their popular status within everyday life, but in relation to the 'essential tensions' (1994: x) which exist at the heart of social reality¹⁶. As I will show, Silverstone's ideas are also useful for theorising *film*-audience relations, especially in terms of the spectatorial "investments"¹⁷ made by my participants. Interestingly, according to Altman, our knowledge and understanding of cinema (and the ways in which we use both) 'derive not so much from cinema itself, but from those who represent cinema to us' (1999: 124) although, as I will show throughout this project, whilst it is important to acknowledge the significance of discourse as the site of production and development of meaning (Jancovich 2000, 2002), audience discourses themselves are arguably 'no less partial, contingent, and socially situated than any other aspect of media (or social practice)' (Mittell 2004: 97). These issues attest to the usefulness of theorising film/viewer engagements from a psychosocial perspective, as opposed to a constructionist or discursive psychological one, and Part 1 of this chapter has set out my arguments in defence of this suggestion. For the purposes of my own work, then, consideration will be given to the films - as texts -

¹⁵ See Chapter 1 (pages 7-8) and Chapter 7 (pages 324-325) for a discussion of the different "modes of engagement" (e.g. Klinger 2006) involved in televisual and cinematic contexts.

¹⁶ A full discussion of Silverstone's concept - and of its usefulness in theorising my interview data - is provided in Chapter 6, entitled *Managing the Self*.

¹⁷ A definition of Hollway and Jefferson's notion of "investment" (2000: 15) (and an account of how this term is appropriated throughout my thesis) is provided on pages 58-59.

themselves, *as well* as to some of the discourses that are constructed around them. This, I suggest, will facilitate a more comprehensive exploration of the meanings that people make in their engagements with movies (Mittell 2004: 5). Whilst such an approach does, to a degree, necessitate a decentring of the text as the dominant “site” of meaning production, however, this is not to suggest that questions of textual significance ought to be dismissed altogether. Rather, as I will show, it is crucial to acknowledge both the specific socio-historical context (Jancovich 2002: 152) and the wider industrial or audience practices within which the films (as texts) are situated (Mittell 2001: 9). I will therefore seek, in line with the psychosocial aims and objectives of my work, to ‘combine theories of the psychic dimensions of cinematic spectatorship with analyses that are socially located’ (Silverstone 1994: 33).

This project is thus concerned with the complex psychodynamics involved in film/viewer engagements, and endeavours to better understand the ways in which meaning is textually and interpretatively constructed in relation to cinematic constructions of (female) criminal agency. As I have already explained, two of the three key films selected for this project are documentaries. It is therefore important to engage critically with some of the key theoretical accounts (from both film studies and cultural studies) that have foregrounded questions of production, content and reception, i.e. text and audience, as these relate specifically to documentary films. A consideration of such work is made in the following section.

Documentary Film

Bill Nichols describes documentary film as ‘... a fiction (un)like any other’ (1991: 109), and it is interesting to note that documentaries have historically been defined in terms of their ‘creative treatment of actuality’ (Winston 2000: 19). Despite popular cultural conceptualisations of how such films offer a “fly on the wall” perspective on reality, questions of objectivity, “truth”, accuracy, belief, credibility and the (mis)representation of subjects are of key concern for many theorists (e.g. Corner 1996, Dowmunt 2003, Bordwell and Thompson 2004, Cousins and MacDonald 2006). Indeed, as Renov observes, the genre is underpinned by a modality of persuasion and promotion (1993a: 22), is heavily reliant upon on rhetorical form, and involves a significant degree of creative intervention on the part of the filmmaker (Renov 1993b, Machin and van Leeuwen 2007). Despite the scope and richness of existing documentary film research, however, I argue - following Austin (2007) - that further audience study is required in relation to visual documentary texts, since few efforts have thus far been made to explore the responses and expectations of documentary viewers across the ‘commercial, discursive and social contexts in which [the films] circulate and are watched’ (2007: 1). My project aims to contribute to - and build upon - this body of work, and some of the key debates that exist within the field are evaluated in the discussion that follows.

According to Beattie, documentary/viewer engagements are organised around a ‘bond of trust’ (2004: 11) between producers and audiences, in which both parties presuppose that documentary representations are ‘based on the actual socio-historical world, not a fictional world imaginatively

conceived' (2004: 11). It is nevertheless the case that such engagements are powerfully informed by processes of imagination and creativity (Wayne 2008: 92), and that documentary viewers use the 'bits of evidence and argument' (Corner 2001: 127) offered by the film texts to 'construct truths from them, truths of fact and perhaps truths of judgement' (2001: 127). Indeed, as I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, my participants do sometimes read the documentary films selected for this project in accordance with the spectatorial processes outlined here. It is also argued that, where the notion of "objectivity" has been over-emphasised in relation to documentary film, questions of *subjectivity* remain largely unexplored (Nichols 1991: 120). Macdonald's feminist approach to these matters is interesting, particularly in terms of her claim that documentary film criticism has traditionally sought to avoid questions of subjectivity and experience because such issues are understood to be 'located on the wrong side of a binary divide that privileges observation, verifiable evidence, and dispassionate reportage' (Macdonald 1998: 107). Drawing upon poststructuralist models of subjectivity, Macdonald seeks to 'politicise the personal' (1998: 107) by 'bringing feminist theories of experience into play with documentary aesthetics' (1998: 120) so as to re-work (rather than *replay*) conventional gendered assumptions about the discourses within and around documentary texts. The concerns raised here by Macdonald are pertinent to my own research, which is similarly critical of such assumptions, and therefore seeks (especially in Chapter 4) to challenge them. As I will show, however, her claim that documentaries serve to '... maintain[...] a dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, between empathy and knowledge' (1998: 111) can be more effectively explored by

engaging with *actual* viewers. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the analysis and interpretation of interview data undertaken in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, my psychosocial approach to this project facilitates a closer examination of the ways in which “real” audiences recognise, engage with and attempt to mediate the complex space between the subjective and the objective, recognising this a key aspect of the connected processes of representation and engagement (Hill 2008: 217). As I have suggested, it is also important to consider how ‘notions of... the familiar and the “other”... operate via the discursive positioning and textual proposals of documentary, and in the responses of particular socially situated audiences’ (Austin 2007: 3). Austin tackles these kinds of questions in his study of *Touching the Void* (2003), in which he observes that audience readings of this particular film involve processes of ‘engaging human characters in the unfolding story’ (2007: 66) and, further, are organised primarily around the narrative and spectacle of the film text. As I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, such dynamics are observable in the complex film-viewing investments made by my participants and these can usefully be theorised by drawing upon the concepts from feminist theory, structuration theory and, especially, psychosocial studies, that I have evaluated in Part 1 of this chapter.

The two documentary film texts selected for inclusion in this study are made and produced by Nick Broomfield, whose work in the genre has attracted a great deal of critical attention. Broomfield’s idiosyncratic directorial style is considered typical of a new generation of non-fiction films which tend towards a disregard of traditional concerns about objectivity (Fraser 2001), and such tendencies are certainly manifest in his ability to

maintain a powerful authorial and peculiarly reflexive - yet self-deprecating - presence throughout his work (Schilt 2000: 51). Broomfield's filmmaking technique, meanwhile, has been described as one with which he attempts to circumvent the conventional "fly on the wall" approach in favour of becoming 'the fly in the ointment' (Cousins and Macdonald 1996: 345). His work is also critiqued for its extensive use of "voice-over" narration: a device often held to be highly controversial because, combining omniscience and intimacy, it threatens to violate the "truth" of the film text (Bruzzi 2000: 43, Trinh 1993). My thesis will therefore explore the ways in which the issues outlined in this section bear significantly upon documentary representations of the female serial killer, and I will also consider how and why viewers' engagements with these representations can be compared to their engagements with those offered by mainstream film. I am interested here, then, in:

how films *work*, not according to some abstract set of principles, but... in response to the divergent exigencies that arise when industry, audience, and aesthetic practice are all defined by their relative fragmentation, dispersion and heterogeneity (Collins, Radner and Preacher Collins 1993: 5).

The objective of this project is thus to study the ways in which viewers are at once textually, culturally, ideologically, discursively and psychically positioned as an inherent part of the film-viewing experience: recognising this experience as one that is "lived" by actual spectators. In considering these complexities, however, I acknowledge that it is possible neither to directly observe nor fully reconstruct film/viewer engagements as "immediate" processes (Jenkins 2000: 167). Indeed, in accordance with the psychosocial

orientation of my research, I am not searching here for objective knowledge or “truth”, but seek to facilitate a better understanding of the spectatorial experience (Grossberg 1987; Ang 1989: 104, Bennett 1996: 149). I also recognise that the interpretations made by my participants (and, of course, by myself as researcher) are neither “neutral” nor merely “descriptive” (Ang 1989: 105, Lull 1988), and this particular issue is addressed more fully in Chapter 3. As I have suggested in Part 1 of this chapter¹⁸, my approach is critical of constructionist frameworks, and so I suggest that the analyses of audience discourse offered by some cultural studies accounts (e.g. Mills 1994: 30, McKinley 1997: 7) are limited in their capacity to explore the psychosocial complexities of the film/viewer engagement. Nevertheless, such work does enable a consideration of the ways in which audiences (actively) discursively construct their own responses to and interpretations of a given text alongside those of others (Barker and Harindranath 2001), and also substantiates the notion that meanings (in cinema) are *made* rather than *found* (Bordwell 1989: 64-5).

For the purposes of my work, the “space” of media spectatorship is thus acknowledged to be complex, contested and often ‘politically ambivalent’ (Stam and Shohat 2000: 398). My aim is to develop these ideas more fully by establishing a psychosocial and biographical account of audience subjectivity adequate to the task of exploring how processes of film/viewer engagement are made meaningful by both texts *and* audiences and, further, are both consciously and unconsciously motivated. In the following section, I will identify - and critically evaluate - existing audience studies’ models of

¹⁸ See pages 38-44.

subjectivity (drawn from film theory and cultural studies), showing how and why these are relevant to my own research, and clarifying the ways in which this thesis will contribute to the field.

Audience Studies

This chapter has thus far sought to show how audience engagements with mediated representations of the female serial killer might be more fully explored. Emphasising questions of *criminal agency* in this context, I have argued for a cross-disciplinary theoretical framework that draws most extensively upon key psychosocial studies concepts, supplementing these with ideas from feminist theory, structuration theory and psychosocial criminology. I have also explained how and why some of the well-established arguments from the disciplines of film theory and cultural studies regarding different “types” of media texts might be usefully mobilised within this framework. In this section, I will situate this thesis within the existing body of audience studies literature, bearing in mind that my project seeks to draw the categories of text and audience more closely together and, further, will engage with *actual* - as opposed to imagined or “ideal” - film viewers¹⁹. I begin here by critically evaluating some key ideas drawn from contemporary audience research. In doing so, I will identify which are most relevant to this project, setting out a critique of certain studies, whilst indicating how others might usefully be “re-read” for the purposes of this thesis, building upon (and seeking to further develop) them as appropriate.

Now widely recognised as being both ambiguous and polysemic (Moore 1993:2, Swanson 1996: 57, Curran, Gurevitch and Woollacott 1982), the

¹⁹ See pages 85-87 of this chapter, and pages 300-301 in my concluding chapter.

phenomenon of the “audience” is considered problematic from both academic and commercial perspectives (Ang 1991). Defying theoretical categorisation (Allor 1996: 209-213) by virtue of being ‘... too large to be apprehended directly in experience’ (Anderson 1996: 75), and thus perhaps ‘a construction of our research and theorising’ (1996: 75), the conceptual boundaries of “the audience” are at once fragile and increasingly dissoluble (Appadurai 1990). Many longstanding debates (some of them contentious) continue to inform the theoretical landscape of contemporary audience research. These range from early “effects” (or “hypodermic”) models (Adorno 1941, Hertog 1941, Horkheimer and Adorno 1972, Marcuse 1972) - in which spectators were conceptualised as little more than passive “dupes”, strategically positioned by (hegemonic) media messages - to uses and gratifications (U&G) approaches, which posited an “active” audience (Katz 1959, McQuail, Blumer and Brown 1972, Klapper 1963), focusing not on what the media *do to audiences*, but on what audiences *do with* media texts (Brooker and Jermyn 2003: 9). Subsequent sociological and cultural studies’ critiques of U&G accounts, meanwhile, have argued that these models displaced (rather than revising or re-evaluating) the dilemmas inherent in previous approaches by simply mapping an entirely new framework onto existing problems (Lewis 1991: 18). It is also observed that such accounts tended towards individualism, reducing the viewer/reader to a ‘set of needs’ (1991: 18), and neglecting the wider socio-cultural elements of audience engagement. Whilst it is now accepted that media messages can - and do - have a persuasive and powerful influence upon processes of viewer/reader interpretation (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; Lau and Sears 1986, Neuman and

Fryling 1985; Noelle-Neumann 1984, Walkerdine 2007), debates about the “active” audience persist within recent research, and are therefore deserving of further attention here.

Several important issues are at stake where audience “activity” is concerned: not only is the concept itself criticised for being ambivalent and imprecise (Bird 2003: 166-167, Bennett 1996: 149), much is made of the complex questions of ideology (Tulloch 1990: 219), aesthetics and emotion (Lovell 1981) to which it gives rise. It is also interesting to note that the matter of what it *means* to be an audience in relation to contemporary culture has become especially pertinent. Theorists attribute this, in part, to the power and omnipresence of the mass media within everyday life (Gross 1989: 132, Bird 2003), as well as to the developments made within media technology (Ross and Nightingale 2003: 2) that enable scholars to examine, define and describe new and distinctive relations between text and audience (Ellis 2000: 126) thereby encouraging a reconceptualisation of widely-held beliefs about media relations (Cover 2006). Modleski (1986), meanwhile, argues that the very idea of the “active” audience has been theoretically overindulged and, as I will show throughout this project, it is perhaps more important to ask not whether audiences are active, but whether - and *to what extent* - that activity can be considered socially, culturally and politically meaningful. In line with Silverstone’s observation that the process of audience activity ‘can, and does, mean too many different things to too many people’ (1994: 158), then, I will show that that audience activity can best be understood as a ‘variable state as opposed to an absolute condition’ (Costello and Moore 2007: 139). I am therefore arguing here that whilst audiences may indeed be active and

creative in their engagements with media texts, the choices that they make within such engagements are always defined and constrained by the texts themselves, and by the political economies and wider socio-cultural contexts in which media texts are received (Bird 2003: 167,172, Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 31), and audience interpretations “performed” (Liebes and Katz 1993; Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 22). The extent to which film/viewer engagements are also *psychically* defined and “constrained”, of course, must be taken into account: this is a matter explored more comprehensively in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. It is also important to note that to speak of audience activity is not to speak of the viewer’s limitless “freedom” because, although media texts may be described as polysemic, they are never *infinitely open* (Curran 1990). Indeed, as I have explained in Chapter 1 - and will argue in Chapter 4 - the three films selected for this project are perhaps more usefully conceptualised as ‘neutrosemic’ (Sandvoss 2005) in this respect.

Thus far in this section, I have argued for a more nuanced exploration of the complex psychodynamics inherent in viewers’ engagements with cinematic representations of the female serial killer. In the remainder of this chapter, I will consider how “the audience” can be understood in *psychosocial* terms. Given that my project draws upon ideas from both film theory and cultural studies, it is perhaps useful to begin by critically examining some of the theoretical and methodological tensions that exist between the two disciplines, especially in terms of how questions of identity, agency and gender are theorised by each of them. These matters are addressed more fully in the following section.

Film Theory versus Cultural Studies

Stam observes that the precise relation between cultural studies and film studies is a 'contested topic' (2000: 226), and it is certainly the case that, whilst the boundaries between the two disciplines are ostensibly becoming more 'permeable' (Turner 1998: 200), their divergent approaches continue to provoke conflict within contemporary audience research. The cultural studies movement, with its focus upon structured activity (Morley 1989: 17) and cultural practice (Morley 1988, Silverstone 1981) has combined semiology and sociology as a means of exploring how communication works in a social context (Morley 1989: 17). Its models of reception theory, meanwhile, have focused upon processes of encoding and decoding (Hall 1980), in which "active" audiences construct meaning via complex and negotiated reading practices²⁰ (e.g. Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998, Condit 1989, Hall 1980) and, importantly, are recognised as being situated within a wider network of continuing cultural relationships (Lewis 1991: 36, Stam 2000: 223). From this perspective, media consumption is acknowledged to be a 'site of cultural struggle' (Ang 1989: 101-102), in which audience responses and interpretations can be explored at a level beyond individual psychology (Morley 1989: 17) and, crucially, within the '... busy, messy settings of everyday life' (McKinley 1997: 31). Stam also notes that cultural studies distinguished itself from film theory by 'being more interested in the uses of texts than in texts *per se*... less interested in psychoanalysis than in sociology, and... more optimistic about the audience's capacity to read "against the grain"' (Stam 2000: 227). Questions of agency are thus greatly

²⁰ See pages 71-74 for a fuller discussion of these concepts.

emphasised within such accounts, hence their relevance to the specific objectives of my own work, concerned as it is with exploring the ways in which viewers respond to mediated representations of the female serial killer. In Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I will build upon and further develop some of the arguments introduced here.

Screen theory²¹, in contrast to the cultural studies' approaches outlined in this section, sought to examine the ways in which spectatorial positions are determined by the ideological apparatus (Comolli and Narboni 1969, Heath and de Lauretis 1980, Baudry 1974) of classical cinema. Early film theory models - characterised by their metapsychological approaches - were largely concerned with the operations and effects of the cinematic apparatus, that is, the technologies of cinema and their effect on the spectator. In such work, the cinema was conceptualised as an 'ideological machine' (Baudry 1974: 44) that, via its presentation of an illusion of objective reality, created a "disembodied" 'transcendental subject' (1974: 43), free to take up a position aligned with the look of the camera. Drawing upon the myth of Plato's cave (in which captives mistake shadows on a wall for images of reality) and the Lacanian concept of the mirror stage, Baudry (1974) suggested that spectatorial pleasure is derived from the sense of power and mastery provided by filmic techniques such that, as Cronin observes, 'it is this misrecognition, the identification both with the camera and the image that completes the illusion that meaning originates from the spectator rather than being already constructed by the text' (Cronin 2011: 16). Theoretical models of this kind, which conceive of the spectator as the 'homogenous and

²¹ Named after the academic journal - *Screen* - within which it was originally conceived.

androgynous effect of textual operations' (Kuhn 1984: 19) have subsequently been criticised for their privileging of the physical arrangement and the apparatus of cinema in explaining the powerfully affective responses of the spectator. Critics note that insufficient attention is given in such accounts to the internal structure of the films themselves (Cronin 2011: 17, Carroll 1999: 790), thus 'clos[ing] off the possibility of making distinctions between different types of cinema' (Kuhn 1994: 56) and specific kinds of (generic) cinematic address. Christian Metz's (1982) later development of Baudry's work posits the notion of a somewhat more agentic spectatorial subject, one who is aware that he (or she) is perceiving an illusion, but wilfully chooses to suspend his or her disbelief in order to maintain the pleasurable effects of the process (Cronin 2011: 20). It is argued that the metapsychological film theory described here 'effectively rips the viewer from the social context in which viewing occurs, and supplants this social environment with a model of the psyche that is universalistic, essentialist and totalising in its effect' (Cronin 2011: 18). Indeed, despite Metz's attempts to advance earlier paradigms, his account nevertheless seemingly:

'falls prey to the same universalism, essentialism and totalism that arise from a reliance on a singular and homogenous account of the spectatorial psyche. It ignores social and cultural difference among the audience, and elides an analysis of the social circumstances within which viewing takes place' (Cronin 2011: 21).

It is certainly the case that - as I will show throughout this project - film/viewer relations cannot adequately be understood in such homogenous terms, since

there are of course very real differences of gender, race and sexuality that have a powerful influence upon how individuals interpret and engage with film texts. Moreover, the *biographically* meaningful aspects of the spectatorial experience are equally deserving of exploration, and it is these latter elements with which my project is particularly concerned. Challenges to the classical metapsychological film theories outlined here have emerged most notably from feminist theory, critiques of visual culture and audience/reception studies. Feminist critiques sought, for example, to challenge Baudry and Metz's universalistic accounts of spectatorship by demonstrating that the ideology of cinema was inherently and powerfully gendered: a discussion of these particular arguments is set out in the following section on pages 81-83. Current film theory, meanwhile, has sought to address and explore the spectator-text relationship from different perspectives, by developing new approaches which draw, for example, on cognitivism (e.g. Carroll 1990, 1996, Bordwell 1989, Grodal 1999, Smith 1995, Plantinga and Smith 1999), haptics (e.g. Purse 2006) and phenomenology (e.g. Orning 2010, Furuya 2011, Aaltonen 2011, Ince 2011). My own theoretical position in relation to such approaches is set out in subsequent sections of this thesis: on pages 94-96, for instance, I argue that cognitive frameworks are of limited value for the purposes of this project, concerned as it is with the complex psychosocial processes - and the sometimes non-rational elements of these - that form part of my participants' film viewing experiences. In my concluding chapter, I acknowledge the usefulness of recent work that explores the phenomenological dimensions of the spectatorial encounter, and consider how the methodological approach

designed and used for my project might helpfully be mobilised as a means of better understanding the significance of touch and sensuality in exploring how and why films are made meaningful by their viewers.

As I have already indicated, the metapsychological models of film theory outlined in this section have been widely critiqued from a feminist point of view. Such critiques were concerned with their failure to 'tak[e] into account the importance of the representations of the female form in the cinema's symbolic order' (Wojcik 2007: 538), drew extensively upon (primarily Freudian and Lacanian) psychoanalytic frameworks, and were therefore typically organised around questions of visual pleasure and sexual difference, as these inform the film-viewing process (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Modleski 1984, 1988, Kaplan 1983, Gledhill 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Doane 1982, 1987). Mulvey's essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975) is considered to have made an especially polemical contribution to this body of work. In this piece, Mulvey argues that both the form and content of classical cinema are structured in accordance with what she describes as the "patriarchal unconscious", and are thus inherently gendered, such that they reinscribe existing - heteronormative - ideologies. For Mulvey, then, film reproduces a binary structure that mirrors the gendered power relations operative in the real social world: relations which are organised around a fundamental opposition of active/male and passive/female, male looking and female *to-be-looked-at-ness*. Spectators, she suggests, are therefore positioned by the active (voyeuristic) and passive (fetishistic) elements of the film text, in which woman functions as 'bearer, not maker of meaning' (1975: 2). From this perspective, the spectatorial experience is conceptualised in

terms of scopophilic pleasure which, in turn, is achieved via unconscious processes of objectification and identification. The film studies approaches summarised here have, however, been extensively critiqued. Where suture theory (e.g. Dayan 1974, Heath 1978, Oudart 1978[1969], Silverman 1983), that is, the “binding” of the spectator into the filmic discourse, is disparaged for being ‘overly generalised and imprecise’ (Stam 2000: 138), psychoanalytic approaches are criticised for too readily absorbing Lacanian notions of the ‘deluded subject of the cinema’ (2000: 163). Indeed, despite the theoretical sophistication (Willemen 1978, Neale 1977) of such accounts, they have been described by critics as universalistic (Hall 1978), lacking in historical and contextual specificity (Walkerdine 1986), and too firmly rooted in the assumption that viewing processes *can* be reduced to a ‘single set of psychic mechanisms’ (Morley 1989: 19). Mulvey’s account, in particular, is censured for its failure to account for - indeed, even *acknowledge* - feminine subjectivity in relation to the spectatorial experience (Rodowick 1982). Such critiques emphasise the extent to which viewing “options” for female spectators are restricted, in Mulvey’s paper, to those involving ‘masculinisation, masochism or marginality’ (Stacey 1988: 120, Case 1993: 301) and masquerade (Doane 1982). This project, whilst engaging closely with some of the arguments identified in this section, is, following Kuhn (2009: 4), critical of their narrowly phallogocentric approaches, as well as their tendency to focus exclusively upon questions of desire and “lack” (e.g. Silverman 1988, Modleski 1988). A fuller discussion of this is provided in the following section, and my own challenge to these theoretical paradigms is made in my three main discussion chapters, especially Chapter 4. Stacey’s

(1994) study - which still stands as her most recent contribution to the field of empirical cinema audience research²² - is perhaps especially useful in articulating and mobilising my critique more comprehensively, and I will draw upon her ideas quite extensively.

Feminist Film Criticism

Observing that some feminist film theorists have challenged and extended Mulvey's account of the male gaze as a means of thinking more carefully about the experiences of female spectators (e.g. de Lauretis 1984, Doane 1982), Stacey notes the extent to which such studies still tend to focus primarily upon questions of sexual difference, emphasising the "pleasures" inherent in the film-viewing process. The problem with this body of work, she argues, is that it provides 'over-generalised accounts of gender, visual pleasure and the power of the look' (1994: 15), and tends to theorise the strategies of identification and object choice that form part of the film/viewer engagement within a 'framework of binary oppositions (masculine/feminine, active/passive)' (1994: 26-27). Here, subjectivity 'is only conceptualised as an effect of textual polarities... [so that] textual meaning is fixed and the sexed subjectivities of cinema spectators are read off across a binaristic determinism' (1994: 25). Following Stacey, I will show (in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) that the film/viewer engagements explored within the context of this project *cannot* be adequately theorised using these frameworks, and I will argue that a far more nuanced approach is required. Indeed, although

²² Stacey's subsequent work on film and cinema has tended to comprise textual studies (e.g. Stacey 2003, 2005, Hinds and Stacey 2001), focusing on, for example, lesbian cinema (1995b), the concept of "history" in screen studies (Kuhn and Stacey 1999), queer theory (2007) and cinematic representations of genetics (2010). Additional studies have focused on Global Culture (Franklin, Lury and Stacey 2000) and women's experiences of cancer in contemporary society (1997).

feminist film studies have continued to build upon the ideas outlined above, with some giving greater emphasis to questions of place, space, race and history (e.g. hooks 1991; Spivak 1987; Nicholson 1990), fewer efforts have been made to recognise the film-viewing process as a “lived” experience (e.g. Kuhn 1995, 2009, Skeggs 1996, 1997, Walkerdine 1986, Walkerdine et al 2001); and it is this latter point with which my research is particularly concerned. This project seeks, then, to address more comprehensively Kuhn’s pivotal question, in which she asks:

Theories which emphasise sexual difference would mostly have us believe that subjectivity is formed through unconscious operations. But how... is it possible in these terms to deal with such representations as “lived experience” and “memory”?... How might “social forces” be negotiated, be represented, in lived experience, in memory, or indeed in unconscious processes? (1989: 215).

My research aims to more fully explore the complex psychodynamics inherent in the “investments” made by film spectators, acknowledging the extent to which these are ‘multiform, fissured, schizophrenic, unevenly developed, culturally, discursively, and politically discontinuous, forming part of a shifting realm of ramifying differences and contradictions’ (Stam 2000: 233, Shohat and Stam 1994). This might perhaps be best achieved - as I have already suggested - by drawing upon cultural studies-based audience research which has sought to engage with “real” viewers (e.g. Stacey 1994, Kuhn 1984; Jermyn 2004: 207), with a view to creating a ‘hybrid’ of film and cultural studies methodology (Turner 1998: 198, Collins et al 1993) that can be mobilised for the purposes of this thesis. Mindful of the theoretical and methodological dilemmas evoked here, Stacey remarks on the historical

reluctance of feminist film theory to deal with the 'social identities of spectators' (1994: 32), to 'engage with questions of social identity in relation to spectatorship' (1994: 32) and, ultimately, to 'dirty[...] one's hands' (1994: 29) with empirical data. Further, she suggests, the tendency of such work to privilege the 'psychic reality' (1994: 33) of the (female) spectator at the expense of her 'sociality' and/or 'historical specificity' (1994: 33) renders it inherently problematic. Following Stacey, then, my research will examine the accounts of real viewers as a means of 'open[ing] up multiple or contradictory readings, depending on variables such as context, company, mood, or differences amongst... [them]' (1994: 33). Stacey advocates 'the use of some aspects of cultural studies approaches in... develop[ing] an understanding of... spectatorship which moves beyond the universal and the textual assumptions' (1994: 35, Kuhn 2009), and this project will duly build upon her suggestions.

Cultural studies' approaches, firstly, tend for the most part to focus not on the unconscious pleasures of the film-viewing process, but on 'the audience's own accounts of their readings of [media texts] and of their viewing practices more generally... [giving] a voice to what particular groups of people have to say about the media and what they mean in their everyday lives' (Stacey 1994: 11). I argue that these kinds of accounts are more useful here than many of the film studies ones outlined above, which continue to privilege textual analysis (rather than engaging with actual audiences), and thus remain preoccupied with either 'images of women' (Hallam 1994: 179) or 'the woman as image' (Mulvey 1975: 9). Whilst cultural studies offers itself ostensibly as 'an *alternative* to what it sees as the ahistoricity of both

structuralism and psychoanalysis [and] explores culture as a site where subjectivity is constructed' (Stam 2000: 225, my italics), however, this project will show how these epistemologically divergent approaches can perhaps be used alongside one another to produce a cross-disciplinary framework suitable for exploring the complex ways in which 'contemporary subjectivity is inextricably interwoven with media representations of all sorts' (Stam 2000: 225). Moreover, where film theory favours the analysis of individual texts, emphasising questions of aesthetic value, cultural studies is bound by "formal" (political and institutional) disciplines to a lesser extent (Frow 1995, Hills 2007a, Clarke 1991), being more concerned with the social processes in which both texts and audiences are created (Turner 1998: 199). Tensions between the two approaches thus arise most notably from their divergent theorisations of "power": that is to say that where Screen theory locates power in the text, cultural studies accounts attribute power to the (active) audience. It is of course important to note that empirical - usually cultural studies-based - audience work has been criticised for its tendency to under-emphasise questions of textual significance (Corner 1995, Hermes 2000: 358, Hagen 1994, McKinley 1997). Further, whilst empirical analyses have been widely appropriated within cultural studies-based work on televisual texts/audiences (e.g. Ang 1989, Morley 1980, 1986, Algan 2009, Bird 2003, Mikos 2004, Costello and Moore 2007, Gorton 2009), similar approaches have perhaps been less extensively mobilised in relation to contemporary film. Recent research has however, made significant contributions in this respect, by advocating a more integrated (cross disciplinary) approach to the study of films and their actual viewers (e.g. Barker 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007,

2008, Benshoff 2008, Igartua 2010, Pardon 2008, Leder 2009, Reinhard 2007, Monk 2011, Christie 2012). Nevertheless, although the 'spectator-as-[real] viewer' (Hayward 1996: 336) is now recognised within contemporary film audience research, new approaches to - and perspectives on - the matter are still required (see, for example, Dhaenens, Van Bauwel and Biltreyst 2008, Meers 2004). This project, seeks to draw more closely together the implied, imagined or ideal spectator of text-focused film studies (the "spectator-in-the-text") and the "social" audience (the real people who actually watch the films). As Kuhn observes, however, this enterprise has long been recognised as a somewhat contested one, not least because "spectator" and "audience" are distinct concepts which cannot be reduced to one another (Kuhn 1984: 21), despite tendencies inherent in some work to the contrary. It can be argued, she suggests, that virtually all film and television theory is marked by a 'dualism of universalism and specificity' (1984: 21): a phenomenon that is perhaps especially observable in the 'the gulf between textual analysis and contextual inquiry' (1984: 21) in film and television studies. Attempts to combine textual analysis with an analysis of the concrete social, historical and institutional conditions of the production/reception of texts are by their very nature deeply problematic, maintains Kuhn, because the terms "spectator" and "social audience" each presuppose 'a different set of relations to representations and to the contexts in which they are received' (1984: 23), such that any study of these divergent categories demands different methodologies and theoretical frameworks. On page 89, I explain that my approach to this dilemma in my own work is to

negotiate the interplay between these two perspectives, rather than trying to resolve or overcome the dualism in question.

I therefore acknowledge that social audiences, that is, the actual group of people who 'can be surveyed, counted and categorised according to age, sex and socio-economic status' (Kuhn 1984: 23) become spectators 'in the moment they engage in the processes... of meaning-making attendant on watching a film or TV programme' (1984: 23), whilst 'in taking part in the social act of consuming representations, a group of spectators becomes a social audience' (1984: 23). Following Kuhn, then, I am interested for the purposes of this project in the very 'particular kind of psychic and social relationship' (1984: 24) that is involved at this point of intersection. Throughout Chapters 4, 5 and 6 in my analysis and interpretation of interview data, I therefore seek to explore the points of continuity between my participants 'interpellation as spectators, and their status as social audience' (1984: 28).

In my conclusion chapter, meanwhile, I acknowledge that relatively little consideration is given throughout this project to the three films themselves, and I reflect upon the implications and consequences of this for my research. In doing so, I suggest that, since the objective of my thesis is to carry out a psychosocial *audience* study, I have necessarily focused most significantly upon the ways in which my participants read and engage with the films. It is after all in this respect that my research makes an especially valuable contribution to the field of audience studies, that is, via its conceptualisation of the spectatorial encounter as psychosocially meaningful and, importantly, informed by individuals' own biographical experiences. In my discussion on

pages 300-301, however, I concede that a fuller discussion of the films as texts might have enabled a more comprehensive discussion of their various modes of address, and of their particular generic conventions, thereby perhaps building upon and further developing the arguments that I set out on pages 66 to 69 in relation to documentary as film form. With these concerns in mind, for the purposes of this thesis, the film-viewing experience can thus best be understood as:...

... not only a question of what one is or where one is coming from, but also of what one desires to be, where one wants to go, and with whom one wants to go there (Stam and Shohat 2000: 398).

As I have already argued, meaning in spectatorial engagements does not inhere (only) in the text or (only) in the discourses around the text. Rather, as Hills suggests, 'both text and audience need to be read through and against one another' (2007b: 461), and this project is approached from a similar perspective. Fiske (1989: 58) and Barthes (1976) have made similar points, arguing that both culture and social experience are fundamentally intertextual, that is to say that meaning is produced within the 'spaces *between* texts' (Fiske 1989: 65) (my italics). Bennett, meanwhile, argues that meaning is transitive rather than inherent, i.e. it is not something which texts "have", but is produced in diverse ways within text-reader relations and processes (1983: 218) and is thus *dialogic* (e.g. Iser 1978, Bakhtin 1981; Corrigan 1986)²³. My research therefore acknowledges that there is more to the viewing experience than merely a *way of seeing* (Barker and Brooks

²³ In Chapter 5, I suggest that since the three film texts used for this project seem to carry no inherent meaning, they can be best described as 'neutrosemic' (Sandvoss 2005: 26). A full definition of this term is also provided in the discussion (pages 202-205).

1998: 136), because viewing practices are not only constructed (Sonnet 2003: 258), and performed (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 43) within a given context, but are also 'learned and reproduced... negotiated, reworked, even resisted' (Austin 1999: 151, Clover 1993a, 1993b). I am suggesting here that it is necessary to explore the social, psychical and biographical elements of audience/text engagement, emphasising that all are significant in terms of how this process is made meaningful for viewers. Moreover, as I will show, a more nuanced account is required of the ways in which both texts and readers might be 'culturally activated' (Bennett 1983: 22), i.e. structured by their material, social, ideological and institutional context(s). For the purposes of this project, I conceptualise these latter processes as *cultural ideologies of self* and, in Chapter 4, provide a full discussion of how such ideas can be used to theorise the film-viewing investments made by my participants.

Debates about the merits and limits of textual analysis also persist within the field of audience studies (e.g. Ytre-Arne 2011, Born 2000, Frith 2000, Miller 2000). Whilst some theorists celebrate its strengths (e.g. Hartley 1987, Gripsrud 1998, Lury 2005, Creeber 2006, Fürsich 2009), others argue that it is of little value as a "stand-alone" research method (Hermes 1995, Ang and Hermes 1991, Currie 1999), and is likely to prove more fruitful when combined with the wider contextual, or 'extra-textual' (Creeber 2006: 84), elements of empirical study (Jones-Vincent 2008, Lavery 2002). It is however important to note that existing research which does seek to combine textual analysis with qualitative audience work tends to deal primarily with televisual media (e.g. Hobson 1982, Brunsdon 1986, Brown 1994), women's

fiction (Radway 1984) or women's magazines (e.g. Ytre-Arne 2011, McRobbie 1982, Currie 1999). Where similar approaches have been mobilised in studies of (contemporary) film texts and cinema audiences, meanwhile, the specific foci of such studies differ from my own quite significantly; exploring, for instance, viewers' media-related fears and anxieties (Leder 2009), audience constructions of gender (Huffer 2004), comparisons of genre-film reception (Reinhard 2007) and the narrative "persuasion" of fictional cinema (Igartua 2010). My research, of course, seeks to explore the ways in which contemporary media representations of the female serial killer are made meaningful for viewers in their engagements with three key film texts. Following Hills (2007b) and Hallam (1994), this project will argue that consideration must be given not only to processes of spectatorial address, that is, the textual "positioning" of the viewer in relation to a given film, but also to the 'discourses of interpretation' (Hallam 1994:188) produced around the films themselves. Importantly, in line with my own psychosocial approach (outlined in Part 1 of this chapter) – and as I have already indicated - I am aiming not to try and *overcome* the 'dualism' (Kuhn 2002: 5) of these two approaches but, instead, to carefully negotiate the interplay between them. This will, I suggest, facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which meanings develop and, importantly, are negotiated in text/viewer engagements. For the purposes of my own research, I will thus draw extensively upon Stacey's (1994) work, as discussed on pages 81-83 of this chapter, and I suggest that the feminist research produced by Stacey (1988, 1994) and Kuhn (1984, 1989, 1995, 2002, 2006, 2009) is highly relevant and extremely valuable to my study in

terms of its epistemological approach. As I have argued in Part 1 of this chapter, whilst my own approach to this project is not a solely feminist one, key feminist ideas can usefully be mobilised here especially, perhaps, in terms of their emphasis upon questions of ‘power, contradiction and struggle’ (Ang 1989: 109). Following Jermyn (2004: 216), however, I am critical of the tendency within other feminist work to conceptualise “women” as a generalised and homogeneous group, and also of their readiness to presume that to “be” female always necessarily connotes marginalisation and oppression (Whelehan 1994: 218). Critics of such studies also observe (correctly) that issues of class and race are often radically under-emphasised within feminist theory²⁴ (Chaudhuri 2006), and point out feminist audience research sometimes endeavours to ‘speak for’ a (female) audience, giving scant consideration to the responses of actual viewers (Hermes 2000: 358). It is also argued that feminist approaches to film theory and cultural studies-based audience work tend to over-emphasise the impact that negative or stereotypical representations of women have on their female readers (Mills 1994: 30), and to make much of the ways in which female viewers struggle as *women* to make meaning in their spectatorial engagements (e.g. Thornham 2007). This project will demonstrate that the complex psychodynamics of film-viewer engagements need not - and, arguably, cannot - be adequately explored by theorising them in purely feminist terms. Moreover, as I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, it must be acknowledged that spectatorial investments are not always necessarily organised around

²⁴ See my discussion in Chapter 7 of the ways in which my project has sought to negotiate issues of class and ethnicity.

questions of gender²⁵. My thesis therefore seeks to build upon and further develop the arguments made by Stacey and Kuhn (as set out on pages 81-83), by examining responses from both male and female viewers.

Given that my research is concerned with cinematic constructions of the female serial killer and focuses specifically upon the story of Aileen Wuornos²⁶, whose lesbian sexuality was, across media and legal discourses, perceived to be inextricably linked to, and/or even *responsible for*, her criminal behaviour (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Basilio 1996, Hart 1994), consideration must be given to the ways in which sexuality has been theorised within audience studies work as constituting a meaningful part of the spectatorial experience. The field of queer film theory - dedicated to the study of gay and lesbian audiences (e.g. Griggers 1993; Richardson and Seidman 2002, Dolan 2006, Henderson 2008, Dyer 2003, Gever, Greyson and Parmas 1993, Stacey and Street 2007, Hanson 1993, Creekmur and Doty 1995, de Lauretis 1988, 1991) - raises valuable questions in this respect, and it is important to critically evaluate some of these here.

Gay and lesbian film theory, with its emphasis upon 'undoing existing conceptual categories of sexuality and undermining traditional notions of sexual identity' (Stacey 2007: 505) has proved both influential and controversial within media and cultural studies (Hinds 1995: 68). Such work is even said to have 'altered the entire frame' (Arroyo 1997: 76) of feminist film criticism by decentring the heteronormative presuppositions that underpin its theorisation of female desire, identification and spectatorship (1997: 76). From the perspective of queer theorists, media texts operate

²⁵ See especially Chapter 4, entitled *Psychosocially Gendered Viewers*.

²⁶ A summary of Wuornos' story is provided in my introductory chapter.

differently, i.e. spectatorial meaning is made in quite specific ways by gay, lesbian and bisexual readers and viewers. This is explained partly as a consequence of their tendency to interpret dominant cultural images in an alternative way (Jenkins 2000: 178, Stacey 1988: 114) by mobilising unique and subcultural reading strategies. What is being suggested here, then, is that such viewers read texts ‘through a specific set of codes apparently undiscerned by other audiences’ (Hinds 1995: 65): codes which involve specific strategies of shared knowledge, self-representation, intense emotions and fantasy (Allen 1997, Farmer 2000, Hankin 2002, Dyer 2003). This is not, of course, to advance the notion of a “unified” gay or lesbian audience experience (Allen 1995: 73). Rather, acknowledging critiques of generalised and reductive conceptualisations of “readers” and reading positions (e.g. Fuss 1989, Mills 1994) and rejecting the notion of a lesbian/gay “look” or “spectator” (e.g. Allen 1995: 73, Stacey 1988: 114), my project seeks to counter deterministic theoretical frameworks of this kind by comparing, contrasting, and emphasising the inconsistencies observable in my participants’ filmic investments. Indeed, as I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, various inconsistencies emerge not only between different viewers’ responses, but also within the responses of individual viewers themselves (e.g. Sandvoss 2005, Hills 2007b, King 2008). With this in mind, I aim to show how the film texts chosen for this project work alongside their audiences to create new representational strategies in terms of ‘*what can be seen*’ (de Lauretis 1988: 171).

In this section, I have provided a critical evaluation of the key audience studies debates that inform the fields of film theory and cultural studies. In

doing so, I have sought to account for the relevance of these debates to my project, identifying those which might be built upon and further developed within the context of my own work. In the following discussion, which concludes this chapter, I will focus more specifically upon questions of audience subjectivity as these pertain to the studies outlined here.

The Subject in the Audience

Audience studies work in both the film theory and cultural studies traditions has focused heavily upon the processes by which audiences identify with texts (or with certain *elements* of a text). It is nevertheless the case that the very concept of audience “identification” is considered by some theorists to be reductive, over simplistic (Barker 2000) and neglectful of important questions of “difference” (e.g. Barker et al 2001: 113). This project is also critical of the spectatorial identificatory process²⁷ as this is conceptualised by existing accounts and, in Chapter 5, especially, I seek to challenge and critique many of these accounts by exploring the ways in which viewers engage with representations of the female serial killer. Some more recent audience research has begun to acknowledge and explore the (sometimes troubling) unconscious processes that are experienced by individual subjects within a media audience (e.g. Campbell 2005: 173, Hills 2005a, 2007a): and these are precisely those elements of the viewing experience that I seek to examine more closely in my thesis. Such work also draws upon psychoanalysis as a means of better understanding the less immediately observable - or communicable - dimensions of audiencehood (Campbell

²⁷ See Chapter 5, where I (re)conceptualise the process of spectatorial identification as one of ‘investment’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 15).

2005: 173, Hills 2002, 2005a, 2007a, 2007b) and attests to the relevance of psychoanalytic understandings of “self” in this context which, I argue (and as I will show in subsequent chapters), ought not to be summarily dismissed as inappropriate²⁸ (e.g. Hills 1999).

Since I conceptualise film/viewer engagements as psychosocially (and biographically) motivated, it is useful to draw upon Höijer’s account of the psychodynamic processes that audience engagements necessarily involve. Suggesting that individuals are constantly engaged in an inner dialogue with their own selves; ‘creating new inner experiences even without external stimuli or social interaction’ (1998: 169), Höijer criticises existing audience research for its failure to adequately acknowledge the personal and cultural tensions that are inherent within the human subject (1998: 166). Her claims certainly serve to problematise cognitivist approaches to film/viewer engagement (e.g. Carroll 1990, 1996, Bordwell 1989, Grodal 1999, Smith 1995, Plantinga and Smith 1999), which reject the notion of film “language”, and ‘look[...] for more precise answers to questions raised differently about film reception by semiotics and psychoanalytic theory’ (Stam 2000: 235, 238). Whilst some film theorists have called for a drawing together of cognitive and psychoanalytic paradigms in relation to film (e.g. Kinder 1991, Hven 2010, Claydon 2010), such studies stop short of engaging with actual viewers. Conventional cognitive frameworks, meanwhile, are critical of ‘what they regard as the hermetic, inflated, and tautological discourse’ (Stam 2000: 236) of film theory (especially psychoanalytic film theory), and understand processes of film spectatorship as ‘rationally motivated attempts to make

²⁸ See pages 53-55 for a defence of psychoanalysis as a useful theoretical tool within the context of this project.

visual or narrative sense out of the textual materials' (2000: 237). So, from a cognitivist perspective, "emotions" and thoughts/cognitions are inextricably linked, such that to experience an emotion is to be engaged in a process of cognition (Hills 2005b: 13). Further, emotion is theorised within cognitive paradigms as being both "object directed" and "occurrent", i.e. 'occurring at a given moment rather than lingering... like a mood' (2005b: 24). Such accounts have however been criticised for their failure to address issues of affect in sufficient detail (2005b:13), and I agree on this point with Hills, who argues that adequate attention must be paid to the feelings experienced by film viewers that are 'are *not* aimed at, or in response to, a readily identifiable object' (2005b:13, my italics); and not only to those that 'have a cognitive knowledge component and a discriminable object' (2005b:13). Indeed, as Hills correctly observes, it is important to recognise that audiences may in fact 'move between experiencing affects and emotions, refuting or refusing some emotions that would be ideally and textually expected' (2005b: 26) and that they sometimes introspectively reject their own cognitive evaluations (2005b: 26). Interestingly, in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, I will show that the complex processes theorised here by Hills *do* form a significant part of the film-viewing experiences described by my participants. For the purposes of this project, therefore, cognitive theory 'allows little room for the politics of location, or for the socially shaped investments, ideologies, narcissisms, and desires of the spectator, all of which seem too irrational and messy for [it] to deal with' (Stam 2000: 241), and is thus of limited use in terms of exploring how spectatorial engagements often 'intertwine the rational and the irrational' (2000: 242).

I am arguing here that the spectatorial experience is (necessarily) an emotionally complex one (Gaut 1999: 201), and I suggest that it can be more meaningfully explored using the psychosocial framework proposed in Part 1 of this chapter. As I will show, this framework enables a more nuanced understanding of how and why viewers “invest” in film texts in particular ways. These processes of investment can perhaps be best described as ‘aspectual’ (Gaut 1999: 205, 208), that is to say that it is important to consider not just how, but *in what respect* they take place and, further, to explore the issues of choice, preference and imagination (Hill 1997: 39) that they involve. Through its mobilisation of a psychosocial framework, then, this project seeks to pursue a “fuller” model of social subjectivity (Giddens 1979, 1991, Archer 1995, 1996) than that conventionally conceptualised within audience studies accounts. As I have already explained, where Screen theory approaches tend to ‘separate... unconscious processes from “the rest” of subjectivity’ (Stacey 1994: 32), cultural studies’ frameworks are often bound by a ‘conceptual duality’ (Yates 2010: 405) that situates unconscious processes ‘in opposition to the experience of “real life”’ (Yates 2010: 405, Walkerdine 1986), and my research aims to draw these elements of viewers’ filmic “investments” more closely together. As I will show, this can perhaps best be achieved by recognising them as forms of “lived” experience (e.g. Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine 1986, Kuhn 1995, Skeggs 1996, 1997, Stacey 1994) in order to think about participants’ “subjectification” (the condition of being a subject) as well as their subjectivity, that is, their lived experience(s) of being a subject (Walkerdine 1999: 4). For the purposes of this thesis, the film/viewer engagement is therefore recognised as both

cultural construction and lived experience (Ellis and Flaherty 1992), and I seek here to explore the 'complex, paradoxical, and mysterious qualities of subjectivity' (1992: 5), whilst acknowledging that each individual's sense of self is always necessarily 'conditioned by the peculiarities of time, place, and activity' (1992: 9).

This chapter has sought to show how mediated representations of the female serial killer - and audience responses to those interpretations - might be more adequately explained and understood. In Part 1, drawing upon (and critically evaluating) existing literature in the relevant fields, I have described the theoretical framework that I will use to address the questions of subjectivity, agency, criminality and gender with which my project is concerned. I have explained that this framework is a cross-disciplinary one, which incorporates key concepts from psychosocial studies (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Clarke 2006, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012), supplemented with ideas from structuration theory (e.g. Giddens 1991, Archer 1990, 1996) and the feminist notion of resistance (e.g. McNay 1999, Mills 1997, de Lauretis 2007, Lloyd et al 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009). Recent research on psychosocial criminology (Gadd and Jefferson 2007a, 2007b, Jefferson 2002) has also been used as a means of linking this framework more specifically to the cinematic constructions of female criminality in which my research is particularly interested. I have argued that the meanings produced by and within viewers' filmic engagements are psychically and socio-culturally constructed, as well as being consciously, unconsciously and biographically motivated. By

drawing upon audience studies work from the disciplines of film theory and cultural studies, I have also acknowledged that the meanings produced in the spectatorial encounter are neither textually nor interpretively determined, and I have explained that my research will engage closely with “real” viewers as a means of exploring these complexities more fully. In the following chapter, I introduce and discuss the methodological framework that will be used for this project.

3: Methodology

The aim of this chapter is to set out the methodological framework that will be used for my thesis. This framework is motivated by my theoretical approach (set out in Chapter 2), and is duly designed to “fit” in this respect. My project seeks to better understand the ways in which the female serial killer is cinematically constructed and, further, to explore how viewers interpret and respond to these constructions. As I have explained in Chapters 1 and 2, my approach is a psychosocial one (e.g. Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Clarke 2006, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012), and I will begin the following section with a discussion of how this theoretical perspective informs my methodology. Later in this chapter, I will describe and offer a rationale for my choice of research interview model and for my selection of participants. I will also provide an account of the ways in which I will approach the subsequent analysis and interpretation of interview data.

Psychosocial Methodology

This project presupposes a ‘defended’ psychosocial subject¹ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 4) whose actions and stories are powerfully motivated by defences against anxiety. According to Hollway and Jefferson, since these defences operate at an *unconscious* level, they cannot be adequately examined using conventional “question/answer” interview technique(s). On pages 117-128 of this chapter, I will introduce Hollway and Jefferson’s

¹ See Chapter 2 (pages 58-59), where I introduce this concept and explain its relevance to the project.

(2000a) (psychoanalytically indebted) model of the Free Association Narrative Interview (FANI), and explain how I have used this to supplement Wengraf's (2001) Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)² in designing an interview model of my own. I will also provide a rationale for the implementation of this model within the context of my research, and will give methodological consideration not only to the ways in which the notion of "defended" subjectivity pertains to my participants, but also of the extent to which it relates to my own identity. Further, in my chapters of data analysis, I will reflect upon *my* feelings, by including in each chapter a reflexive discussion of my thoughts as to how my own biographical experiences may have produced certain anxieties, conflicts and phantasies that motivate the organisation and interpretation of my data in relation to specific themes and processes. Careful attention will also be paid to the importance of my role as researcher (Kvale 1999: 101), and a fuller discussion of the complexities that this involves is provided on pages 11206-109 in this chapter.

Firstly, however, it is important to situate my specific choice of psychosocial method in its relevant theoretical context, that is, in relation to recent debates in the field regarding the various epistemological and methodological developments that have emerged within the discipline itself. As a relatively "new" academic field, psychosocial studies can perhaps be characterised as an 'emergent perspective' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 2), whose 'exact contours... necessarily remain indeterminate at present' (Clarke 2006, Hollway 2004, 2009: 2). Such concerns are especially well summarised by Frosh in his observation that:

² Full definitions and descriptions of these interview models are provided on pages 103-105.

‘the idea of the psycho-social *subject* as a meeting point of inner and outer forces, something constructed and yet constructing, a power-using subject which is also subject to power, is a difficult subject to theorise, and no one has worked it out yet’ (Frosh 2003: 1564)

Theorists working within and contributing to the existing body of psychosocial research also come from a rich variety of academic disciplines: these include psychology, sociology, social policy and political studies. Drawing upon a range of different concepts and frameworks including discourse psychology, phenomenology, hermeneutics, continental philosophy, anthropological and neuroscientific approaches to understanding emotion, and psychoanalysis, different interdisciplinary perspectives - that relate to different professional and intellectual contexts - are duly brought to bear on the discipline. Indeed, as Rustin emphasises, it is important to note that there is ‘no one right way of doing psychosocial studies’ (2008: 411). In keeping with the objectives of this particular project, however, it is the psychoanalytic approaches to psychosocial studies that are most useful, that is, those which are concerned with ‘...researching beneath the surface and beyond the purely discursive’ (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 2), and in which careful consideration is given to the unconscious communications, dynamics, and defences that exist in the research environment itself, as well as to the notion of the ‘reflexive researcher’ (2009: 2). This latter idea is discussed further on pages 106-109. A rich and diverse array of research has developed within the field, then, exploring topics such as the fear of crime (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a), young masculinities (Frosh, Phoenix and Pattman 2002), young femininities

(Walkerdine et al 2001), maternal identities (Urwin 2007), the significance of anxiety within institutions (Clarke 2002, 2006), the narrative study of the personal identifications - particularly in terms of class and gender - that reinforce welfare workers' sense of commitment to their professional roles (Hoggett, Beedell, Jimenez, Mayo and Miller 2006), the uses of metaphor (Boydell 2009, Watts 2009), and the application of biographical narrative methods to social policies and professional practice (Chamberlayne et al 2002). Such work has sought to deepen existing approaches to qualitative research via the development of new methodologies, including biographical interviewing, infant observation (Urwin 2007), organisational observation (Hinshelwood and Skogstad 2000, Nicholls 2009), and psychoanalytic ethnography and fieldwork. Approaches of the kind described here have engendered 'groundbreaking innovations' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 8) in the way that research data is generated (2009: 8), whilst also seeking to address and to better understand the affective dynamics of the research encounter itself, as well as the ways in which feelings and emotion are dealt with in this specific context (Gilmour 2009, Beedell 2009). One of the key concerns of psychosocial work is thus to explore 'how we know what we know' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 22), and so a psychosocial approach can usefully be described as 'more an attitude, or position towards the subject(s) of study rather than just another methodology' (2009: 2).

Given these multifarious perspectives, it is perhaps unsurprising that, as Clarke and Hoggett observe, the field of psychosocial studies is 'full of controversies' (2009: 22). It is certainly the case that a number of 'lively arguments' (Rustin 2008: 407) regarding the merits of the different

approaches continue to pervade the field and, to this end, a special issue of the journal *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society* was devoted to some of these concerns in the winter of 2008. The specific debate invoked therein crystallised around questions about the use of psychoanalysis for the purposes of non-clinical research³, the application of psychoanalytic ideas and techniques within psychosocial work and, importantly, contrasting notions of how the psychosocial ought to be *conceptualised* (Jefferson 2008: 366). Uneasiness about the individualising tendencies, the “top down” expert knowledge and “certainty” (Frosh and Baraitser 2008: 347) of psychoanalysis are paramount here, and Frosh articulates his ambivalence about its ‘too rigid or “certain” deployment’ (Frosh 2008: 419) as a totalising system of knowledge. Frosh and Baraitser also express their concerns about the potential of psychoanalysis to become blunted or “sanitised” as a consequence of its mobilisation within psychosocial studies, losing its specificity and its ‘critical edge’ (2008: 348) in the process. Moreover, critical of Hollway (2006b) and Hollway and Jefferson’s (2005) specifically Kleinian object-relations approach to their psychosocial work, Frosh and Baraitser call for a more ‘tentative and disruptive’ (2008: 348) psychoanalytic approach, and advocate the mobilisation of Lacanian frameworks as a means of achieving this. In his response to this critique, Jefferson problematises the Lacanian direction that Frosh and Baraitser propose, arguing that such an approach ‘effectively eliminates the psychic dimension’ (Jefferson 2008: 366) of psychosocial investigation. Hollway, meanwhile, maintains that Lacanian theory’s quest for permanent deconstruction does not sit well with the

³ This matter is discussed further on pages 109-110, where I also clarify my own position in this respect.

purposes of empirical research (Hollway 2008: 390). She suggests that Frosh and Baraitser's view of Kleinian and Lacanian positions in this context is troublingly polarised, and criticises what she describes as the 'one-sided [and] oversimplified' (2008: 390) thrust of their argument, characterised as it is by a caricatured understanding of the use of Kleinian ideas in empirical work (2008: 386).

Frosh and Baraitser go on to suggest that the image of the *Moebius strip* is useful as a way of thinking about psychosocial studies, that is, an image in which "psychical" and "social" flow together as one, such that the choice of how to study the two elements is merely a tactical one (2008: 349). For Jefferson, however, it is crucial to hold on to *some kind of distinction* between psychic and social (Jefferson 2008: 368), since it is the tensions, conflicts and disjunctions between psychic and social that are so especially deserving of exploration from a psychosocial point of view. It is, he argues, important not to 'erase[...] the psychosocial problematic' (Jefferson 2008: 369) in such a way that there is 'ultimately nothing to be explained' (2008: 369). Similarly, Hoggett maintains that it is precisely this space of 'overlap and interpenetration' (Hoggett 2008: 383) that is of value to psychosocial research, recognising this as 'the place where things do not fit but should fit (2008: 383). It is this "not fittingness", he argues, that indicates the impossibility of closure between the psychical and the social.

My own epistemological position in relation to this polemical debate, however, is closely aligned with Hollway's, and my approach to this project is motivated by a similar love of psychoanalysis because it is so 'deep, varied and complex' (2008: 387), offers concepts and frameworks that facilitate a

continual learning process, and can therefore be hugely productive both theoretically and methodologically. Whilst it is necessary to acknowledge the concerns outlined in this section regarding the 'plunder[ing] of psychoanalytic ideas [for use in] in an empirical research arena' (Hollway 2008: 386), I agree with Hollway that the risks of mining psychoanalysis and thereby using it as an 'ungrounded expert system of knowledge' (2008: 391) are perhaps rather overstated. Following Hollway, I am critical of the 'deconstructive, negative and critical agenda' (2008: 392) that Frosh and Baraitser propose for psychosocial studies, and I argue that it is better to think dialectically rather than dichotomously (2008: 392) in this epistemological context. Throughout this project I duly seek to acknowledge the trajectories of opposing ideas, and to give consideration to what these might represent (2008: 392) specifically situated as they are in relation to my own research.

My methodological starting point, then, is the 'transparent self problem' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 3), that is, the presumption within much qualitative research that participants know exactly who they are and what makes them tick. Following Hollway and Jefferson, I assume for the purposes of this project that 'neither selves nor accounts are transparent' (2000a:3), I will show that interviewees cannot *necessarily* 'tell it like it is' (2000a:10) and, importantly, will demonstrate that such issues can be meaningfully explored using object relations psychoanalysis⁴. In seeking to more comprehensively understand how and why viewers interpret cinematic constructions of the female serial killer in particular ways, I therefore build

⁴ Following Hollway and Jefferson (2000a), my approach is primarily a Kleinian one. See Chapter 2 for a full account of the psychoanalytic paradigms upon which this project will draw.

upon Hollway and Jefferson's notion of 'investments' (2000a: 15)⁵ - a term they use to describe:

someone's desires and anxieties, probably not conscious or intentional, which motivate the specific positions they take up [in particular discourses] and the selection of accounts through which they portray themselves (2000a: 15).

Hollway and Jefferson suggest that this process of "investment" is inextricably linked to individuals' life experiences - their biographies – and so, drawing closely upon their work, I have (as part of the four-stage interview process used for the project⁶) sought to elicit "life story" narratives from my research participants. On pages 117-121, I describe the model of research interview that I have designed for my study, and justify its use within the context of this thesis. Firstly, however, it is important to consider the questions of subjectivity - for participant and researcher - that inform my methodological approach, and it is to a discussion of this that I shall now turn.

Reflexivity, Subjectivity and (Unconscious) Communication in the BNIM and FANI

Both BNIM and FANI approaches are notable for their prioritisation of the researcher's own feelings and emotions: elements which are often under-emphasised within sociological/psychological studies (Walkerdine 1997: 56). In this section, I will explain how and why such matters are valuable for the purposes of this project. To begin, following Walkerdine, I argue that, as a

⁵ See, especially Chapter 5, in which I use this concept to reconceptualise the spectatorial process of "identification" as one of viewer "investment".

⁶ See pages 117-121 for a full description of my interview model.

researcher, my own (psychosocial) subjectivity cannot be “detached” from the research process and might instead be utilised as a *feature* of the same (1997: 59), especially in terms of how this can be understood to include ‘unconscious, conflictual forces rather than simply conscious ones’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 33). It must of course be acknowledged that the notion of reflexivity is itself a complex one (Couldry 2000: 115, Hills 2002: 72), not least because - as I will show in my main thematic chapters - *all* subject positions are produced by and within the distortions inherent in various wider (socio-cultural) structural hierarchies (Couldry 2000: 115, Layton 2008: 13, Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 13, Walkerdine 2007). Whilst I agree with Hills (2002: 73) that the reflexive element of the FANI model, in particular, is perhaps one of its most valuable qualities (and have thus incorporated this into my own interview design), it is a matter that has required careful handling. It has been crucial throughout the project, for example, to avoid too readily projecting⁷ my own feelings onto participants, or onto the interpretation of data (Gray 2003: 113). It has been equally important to acknowledge the inherently fragile (Hills 2002: 72) nature of the discursive accounts and explanations provided by my participants, and to recognise that these qualities also pertain to the accounts that I myself am able to provide⁸. These are issues to which I will return in Chapters 4, 5 and 6⁹, where I consider how, and to what extent, the analysis and interpretation of interview data undertaken within each chapter is to a certain degree

⁷ The (psychoanalytic) processes of projection, transference and countertransference are defined and discussed more fully in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

⁸ Hills’ account of ‘autoethnography’ (2002: 42-44) is useful in this respect. Further consideration of the fundamental inadequacy of language as a means of expressing our experiences (e.g. Frosh 2002: 16, Hoggett 2008: 381) is made in Chapter 2 (pages 51-52).

⁹ A detailed outline of these chapters (which constitute the main “body” of my thesis) is provided in Chapter 1.

reflexively motivated. In these discussions, I suggest that the emphasis given within all three chapters to particular themes observable in my participants' cinematic engagements is partly motivated not only by my own desire - as an academic researcher - for knowledge (Walkerdine 1986: 190) and mastery (Shacklock and Smyth 1998: 53), but also by the meaningful biographical events (including some of the powerful spectatorial encounters) that I have myself experienced.

In Chapter 4, for instance (pages 150-198), I suggest that my decision to focus closely upon the paternal as a meaningful element of participants' gendered filmic investments - especially their relationships with their fathers (and the complex emotions involved therein) - is partly informed by unconscious feelings relating to my relationship with my own father, which has, at times, been troubling. My reflexive considerations in Chapter 5, meanwhile, acknowledge that I have paid particularly close attention to the *struggles* observable in the processes of managing the self in which participants engage as they read the films. I suggest that this specific emphasis is motivated in part by one particularly memorable - and distressing - personal film viewing experience that occurred during my late teenage years. Here, I describe how the transgressive reading that I made of the film in question aroused a powerfully unsettling emotional response that I felt unable to articulate adequately, and consider how this bears upon my analysis and discussion of interview data. In Chapter 6, I reflect upon a similarly memorable spectatorial engagement, one which fostered in me the confidence to make pivotal changes to my own life as a more mature adult. In doing so, I suggest that my decision to focus upon the ways in which my

participants use the films as 'symbolic resources' (Zittoun 2006: xiii) is to some extent motivated by the conflictual feelings that are, for me, unconsciously associated with this experience.

In my conclusion, meanwhile, I evaluate the usefulness of the reflexive diary that I kept - following Hollway and Jefferson (2000a) and Wengraf (2001) - throughout the interview stage of this project¹⁰. I note that, whilst this constituted a valuable means of recording the thoughts and feelings that I myself experienced during each interview session, and thus enabled me to remain mindful of these during the analysis of interview data, the role of the diary and its significance to my work might perhaps have been more explicitly addressed throughout the project. In addition to the points raised in this section, the BNIM and FANI - as psychoanalytically indebted methods of collecting and interpreting data - raise a number of ethical concerns: these are considered further in the discussion that follows.

It must be emphasised, firstly, that the mobilisation within this project of the FANI/BNIM interview methods is fundamentally distinct from their use within clinical settings, and has wholly different objectives. In this context (i.e. for qualitative research purposes), I use these methods to obtain knowledge, keeping my interpretations separate from the interview interaction itself whereas, applied within in a clinical context, they are used to provide "therapy" for a patient (Kvale 1999: 105, Alexandrov 2009: 42, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 77). Whilst I approach this project not as an analyst or a therapist but as a qualitative researcher, it has nevertheless been important to acknowledge that the interviews undertaken here were seeking to explore

¹⁰ This diary is attached at Appendix F (CD), and my critical evaluation of its usefulness is provided in Chapter 7 (page 323).

potentially sensitive and emotionally intense topics, and might therefore have involved an ‘unearthing of experiences and emotions’ (Gabb 2008a: 18, Brannen 1988) which could, in turn, have been unsettling for me and/or my participants. This is not to suggest, of course, that BNIM or FANI-based interviews are inherently harmful. Certainly, even when some participants became mildly upset when revealing emotionally significant information, this was quite different from their being *harmed* by the process. Indeed, as Daly (2007: 251) correctly observes, talking about our emotions is a necessary part of everyday life: and these emotions are not always positive ones. Anticipating that participants were perhaps unlikely to ‘divest hitherto unknown "stories" and memories’ (Gabb 2008b: 25) after only a few hours of interview contact, then, I nevertheless remained sensitive to the possibility that some might find themselves making impulsive disclosures which they would later come to regret. Interestingly, however, none of my participants reported any such concerns to me and neither did any of them appear to become significantly distressed during the interview sessions. The few individuals who did become a little tearful at certain points during their interviews (usually when recounting painful biographical memories) subsequently described the experience as having been positive, even “therapeutic” for them¹¹.

Whilst no significant discomfort or distress was experienced by my participants during their interview sessions, the level of emotional engagement that the BNIM/FANI methods demand of psychosocial

¹¹ Certain individuals (most notably Alice and Mandy) came to the sessions enthusiastically prepared to disclose sensitive information, and seemed to wilfully anticipate becoming upset during their interview sessions. They subsequently described their experiences as having been enjoyable - even “therapeutic” - for them.

researchers - recognised to be both 'burdensome and beneficial' (Beedell 2009: 103) - must be acknowledged here. It is argued that psychosocial interview methods render the researcher him/herself vulnerable to the experiencing of unexpected ideas or emotions that may prove disturbing (Clarke 2002, Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003, Savin-Baden 2004) although, as I will demonstrate in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, there is still much to be gained from the process (Jervis 2009: 163), and the richness of my findings from the project attests to this.

My role as interviewer in this respect can perhaps best be described as that of an empathic¹² listener since, during interviews, I have not attempted to offer advice or solutions to problems. Rather, I have sought to 'refrain[...] from making moral judgements' (Gabb 2008a: 19), even where participants' opinions challenged my own beliefs and understandings (2008a: 19), whilst endeavouring to respond carefully to their emotional disclosures (2008a: 19). This role therefore required empathy *and* detachment (Beedell 2009: 117) since, as Jervis correctly observes, 'for researchers to really understand respondents' experiences, they must first *feel* them' (2009: 157). Processes of transference and countertransference - which are not exclusive to the (clinical) analytic relationship between therapist and patient, but also apply to and 'occur instantly' in *any* relationship (Kahn 1997: 18) - are understood to be of primary significance in this respect. These processes, and their importance within the context of this project, are discussed more comprehensively in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Thus far in this chapter, I have

¹² According to the Oxford Dictionary (2012) the adjectives "empathetic" and "empathic" are both derivatives of the mass noun "empathy", and can be used interchangeably. I have chosen to use the latter throughout this project.

provided an outline of my methodological approach, and have explained how I sought to manage the epistemological and communicative complexities of the psychosocial interview interaction in which I myself participated as a researcher. In the following section, I describe more fully the models of research interview (BNIM and FANI) upon which my own model is based, and critically evaluate their usefulness for the purposes of this thesis.

BNIM and FANI

The interview model/technique that I designed for my project draws extensively upon the BNIM (Chamberlayne, Bornat and Wengraf 2000, Wengraf 2001): a case-study approach based on a method of biographical-narrative interviewing and analysis originally developed in Germany in the early 1990s (Rosenthal 1990, Rosenthal and Bar-On 1992: 109). In the following discussion, I will show how I have supplemented this model with Hollway and Jefferson's FANI approach. Interestingly, Wengraf himself has encouraged such an enterprise, arguing that the integration of Hollway and Jefferson's notion of anxious defended subjectivity (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) into his BNIM-SQUIN¹³ model ought to provide a 'good starting point for depth-interview research' (Wengraf 2001: 159). I will begin here, however, by discussing the BNIM in further detail, showing how and why it has been relevant to my own study.

A useful tool for a diverse range of research questions, the BNIM invites participants to tell biographical stories in their own way, with minimum guidance or intervention from the researcher. This "in-depth" approach to

¹³ *Single Question Aimed At Inducing Narrative*. See pages 118-119 for a more comprehensive definition (and discussion) of this technique.

interviewing conceptualises participants as active, agentic subjects and endeavours to acquire “deep” knowledge of their life experiences (Johnson 2001; Gubrium and Holstein 2001). As I will show in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, participants’ biographical experiences (and the unconscious conflicts, anxieties and phantasies associated with them) bear significantly upon their readings of the three key films selected for the project, attesting to the value of utilising this particular interview method within an audience studies context¹⁴. Wengraf argues that the BNIM also offers a richer understanding of the narratives that individuals construct for themselves over their life course, by enabling the researcher to ‘get a sense of how the apparently straight-forward is actually more complicated [and] of how “surface appearances” may be quite misleading about “depth realities”’ (Wengraf 2001: 7). In contrast to conventional narrative analyses’ ‘preoccupation with coherence’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 37), then, my own psychosocial methodological approach has sought instead to emphasise the ‘*incoherences... contradictions, elisions [and] avoidances*’ (2000a: 37, my italics) observable in my participants’ accounts, and to ‘accord them due significance’ (2000a: 37). In doing so, I have endeavoured to identify and examine those emotions which are difficult - or too sensitive - for participants to acknowledge in conscious thought, or to share openly (Day Sclater 2000).

I decided, following Wengraf (2001), that the complexities outlined here could best be explored by incorporating two different questioning techniques into my interviews: Single Questions Aimed at Inducing Narrative (SQUINs) (Wengraf 2001) and TQUINs (Topic Questions Aimed at Inducing Narrative),

¹⁴ See Chapter 7 (pages 327-328), where I discuss the “transferability” of my interview model, and make suggestions as to how this might be used to study other forms of cultural engagement.

that is, more thematically or topically driven questions (Wengraf 2001, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a): these ideas are developed further in the discussion that follows. Firstly, however, it is important to note that I apply the BNIM/FANI methods here for purposes that are quite different to those for which they have more conventionally been utilised by psychosocial researchers. For example, Hollway and Jefferson have used the FANI to explore the phenomenon of date rape (1998), family-based generational and gender anxieties (1999) and individuals' fear of crime (2000a), whereas Clarke (2002) has drawn upon similar interview models to address students' experiences of racism in higher education. My work uses these methods as a form of audience study: specifically, as a means of examining viewers' processes of "investment" in three key film texts. As I have explained in Chapter 1, this project is especially concerned with the *link between* individuals' biographical experience(s) and their understandings and interpretations of cinematic constructions of the female serial killer. Recognising that participants' life stories were likely to be structured by an infinite number of themes (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 37), I have also supplemented my BNIM/FANI model with elements of the 'focused interview'¹⁵ (Mishler 1986: 99), as a means of constructing a frame suitable for the elicitation of the required information (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 37)¹⁶.

The interview models described in this section are of course complex and time-consuming and so, given the relatively restricted timescale (and word

¹⁵ See pages 121-128, where I provide a detailed account of the four-stage interview process used for this project. This is comprised of an initial BNIM-SQUIN (Wengraf 2001) session, followed by three more thematically focused and semi-structured sessions.

¹⁶ A full discussion of these "requirements" is provided in subsequent sections of this chapter.

limit) available for my thesis, there were limitations in terms of the number of participants, interview sessions and volume of data that could be adequately managed¹⁷. Since the aim of my research is to carry out an in-depth analysis of the ways in which viewers respond to cinematic constructions of the female serial killer, it was decided that these objectives could best be met - and the pragmatic limitations that I have identified effectively managed - by using a small number of individual case studies. As I have indicated in Chapter 1, the value of in-depth case-studies within psychosocial research is well documented (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 19, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 107) and, whilst concerns have been raised about the extent to which data produced using such methods can be generalised, these often stem from confusion regarding the role of case studies within social scientific disciplines (Flyvbjerg 2006, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 104). I emphasise that the aim of this project is not a quantitative one, in that I do not seek to produce findings which are “representative” on a wider scale or, indeed, to present results which can be generalised, and so the psychosocial approach that I take here is perhaps best defined as ‘a method for *understanding* rather than *explaining*’ (Clarke 2002: 192).

I therefore argue that the small but diverse sample of participants used for my project enables better ‘access [to] a wide range of different... experiences’ (Hills 2005: 803) and, with this in mind, I sought to incorporate as many different demographic variables as possible into my case-study sample in terms, for instance, of age, gender, sexuality, class and

¹⁷In Chapter 7, I reflect upon the impact that these limitations have had on the project as a whole.

educational background. A fuller discussion of my approach to the recruitment of participants is provided on pages 129-133.

Thus far in this chapter, careful consideration has been given to the methodological concerns that pertain to the process of data *gathering*, although it is perhaps the *interpretation* of data in the psychosocial research tradition that is sometimes said to constitute its 'biggest epistemological stumbling block' (Gabb 2008a: 20), and this is a matter that must also be addressed here. It is certainly the case that, within the field of psychoanalytically indebted psychosocial methodologies, arguments about the potential for "over-interpretation" of participants' subjectivity (Roseneil 2006: 865) remain controversial, whilst the tendency of such work to afford 'unmediated power' (Gabb 2008a: 20) to a researcher's capacity for making meaning(s) from the data also causes concern. In my handling of interview data, then, I have sought to beware of 'wild analysis' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 18) that is, of a temptation to 'see instances of splitting and projective identification¹⁸ everywhere, and in every action' (Clarke 2002: 188). I have managed such issues effectively by remaining transparent in my theoretical and methodological approaches (Hiles 2008), i.e. by making explicit the methods that I have used for - and any assumptions that I made in relation to (Seale, Gobo, Gubrium and Silverman 2004) - the collection, interpretation and analysis of interview data¹⁹. As far as the legitimacy and reliability of psychoanalytical approaches to data interpretation are concerned,

¹⁸ The psychoanalytic processes of splitting and projective identification are defined and explored more comprehensively in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

¹⁹ Wengraf encourages BNIM researchers to spend time 'self-debriefing' (2001: 142) after each interview, recording in detail their memories, experiences and ideas, etc. in relation to each session. In Chapter 7, I reflect upon the usefulness of the reflexive diary that I kept whilst undertaking the interviews and screenings for the project. The complete diary is attached at Appendix F (CD).

meanwhile, Hollway and Jefferson (2000a) argue that, within psychosocial research, the notion of “reliability” ought to be conceptualised in a different way, i.e. one that is not exclusively preoccupied with the consistency, stability and/or repeatability of results (Hiles and Čermák 2007: 2). It is not enough, they suggest, to assume that meanings ‘can be controlled and made identical in successive applications of a question’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 79)²⁰. Rather, it is perhaps more useful to focus upon whether the methods *used to produce the data* can satisfactorily be transferred or extrapolated to other similar research contexts (Hoepfl 1997: 489). Indeed, as I emphasise in Chapters 1 and 7, the transferability of the interview model I have designed is perhaps one of this project’s greatest strengths.

I have in this section set out the methodological framework that I will use, and have discussed its relevance to the aims and objectives of my thesis, which seeks to explore how and why cinematic constructions of the female serial killer resonate with viewers in the ways that they do. In the remainder of this chapter, I will set out the model of research interview that I designed for the project, and will explain how it was “tested” using a pilot study. Finally, I will introduce the participants recruited for the project, and offer a rationale for their selection.

Designing the Interview

As I have already noted, the interview model designed for my thesis draws upon the BNIM (Wengraf 2001) and FANI (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a)

²⁰ See my discussion of this project’s findings in Chapter 7 (pages 296-298), in which I emphasise that there is no “dominant/correct” reading to be made of my interview data: rather, that a multi-interpretive approach is more valuable (Jones 2002: 7).

techniques²¹. I have explained that the objectives of my project - which itself constitutes a form of media audience study - differ significantly from those in which such methods are more conventionally applied²², and have described how the BNIM and FANI models have been adapted to 'reflect the core theoretical concerns' (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 63) of my own research, which seeks to explore participants' "investments" in three key film texts. Screenings of the selected film texts, of course, also had to be incorporated into my methodological framework, and the logistics of this are discussed on pages 119-120. Firstly, however, I will provide a more detailed description of the interview model that I have designed.

Hollway and Jefferson implement a 'double interview' method (2000a: 43, 2005) in their studies, and so it was necessary to modify their framework to suit the objectives of my own work: Wengraf's model of BNIM "subsessions" (2001: 119), in which he advocates three separate interviews, involving full and partial SQUIN requests (2001: 121), provided a useful way forward in this respect. In full SQUIN requests, the researcher asks a single initial question designed to elicit participants' life story narratives, whereas partial SQUIN requests enable the researcher to ask 'thematically or temporally focused, but open, initial questions' (Wengraf 2001: 121) concentrating, for example, upon a particular phase of the participant's life, or a specific topic or theme. For the purposes of this project, then, I decided that it would be most helpful to build up the information (data) gathered from my participants in a gradual way and sought to accomplish this by using *four* separate

²¹ As I have already explained on page 114 in this chapter, I have also found it useful to draw upon ideas from the 'focused interview' (Mishler 1986: 99) technique.

²² A summary of these studies is provided on page 114.

interview sessions: two prior to each film screening, and two afterwards²³. My aim in doing so was to construct a biographical “portrait” of each participant in the first session, and to then introduce the five themes deemed most relevant to my research²⁴ in the second. These first and second sessions, in accordance with the BNIM and FANI techniques, were un-structured and semi-structured, respectively. Following the film screenings, which are discussed below, the third interview session endeavoured to elicit participants’ initial responses to the films. The structure of the fourth and final interviews, meanwhile, was individually tailored to each participant: questions for these sessions were based upon my preliminary analysis and interpretation of the data collected in Interviews 1, 2 and 3. The aim of the interview model as a whole was to better understand the connection between participants’ life experiences and their responses to and interpretations of the ways in which the female serial killer is cinematically constructed.

The films themselves were watched on DVD²⁵, and all three were shown back-to-back at each screening. I attended each screening myself, primarily as a means of verifying that the films *had* been watched in full by each participant²⁶. I had originally endeavoured to set up screenings that could be attended by several participants at once, thus making the best use of the

²³ All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder (all participants were made fully aware of this before beginning each first interview session), and were subsequently transcribed using Jeffersonian (Maxwell Atkinson and Heritage 1999) transcription conventions. A “key” to these conventions is provided at Appendix E, and the full interview transcripts themselves are available at Appendix F (CD). See Chapter 7 (page 324) for a critical evaluation of my choice of transcription conventions.

²⁴ Participants were asked to tell me about their experiences of cinema/film, crime, gender, sexuality and class: themes which are salient in relation to the project as a whole, and also deemed to be specifically relevant to the narratives of the three films. See page 123 for a further account of this.

²⁵ See Chapters 1 and 7 for a discussion of this particular “mode” of viewing, and its implications for the project.

²⁶ It was also useful on some occasions to take note of any particularly interesting comments made (or questions asked) by participants during the screenings.

time available for this stage of the project. In practice, however, although a few “shared” screenings were successfully undertaken, most screenings (for convenience purposes) were actually carried out either at my home or at the homes of participants, depending upon their personal preferences. For interviews and screenings alike, I ensured that demands upon participants in terms of travel, finances and time, etc. were minimised. In this section, I have provided a summary of the four-stage interview model used for the project, and have described the film-screening arrangements that were made. Mention must also be made, however, of the preparatory tasks that were carried out in advance of the interview sessions.

Whilst preparing for this stage of the project, I acknowledged that participants’ understandings and expectations of forthcoming interview events would already have been encoded into their own particular “frame” (Wengraf 2001: 189), and that this ‘pre-interview framing’ (Berteaux 1997, Wengraf 2001: 121) would be likely to bear significantly upon the subsequent interview interactions (Wengraf 2001: 121). I sought to manage these issues by providing each participant with a clear outline of my thesis: this included a basic description of my research objectives, and explained precisely what involvement in the project would entail for them in terms, for example, of timescale, commitment and availability. Prior to their interview sessions, each participant read and signed an “informed consent” declaration²⁷. I also collected “pre-interview” proformas (Wengraf 2001: 192) from each person, on which I recorded essential personal information: date of birth, contact details, educational qualifications, current occupation and political

²⁷ A sample copy of the consent form signed by all participants is attached at Appendix C.

affiliation²⁸. Locations for the interviews were “co-arranged” with participants, since I presupposed that their active involvement at this preparatory stage would be likely to increase their longer term level of commitment to the project (2001: 192). In this section, I have explained how the interviews and film screenings for my project were planned, organised and carried out. In the following sections, I will provide a detailed description of each of the four interview sessions in terms of their form and content.

Interview 1: Biographical Portrait

Initial interview sessions were based upon Wengraf’s full SQUIN model (Wengraf 2001: 121): their purpose being to elicit a full biographical (life story) narrative from each participant. During these first interviews, my role as researcher was to listen “actively” and to provide non-directional support (2001: 125), thereby encouraging participants to tell their own life stories in their own way (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 35). Following Wengraf’s suggestion (2001: 119-121), the following SQUIN was used:

I would like you to tell me your life story: all the events and experiences which were important for you. Start wherever you like, and please take all the time you need. I’ll listen and won’t interrupt, and I may take some notes for later.

For the duration of participants’ narrations, I provided non-verbal “support” using the appropriate body language and eye contact, etc. Following Wengraf, I approached these sessions in full anticipation of long pauses or

²⁸ The participant “profiles” provided on pages 134-148 serve as anonymised versions of these proformas. Questions of confidentiality and anonymity as they relate to this project more widely are addressed on page 132 of this chapter.

silences, such that I was adequately prepared to tolerate them as and when they occurred. Where strong emotions arose, I endeavoured to “mirror” these in an empathic and non-judgmental way (Wengraf 2001: 128), resisting the temptation to interpret, console or provide advice to participants, even where they asked me for more directional interview questions (2001: 126). On the few occasions when it became necessary for me to give reassurances or prompts for further story²⁹, these were structured using participants’ own words, ordering and phrasing (2001: 119, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 36), in order to avoid imposing *my* structure on their narratives as they unfolded. For these first interview sessions, it was therefore not possible to set a precise time-limit in advance: a matter that was taken into consideration when making the relevant logistical arrangements (Wengraf 2001: 119). Interestingly, in fact, the time actually taken by participants to tell their life stories varied enormously, ranging from 6 minutes to nearly two hours. In each case, I ensured that the ending of each session was determined by the participant him or herself, and the interview brought to close only when he or she indicated clearly that they had no more to say (2001: 119, 136).

Wengraf recommends that researchers carry out a ‘self-debriefing’ session (2001: 138) between interviews and so, throughout the data gathering stage of my project, I kept a reflexive diary in which I recorded my observations, thoughts, feelings and concerns immediately following each interview session. This process was useful in terms of enabling me to remember and

²⁹ The provision of “facilitative” and “non-directional” support does not constitute a violation of the SQUIN principles. Rather, Wengraf suggests that it is useful where necessary to reassure the participant that they are “doing OK”, or to use phrases such as: “*I want to know how [that experience] was for you: I don’t have any special questions*” (2001: 124) as a means of encouraging further narration.

reflect upon my own reflexive involvement in the sessions³⁰. Second interviews were conducted immediately following the first ones, with a short “comfort” break (for refreshments, etc.) in-between. These second sessions were used as an opportunity to construct a “thematic portrait” for each participant. Here, I introduced five specific themes - cinema/film, crime, gender, sexuality and class³¹ - that I identified as being particularly important in relation to the aims and objectives of the project as a whole, which are to explore the ways in which viewers engage with cinematic representations of the female serial killer. These five themes were also deemed to be relevant to the subject matter addressed by the three films chosen for inclusion in the project³².

Interview 2: Thematic Portrait

Rather than simply “following-up” topics raised by participants in their first interview, my second interview sessions sought to explore the ways in which the five key themes identified above - cinema/film, crime, gender, sexuality and class - were biographically significant for each participant. Drawing upon Wengraf (2001) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000a), second interviews were therefore more semi-structured than the first, and incorporated five TQUINs (Wengraf 2001: 120), based upon these five themes. The questions were structured as follows:

³⁰ See also Chapter 7 (pages 323-324), where I note that despite the logistical usefulness of this diary (attached at Appendix F (CD)), I have not (owing to the pragmatic limitations of the project) referred to it in my main discussion chapters.

³¹ See, however, my discussion in Chapter 7 (pages 316-317) regarding the lack of emphasis ultimately given to issues of class (and, to a certain degree, issues of sexuality) in my main thematic chapters.

³² A description of these films is provided on page 4, and a rationale for their inclusion in the project is provided on pages 10-14.

Please tell me about your experience of cinema/crime/masculinity/femininity/sexuality/class since it became important in your life, how things happened up to now. Begin wherever you like: I might take a few notes, but won't interrupt (Wengraf 2001: 122)

I had originally intended (following Wengraf and in keeping with the more semi-structured interviewing technique outlined here) to suggest a time limit for these second interviews of approximately an hour and a half. It became clear during my pilot study³³, however, that it would be more useful to allow participants to respond freely to each question, since this seemed likely to elicit more comprehensive narrations from them.

The aim of interview sessions 1 and 2 was to construct a biographical portrait of each participant, and to build upon this by introducing five key themes (discussed above) that had been identified as being specifically relevant to my research. Screenings of the three films were subsequently carried out with each participant as soon as possible following the completion of our second interview. The third stage of the interview process, which took place following the screenings, is described more fully in the following section.

Interview 3: Initial responses to films

Third interviews were carried out with each participant immediately after the film screenings (having taken a short comfort break if required), and sought to explore participants' initial (and immediate) responses to the film texts. In keeping with the psychoanalytic orientation of my project³⁴, I chose during

³³ A fuller discussion of this pilot study is provided on pages 128-129 of this chapter.

³⁴ See Chapter 2, which sets out the theoretical framework that I use throughout the project.

these third sessions to ask for further “open” narrations from participants (Wengraf 2001: 144), rather than using a series of more tightly structured questions (*contra* Hollway and Jefferson’s 2000a: 37-38 utilisation of this latter technique). My rationale in doing so was that, by asking participants to say whatever came to mind in terms of their feelings about the films, it would be possible to elicit ‘the kind of narrative that is not structured according to conscious logic, but according to unconscious logic’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 37), and thereby to explore how the associations they made in their narrations ‘follow[ed] pathways defined by emotional motivations, rather than rational intentions’ (2000a: 37). Not only did this technique produce much richer data, it also facilitated a more nuanced exploration of each participant’s own individual reading of the films. As in Interviews 1 and 2, participants were allowed to give their accounts using their own words, such that their narrations were structured for importance and significance on their own terms. Combining Wengraf’s suggested SQUIN/TQUIN techniques (2001: 119-122) as described on pages 118-119, these third interviews involved one question only, framed as follows:

Please tell me about any thoughts or feelings that you experienced whilst you were watching the three films. Begin wherever you like, and take as long as you need. I’ll listen and won’t interrupt, but I might make some notes for later.

In accordance with the decision made about setting time-limits for my second interview sessions³⁵, there were no time constraints imposed for these third interviews. Rather, participants were allowed to narrate freely and for as long

³⁵ See page 122.

as they wished. Once again, the duration of each session varied dramatically, although most sessions drew to a close in less than an hour.

These first three stages of the interview process enabled me to construct a detailed “profile” for my participants, incorporating:

- (i) a biographical portrait (life history)
- (ii) a thematic portrait, that is, a clear picture of the ways in which the five themes deemed specifically relevant to my project (cinema, crime, gender, sexuality and class)³⁶ were personally relevant to each participant
- (iii) an individual account of each participant’s initial readings of the three films

The aim of the fourth and final interview sessions, meanwhile, was to build upon the information already gathered by drawing up a series of questions tailored specifically to each participant. A detailed description of this process is provided in the section that follows.

Interview 4: Bringing it all together

Fourth interview sessions took place following a preliminary analysis of the data collected from Interviews 1, 2 and 3³⁷ and so, in order to allow sufficient time for this task, final interviews were usually carried out between 4 and 6 weeks after the third sessions. My aim, upon completion of all four interviews, was to “make sense” of participants’ readings of the film texts in

³⁶ I clarify the relevance of these themes to my project on page 123.

³⁷ A full description of each of these three sessions is provided on pages 121-127 of this chapter.

relation to my analysis of the biographical/thematic data that had been collected, that is, to explore the spectatorial *investments* that they had made.

Fourth interview sessions were far more structured in nature than the preceding ones, and were tailored to each individual participant according to the profiles that I had drawn up. The questions that I asked each participant in these sessions were designed to pursue not only those patterns and themes which emerged as particularly significant throughout their narrations, but also to explore further any of the notable inconsistencies, contradictions, puzzles, absences or interesting juxtapositions (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 70) that I had observed in their interview data. Where my questions involved requests for further narration/story (Wengraf 2001: 144), I made sure that these were structured using participants' own words, ordering and phrasing: a strategy already identified in this chapter as being important³⁸. As with the previous stages of interview, there was no time limit set for these final sessions and, as before, their durations varied as a consequence of this.

Mindful of the concerns acknowledged on pages 106-112 regarding the potentially 'gross intrusion of the researcher's subjectivity' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 18) into the processes of data analysis and interpretation involved in psychosocial work, it is important to point out that, for some researchers, these processes should be 'participative and dialogic' (2009: 18). Annie Stopford argues, for example, that 'it is... imperative that psychoanalytically inclined researchers try to devise methods which facilitate our participants' involvement in construction of interpretation' (Stopford 2004:

³⁸ See my discussion of this on page 122.

8). Such an approach might have involved 'engaging participants in dialogue around emerging findings' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 18) during my fourth interview sessions by asking questions such as:

*When you told me about X in interview 1/2/3, I understand this to mean Y.
Have I understood this correctly?*

Whilst Stopford makes a valid point here, Clarke and Hoggett concede that 'only a minority of psychosocial researchers would advocate such a strongly dialogic approach' (2009: 19)³⁹. Given the small-scale of my project, then - meaning that I worked alone, rather than as part of a team of researchers (see Cox, Geisen and Green 2008)⁴⁰ - the intensive approach that Stopford recommends was, for pragmatic reasons, deemed to be unsuitable for appropriation within the context of this thesis, but might perhaps usefully be incorporated into any larger scale studies that it generates⁴¹. I have in this section provided a detailed account of the research interview model designed for this project. I have described the aims and objectives of each of the four interview stages, and have offered a rationale for my approach to each of them. In the discussion that follows, I describe and summarise the pilot study that was undertaken as a means of trying out my interview model, ensuring its "fitness" for the purposes of my research (Wengraf 2001: 187, Baker 1994: 182-3, De Vaus 1993: 54) and thereby minimising potential problems.

³⁹ I note, however, that Walkerdine (e.g. 2012) has made excellent use of the dialogic approach that Stopford recommends.

⁴⁰ Although, of course, my handling, analysis and interpretation of interview data was closely monitored by my supervisor at all stages of the project.

⁴¹ See Chapter 7 (pages 327-328), where I make some suggestions as to how this project might be developed for future studies.

Piloting the Interview Design

The aim of the pilot study carried out for the project was to identify any flaws, weaknesses or limitations inherent in my interview model, with a view to making any amendments and/or improvements deemed necessary -in terms of both design and practice (Kvale 2007, Wengraf 2001: 187) - before beginning work with my actual participants. For convenience purposes, I carried out my pilot run with a willing acquaintance⁴² who had volunteered for the task: a decision that I made on the premise that the arrangement seemed likely to facilitate a constructive and secure environment in which to “test” my interview model. The degree of success achieved in the implementation of this pilot study - and the richness of the data that it produced - far exceeded my hopes and expectations, and I embarked upon interview sessions with my selected participants very shortly afterwards. It is perhaps useful to provide a full explanation of (and justification for) the participant-sampling processes that I used for this project, and so this matter will be addressed in the following section.

Participant Sampling and Selection

Given the complexities of the BNIM-FANI methods outlined in this chapter, careful consideration was given to the selection of participants for the project. A rationale for my “case-study” approach is provided on pages 114-115, in which I explain that it was possible to recruit only a very small sample of participants⁴³. As I have already indicated, it was important to incorporate

⁴² Larry (whose biographical portrait is included at Appendix D) is a friend of my husband. Whilst Larry has been part of my wider social circle for several years, he and I do not have a close friendship. See also my discussion of Larry in Chapter 7.

⁴³ In Chapter 7 (page 319), I reflect upon the limitations that this incurred for the project.

into this sample as much demographic diversity as possible in terms of age, gender, sexuality, class, educational background and political affiliation. Ethnicity was also of demographic concern although, as I note in Chapter 7⁴⁴, the only non-white participant that I recruited withdrew from the study for personal reasons shortly after our second interview session. Since my interview and transcription schedules were extremely demanding at the time, I decided for logistical reasons not to recruit a replacement. The implications of this decision upon the project are considered in Chapter 7⁴⁵. In this section, I will set out a 'person specification' (Wengraf 2001: 188) for each of my participants, and will offer a rationale for my choice of the individuals involved. In the discussion that follows, I provide a full list of participants included in the project⁴⁶: a sample that (in accordance with the criteria listed on page 129) includes an equal number of men and women, of various age, class, sexuality, educational background and political affiliation. I will begin here, however, by summarising the sampling techniques that I used to identify and recruit my participants. As stated on page 99, this project's methodological approach is motivated by the theoretical framework set out in Chapter 2, and is qualitative, rather than quantitative. My strategy for selecting participants was also designed to "fit" the theoretical aims and objectives of the thesis, and can best be described as a system of non-random 'purposive sampling' (Wengraf 2001: 102-103, Patton 1990: 169,

⁴⁴ See page 318.

⁴⁵ See page 318.

⁴⁶ In Chapters 1 and 7 I explain that, owing to the relatively limited time and space available for this project, it was not possible to include every participant in my main discussion chapters. Consideration is however given in Chapters 1 and 7 to some of the ways in which their film-viewing investments might usefully have been theorised.

Hessler 1992) which sought to locate 'information-rich' cases that would be suitable for intensive study (Patton 1990: 169).

The purpose of this project is to more comprehensively understand how and why participants respond to cinematic constructions of the female serial killer in a particular way. As I have explained on page 115, I do not seek to generalise (to all cases) from the findings of this study, and neither do I suggest that my findings are representative of a particular community or population. Rather, the aim of my research is to perform a small number of in-depth individual case-studies. My approach to the 'purposive sampling' (Patton 1990: 169, Hessler 1992) of participants therefore sought to ensure 'maximum variation' (Wimmer and Dominick 2005: 125, Bryman and Hardy 2009: 635, Singh 2007, Ritchie and Lewis 2003) within the group, aiming to obtain as much rich data - and to incorporate as many varied perspectives - as possible.

My choice of participants was also motivated, of course, by the demands of the in-depth interview method that I have used⁴⁷. Following Wengraf's suggestions, I sought out those individuals most able and/or likely to talk openly and therefore provide the kind of rich narrative data that I required (2001: 95, Creswell 2007: 133). It is however important to note that my project differs quite significantly from other studies in which the methods of sampling outlined here are more conventionally used: not least because I myself provided participants with the (project-driven) "topic" (the three key film texts) that I wished them to watch and discuss. It was therefore not necessary for me to recruit specific types of 'desired informant[...]' (Wengraf

⁴⁷ These issues are discussed more comprehensively on pages 109-111.

2001: 96), i.e. individuals with pre-existing knowledge or experience of the topics which inform my work. Rather, my 'deliberate and purposeful' (2001: 96) approach to the sampling process described in this chapter was motivated primarily by the need for 'maximum variation' (Patton 1990: 169, Hessler 1992) identified above. In the following section, I will explain precisely how participants were recruited for the project, and then provide detailed biographical "profiles" for each of them. Firstly, however, the issues of consent, confidentiality and anonymity that pertain to my research must be properly addressed.

The findings of my research will necessarily be made available to select others (examiners, etc.) upon completion of the study (Oliver 2003, Gregory 2003). The anonymity of my participants has therefore been assured through the use of pseudonyms, and by avoiding the disclosure of information about individual participants that might render them "identifiable" (Social Research Association 2003), although it was crucial to ensure that my data did not become distorted (British Sociological Association 2002) as a consequence of these processes. As I have already explained, informed consent was obtained from each participant (and all of the standard documentation⁴⁸ completed) in advance of the interview sessions, such that participants were provided with all of the information necessary for them to adequately understand the aims and objectives of my research and their involvement therein (Wiles et al 2007, British Psychological Association 1996, British Sociological Association 1996, Yow 1994). Whilst it was not possible to anticipate the precise nature of the (biographical) information that might be

⁴⁸ Cardiff University's guidelines are available at:
<http://www.cardiff.ac.uk/racdv/ethics/whatis/consent/index.html>

revealed by each participant (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 86-90), I was able to provide a safe and private interview environment for each individual participant: one in which empathy, honesty and respect were ensured (2000a: 88).

Initially, I recruited 15 participants in total, including Larry, with whom my pilot study was carried out. 10 of these were recruited via word of mouth: invitations were made to friends of friends and friends of colleagues, etc., i.e. individuals who were known to me (and vice versa), but with whom I shared no personal relationship. Larry, Alice, Colin, Denise, Darren, Denise, Jane, Jim, Mandy and Susie were recruited in this way. The remaining 5 participants: Elinor, Harry, Beccy, Gavin and Angela answered the call for participants that I distributed via the Cardiff University email database, although Elinor subsequently withdrew from the study⁴⁹. Whilst Beccy and Gavin had the year previously been students in my Undergraduate seminar groups, I had not met Harry or Angela prior to their involvement in the project. In this section, I have provided a detailed account of my approach to participant sampling, addressed the primary logistical and ethical issues involved in the process, and explained how my participants were actually recruited. "Profiles" of each individual participant are presented on the following pages (pages 134-148), and included in each of these is a rationale for his or her inclusion in the project⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ See my discussion of this on pages 129-130 of this chapter and in Chapter 7 (page 318).

⁵⁰ I arrived at this selection by first making a long list of possible participants - lining up "alternative" candidates in addition to my "first choices" (Wengraf 2001: 187) - and then narrowing this down to a shortlist, making my final decisions only after carefully reviewing all of the possibilities (2001: 187-188).

Participant “Profiles”

NAME	Jane
AGE	26
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Middle class background
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	BA and MA in Applied Linguistics
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Liberal
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Admissions Officer at F.E College International Office
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Met during MA study 2007-2008: casually acquainted
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant is a horror film fanatic, and contributes regularly to online horror movie internet-based “blogs” and chat-rooms • Participant has a keen recreational interest in horror genre conventions, especially the representation of women in horror film, and enjoys discussions on the subject

NAME	Colin
AGE	29
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Homosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Middle class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	BA in Film Studies
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Liberal
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Retail manager for UK supermarket chain
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Met during BA study 2004-2007: fairly well acquainted, but no close friendship
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant has an excellent (academic) understanding of and interest in film theory and in issues of gender, sexuality and identity as these relate to cinematic representation • Participant self-identifies as a fan of cult television and independent cinema, and enjoys critical discussions on these topics

NAME	Elinor ⁵¹
AGE	30
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	Black/Nigerian
CLASS BACKGROUND	Middle class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	BSc in Human Nutrition
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	MA in International Public Relations
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Full-time PhD Student
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Fellow PhD student at Cardiff University since late 2009. No extra-curricular relationship
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Had heard about my project from other PhD students, and was fascinated by my research topic. Volunteered to act as participant
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant has a long-standing dislike of horror films, and is apprehensive about watching the film texts for the project • Participant has an interest in (and good knowledge of) feminist literature

⁵¹ Note that Elinor subsequently withdrew from the study for personal reasons. See my discussions of this matter on pages 129-130 of this chapter, and page 318 of Chapter 7.

NAME	Denise
AGE	24
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	A' Levels
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Unsure
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Fitness Instructor
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Casual personal acquaintance
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participant has limited interest in film and cinema, but enjoys discussing favourite TV programmes, etc.

NAME	Darren
AGE	38
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	CSEs
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Conservative
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Contracts Supervisor for National Car Parking Company
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Casual acquaintance, and friend of my husband
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spent 2 months in prison in 1996 for violent assault • Enjoys films of all genres and likes to participate in discussions about favourite movies, etc.

NAME	Angela
AGE	19
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Middle class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	A' Levels
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Conservative
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Full-time Theology Undergraduate
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	No relationship with me prior to involvement in the project
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Recruited via call for participants through University email database
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to call for participants

<i>NAME</i>	Larry (Pilot Study Participant)
<i>AGE</i>	42
<i>GENDER/SEXUALITY</i>	Male/Heterosexual
<i>ETHNICITY</i>	White/British
<i>CLASS BACKGROUND</i>	Middle class
<i>EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS</i>	A' Levels
<i>POLITICAL AFFILIATION</i>	None
<i>CURRENT OCCUPATION</i>	Marketing Manager for telecommunications company
<i>RELATIONSHIP TO ME</i>	Casual acquaintance of mine, and friend of my husband, but no close relationship to me
<i>RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT</i>	Volunteered as Pilot Study Participant
<i>RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As Above

NAME	Harry
AGE	49
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class/Middle class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	O' Levels, Professional Management Diploma
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Left Leaning
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Full-time Media Studies undergraduate and Call Centre Worker
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	No relationship to me prior to involvement in the project
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Recruited via call for participants through University email database
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to call for participants

NAME	Beccy
AGE	20
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Middle class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	Scottish Highers, International Baccalaureate
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Socialist
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Full-time Language and Communication Undergraduate
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Student in my seminar group during 2009: no personal relationship
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Recruited via call for participants through university email database
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to call for participants

NAME	Gavin
AGE	19
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	A' Levels
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	None
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Full-time Media Studies Student
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Student in my seminar group during 2009
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Recruited via call for participants through university email database
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responded to call for participants

NAME	Alice
AGE	52
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	O' Levels
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	None
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Box Office Manager for local music venue
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Friend of a mutual acquaintance, and best friend of Mandy (page 148). No personal relationship prior to the project, but has since become a good friend
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Older female keen to participate in the project

NAME	Jim
AGE	51
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	O' Levels
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	None
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Operations Manager for travel visa outsourcing company
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Friend of my husband
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participant is well-known for being a long-time film “buff” and enjoys all genres • Contributes (non-academic) film reviews to a number of online blogs and websites

NAME	Daniel
AGE	65
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Male/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	B.Ed
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Left/Socialist
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Freelance Education Consultant in the Arts
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Father of my sister's friend. No personal relationship prior to involvement in the project
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Heard about my project from my family, and volunteered to participate
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above

NAME	Susie
AGE	29
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Lesbian
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	GCSEs
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Green Party
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Domestic cleaner
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	None: employed by my father
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Heard about the project from my father, and volunteered to participate
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As above

NAME	Mandy
AGE	42
GENDER/SEXUALITY	Female/Heterosexual
ETHNICITY	White/British
CLASS BACKGROUND	Working class
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	CSEs
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	None
CURRENT OCCUPATION	Helper at local primary school
RELATIONSHIP TO ME	Friend of a mutual acquaintance, and best friend of Alice (page 144). No personal relationship prior to the project, but has since become a good friend
RECRUITMENT FOR THE PROJECT	Invited to participate by me
RATIONALE FOR INCLUSION AS PARTICIPANT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As above

In this chapter, I have set out the methodological framework that will be used in this project to explore the way(s) in which the female serial killer is cinematically constructed and to better understand how and why viewers “invest” in these constructions. I have provided an outline of my methodological approach, and a detailed description of the research interview model (based upon the BNIM-FANI methods) that was used for the collection of data. My own subjective, reflexive role as a researcher has also been discussed here, and I have given details of my approach to participant sampling, as well as providing “profiles” of the individual participants themselves: I have offered a rationale for this approach. I have also given consideration to the key concerns that relate to the analysis and interpretation of my data.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6, which follow, constitute the main “body” of my thesis. These chapters are organised thematically, that is, according to the three key themes observed in my interview data. In each, I present extracts from this data, and discuss the analyses and interpretations that I have carried out.

4 - Psychosocially Gendered Viewers

This is the first of three discussion chapters that constitute the main body of my thesis: each will consider one of the key themes observed in my interview data, and extracts from this data will be used to illustrate the discussions as appropriate. All three chapters seek to build upon and challenge (where appropriate) existing Screen theory¹ and cultural studies' accounts of film/viewer engagement, aiming for a more nuanced understanding of this as a psychosocially and biographically informed process. I take a reflexive (e.g. Walkerdine et al 2001: 85) approach to my data analysis and interpretation, by acknowledging how this is motivated by my own feelings and emotional responses (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a), as well as my investments (conscious and unconscious) in the subject position of researcher (Nicholls 2009: 186).

Chapter 5 provides a critique of Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts of spectatorial "identification". Using the term 'investment' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 15) to (re)conceptualise this process, I explore the tendency amongst my participants to read the three films (and Wuornos) through their own selves, and characterise this phenomenon as one of *self-primacy*, arguing that strategies of text/viewer engagement are not primarily organised around a voyeuristic "look" (e.g. Mulvey 1975), nor motivated solely by desire or "lack" (e.g. Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983). I suggest that such strategies cannot be adequately defined in terms of hegemonic resistance or compliance (Huffer 2007, Krunen et al 2011, McRobbie 2009, Gorton 2009, Waters 2011). I also demonstrate that the

¹ See my discussions on pages 76-79 regarding the specific models of film theory that are being invoked critiqued in this respect.

film-viewing experiences described by my participants cannot be straightforwardly characterised as processes of mirroring or self-reflection (Sandvoss 2005, McKinley 1997) and, further, that their filmic investments do not necessarily involve a “closing down” of self/other boundaries (Sandvoss 2005). Rather, as I will show, participants struggle continually with such boundaries as they invest in the films. Chapter 5 also challenges cultural studies’ arguments about single or stable readings of film texts (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980), by emphasising the extent to which my participants’ readings are in fact often unstable, shifting, and conflicting.

In Chapter 6, I consider how participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their readings of the films and, in doing so, I critique both Screen theory notions of the ‘passive’ spectator (e.g. Pribram 2005, Heath 1978, Moores 1993) and cultural studies’ accounts of the “active” audience (e.g. Morley 1980/1992, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992). I substantiate this critique by showing that my participants do not merely oscillate between the active and/or passive viewing positions made available to them by the film texts: rather, that they work continually to manage the tensions *between* these positions. I emphasise that such tensions operate psychosocially (on both conscious and unconscious levels) and, importantly, that they are also biographically informed.

The aim of this chapter, meanwhile, is to explore the ways in which gender is meaningful for my participants in their readings of the films. I argue that there are often more complex psychodynamic reasons for this than those

advanced within existing Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts², and therefore seek to build upon and further develop some of these accounts. Gendered subjectivity is conceptualised here in psychosocial terms, that is, constructed and experienced within our outer (shared social) *and* our inner (individual psychical) worlds. Consideration will therefore be given to the significance of gender as a cultural ideology³, but also - drawing on psychoanalysis - to its importance in developmental, i.e. psychosexual terms. As I will show, my participants' gendered investments in particular film-viewing positions can be linked to and understood as being motivated by their own biographical experiences and are also often intertwined with other powerful unconscious conflicts and anxieties. Four of my participants - Angela, Denise, Jim and Colin⁴ - will be discussed here, and extracts from their interview data will be used to illustrate my arguments as appropriate.

In the following sections, I will begin by introducing the theoretical concepts and frameworks that will be mobilised in this chapter, and will subsequently explain how my research builds upon certain key cultural studies and Screen theory accounts already advanced within the field (e.g. Kuhn 1995, 2009, Stacey 1994). In particular, following Walkerdine (1986), Walkerdine et al (2001) Stacey (1994) and Kuhn (1995, 2009) respectively, I seek to move away from universalist models of gendered spectatorship, and towards a better understanding of the diverse, situated and "lived" (e.g.

² Fuller discussions of these accounts and the specific bodies of work within which they are situated is provided in Chapter 2, where I also clarify my own theoretical perspectives on - and my contributions to - such work.

³ *Cultural Ideologies of Self* are discussed more fully in the following section.

⁴ Issues of gender are of course significant to all fourteen of my interview participants in their readings of the films and, as such, are not unique to the four individuals introduced here. See pages 163-164 for a reflexive consideration of my choice of participants for inclusion in this particular chapter.

Skeggs 1997) elements of the film-viewing experience. These latter elements can, I suggest, usefully be understood in terms of cultural ideology: a concept addressed more fully in the following section.

Cultural Ideologies of Self

This project presupposes that both mind and self 'emerge out of social and cultural contexts' (Kirschner 2010: 765) and, further, that culture plays a crucial role in 'anything we do' (Hewitt and Schulman 2011: 4). My participants' readings of and investments in the three films used for this project are thus acknowledged to be powerfully influenced by the 'underlying cultural frames' (Markus and Kitayama 2001: 122) of their construction. Indeed, as Elliott (2001: 2-6) argues, selfhood is not merely fashioned from the inside out, because:

In everyday life we routinely engage in the process of self-shaping and self-cultivation, acting on the world and on others through our very need to give form and content to our identities, our senses of self... we draw upon psychic frames of memory and desire, as well as wider cultural and social resources, in fashioning the self.

As psychosocial film-viewing subjects, then, I understand my participants' responses to be 'made at the intersection of many different influences on thought and action' (Smith 2007: 2), and always within a range of socio-cultural 'interpretive frames' (Austin 1999: 151) which shape the reception of any given text. The Gramscian (Gramsci 1971) concept of hegemony can provide a useful way forward here, given its emphasis on the complex operations of cultural force (Williams 1977: 108, Fontana 2008), which come

to 'saturate[] all aspects of life' (Brookfield 2005: 97). As Hills (2005a: 35) observes, Gramscian-based hegemony theories have been effectively appropriated within much cultural studies work (e.g. Harris 1992; Tudor, 1999), becoming especially popular in 1990s audience research (e.g. Lewis 1991, Morley 1992, O'Shaughnessy 1990), where they offered a 'more sophisticated' conceptualisation of cultural power and ideology (Hills 2005a: 35) than those advanced within linear models of ideological domination (e.g. Grossberg 1996). This approach is helpful because, as I will demonstrate, my participants' responses cannot adequately be theorised as *either* resistant *or* compliant, i.e. in terms of incorporation or resistance to dominant ideology. Abercrombie and Longhurst's (1998: 15) audience study paradigms are relevant in this respect. The 'Incorporation/Resistance Paradigm' (IRP) seeks to define 'whether audience members are incorporated into the dominant ideology by their participation in media activity or whether, on the contrary, they are resistant to that incorporation' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 15), whilst the 'Spectacle/Performance Paradigm' (SPP) explores how 'the qualities and experiences of being a member of the audience have begun to leak out from specific performance events which previously contained them, into the wider realms of everyday life' (1998: 15). These models have however been criticised for over-emphasising the importance of "resistance" in the viewing experience (e.g. Stabile 2000). As I have explained in Chapters 1 and 2, feminist readings of this concept (e.g. McNay 1999, Mills 1997, de Lauretis 2007, Lloyd, Few and Allen 2009, Kowaleski Wallace 2009) are useful in establishing a more nuanced conceptualisation of such processes. With this in mind, I will consider how and why hegemonic

“ideals” become effective in the ‘individual psyche[s]’ (Wetherell and Edley 1999: 337) of my participants, and are thus mobilised ‘interactionally and practically’ (1999: 337) in their narrations about the three films. This will, I suggest, make it possible to explore ‘... both the powerful effects of social discourses and the agentic struggles of particular subjects as they locate themselves in relation to these discourses’ (Frosh, Phoenix et al 2003: 42), enabling a fuller recognition of the ways in which their unconscious is both ‘generated by this struggle and generative of its consequences’ (2003: 42). The following section will show how the notion of cultural ideology introduced here can also be applied to a consideration of gendered subjectivity.

Gendering the Subject

According to Frosh, gender is ‘both a position in discourse, a category of culture to be contested, and an intersubjective and intrapsychic element of each individual’s sense of self’ (1994: 1). The discussion that follows will therefore draw upon postmodern and (relational) psychoanalytic accounts of gendered identity in order to explore how such identities exist as ‘multiple and contradictory positions in discourse’ (Layton 2004: 9), and also involve ‘subjection to the power relations that criss-cross the[m]’ (2004: 8/9). This postmodern conceptualisation is valuable for its emphasis upon questions of fragmentation and fluidity, and for its socio-political openness (Fairfield, Layton and Stack 2002), which facilitates an appreciation of how hegemonic gender categories sometimes ‘constrict the multitude of ways that [individuals] can be’ (Layton 2004: 4). By also incorporating a psychoanalytic framework here, however, recognition is made of the ways in which gender

identities both evolve and are relatively coherent and stable' (2004: 25), being 'forged in a relational matrix, an ongoing dialogue [and] performance with the culture regarding the meanings of masculinity and femininity' (2004: viii). Following Layton, then, I suggest that postmodern and psychoanalytical accounts are often perhaps 'falsely polarised' (2004: 25). As such, I seek here to explore how my participants (as subjects) are formed in discourse, as well as studying the ways in which they experience their own selves (2004: 218), yet without 'conflating discursive subject positions with the psyche of the experiencing self' (2004: 217/218)⁵. Consideration will also be given to participants' unconscious investments in certain gendered subject positions, and to how they are sometimes motivated to select from the competing gender norms that such positions offer in order to 'disavow feelings they do not want to feel' (2004: 226, Hollway 1984). Further, I will acknowledge the extent to which participants are perhaps ideologically motivated to find a more socio-culturally "acceptable" discursive vehicle for their most deeply felt anxieties (Hollway and Jefferson 2000b, Frosh, Phoenix et al 2003) as a part of this process.

I therefore argue that for my participants - as film viewing subjects - meaning is not merely constructed and reconstructed in terms of *personal* gender, because it is always necessarily 'entangled with the specifics of individual emotion and fantasy, with aspects of self... and in particular cultural contexts' (Chodorow 1995: 538). I will also show how the significance of gender extends beyond the question of polarity - the masculine/feminine binary - which is the focus of much feminist literature

⁵ In Chapters 2 and 7, I provide a critique of constructionist (especially Foucauldian) frameworks, and clarify my epistemological position in relation to these.

(e.g. Flax 1990, Benjamin 1998, Buhle 1998, Goldner 1991, Mitchell 2004). In terms of psychosexual gender development, meanwhile, both classical (Freudian) and object relations (especially Kleinian) accounts are important here. Interestingly, from a Kleinian⁶ perspective, following Gylter (2010), the depressive position and the Oedipus complex are 'inextricably interconnected' (2010: 122), such that 'the working through of one relies on the working through of the other' (2010: 122). This latter idea is useful for the purposes of this discussion, because it emphasises the 'development of symbolic thinking' (2010: 120) as a fundamental part of gendered identity, and enables a conceptualisation of both the depressive position and the Oedipus situation as 'never finished but [rather] having to be reworked in each new life situation, at each stage of development and with each major addition to experience or knowledge' (Britton 1992: 38). This, as I will demonstrate, is more helpful for theorising the ways in which gender becomes significant for my participants as a part of their film-viewing experiences than are Freudian accounts of the castration complex, with their specific focus upon the structure of sexual difference (Benjamin 1998: 46).

Recent audience research has begun to incorporate relational psychoanalytic frameworks into its studies of the film/viewer relationship (e.g. Clarke 1994, Crème 1994, Kavaler-Adler 2009, Kuhn 2008, 2010, forthcoming, Bainbridge and Yates 2005, 2010, Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Redman and Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Zittoun and Grossen forthcoming), although these studies tend to draw most extensively upon Winnicottian frameworks (see also Silverstone 1994). Such work does, of course, make

⁶ See also Britton (1992).

valuable and important contributions to the field by 'explor[ing] creative engagement with the media as an object of fantasy that constitutes a transitional bridge between inner and outer worlds' (Yates 2010: 4). Conceptualising the film viewing experience as one in which "real" viewers relate to, consume and use cultural resources and texts, then, these studies recognise the relationship between media consumption and lived cultural identity as a psychosocial one, and seek to better understand the creative psychical investments involved therein (Kuhn 2008).

For the purposes of this project, however, following Hollway and Jefferson (2000a, 2008) and observing that the application of Kleinian ideas within the field of media/cultural studies remains limited (Yates 2010: 3), I presuppose (as I have explained in Chapter 2) a "defended" psychosocial subject⁷ (Hollway and Jefferson 2008). I therefore presume that the unconscious defences with which my participants manage their powerful (inherent) anxieties bear significantly upon their actions and relationships, influencing the ways in which they make meaning in their everyday lives (Hollway and Jefferson 2008), and I use this framework to theorise participants' investments in certain film-viewing positions in light of their own individual biographies. I suggest that this approach facilitates a better understanding of the sheer diversity of readings made by different participants in relation to the same three film texts, especially in terms of how these readings are motivated by specific (biographically significant) unconscious anxieties, conflicts and phantasies. Within the context of this chapter, then, I argue that my particular analytical framework - oriented as it is towards Kleinian, rather

⁷ A full definition of this concept is provided on pages 58-59 (Chapter 2).

than Winnicottian ideas - enables a more nuanced consideration of the ways in which the gendered subjectivity of my participants (as film-viewers) forms 'part of [their] psychic functioning in general' (Chodorow 1999: 242). Thus, whilst the Kleinian (1926, 1928) concepts of projection and introjection (upon which this discussion will draw) were not developed specifically in relation to the psychology of gender, I suggest that they can nevertheless 'be applied to help specify the psychic processes that create gendered subjectivity' (Chodorow 1999: 246).

My aim here is to consider the 'anxieties and defensive patterns and processes' (1999: 246) that contribute to participants' gendered identities, recognising their investments in the three films as some of 'the creative and constructive elements that may animate, enliven, and enrich' (1999: 246) these. I will also acknowledge that culturally/ideological sanctioned gender "norms" do bear significantly upon the kinds of gender performances that are possible for my participants and upon how these are performed (Layton 2004: 50, Butler 1990). Having delineated the theoretical concepts and frameworks to be used in this chapter, the following section will clarify how these will be used to build upon - and to challenge, where appropriate - existing Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts of gendered spectatorship.

Gendered Spectatorship

Although - as I have explained on pages 81-83 - feminist film criticism sought to challenge the seemingly "gender neutral" accounts of spectatorship offered by earlier apparatusal and metapsychological theory, many such

studies nevertheless understand “gendered” spectatorship to be organised around and motivated by sexuality, desire, erotic instinct, and castration anxiety⁸ (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Clover 1999, Creed 1993) although, as Kuhn observes, the ‘phallogentrism’ (2009:4) and ‘narrow ocularcentrism’ (2009: 7) characteristic of this theoretical ‘cinepsychoanalysis’ (2009: 6) is now rather out of favour. Moreover, psychoanalytically-oriented audience research - within both Screen theory and cultural studies - typically draws upon Freudian or Lacanian frameworks which tend to restrict how gender can be discussed (Layton 2004: 120) as part of the viewing experience, since these frameworks focus primarily upon the oedipal constellation and, therefore, on the pain of fragmentation (Mulvey 1975), or questions of “lack” (Silverman 1988, Modleski 1988, de Lauretis 1984). The emphasis of such work on ‘the mutual exclusivity of each gender’s position’ (Benjamin 1998: xvii) also limits the extent to which my participants’ investments in the films can be properly explored, and I therefore argue that relational psychoanalytic accounts are more useful for the purposes of this discussion; specifically their conceptualisations of phantasy, introjection and internal objects (Klein 1926, 1928). Whilst I will draw upon the classical concepts of superego (Freud 1923, 1924a) and masochism (Freud 1905, 1930), then, these are supplemented here with their relational derivations (Klein 1937).

This chapter endeavours to build upon key audience studies accounts of gendered spectatorship (especially Kuhn 1984, 2002, Stacey 1994) by also contemplating the ways in which the spectatorial encounter is powerfully

⁸ In Chapter 5, I note that gender tends to be inextricably linked to narcissism within such accounts. I observe, however that this is not necessarily the case according to the responses provided by my participants.

influenced by my participants' biographies, thus moving away from the binary opposition between 'text and lived experience' (McRobbie 1994: 59), especially as this is re-inscribed within those Screen theory models of cinema spectatorship (e.g. Mulvey 1975) that impose a 'universalism of meaning, reading and interpretation' (Walkerdine 1986:182). Of considerable value in this respect are cultural studies' accounts of gendered spectatorial processes (e.g. Stacey 1994, Gledhill 2006, Kuhn 1984, 2002, 2009, McRobbie 2009, Huffer 2007, Gorton 2009, Thornham 2007, Ross 2011), which acknowledge that gendered viewing practices are neither pre-determined nor fixed (Stacey 1988), and recognise the 'gaps and contradictions within patriarchal signification... [thus] opening up crucial questions of resistance and diversity' (1988: 120). Following Stacey, I therefore conceptualise the film-viewing experience as a cultural process whose powerful unconscious dynamics must also be 'analysed in terms of the conscious everyday meanings' (Stacey 1994: 78) that they have for individual participants. From a cultural studies' perspective, of course, gender is understood to be powerfully intertwined with other socio-culturally situated and constructed categories, such as race and class (Dines and McMahon Humez 2003, Walkerdine et al 2001, Savage, Barlow, Dickens and Fielding 1992, Devine and Savage 2000, Skeggs 1996). In exploring the importance of participants' "lived" experience (e.g. Walkerdine et al 2001: 13, Kuhn 1995, Skeggs 1997), then, I will give thought to the 'situated and specifically local character' (Walkerdine et al 2001: 15) of their investments in the three films, recognising these as meaningfully related to the other biographical events and experiences that form part of every participants'

gestalt, that is, the ‘constructed shape’ (Jones 2002: 1) of their stories ‘through theme, motif and/or various agendas, hidden or otherwise’ (2002: 1, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 34). Following Skeggs (1997: 2), I seek to explore how, as film-viewers, participants come to occupy gender categories (man/woman) which are always necessarily ‘produced through power relations’ (1997: 27), creating ‘very real effects which are lived on a daily basis’ (1997: 2).

Where gendered audience experiences are often theorised by cultural studies in (feminist) terms of resistance to dominant (patriarchal) representational and ideological “norms” (e.g. Durham 1993, Radway 1984, Ang 1985, Hobson 1982), however, I will show that although such processes are salient within the film-viewing experience, the responses of my participants are not necessarily (and certainly not exclusively) motivated and organised in this way. My interview data also suggests that the viewing practices (Morley 1992: 66) in which participants engage cannot be characterised as simply “male” or “female” (Morley 1980), because they involve complex unconscious processes, which also relate to other aspects of their identities. Interestingly, however, where gender issues do seem to have specific, conscious biographical significance for individual participants, these issues do not necessarily form a key axis of their investments in the films, even where this might be expected to be so. It must be noted here that, given the films’ subject matter, questions of gender might be presumed to feature significantly in participants’ responses. This is so since Aileen Wuornos’ story is considered to have been uniquely controversial specifically because she was a *woman*, whose murderous behaviour not only constituted

a transgression of heteronormative gender identities (Morrissey 2003, Keitner 2002, Hart 1994, Austin 2008), but also threatened the very structures of hetero-patriarchal society (Morrissey 2003, Faith 1993). Nevertheless, as I will show, such concerns are not always especially significant for my participants.

It is also important to reflect in this discussion upon the ‘fantasy space’ (Walkerdine 1986: 194) that I myself occupy as researcher⁹; and thus to examine my own psychosocial (and biographical) motivations for choosing the four particular participants that I include in this chapter. This necessitates thinking reflexively about the conscious and unconscious dynamics of my choice and, by extension, about how such psychodynamics bear meaningfully upon the process of data analysis undertaken here. Having observed that virtually all participants’ readings of the films might ostensibly be theorised in terms of gender¹⁰, a deliberate (conscious) selection was made based on the richness of the data available¹¹ for such a discussion. Had I instead selected other participants in the project (for example, Darren and Susie in Chapter 5 or Alice and Harry in Chapter 6), the discussion of gendered spectatorship provided here might perhaps have been organised rather differently: in terms, for instance, of hegemonic (or counter-hegemonic) readings, which could be theorised in relation to cultural

⁹ Similarly reflexive considerations are also made in relation to the data analysis/interpretation provided in Chapters 5 and 6. See also Chapter 7 (page 323) where I reflect critically upon this element of my approach.

¹⁰ Although, as I shall emphasise in Chapter 6, whilst participants’ engagements with the films can be understood as “gendered” to a certain extent, they are not always primarily motivated by questions of gender.

¹¹ By “richness” in this context, I mean that my selection was based on the gender-themed observations made during data analysis that became clearly apparent within participants’ responses to the films.

ideologies¹² of gender; that is, discussed primarily in terms of their construction within heteronormative socio-cultural structures. Interestingly, however, the gendered filmic “investments” made by three of the four participants discussed in this chapter seem to be motivated most powerfully in relation to the paternal, and appear to be quite specifically linked to their relationships with their fathers¹³, as well as to the conflicts that these relationships have produced. As I will argue, this attests to the value and importance of recognising participants’ cinematic investments as both textually and structurally motivated, but also always biographically informed by their own lived experience. Consideration must therefore be made of the extent to which the analytic/thematic focus of this chapter necessarily reflects - and is motivated by - my counter-transference (Walkerdine et al 2001: 90, Jervis 2009), that is, my *own* personal unconscious conflicts and anxieties. These relate, perhaps, to my feelings towards my own father, especially given the disruption of our relationship caused by the separation of my parents during my childhood¹⁴, which produced difficulties and tensions that persisted for many years. It is likely to be meaningful in this respect, then, that the data interpretations I make here tend to emphasise, and are organised around, similar issues observable in my participants’ biographical accounts. In the following sections, I introduce my four selected participants (using a summarised ‘pen-portrait’¹⁵ for each), beginning here with Angela.

¹² A detailed discussion of this concept - *cultural ideologies of self* - is provided on pages 153-155.

¹³ This theme also re-emerges in Chapter 5 in my discussion of Daniel. Here, I argue that the death of Daniel’s father (during his childhood) motivates the passive or “avoidant” film-viewing position that he takes up.

¹⁴ I was 9 years old at the time of this separation.

¹⁵ Full biographical (“pen”) portraits for each participant are available at Appendix D.

Angela is 19 years old, and a full-time Theology undergraduate. She currently lives in Cardiff, and was born in Herefordshire, where her parents own a farm. Angela is very close to her Mum, Dad and younger sister; she has had two fairly long-term boyfriends, and is currently single.

One of Angela's key concerns in her initial readings of the films is how Wuornos (and Selby) were treated by others (3: 16, 22, 39, 124):

I think she probably wasn't treated obviously she wasn't a hundred percent sound mentally but she probl- she was probably wasn't treated as badly as she makes out but she clearly didn't have it very very good when she was in prison (3: 16-23)

it's a shame that she was treated in that way I think (3: 36-39)

[Broomfield] treated her (.) in a way that seemed quite fair and he was very respectful of her wishes (3: 124-125).

She also repeatedly emphasises the ways in which she feels both women were 'taken advantage of' (3: 8, 68, 161) in the filmic portrayals of the story. Theorised in terms of cultural ideology, it can be argued that, by constructing Wuornos and Selby around the 'doer-done to binary [which captures] the all too frequent oppositional relationship between the feminine and the masculine and men and women in Western society' (Gyler 2010: 90), Angela assigns to them gender behaviours which are conventionally coded as feminine; demonstrating how 'socially normative gendered positions are woven unconsciously and consciously into our conceptual frameworks' (2010: 2). The seemingly empathic viewing position that Angela takes up here can also perhaps be interpreted (in cultural studies' terms) as a typically "feminine" (e.g. Hines 2010, Stake and Eisele 2010) way of relating to

Wuornos as a (female) character. Her responses certainly do suggest that there is in contemporary culture a 'conventional position that women can psychologically occupy' (Gyler 2010: 90, Orbach 1997) and, further, that 'women's reference point for their psychological positioning is in relation to others' needs' (Gyler 2010: 90). Accordingly, perhaps, Angela emphasises how she consciously strives to see Wuornos 'in a positive light' (3: 212; 4: 3178, 3208), and to identify 'the best in her' (4: 3223), even though this is something she finds very difficult (3: 215). Interestingly, then, whilst Angela does not tend towards pathologisation or monsterisation (Allen 1987, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006, Austin 2008) of Wuornos for her murderous behaviour in her readings of the films, she *does* recognise that Wuornos' actions are culturally and ideologically problematic in terms of gender representation:

[the media] ma- he kept repeating the um the first (.) America's first female serial killer (.) and I think that sort of (1.0) it shows how much the media became involved in it I mean if it if it had been a man who'd killed seven prostitutes then it wouldn't have been as as big a deal as it-y'know because it was a woman then (3: 133-141).

Angela's preoccupation with Wuornos' efforts to 'look after' herself and Selby (4: 2794, 2824-2825, 3192, 3661, 3673) might be interpreted similarly: as indicative of her "feminine" reading of the films (e.g. Radway 1984, Gledhill 2006) and, by extension, of her investment in a conventionally "feminine" subject position: one in which she offers protection and support to others, ostensibly fulfilling the 'two key features of women's psychology... that women should not be emotionally dependent but should instead provide a

dependent relationship that others may rely on' (Orbach 1997: 49). Interestingly, from a psychoanalytic perspective, it becomes apparent that this latter point is indeed a biographically significant one for Angela.

Chodorow argues that 'part of the meaning of gender involves feelings and [ph]antasies about the parent of either gender and their relationship to him or her' (1995: 532) and this is certainly the case here, since Angela's most powerful unconscious anxieties do seem to involve her introjected images of her parents, and the relational identifications she has formed with them (Perlow 1995: 35)¹⁶. This interpretation is further corroborated by the emergence of a powerfully ambivalent unconscious conflict throughout Angela's narrations that relates to the masculine and feminine aspects of her own self: a conflict manifest even at a discursive level in her tendency to stammer over the relevant lexical terms:

... being feminis- um being femin- I... can't even say the word being feminine (2: 1002-1005)

... I don- I don't mind (.) being (.) so un-feminine feminine feminine ((smiling)) (2: 1035-1036).

Her most deeply felt (gender-related) conflicts and anxieties are further illustrated in the following examples:

I think (.) the masculine influence on my life has been significantly more than the feminine... I think I am a bit more masculine (.) in my way of thinking and my perspective on things y'know (2: 1327-1346)

¹⁶ I engage more closely with the related concepts of 'superego' (Freud 1923, 1924a) and 'internal objects' (Klein 1937) in my discussion of Colin: see pages 196-197.

I do I do (.) like to think that um (.) I can I am I am feminine (.) but just not excessively so (2: 831-834).

The extract below is particularly enlightening in this respect:

I'm not a (.) a particular- I think I'm quite masculine in the way that I think as well I'm quite a practical person (.) I um I've got like the- the empathetic¹⁷ side I think the feminine traits but I'm very (.) I'm very masculine in my way of (.) of dealing with things I- (.) and my (.) um (.) my way of solving problems is very (.) um (.) manly I suppose just the w- ((laughs)) just the way- and my relationships as well I think um (2.0) I think I (1.0) I- I- (.) initially I think I do take a bit of a (1.0) I don't like to give away too much too soon like I don't- I don't reveal (.) a lot I think I've taken that from my Dad (.) if I don't- if there's a- (.) if there's a chance that I might end up going out with somebody or like being in a relationship with somebody I try not to (smiling) to reveal the inner weirdness that I (.) that I harbour (2: 744-768).

Interpreted psychoanalytically, there are several important (unconscious) associations or 'juxtapositions' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) made here. Angela's "masculine" self appears to enable 'potency, adequacy and agency' (Gyler 2010: 77) and, crucially, self-control. As such, it functions as a defence against her "feminine" self, which represents (and continually threatens to expose) her 'inner weirdness'. For Angela, there seems to be a tension between a paranoid schizoid form of gender identity¹⁸ - characterised by a radical splitting of male and female: one felt to be good, the other bad (Chodorow 1999: 246) - and a more "depressive" one, which is not

¹⁷ See n14 (page 111).

¹⁸ It should be noted that my objective here is not to "pathologise" Angela. Rather, I recognise the paranoid-schizoid position described by Klein as one that is 'never surmounted in our psychological health, and which we return to in times of stress and anxiety' (Hills 2002: 66).

dominated by persecutory anxiety, but involves 'a rueful sense that something must be given up, something acknowledged' (1999: 246). These anxieties seem to be unconsciously linked to Angela's early relationship with her parents, especially her father, as becomes apparent in the following example:

[I'm] very much a um (.) a farmer's daughter... I think (.) I am (.)... I'm the son that my Dad's wanted he alw- he always wanted a son he- he's never explicitly said that but I think he wanted somebody to carry on the [family] line then so he he sort of put that onto me (2: 623-630).

Angela's conflicts might alternatively be theorised in terms of hegemonic resistance (e.g. Waters 2011, Buikema and Van Der Tuin 2009, Gorton 2009, McRobbie 2009, Krunen et al 2011), by suggesting that Angela is struggling here to find an acceptable subject position for herself within the structural limitations of patriarchal gender discourse (Wood 1994), especially since the security of her relationship with her father does seem to revolve around a tension between gender polarities:

I would rather the respect of my Dad and y'know like that relationship that I've got with him than (.) than having nice long blonde hair and y'know like ((smiling)) that's I think that's probably (.) the the most stereotypical ((laughing)) view (2: 1008-1014).

As I have suggested, however, her investments in the films cannot be explained solely in these terms. Rather, they seem to be powerfully motivated by (biographically significant) unconscious anxieties described on

pages 166-168, which become manifest in her tendency to narrate quite extensively about the (semi-fictional) character of Selby in *Monster*, who represents - as other participants have observed - a far more “feminised” version of Wuornos’ (“real”) girlfriend Tyra. Whilst many participants recognise and, indeed, often emphasise, Wuornos’ masculine appearance¹⁹, also making contrasts and comparisons between Selby’s femininity in *Monster* and Tyra’s butchness in the documentaries, Angela does not give priority to this. Rather, as a spectatorial subject, she seems to disavow the masculine elements of herself and, consequently, (the masculine) Tyra quite literally goes “unseen” (unrecognised) in her readings of the films. By splitting off these elements, Angela is able to take up a more conventionally “feminine” viewing position, such that she invests in the films and their characters in a more empathic way, as observed at the beginning of this section.

It can thus be argued here that, for Angela, the films provide a safe aesthetic space in which she feels able to perform the (hegemonic) feminine identity that creates such conflict for her, and she can therefore be said to use them as ‘symbolic resources’²⁰ (Zittoun 2006: xiii): ‘a powerful means to feel and live experiences beyond the limits of the here and now’ (2006: 64). Indeed, despite her apparent rejection of a normative feminine role, Angela seems unable to wholly renounce this subject position, hence perhaps the phantasy of “ideal” femininity that emerges in her biographical narrations,

¹⁹ See, for example, the points raised in Chapter 5 by Alice, Daniel and Harry in this respect.

²⁰ A fuller discussion of ‘symbolic resources’ (Zittoun 2006: xiii) is provided in Chapter 6 in relation to Daniel, for whom the film-viewing experience offers a similar process of “making safe”.

and is symbolised in the figure of the 'domestic goddess' (1: 856, 2: 707, 904, 1327). For example:

I- I've absolutely no qualms with being a domestic goddess at all I'd really like to be Delia Smith or Nigella Lawson I'd really like to do it um (.) but I think it's probably getting to the age now where that's not really acceptable anymore is it ((smiling)) but I'd really like to do it it's one of my (.) maybe if I do it when I retire then y'know I've got an excuse haven't I (1: 856-864).

Further, she recognises that her phantasy is (potentially) culturally and/or ideologically problematic:

I think... this whole domestic goddess thing I've got going on um (.) it's very (.) anti (1.0) **anti-feminine**- s- uh fa- feminism (2: 903-905).

Angela's discursive "slip" (Billig 1999, Gossy 1995) (highlighted here in bold type) can also be read as a further manifestation of her unconscious anxieties about her counter-hegemonic femininity, and it does certainly seem that issues of appropriate feminine performativity (Butler 1990) are personally significant to her, e.g.:

if I try and be too feminine I just look like I'm a bit of a drag queen really ((laughs))y'know or I feel like I feel like I look a bit of a drag queen (2: 866-869).

Yet these anxieties do not seem to inform her *conscious* investment in the films, challenging cultural studies' arguments to the contrary (e.g. Scannell, Schlesinger and Sparks 1992, Gauntlett 2002). This finding again demonstrates the importance of theorising my participants' gendered

readings of the films not merely in terms of their relation to hegemonic power structures, but as always necessarily motivated by their own (biographical) lived experiences (Walkerdine et al 2001, Kuhn 1995, Skeggs 1997). Moreover, although gender polarity is important for Angela in the construction of her identity, and in her readings of the films, this is not organised around a clear bifurcation of (active) male and (passive) female subjectivities²¹. Rather, oscillating between “schizoid” and “depressive” gendered identities²², Angela engages in a process of splitting/assimilation, in which “good” aspects of her masculine and feminine selves remain in continual conflict with those that she feels to be “bad”.

I have shown here that Angela’s gendered investments in the films are produced in relation to culturally and ideologically sanctioned gender “norms”, but are also motivated by her own unconscious conflicts which, whilst not explicitly about gender per se, are nevertheless powerfully linked to other biographical gendered experiences²³. Interestingly, it is Angela’s relationships with her parents that seem especially meaningful in this respect. Her responses illustrate how individuals ‘recreate and change recognisable cultural meanings in ways that emotionally, often conflictually, through unconscious and conscious fantasy, construct their own sense of personal gender’ (Chodorow 1995: 525) and, whilst she uses her film-viewing experience to better manage her anxieties and conflicts, she is

²¹ A more detailed discussion of active/passive “tensions” is provided in Chapter 6.

²² See also *n*120 and *n*169.

²³ It should be noted that this process of “shifting” or “mapping” certain unconscious conflicts and anxieties onto different axes is not exclusively related to issues of gender for my participants. See, for example, my discussion of Susie in Chapter 5 (see pages 237-238) and Harry in Chapter 6 (see page 286).

nevertheless unable to overcome them altogether. Similar processes can be observed for Denise, who is discussed in the following section.

Denise is 24 years old, educated to A' Level and works as a personal trainer at a local gym: she was born near Cardiff and continues to live in the same area. Denise lives with her fiancé and, at the time of our interviews, was planning her wedding. Despite some intense family difficulties²⁴, she now has good relationships with her Mum, Dad and half-sister (they share the same father).

Of particular note in Denise's initial readings of the films is her concern with the question of whether, and/or to what extent, Wuornos' victims 'deserved to die' (4: 1464, 1470, 1524, 1716). She seems to be even further preoccupied with whether or not Wuornos herself 'deserved' her death penalty, and returns to this point repeatedly when narrating about the films (3: 51, 55, 85; 4: 1738, 1739, 1745, 1761, 1899, 2088, 2104). Given this apparent concern with matters relating to the "punishment" of Wuornos' gender transgressions (Faith 1993, Hart 1994, Basilio 1996), it could be argued that Denise is merely taking up a culturally and/or ideologically sanctioned viewing position here despite, like Angela, not explicitly reading Wuornos as monstrous (Creed 1993, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006, Austin 2008) to any degree. She is indeed concerned with the question of whether Wuornos *needed* to act in self-defence, that is to say, whether or not she was maltreated sufficiently to make such behaviour justifiable:

when she done the killings that were (.) the people that (.) y'know(.) wasn't

²⁴ Aged 11, Denise discovered her Mum's extra-marital affair and, after being coaxed into reporting this to her Dad, her parents separated acrimoniously. Denise was subsequently raised by her Dad, and relations with her Mum remained difficult until fairly recently.

provoking her to no self-defence was needed then that's ((inhales deeply))
(.) um (sighs) quite disturbing really (3: 66-84)

yeah I think when she killed the first guy the one that was violent with
her (.) perhaps she- she perhaps she built up sort of a hatred to men from
being abused... um but then I think perhaps she just assumed that all the
other guys that she met would be the same so perhaps she just got um (.)
enjoyed the feeling she got when she killed them and she thought this
is my (.) me paying men back from the way I've been treated throughout
my life so in some ways you could see why she may have thought oh (.)
um (.) you know shoot them but then the good guys didn't deserve it so-
that's why I probably felt a bit of sympathy for her in the beginning but then
when she got a bit carried away killing the good guys then it's like oh she
needs to ((smiling)) (.) go down ((laughs)) yeah (4: 1501-1532).

In terms of cultural ideology, Denise seems to construct Wuornos in line with dominant (patriarchal) discourses of female subjectivity (Smart 1989) and female criminality (Surette 1998, Hermes 2005, Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008), which tend to reinscribe gender stereotypes (Taslitz 1999, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006) by routinely constructing women as vulnerable (Frei et al 2006), and passive (Shaw 1995), whilst conceptualising female killers as revengeful (Morrissey 2003). Her suggestion above that Wuornos 'got a bit carried away' is also significant in this respect. I argue however, that Denise does not deny agency to Wuornos for the killings via the conventional representational strategies of victimisation (Hermes 2005, Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008) and monsterisation (Creed 1993) or, importantly, because of her gender: rather, she works to find an acceptable way of framing Wuornos' (female) aggressive impulses. Read psychoanalytically, this appears to be linked to Denise's own unconscious avoidance of aggressive affect, and it is

therefore perhaps significant that she describes Wuornos as having inherently 'crazy' tendencies and engaging in 'crazy' behaviour (3: 11, 142; 4: 1540, 1563, 1759), interpreting the killings as spontaneous, even instinctual; rather than as a befitting response to the violent rape depicted in *Monster*.

I wasn't really sure whether she was all there mentally so (.) and obviously with her rages you could see that (.) that might be relevant to the killings that she committed y'know where she- having sort of a- a rage while it all happened which caused her to (.) shoot her victims (3: 12-21).

It is indeed important that, for Denise, Wuornos' murderous actions are linked to a collapse of self-control: a result of her losing her temper, or releasing a pent-up aggression, and a means of 'calming herself down'. This is particularly well illustrated in the following example:

R:... you were saying that you thought Aileen's rages (.) that she had might be relevant to the killings um where she was having a rage which kind of caused her to shoot the victims and I just wonder if you could tell me a bit more about w- about what you were thinking about that

D: yeah um I think when anyone's worked up they do (.) silly things like a few times I've been worked up and I've thrown things or punched doors um (.) sometimes you just- you get a temper and you build it up so much you need to sort of release it by hitting something and perhaps her way of releasing her temper was y'know shooting someone and think yes great (.) um so that's probably how she well once she had a rage she controlled them- the-her rage by using the gun um or whatever sh- (.) getting aggressive

R: mm

D: um (.) yeah I think that's the way she probably coped with it

calmed herself down just thought right (.) ((smiling)) bang ((laughs)) yeah
(.) um (0.5) yeah I think that was it when she s- got worked up she
just sort of I'm gonna kill you y'know ((laughs)) (4: 1582-1615).

It can be argued here that Denise projects onto Wuornos the struggle for containment of aggressive feelings in which she herself is engaged, but has unconsciously repressed. Correspondingly, perhaps, in the extract below, she suggests that the murders were (at least partly) motivated instead by Wuornos' envious feelings towards Selby:

sometimes I think with Selby (.) um she w- at one point she w- Selby
went out with some other friends didn't she (.) and she wanted to (.)
'cause Selby was quite innocent and had had a decent upbringing and
had worked um perhaps she thought that was a threat (.) to their
relationship so which um caused her to flip out um... p'raps she was a
little bit jealous of Selby (.) that her life had not turned out the same which
caused her to (.) freak out (4: 1548-1576).

From a psychoanalytic (especially Kleinian) perspective, it is important to note that envy is closely linked to aggression and destructiveness (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983: 128). These affects - also shown to be significant for Alice in Chapter 6 (pages 254-267) - are ones which, for women, must be warded off if a "stable" gender identity is to be maintained (Flax 1996: 585). Denise therefore seems to engage with Wuornos in terms of a shared gendered (female) psychosocial need to "use" angry or aggressive emotions in a constructive way (Gyler 2010: 15) although, as I will show, there are other unconscious conflicts to be considered here as well.

It is argued that women are perhaps particularly likely to struggle with aggressive feelings because:

if [they] disown their aggression and project it on to others, they are vulnerable to positioning themselves as helpless victims. Conversely, if they internalise their anger, they are vulnerable to experiencing depression (Gyler 2010: 15, Sayers 1987).

It is significant in this respect that there is a striking absence of any negative or aggressive affect throughout Denise's narrated accounts, even when she recounts experiences which might be expected to produce emotional responses of precisely this nature. It can thus be argued that Denise's construction of Wuornos reflects the way in which she constructs herself, disavowing her own aggressive feelings, and struggling continually to keep these affects carefully controlled. This is partly achieved by her investment in a discursive subject position that enables a repression of difficult or threatening feelings (Billig 1999), as illustrated in the following examples:

I haven't really had many good things [in my life] (.) shouldn't complain though (1: 271-273)

the way I see it sometimes I think there's always someone worse off than you I mean no matter what has happened at the moment I'm really happy because I've got my family (4: 1082-1086)

I try not to moan too much (4: 1114-1115)

the way I see it is just as long as you're happy (.) that's the best way I think (4: 1139-1142)

you just gotta make the most of it ((smiling)) that's the way I see it
(4: 1152).

She constructs Wuornos in similar terms, observing that:

[she was] smiling a lot while she was in jail... she always seemed happy
(3: 92-93)

I found it strange how she could still smile all through it all... I didn't expect
her to smile (4: 1866-1874).

Denise's avoidance of aggression might be theorised as a desire to uphold culturally sanctioned gender norms, in which aggressive or angry behaviour is usually coded as *not*-feminine (Naylor 1995, Allen 1987, Morrissey 2003). Nonetheless, interpreted psychoanalytically, her discursive construction of a subjectivity in which such conflicts can be safely managed serves in fact to intensify the aggression it strives to contain, and her persecutory anxieties are turned inwards, becoming masochistic in nature. This is seemingly linked to Denise's almost obsessive preoccupation with "keeping fit", which is observable throughout her narrations (1: 51, 65/66, 70; 4: 92, 109) and is readily apparent in the extract below:

D: ... say sometimes I over-indulge and I eat chocolates and chips like-
y'know a lot of people does ((smiling)) not that- not everyone but
((laughs)) um it hel- I think it makes me feel a little bit better thinking oh
I've earnt that y'know I've worked hard today I've trained um I'm keeping
fit but I'm also allowing myself little treats so I think (.) the sense of earning
like uh rewards say I dunno a snack bar nothing (.) (smiling) too crazy
y'know ((laughs)) or a glass of wine definitely that's the best um yeah s-
that's y'know earning that I think you enjoy then more because you think
I've earnt it... I think you feel g- better about yourself if you train y'know

you keep your weight um your ideal weight you f- when you go out then you feel comfortable relaxed you enjoy more 'cause you think (.) it's um (.) how can I put it yeah it's (0.5) you go out and you feel comfortable (.) in what you're wearing you think yeah y'know

R: mm

D: you feel confident (.) 'cause you think well I've worked to (.) y'know (.) even if you're not a hundred per cent to how you wanna look I think it- (.) y'know knowing you've trained and you're putting your effort in you feel better yeah (4: 87-137).

Here, Denise's unconscious struggle with her own aggression is manifest in a cycle of punishment-reward, or retribution, centred around what is (or is not) "deserved", and I suggest that this subsequently motivates her reading of Wuornos. Although her behaviour can certainly be theorised in terms of cultural ideology, i.e. a desire to uphold feminine "ideals" about body image (Grogan 2008, Cash and Smolak 2011, Weiss 1999, Kindes 2006), then, it can also be interpreted psychoanalytically as a form of masochism (Freud 1905, 1930, Klein 1937). Where Freudian accounts suggest that sadism and masochism arise from the fusion between libidinal and death drives (Freud 1930), Klein argues that such processes are linked to the powerful aggressive impulses experienced by the infant from the very beginning of life (Klein 1937). These impulses are projected outwards as sadistic phantasies, but continue to threaten the individual from within (Perlow 1995: 45) and are therefore also masochistic in nature. This in turn creates a cycle of psychological upheaval: fearing retribution for its sadistic projections, the individual turns them back onto her own self; for Denise, in the form of a gruelling - indeed, masochistic - quest for physical "perfection". She thus

seems unconsciously to recognise that, as Chodorow observes, '[w]omen's anger... destroys absolutely. There is no surviving it' (1995: 527).

Thus far, I have argued that gender is an important motivational factor in the film-viewing investments made by both of the female participants (Angela and Denise) that I have discussed in this chapter. For Angela, this involves unconscious conflicts that are powerfully informed by her biographical experiences as (her father's) daughter, and are manifest in an ambivalent tension between masculine and feminine aspects of self. Denise's unconscious struggle for self-control²⁵, meanwhile, both produces and is produced by a masochistic "turning-in" of aggressive impulses onto her own self, such that her readings of the films - and of Wuornos, in particular - are motivated by the continual threat of a collapse of this defensive system. In the following sections, I introduce two male participants, Jim and Colin, respectively, and will show how their gendered investments in the films are also unconsciously motivated by conflicts originating in their childhood experiences.

Jim is 51 years old, educated to O' Level, and works as Operations Manager for a travel visa outsourcing company. He was born in Liverpool and moved to London (where he lives today) aged eighteen. Jim's Dad died when Jim was 12 years old: his Mum suffered from severe depressive illness and was hospitalised at various times throughout his childhood. Jim is currently single²⁶.

²⁵ Denise's rigorous self-discipline and "controlled" self might alternatively have been theorised here in terms of narcissism: see my discussion of Darren (Chapter 5, esp. pages 215-216) on these issues.

²⁶ Jim lived with his partner Pamela - who was 20 years his senior - for 20 years until she died suddenly in 2002.

Jim's initial responses to the films are marked by an immediate free-association: to the (inevitable) "changes" that were made to Wuornos' "real" story for the narrative of *Monster*. In the following extract, he seems eager to show that he had anticipated these changes and, moreover, is prepared to accept them as a part of his viewing experience:

J: it's a film I've never seen before or I- was vaguely aware of what the basic story was... and with what eventually happened of course that- it now (.) on reflection the movie is- looks incredibly i- inaccurate in a lot of respects

R: ok

J: but then I guess that- that was well pra- I based on A what they knew at that point uh and B like any (.) source novel that is filmed uh where th-

[]

R: mm

J: y'know there's- there's always going to there- there- there has to be changes there will be changes at the end of the day it has to have a

[]

R: yeah

J: certain amount of... entertainment value so you would never rely on it as um (.) y'know (.) you wouldn't y- uh- y- well I- I've never looked at a film for accuracy and I don't think anybody should I don't get this thing about uh oh that film was rubbish 'cause it wasn't accurate I say it's a Hollywood movie come on don't- don't even ((laughing)) do- go- accuracy read a book (3: 7-39).

In cultural/ideological terms, the 'knowingness' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 53)²⁷ that Jim demonstrates here can be read as a normative or hegemonic (Connell 1995) masculine response, and/or as evidence of his investment in a position of defended masculinity (Gadd 2000, Edley and Wetherell 1997,

²⁷ A full discussion of the "knowing" viewer conceptualised by Barker and Brooks (1998) is provided in Chapter 6.

Evans and Wallace 2008). This investment enables him to provide an intellectualised, that is, rational and objective, account of his film-viewing experience, creating a sense of mastery over difficult emotions (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988). Notably, perhaps, all of Jim's personal narrations are framed in a similar way. There are however some important contradictions or 'incoherences' (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) to be observed here since, whilst Jim criticises the movie for being 'incredibly inaccurate', he goes on to claim that accuracy is something that he 'never' expects from a film text. As I will show, this contradiction can be read psychoanalytically as being indicative of some powerful unconscious conflicts. Meanwhile, given Jim's keen investment in this "knowing" viewing position, it is perhaps unsurprising that he immediately sets about attempting to draw a 'conclusion' from the films, despite not in fact having been asked specifically to do so:

if there's a conclusion I dunno if I could say I've come to a conclusion
it's difficult to say I've- I think this 'cause it- I think it's far more complicated
to say the result of what happened I think is (.) this you can't say A
she was guilty 'cause she was- wasn't- uh or she was mad or she was (.)
lucid or she knew what she was doing or wasn't planned- I- I think- I don't
think you can come down to one single definable answer (3: 43-52).

This response can, like those of Angela and Denise, be theorised in terms of (gendered) cultural ideology, that is to say that Jim's urge to seek - and find - answers and/or solutions is one conventionally coded as masculine (Nezu and Nezu 1987, Harper and Harris 2010). Similarly, his wariness of providing the "wrong" interpretation, and his eagerness to show that he has read the films "correctly", can be understood as a strategy for 'proving' his masculinity

(Kimmel 1994) in line with the 'sets of social expectations... created and maintained in a patriarchal society' (Craig 1992: 2). This conventionally masculine investment in the films is emphasised still further in the extract below, where the first of the films' characters that Jim mentions is Steve Glazer (Wuornos' lawyer): it is also interesting that Jim is the only one of my participants to give priority to this particular character in this way. His disparagement of Glazer is readily apparent here:

the lawyer I- I- I dunno what r- ho- how the hell the man ever got to be ((laughing)) I mean he looks like- like a failure at everything he'd ever done he was obviously a failure as a singer as a musician um as a (.) as a fitness instructor ((laughing)) 'cause he's obviously let himself go along those lines um he's just th- th- the man's a total disgrace ((laughs)) an absolute disgrace (3: 55-62).

Read as being culturally/ideologically motivated, then, Jim's investments in the films could be understood as an adherence to, and performative (re)inscription of masculine "norms" (Craig 1992, Connell 1995) although, interestingly, his responses (as a male spectator) cannot be adequately theorised in terms of the spectatorial relationship between male viewers and male characters advanced within Screen theory accounts, because these are typically organised around processes of desire and lack (e.g. Modleski 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Silverman 1988) or (mis)recognition of an 'ego-ideal' (e.g. Mulvey 1975)²⁸. Nevertheless, a psychoanalytic reading of Jim's narrations suggests that there *are* powerful unconscious anxieties and conflicts in

²⁸ Layton's (2004) critique of Freudian and Lacanian film studies is noted on page 160. See also my discussion on pages 76-79 of how such accounts are situated in relation to the earlier apparatical and metapsychological approaches that they sought to challenge.

operation here, and I argue that these can be linked to some of his childhood experiences. One particularly striking theme recurs throughout Jim's responses to the films: an apparently powerful reluctance to "commit" to any one particular interpretation of Wuornos' story, for example: 'it just struck me that there was something else going on' (4: 2299-2300); 'there's something we weren't being told' (4: 2328-2329); 'I don't think it was that clear cut' (4: 2347-2348).

Despite the "knowing" viewing position that he takes up initially, then, it becomes apparent that Jim is peculiarly avoidant when it comes to forming or, more specifically, *voicing* his opinions about Wuornos' behaviour (and her motivations for the killings). This is illustrated in the extracts below:

I would never begin to speculate... (4: 2376)

I'm not sure I could say that... (4: 2395)

I can only give an opinion but it wouldn't be an informed opinion
(4: 2573-2574)

if you want me to give an opinion...I'll probably say no I'm not convinced...
but that's not to say I know 'cause I don't know (4: 2591-2593).

Similarly, he works to remain objective in his interpretations of her motivations to kill:

I don't understand why she's doing it (3: 122)

I don't quite understand (3: 133)

I found it difficult to gauge exactly what it was from her past that made

her do what she did (3: 152-154).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Jim seems to be powerfully ambivalent about “knowingness”²⁹. Whilst, as I have suggested, these processes can be understood in terms of masculine cultural ideologies, I argue that, for Jim, the conflicts manifest here can also be linked to a traumatic childhood event: the death of his father when Jim was twelve years old. His unconscious anxieties about this are discernible in the following extract, where he describes having ‘missed out on’ crucial childhood experiences:

I never quite understood what what um what I missed out on by not having a father (.) for most of my teenage year- I mean people kind of say y’know but y’know it’s (.) y- it- it’s it’s not the same when you grow up without a father but you don’t tend to think- well I don’t know what I’m missing (.) I don’t know ‘cause to me that’s I don’t have anything to (.) equate it to (.) but I do know that I felt like I matured quicker than I probably would have done and I was always told when I was in my teenage years and twenties or whatever that I had a more mature outlook than somebody of my age and I think that’s why- I think that’s one- one thing it definitely does is it- (.) y- you do mature um my mother wasn’t a strong person mentally she actually did have um some mental problems... so that was a difficult thing ‘cause my mother had to ha- spend long times in hospital and we would spend time with relatives so that was a kind of a difficult phase as well (1: 238-274).

Whilst, like Angela, Jim’s anxieties are not explicitly *about* gender, they can still be interpreted as gendered ones, since they are linked to his phantasies

²⁹ Similar observations are made in relation to Daniel (pages 267-281), who also takes up an ambivalent or defended “knowing” position in his readings of the films. This forms part of my discussion of *managing the self*, provided in Chapter 6. Interestingly, I also link Daniel’s investment in this defended position to the death of his father, and go on to make a similar interpretation for Jim on pages 187-188 of this chapter.

about the son that he might/might not have been. Jim's gender identity is thus seemingly 'built from internalisations of lost objects' (Layton 2004: 214) as well as existing in his 'performative citing of norms' (2004: 214, Butler 1990). It is also interesting that, throughout his narrations, Jim uses his position as a film-viewer (more generally) to construct himself not only as a person who is able to anticipate and manage change (as noted on pages 180-181) but also as someone who is fundamentally "immune" to disappointment. As a self-confessed film fanatic, he criticises other people for being too easily 'swayed' by film trailers, and suggests that they continually and inevitably set themselves up to be disappointed. This is illustrated in the extract below:

how many y'know (.) people will watch a a trailer for a film (.) and say (.) wow it looks awesome so well- y- it looks awesome but then ok has every (.) film you've ever seen that you've gone to see on the basis of an awesome trailer (.) met your expectations oh well no so well then ((laughing)) it doesn't work does it y'know you're y'know but unfortunately people have short memories like that they'll go- they'll watch a trailer and they'll say wow (.) can't wait and then they watch the film (.) ((horrified tone of voice)) God that wasn't anything like I expected it to oh y'know rubbish da- da- (1.0) ((excited tone of voice)) wow have you seen that trail- we must- and th-it just ((smiling)) (.) it just all starts again (2: 354-373).

The following examples show, however, that Jim's investment in this "un-disappointable" subject position is a powerfully defended one:

um (1.0) so I- I'm I've- I- I guess I'm kind of I'm not easily swayed I'm not a- I'm- I'm- I've seen all the tricks y'know used to sell movies (2: 393-398)

I- I dunno whether I:: have the bi- the power to be able to do it I know a lot of people can't (2: 432-436).

I argue here that Jim's unconscious motivations for taking up this particular identity position are in fact linked to the anxieties and conflicts produced by the patriarchal responsibility imposed upon him following his father's death.

He remembers the experience thus:

I was about twelve thirteen w- w- when when m- my father died and I can remember prior to that we had a f- fairly comfortable w- sort of lifestyle we were um a fairly normal family uh it's- it's obviously difficult when I think you lose a father when you're young first because you tend to mature a lot quicker you- I was the oldest uh (.) boy in the family so I kind of (.) had to sort of become like (smiling) not quite the head of the family but y'know the man in the family (.) you sort of become the man of the family so I sort of was the person that would do the things that that that my father did (1: 219-238).

Many of these anxieties involved others' expectations of him during this difficult time:

when we were younger I was the one who was looked upon well- you're the man of the house now 'cause it's we're talking the Seventies here so that it was that thing about the man was still considered to be the dominant person in the house and whatever the woman was secondary so I was like I'm- was- was (.) even told by some people friends of my father said right it's up to you now you've gotta look after your Mum and you've gotta look after you're the man of the house and (all that) I'm thinking but I don't know what I'm supposed to do what exactly (mumbles) and you're not told but it's- so you just have to kind of figure it out for yourself (4: 151-168).

The knowing and un-disappointable film-viewing identities that Jim constructs for himself therefore serve to defend against the anxieties and conflicts produced by his memories of this struggle with patriarchal responsibility. With this in mind, I suggest that by taking up an omnipotent (“patriarchal” or “paternal”) spectatorial position, Jim’s film-viewing experience functions as a process of ‘acting out’ (Freud 1920: 18), such that he is able to ‘repeat [his] repressed material as a contemporary experience instead of *remembering* it as something belonging to the past’ (1920: 18, Rowan 2000: 87). This can also be understood as a form of ‘working through’ (Limentani 1999: 35) of his unconscious conflicts, i.e. as ‘a persistent effort to rectify the helplessness of the original traumatic experience’ (1999: 37). I argue, then, that because Jim finds it difficult to provide an adequate discursive account of his painful memories, he acts out his phantasies by unconsciously taking up a patriarchal or “paternal” (viewing) position of his own. Further, according to Rowan (2000: 89), the process of acting out can be characterised by a tendency to enact or replay certain aspects of the Oedipal drama and, for Jim, there certainly does seem to be a reawakening of Oedipal conflicts (Newman and Newman 1975) here. This also appears to be biographically linked to the death of his father: an event which, because it occurred during Jim’s early adolescence, may have served to disrupt the latency stage of his psychosexual development (Freud 1924b).

The latency period is one in which gender phantasies and feelings are consolidated (Chodorow 1995), such that the child establishes:

decisive patterns of adaptive functioning [as well as] a sense of industry... a capacity for mastery of objects and concepts that allows

autonomous function with a sense of initiative without running the risk of failure or defeat or a sense of inferiority (Sadock, Kaplan and Sadock 2007: 200).

During this stage, the child develops the capacities for 'categorisation and association... symbolic thought and action' (Rorty 2000: 206) that provide for him a means of 'mastering and controlling' (2000: 206) his world. I argue that Jim's disrupted biographical experience of this process now bears significantly upon his ability to manage feelings of responsibility and/or failure (Kaastenbaum 1993) and that, as a consequence, he remains ambivalent about his own sense of 'personal competence' (1993: 13) as a film-viewer. It can therefore perhaps be argued that Jim uses his spectatorial experience to take up - and perform - the gendered subject position (father) that was foisted upon him as a teenager, and that he feels he has thus far failed to accomplish satisfactorily. It is interesting that this apparently active investment in the films, in which Jim is unconsciously motivated by the experience of his father's death to become an omniscient/omnipotent, that is, a "paternal", figure, can be contrasted to the passive one made by Daniel (discussed in Chapter 5), which, I will suggest, is motivated by a similar life-experience³⁰. Colin (introduced in the following section), meanwhile, seeks out this kind of figure in his readings of the films, projecting his desire onto Broomfield, and thereby engaging with him as a paternal "guide" or "guardian".

³⁰ See pages 267-281.

Colin is 29 years old, has a BA (Hons) in Film Studies, and works as a retail manager for a UK supermarket chain. He was born in Cambridge and moved to London - where he continues to live - aged 21, to attend University. Colin is homosexual, and lives with his partner of seven years. His parents separated when Colin was twelve: they have both since re-married, and Colin now has a good relationship with both couples, despite some very difficult periods. Colin suffers from mild depressive illness: he made three suicide attempts as a teenager, and has undergone CBT for this. His Mum has severe long-term clinical depression and is often unwell.

It is readily observable from his interview data that, for Colin, issues of masculinity are psychosocially problematic, not least in terms of his own conflicted feelings about heteronormative gender ideologies:

masculinity is quite a loaded term isn't it ((smiling)) it's more than just being male it's like it's something people wear it's- it's it's behaviours people take on and (2.0) it's y'know I like people like to reject labels quite often don't they and (1.0) I would not call myself particularly masculine um (3.0) hmm (2.0) I (.) well (.) as I'm attracted more to men than women I guess (2.0) that's more than just a purely physical thing although that's a very big part of it... I (.) I guess in my mind I associate masculinity with some degree of like stupidity or something ((laughing)) (2: 498-511).

Interestingly, then, in Colin's readings of the films, he does not consciously emphasise the issues of gender that are, arguably, raised by them. Rather, it is his own unconscious anxieties about masculinity - and the defended subject position in which he is consequently invested - that influence his viewing experience most powerfully. Read psychoanalytically, Colin's investment in the films is also "gendered" for more uniquely biographical reasons, in as much as it is unconsciously motivated by his lived (childhood)

experiences and, specifically, his relationship with his father: this will be considered further in the discussion that follows. The extracts below illustrate a theme that recurs throughout Colin's responses to the documentary films, in particular, in which he seems to engage closely with Nick Broomfield:

I found Nick Broomfield quite personable like y- y- you feel like he's uh sort of (.) he's a guide who you don't mind having through the documentary I liked that he was sort of holding our hand and taking us through his experience of her (3: 61-66)

I like I like th- the way Broomfield's stuff was put into like this little travelogue he's quite often in the car talking to the camera and its very personal (4: 1065-1069).

Here, Colin constructs Broomfield as a "guide" or "guardian", who exerts a powerful influence over his spectatorial experience. In doing so, he takes up a viewing position in which he effectively reads the films through Broomfield:

you sort of watch (.) the Broomfield stuff because you feel like you're getting this first hand information and stuff (4: 997-998)

obviously it's (2.0) it's uh been edited together to tell his version of the story but that's fine I (.) I found him a reliable guide whereas I found whoever was producing *Monster* to be less of a reliable guide (4: 1051-1055).

Psychoanalytically speaking, this process of entrusting responsibility (to Broomfield) for an interpretation of events seems to mirror Colin's unconscious anxieties about reflecting upon his own past:

[I'm] somebody who tends to live in the present quite a lot um (1.0) and I find it really hard to (2.0) I don't like to look back particularly (4: 680-684).

In accordance with this, it becomes apparent that the viewing position Colin has taken up is very much a conflicted one, and the extract below reveals his concern with the "limited" access to the story provided by Broomfield:

... I felt that we were only seeing parts of the story that Nick Broomfield had access to like people who were willing to talk to him essentially and y'know he used the news footage quite effectively um ((coughs)) I didn't feel that either of them really brought me any closer to the truth of the event so I felt like to a degree they were unknowable and these were just people's(.) versions of them (3: 111-121).

Colin's film-viewing experience, then, involves a struggle with the adequacy of the (paternal) guidance that Broomfield provides:

[Broomfield] didn't have complete access to the facts and it made- that made- I think it made his investigation seem more (.) genuine as well (4: 1375-1379).

Interestingly, he also considers the extent to which this "guidance" is extended to Wuornos herself, and his own powerful engagement with Broomfield is especially striking in the example below, in which he discusses such matters:

I think Nick Broomfield (.) presents himself as being (0.5) slightly fond of her and (.) he probably takes a similar line to me that (.) all those biographical traumas that led her to (.) y'know to be (.) a homeless person or to be of (.) uncertain abode and uh to be a hooker and (.) y'know (1.0) he w- he was obviously very interested in all of that too but I think you

could see flashes of him thinking well actually at the end of the day (1.0) there is a time when she might have to take a bit of a responsibility for what she'd done... I think actually he does (.) think he actually does hold her fairly accountable for her actions I don't think (.) no matter how paranoid she is and what- whatever lack of care she had I think uh (.) I think he still treats her as a human who had done bad things (4: 1406-1436).

From the Screen theory perspective that informs this project³¹, Colin's readings of the films - and, specifically, his engagement with *Broomfield* - might perhaps be understood as a narcissistic process of identification³² with an ideal ego, that is to say that, by engaging with *Broomfield* as the main male "protagonist" of the documentary film texts, Colin 'projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate... giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence' (Mulvey 1975: 28). Arguably, however, this framework is not especially helpful for theorising the experiences he describes, because of its organisation around the powerful alignment of an *erotic* look (1975: 28) between spectator and protagonist. Queer theory (e.g. Creekmur and Doty 1995, de Lauretis 1991) might be considered more relevant to this discussion, both for its focus upon gay/lesbian viewing strategies and its critique of the 'compulsory heterosexuality' (Stam 2000: 265) assumed by conventional film studies, although I argue that it does not enable a sufficiently nuanced theorisation of the experiences that Colin recounts³³.

³¹ This is explained more fully on pages 76-79.

³² A fuller discussion of narcissism and its significance within the film-viewing experiences described by my participants is provided in Chapter 5 although, as I will emphasise, narcissistic identifications are not always organised around issues of gender.

³³ I am suggesting that Colin's (homo)sexuality is relevant to his "gendered" film readings, in line with Sedgwick's (1990: 30) understanding of gender and sexuality as 'two analytic axes' that are minimally - and yet usefully - distinct from one another.

From a cultural studies' perspective, meanwhile, it might be suggested that Colin is distinctively "positioned" as a documentary film viewer, given that voice-over techniques (as used by Broomfield) are believed to "speak" directly to the film viewer... providing a dominant perspective on the events portrayed and, arguably "telling people what to think" (Bruzzi 2000: 43, Trinh 1993). This point is perhaps specifically relevant in relation to these particular documentary texts, since Broomfield is renowned for the 'powerful authorial... presence' (Schilt 2000: 51) that informs his work. Colin's reading of Broomfield's films certainly seems to substantiate Austin's suggestion that individual viewers have their own preconceptions and/or expectations of "documentary" material, be it cinematic or televisual (Austin 2007: 5). His responses also serve as a good example of the 'third level of meaning' (Corner 1991: 272) produced in relation to documentary film texts, which, argues Corner, develops as viewers and readers evaluate what they have seen and heard and 'locat[e] it within a negotiated place in their knowledge or memory, where it may continue to do modifying work on other constituents of their consciousness (and, indeed, of their unconscious)' (1991: 272).

Interpreted in terms of Colin's *gestalt*, however, his investment in the films seems to be biographically motivated by specific feelings and events experienced as a part of his early relationship with his own father:

my Dad was massively into films when I was growing up and had a massive library of titles and from quite a young age showed me (.) films that would probably have terrified my oth- like other kids of my age ((smiling)) like I remember seeing Aliens when I was very young but my Dad's sitting there with me and explaining how they did the effects and (.)

never had a nightmare or any kind of fear of any of those films and that- that was great to have everything explained like how they- how they did everything so I guess that was a- experience I shared with my Dad (2: 8-21).

For Colin, the film-viewing event in which he is involved here as a research participant evokes powerful (and fond) memories of specific lived experiences (Walkerdine et al 2001: 13, Skeggs 1997), that is, moments of shared intimacy with his father. This attests still further to the argument already set out in this project, i.e. that a more adequate understanding of the encounter between film and viewer can be achieved only by considering both its socio-cultural “situatedness” *and* the ways in which it functions as a subjectively (and biographically) constructed ‘cultural memory’ (Kuhn 2002: 4). As a film-viewing subject, Colin perhaps also seeks unconsciously to re-create this remembered father/son intimacy by projecting onto Broomfield an ideal image; not of his own self, but of his father. It gradually becomes apparent that this strategy functions to defend against anxieties created by later problems in their relationship, following the separation of his parents. These are described in the extract below:

I don't really think I felt that I had anybody to talk to at that time³⁴ because my Dad was (.) y'know wor- he was working full time and then coming home and cooking for me and being very tired and uh while I was close to him in terms of a m- mate or a buddy he wasn't he's not good at dealing with emotional matters he doesn't talk about his feelings yeah he- (.) probably seen him cry two or three times in his life he's very- his emotions are very (.) locked away (.) um (2.0) and I think yeah at the same time I

³⁴ Colin is referring here to the period following his Mum's first episode of severe depression.

was sort of coming to terms with my sexuality and this thing with my friend and there wasn't really anyone I was talking to about it (4:269-285).

Like Jim, whilst Colin's capacity for compliance with (or resistance to) cultural and ideological norms is significant as far as his gender is concerned, his investments in the films are not organised explicitly around these as conscious concerns. Rather, it is his unconscious conflicts and anxieties about the gendered relationships in his life (and the biographical experiences that these symbolise, or are associated with) that motivate his readings of the films far more powerfully. Where Jim's investment in a knowing and omniscient viewing position is motivated by a phantasy about "becoming" the father that he lost as a child (and also enables him to defend against the painful experience of this loss), Colin seeks to re-create the 'watchful protectiveness' (Diamond 1997: 443) provided by his early, idealised father/son relationship: one later destabilised by family difficulties. The psychoanalytic concept of 'superego' (Freud 1923, 1924a) is also useful here, understood in Freudian terms to constitute an introjection of parental figures following the decline of the Oedipal stage of development (Perlow 1995: 35, Freud 1923, 1924a), and elaborated within Kleinian theories of internal objects (Klein 1937, Perlow 1995) to mean that, 'inasmuch as a superego exist[s], it [can] be considered to function as a *substitute for the relationship with external objects*'³⁵ (Perlow 1995: 35, my italics). For Colin, then, Broomfield is introjected not as an 'internal persecuting object'

³⁵ It is important to note here that, for Klein, the superego is formed earlier than Freud suggested, that is, in the *pre-Oedipal* stage of development. As such, it is closely linked to the child's earliest instinctual phantasies (especially aggressive ones), and the nature of the introjected object is thus determined by the libidinal instincts dominant during its formation (Perlow 1995: 37, Klein and Money-Kyrle 2001).

(Symington 1986: 262), but as a substitute paternal figure, and it is this image of ideal father with whom he identifies as a film-viewer.

In terms of cultural ideology, both Jim and Colin, as contemporary Westernised men, are powerfully influenced by 'the protective, providing father imago [which] reflects duties emblematic of such constantly sought manhood' (Diamond 1997: 455). Each uses his experience as a film viewer to (re)construct this image in a different way: Jim by seeking to become it, and Colin by projecting it onto Broomfield, with whom he then engages very closely, illustrating the extent to which the notion of an "ideal" father figure 'operates powerfully as a cultural representation even when the real parents do not reinforce it' (1997: 455, Benjamin 1990). Interestingly, for both men, their masculine gender identities are not fundamentally acquired 'through a hateful negation of the feminine' (Yates 2000: 85): rather, they involve an 'embracing of complexity and finding [of] one's place within a generational context in which one acquires a sense of perspective in relation to oneself and others' (Yates 2000: 85, Bollas 1993).

This chapter has sought to explore the ways in which gender is psychosocially and biographically significant to my participants in their readings of the three films. I have argued that, whilst their investments in the films can certainly be understood as "gendered" in cultural and ideological terms, this process nevertheless involves more complex psychodynamics than those that are acknowledged within existing cultural studies (e.g. Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985) and Screen theory (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, Modleski 1988, de Lauretis 1984) accounts of how and why gender is significant within the film/viewer relationship. My analysis has

shown that gender is important for my participants on both conscious and unconscious levels and, further, that their gender-related phantasies and anxieties are intertwined with other powerful unconscious conflicts. I have also shown here that for my participants, as film-viewing subjects, gender is often especially meaningful in terms of their own biographical relationships with their parents, that is, their experiences as daughters or sons. Further, I have considered the extent to which my data analysis and interpretation is always partly motivated by my counter-transference (Walkerdine et al 2001, Jervis 2009), and informed by my own unconscious conflicts and anxieties as well as my personal biographical experiences.

I therefore suggest that gender is significant within my participants' film-viewing experiences as a process of 'ongoing emotional creation and intrapsychic interpretation, of cultural meanings and... emotional, and self-other experience, all mediated by conscious and unconscious fantasy' (Chodorow 1995: 541). With these issues in mind, I argue that a more nuanced approach to gendered spectatorship is required: one which might adequately acknowledge this as a psychosocially and biographically 'lived experience' (Walkerdine et al 2001, Skeggs 1997), and theorise it as such. Chapter 5, which follows, is approached from this same epistemological perspective, and seeks to build upon existing Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts of audience "identification" by exploring the ways in which my participants tend to read the three film texts through their own selves: a phenomenon that I will describe using the term *self-primacy*.

5 - Spectatorial Investments: Self-Primacy and the “Neutrosemic” Wuornos

The aim of this fifth chapter is to consider another of the key themes observed in my interview data, which is that my participants often seem to be ‘wrestling with important issues concerning their own identities’ (McKinley 1997: 2) as they engage with the three films. Here, I will focus on the spectatorial investments made by my participants, and will explore the tendency amongst participants to read the three films - and Wuornos - through their own selves, using the term *self-primacy* to describe this.

In Chapter 4, I have considered the ways in which gender is psychosocially and biographically meaningful for my participants in their film-viewing experiences, theorising this in relation to cultural ideology¹, but also in psychoanalytic (psychosexual) terms. In doing so, I have challenged Screen theory’s often phallogentric and universalist models of gendered spectatorship (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Modleski 1988), whilst also critiquing those cultural studies’ accounts that conceptualise gendered viewing primarily in terms of conscious engagement (e.g. Scannell, Schlesinger and Sparks 1992), endeavour to explain it solely as a form of resistance (or conformity) to dominant (patriarchal) representational and ideological “norms” (e.g. Durham 1999: 214, Radway 1984, Ang 1985, Hobson 1982), or reduce it to specifically gendered ‘modes’ (Morley 1992: 66) of viewing.

Chapter 6 will explore how participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their readings of the films, critiquing both cultural studies’ accounts of the “active” audience (e.g. Morley 1980/1982, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992)

¹ *Cultural Ideologies of Self* are discussed fully in Chapter 4, and are also addressed in Chapter 6.

and Screen theory notions of the “passive” spectator² (e.g. Pribram 2005, Heath 1978, Moores 1993). I will show that my participants do not merely oscillate between the active and/or passive viewing positions made available to them by the film texts: rather, that they work continually to manage the ‘essential tensions’ (Silverstone 1994: 160) between these positions. I will also argue that such tensions operate consciously and unconsciously, and that they are both psychosocially and biographically meaningful. In all three of these main chapters, I seek to further develop the body of audience studies work that recognises film/viewer engagement as a situated, “lived” experience (e.g. Kuhn 1995, Stacey 1994, Walkerdine 1986, 2007).

The aim of this chapter is to set out a critique of existing cultural studies and Screen theory accounts of spectatorial identification: here, I will use the term ‘investment’³ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 15) to conceptualise the ways in which my participants engage with the three film texts. I will argue that, whilst issues of hegemonic resistance and/or compliance (e.g. Harris 1992, Tudor 1999) are meaningful in this context, that their investments cannot be explained solely in these terms and, further, that they are not exclusively organised around an erotic “look” (e.g. Mulvey 1975), nor motivated primarily by desire or “lack” (e.g. Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983). This chapter also seeks to challenge those cultural studies’ arguments that presuppose single or stable readings of film texts (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980), by emphasising the extent to which my participants’ readings are in fact often unstable, shifting, and conflicting. Here, I use the

² See also my discussion on pages 85-87 of the dualism that Kuhn (1984) observes in relation to the categories of “spectator” and “social audience”.

³ A full definition of this term - and an explanation of its relevance to my project - is provided on pages 58-59.

term *self-primacy* to describe some of the patterns which recur throughout participants' narrated accounts, such as the drawing of contrasts and comparisons between selves and characters, the complex negotiations of self/other boundaries, and the tensions and conflicts that are produced by and played out within these processes. I also show that many responses are highly self-reflexive in nature. Throughout this chapter, then, I will consider the ways in which (and the extent to which) almost all of my participants appear not merely to "identify" with Wuornos in their readings of the films but, rather, seem to read her *through their own selves*.

I will argue that the concept of narcissism can be used effectively to theorise this subjective investment in the films, and that it may also help to account for the sheer diversity of my participants' readings, since it qualifies an understanding of how 'different readers... "read" films, not in terms of a pre-existing set of relations of signification... but by what those relations *mean to them*' (Walkerdine 1986: 190). I will also draw upon the psychoanalytic notion of projection (e.g. Grant and Crawley 2002: 18) as a means of exploring the ways in which my participants tend to attribute certain thoughts, feelings, traits and behaviours to Wuornos which are in fact characteristic of themselves. As I will show, this often occurs when participants 'feel uncomfortable about something they experience at an unconscious level within themselves' (2002: 23), such that projection enables them to avoid awareness of possessing these characteristics or aspects of self and to defend against feelings of anxiety and conflict (2002: 18). Data from my interviews will be used to illustrate this. Attention will also be given here to the role of phantasy, as it works to 'inform and structure our

perceptions of outer objects and creativity' (Glover 2009: 47/48). As I will show, this facilitates a better understanding of the varying intensity and complexity of the viewing experiences described by participants, and of the often unstable and conflicted nature of their individual readings. I will argue that this approach helps to emphasise the significance of anxiety and fear as key factors in the process of spectatorial investment, alongside the more conventionally prioritised elements of pleasure and desire (Sandvoss 2005: 73), and that it also offers a 'mediating bridge' (Sonnett 2003: 257) between these affects and the ideological conditions of their production.

As I have explained in Chapter 4, this project understands film readings to be psychosocially and biographically motivated, made meaningful by participants' inner (psychical) and outer (socio-cultural) worlds, and involving both conscious and unconscious processes. This chapter will therefore consider how my participants' responses are constructed in relation to their individual, "lived" experiences (Skeggs 1997), but emphasis will also be given to their sociocultural "subjection" (Tyler 2007) and to how this is informed by their *cultural ideologies of self*, thereby exploring how, as film viewers, their identities are (re)produced within dominant ideological structures. It is of course necessary to consider the textual elements of the film/viewer relationship as well: this matter is discussed further in the section that follows.

The "Neutrosemic" Wuornos

As is evident throughout these three main chapters, participants' readings of the films - and of Wuornos as a character - are both richly subjective and strikingly diverse. Data from my interviews indicates that there is no single or

definitive reading of the film texts, and that far from providing a set of 'patterned' responses (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 33; Hills 2005a: 37), participants frequently find elements or "versions" of themselves in Wuornos. From a textual perspective, this suggests that she can perhaps be described as 'neutrosemic' (Sandvoss 2005: 26) (rather than merely polysemic) in this respect. Sandvoss defines neutrosemy as 'the semiotic condition in which a text allows for so many divergent readings that, intersubjectively, it does not have any meaning at all' (2005: 126), and I argue that the concept is helpful for exploring the complex and sometimes surprising readings made by different participants in relation to these same three film texts. The inclusion of both mainstream film and documentary texts in this project also adds to Wuornos' neutrosemic potential, because it enables viewers to engage with her as a 'fictional character [with] real-life referents' (Scodari 2007: 54). Austin suggests that, central to documentary's appeal is its 'presentation of opportunities to find out about, and somehow connect with, other people "out there" in the world' (Austin 2007: 79), and these three films do, after all, have 'roots in "real life"' (Scodari 2007: 52).

In the context of this project, then, a coalition of texts, paratexts and discourses is available to my participants, in which they are able to create and negotiate meaning in their engagements with Wuornos: both in relation to their own inner worlds, and in accordance with their subjection as culturally and ideologically situated individuals (2007: 52, 58), i.e. as psychosocial subjects. The theoretical concept of neutrosemy also helps to explore how the multiplicity of meanings described is experienced reflexively at the level of individual participants (Sandvoss 2005: 143) and to explain

how different readings are produced by different viewers, studying how viewers themselves inscribe and shift specific boundaries around texts, rather than simply reading them according to a set of pre-existing 'symbolic boundaries' (Hills 2007b: 152). Sandvoss' (2005) work is therefore useful in analysing my participants' readings of the films: especially the ways in which they project aspects of themselves (Ruddock 2007: 91) onto Wuornos. His notion of neutrosemy has however been criticised for being rather reductive, and for 'limiting the texture of [the viewer's] experience' (Hills 2007b: 152) by neglecting to consider the 'more dimly sensed half-graspings' (2007b: 152) of their own self-identities. Indeed, as Hills observes, it is important to acknowledge that selves can be 'provisional... chimerical, or only semi-narratable' (2007b: 152), and these are precisely the elements of subjectivity with which this project is concerned. For King (2008), meanwhile, Sandvoss's work forecloses any consideration of the interplay between the collective and individual dimensions of the viewing experience, by disregarding the structural aspects of and the influences external to the viewer/text relationship. Ideology does of course play an enormously significant role in 'the negotiation of meaning surrounding a neutrosemic cultural object' (Scodari 2007: 58), and I seek in this chapter to explore these issues further. I argue here, then, that where Sandvoss's analysis is perhaps limited by its exclusive focus on 'mirroring' (Sandvoss 2005: 126), the responses described by my participants, as film viewers, point towards the operation of more complex psychodynamic processes in the spectatorial encounter. It would therefore seem that Wuornos does not function as a blank screen on to which viewers' images and experiences are merely

projected (and then reflected back at them): rather, that their engagements with her are formed by reading her *through their own selves*. This produces shifting and often contradictory responses, whilst also creating tensions between participants' actual, biographical experiences and the 'potential experience' (Sandvoss 2005: 142) represented in the texts.

The following sections seek to show how and why the concepts of narcissism and neurosemy detailed here are useful for theorising and analysing the *self-primacy* observed in my participants' readings of the film texts: extracts from the interview data will be used to support and illustrate my arguments. I will begin, however, by providing a more detailed theoretical overview of narcissism as a psychological and socio-cultural concept.

Narcissism

Acknowledged as a crucial part of childhood development⁴ (Freud 1914[1958], Klein 1975), narcissism is said to be inherent in all object relations (Britton 1998, Stacey 1994, Merck 1987: 6), and thus to bear significantly upon our capacity for meaning-making through processes of identification with others (Parker 1997b, Frosh 2010). Narcissism is therefore fundamental to our subjectivities at both intrapsychic and interpersonal levels, and forms part of 'the reflexive project of the self' (Giddens 1991: 9). For the purposes of this discussion, it is useful to conceive of narcissism not only as a state, but also as a process (Klein 1975, Alford 1988) which exists on a continuum between pathology and normality (Lasch 1979: 50), and

⁴ Klein rejected Freud's concept of *objectless* primary narcissism (Freud 1914[1958]), which was linked in psychoanalytic "drive" theory to early autoerotic stages of development. According to Klein, narcissism is inherently object related and constitutes part of the (defensive) splitting process.

constitutes an ordinary aspect of the human condition (Kohut 1971, Brown 1998: 44): one which is never overcome, but continually rechannelled (Alford 1988: 27). Given the wider psychosocial approach of my study, it is also important to consider how narcissistic patterns and processes are woven into the ideological structures of our contemporary social environment (Hall, Winlow et al 2008: 166-167, Tyler 2007), operate at both micro and macro levels of cultural relations (Alford 1988) and are therefore inextricably linked to issues of agency (Giddens 1991: 175).

In this chapter, the concept of narcissism will be used to analyse the complexities of the film viewing experiences described by my participants where, as I will show - *contra* much feminist film theory - it constitutes far more than a textually determined scopophilic or voyeuristic “desire to look” (e.g. Mulvey 1975). Within accounts of this kind, processes of narcissistic identification (with an idealised screen image) are argued to be textually determined by being integrated into the story/image of the film itself (Mulvey 1975) and, from this theoretical perspective, narcissism is inextricably linked to pleasure and desire (Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Penley 1988, Kaplan 1983) and always necessarily structured according to the patriarchal unconscious, that is, along the lines of sexual difference. As noted in Chapter 4, in cultural studies based audience research, the concept of narcissism is often similarly linked to gender and sexuality as key axes of identification (e.g. Ellis 1982, Radway 1984, Doane 1982, 1987, Brown 1994, Brunson 1986, Hobson 1982). It is therefore interesting that data from my interviews indicates that this is not necessarily the case. Rather, as I observe in Chapter 4, gender is often *implicitly* significant for participants (both male and

female) in their readings of the films, and unconsciously linked to specific biographical experiences. Indeed, for the participants discussed in this chapter, Wuornos' gender and sexuality do not constitute key identificatory aspects of their spectatorial investments⁵, and such issues are sometimes rendered almost invisible (Hermes 2000: 362, Ang and Hermes 1991: 322) in their accounts.

It would therefore seem that gender is not a reliable predictor of viewing behaviour (Ang 1995: 110) for my participants, not least because questions of sexual difference are not inevitably operational in their narrations. This demonstrates that no two men (or women) among my participants have exactly the same film-viewing experiences in the 'ever-shifting kaleidoscope of cultural circulation and consumption' (Radway 1984: 361). As I have argued in Chapter 4, then, despite feminist conceptualisations of women's (gendered) socio-cultural subjection (de Lauretis 1987), the narrations of my female participants indicate that gender is not always explicitly relevant to their day-to-day feelings and experiences (Ang 1995: 124) and that, as film viewers, they most certainly do not 'live in the prison house of gender' (Ang and Hermes 1991: 320). My data indicates instead that where both male and female participants' investments in the films may be narcissistic in nature, they are also sometimes gender neutral (Ang 1995: 124).

It is also clear from my interview data that, whilst a narcissistic 'preoccupation with self' (Giddens 1991: 170) does constitute a meaningful element of my participants' readings of the films, this does not inevitably amount to a collapse or erosion of self/other boundaries in the viewing

⁵ See Chapter 7 (pages 314-316) where, in light of this observation, I critically evaluate the relative lack of emphasis given to questions of sexuality in my analysis and interpretation of interview data.

experience, nor does it necessarily *facilitate* the process of cinematic investment. On the contrary (especially for Darren and Mandy, who are discussed in this chapter) self-primacy actually functions sometimes to *restrict* the extent to which such investments are possible. There are indications here, then, of a “struggle” inherent in my participants’ readings of Wuornos: one that is partly linked to the disconcertingly unstable and ‘ineradicably paradoxical’ (Cohen 2007: 33) nature of narcissism itself. The notion of (unconscious) “struggle” as it pertains to my participants’ film-viewing experiences will be developed further throughout this chapter, where I explore this in relation to self/other boundaries and, in Chapter 6, I will consider how participants struggle with the tensions between the active and passive viewing positions that are available to them.

As I have already emphasised, this project is approached reflexively, that is, in acknowledgement of the extent to which my own emotions - as well as my unconscious conflicts and anxieties - bear significantly upon my work as a researcher (Jervis 2009, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, Nicholls 2009). As such, it is important to reflect upon the ideas and assumptions (conscious and unconscious) that I bring to the process of data interpretation (Mauthner and Doucet 2003: 147-418, Devine and Heath 1999), not only ‘in the here and now’ (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 17), but also in relation to my own personal history (2009: 17, Finlay 2002: 210). In the context of this particular chapter, it seems likely that the selection, analysis and interpretation of interview data that I make are motivated by some of the powerful cinematic investments that I have personally experienced. One such experience relates to my first viewing, aged 17, of *Fatal Attraction* (1987). Whilst watching the

film, I became increasingly uncomfortable with my realisation that I seemed to have engaged most closely with (and had powerfully empathic feelings towards) the “wrong” character: Alex Forrest/ Glenn Close. It was clear to me that, as a spectator, this affective response amounted to a violent transgression of the film’s preferred readings (e.g. Hall 1980), such that I felt disturbed by and, moreover, ashamed of it. Sensing the probable inadequacy of any discursive account (Hills 2002: 43) that I might offer of this unsettling spectatorial investment, I chose not to share my feelings with anyone at all, and continued to struggle privately with the guilt and shame that I had experienced. It is therefore perhaps significant that the participants chosen for inclusion in this chapter - and the data interpretations that I make - are thematically organised around a key issue, i.e. the conflicting and problematic filmic investments observable in their accounts.

It can certainly be argued that all of my participants’ responses could usefully be theorised in terms of self-primacy (indeed, my data shows that all participants do read the films through their own selves), and yet the primary focus of the discussion provided here is the “struggle” inherent in the spectatorial investments described by the participants included in this chapter. Emphasis is also given to the striking diversity of the readings that they make. According to Mautner and Doucet, ‘the benefit of hindsight can deepen [the] understanding of *what* is influencing our knowledge production and *how* this is occurring’ (2003: 419). With this in mind, I suggest that my decision to emphasise these specific themes and to present these particular data extracts (Devine and Heath 1999: 418) is partly motivated by my desire for knowledge (Walkerdine 1986: 190) and mastery (Shacklock and Smyth

1998: 53) as an academic researcher, and a film-viewing subject (Hills 2005b: 77). It is also motivated, however, by my own biographical “lived” film-viewing experiences, especially, perhaps, the event to which I have referred in this section. In the sections that follow, I discuss the various kinds of investments made by four more of my participants, beginning here with Darren.

Restricted, Limited, or “Prevented” Investments

Darren is 38 years old, educated to CSE level and works as a Contracts Supervisor for a national car parking company. He has a good relationship with his family, is single, and still lives at home with his parents. Darren served two months in prison in 1996 for violent assault.

It can be observed that, for certain participants, narcissism seems to operate *explicitly* in their readings of the films, such that it is manifest even at a discursive level. Darren’s structuring of his narrations in the examples below is illustrative of this: ‘my sort of outlook on a normal family’ (4: 1824); ‘the way I see it’ (4: 2025-2026); ‘the way I look at it’ (4: 2028); ‘again from obviously my perspective’ (4: 2033-2034).

He quite literally reads Wuornos through his own self, thus:

the weird little thing I always do... when they said she was killed on such and such a date the minute I know the dates I start thinking to myself what was I doing back then... thinking when I was doing that all this was going on (3: 149-162).

Darren is apparently consciously aware of this as a process over which he has at least some control:

that's probably the only real thing that (.) goes through my mind... the rest of the time I just sit there and just... y'know absorb it a bit and just enjoy it for what it is (3: 164-173).

Whilst he seems to read the films by 'asking only "what this means to me"' (Giddens 1991: 170), however, the process appears to limit rather than enhance Darren's engagement with Wuornos. This is apparent not only in the narrative framing of his responses: 'from what I could gather' (4: 1848); 'from what I could... take on of it' (3: 30), but also in his more general reluctance - or inability - to engage closely with Wuornos at all, avoiding the use of her name altogether in his narrations, and merely referring to her as 'she', 'the woman' (3: 102) or 'this woman' (3: 103, 105). Had I included Darren in the discussion of gender that I provide in Chapter 4, this discursive tendency might perhaps have been linked to the wider difficulties that Darren seems to experience in terms of relating to female others and identifying with femininity: a theme that recurs frequently throughout his life-story narrative. Interestingly, then, whilst Darren does seem to recognise the cultural and ideological significance of desire, acknowledging it as an important axis of cinematic investment, he is nevertheless careful to avoid constructing *himself* as a desiring subject, by projecting this quality onto other viewers instead, and effectively disowning it:

I dunno whether they just used... Christina Ricci as a sort of um someone who the audience could... y'know get to like or y'know (.) or um connect with... on a ... sort of more (.) um (.) I'd say fanciable or sexier way (3: 112-115).

It is significant that Darren not only reads film texts (more generally) through his own self, but also reads his own life through situations and feelings that he has already experienced and internalised as a film viewer: a process that enables him to (re)focus certain events and experiences encountered in his actual day-to-day life. In this respect, Darren is perhaps using the films - like Angela in Chapter 4 and Daniel in Chapter 6 - as 'symbolic resources' (Zittoun 2006: xiii).⁶

there'll be some films that I'll watch... where... something will happen uh in my life... [I'll be] stuck at a rut or whatever and go oh what do I go from here but then I can think back to a film I've watched and there was like a situation that's happened in that film that's given me the idea to think oh I know what to do here and then work my way out of it (4: 2275-2284).

This process appears to operate more consciously for Darren than it does for Angela and Daniel, such that he is able to use the cinematic investments that he has previously fostered elsewhere in order to select from a wider range of subject positions which he recognises as available to him in a given situation. Indeed, for Darren, this can apparently be mobilised in a particular context, or under specific conditions or circumstances:

there are things y'know out there that I've picked up the⁷ long the way that I may have forgotten I may just remember accidentally that help me (.) better myself (4: 2350-2352).

⁶ On pages 253-254, I reflect upon my own use of film texts as symbolic resources. A more detailed discussion of the concept is also provided in Chapter 6 (pages 275-276), in relation to Daniel.

⁷ See my note on page 17: the grammatical content of all data extracts is reproduced verbatim from the original transcripts throughout these main chapters, inclusive of participants' mispronunciations, etc.

Nevertheless, as I also show in Chapters 4 and 6, it is not necessarily participants' *conscious* experiences of significant personal or biographical events that provide the key motivations for their investment in the films. On the contrary, it is often their unconscious anxieties (and the complex defence mechanisms that they have developed to manage these), alongside their own well-established patterns of object-relating, that motivate their cinematic investments most powerfully. For instance, themes of humiliation, shame, and the threat of uncontrollable rage recur persistently throughout Darren's personal narrative. It is worth noting that these affects are often associated with narcissistic identities (e.g. Morrison 1989, Rhodewalt and Sorrow 2003, Twenge and Campbell 2003) and are perhaps even an inevitable consequence of our subjection within contemporary society (Lasch 1979: 11).

The following examples illustrate how such affective issues became significant for Darren during his childhood:

[On being doused in water from a fire hose by the school bully]... I was soaked through to the skin and um I remember him stood there laughing and a lot of other people with all of my class mates laughing (.) and of course I got just really embarrassed and all upset and whatever (1.0) didn't burst into tears or anything but I was just like you know (.) humiliation and all that... it basically stayed with me a lot of stuff like that just stayed with me I just built it up and built it up (1: 396-403).

The extract below is perhaps especially relevant in this respect:

D: ... something had happened [during a games lesson] and there was the old humiliation thing again... and it just wound me right up and I just I- I just had enough I was just like (.) boiling point I was y'know he was gonna get it whatever it was... I just snapped (.) I just ran (.) as fast as I could (.) just basically got into him like in a rugby tackle and just smashed him straight into the wall bars

R: mmm

D: um and he just fell t- well he just fell to the bloody floor like a sack of shit then and just uh he started crying he was all like y'know (.) and um I just sort of like just stood up then and (.) just sort of like looked at him y'know (.) with a sort of yeah y'know sort of that's what you get for picking with m- picking on me type of thing

R: mmm

D: um course I was reprimanded by the school teachers given the dap and all that like (.) um but uh (.) from that day onwards then it was like a few of the boys kind of went (.) oh (.) he's not so s- not so soft after all whatever y'know and uh (.) and so I ki- they kind of accepted me on another level then or some of the bullies did anyway (1: 427-458).

These are issues with which Darren continues to struggle in his everyday (adult) life:

I did get picked on a bit here and there um uh and humiliated a lot with my size⁸ um (.) and that has that has continued (.) on and off to d- certain degree (.) to this day... y'know just one thing you'll always you know just have to deal with (1: 408-412).

During our final interview session, I therefore pursued this⁹:

⁸ Darren's height is 6'10" and, even as a child, he was always much taller than others in his age group.

⁹ See Chapter 3 (pages 126-128), where I explain (and provide a rationale for) the questioning technique that I used in the fourth interview sessions carried out with participants.

R: ... you said that um as a boy you had a habit of not telling people about things um and you say that you still bottle stuff up... that you don't release it and you don't let it out um and you described in the interview how sometimes when you get really angry thoughts you calm down because you know what'll happen if you do something... can you tell a bit more about how these feelings are for you

D: (3.0) um (2.0) I mean a- well when I get 'em um (.) I just I dunno um (2.0) they (2.0) um (2.0) I guess it- y'know I just like sort of it- it depends on what it is I mean if someone- like say guys in work are winding me up (.) um and I just feel really uh (.) y'know my initial thoughts are just y'know I just get really angry and um (.) um I dunno I guess I y'know I just I think about (1.0) um... again it all depends on the situ- I just think of (.) revenge uh how can I really hurt 'em now and what would I- oh I've looked at y'know whether it be beat 'em up or humiliate them big time... again i- it all depends on what has wound me up or y'know got me mad um and i- i- the- the feelings are just y'know rage anger y'know um um (.) and even maybe a bit of frustration for thinking that (.) maybe I could have done things to prevent getting to that point in the first place (4: 243-273).

It is interesting that the carefully "controlled" self-image constructed here by Darren is so 'dynamically linked' (Klein 1992) to others' opinions of him. Understood in narcissistic terms, this can perhaps be read as an internalisation of structural constraints (Lasch 1979: 11), given that 'the ways in which we come to see ourselves... profoundly affect the way we view and interact with others' (Klein 1992) and vice versa. As a narcissistically motivated subject, maintaining an 'integrated, stable, positive self-representation' (Morrison 1989: 45) is clearly felt to be important for Darren, and he seeks to achieve this through a set of 'self-regulatory strategies that collectively may be termed "self-solicitation"' (Rhodewalt and Sorrow 2003: 531). Darren's investment in this stable, controlled subject position might

also have been theorised as a gendered one: see, for example, my discussion of Jim and Denise (Chapter 4) and Daniel (Chapter 6). Darren's own objectives here are twofold: to produce evidence that he is who he desires to be (2003: 531) and to manipulate others to view him as he hopes to be seen (2003: 532): the latter accomplishing the former. According to Lasch, '[n]otwithstanding his occasional illusions of omnipotence [the contemporary narcissistic subject] depends on others to validate his self-esteem' (1979: 10), and this is certainly a recurring pattern throughout Darren's narrations.

So, given the extent to which the cycle of embarrassment-humiliation-anger/rage and a need for self-control are apparently consciously significant for Darren, this might be expected to bear considerably upon his film readings. However, whilst such issues are arguably shown to be enormously relevant to Wuornos herself in both *Monster* and the documentaries, they are in fact largely absent from Darren's account of his thoughts and feelings about the films. Similarly, despite narrating at length and in exhaustive detail during Interviews 1 and 2 about having spent two months in prison for violent assault, Darren makes no mention of this "lived" experience (Skeggs 1997) *at all* during his initial responses to the films, which would seem to challenge some existing cultural studies accounts of audience identification based on such dynamics (e.g. Jermyn 2006, Cavender, Bond-Maupin and Jurik 1999). It is only later in Interview 4, when Darren is asked to elaborate on his comment that Wuornos 'just seemed to think that she was not so much invincible but she could just get away with [the murders]' (3: 44-47) that he relates this to his own criminal experience. Significantly, though, at this point,

Darren focuses not on his own actual criminal behaviour, but instead (and exclusively) upon what he tried to *forget or hide* at the time:

I can probably attribute that to the same sort of thing that I experienced... I had committed a crime but... because I wasn't known... it went for a couple of weeks or months without me being found out... initially there's the panic and the fear and oh God someone's gonna know... but then it just sort of continues then where (.) it's a- y'know literally kind of forgotten or whatever and it's just put into the back of your mind and... you feel (.) um wouldn't say invincible but... it's like a weight's been lifted off your shoulders... so I can see where she was coming from with that (4: 2094-2108).

Narcissism therefore seems to enable a defensive strategy of filmic investment for Darren, allowing him to disavow those parts of himself felt to be unreliable and/or threatening (Lubbe 2011: 27) by externalising them and projecting them onto Wuornos, where they can be more adequately controlled. In doing so, he also draws a clear distinction between criminal actions and criminal agency, recognising that whilst he had himself 'done something that was bad' (4: 2115), he 'didn't feel the need to continue' (4: 2120), in contrast to Wuornos' more pathological 'drive to continue' (4: 2113, 2124).

As a neuroseptic (Sandvoss 2005: 26) character, Wuornos makes it possible for Darren to (re)create in her two available versions of his own self¹⁰. One which he has disavowed - achieved by splitting off of his criminal agency - and another which he desires to be (Rhodewalt and Sorrow 2003:

¹⁰ See also my discussion of Harry in Chapter 6 (pages 282-291), who constructs two different "versions" of Wuornos in his readings of the films. Here, I argue that this corresponds with the discourse of "split self" in which he is himself biographically invested.

531), that is, the self that “got away with it”. There is also an important element of omnipotent phantasy (Giddens 1991: 172) in Darren’s conviction that:

[if] someone in her position or say someone in my position was put in exactly the same circumstances the end result would (.) realistically be different... I’d be able to look at the situation from many different angles... and be able to think of several different outcomes (4: 1917-1925).

His unconscious anxieties (about his capacity for self-deception) cannot, however, be absolutely eliminated:

[Wuornos] got under the sort of false impression that she was... her genuine impression was she could get away with it (4: 2092-2093).

Theorised in terms of narcissism, then, Darren seems to make sense of Wuornos’ actions and experiences in his conscious readings of the films by re-framing them in order to reassure himself that they are “like” his own, perhaps providing a sense of familiarity and security. Nevertheless, whilst he seems to (re)create or recognise in Wuornos certain aspects, images or versions of his own self, his investment in what might be described as a narcissistic viewing position actually *prevents* him from engaging closely with her. This is because he is able to engage only with those parts of himself he feels to be non-threatening: parts which, for Darren, are characterised by self-control and hidden or forgotten criminal behaviour. Meanwhile, the aspects of Darren’s identity which cause him anxiety and conflict - a potentially uncontrollable temper and the memory of his own criminal actions - are (on a conscious level) unrecognised in Wuornos altogether. Because

these elements of self are unconsciously felt to be threatening, Darren's "dis-investment" from her functions as a defensive process of disavowal.

In the following section, I introduce Mandy, and will discuss the ways in which restricted or limited strategies of investment are also relevant to her. I will show, however, that these are made manifest in her construction of a reading position that is very different to Darren's, because Mandy does not merely read Wuornos through her own self. Instead, it is apparent that, at times, her identity becomes almost "interchangeable" with Wuornos'.

Contested and Interchangeable Investments

Mandy is 42 years old and educated to CSE level: she is a housewife and works as a helper at a local primary school. She has been married (to Simon) for 22 years and they have three sons. Mandy's Mum died very suddenly when Mandy was aged 15: her Dad has since remarried, and relations with him and his new wife are still troubled. Simon was almost killed in a road accident in 1992, but has since made a full recovery.

Consideration will be given in this section to the ways in which, like Darren, Mandy's self-primacy seems to prevent close engagement with Wuornos in her readings of the films. I observe, firstly, that during her third interview - when asked to narrate freely about her initial responses to the films - Mandy's account is virtually devoid of any "subjective" or personal investment, and is notable for its sense of affective distance or detachment. Here, Mandy can do no more than 'sympathise with' (3: 50, 53) Wuornos' compulsion to kill in self-defence. She also takes up a "mistrustful" viewing position in relation to her:

if [Wuornos] genuinely was raped and abused... I can see why she did the defensive went for the defensive (3: 69-70).

There is ostensibly very little in the way of any explicit self-primacy in Mandy's first readings of Wuornos, then: indeed, her own "self" seems largely absent here. Reflecting upon this as a part of the whole data (Mandy's *gestalt*), however, it can be interpreted as indicative of a repressed narcissism, manifest in her repeated descriptions of Wuornos' experiences and actions as 'obvious' (3: 6, 13, 28, 31, 37, 41, 44, 50, 76, 79). Some examples follow (my italics added for emphasis):

obviously um she had a- a very (.) disturbing (.) childhood which (.)
um *obviously* added to her mens- mental instability (3: 3-6)

it was *obvious* from the beginning that she was uh (.) uh (.) not
counselled very well... she *obviously* needed mor- more help from
genuine people (3: 31-37).

By framing these issues as objective "truths", and therefore transparent to *all* viewers, Mandy is able to disavow her own subjective capacity (and, by extension, any personal responsibility)¹¹ for meaning-making in her readings of the films, effectively removing her own narcissistic "self" from the process. Interestingly, this stands in dramatic contrast to Mandy's responses in Interview 4 when, asked to elaborate upon these initial thoughts and feelings, her narrations are framed very differently:

going by my own experiences (4: 2109)

¹¹ Similar disavowals of responsibility for meaning-making are observed in relation to Daniel: see my discussion in Chapter 6 (pages 267-281).

I can sympathise... because I've been there myself (4: 2226-2229)

[re bad counselling] I've been there ((laughing)) as well with Simon (4: 2372).

Whilst there are clear similarities here with the discursive framing of Darren's account (discussed on pages 210-211), it becomes evident that Mandy is not only reading *Wuornos* *through* her own self, but that she has taken up a viewing position from which her subjectivity is virtually "interchangeable" with *Wuornos*'. Indeed, Mandy uses my questions throughout Interview 4 as a prompt to re-frame or re-orient her narrations back onto her own personal (biographical) experiences. This can perhaps be understood as a narcissistic pattern of object-relating, which is often characterised by a continual struggle over the tension between dependency and autonomy (Klein 1992), and which can serve to hinder intersubjective interactions (Giddens 1991: 179). It is also a process reminiscent of the 'visiting self' (Munt 1998: 4) which, according to Munt, 'leans into the experience of others' (1998: 4), producing a 'sense of belonging, a sense of "we"' (1998: 4). This latter concept is useful here in enabling a more nuanced understanding of the underlying tensions and conflicts inherent in all self/other relations and, specifically, the struggles experienced by my participants as a necessary part of their investments - or dis-investments - in the films and their characters. For Mandy, then, her story 'interactively' (Munt 1998: 5) becomes *Wuornos*' and vice versa, and her identity is (re)constructed in the process. Some further examples follow. Having asked Mandy to elaborate on her previous comment that *Wuornos*' disturbing childhood (obviously) created family grudges:

I can sympathise... I mean like I say being fifteen I was that bit older so I had (.) a certain amount of stibi- stability um till I was fifteen (4: 2027-2031).

This pattern recurs continually:

[in relation to Wuornos' prostitution] it's your comfort zone isn't it... I have my own comfort zones as well (4: 2125-2134)

[Wuornos'] whole life was a mess though wasn't it from very early on... we're back to me own family here my- with my brother finding my Mum dead at six (4: 2318).

Mandy's engagement with Wuornos cannot be adequately explained, then, in terms of mirroring or self-reflection (Sandvoss 2005, McKinley 1997), or as indicative of a straightforward closing down of the space between self and other. Where Darren reads (some of) Wuornos' experiences as similar to and/or comparable with his, Mandy effectively replaces them with her own, literally, and continually, (re)inserting herself into Wuornos' narrative, investing her own self as if it were an other (Parker 1997: 181), (and vice versa). For Mandy, however, this is not motivated by desire; nor is it a case of finding an (ideal) image of herself (1997: 218) in Wuornos. Her capacity for investment in the film is therefore perhaps more a question of (re)creating "sameness" than it is a recognition of it: a strategy which enables Mandy to defend herself against the perceived threat of disintegration/fragmentation (Alford 1988: 30) in her spectatorial investment by exchanging places with - instead of merely engaging with - Wuornos.

Darren, meanwhile, seems to "synchronise" himself with Wuornos:

I just... go what was I doing back then and thinking oh yeah match- y'know sort of matching it up thinking while this was going on I was doing this (4: 2252-2254).

Whilst there is a sense of 'immediacy' (Sandvoss 2005: 163) apparent in Darren and Mandy's viewing experiences, it is important to emphasise that both involve a *struggle* to negotiate the extent to which Wuornos - as (criminal) Other - becomes 'an integral part of their identity and vision of self' (2005: 163, Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 2). This is indicative of the inherently ambiguous and paradoxical nature of narcissistic identification: a process described by Cohen as 'a structure of enclosure conditioned by the presence of the other' (Cohen 2007: 33), which always necessarily involves a struggle (rather than an opposition) between 'monadic self-enclosure and dyadic relatedness' (2007: 33). Such dynamics are manifest particularly in Mandy's continual drawing of explicit parallels and contrasts between herself and Wuornos (McKinley 1997: 100). Her engagement with Wuornos thus constitutes not merely a challenging of boundaries between internal and external realities (Sandvoss 2005: 86, Harrington and Bielby 1995: 133), but also a continual manipulation of these: particularly given that she often constructs Wuornos as "worse-off" than she feels herself to be. Here, then, cinematic investment works for Mandy to allow the integration of difference, preserving - and not assimilating - different subject positions (Benjamin 1995: 16) and producing a distance which is 'desirable both as something to overcome *and* as something to maintain' (Stacey 1994: 175, my italics).

It can perhaps therefore be argued that both Darren and Mandy read Wuornos in neutrosemic terms, in other words, that her 'actual signification

value' (Scodari 2007: 52) as a character is neutralised by their 'existing schemes of perception' (Sandvoss 2005, Scodari 2007: 52). It is interesting to note, however, the extent to which the narcissistic meaning-making processes that they use are also *themselves* projected onto Wuornos. For Darren, then:

obviously because of the way her life has um turned around...
[Wuornos] could only make limited choices she could only see from a certain point of view (4: 1978-1982)

[because of her experiences with violent men] 'she would only look upon men from (.) that point of view (4: 2046-2047)

the film is obviously trying to get you into her mind-set of how she perceived life (4: 2140-2141).

Certainly, neither Darren nor Mandy seem to "identify" with Wuornos in the conventional or 'commonsense' (Stacey 1994: 130) way. Their readings are instead characterised by a *lack* of engagement with her, produced largely by a re-framing of Wuornos' experiences in terms of (or as versions of) their own, such that she is 'fundamentally structured through their own beliefs' (Sandvoss 2005: 104, Brooker 2002). This produces a dynamic and complex system of interaction: a "negotiation" of sameness and difference between reader and character, perhaps, in which Wuornos' external object qualities do not simply 'disappear' (Sandvoss 2005: 100): nor is she erased, or rendered completely meaningless through the devouring and transformational process of identification (Sennett 1977: 325). In contrast to Freudian and Lacanian based models of viewer identification as a 'static

rather than dynamic' (Chabot Davis 2003: 6) process¹², then, (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Doane 1987), my interview data shows that participants' spectatorial investments do not always involve 'turning the other into the same, thereby erasing difference' (Chabot Davis 2003: 8). Rather, their investments in the narcissistic film-viewing positions described here are in fact powerfully ambivalent, because they always necessarily involve - and retain - an 'image of the other' (Stacey 1994: 30). This is also the case for Beccy, who is introduced below, and whose biographical investment in a discourse of a "non-feeling" self renders her engagement with Wuornos similarly problematic.

Beccy is 20 years old, and is a full-time undergraduate Language and Communications student. Her Mum died when Beccy was 7 years old, and her Dad has since remarried. Despite some initial difficulties, family relationships are now fairly good. Beccy separated from her first long-term boyfriend during the period of our interview sessions.

In the examples that follow, Beccy takes up a characteristically narcissistic identity position in which 'those states of mind in which emotional investment in anybody or anything outside the self appear[...] to have been withdrawn' (Britton 1998: 170). As with Darren, this is manifest even at a discursive level, in that she does not once use Wuornos' name in her narrations, referring instead to 'her' (e.g. 3: 9,10, 24, 32...) and using the pronoun 'she' (e.g. 3: 9, 14, 24, 34). Beccy repeatedly constructs herself as cynical and non-empathic, if not insensitive (Mischel and Morf 2003: 35). This is evident throughout her personal narrative, in which affective and emotional issues

¹² See also page 160, where I consider critiques provided by Layton (2004) and Kuhn (2009) of "classically" oriented psychoanalytic film studies.

are carefully avoided, and where she describes having only a limited capacity for “feeling”, and finding it difficult to engage emotionally with others: qualities typically associated with the identity positions made structurally available within the culture of narcissism (Lasch 1979: 11):

I think it’s harder to feel strongly or... feel affected by things unless I have a closer link to whatever it is that’s happened (4: 360-364).

She is also strikingly self-reflexive about this:

I’m not the sort of person that really sort of tries to take other peoples’ feelings into account’ (4: 930-933)

I was reading recently [that] you can only sort of feel for one or two people really... humans only have the capacity to feel for a few people or something like that... so it makes me feel a little bit better (4: 388-398).

Nevertheless, Beccy’s narrations reveal an underlying distrust of “feelings” more generally, and point towards some significant unconscious anxieties about vulnerability and insecurity: affects typically linked to narcissism (Mischel and Morf 2003: 35). She thus describes how:

[my ex-boyfriend’s] emotional neediness pushed me away a bit... anyone can be emotionally ((laughs)) needy um or (.) I dunno (.) insecure... I tend to think of it in the negatives... both things are a negative obviously but needy sounds worse (4: 855-870).

There is also perhaps a notion of narcissistic *agency* here:

my opinion towards insecurities is to act unfeeling towards it or be unfeeling towards them... be cold towards them or callous (4: 874-890).

She says:

if [insecurities are] attacked enough then they'll go away... I felt that if I gave them air then they would just get worse and then it becomes something you have to talk about so... if you pretend they're not there... (4: 881-900).

Beccy considers the extent to which her “unfeeling” self is culturally and ideologically produced, by making a correlation between her own individual lack of emotion and wider discourses of media-related desensitisation:

[I've] just realised how de-sensitised we've become [to media reports of violent crime] (4: 1897).

Later, she also says (in relation to violent crime):

you're so bombarded with all these horrible things that are happening people that are going through so much then... it's not really possible to feel for all of them... so it just becomes words and... not quite real maybe (4: 1939-1949).

Beccy demonstrates an awareness here of her subjection to the 'alternating current of centrifugal and centripetal forces' (Hall, Winlow et al 2008: 166) inherent in narcissistic consumer culture, which serves perhaps to problematise her capacities as an autonomous “feeling” agent (Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991). Conventional accounts of film/viewer identification can also perhaps be challenged in this respect, since Beccy's reading of the films does not seem to rest upon processes of reflection, mirroring or

(mis)recognition of her own “unfeeling/de-sensitised” subjectivity. Rather, her ability to relate to Wuornos is tempered by her own unconscious anxieties (Symington 1993: 100) about these issues, such that she engages with the actual *processes* which function to foreclose the possibility of her emotional “investment” in Wuornos in the first place.

Similarly, in her biographical narrations, Beccy defends against the perceived threat of close identification with others by continually (re)constructing strict boundaries around her own self. As with Darren, this can be socio-culturally interpreted as a consequence of Beccy’s internalisation of structural and ideological constraints which, according to Lasch, involve an ethic of self-preservation and psychical survival (1979: 51), as well as a need to erect ‘strong barriers against strong emotion’ (1979: 11). Psychoanalytically speaking, meanwhile - and from a Kleinian perspective - narcissism is defined as a defence against unconscious aggression¹³ (Chessick 1985: 50/51), and the strictly controlled “*non-feeling*” self that Beccy constructs for herself might certainly be understood in these terms. Nevertheless, it can be observed here that her narcissistic phantasies not only occupy an internal, psychic space, but also have a material effect (Frosh 2003) upon her film-viewing experience by preventing her from engaging closely with Wuornos.

In this chapter thus far, I have shown how the film-viewing experiences described by Darren, Mandy and Beccy can be theorised using the concept of narcissism. Consideration has been given to the notion of (narcissistic)

¹³ For an alternative interpretation of aggressive affect, see my discussion of Denise (Chapter 4, pages 173-180), where this is theorised psychoanalytically in terms of gender and, specifically, envy and masochism.

identification as inherently conflicted and sometimes paradoxical, and to how it produces a “struggle” between self and other, which becomes manifest in these participants’ investments in the films. This has been explored from a psychosocial perspective, emphasising how such investments are motivated not only by participants’ own biographical experiences (and their individual phantasies and anxieties), but also by their *cultural ideologies of self*. Where the spectatorial engagements made by these three particular participants share themes of restricted, conflicted and emotionally avoidant investment, however, important contrasts can be drawn with the more intensely affective patterns of object-relating demonstrated by others. A fuller discussion of these latter processes is developed in the following section, in which I will introduce Susie, and will explore the affective and ambivalent investments that she makes in relation to the three films.

Affective and Ambivalent Investments

Susie is 29 years old, lives in Swansea where she works as a domestic cleaner, and is taking an Open University degree in Geology. She is a lesbian, and lives with her partner (Cathy) of eight years.

Susie’s engagement with *Wuornos* is characterised from the start by its explicitly affective nature. As with my other participants, the discursive framing of her responses is important and here, she immediately free-associates to issues of “feeling” in her first narrations about the films:

my feelings today were different than um (.) last time I watched [the films] (3: 3-4).

This specific example is also important because it indicates that, for my participants, there is no *one* single or stable reading or “decoding” of the film texts, as is suggested in semiotically oriented approaches to audience studies (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980). Moreover, my data shows that meaning is not created conclusively in the initial viewing encounter (the film screenings), but continues to develop, shift and change diachronically: and sometimes quite dramatically. Susie, for instance, notes how in her most recent viewing of *Monster*:

the first time... I think I... was quite warm to her um but I still had this complete confusion (3: 4-8).

Darren, meanwhile, reflecting retrospectively upon his initial responses, says:

I’m thinking my choice of the wor- the word weird [to describe Wuornos’ actions] is probably wrong now (4: 2138-2139).

The issue of temporality within film readership tends to be somewhat underemphasised in much existing audience research¹⁴, and the experiences described here by Susie and Darren can perhaps be usefully understood by drawing upon Huppert’s psychoanalytically informed notion of ‘allegorical space’ (Huppert 2009: 139) that is, ‘the time between observation, reaction and then understanding’ (2009: 139) in which participants begin to make sense of their own subjective film viewing experiences. In Susie’s case, certainly, there is much evidence of a continued (re)creation of meaning, especially in her struggle to “understand”

¹⁴ See also my discussion of these issues in Chapter 7 (pages 312-314), in which I reflect further upon this point.

Wuornos (3: 73, 77, 90; 4: 941, 962, 988, 1007, 1037, 1044). Importantly, perhaps, Susie is also reflexive about the inconstancy of her own responses:

I wonder if I was a bit (0.5) angry at myself for warming to her
(4: 751-752)

that's why it was con- conflicting (4: 799).

Theorised in terms of narcissism, Susie engages most powerfully with Wuornos by reading her as, like herself, fragile and emotionally conflicted:

[Wuornos] thought they were in it together and that Tye... loved her as much as she loved her and would act the same and support her and then all of a sudden she did this thing... you couldn't get much more betrayal than that... I would act like that if I was in that situation it just made me really sad (4: 908-930)

she was on her own quite a lot and didn't really get emotional with anybody... didn't have any friends (4: 965-971).

There is also a sense in which Susie experiences her own inner, psychical self as an autonomous agent, in order to manage these difficult emotions as they are produced in her engagements with the films. For example (my italics added):

I can't imagine *my personality* doing that (3: 11)

my mind is just constantly thinking do I like her do I hate her... (3: 86-87).

The phantasies fostered by Susie's "oversensitive" self enable her to invest deeply in Wuornos' emotional experiences, then, such that she is able to

share - and feel - them (van Beneden 1998) but, crucially, *only as if they were her own*:

[I've put myself in that film]... so I'm quite emotional for them (.) uh well for me (4: 1095).

Thus Susie's self-image is dynamically linked to the image of Wuornos, that is, the way she has come to see herself bears significantly upon the way in which she views and relates to others (Klein 1992) and therefore, by extension, upon her investment in the film texts:

[I'm] just up and down with emotions and constantly relating it to my life (3: 97-100).

The conflicted and unstable nature of Susie's film readings can be explained partly in terms of her biographical investment in a discourse of fragility, within which she experiences her own emotions as intense and overwhelming. In contrast to Beccy (discussed on pages 225-229), who demonstrates rigorous unconscious control over her affective "self" and tends to objectify her emotions, Susie is very much subject to hers and, further, she seems to be consciously aware of this. For instance:

I look up to [men] slightly because I envy the way that they can generally control their emotions... I find that really difficult (2: 158-161)

[on mildly stressful everyday situations] I don't understand where it comes from... I just become really tearful straight away and it's just so alien to me the thought of that not happening... I don't understand how I can get to that point (4: 592-605)

I need to get stronger emotionally (94: 622-625).

It becomes evident that cultural ideologies of “appropriate” (gendered) appearances and behaviour (and the extent to which she herself transgresses those norms) are enormously significant for Susie, not least via her admission that: ‘I’m conscious of what people think of me’ (2: 100). As such, Susie’s personal investment in this discourse of fragility, whilst not reducible to questions of gender and sexuality, is at least partly motivated by her unconscious anxieties about “butchness”: a theme which recurs throughout her narrations, for example:

I consciously always think about not being butch (2: 75)

it’s really important for me to be feminine (2: 96-97)

I just have this horrible feeling towards the thought of looking manly (4: 474-477)

I’ve never had any really butch friends... p’raps I’ve stopped myself from being their friend... (4: 480-488).

This too can be theorised in terms of narcissism, especially as a manifestation of the ideologically rooted tension between self-satisfaction and hyper self-consciousness which, Douglas (1995) suggests, infiltrates our everyday lives. Here, Susie carefully takes up a socially “acceptable” subject position: one that is, in part, constructed in response to the homophobic stereotyping of butch lesbian women (Mason 2002, Halberstam 1998) of which she is powerfully aware. Munt and Smyth suggest that butch/femme designations constitute a ‘powerful personal code of behaviour’ (1998: 192) for lesbian women, and this is clearly the case for Susie:

R: =um you described how you consciously always think about not being butch... and you also said that it's really important for you to be feminine and I just wondered if you could tell me a bit more about how those sorts of things are important for you

S: yeah (.) I don't know I don't know why I think (.) um (1.0) I don't know why it's such a big thing and I even (.) I usually go along with um (.) um ((smiling)) what society wants like there's a pr- society p'raps would like (.) th- they would y'know if you looked butch then they'd be like oh th- you're a lesbian (4: 421-433)

um (.) I don't know I don't know and I think I wonder whether it's something that's you just like y'know how you're kind of you're born and you ei- you like a man or you like a woman and p'raps you're born um (.) also w- wanting (0.5) to um appear as a certain (.) like y'know have a certain appearance (4: 451-454).

Given that, like Colin in Chapter 4, gender and sexuality are clearly elements that are salient in relation to Susie's sense of self¹⁵, it is surprising that these issues do *not* figure highly in her readings of Wuornos. Whilst she does seem to engage on a personal level with the relationship between Wuornos and Tyra, for example, there are no explicit references to their lesbian sexuality:

when I actually saw her crying and um at the thought of this woman who she thought really supported her (.) so that really made me like oh and I felt a bit (.) um I understood (3: 67-73)

¹⁵ In Chapter 7 (pages 314-316), I note that relatively little emphasis has been given to questions of sexuality throughout the project, especially in relation to those participants who self-identify as heterosexual, and make a critical evaluation of this.

if that was me and the woman was Cathy (.) y- the woman who wasn't nice to her um (.) 'cause I have Cathy and this um I- I- I have a- there's this um (.) person who (.) I- I know what- I think I know what um she's like and um ((smiling)) and to me she's perfect (4: 888-892).

Moreover, Susie makes no mention whatsoever (in any of her responses) to Wuornos' butch appearance: and this is especially interesting given the extent to which other participants do tend to make much of this. For Alice (Chapter 6), then:

[Wuornos] didn't look like... your idea of a prostitute... she did look very butch... she looked sort- sort of manly (3: 18-20)

she was a... very plain looking person if not a masculine looking person (4: 1787-1790).

Daniel (in Chapter 6), meanwhile, observes that:

the real [Tyra] (.) was... y'know butch lesbian... she was more of a stereotype... [but in *Monster*] Lee was (.) much more... the butch one (3: 143-158).

Similarly, Harry (in Chapter 6) describes Wuornos as:

... very masculine in the way she looked the way she dressed and the way she acted ... [she was a] female serial killer with lots of male traits (3: 166-173).

Susie's unconscious anxieties about her own (latent, threatening) "butch" self are thus effectively "forgotten" in her readings of Wuornos, since to recognise these qualities in Wuornos would be to recognise them in *herself*. This is partly a consequence, perhaps, of the multiple and fractured axes of identity

involved in the film-viewer relationship, as well as the complex psychological and ideological frameworks within which film readings are made meaningful. Further, there are clearly conscious and unconscious processes at work here, and it is interesting that my participants' investments (and/or dis-investments) in the films are often complicated by a '*conscious negotiation between self and other*' (Chabot Davis 2003: 6, my italics), that is (re)produced in their narrative accounts. As Chabot Davis correctly observes, '[i]t is one thing to experience an identification with the other in an unconscious fantasy space, and quite another to admit to such an identification... in public space' (2003: 7). Indeed, as I have explained in Chapter 3, my methodological approach to the data analysis and interpretation undertaken throughout the project calls for careful consideration of the absences, gaps, inconsistencies and puzzles (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) which emerge in my participants' narrated responses to the films, and there are some significant examples of this at work in the examples provided here. It might be anticipated, for instance, that the events and experiences which appear to have particular conscious significance in participants' biographical narrations should recur as key motifs in their film readings. This is often not the case, however: in fact, there are several instances in which such apparently vital issues seem to "disappear" from their readings altogether¹⁶.

Billig (1999) argues that conversation is 'habitually structured by agents in ways that open up certain topics and simultaneously close down others'

¹⁶ For further examples of this, see my discussions of Darren in this chapter, and Angela and Colin in Chapter 4.

(quoted in Hills 2005a: 43) and, drawing upon Freudian psychoanalysis, he suggests that repression may be mobilised in discursive contexts as:

a form of changing the subject... a way of saying to oneself, “talk, or think, of this and not that”. One then becomes engrossed in “this” topic, so “that” topic becomes forgotten... A replacement topic is needed, if attention is to be shifted (Billig 1999: 54).

This is not to suggest that narcissistic processes of relating are no longer in operation for Susie: rather, that in her investments in the films, these are “shifted” onto another axis, destabilising the binary opposition of femme/butch as the key focal point of her narrated account. This illustrates not only that the complexities of the film-viewing experience cannot be reduced to issues of gender (van Zoonen 1994: 3) or sexuality, but also that there are ‘many different ways of experiencing even a supposedly singular identity, such as femininity or homosexuality’ (Chabot Davis 2003: 5), and it attests (as I suggest in Chapter 4) to the importance of recognising participants’ own biographical experiences as being highly significant. Despite their prevalence in her life-story narrations, then, Susie’s phantasies about butchness are projected onto Wuornos in her readings of the films not as a *gendered* conflict, but as a tension between “fragile” and “tough” selves instead. It is interesting to note that this “mapping” of unconscious gender-related conflicts and anxieties onto different axes is a process also observed in relation to Angela (discussed in Chapter 4) and Harry (discussed in Chapter 6). For Susie, the process is observable in the following extracts:

she wasn't happy to do manual work which I would have been... I wonder if she's just being an idiot thinking that she's too good... thinking too much of herself (4: 997-1011)

she made it quite hard for herself... when she was younger there were lots of things that was everyone else's fault but when she was older there was a few times when she could've had just a normal happy life (4: 1020-1032)

I would have gone straight to the Police afterwards... but she didn't (.) and s- she covered it up (4: 989-993).

Susie's investment in a "fragile" identity position, although powerful, is nevertheless an ambivalent and defended one: she describes feeling as though she has 'lived in a bubble' (2: 55), such that some potential experiences (most significantly, the phenomenon of crime) have 'never felt real' (2: 63) to her. Susie also recognises that her emotional fragility poses a set of (hypothetical) socio-cultural dilemmas:

I just think it's a just a really bad quality I think should be um (1.0) well I mean obviously I nee- um (.) I've got to have emotion ((laughing)) but um but um I just I'd love to be more strong 'cause like the- the women I admire as well are really um ((smiling)) (.) fictional women (laughing) like y'know just from TV so I don't actually know them but um (.) they're quite strong characters y'know so that (.) they're doing well in their um (.) careers and that's where I'd love to be and to get to there I think I need to uh m- I need to s- get stronger (.) like emotionally 'cause I'm not going to do really well in a career as crying all the time when- and somebody doesn't even mean it horribly y'know (4: 608-626).

The psychodynamic spectatorial processes to which she alludes here cannot be reduced to questions of self-reflection or mirroring (Sandvoss 2005),

however. Rather, for Susie, it appears that the cultural and creative activity of film viewing enables her to continually make and remake (Yates and Day Sclater 2000) her emotionally fragile self:

[describing an especially moving film] I just find it (.) so close to um me that... I can't watch it... ((smiling)) and I just (.) i- just I just cry and cry and cry I don't really sh- I'm not really sure where it comes from and I am thinking about trying to watch it again just to try and (.) strengthen ((laughing)) myself a bit y'know and try and get though it without crying (4: 323-335).

Consequently, she is preoccupied with phantasies of what Wuornos *could have* done and what she (Susie) *would have done* or *would do* in similar situations, for instance:

I'm thinking well if she killed my Dad would- what would I think then (3: 90-91)

[if Cathy betrayed me] I would act like Aileen and I'd just feel absolutely (0.5) um... cheated (4: 901-904)

I would act like that if I was in that situation (4: 927)

I would have acted exactly the same way (4: 978)

I would have acted the same way (4: 982-985).

The discursive structure of these responses, specifically the modal auxiliary constructions (Eggins 1994: 180, Halliday 1985: 357) “would have”/“would do” that Susie uses here are also important¹⁷. Such constructions signify personal levels of probability and commitment and so, in this case, reflect

¹⁷ A similar argument is made in relation to Daniel (discussed in Chapter 6, pages 267-281).

Susie's anxieties about taking up more assertive subject positions, which might threaten her "fragile" self. Alternatively, perhaps, her responses could be theorised in terms of "possible selves" (Markus and Nurius 1986: 954): a concept discussed in relation to Alice in Chapter 6 (pages 254-267). Susie's investment in the films stands in contrast, then, to the other participants discussed in this chapter, whose engagements with Wuornos are either resisted, limited, or prevented by the complex construction of self-other boundaries, or who effectively seek to "exchange" subject positions with her: investments that I have conceptualised as narcissistic. Here, as a narcissistic film viewing subject, Susie is able to invest in a more assertive, and therefore less fragile, identity position, which she recognises to be culturally and ideologically preferable. Nevertheless, this, as with my other participants, is not a case of "forgetting" one's own self in order to adopt an(O)ther's point-of-view (Cohen 2001: 248). Rather, the narcissistic viewing strategies that participants describe indicate that consciousness of their identities is not "surrendered", but is woven into the very fabric of their readings. Hence, for Susie: 'I can imagine that's what [Wuornos] had to (.) always think' (4: 959-962).

Socioculturally speaking, meanwhile, Hall et al (2008: 67) argue that the narcissistic subject of contemporary consumer culture is bound by a tension between regulation and rebellion, which is internalised as an unconscious avoidance of risk and transgression. Consequently, individuals are careful to '... travel to the edge *only in the imagination* to obtain some mass manufactured souvenir of a brush with edginess' (2008: 167, my italics), and it is interesting that, throughout Interview 4, especially, Susie recurrently

focuses on experiences, events or feelings that she can (or cannot) 'imagine' (3: 11; 4: 23, 480, 554, 717, 747, 824, 959), corroborating the points that I have made about the discursive construction of her responses. So, for example:

If I was in her situation and um (.) again I'm relating my life to hers (4: 884-885)

I'm trying to figure out what will happen... I'm constantly (.) thinking would I have done that... and always just imagining myself in that situation and um (.) and the thought of that happening to me um (.) that's why it feels so emotional 'cause I've put myself in that film and... I just have no idea what it would be like because I'm in my bubble... it's so alien to me I just would have no idea what it's like (4: 1081-1095).

Moreover, her defences against *actual* risk or transgression seem to be mobilised via the 'double aspect' (Freud 1986: 457) of a particularly harsh (maternal) superego¹⁸ (Freud 1923, 1924a), which functions as 'the advocate of a striving towards perfection' (Freud 1986: 493), prescribing not only that "you ought to be like this" (1986: 457), but also that "you *may not* be like this" (1986: 457), for example:

throughout my life part of me has been um (1.0) um completely influenced by how [my Mum] thinks (4: 784-785).

Susie's engagements with the three films are similarly regulated:

the reason um (.) why I think [the death penalty is] bad is because ((smiling)) my Mum thinks it's bad... but I (.) completely agree (4: 848-849).

¹⁸ See also my discussion of *paternal* superego in relation to Colin (Chapter 4, pages 196-197).

Her reading of Wuornos (through her own self) also occurs under the watchful “I” of this superego:

I was warming to [Wuornos] and whereas um in my head my Mum was... just saying (.) um (0.5) but she's a murderer that's it (.) she's just evil (.) evil evil (4: 785-787).

It is interesting that these two elements of Susie's viewing self - rebellious and regulated - remain in continual tension with one another, and that this tension interferes quite considerably with her ability to invest in the film:

[in contrast to Mum's voice in her head] I've got another half of me that um is... just thinking about um (1.5) uh (.) imagining me having [Wuornos'] life (4: 791-795)

I felt like I couldn't really relax (3: 100-103)

[I've put myself in that film]... and then I'm just trying to be um just relax and enjoy it (.) and um just trying to be um like (.) watch it as a film (4: 1088,1103-1104).

Susie defends against the anxieties that this creates partly by denying her own agency as a viewer, and constructing herself as being (passively) *positioned by* film texts¹⁹ more generally, demonstrating, as I will show in Chapter 6, that participants sometimes wilfully take up passive viewing positions (Barker and Brooks 1998: 143):

¹⁹ A full discussion of active vs. passive viewing “positions” is provided in Chapter 6.

a lot of films try and make you relate to the person... I think p'raps they try and make you um (.) like relate to them... 'cause they're um (.) like quite like reality like p'raps like you or (.) or doing things that you would like to do (4: 1052-1068).

Throughout this chapter, I have used the concept of narcissism to theorise the *self-primacy* observed in my participants' readings of the films, that is, the ways in which each participant seems to read the film texts - and Wuornos - through his or her own self. For the purposes of this discussion, narcissism has been conceptualised in psychosocial terms not as a phase, but as an inherently conflicted and sometimes paradoxical position: 'an insurmountable and permanent component of the human being' (Pontalis 1981: 136). I have given consideration to the psychodynamics of narcissistic identification, linking this process to the cultural and ideological subjection of my participants as well as to their own biographical experiences. I have also used object relations work on phantasy and projection to explore these issues from a psychoanalytic perspective, enabling a richer understanding of the diversity of film readings they describe. In textual terms, I have argued that Wuornos can be described as *neutrosemic* (Sandvoss 2005: 26), such that she is made meaningful in different ways by each of my participants. This has been useful in qualifying the diversity of the readings provided, and has also helped to theorise the extent to which participants invest and "dis-invest" in Wuornos: processes which I have observed here as being shifting, unstable and often conflicted. My approach to the analysis and interpretation of data provided here has also been a reflexive one, that is, I have acknowledged how this process is necessarily informed by my counter-

transference (Jervis 2009, Walkerdine et al 2001), as well as my own “lived” (Skeggs 1997, Kuhn 1995) experiences.

I have therefore sought in this chapter to critique those Screen theory and cultural studies’ accounts whose universalistic and metapsychological conceptualisations of spectatorial identification (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983, Hall 1980, Morley 1980) ‘offer little scope for theorising subjectivity in its cultural or historical specificity’ (Kuhn 1984: 21) by building instead upon the body of audience studies research that recognises film/viewer engagements as situated, and “lived” (e.g. Kuhn 1984, 2002, Stacey 1994, Walkerdine 1986). In Chapter 6, which follows, I will use this same approach in considering how participants engage in processes of *managing the self* as they view the films.

6 - Managing The Self: Active/Passive “Tensions”

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the third key theme observed in my interview data, that is, the ways in which participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their readings of the films. Here, I will critique existing cultural studies’ and Screen theory accounts of the “active” audience (e.g. Morley 1980/1982, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992) and the “passive” spectator (e.g. Pribram 2005, Heath 1978, Moores 1993) respectively, by conceptualising the spectatorial process as a situated and “lived” one (e.g. Kuhn 1995, 2002, Stacey 1994, Walkerdine 1986), involving powerful investments which are psychosocially and biographically informed, as well as being both consciously and unconsciously motivated.

In Chapter 4, I discussed the ways in which gender is meaningful for my participants in the filmic investments they make. This discussion offered a critique of the universalist and phallogocentric models of gendered spectatorship (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Modleski 1988) advanced within Screen theory, whilst also challenging the tendency within cultural studies’ accounts to understand the gendered viewing process exclusively as a form of resistance - or conformity - to patriarchal “norms” (e.g. Durham 1999: 214, Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985, Hobson 1982). Chapter 5 focused on questions of spectatorial identification (reconceptualising this as a process of “investment”), and explored participants’ tendencies to read the three films (and Wuornos) through their own selves, using the term *self-primacy* to describe this phenomenon. I suggested that Wuornos can be considered ‘neutrosemic’ (Sandvoss 2005: 26) in this respect, critiquing Screen theory and cultural

studies' accounts of the film-viewer encounter by showing that whilst questions of hegemonic resistance and/or compliance are meaningful within my participants' readings of the films, the filmic investments that they make cannot be understood solely in terms of such processes (Huffer 2007, Krunen et al 2011, McRobbie 2009, Gorton 2009, McRobbie 2009, Waters 2011): and neither are they determined by specific forms of textual address¹, narrative filmic structure or the workings of the cinematic apparatus, nor primarily organised around a voyeuristic desire to look (e.g. Mulvey 1975, 1989) or questions of desire and "lack" (e.g. Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983). This critique also challenged cultural studies' arguments about single or stable readings of film texts (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980), by emphasising the extent to which my participants' readings are in fact often unstable, shifting, and conflicting.

This chapter will argue that the processes of *managing the self* in which my participants engage as film-viewers are manifest most notably in a continual negotiation of active and/or passive identity positions. As I will show, however, this is not merely a question of participants taking up such subject positions as they become available to them during their viewing experiences; rather, they work continually to manage the 'essential tensions' (Silverstone 1994: 160, Hills 2007c) *between* them. It would therefore seem that it is the interplay between the object/subject and agent/structure dichotomies (Archer 1990: 83) - as this informs the spectatorial encounter - that is of particular interest here. In this chapter, I will consider how such tensions motivate my participants' investments in the three films. In doing so,

¹ See my discussions in Chapters and of the ways in which questions of textual address might perhaps be more fully explored in future developments of this study.

I will build upon the Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts outlined in this section as a means of more fully exploring the psychodynamic complexities of the viewing experiences described by another three of my participants: Alice, Daniel and Harry. Extracts from their interview data will be used to illustrate the discussion.

Managing the Self

It can be argued that processes of *managing the self* form an inescapable part of our everyday lives. Indeed, according to Elliott (2001: 2):

In everyday life we routinely engage in the process of self-shaping and self-cultivation, acting on the world and on others through our very need to give form and content to our identities, our senses of self. This is recognised as a psychosocial project, in which individuals draw upon psychic frames of memory and desire, as well as wider cultural and social resources, in fashioning the self.

Crucially, these “techniques” of the self (Rose 1989: 11) are comprised of active and passive elements, such that the self is ‘not only something we are, but an object we *actively* construct and live by’ (Holstein and Gubrium 2000: 10). As individuals, then, we ‘actively engage in structuring our lives so they appear individually meaningful, organised, coherent, and responsible’ (2000: 12, Garfinkel 1967), and yet our identities are also always constructed and maintained in relation to dominant cultural frames (Markus and Kitayama 2001: 120) and practices (Walkerdine 2007). Our ‘self-constitution’ (Elliott 2001: 2), in other words, is something that also happens *to* us, ‘through the design of other people, the impact of cultural conventions and social practices, and the force of social processes and political institutions’ (2001:

2). In Chapters 4 and 5, these latter processes have been conceptualised as *cultural ideologies of self*²: and this concept will be revisited in the discussion that follows, by considering how our culturally specific ‘set[s] of beliefs’ (Markus and Kitayama 2001: 122) about ourselves help to configure ‘the nature of the fit between the individual and the cultural environment’ (2001: 122).

In addition, I seek to show here that psychoanalytic interpretations of my participants’ responses can be extremely valuable in understanding this ‘*work of culture*’ (Bjerrum Nielsen 1999: 46). As previously stated³, this project presupposes a ‘defended’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2001: 103) subject, and draws upon the Kleinian notion of a self that is inherently anxious (Klein 1937, 1975), and ‘always in tension between subjective experience and objective reality’ (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983: 197). From this perspective, our lives, actions, and relations with others are powerfully motivated by the unconscious defences that we deploy to cope with these anxieties (Hollway and Jefferson 2000b: 168), such that individual and society can be said to remain in continual conflict with each other (Freud 1930). In this chapter, I will explore the ways in which ‘mixings of certainty and anxiety... allow an individual to *read* cultural life and its textured flow of social action’ (Elliott 2001: 37, Giddens 1991). In the sections that follow, as in Chapters 4 and 5, I will also emphasise the significance of the discursive framing of my participants’ accounts (Wetherell 2008: 79), in order that consideration might be given to the “performative” nature of language’ (Frosh, Phoenix et al 2003: 42) in the construction of their identities. This, I suggest, will enable a

² See Chapter 4, pages 153-155 for a detailed discussion of this concept.

³ See pages 58-59.

richer understanding of the ways in which their film viewing practices are unconsciously (and biographically) motivated, whilst also being 'learned and reproduced... negotiated, reworked, even resisted... through the social and discursive contexts in which spectators and films take their places' (Austin 1999: 151, Clover 1993b).

“Active” Audiences and “Passive” Spectators?

Analysis of my interview data indicates that my participants work to negotiate a continual tension between active and passive identity positions in their responses to the films. As such, they epitomise fully neither the passive spectator (Pribram 2005: 155) proposed within Screen theory, nor the cultural studies' notion of the “active audience” (e.g. Morley 1980/1992, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992, Hayward 2009, Wilson 2009, Jin 2012)⁴. Whilst some of the participants that I will discuss in this chapter do, to a degree, “use” (Brooker and Jermyn 2003, Lewis 1991, Alasuutari 1999, Curran 1990) and “play” with (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 31, Liebes and Katz 1993) the three film texts, they are not always active (Evans 1990) in their responses. Rather, as my interview data demonstrates, participants sometimes appear to *wilfully* take up passive positions in relation to the texts (Barker and Brooks 1998: 143). *Contra* Barker and Brooks, however, this is not necessarily a (conscious) pleasure-seeking process, but is sometimes unconsciously motivated; and I therefore suggest that it can also be theorised psychoanalytically as a means of managing unconscious anxiety. Nevertheless, as I have shown in Chapters 4 and 5, although my participants

⁴ See also Walkerdine's account of this active/passive distinction which, she suggests, is 'quite unhelpful' (2007: 5) in explaining how meaning is made during forms of media/cultural engagement.

are unconsciously invested (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a) in the films, they are not unproblematically 'sutured' (Heath 1978) into subject positions predetermined for them by the film texts (Moore 1993). Further, participants' responses indicate that whilst their spectatorial "gaze" does incorporate both active and passive elements, these are not primarily organised around the gendered active-male/passive-female binary opposition (Mulvey 1975, Williams 1995: 221) conceptualised within film studies. As I have already argued, my participants' viewing experiences do not seem to be structured in relation to the voyeuristic and fetishistic 'modes of looking' (Mulvey 1975, Ellis 1982: 45; Macdonald 1995: 26; Lapsley and Westlake 1988: 77-9) typically advanced by such accounts, and so their readings of the films cannot usefully be theorised in terms of erotic instinct or castration anxiety (e.g. Creed 1993, Clover 1999). Such essentialist models have of course been criticised (Kuhn 2009, Stacey 1994) and - as I have explained in Chapter 5 - they do not help to account for the 'gender neutral' (Ang 1995: 124) responses that some participants seem to provide.

This chapter will also consider the ways in which my participants carry out 'symbolic work' (Willis 1980) in their encounters with the three film texts, enabling them to 'produc[e] and reproduc[e]' (Abercrombie and Longhurst 1998: 24) their own identities. Zittoun characterises such encounters as 'cultural experiences' (Zittoun 2006: 34), which can 'change people's relationships to real-life issues' (2006: 34), and which occur at 'the meeting point of one's past memories, present experience, and the direction of its resolution or its future' (2006: 56). I will show how my participants use the films in this respect as 'symbolic resources' (Zittoun 2006: xiii) as a part of

their processes of managing the self, enabling them to transform their relationships to themselves (2006: 110). Although “active” viewing practices of this kind are often assumed to be cognitive and/or conscious ones (Phillips 2003), I will argue that attention must be paid to the unconscious processes that they also involve, demonstrating that my participants’ readings of the three film texts *are* often unconsciously motivated.

In this chapter, then, I seek to more fully explore the complex psychodynamics of the tension between active and passive subject positions observable in my participants’ responses to the three films. I will argue that this matter is not adequately addressed by existing cultural studies and Screen theory accounts of “active” and “passive” spectators (and viewing processes)⁵, and I will also suggest that such work often oversimplifies audience relations by defining them in terms of an active/passive *binary* (Bailey 2005: 15). Interestingly, some theorists have argued that the active/passive model of understanding audiences is now altogether redundant (Barker and Brooks 1998, Jermyn and Holmes 2006, Modleski 1986): this matter is addressed in the section that follows.

“Essential” Tensions

According to Silverstone, where audiences are concerned, it is now more important:

not to discover presence or absence, activity or passivity, but on the contrary to understand engagement. That engagement might be weak or strong, positive or negative in its implications. But it is... always dynamic (1994: 170).

⁵ See also my discussion on pages 85-87 of the distinctions made by Kuhn (1984) between the categories of “spectator” and “social audience”.

I will draw upon Silverstone's work throughout this chapter, aiming for a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which my participants, as viewers, are not just 'sometimes active and other times passive' (Livingstone 1998: 244) but, crucially, work to manage a continual tension *between* these positions in their responses to the films. Whilst Silverstone's study focuses exclusively on televisual consumption, his argument can usefully be appropriated here as a means of exploring how my participants invest in the three film texts in a similar way, that is, via 'the same practices that define [their] involvement with the rest of everyday life, practices that are themselves contained by, but also constitutive of, the basic symbolic, material and political structures which make any and every social action possible' (Silverstone 1994: 170). The aim of this discussion is therefore not to use the active/passive audience debate for the purpose of 'resolv[ing] whether audiences really are one thing or the other' (Hills 2005b: 97), but to conceive instead of "active" and "passive" as '... positions, and representations, that are fought over within cultural politics, rather than ontologies to be decided between' (2005b: 92).

It is also important that I think reflexively - as I have done in Chapters 4 and 5 - about the ways in which the analysis and interpretation of data that I provide in this chapter is always necessarily motivated by my own conscious and unconscious feelings (e.g. Walkerdine et al 2001, Jervis 2009). This involves reflecting upon my own behaviour and thoughts (Watt 2007: 82) and thus bringing my own counter-transference to awareness, in order that it might be used as a research resource (Hollway 2006a). The personal revelations that I make in these three main chapters, then, are used not as an end in themselves, but as a 'springboard' (Finlay 2002: 215) for further

insight into the data interpretations that I offer, so that, 'links [can be] made to analyse their relevance in terms of the study as a whole' (DeVault 1997: 226).

With this in mind, I suggest that the emphasis given in this chapter to the tensions and struggles between active and passive film-viewing positions observable in my participants' accounts is partly informed by the spectatorial experiences (involving precisely these kinds of complexities) that have occurred in my own life. One such event, which occurred on New Year's Eve in 2003, has particular biographical significance for me in this respect, and involved a repeated viewing of the movie *Labyrinth* (1985), which has been a personal favourite since I first watched it as a fourteen year-old. As a spectator on this more recent occasion, however, the film's iconographic mise-en-scene and a key narrative motif: respectively, a clock depicting thirteen hours and the words "you have no power over me", combined to produce a very different viewing experience. This time, my filmic investment quite suddenly fostered in me the courage to make long sought after changes in my own life by leaving a damaging marriage after many desperately unhappy years, and taking steps to begin building a new future for myself: an unsettling (and yet enlightening) spectatorial encounter that remains still one of my most memorable. I suggest that this biographical event, marked as it is by a struggle over passive/active subject positions - and, in this case, a shift from the former to the latter - might usefully be described as a "rupture" resulting from the 'unexpected fusion of various spheres of [my] experience' (Zittoun 2006: 6) - one in which I was able to "use" the film text in question as a 'symbolic resource' (Zittoun, Dudeen,

Gillespie, Ivinson and Psaltis 2003: 417). Whilst my data indicates that *all* of my participants do, to some degree, engage in processes of managing the self in their investments in the three films, it is therefore likely that my decision to select for this chapter those participants who can be seen to “struggle” (as viewers) with the powerful tensions, conflicts and anxieties that form a part of their investments is partly motivated by the unconscious feelings that are linked to my own memories of a similar event. It can therefore perhaps be argued that the processes of data analysis undertaken in each of these three main chapters function for me to a certain extent as a way of “working through” (Freud 1914) comparable issues encountered as a part of my own “lived” (Skeggs 1997) cinematic encounters.

In the sections that follow, I will introduce another three of my participants, beginning with Alice. I will use extracts from their interview data to discuss the ways in which they engage in psychosocial processes of *managing the self* in their responses to the three films, especially as this involves negotiation of a continual tension between active and passive identity positions.

Anxious “Activity” and Ambivalent Agents

Alice is 52 years old, educated to ‘O’ Level, and works as Box Office Manager for a local venue. She was born in the Midlands and still lives in the same local area. Alice is the youngest of four children - her Dad died in 2001, and her Mum in 2007 - and she met her husband (Pete) when both were in their early twenties. They are still together, despite a few tumultuous years, and have a son (James) aged 21, with whom both have a good relationship.

As I have suggested with regard to the participants discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, the discursive framing of Alice's responses demands consideration. Her apparent *ambivalence* towards active and passive viewing positions in relation to the films is immediately observable in this respect, and is manifest in the accounts she provides of her 'impression(s)' (3: 34, 51, 146, 149, 153, 174 and 4: 1770, 1793, 1963, 1972, 1997, 2024, 2376) of certain filmic events. Interestingly, these accounts are themselves characterised by a continual negotiation of active and passive processes, in which Alice alternates between describing how she "got" such impressions, or was *given* them by the films and their character portrayals. Some more detailed examples follow (my italics added for emphasis):

[they] certainly *gave* in the Hollywood version (.) the impression that she was attacked in a fairly um (.) violent way (3: 51-52)

you *got* the impression from the film that love just tripped this switch (3: 174)

you certainly *got* the impression from [Wuornos' friend Dawn] that they were like good friends (4: 1997-1998).

Interpreted in cultural studies' terms, Alice seems to take up what might be described as an active viewing position (e.g. Ang 1985, Wilson 2009), in which she is critical of *Monster's* form and content:

... I don't think from the actual sort of Hollywood portrayal of it um (1.0) ((sighs)) i- it was uh (.) I s'pose they didn't go as far as they could have (3: 3-7).

Here, Alice demonstrates awareness of the cinematic and generic conventions associated with the film text itself, and is aware of how her expectations - as a spectator - have to a certain extent been subverted (e.g. Neale 1980, 2000; Altman 1996; Hagen 1994; Austin 2002: 295). This can also be observed in the following extract from Interview 4:

A: um (1.5) certain- certain filmmakers tend to have a- a bit of a shock value

R: yeah

A: um and I- y'know and p'raps if something like Tarantino had ((laughing)) had made a- her story

R: yeah

A: um it- it would have been a more (.) y'know ((gasps)) y'know a sharp intake of breath every so often um y- but what- what I- I mean they didn't go into the sort of explicit details regarding the the murders (4: 1744-1753).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, Alice's immediate free-association in Interview 3 to what the film did *not* do (to her) as a viewer is meaningful in itself (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a), because it seems to suggest that questions of personal agency are unconsciously and biographically significant for her. Frie conceptualises the very notion of agency as inherently problematic, describing it as 'never simply an isolated act of choice, but a complex process of reflection, informed by personal history and fundamentally embedded in... sociocultural contexts' (2008: 17). I acknowledge these concerns in the discussion that follows, where I seek to show that personal agency creates powerful unconscious conflicts (Hollway and Jefferson 2005: 150) for Alice, and that agentic behaviour is both feared and desired by her, that is, experienced in ambivalent terms. Analysis

of her interview data reveals that, as a film-viewing subject, she appears initially to renounce the passive viewing position available to her in relation to *Monster*.

A: I wasn't shocked by the film I'd- I'd- I'd heard about it but I didn't know (.) that the whole oth- I didn't know this story before

R: ok

A: so um it didn't shock me (3: 115-121).

Whilst Alice recognises and resists the film's preferred reading (Hall 1980) - i.e. the "shocking" story that it tells - this is not a straightforward example of audience activity. Read psychoanalytically, there are some far more complex psychodynamic processes in operation here, and consideration of Alice's *gestalt* indicates that it is not only as a film viewer that she experiences tension between active and passive identities, but that this 'dialectic of activity and passivity' (Silverstone 1994: x) is also a recurring theme throughout her biographical narrations. Matters of personal agency are said to be 'woven into the fabric of everyday life' (Caston 2011: 913) and, moreover, to be inherently complex and often contradictory (Archer 1996: 65). Its psychosocial complexities can usefully be defined thus:

We cannot understand, blame, or remember one another without implying that we hold ourselves and others accountable for things said, promised, hinted at, or done. Even when we consciously or unconsciously deny or project any of the foregoing, our denials ground themselves in the assumptions underlying such accountability (Caston 2011: 913).

It becomes evident that such issues, especially the problems of conscious and unconscious 'control' (2011: 913) that they involve, do indeed create

conflict for Alice and, further, that her conflict seems to be motivated by an unconscious anxiety about active subject positions more generally⁶. The following extracts illustrate how she works continually to manage her own self in this respect: in these examples, she seems at first to invest willingly and unproblematically in a passive subject position throughout her life story narrative: 'we just sort of carried on' (1: 79); 'it was just a life to me... nothing spectacular' (1: 97-100); 'we just used to get on' (1: 104-107); 'life just went on' (1: 118); 'life carried on' (1: 310). Similarly, in relation to her marriage: 'we just sort of trotted along... it was just life we just carried on' (1: 476-480); 'we were swimming along (1: 519-520). On summarising her life experiences thus far: 'nothing noticeable nothing nothing out of the ordinary' (1: 1214-1217).

It is therefore perhaps surprising that, in her initial responses to the films, Alice does not wilfully take up a similarly passive viewing position. Rather, she is quite harshly critical of Wuornos for failing to behave in an adequately "active" way:

life is what you make it (3: 92)

I do believe you don't have to be a victim... there is a way of helping yourself (3: 257-261)

I'm always back to this thing that (.) you can help yourself ((smiling)) (3: 304-307).

This conflict re-emerges later in Interview 4, where Alice also condemns others for too readily investing in passive subject positions:

⁶ See also my discussion of Susie in Chapter 5, who is similarly ambivalent about "active" subjectivity.

I d- do think that some people that tend to get oh woe is me... um and then wait for people to fall over themselves to help ((laughing)) um rather than than say (.) hang about (.) y'know there must be more to this or if I just turn this corner (.) something different lies ahead... some people take what they're given (.) and take and take and take and will not go out and do it for themselves (4: 2081-2156).

Some important contradictions can be observed here. In her apparent rejection of the passive spectatorial position made available to her by the film texts⁷ (e.g. Metz 1982, Moores 1993), Alice appears to construct herself as an active viewer. Meanwhile, despite appearing to invest in a passive identity throughout her biographical narrations, she finds this tendency unacceptable in others, including Wuornos. The processes of *managing the self* in which Alice engages as a spectator are thus perhaps most significantly motivated by a powerful unconscious conflict about her own agentic capacity: this is manifest throughout her biographical account as a preoccupation with certain decisions and actions in her own life which she feels should or could have been made or taken “earlier”. Some examples follow:

[on the birth of her son James] when I think back ((smiling)) I don't know if I should really... I should have done it earlier (1: 524-527)

there may have been another [child] had- had we gone about it earlier... there could well have been two if I'd started earlier (4: 206-234).

Alice is seemingly conflicted, then, about her own ‘possible selves’ (Markus and Nurius 1986: 954), that is, the active/agentive identities which are (or have been) available to her. These possible selves represent her ‘specific,

⁷ Extract op cit (3: 115-121).

individually significant hopes, fears, and [ph]antasies' (1986: 954) which, in this case, revolve around the 'inventive and constructive nature' (1986: 954) of her own identity: something she both fears *and* desires. Her phantasy - about failing to act in good time - can also perhaps be psychoanalytically interpreted in terms of guilt and regret (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988): a sense of unworthiness in her "failure" to have had a second child with Pete and, consequently, a feeling of 'failure to do well the task [she] has set [her]self' (Levine 2000: 189) as a wife and mother. It is interesting that this same phantasy re-emerges in her initial readings of the films and their characters, as illustrated in the following examples:

[of Wuornos herself] if she thought with the love of a good (.) woman she could change when she went after these jobs... w- why wasn't there something earlier (3: 92-99)

[of Wuornos' friend Dawn in the documentaries] why wasn't she somebody she could have turned to a lot earlier (3: 211-212).

These responses can certainly be understood in audience studies' terms as an example of how Alice "uses" the film texts to 'serve [her] own interests' (Jenkins 1992: 214), that is, by (consciously) making them personally meaningful to her⁸. From a psychoanalytic perspective, however, the tension between active and passive subject positions that she experiences as a film viewer are also biographically motivated: by an unconscious ambivalence about her own potentially agentive self. Consideration of Alice's *gestalt* suggests that this ambivalence is linked to her husband Pete's fairly recent

⁸ As with the participants discussed in Chapter 5, this might also perhaps be theorised in terms of narcissism.

reunion with his daughter from a previous relationship. In the following extract, she describes her feelings about this in some detail:

A: she was (.) in Oxford she'd obviously got his brains (.) um oh- found out that she'd (.) been adopted by a doctor that lived literally (.) half a mile from where we live and h- he would have driven past her walking to school every single day he was at work oh uh um (1.0) and they s-swapped emails (.) she sent him pictures of her wedding day um (1.0) ((sighs)) but he didn't- he never quite said how he felt y'know um (2.0) and th- the- he's- he's met her a couple of times (.) went to Oxford to meet her once um she's married s- she ended up with two children um but she sent him pictures of her first scan with the first child and (.) um and I've never wanted to meet her

R: ok=

A: =I just um (1.0) ((sighs)) (.) I still have i- James is mine... he's not ours (1: 881-901).

Alice continues:

A: he's my first born he's not Pete's (.) um and I don't think I've ever said that to him... I still- y'know there's still something about that situation and um so I put all my efforts into James I s'pose because I think Pete's and the- I'm- he isn't split I'm sure but in my mind (.) there's- (.) he is (.) he's already got this girl who's very clever very bright and biologist research scientist... sporty two lovely kids now she had another one just before Christmas um (.) and y'know he very- he very rarely talks about I mean I'll ask and say have you heard from her 'cause know her birthday's ri- Chris- round Christmas time y'know oh I've sent her a card °and all this° ((sighs)) (.) and uh ((sighs)) if we go away or (.) sends her a postcard stuff like that (.) which I'd never stop him doing but it just ((smiling)) (.) y'know I always go a bit quiet for f- a couple of hours ((laughs)) and uh (.) but despite my many requests he's never told James(.) or or his family (1: 903-936).

She remains preoccupied with the issue:

now I think (.) I think he should (.) he doesn't agree um (.) I can't do it and I never would it's his decision (.) but that sometimes is always hanging about in the background ((sighs)) (1: 940-946).

Read psychoanalytically, elements of jealousy *and* envy are apparent in these particular extracts. Alice's jealousy involves the triadic relationship between herself, Pete and his daughter, and is 'based on love and aims at possession of the loved object and removal of the rival' (Segal 1973: 40), whilst the envy that she also experiences can be understood as a 'two-part relation [in which] the subject envies the object for some possession or quality' (1973: 40). Interestingly, for Alice, there is a continual tension between active and passive subject positions associated with both of these affective states. Her narrations indicate that she feels excluded from the relationship, and feels unable to make any "active" contribution to the ways in which the situation is handled. As such, she struggles with a powerful conflict: a desire, on one hand, to take up an active role in the relationship and, on the other, a powerful anxiety about the relationship's capacity to destabilise and/ or destroy her own relationship with her son, and the threatening possibility that James (her ideal object) will be "stolen" from her in the process.

As I have stated in Chapter 4, envy - from a Kleinian perspective - is also a form of innate aggression, in which hatred is directed towards *good* objects (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983: 128). Where envy is very intense, it is said to undermine (1983: 129) and interfere with the schizoid (splitting) process (Segal 1973: 41/42), such that the splitting of good (ideal) and bad

(persecutory) objects cannot be maintained (1973: 41/42). Alice's (unsuccessful) attempt to split the "good" elements of this experience from the "bad" ones is certainly observable in the above extract. The apparently passive position that she takes up - which enables her to avoid any involvement in the relationship - can therefore be interpreted as a defensive attempt to manage the tension that this creates although, ultimately, these strategies serve merely to *increase* Alice's feelings of anxiety (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983: 129).

Her disinterest in and apparent repudiation of any attachment to her step-daughter - as 'lost object' (Clewell 2002: 51, Symington 1986: 146) - can also perhaps be theorised psychoanalytically in terms of mourning (Freud 1917 [1915]). A means of dealing with her (potential) "loss", (1917 [1915]), mourning, for Alice, involves 'the backward face of hope, acknowledging, through loss, the unrepeatability of time itself' (Levine 2000: 94/95), and the 'turning away from activities that are concerned with the object of love' (Symington 1986: 14). These tensions and conflicts are especially apparent in the following extract:

A: um (.) I do (.) I do think that she has ((laughs)) some of the- (.) some of the best bits and I know this is gonna sound really weird but I think she (.) Pete is by far the brainiest one out of us ((smiling)) and she obviously inherited that bit so it's almost like it got watered down ((laughing)) by the time James was born ((laughs)) do- and that probably sounds a really strange thing to say but (.) she's obviously been very successful (.) very clever (.) um (1.0) and she I mean she's got two kids wa- y'know so (.) she- she not o- she's not only his first born but she's also given him (.) ((smiling)) his first grandchildren... so even i- when James gets round to that I- it's mine (.) ((smiling)) but it's not Pete's

R: mm

A: and (.) I can't (0.5) I can't have an opinion about her as such 'cause o- (.) of not meeting her... but (.) I don't uh I- I just don't know how I'd cope with it if- 'cause I really do think (.) she's got first of everything ((shrugs)) (.) in a way (4: 493-525).

In terms of her responses to our three films, then, I argue that, by constructing herself as an active viewer, Alice is able to “use” the textually constructed Wuornos as a ‘symbolic resource’⁹ (Zittoun 2006: xiii), which enables her to manage the ambivalence that she experiences in relation to her own agentic self. Some examples of this follow:

[of Wuornos' murderous actions] have we all got it in us to do something like that (4: 1915)

[of Wuornos]... there was definitely something in there that it was always gonna happen (3: 166-169).

Alice's description of *Monster* as ‘reined in’ (4: 1763) also reflects the active/passive tension that she experiences; this is sometimes framed discursively in terms of a “switch”, that signals a sudden, even unexpected, transition from one position to the other. For Wuornos, then, Alice wonders:

A: I don't know whether the (.) the betrayal (.) of the woman (.) that she loved was what (.) sent her over (.) the edge... y'know if there was a little switch in there ((points to side of forehead)) that was tripped by that

R: mm

A: 'cause there was obviously something in there (3: 104-113).

⁹ See my discussions of Angela (Chapter 4), Darren (Chapter 5) and, especially, Daniel (this chapter) for a more fully detailed consideration of this concept. See also Chapter 7 for my suggestions as to how my participants' filmic investments could have been theorised differently.

I therefore suggest that, for Alice, the unconscious conflicts associated with her agentic behaviour produce in her a complex and continual tension between active and passive identities. It is also interesting to note that Alice seems to resist the strategies of (criminal) “othering” (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 2) that might be anticipated in her readings of the films, and appears instead to make a concerted effort to understand - rather than to demonise - Wuornos (2007: 2). As I have explained in Chapters 1 and 2, many feminist accounts argue that media representations of women who kill typically deny such women agency or blame for their criminal actions (Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989) and are organised around a binary opposition of good/evil (Morrissey 2003) or victim/vamp (Benedict 1992) (which in itself belies an active/passive dichotomy). Alice’s responses, however, indicate that not all spectators re-create such binaries themselves during the film-viewing process although, given her own apparent preoccupation with issues of personal agency, this is perhaps surprising, and therefore constitutes a potentially meaningful inconsistency (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a). I pursued this during Interview 4, and some interesting conflicts can be observed in the following extract, in which Alice contemplates whether Wuornos can be said to have killed in self-defence:

A: (3.0) um ((sighs)) m- (0.5) the instinct to say without thinking (what it’s going to be) (1.0) n- (.) no... because um (1.0) uh- if if the film was anything to go by... she- she tended to ((sighs)) not intimidate but (.) almost (.) she was saying things to some of those people to m- to make them like think- what and- and to lose their temper (4: 2360-2373).

She continues:

A: uh I'm not saying that that's- that's right and- and you know y- you hit a woman 'cause you lost your temper but (.) that that was the impression I got the film was that she would get into that car (.) um and- and (0.5) originally y'know she'd get in she'd be thinking ok well I- I'll turn a trick and earn some money

R: yeah

A: but then she always managed to say something provocative um that (.) would generally lead to (.) harsh words or ((laughs)) (let's put it one way) so (2.0) I a- a couple of times in the film it was like- yeah it was like she was goaded them... to give herself an excuse to do something to them... so I don't (.) know- I but I wouldn't view that as self-defence... because if she was goading... and- and someone had a go that gives her an excuse to have a go back... so no no ((laughs)) (4: 2375-2404).

Alice seems reluctant to suggest that Wuornos acted in self-defence, and is also apparently conflicted about how best to read or understand her murderous actions. In the examples provided (on pages 264-265), she conceptualises these as neither active nor passive, reading them instead in terms of a continual active/passive tension and, in doing so, she converts Wuornos from passive victim into "goaded" agent.

In this section, I have argued that Alice's tension between active and passive identity positions is linked to an unconscious conflict about her own agentic capacity. I have suggested that this is biographically motivated, in part, by her jealousy - and her unconscious envy - about her husband's relationship with his daughter, and have shown how her phantasy about having "failed" to act earlier (by not having had a second child) can be theorised psychoanalytically in terms of guilt, regret (Laplanche and Pontalis 1988) and mourning (Freud 1917[1915]). In addition, I have explained how Alice's conflict becomes manifest in her responses to our three films as a

powerful ambivalence towards her own - and Wuornos' - agentic aspects of self. This ambivalence might also, perhaps, have been theorised in terms of gender, that is, interpreted as a normatively "feminine" behavioural tendency: see, for instance, my discussion of Angela in Chapter 4¹⁰.

In the following section, I will introduce Daniel, and consider how his investments in the films are, like Alice, motivated by a tension between active and passive subject positions. Given that Alice's tensions primarily involve her ambivalent feelings towards "active" or agentic subjectivity, whereas it is the notion of *passive* identities which can be seen to cause greater conflicts for Daniel, the responses of both participants could arguably be read as normatively gendered in this respect. In my discussion of Daniel (which follows), however, I will consider the ways in which his filmic engagements are also biographically motivated.

Passive Positions and "Symbolic Resources"

Daniel is 65 years old, and educated to degree level (B.Ed). He is a retired Drama teacher, now works as freelance education consultant in the Arts, and has many years' experience as a theatrical director. Daniel is married to wife Fiona, and they have three grown-up children, who have now left the family home. He was born in London and lived there until the early 1980s, then moved to Swansea, where he still lives. Following the death of his father when Daniel was about six years old, he and his brother were raised by their mother and grandmother.

In Daniel's narrated accounts, it is his "tutored" response to the three films that is immediately striking. This can be contrasted with the ambivalent

¹⁰ The ambivalent feelings experienced here by Alice are also similar to those observed in relation to Susie (Chapter 5).

viewing position that Alice (discussed on pages 254-267) constructs for herself, although it does betoken a similar tension between active and passive identities. In Interview 3, for example, Daniel immediately free-associates to issues of cinematic style and form, using what might be described as a language of aesthetics (Singer 1956) to provide a critique of *Monster*. For example:

I thought it was really badly filmed there was no no (.) style to it no- no it was just flat and (.) and there were a couple of moments when I actually watched the design it was (.) the flat they were in you could actually watch the distress- the distressing on the walls behind ((laughing)) and I watched the distre- it's been so carefully done that I started to watch that rather than the what was going on on the screen (3: 21-33).

Questions of cultural and aesthetic value (e.g. Ang 1985, Radway 1984, Jenkins 1992, Stacey 1994) are clearly important for Daniel, and these bear significantly upon the extent to which he takes up an “active” position in relation to the film. His emphasis in the extract cited above upon the “distressing” used in the film’s mise-en-scene is also important from a psychoanalytic perspective, however, since it later becomes apparent that this is indicative of a powerful unconscious conflict about his *inability to feel*. A more detailed discussion of these issues is provided in the following section. As Daniel’s narrations continue, he remains preoccupied with aesthetic matters:

I didn’t think the acting was particularly good and I thought the script was dire (3: 48-49)

there was no sense of period... in the- in the film which I thought was

interesting that there was no sense (.) nothing to try and put it into the context of the time or the period (3: 66-71)

you could have I mean y'know even on a level of a designer having fun you could have had quite an interesting thing about the changing of the times (.) um and there was... none of that (4: 2993-2998).

Throughout the above extracts, it is *Monster's* status as a cultural artefact (Thompson 1990: 122) that renders it particularly meaningful for Daniel, and he can certainly be said to take up an active, 'knowing' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 53) viewing position in this respect. This can of course be theorised in terms of Daniel's cultural ideology of self, that is, it can be understood as a necessary part of the professional identity that he constructs for himself as theatrical director/Arts consultant. From this perspective, the "tutored" responses that he provides are produced as a form of professional and/or academic discourse (Gunnarsson, Linell and Nordberg 1997), which is notable for its objective and impersonal style (Zamel 1998), and is often described as detached (Hills 2002: 146), even agonistic (Tannen 2002) in nature. By taking up this position, Daniel is able to identify and, crucially, to *reject* what he perceives as the film's dominant or preferred reading (Hall 1980). He comments upon *Monster* as follows:

there was a little bit of sense of aren't we being daring (.) doing this film but it wasn't it wasn't that daring or in fact it wasn't daring at all but it it- it they expected you to be shocked mostly by the fact that she was killing men I suspect and saying that she was a lesbian... [it] would have been much more daring to sort of say isn't it shocking about the death sentence but they (.) there was no real examination of (.) the ethics of (.) killing people (.) or the death sentence in America... it would have been a

much more interesting film if (.) it had it had had m- more ambition either to talk about why the girls ended up in this position (4: 2814-2843).

Whilst Daniel's resistance to - even rejection of - the film's ideological positioning of its spectators (Moore 1993) in these responses seems resolute, there are nevertheless some surprising contradictions to be observed in his narrations. These gradually become apparent when Daniel begins to criticise *Monster* for an entirely different reason, namely its failure to have an adequately powerful impact on him as a viewer:

the film never surprised me it never (.) it never did anything new or never m- (.) it was just flat °right through the story° (.) and that probably colours (.) how I reacted to the thing... (.) nothing in there surprised me (3: 315-332).

Here, Daniel acknowledges that he *has* been positioned by the film text and, further, that this has in fact limited or restricted the scope of his investment as a viewer. Whilst this might appear to be an example of the spectatorial "suturing" (e.g. Heath 1978; Silverman 1983) advanced within Screen theory, such accounts do not help to theorise Daniel's conscious awareness of the process, that is, his 'knowingness' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 53) about how he has been positioned, and how his response has been "coloured" as a result. It should be noted that existing criticisms of suture theory (e.g. Bordwell 1985, 1989; Carroll 1996) explain processes of this kind only in cognitive terms, and do not adequately address their more nuanced psychodynamics. It is especially interesting in this respect that there is almost a sense of disappointment in Daniel's inability to invest more fully in a passive viewing position. He laments, for instance, that:

I like to be surprised... like somebody there is actually playing with you (4: 3300-3304).

For Daniel, then, the process of “knowing” or “active” reading does not guarantee a pleasurable viewing experience (Barker and Brooks 1998, Tulloch 1990). On the contrary, it results in a *lack* of enjoyment. He emphasises the importance of being “surprised” as a film viewer thus:

oh I think it is isn't it you want to (.) you want to be sort of like ooh (.)... that makes the film interesting it- (.) means that somebody's actually thinking about (0.5) how it's affecting its audience (4: 3264-3270).

Whilst these examples can simply be theorised as further manifestations of Daniel's “tutored” response to the films, there are apparently unconscious (biographical) motivations in operation here as well. Indeed, it emerges that Daniel is particularly concerned with the extent to which the films failed to make him “feel”, or “care”:

they didn't make us feel- I didn't care about the men really (.) and I didn't care about her really either (4: 3327-3331).

This corresponds with the contradictions and conflicts observable throughout Daniel's narrations in relation to this issue of “feelings”. In the following extracts, for example, he constructs himself as being largely uninterested in emotional matters:

[Reflecting on his life-story in Interview 1]... that's all- that's all about jobs and things rather than about family life and emotions and feelings ((smiling)) and probably I'll- that's is that me I suspect it

is ((laughs)) (1: 521-525)

I'm not- I don't (.) I don't do trauma ((laughs)) (4: 1144).

It is therefore interesting that Daniel's responses to the three films tend to focus on *precisely* these kinds of concerns, or, more specifically, the films' inadequate portrayal of them:

[the films] didn't ever explore her re- (.) feelings or the feelings of both of them that (.) they were (0.5) it was very plot-driven although it kept on trying to pretend it wasn't (4: 2547-2553).

Psychoanalytically speaking, Daniel's readings of the films can be understood in terms of *transference*: 'an organising activity that all humans engage in to help make sense of the multitude of interactions and experiences over a lifetime' (Grant and Crawley 2002: 5). Transference 'applies to all of us in all our relationships [such that] [e]verywhere we go, we are ceaselessly replaying some aspect or other of our early life' (Kahn 1997: 28), and it involves an 'unconscious transferring of experiences from one interpersonal situation to another... concerned with revisiting past relations in existing circumstances' (Jones 2004: 14). Ostensibly, of course, the film-viewing experiences described by *all* of my participants could be theorised in terms of transference: this further substantiates my argument for the importance of recognising such experiences as also being biographically motivated. In Daniel's case, then, I argue that the lack of emotion apparently experienced by him during his childhood - as described in the following extracts - becomes "transferred" to the present, and bears significantly upon his perceptions and interpretations of *new* experiences (Casement 1985),

including his investments in our three films. Some examples from his biographical narrations follow:

[we had a] slightly unemotional childhood ((laughs)) y'know we didn't hug we didn't (.) y'know we w- it was just (.) you lived together and you (.) did things and things happened (4: 348-354)

I wouldn't have called us close... she didn't (.) we didn't talk about feelings (4: 2040-2043).

Like Jim in Chapter 4¹¹, Daniel's investment in the position of "knowing" viewer seems to be a defended one¹². His responses to the films might therefore perhaps be understood as a process of *making-safe*: by attributing responsibility and blame to the film texts for their failure to make him "feel", he is able to disavow his own affective or emotional lack: an unconscious defence against this otherwise intolerable anxious conflict (Grant and Crawley 2002: 18). I argue, however, that this is more than simply a process of projection. Whilst Daniel does split off the "non-feeling" aspect of his own self, he unconsciously projects this *into* and not just *onto* (Hinshelwood 1995) the films (as objects) and, consequently, they are really believed to have these characteristics and are responded to accordingly (1995:185-204). This can perhaps be understood as an example of projective identification which, defined as a 'more powerful form of projection' (Casement 1985: 81), is argued to be 'especially relevant when what is being communicated is beyond words, relating to unspeakable experiences...' (1985: 80), such that

¹¹ Jim is discussed on pages 180-189.

¹² Consideration might also be made here of the extent to which Daniel's investment in this "knowing" position is a meaningfully *gendered* one: this matter is explored in my discussion of Jim (Chapter 4), and acknowledged in relation to Harry (Chapter 6).

‘the ego projects its feelings into the object which it then identifies with, becoming like the object which it has already filled with itself’ (Mitchell 1986: 20). It is important to note here that the process of projective identification is conventionally recognised as a form of affective and interpersonal communication (Casement 1985: 80, Molnos 1998), i.e. as a relational mechanism, via which we attempt to “control” an object from within (Ogden 2000: 221, Sandvoss 2005: 83). Nevertheless, according to Clarke, it is our inherent *ability for* projective identification (1994: 378) that is mobilised and becomes significant during the film-viewing experience, particularly since cinematic representation necessarily involves ‘projecting a private world onto a public screen’ (1994: 378). As spectators, then, we ‘lend or invest our emotions to the characters on the screen in a projective move... so it is our own emotions that are being mobilised, our own internal world that is being dramatised’ (1994: 378). For Daniel, it is his *lack* of emotion that is mobilised and “dramatised” here, and subsequently experienced as a lack that “belongs” to the film texts, rather than to his own self.

I therefore argue that, whilst Daniel’s “tutored” response does indicate a culturally or ideologically motivated investment in an active reading position, his expectations and desires as a film viewer (e.g. Austin and Gordon 1987; Neale 2000; Hagen 1994) also involve some complex - and biographically significant - psychodynamics. Indeed, read psychoanalytically (and in relation to his *gestalt*), Daniel is perhaps unconsciously motivated to take up this active position because, for him, in direct contrast to Alice (pages 254-267) and Susie (Chapter 5), *passivity* threatens to produce emotions that he feels

to be unmanageable and consequently threatens to destabilise his “non-feeling” self. This point will be developed further in the next section.

Zittoun et al observe how, as culturally situated subjects, we are furnished with ‘the symbolic means... for making sense of what happens’ (2003: 415) to us and, further, that this may have a positive impact upon our interpersonal relations. Daniel can thus be said to “use” the three films (as cultural artefacts) to ‘find a sense of unity and continuity... [and] to rearrange [his] own understanding’ (2003: 418). Moreover, functioning for him as ‘symbolic resources’ (2003: 417), the films ‘create new emotions and thoughts, and thus become part of self-explorations that...reveal new aspects of [him]self’ (Zittoun 2006: 110, Alvarez 1992). This process also has ‘external’ effects (Zittoun et al 2003: 7) for Daniel, and the conflicts that it involves are further illustrated in the juxtaposition of “style” and “feeling” observed in the following extract:

p’raps I like films that are a little bit a- more unrealistic ((smiling))
y’know that they’re a bit have got a bit of style or a bit of (.) which that
one didn’t have and I sometimes think the style makes you feel- care more
about it (4: 3402-3408).

By positioning himself as an active viewer, Daniel is - through his discursive account of his film-viewing experience(s) - able to construct himself in more agentive terms (Frosh, Phoenix et al 2003: 419). His investment in the films as a cultural experience thus enables him to ‘live emotions that are forbidden in real life’ (Zittoun 2006: 56), and to liberate his active/passive tension by ‘experie[n]c[ing] mastery, rather than passivity’ (2006: 56, Freud 1908, 1914, 1920).

The extracts cited on pages 267-271 show that Daniel's responses to the film texts are neither wholly active nor entirely passive; and also that his viewing experience does not merely involve an oscillation between one clearly defined position and the other. Rather, the two subject positions are in continual tension, and Daniel's processes of managing his own self are both inextricably linked to and played out within the space between them. His seemingly active, tutored response thus enables him to 're-contextualise' (Zittoun et al 2003: 417) the film texts, providing him with a manageable way of thinking (and talking) about his own "feelings", which he is otherwise unable to formulate discursively. The very notion of passive identity is seemingly experienced by Daniel in ambivalent terms, and this once again seems to be biographically motivated. The following extracts show how Daniel continues to struggle with the active and/or passive subject positions that were available to him as a child, following his father's death:

D: I have actually always been slightly puzzled by my childhood in the sense that I (0.5) I wasn't a very self-aware child

R: mm

D: and whether that was partly to do with what happened or whether it was to do with me (.) i- or the way (.) my Mother and Grandmother (.) were (1.0) but as far as I can tell things just happened... I- I didn't sort of (.) it wasn't a question of (.) thinking oh I've got a choice to do this or that or that it- things just happened to you ((inhales deeply)) (4: 16-25).

He continues:

I can't remember much (.) and I don't really remember I mean we must have been involved in the packing up and moving (.) but I

don't remember that either we just went to this and- and things happened (4: 104-109).

Daniel constructs himself, like Alice¹³, as having “drifted” passively through various subsequent events and experiences in his life, as illustrated in the examples below:

[on his career options] someone in the first year of the sixth (.) um why don't you go and try and be a teacher at Goldsmiths and so I did (.) um but without any real idea what that was or why I was doing it... I got sent off to be interviewed for drama and actually found it was suddenly something I could do (1: 135-159)

[on getting a place at University] it just happened (4: 366, 2310).

Correspondingly, perhaps, Daniel also repeatedly describes himself as having taken up a subject position ‘on the edge(s)’ (4: 1150, 1165) of particular events. Here, he invests in a discourse of “non-involvement” which, in turn, recreates a continual tension between active and passive identity positions. As with my other participants, the discursive framing of Daniel's responses is significant for the purposes of this analysis, most particularly his recurring descriptions of the way(s) in which certain events and experiences ‘must have’ come about, or developed. This emerges in relation to memories of his childhood (4: 37, 52), the events relating to his father's death (4: 66, 68, 95, 105, 297, 313), moving house shortly after this (4: 77, 80, 85), his relationship with his brother (4: 171, 202, 273, 444, 619, 635, 723), and his time at school (4: 215, 126). The modal auxiliary construction (Downing and Locke 2002: 382, Eggins 1994: 180) “must have” is used discursively to

¹³ Alice is discussed on pages 254-267.

express personal levels of obligation and inclination (Halliday 1985: 89), and I argue that Daniel's persistent use of this term reflects his avoidant (Freud 1926, Sandler 1989) subject position and his reluctance to engage fully (and, moreover, affectively) with the experiences that he describes. It also enables him to maintain an emotional "distance" throughout his narrated accounts, and some more detailed examples of his "non-involvement" follow:

[on socialising] I mean we never went out drinking the boys on our own or the- (.) never got involved in football... I'd never been involved in those all male (1.0) activities or all those- those all male groups (2: 285-366)

[re sport at school] I never got involved in that scene (2: 297)

in one sense I can't remember [events immediately following Father's death]... either we blotted it out or my Mother just didn't involve us or kept us out of it... I've never talked to [my brother] about it and I've never really wanted to get involved... never really talked about it with my Mother either (4: 31-67).

On the disapproval of his wife's parents at her marriage to Daniel:

when she she went back and there would be huge rows and (.) tears and things but (0.5) I wasn't... really involved in it all (4: 1193-1197).

This same discursive pattern - i.e. a framing of things in terms of how they "must have" been - is observable in Daniel's narrations about the three film texts (4: 2640, 2669, 2922, 2982, 3218, 3487), and he takes up an equally non-involved position as a viewer, describing how he 'got really bored' (3: 20) with *Monster* and failed to engage meaningfully with Wuornos:

in the film I never got her name I didn't know who she was I didn't know her name even in the film (3: 154-157).

Given his apparent non-involvement in the films, then, it is perhaps surprising that Daniel seems so preoccupied with the stories that they leave "untold". This is so especially in relation to Wuornos' partner Tyra, of whom he observes:

there was no attempt to look at her life or why (3: 139-140)

I thought there was a movie to be made if any ((inaudible)) about her... cause in the film they'd given her a very strange role... I thought-but there's an interesting (2.0) there... was something quite interesting going on (3: 160-166).

He is similarly concerned with how *Monster* 'never got (.) well never really got to grips with [Wuornos and Tyra's] relationship at all' (4: 2697-2699), and emphasises the extent to which 'all the bits all the- all the (.) the stuff that w- the messy stuff had been just left out' (4: 3253-3254). Daniel's critique of the film's 'complete avoidance of motive' (3: 169) is also interesting in this respect, not least because it mirrors the (similarly avoidant) form and content of his own personal narrations¹⁴. He continues:

there's no examination of motives (4: 2243-2246)

I just think it was th- that was part of the shallowness of the script that it- it hadn't explored motive (4: 2803-2806)

¹⁴ See my detailed discussion of this on pages 278-279.

nobody really knows the motives (4: 2876)

the lack of exploring of- (.) motive and reason (4: 3138)

[re Tyra] there was no sense of her motives (3: 120).

It is also significant that Daniel recognises in Wuornos his own most powerful phantasy, that is, an inability to reconcile active and passive identities:

she just did thing- y'know she sat there and things happened to her that she didn't (.) she never took control of her (1.0) world (4: 3141-3144).

Most importantly, he notes that: 'there was a sort of passive aggression about her' (3: 224), which is a behavioural state that, in itself, signifies an irreconcilable tension between active and passive positions. Interestingly, when asked to elaborate upon this in Interview 4, Daniel seems to have great difficulty in doing so; emphasising the extent of his unconscious conflicts around the issue:

R:... you said that in *Monster* that you thought there was a passive aggression about Lee... I just wondered if you could tell me a little bit more about that

D: (smiling) oh I dunno... I don't know whether I- I qui- no I don't know whether I wanted it to- or p'raps I did say this and p'raps I shouldn't have done (smiling)... (2.0) sorry I ca- I can't really remember what uh- the context of that one so you'll have to (.) live with what I said the first time ((laughs)) (4: 3118-3153).

It can therefore be argued that the *non-feeling, non-involved* identity positions taken up by Daniel serve as unconscious defences against his

anxieties about passivity and “failed” personal agency. Moreover, this can be interpreted as being biographically linked to his own childhood experiences: especially his father’s death. These experiences motivate Daniel’s investments in the three films, such that, by constructing himself as a “knowing” viewer, and using the film texts as symbolic resources (Zittoun et al 2003), he is better able to manage his unconscious conflicts. As I have suggested on page 273 (n12), Daniel’s psychosocial investment in these particular subject positions might also be read as normatively gendered, that is, powerfully informed by his masculinity (Gadd and Jefferson 2007, Moore 1994: 66/67). This is a concept that I have discussed more fully in Chapter 4.

Thus far in this chapter, I have considered how a tension between active and passive identities can be observed in the narrations of two participants - Alice and Daniel - and have shown how this motivates, and is played out within, their responses to the films. This tension is experienced quite subjectively by each; Alice’s unconscious ambivalence about her own agentic aspects of self are manifest in her struggle with an active viewing position in relation to the films. For Daniel, meanwhile, his investment in the films as an ‘active [cultural] experience’ (Zittoun 2006: 55) and his use of them as symbolic resources (Zittoun et al 2003) enables him to avoid investment in a passive subject/viewing position, thereby “making safe” his unconscious conflicts and anxieties. His responses are, indeed, duly characterised by a struggle to reconcile this active/passive tension. In the following section, I will introduce Harry, who can be seen to manage this same tension by “splitting” its active and passive components.

Active versus Passive Selves

Harry is 49 years old, and is a full-time (mature) Media Studies undergraduate, with a previous career background in Sales. He is divorced and lives with his long-term girlfriend of eight years. Harry has two daughters, one from his first marriage and another from a subsequent relationship: he is very close to both and sees them regularly.

Of the participants discussed in this chapter so far, Harry's narrated accounts provide the most explicit example of an on-going negotiation of the active/passive tension I have sought to conceptualise. From the outset of Interview 2, it is evident that, as a media viewer more generally, he takes up a noticeably ambivalent (and conflicted) subject position. Whilst he describes himself as a very 'conservative' film viewer (2: 30, 186 and 4: 1201, 1215), the following extract shows how Harry uses the discursive spaces around film texts (Hills 2003, Austin 2007) as a means of negotiating his conflicts:

H: I would say I'm a very conservative film watcher I- I tend not to go for
(.) films that people rave about I- I will make a point of not going

R: yeah

H: because o- of all the people in the pub (.) that are talking about it I
want to be the one that hasn't seen it ((smiling)) and if- and if I go and
see a good film (.) I want to be the only one that's seen it um (.) that's
something about me I dunno ((smiling)) but- but but then because
I- because that's the way I look at films I tend to have a fairly narrow
range of films that I really love and I'll watch them again and again and
again and again uh and I'll have them on (.) DVD and I'll occasionally
watch them um (.) so but I never s- I would never say I've had a
real engagement with films (2: 30-48).

Some important inconsistencies are observable here: Harry constructs himself as very much an active, “engaged” film viewer, which contradicts the discursive framing of his account, i.e. that he has no ‘real engagement’ with movies. He goes on to describe his ‘floating relationship’ (2: 167, 4: 1352) with film and cinema, which further substantiates his sense of ambivalence and, in his initial responses to the three film texts, he free associates to his ‘ambivalent feelings’ (3: 7) towards Wuornos, explaining that:

I- I did experience a sort of a a definite gear change of feeling towards her¹⁵ (3: 20-21).

Harry reads Wuornos in similarly ambivalent terms, describing her as ‘engaging’ (3: 404; 4: 3397, 3402, 3408), and noting that:

on a personal level there was something likeable about the woman
(.) I thought (.) I felt there was something (.) that you could connect
to y’know you had to kinda (.)even knowing what she’d done (.) um (.)
and maybe choosing in- in the back of your mind to believe that she
had pr- perhaps been a big element of self-defence there was something
very um (.) engaging about her I thought (3: 391-404).

Harry’s responses here would seem to contradict arguments about the inevitable “Othering” of criminal subjects (Gadd and Jefferson 2007: 2) and the “monsterisation” of female killers (Allen 1987, Chesney-Lind and Eliason 2006, Austin 2008) quite radically. Nevertheless, it is significant that he describes Wuornos merely as *having* “engaging” or “likeable” characteristics, rather than saying that he “engaged with” or “liked” her. This in itself belies

¹⁵ See also my discussion on pages 312-314 of “temporality” as a meaningful aspect of film readership.

an important active/passive tension which subsequently becomes manifest in his interpretations of her criminal agency:

I s'pose in some ways I was too taken with her as a person to um imagine her I didn't wanna th- (.) I didn't want didn't want to think about things like that (4: 3509-3540).

In the discussion that follows, I will argue that Harry's ambivalent reading of Wuornos is also biographically motivated by a powerful anxiety, manifest in his tendency to "split" active from passive aspects of his own self. This conflict is readily apparent throughout his personal narrations, where he constructs himself primarily in non-agentive terms, but invests in a very different discourse of self in as far as (he believes) he is *perceived by others*, for instance as: 'a little bit of a handful' (4: 1528), '[having] too much to say for myself' (4: 1531-1534), '[occupying] the dominant position' (4: 1537) and being 'the one who's got everything to say' (4: 1551-1554) in his relationships. He also insists that he often has to be 'dealt with' and 'defused' by his current partner (4: 1557-1565). Harry's constructions of self might be read, then, as paranoid-schizoid (Klein 1946/2000) in nature¹⁶, especially since he also splits "good" aspects of self from those felt to be "bad" (Gomez 1997: 59). Admitting that he '[doesn't] take very easily to criticism' (4: 1759), Harry recalls monthly meetings with his supervisors at work in which 'they tell you the good bits and the bad bits' (4: 1784). He continues:

two or three years ago there wouldn't have been any bad bits 'cause I wouldn't have allowed them to tell me what they were... I would have only wanted to listen to the good bits and the bad bits I would have

¹⁶ See also *n120*, and note that I do not mean to "pathologise" Harry in this respect.

argued about so much so that... I'd have never found out what they were 'cause I didn't wanna hear that about myself (4: 1787-1805).

It becomes clear that Harry's investment in this discourse of "split" self has a powerful influence upon his readings of the three films, such that he constructs two separate "Aileens", referring to them alternately as 'the fictional one' and 'the real one' (3: 63, 4: 2793-2794, 3356, 3509, 3603-3604). He describes these two versions of Wuornos in dichotomous terms, the 'real Aileen' as 'lucid' (4: 2806), 'measured' (4: 2815), 'cohesive' (4: 2815), 'careful about the way she was saying things quite relaxed... in control of herself' (2839-2840) and with 'reasonable intellect' (4: 2816). The 'fictional' version, meanwhile, he reads as 'agitated' (4: 2822), 'nervous' (4: 2825), 'transient' (4: 2829), 'hyper and irrational' (4: 2864), 'flaky... temperamental a bit unstable' (4: 2895-2898), and Harry emphasises how he finds it 'difficult to reconcile those two halves to that person' (4: 2886). From an audience studies perspective, Harry's response emphasises how, for spectators, the categories of screen fiction and documentary are 'fluid, shifting and far from monolithic... [such that] no watertight barrier exists between the two' (Austin 2007: 179). Considered in relation to his *gestalt*, however, it can be argued that it is as a means of negotiating the 'essential tensions' (Silverstone 1994: 160, Hills 2007c) between activity and passivity experienced within his own self that he attempts to split the two positions, and that this is in turn mapped onto a different axis¹⁷ in his readings of the films: a clear distinction between the fictional and documentary representations of Wuornos. This distinction is maintained and emphasised

¹⁷ See also my discussion of "mapping" as this pertains to other participants in Chapters 4 and 5.

throughout his narrations: 'I'm talking now about the film portrayal of Aileen not the real Aileen but the film portrayal of Aileen' (3: 56-66).

In terms of cultural ideology, it might of course be argued that, as a media student, Harry would be expected to provide a filmic reading organised around textual distinctions of this kind. I argue, however, that a psychoanalytic interpretation is also useful here. From this point of view, Harry's ambivalent investments in the films can be understood as a move towards a more 'depressive' position (Klein 1946/2000: 139), in which he gradually comes to accept that the same object (Wuornos) can be both "loved" and "hated" (Glover 2009: 33), and it is especially interesting in this respect that his ambivalence seems to revolve around a temporal "waning" sense of sympathy that he feels for Wuornos. This ranges from a 'great level of sympathy' (3: 52-53), via 'waning' sympathy (3: 66) and having 'still a little bit of sympathy (.) left' (3: 127) to feeling only 'residual' sympathy (3: 130), or 'a faint residual trace of sympathy' (3: 186). For Harry, it therefore appears that both active and passive viewing positions are sources of unconscious *affective* conflict and anxiety. Indeed, when asked during Interview 4 to elaborate upon the tendency towards "floating" spectatorship that he described previously¹⁸, some interesting contradictions begin to emerge:

floating is one way of putting it another way of putting it is a very kind of arm's length (.) suspicion (.) kind of (1.0) that sort of relationship with films (4: 1384-1387).

It gradually becomes apparent that Harry's investment in this spectatorial position functions not only as an active, conscious viewing strategy, but also

¹⁸ See page 283.

as an *unconscious* defence mechanism against the emotionally threatening power of film texts. Where such processes - the ways in which spectators experience and manage the “threatening” elements of cinematic representation - have been extensively explored within psychoanalytic (feminist) film theory, they are typically theorised by such work in terms of erotic instinct (Neale 1992, Ellis 1982). According to these frameworks, the spectator (usually assumed to be male) manages the castration anxieties (e.g. Creed 1993; Clover 1999) provoked in him by the film text via the appropriation of a voyeuristic or fetishistic gaze (Mulvey 1975). This is certainly not the case for Harry, however, who feels threatened by the potentially overwhelming *emotional* power of cinema. In Interview 2, for example, he acknowledges that:

... on the whole I enjoy (.) I enjoy moving films (.) but not too moving (2: 72-73).

He goes on to describe how:

there are some films that I’ve watched in my life that I feel have made um a b- a quite a big impact on me quite- I’ve found quite um disturbing (.) um (.) and I’ve thought about for a long time afterwards (2: 89-91).

Later, during Interview 4, Harry’s unconscious anxieties about the (threatening) affective elements of cinematic representation become clearer still, and are especially well illustrated in the following extract:

R: you were saying that you enjoy (.) moving films but not too moving

H: yeah

R: and I just wondered if you could tell me a bit more about how you

feel about that

H: um ((smiling)) I can't remember saying that actually but um I- I think I know what I mean by that um (2.0) I sp- I suppose i- it's u::m there are certain films that will get will make me quite emotional that I- I've watched time and time and again and I and I (.) would only ever watch those by myself... because I wouldn't want to be (.) I wouldn't want to be caught (.) getting emotional y'know there are s- there are (.) maybe three or four films that would make me (.) sort of well up a bit and I not that I'm ashamed of that but um (1.0) yeah that's something that I would-y'know I would sooner keep to myself in terms of I don't want other people to see it um but yeah (.)... so in a public forum (.) I would always (.) tend to avoid films that are gonna make me upset (4: 1090-1116).

Harry seems to be powerfully conflicted about this issue, and some related contradictions begin to emerge:

I'm not afraid of showing people my emotions I get quite sort of passionate about stuff (4: 1172-1173)

I mean- I s'pose it's not as much I don't want other people to see how upset I am but I don't wanna feel like that... (smiling) I'm starting to think I'm a bit odd now (laughs) (4: 1274-1282).

Harry's continual struggle between active and passive identities is quite apparent in these extracts. He values 'knowingness' (Barker and Brooks 1998: 53) as a film viewer, such that he is aware of what to expect from a film, and is 'ready to attend to [it] in a chosen and appropriate way'¹⁹ (1998: 53). In doing so, he endeavours to exert conscious control over two elements

¹⁹ Consideration of the extent to which Harry's "knowing" responses are meaningfully *gendered* might also be made here. Similar points have been made in my discussions of Jim (Chapter 4, pages 180-189), and Daniel (Chapter 5, pages 267-281).

of his viewing experiences: the kinds of film texts that he chooses, and the social context in which these are watched. It is certainly possible to account for this in audience studies' terms, that is, as an example of the ways in which viewers actively seek out particular texts according to their own conscious expectations, needs and desires (e.g. Ang 1985, Radway 1984, Hobson 1982, Fiske 1987). The following extract, however, reveals the extent to which this apparently "active" process in fact functions as a defence against Harry's fear of emotional destabilisation:

H: I can't get enthusiasm about the process of starting to watch a film unless I know what's gonna happen if it's a film I know and enjoy I'll be gr- I'll sit down and i- 'cause I know what's coming

R: yeah=

H: =but I won't (.) I find I find no enthusiasm at all in watching something (.) that's new that's coming up um (.) and so my floating relationship with film would be I like what I like ((smiling)) I stick to what I like and what I don't like... or what I don't know (.) is a massive world out there (.) but I'm quite happy for it to stay a massive world that I don't know anything about (4: 1341-1360).

As noted on pages 286-287, the tension between active and passive viewing positions experienced by Harry in relation to the three films seems to revolve around the gradual loss of sympathy that he feels for Wuornos. It is important, then, that he frames this as a *textually determined* spectatorial response, most notably to *Monster*:

for any um (.) texts to (.) leave you with the feeling that someone who's killed seven people um (2.0) you feel sorry for 'em a bit (.) uh in a way that you wouldn't have felt sorry for (.) I mean I just put it in f- in

a female context right you think of (.) uh Rosemary West (.) right so I don't think you could make a documentary (.) that would make you feel sorry for her I don't think um(1.0) she was the only one that springs to mi- Myra Hindley is another one maybe... ((coughs)) how could you feel good about- how could you feel not good how could you feel any th- any trace (.) of positivity towards those people um (1.0) and potentially here's you've got someone who's p-possibly killed more people (.) than those (.) did and yet at the end of it you've got all these doubts in your mind... you just feel that woman had had a terrible wretched (.) um miserable unfair life (3: 502-534).

Significantly, however, Harry manages to avoid constructing himself in exclusively passive terms. Whilst he says of our screening that 'it was a powerful sort of (.) viewing experience' (3: 541-543), his own agency as a film viewer seems to be unconsciously significant for him: this is made manifest in his repeated emphasis of the fact that that he did not choose to watch the films himself, but that they had been *shown to* him. Some examples follow (my italics added for emphasis):

the [film] *you showed me* first was the one I'd seen before
(3: 176-177)

my feelings towards her (.) warmed in- in that documentary because
um as it unfolded and in the order that *you showed it to me*
(3: 188-192)

the second film that *you showed me* (3: 240-243, 361-362).

In this section, I have argued that Harry works to manage the tension between active and passive elements of his own self by attempting to "split" one from the other, and that this motivates his investment in an ambivalent

film-viewing position. I have also suggested that his ambivalence is powerfully linked to (biographically meaningful) issues of emotion and affect, and the unconscious conflicts that these produce for him. By constructing himself as an ambivalent viewer, Harry is able to manage his level of emotional involvement in the film texts more fully. For Harry, like Daniel (discussed on pages 267-281), the tension between active and passive subjectivities that he experiences is closely linked to a perceived threat: his (lack of) capacity to “feel”. As film-viewers, the two men manage their anxieties in different ways. Daniel uses the film texts as symbolic resources (Zittoun et al 2003), and his investments in them constitute cultural experiences (Zittoun 2006: 34) which in turn facilitate a process of “making safe” (I make a similar interpretation in relation to Angela in Chapter 4, page 170²⁰). Harry’s ambivalent viewing position, meanwhile, enables him to defend against the films’ potential to produce in him an intolerable emotional response.

This chapter has sought to explore the ways in which three of my participants engage in processes of *managing the self* in their responses to the three film texts selected for this project. I have argued that this tends to revolve most significantly around a negotiation of the active and passive subject positions that are available to them, and have shown how, rather than oscillating between these two positions, my participants work instead to manage what might best be described as the ‘essential tensions’ (Silverstone 1994: 108, Hills 2007c) *between* them. I have suggested that such processes operate psychosocially, that they are biographically informed, and, further,

²⁰ See also Chapter 7 (pages 308-309) where I reflect upon these interpretations.

that they motivate my participants' investments in the film texts on both conscious and unconscious levels. Extracts from my interview data have been used to illustrate this, and also to demonstrate how this active/passive tension is sometimes managed and played out at a discursive level (Holstein and Gubrium 2000, Wetherell 2008) in participants' narrations. I have also argued that the complex psychodynamics of these processes are not adequately theorised within existing cultural studies and Screen theory accounts of the "active" audience (e.g. Morley 1990, 1992, Fiske 1987, Jenkins 1992) and the "passive" spectator (e.g. Pribram 2005, Heath 1978, Moores 1993), and that a more nuanced approach is required. Moreover, this chapter has shown that the denial of agency said to be mobilised in mediated representations of the female killer (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Allen 1988) does not constitute a key concern for participants in their readings of the films. Rather, they tend to recognise in and/or project onto Wuornos a struggle or tension *between* agentic and non-agentic (active/passive) subject positions. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 have provided critiques of three key areas within existing Screen theory and cultural studies' accounts of the film/audience relationship. In Chapter 4, I challenged those accounts of gendered spectatorship advanced within cultural studies which give priority to processes of conscious engagement (e.g. Scannell et al 1992), and tend to conceptualise the film viewing experience solely in terms of resistance (or conformity) to dominant (patriarchal) representational and ideological "norms" (e.g. Durham 1999: 214, Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985, Hobson 1982), emphasising the gendered viewing practices (Morley 1992) that this involves. I also critiqued the phallogentric and universalist models of

the gendered spectator (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Silverman 1988, de Lauretis 1984, Modleski 1988) offered by existing Screen theory accounts.

Chapter 5, meanwhile set out a critique of existing work on viewer identification, and explored the ways in which my participants read the films *through their own selves*. I demonstrated that the spectatorial experiences they describe cannot be adequately understood in terms of the voyeuristic or erotic “look” advanced within many film studies accounts (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Modleski 1988, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983), and argued that these experiences are not necessarily always organised around processes of hegemonic resistance or compliance; challenging cultural studies arguments to the contrary (e.g. Harris 1992, Tudor 1999). Chapter 5 also sought to problematise notions of single or stable readings of film texts (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980), by demonstrating that my participants’ readings are in fact often unstable, shifting, and conflicting. Importantly, throughout all three chapters, my participants’ investments in the film texts are understood to be psychosocial and biographical ones, that is, not merely formed consciously in relation to cultural ideologies, but also unconsciously motivated by their individual anxieties, conflicts and phantasies. My analysis and interpretation of interview data undertaken throughout these chapters has also been approached reflexively, that is, in acknowledgement of the extent to which these processes are necessarily motivated by my own counter-transference (Walkerdine et al 2001, Jervis 2009). I have therefore demonstrated that my participants’ cinematic investments are powerfully influenced by their own “lived” biographical experiences (e.g. Kuhn 1995, Skeggs 1997) and recognised as being socio-culturally situated (Walkerdine et al 2001).

In the following (and final) chapter, I will set out a summary of my findings from this project, and will critically evaluate these. I will also make suggestions as to how these three main chapters might have been structured differently, and discuss some of the alternative ways in which my participants' investments in the three films might have been theorised from different perspectives. I will identify and discuss the strengths and limitations of my thesis, and consider how it might be developed as the basis for future research projects.

7 - Conclusion

This project has sought to explore how the female serial killer is cinematically constructed, and to better understand the ways in which viewers engage with, “invest” in, and respond to these constructions. I have shown how my research might enable a richer and more nuanced understanding of film-viewer engagements, not only by conceptualising these engagements in psychosocial terms but also, importantly, by emphasising the extent to which they are powerfully informed by viewers’ own biographical experiences. Chapters 2 and 3 have set out the theoretical and methodological frameworks used as a means of achieving these objectives. The analysis and interpretation of interview data in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, meanwhile, has been organised thematically, focusing upon three of the key themes observed in my participants’ readings of the three films selected for the project¹. The themes are, respectively, gender, the *self-primacy* manifest in participants’ spectatorial ‘investments’ (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 15)², and the active/passive processes of *managing the self* in which they engage as a part of these investments³.

In this concluding chapter, I begin by summarising the findings from my data analysis. I then suggest some of the ways in which my main discussion chapters might perhaps have been structured differently by, for example, foregrounding some of the additional themes that were observed in my interview data. In doing so, I draw attention to the spectatorial investments

¹ See page 4, on which these three films are introduced, and pages 10-14, where I provide a rationale for their selection.

² A full definition of this term (and a rationale for its use in this specific context) is provided on pages 58-59.

³ See also the chapter-by-chapter summaries provided in my introduction.

made by the three participants⁴ who, owing to the logistical restrictions of the project, could not be included in these main chapters. I make suggestions as to how their particular investments might have been theorised, contrasting and comparing my ideas with the concepts and themes that have already been addressed and explored. The present chapter will critically evaluate the theoretical and methodological frameworks used for the project as a whole, and will identify strengths and limitations of the study. Importantly, of course, I will clarify how and why my research makes a productive contribution to the field of audience studies (in both the film theory and cultural studies traditions), and will make recommendations as to how the work accomplished here can be further developed for future projects.

Summary of Findings

In Chapter 4, I have shown that, whilst gender is a meaningful element of participants' investments in the three films selected for inclusion in this project, the psychodynamic complexities that this involves are inadequately theorised by existing film theory and cultural studies' accounts of gendered spectatorship. This is so, I have argued, because these accounts tend, respectively, to conceptualise such spectatorial experiences as organised primarily around the masculine/feminine binary (Benjamin 1998, Flax 1990, Mitchell 2004), in relation to processes of erotic instinct, desire and "lack" (e.g. Mulvey 1975, de Lauretis 1984, Silverman 1988, Modleski 1988) or as forms of resistance (or conformity) to hegemonic gender norms (e.g. Radway 1984, Brown 1990, Ang 1985, Durham 1999). My findings, however, show

⁴ Biographical ("pen") portraits for these three participants - Larry, Gavin and Jane - are included in Appendix D.

that participants' film-viewing investments are powerfully motivated by the gendered subject positions in which participants are themselves biographically invested, and are thus also informed by the other unconscious anxieties, phantasies and conflicts that form part of their gendered identities. Chapter 5, meanwhile has challenged existing theories of spectatorial identification (e.g. Mulvey 1975, Doane 1982, Kaplan 1983, Ellis 1982, Radway 1984, Brown 1990, 1994, McKinley 1997), reconceptualising the process as one of "investment"⁵, and has demonstrated that there is no one, single, stable reading (e.g. Hall 1980, Morley 1980) of the three film texts put forward by each viewer: rather, participants' readings are unstable, shifting and conflicted. Using the term *self-primacy*, I have shown how participants seem to read the films through their own selves and, further, have observed that rather than seeking to close down self/other boundaries in their filmic investments, they can be seen to struggle considerably with such boundaries. Since this indicates that the film texts (and Wuornos) carry no inherent meaning, I have suggested that they can best be understood as neutrosemic (Sandvoss 2005) in this respect. Building upon these arguments in Chapter 6, I have demonstrated that participants do not merely take up *either* the "active" *or* the "passive" viewing positions that are available to them (e.g. Pribram 2005, Jenkins 1992, Moores 1993, Bailey 2005): rather, that they work continually to negotiate the tensions between active/passive audience positions. This, I have argued, shows that the concept of audience agency is more nuanced than existing film theory and cultural studies research would seem to suggest. I have also considered how participants

⁵ See pages 58-59.

use the films as symbolic resources (Zittoun 2006), that is, as a means of managing their own selves: processes that operate on conscious and unconscious levels.

These three discussion chapters have therefore shown that the film-viewing investments my participants make are motivated by and defined according to both their “social” (shared outer) worlds and their inner (individual, psychical) worlds: shaped in relation to dominant cultural ideologies, but also by their own conflicts, phantasies, desires and anxieties. I have demonstrated that these investments are both consciously and unconsciously motivated and, crucially, that they are also informed by participants’ own biographical experiences. Further, I have challenged feminist arguments about the extent to which female killers are denied agency and/or blame for their actions within mediated representations (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Naffine 1987, Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989), finding that participants do not necessarily - indeed rarely - “read” the films in these ways. The findings outlined here attest to the value and importance of drawing film theory and cultural studies approaches more closely together, building upon existing studies which are similarly aligned (e.g. Stacey 1994, Kuhn 1984), by introducing the psychosocial frameworks⁶ that I have developed for this project.

It is also important to consider whether or, at least, to what extent, the audience processes that I have identified throughout my project can be said to be specifically produced by the Wuornos case and the three film texts incorporated into this study. I suggest in this respect that whilst these do call

⁶ My theoretical and methodological frameworks are set out in Chapters 2 and 3, respectively.

up certain themes and ideas which emerge within my participants' responses, the key spectatorial processes of gendered viewing, *self-primacy* and *managing the self* that have been explored in my main discussion chapters are not exclusively produced by Wuornos' story or by these particular films. Rather, such processes might also be expected to occur in relation to other movies and, indeed, in relation to other patterns of mediated representation. This matter is discussed further on pages 327-330 below, where I make some suggestions as to other contexts in which these processes could also be identified and explored. On a similar point, it has been useful for the purposes of this thesis to focus closely upon cinematic constructions of the female serial killer: not least because she arguably constitutes a figure likely to arouse especially powerful audience reactions. It is however interesting (as I have shown in Chapters 4, 5 and 6) that my participants' responses are not, *contra* many feminist studies, primarily organised around the spectatorial strategies of monsterisation (Creed 1993, Chesney-Lind 1999, Berrington and Honkatukia 2002), demonisation (Michlin 2006: 1) or criminal "othering" (e.g. Gadd and Jefferson 2006: xiii) that are believed to be central to readers' interpretations of such constructions. I therefore acknowledge that the psychodynamically complex film viewing processes that I have identified and explored throughout my study ought not to be considered specifically linked to the representations of Aileen Wuornos nor, indeed, to representations of *female* serial killers more widely. As such, the arguments that I have developed here might also usefully be applied to (and mobilised in relation to) audience engagement with, for example, images of *male* serial killers. There is certainly scope for developing a

comparative study of such representations in future projects - perhaps based around some of the film texts featuring male serial killers that are identified in my introductory chapter⁷ - as a means of exploring whether texts of this kind also produce similar kinds of audience dynamics.

Another point of concern that demands consideration in this final chapter relates to the relatively little attention that has been paid throughout this thesis to the three films themselves. As I have indicated in Chapter 2, this is primarily a consequence of my pursuing the specific aims and objectives of my project, which have of course been to carry out a psychosocial *audience* study, thereby focusing most significantly upon how and why the films are read and understood by my participants in various ways. It is therefore perhaps inevitable that, especially throughout my main discussion chapters, I have emphasised and given particular priority to the spectatorial experiences described by my participants, rather than offering my own textual analyses or interpretations of the films. It is however important to acknowledge that a more comprehensive discussion of the films as *texts* might usefully have invoked greater consideration of the films' various modes of address. In doing so, more detailed attention could also perhaps have been paid to the dilemmas raised by Kuhn (1984) regarding the dualism between the categories of "spectator" and "social audience", as these relate specifically to my own work by seeking to better understand, for example, how the points of continuity between the two categories constitute meaningful aspects of the ways in which my participants read and interpret the films.

⁷ See page 10.

Further, by more closely analysing the film texts themselves, a more detailed theorisation might have been made of their specific generic conventions. Whilst on pages 66-69, I have set out a discussion of the “form” of documentary film and its pertinence to the project, deliberation might also perhaps have been made regarding, for example, true crime as a genre that is similarly relevant within the context of this thesis. These are matters which might productively be explored in future developments of my project and, in doing so, could perhaps be combined with (as I suggest on pages 321-322) a more extensive analysis of the specific historical and institutional contexts in which the films were produced and distributed.

Thus far in this chapter I have provided a summary of my research findings, and the sections that follow will reflect critically upon the thesis as a whole. I begin in the next section by considering some of the alternative ways in which the main themes that I have identified and explored in relation to my participants’ filmic investments - gender and processes of *managing the self*, in particular - could perhaps have been differently theorised.

Alternative Approaches

I note, firstly, that the gendered filmic investments made by three of the four participants included in Chapter 4 (Angela, Jim and Colin) have been theorised in relation to the paternal⁸. I have suggested that this thematic emphasis is reflexively significant: perhaps motivated in part by my own

⁸ Here, I argue that the ways in which Angela, Jim and Colin invest in the films are biographically motivated by their relationships with their fathers as well as by the unconscious conflicts, anxieties and phantasies produced by these relationships. The gendered filmic investments described by Denise (who is also included in the chapter and discussed on pages 173-180), meanwhile, have been interpreted as being linked to her own masochistic strategies of “self-control” which are, in turn, a manifestation of an unconscious struggle with her (non-feminine) aggressive impulses.

unconscious anxieties, phantasies and conflicts as these pertain to my biographical experiences, that is, my relationship with my own father. Given that this project draws closely upon Kleinian theory - with its focus on the pre-oedipal mother/infant dyad (e.g. Flax 1996, Chodorow 1999, Gylter 2010) - however, it is useful to consider how these participants' responses to the films could instead have been understood in relation to the *maternal*. Interestingly, in fact, I observe that the relationships Jim and Colin, in particular⁹, have shared with their mothers can for various reasons be described as problematic, and I suggest that these are biographically significant experiences that might be expected to bear meaningfully upon their spectatorial investments. In the following section, I make some suggestions as to how the filmic investments made by these three participants could have been described as "gendered" from this alternative perspective.

Firstly, in my discussion of Angela¹⁰, I observe that she seems to struggle with the conventionally "feminine" film-viewing position that is ostensibly available to her. I have argued that this struggle is powerfully motivated by the ambivalence that she feels towards her own counter-hegemonic femininity and that this, in turn, is biographically linked to the conflicts and anxieties associated with her experience of being 'a farmer's daughter.... the son that my Dad's (always) wanted' (2: 623-630). I have suggested that Angela's empathic reading of Wuornos and Selby - especially her concern with how they were treated by others - further substantiates this interpretation. Understood in relation to the maternal (rather than the

⁹ See n181 regarding my discussion of Denise, who is also included in Chapter 4.

¹⁰ See Chapter 4, pages 165-173.

paternal), however, Angela's engagements with both women in terms of the extent to which they were 'looked after' (4: 2794, 2824-2825, 3192, 3661, 3673) might be theorised as a form of "working through" (Freud 1914) conflicts about her femininity: a process that she seeks to accomplish by taking up a motherly/maternal viewing position herself.

The biographical mother/son relationships experienced by Jim and Colin, meanwhile, are perhaps especially deserving of attention here. Whilst I have, in Chapter 4, emphasised their troubled relationships with their fathers¹¹ as key motivational factors in their filmic investments, it is interesting to note that both men's mothers suffered from severe depression, which caused significant difficulties during their childhoods and adolescent years: Jim's mother was frequently hospitalised, and Colin's mother divorced his father and left the family home to start a new relationship¹². Evaluating the interpretations I have made, I observe that Jim's investment in an "un-disappointable" viewing position¹³ - most notably, his pre-occupation with the "changes" made to Wuornos' story in *Monster*, and his reluctance to speculate about her motivations for the murders - has been understood as being biographically linked to the conflicts and anxieties he experienced in relation to the patriarchal responsibility imposed upon him at the age of 12 as a result of his father's death; when he was expected to become 'the man of the house' (4: 151-168). Reflecting upon this, however, Jim's engagements with the films might alternatively be theorised in relation to the maternal: in

¹¹ Colin was very close to his Dad until his parents' acrimonious divorce during his teenage years, and the relationship has been difficult since then. Jim's father, meanwhile, died when Jim was 12 years old. Full discussions of both men are provided in Chapter 4.

¹² In Interview 2, Colin describes his relationship with his father's new wife as having been tempestuous: especially in its early stages.

¹³ See my discussion of Jim in Chapter 4, pages 180-189.

terms, for instance, of transference (Grant and Crawley 2002). From this perspective, as a film-viewer, Jim is perhaps unconsciously replaying (Kahn 1997: 28) the patterns of object-relating that he developed as a means of coping with the inadequate (and, arguably, inconsistent) maternal support that he experienced as a boy, “transferring” these to the present (Jones 2004).

Colin’s engagement with Nick Broomfield as a “guide” or “guardian” (3: 61-66) has been described as paternally meaningful for rather different reasons. Here, I have drawn upon the psychoanalytic concept of superego (Freud 1923, 1924a, Perlow 1995), theorising his filmic investment as an unconscious process of re-creating the early, idealised relationship that he shared with his father before his parents’ divorce. Alternatively, however, Colin’s tendency to engage closely with Broomfield (whilst seeming to resist engaging with Wuornos at all) could be linked to his relationship with his mother, and it is perhaps salient in this respect that he describes Wuornos as ‘damaged’ (3: 82, 89) and his mother as ‘fragile’ (1: 308). It might therefore be suggested that Colin’s “avoidance” of the female characters in his readings of the films is motivated by - and functions as a defence against - the anxieties and conflicts associated with the complex maternal relationships that he has experienced in his life¹⁴.

In this section, I have acknowledged that whilst my participants’ gendered spectatorial investments have, in Chapter 4, been interpreted in relation to the paternal, they might perhaps also have been understood effectively by focusing more closely upon the maternal as a key motivational factor. I have

¹⁴ See pages 308-309 of this chapter, where I reflect upon the ways in which other participants’ engagements with the films have been understood/interpreted as processes of “making safe”.

offered some suggestions as to how these discussions could have been approached from this perspective, and thereby organised differently. A consequence of the emphasis given to individual biographical experience as a part of my methodological approach, these findings demonstrate that that there is no one dominant/correct or marginal/incorrect reading to be made of my participants' filmic investments: rather, that the counter readings that I offer here are equally as valid as the interpretations made in my main chapters. Mindful of the concerns acknowledged in Chapter 3 about the potential for over-interpretation (Roseneil 2006, Clarke 2002), and 'wild analysis' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 18) that pertain to psychosocial research, I am of course not suggesting that *any* interpretation would be credible here. As I have explained on page 295, the themes that I identify as being significant in my main chapters are clearly observable in my interview data, and are understood to be meaningful in relation to each participant's *gestalt*.

This project therefore attests to the usefulness of 'opening up... the *possibilities* in interpretation' (Jones 2002: 7, my italics) which, I suggest, carries significant implications for empirical audience research more broadly, by pointing towards a need for multi-interpretive or multi-dimensional engagements with actual viewers. My work thus makes a key intervention into the field of existing audience studies by showing how film/viewer engagements can be more comprehensively explored by emphasising that '[o]nce an interpretation of a text is developed, one may engage in a comparison of that interpretation with any other level of theoretical or cultural discourse offering critical reflection and comparison with the interpretive

commentary” (Benner 1994: xviii). Indeed, as I have shown, ‘all texts can be read in multiple ways warranted by “plausible interpretations”’ (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 264). In the following sections, I critically evaluate the arguments advanced in Chapters 5 and 6 and, in doing so, draw attention to some of the participants who were not included in my discussion chapters, considering how their film-viewing investments might have been theorised in an alternative way.

Chapters 5 and 6 have explored, respectively, the themes of *self-primacy* and *managing the self* observed in my interview data¹⁵. Particular attention has been paid to the ways in which participants seem to read the films through their own selves, using them as ‘symbolic resources’ (Zittoun 2006)¹⁶. I have shown that participants do not simply conform to or resist hegemonic/ideological norms in their readings of the films: rather, that they seem to *struggle* continually with these processes. Whilst these discussions have been primarily data-driven¹⁷, they might have been organised differently by, for instance, linking the questions of audience agency that are pertinent here more directly to feminist arguments (about how media representations deny agency to female killers) that this project has sought to challenge (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Naffine 1987, Allen 1988, 1990, Smart 1989)¹⁸. From this perspective, I might have focused more closely upon the extent to which participants’ readings of the films correspond with - or subvert - such arguments. Alternatively, perhaps, greater emphasis might have been given

¹⁵ See the introductory sections to each chapter, in which these terms (and the processes they describe) are fully defined and explained.

¹⁶ See my discussion of Zittoun’s notion of ‘symbolic resources’ (2006: xiii) in Chapter 5.

¹⁷ I.e. observations made during the analysis and interpretation of interview data were used to shape the thematic content and organisation of each chapter.

¹⁸ A full critical review of this literature is provided in Chapter 2.

to the concept of agency more broadly, by drawing attention to how the agentic viewing positions taken up (or refused) by each participant are linked to the strategies via which they construct agency for themselves across their biographical narratives, exploring the conflicts and anxieties that motivate these processes. Whilst such issues have been acknowledged and addressed in my main discussion chapters as they pertain to certain participants¹⁹, they are, on reflection, similarly observable across *most* participants' responses, indicating that this could usefully have been explored as a key analytic theme.

With this in mind, mention ought to be made here of Jane²⁰, who might have been included in such a discussion. Jane's investment in a strikingly "non-committal" or "mistrustful" viewing position is relevant in this respect: she is pre-occupied with the 'conflicting information and different perspectives' (4: 1256-1257) in the films, focusing on the way that Wuornos' story 'kept changing' (3: 28, 100-101), so that 'you never quite know which way it is' (3: 101-104). Her investment in this position could, I suggest, be linked to the powerful unconscious anxiety that she harbours about her own agentic capacity: particularly her phantasy about a "rebellious" aspect of her own self, which she feels to be threatening. Narrating about her 'pleasantly boring life' (1: 114), for example, Jane says 'I'm ok I guess I'm just maybe a bit worried that I might [rebel] later like get sick of everything and go to Australia or buy a sports car have an affair or something... but I don't think I feel that urge' (4: 145-152).

¹⁹ See, most notably, my discussions of Alice and Daniel in Chapter 6 (pages 254-267 and 267-281, respectively).

²⁰ A biographical ("pen") portrait for Jane is included at Appendix D.

Jane describes how, as a film-viewer more generally, she often consciously and deliberately seeks out intense, even difficult emotional experiences: 'I like experiencing emotions in films that I don't experience in real life, films about people dying, films that are bleak when I don't really have a very bleak life' (4: 278-286), '... I don't want horrible things to happen in my life but I like to have the emotional workout' (4: 327-329). Spectatorial processes of this kind have of course been widely explored within existing audience studies' work on the horror genre (e.g. Carroll 1990, Hills 2005, Jancovich 2002), and yet Jane's account attests to the importance of theorising them from a psychosocial and biographical perspective, enabling a richer understanding not only of the psychical - typically, in such studies, unconscious or cognitive - processes involved, but also of the extent to which filmic engagements are always necessarily experienced in relation to socio-cultural ideologies and "norms". Indeed, Jane remembers a particular horror film thus 'I was slightly disappointed that it didn't upset me as much as I thought it would but then that's good 'cause you don't... really we don't wanna be upset' (4: 535-541), and is concerned that 'I couldn't really justify to myself... for wanting to see it' (4: 576).

For Jane, then, personal agency is clearly a key element of the spectatorial encounter: this is manifest in her use of the films as 'symbolic resources' (Zittoun 2006: xiii) although, interestingly, there are important contrasts and comparisons to be drawn here with the strategies via which other participants also seem to "use" the films in this way. By way of example, I have argued in Chapters 4 and 6 respectively that the films function as symbolic resources for Angela, Alice and Daniel because they

facilitate important processes of “making safe”²¹ their unconscious anxieties. Whilst Jane’s filmic investments arguably involve similar processes, they function rather differently, because they enable her firstly to *create* (and then manage) specific kinds of powerful affect.

The richness and diversity of the ‘cultural experiences’ (Zittoun 2006: 34) recounted by my participants indicates that the psychodynamic complexities of film/audience investments have yet to be fully explored. As I have noted in Chapter 4²², recent work in this particular field (e.g. Kavalier-Adler 2009, Kuhn 2008, 2010, Bainbridge and Yates 2005, 2010, Whitehouse-Hart 2007, Redman and Whitehouse-Hart 2007) has tended to draw upon Winnicottian frameworks in its explorations of various forms of cultural engagement. Whilst these studies provide valuable accounts of viewers’ creative engagements with and uses of media texts, emphasising the elements of lived cultural identity and psychical investment that these involve, I argue that the Kleinian approach advanced within this project facilitates a more nuanced appreciation of the ways in which viewers’ “symbolic” uses of film texts are often powerfully linked to the anxieties and conflicts associated with their own specific biographical experiences.

Thus far in this chapter, I have provided a summary of my findings from the project, and have made suggestions as to how my main discussion chapters might perhaps have been organised differently: giving consideration

²¹ In Chapter 4 (pages 165-173), I observe that Angela uses the films in order to perform (as a viewer) the hegemonic feminine identity about which she is so powerfully conflicted. My discussion of Alice in Chapter 6 (pages 254-267), meanwhile, shows how the films function as symbolic resources by enabling her to construct a more agentic subjectivity for herself: an aspect of her identity that she experiences in ambivalent terms. Similarly, in Chapter 6, Daniel (discussed on pages 267-281) positions himself as a “knowing” viewer, using the films to defend against the unconscious anxieties about passivity and “failed” personal agency that are linked to his actual childhood experiences.

²² See pages 157-158.

to the ways in which alternative theorisations of my participant's filmic engagements could have been made. In the section that follows, I consider some of the themes observable in the interview data that have not been so comprehensively explored within these chapters, and suggest how these might also have been addressed here.

Additional Theme 1: "Fact" vs. "Fiction"

One of the themes that might perhaps have been explored more fully in Chapters 4, 5 and 6 is the difference between the representational forms of mainstream cinema and documentary: especially since this is an issue to which most participants do refer (even if only briefly) in their narrations about the films. Indeed, as I note in Chapter 2, these disparate textual and interpretive representational strategies are acknowledged to be highly significant from an audience perspective (e.g. Austin 2007, Beattie 2004, Corner 2001). This is shown to be the case in my discussion of Harry in Chapter 6, for instance, who "splits" Wuornos into two separate - fictional and factual - "versions"²³. In Chapter 4, meanwhile, I have emphasised the extent to which Jim is concerned with what he perceives to be the inaccuracies produced by *Monster* in its fictional portrayal of the Wuornos story, such that he continually reads the film off against the documentaries²⁴. It might however have been interesting to explore more extensively the ways in which my participants' knowledge of and/or familiarity with genre conventions

²³ I have linked this to Harry's biographical investment in a discourse of split-self, within which the active and passive elements of his own identity are continually in conflict: see Chapter 6 (pages 282-291).

²⁴ I have theorised this reading as a gendered one, in which Jim takes up a "knowing" or "un-disappointable" viewing position, and have suggested that this is at least partly motivated by the unconscious phantasies linked to a specific biographical event, that is, the premature death of his father. See Chapter 4 (pages 180-189).

informs their engagements with the films. This is a matter that is acknowledged and discussed briefly in relation to Alice²⁵, where I observe that her awareness of the generic parameters and possibilities of *Monster* - as a “Hollywood” movie - serves in fact to subvert her spectatorial expectations (e.g. Neale 1980, 2000; Altman 1996; Hagen 1994; Austin 2002: 295).

A fuller discussion of this theme might also perhaps have been undertaken in relation to another of the participants not included in my main chapters. Gavin²⁶, like Harry and Jim, repeatedly draws comparisons between the divergent representations of Wuornos (and the details of her story) offered by *Monster* and the documentaries. He observes, for instance, that: ‘the way Hollywood portrayed it is a little bit false.... because what they’ve said is obviously what they know... but they haven’t explained why they’ve done it’ (3: 21-27). Gavin can be said to invest in a “knowing” viewing position (Barker and Brooks 1998) here, insisting that ‘I would have looked into... her history I’d have looked into what happened to her’ (3: 43-45), and maintaining that:

I would have looked into it online... ‘cause when you find out that it’s based on a true story you wanna know what the true story was and how well the filmmaker has presented it... just seeing how well it’s done really (4: 725-742).

²⁵ See Chapter 6 (pages 254-267).

²⁶ A biographical (“pen”) portrait for Gavin is included in Appendix D.

As with the similarly “knowing” responses to the films provided by Jim, Daniel and Larry²⁷, Gavin’s investment in this position could be theorised in terms of gender. For Gavin, however, the motivations for taking up the omniscient or “detective” viewing position from which he subsequently critiques the films’ fictional/factual techniques of representation seem to be linked to a specific unconscious phantasy. Recurring throughout his narrations, this phantasy involves the potential slippage and/or potentially threatening overlap of the categories “fantasy” and “reality” as these categories have been biographically significant for him. In this particular case, Gavin’s phantasy is linked to powerful nostalgic memories about his childhood, especially in terms of the extent to which these memories are accurate. He says, for example: ‘... when you’re young everything’s really amazing and like really brilliant so I’d like to see just how good it was because obviously when you grow up your parents tell you lots of stuff of how the situation actually was’ (4: 10-15); ‘I dunno how good my parents were... to make it feel like that when actually it wasn’t’ (4: 22-26). It is this biographically meaningful anxiety, I suggest, that motivates his concern with how the fictional and factual versions of Wuornos’ story ‘matched up’ (3: 7, 4: 680). Gavin’s account therefore attests, once more, to the importance of exploring participants’ psychosocial filmic engagements in relation to their *gestalt*.

Alternative Theme 2: Temporality

Another of the themes observed in my interview data but unexplored fully in my main chapters is the notion of temporality as this constitutes a meaningful

²⁷ Jim is discussed in Chapter 4 (pages 180-189), Daniel in Chapter 6 (pages 267-281), and Larry on pages 315-316 of this chapter.

element of participants' film-viewing investments. In my discussion of Susie and Darren in Chapter 5²⁸, I note that this aspect of the spectatorial experience remains under-researched, and have suggested that it might best be theorised using Huppert's concept of 'allegorical space' (Huppert 2009:139), that is, the temporal space in which we, as viewers interpret and make sense of our subjective reactions after watching a film (2009: 140).

In the context of this project, such ideas might perhaps have been most richly discussed in relation to Harry²⁹, given that he seems so acutely aware of - and, to a certain extent, uncomfortable about - the temporal shifts in his feelings towards the films. He recounts, for instance, that between Interviews 3 and 4, he 'seem[ed] to have sort of softened to [Wuornos] over the elapsed time' (4: 2694-3695). Harry continues: 'if I said I felt cold I obviously did at the time but I would say I probably felt a bit warmer now than I did' (4: 2734-2737) and, interestingly, he is keen to address the contradictory nature of these responses: 'I'm aware that a lot of the things I'm saying seem to contradict each other... maybe my memory isn't as good...who knows, people change their minds don't they' (4: 2920-2935). The observations made here indicate that temporality is an element of the spectatorial encounter that deserves more comprehensive exploration within the field of audience studies. Where existing research has shown that memory is meaningful to viewers in their cinematic engagements (e.g. Kuhn 2002, Stacey 1994), I suggest that there is still much to be understood in terms of how and why readings of a given film text may shift (and continue to shift) so

²⁸ For my full discussions of Darren and Susie, see Chapter 5. See also page 230 for a discussion of allegorical space.

²⁹ See Chapter 6 (pages 282-291) for a full discussion of Harry.

significantly *after* such an engagement. The extent to which viewers are themselves reflexive about these processes is also worthy of attention in this respect. In this section, I have considered two themes which, whilst observable within my interview data, have not been comprehensively explored in my three main chapters. Suggestions have been made as to how these themes might perhaps have been introduced and discussed in relation to specific participants. There are also two important topics to consider - sexuality and class³⁰ - which, although deemed significant enough to incorporate into my TQUINs³¹, were relatively underemphasised as motivating factors in participants' actual readings of the films. These issues are addressed in the discussion that follows.

Sexuality

In critically evaluating my three main chapters, it is interesting to note that sexuality, as a meaningful element of the film/viewer engagements that I explore, has only been discussed in detail in relation to two of my participants, Colin and Susie³², both of whom self-identify as homosexual. Given that sexuality was deemed to be a significant theme within the films themselves³³, and thus included as one of my TQUINs, the relative lack of emphasis given to this in my discussions of heterosexual participants' spectatorial experiences is perhaps surprising. I suggest that this "absence" can be explained primarily in terms of the fact that few participants seemed

³⁰ The relevance of ethnicity in this context is discussed on page 318 of this chapter.

³¹ *Topic Questions Aimed At Inducing Narrative* (Wengraf 2001: 120). See Chapter 2 for a full account of how TQUINs are used as part of my methodological framework.

³² Full discussions of Colin and Susie are provided in Chapters 4 and 5, respectively.

³³ This is so because, across media and legal discourses, Wuornos' lesbian sexuality is argued to have been linked to - and even cited as a reason for - her murderous actions (e.g. Morrissey 2003, Basilio 1996, Hart 1994).

especially concerned with questions of sexuality - or, indeed, with issues relating to Wuornos' lesbian sexuality - in their readings of the films³⁴. An important exception to this pattern, however, is Larry³⁵, another of my participants who is not included in my main thematic chapters. In this discussion, it is therefore useful to compare and contrast Larry's investment - as a film-viewer - in a position of defended masculinity with similar experiences described by other heterosexual male participants. The investments made by these other male participants have been theorised, variously, in terms of gender and as processes of *managing the self*³⁶, although the extent to which they are also informed by powerful conflicts and anxieties about (and specific biographical experiences of) *sexuality* have been less thoroughly explored here.

Larry therefore constitutes an interesting example in this respect, particularly in terms of the resolutely "not-gay" identity that he constructs for himself. By taking up a hegemonically masculine subject position (Kimmel 1994, Connell 1995, Wetherell and Edley 1999: 336), Larry is better able to cope with (and manage) his unconscious conflicts and anxieties about his own sexuality. Throughout his biographical narrations, he emphasises that he has 'no doubts' (2:312-313, 2: 456) about this, (re)inscribing the boundaries of his heterosexuality by declaring: 'I've never had any gay thoughts in my life' (2: 457). Of particular interest, then, are the ways in which Larry's readings of the films are so powerfully informed by the

³⁴ These matters are discussed fully in Chapter 4. N.B. the lack of emphasis given in these chapters to the theme of sexuality can also perhaps be understood reflexively. By this I mean that, since sexuality has not been of troubling or notable concern (biographically speaking), I was perhaps less likely to focus closely upon this specific topic in my data analysis.

³⁵ A biographical ("pen") portrait for Larry (my pilot study participant) is included in Appendix D.

³⁶ See my discussions of Jim in Chapter 4 and Daniel in Chapter 6, on pages 180-189 and 267-281, respectively.

psychosocial complexities observable in his biographical account. For Larry, gay men are felt to be dangerous because they are directly threatening to his “not-gay” self: ‘gay men are something to do with you’ (4: 317-318). Lesbians, meanwhile, arouse no such anxiety, since they are ‘nothing to do with me’ (4: 317). In relation to the film texts, Larry therefore engages closely with Wuornos because he *shares her view* of men and women: ‘I think she saw men (1.0) or she viewed men as (.) people who could harm her... whereas she didn’t view women that way’ (4: 796-799).

This example further substantiates the key argument that underpins this project, i.e. that viewers’ spectatorial investments are best conceptualised not only as psychosocial in nature, but also as powerfully linked to their own specific (and biographically motivated) anxieties, conflicts and phantasies. Throughout my main thematic chapters, I have shown that my participants’ engagements with the films are not exclusively organised around or determined in relation to sexuality and gender. Nevertheless, *contra* many Screen theory and cultural studies accounts which emphasise, for example, the centrality of the patriarchal unconscious (e.g. Mulvey 1975), the male/female binary (e.g. Williams 1995) and “queer” viewing practices (e.g. Dolan 2006, Henderson 2008, Dyer 2003, Stacey and Street 2007), Larry’s responses demonstrate that although sexuality, like gender, can form a meaningful part of the spectatorial experience, the reasons for this are far more nuanced than those conventionally advanced by such accounts.

Class

Reflecting upon my analysis and interpretation of interview data, it is interesting to note that the theme of class was not only under-emphasised by

participants in their readings of the films, but also in their biographical narrations more generally. Indeed, many participants found my TQUIN on class relatively difficult to answer at first, acknowledging that they had rarely given much consideration to such issues. There are of course exceptions: Alice, Jim and Daniel³⁷, in particular, were more reflexive about the extent to which class-related experiences had been meaningful in their lives, and it is perhaps significant that - at ages 52, 51 and 65, respectively - these three participants are the eldest of those included in the study. This is especially salient since younger participants seemed less inclined to feel that class had been personally important. These degrees of individual biographical significance notwithstanding, it can be observed throughout my interview data that questions of class do not feature significantly in participants' responses to the films despite, arguably, being portrayed by the movies as having been an important factor in Wuornos' own story. The relative lack of emphasis given to the topic in my thematic chapters can certainly be explained in these terms. Reflexively speaking, meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge that, having myself been brought up in a middle-class family, and having had few life experiences in which questions of class have proven to be specifically meaningful to me, I was perhaps less likely to find myself consciously (and, indeed, unconsciously) motivated to emphasise this topic as a part of my data analysis and interpretation³⁸.

³⁷ See Chapters 4 and 6, respectively.

³⁸The extent to which these issues are considered significant in qualitative (especially ethnographic) research has of course been widely explored (e.g. Skeggs 1997, Walkerdine et al 2001).

Whilst I have reflected here upon how and why the themes of sexuality and class that were included as TQUINs for this project³⁹ have to a certain extent been under-emphasised in my main discussion chapters, consideration must also of course be given to the theme of ethnicity, which has *not* been addressed therein. As I have already acknowledged, my own position as a middle-class, heterosexual, white researcher necessarily bears significantly upon the ways in which (and the extent to which) I am consciously and unconsciously motivated to focus closely upon questions of class, sexuality and ethnicity as a part of my academic work. My decision not to include a TQUIN on ethnicity as a part of my interviews is similarly notable: a rationale for this decision is provided in Chapter 3⁴⁰. In pursuing a suitably diverse participant demographic for this project, however, efforts were made to ensure that differences in class, sexuality and ethnicity were adequately represented. Indeed, as I explain in Chapter 3, a Nigerian female was recruited as a participant, but subsequently withdrew from the study shortly after her second interview⁴¹. Given the demanding interview and transcription schedule underway at that time, I chose not to search for a successor. I therefore acknowledge that the thematic “absence” identified here, whilst logistically inevitable, has limited the extent to which I have been able to explore whether (and in which ways) questions of ethnicity might have informed my participants’ readings of the films: this is a matter that can of course be addressed in future studies.

³⁹ Class and sexuality (as well as age, gender and educational background) were also deemed to be demographically significant criteria in the recruitment of participants for this project. See my discussion of this in Chapter 2.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 3, where I explain that race and ethnicity were not deemed to constitute significant narrative or thematic elements of the films themselves.

⁴¹ See my discussion of this in Chapter 3.

Thus far in this chapter, I have provided a summary of my project's key findings, and have made suggestions as to how some of these might perhaps have been organised differently, or theorised from alternative perspectives. I have also considered some of the themes that were *not* comprehensively addressed within my main discussion chapters, offering a rationale for this and reflecting upon the ways in which they might have been more fully explored. In the section that follows, I discuss the limitations of the project as a whole (as I perceive them), and reflect upon some of the problems that I encountered in carrying out the research.

Limitations of the Project

The most notable limitations that I experienced relate quite specifically to the immensely time-consuming interview method used for the project. Whilst this method produced rich and fascinating data, it did of course restrict the number of participants that could realistically be recruited⁴²: this is so especially since my research has been entirely self-funded. Despite having endeavoured to ensure as diverse a demographic as possible across my small sample in terms of age, gender, class, sexuality and ethnicity⁴³, then, it would have been interesting to work with a much greater number, and a much wider cross-section, of participants. This, I suggest, might have resulted in a more comprehensive exploration of the complex psychodynamics involved in film-viewer engagements⁴⁴. As already noted in

⁴² See Chapter 3 for a fuller discussion of this.

⁴³ See my discussion of this in Chapter 3, and my critical reflections on these topics in this chapter.

⁴⁴ One avenue of exploration made possible by a larger-scale study would perhaps have been a fuller consideration of national identity as a motivational factor in viewers' filmic investments. Indeed, given that the Wuornos case provoked particular controversy across the United States - her native country - such issues are arguably salient in this respect.

this chapter, an extensive corpus of data was produced by the interviews that were carried out but, given the relatively limited parameters of this project in terms of time and space, it has not been possible to explore in detail all of my findings. Although I have made suggestions here as to how some of my additional observations and interpretations might have been addressed, there remains a wealth of material that is equally deserving of attention. Upon completion of this thesis, I therefore intend to continue analysing the data that I have gathered, with a view to publishing more of my findings and, in doing so, making further contributions to the field of audience studies.

In terms of the theoretical limitations of the project, meanwhile, it is important here to return to the critique of constructionist frameworks set out in Chapter 2⁴⁵, in which I explain that, for the purposes of this project, I have chosen not to draw upon Foucauldian paradigms, despite the mobilisation of such paradigms within some psychosocial studies, where these are used to explore the ways in which individuals are 'produced in the signs, narratives, fictions and fantasies which make up the social world' (Walkerdine 1996: 99). In my main discussion chapters, I have used the term *cultural ideologies of self* in my consideration of how participants' identities are constructed, situated and performed within particular socio-cultural contexts. I have in these discussions drawn upon psychosocial studies (e.g. Clarke 2006, Frosh 2003, Frosh and Baraitser 2008, Hollway and Jefferson 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001, 2005, 2008, Walkerdine 2007, Walkerdine et al 2001, Walkerdine and Jimenez 2012) supplemented with ideas from structuration theory (e.g. Archer 1990, 1996, Giddens 1991).

⁴⁵ See pages 38-44.

This is so because, given the focus of this project upon questions of agency, I (like many other theorists, e.g. Allen 2000, McNay 1992, 2000, Hunter 2012) find Foucault's 'negative paradigm of subjectification' (Caldwell 2007: 2) and 'failure to engage with the "domain of the psyche"' (Campbell 2001: 36) problematic. Giddens' and Archer's ideas have therefore proved more helpful in restoring a sense of empowered action to my participants in their readings of the films, whilst still acknowledging that they are always necessarily 'caught at an intersection of discourses and practices' (Walkerdine 1986: 188). In approaching this project, then, Foucault's account of how 'discourses structure the world and indeed human consciousness itself' (King 2004) and his concern with 'disciplinary power' (Clarke and Hoggett 2009: 263) has thus been less useful than Giddens' conceptualisation of power as neither 'necessarily linked to conflict... nor inherently oppressive' (Nandan 1998: 135). I nevertheless acknowledge that although my theoretical and methodological approaches are neither reductively nor problematically individualistic, my rejection of the constructionist paradigms outlined here has perhaps, ultimately, produced a more fragmented, that is, less historically "grounded", account of the structural power relations that inform my participants' filmic investments. As a consequence, perhaps, this project has not closely addressed the historical context(s) in which the cultural ideologies of self (and the discourses around them) identified as being significant have been produced and made meaningful (e.g. Neubauer 1999, Sarup and Raja 1996, Meyer, Sahlin, Ventresca and Walgenbach 2009). Such an approach might, I suggest, have facilitated a more comprehensive consideration of the ways in which culture

is itself 'subject to the whims and shifts of history' (Ott and Mack 2010: 126). Similarly, detailed consideration has not been given to the specific historical milieu in which the film texts themselves were produced, distributed and consumed (e.g. Stacey 1993, 1994, Hinds and Stacey 2001, Kuhn and Stacey 1999, Kuhn 2009). These are issues that I suggest might productively be explored in future developments of this project.

Consideration must also be made here of the ways in which psychoanalytically informed psychosocial approaches might be resisted or even rejected by the disciplines of film and media studies, and this is especially likely, I suggest, from a methodological perspective. This is not least because of the emphasis within psychosocial studies given to how 'the traditional boundaries between subject and object have broken down' (Walkerdine 1996: 97). Indeed, acknowledging that researchers' own subjectivities are 'formed like that of those [they] research' (1996: 97) presents a significant challenge to both the notion of the 'embedded audience' (Barker 2000: 5) conceptualised by Screen theory⁴⁶ and the "transparent selves" (Hollway and Jefferson 2000a: 3) that seem to populate much cultural studies-based audience research, and so the extent to which the 'mixing of personal and theoretical' (Walkerdine 1996: 96) in psychoanalytically oriented psychosocial methodologies 'constitutes bias or a "clouding of vision"' (1996: 96) is of concern in this respect. Approaches of this kind are also criticised because their findings are said to 'resolutely refuse any kind of verification' (Barker 2000: 13). I have however shown that whilst aspects of my personal biography necessarily inform and motivate my

⁴⁶ A more comprehensive discussion of these matters is provided on pages 76-79.

work, this is 'quite opposite to the idea that this 'pervert[s] and distort[s]' (Walkerdine 1996: 97) the project's findings. Rather, in demonstrating that 'our life histories produce different experiences of the same event' (Walkerdine 2007: 214), I have shown that the psychosocial methodology mobilised throughout this thesis will make a productive contribution to the existing body of audience research, in both the film theory and cultural studies traditions.

In terms of methodological restrictions, I acknowledge here the limited extent to which I have been able to explore my own reflexive involvement in this study⁴⁷: this is primarily due to the constraints of time and space that I have already acknowledged. Despite having in each chapter included a section in which I reflect upon how such issues have informed my work and, I believe, having drawn attention to the most significant elements therein, it would nevertheless have been interesting to emphasise this dimension of my research more fully. Following Wengraf (2001) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000a), I kept a reflexive diary⁴⁸, in which I recorded my thoughts and feelings immediately after every interview session. Had sufficient space been available, it would have been interesting to make references to this in my main discussion chapters. I note, for instance, that in my diary entries I describe feeling anxious before almost every interview, and often mention feeling disappointed immediately afterwards: feelings that, in hindsight, I find surprising. These are, arguably, issues worthy of further exploration and, to this end, ones that can be more comprehensively addressed in future studies

⁴⁷ See Chapter 3, in which I provide a rationale for my methodological approach to this study, and explain how and why reflexivity is considered to be so important in this context.

⁴⁸ A copy of the full diary is included at Appendix F (CD).

based upon this thesis. Hills' study of media fandom and the 'patterns of surprise' (2005c: 801) that form part of the processes of self-discovery and self-understanding experienced by both participant and researcher would seem to offer a useful starting point for such an approach.

Also significant was my decision to transcribe my interview data using Jeffersonian conventions (Maxwell Atkinson and Heritage 1999)⁴⁹. My intention in doing so was to make as "visible" as possible my subjectivity as researcher/interviewer and my reflexive involvement in the project, so that both might be studied more effectively⁵⁰. Ultimately, however, my chosen method did not contribute as helpfully to my research as I had anticipated, and served primarily to render the transcription process more challenging, thereby creating additional work. I acknowledge, then, that the less complex transcription conventions more traditionally used within psychosocial research would in fact have been both adequate and effective for the purposes of this project.

Other than the matters outlined above, there were no significant logistical problems or difficulties encountered in the course of completing this project. In this concluding chapter, however, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge some further ways in which my thesis might be challenged and critiqued. One of the elements of my research perhaps most liable to interrogation is the contextual and situational "mode" of film viewing (e.g. Klinger 2006, Bennett and Brown 2008, Barker and Mathijs 2008) in which my participants engaged during screenings of the three movies. As I have

⁴⁹ A key to these conventions is provided at Appendix E.

⁵⁰ I acknowledge that my desire to use such richly detailed transcription conventions was perhaps also motivated by my previous academic experience of - and enjoyment of - Conversation Analysis as a methodological approach: skills that I developed during my master's degree.

argued in my introduction, although the films were watched by participants on DVD⁵¹ rather than being screened in a cinema theatre, this project's references to contemporary *cinematic* constructions of the female serial killer can be satisfactorily vindicated. This is so since, as I have already suggested, the theoretical frameworks conventionally applied to the study of theatre-based cinematic engagements *can* helpfully be utilised as a means of exploring film-viewing experiences which occur outside of this specific context. The richness of the findings from my main discussion chapters certainly attests to this. Following Klinger, I therefore maintain that the "spaces" of home and theatre as modes of exhibition and reception are historically, financially and 'experientially connected' (Klinger 2006: 3), such that contemporary viewers 'observe and fully anticipate a continuum between public and private cinemas' (2006: 4). Consequently, the 'viewing dynamics commonly linked to the motion picture theatre - that is, attentive watching from beginning to end without interruption' (2006: 4) - now also inform our experiences of domestic spectatorship (see also Dinsmore-Tuli 2000)⁵². In the contemporary era, then, television is no longer held to be the antithesis of the film theatre (Klinger 2006: 55), to the extent that home cinema provides a 'domestic version' (2006: 242) of its theatrical equivalent, and I therefore argue that the two modes of viewing can usefully be explored using the same kinds of theoretical frameworks.

⁵¹ As noted in Chapter 1, screenings usually took place at my home, or at participants' own homes, where we watched the films together. Where this was not possible, screenings were carried out in a small university lecture theatre: on these occasions, I watched the films with two participants at the same time.

⁵² See *n11*, in which I distinguish the contexts in which screenings were carried out for this project from those described in other ethnographic studies (e.g. Walkerdine 1986).

Questions might also be asked about the element of viewer “choice” that necessarily informs my participants’ spectatorial engagements, given that participants did not select the three films out of personal preference, but were *asked* to watch them as part of their involvement in the project. Interestingly, some participants do refer explicitly to this matter during their interviews, indicating that it is significant to a certain degree. By way of example, Harry notes that:

when we watched those films together... I mean I thought my God this gonna be (.) (smiling) this is gonna be like torture... if [someone] said to me I want you to watch five (.) five hours’ worth of films (smiling)... well I’d sooner walk to the moon and back to be honest (laughs) (4: 1392-1422)

Daniel, meanwhile, says:

I would have probably turned off the second- well th- the (.) the first one we saw the second film (.) um long before the end but I that’s because I (.) tend not to watch that sort of thing anyway (laughing) (rolls eyes)... I think I would have turned it off and I don’t think I’d have kept it on (3: 303-313).

It is evident from these responses that participants’ “expectations” as viewers (e.g. Hills 2005c, Barker and Mathijs 2008, Barker et al 2001) - especially in terms of the extent to which such expectations sometimes seemed to shift as a consequence of being shown the films (rather than choosing to watch them) - are deserving of further attention here. I therefore suggest that these are elements of the film/viewer encounter that, whilst not comprehensively explored within the context of this project, might usefully be addressed in the

course of any future studies that it generates. In this section, I have considered some of the limitations of my project, providing justifications for these, and making suggestions as to how they might be examined in subsequent research. The following section concludes this chapter: here, I identify and evaluate the main strengths of my work, and consider some of the possibilities for its development.

As I have suggested in Chapter 1, the transferable methodological framework that was designed for (and mobilised successfully throughout) this project is perhaps one of its greatest strengths, and it is therefore perhaps from a methodological perspective that my research makes its most innovative and valuable contribution to the existing body of audience studies work. With this in mind, I argue that the interview model (and the approach to data analysis and interpretation) used here might perhaps be further developed as a means of exploring the affective, that is, the “lived” and “felt” elements of the spectatorial experience more comprehensively. The significance of these sensory aspects of cinematic engagement - and the difficulties inherent in studying them - are widely acknowledged (e.g. Hills 2002⁵³, Barker and Mathjis 2008, Massumi 2002, Sobchack 2004), and it is interesting to note that some recent audience research has focused specifically upon this topic (e.g. Orning 2010, Furuya 2011, Aaltonen 2011, Ince 2011). By drawing upon recent psychosocial work, then, (e.g. Redman, Bereswill and Morgenroth 2010, Bereswill and Morgenroth 2010, Skeggs and Wood 2012), and supplementing this with the methodologies utilised here, it

⁵³ See Hills’ (2002: 129) valuable discussion of the ‘dialectic of value’ that forms part of this dilemma.

might be possible to better understand the phenomenological aspects of our cinematic investments.

Beyond questions of film spectatorship, meanwhile, I suggest that the methodological framework used for this project might also facilitate a more nuanced understanding of our experiences of other forms of cultural engagement, exploring the complex psychodynamics of the relationships that exist between identity and, for example, popular music or theatre, or forms of new media, such as video or on-line gaming. There is scope here, I argue, to restore a dimension that is missing from existing cultural studies accounts of media consumption, that is, by using my methodological framework to establish an empirically grounded and more comprehensive account of the ways in which such experiences are not only psychosocially, but also biographically motivated.

In Chapter 1, I have argued that another of this project's strengths is its cross-disciplinary approach, and it is therefore interesting to note that my epistemological position on this point transcends the parameters of the study itself. Indeed, whilst working on this thesis, I have deliberately sought to challenge some of the long-established (and often tenaciously upheld) disciplinary boundaries that have informed my research. I have achieved this by participating regularly in seminars, conferences and other postgraduate events across, for example, the Humanities (media studies, cultural studies, audience studies, psychoanalytic studies, language and communication studies), the Social Sciences (especially psychosocial studies) and criminology (most notably Cardiff's school of Crime, Law and Criminal Justice), thereby introducing my work to these fields of study.

Of the bodies of research outlined above, the mobilisation of my methodological framework within the field of criminological study can perhaps be expected to have particular cross-disciplinary benefits. Here, I suggest that by building upon work already being done on psychosocial criminology (Jefferson 2002, Gadd and Jefferson 2007), an approach of this kind might enable a richer understanding of the powerful ways in which viewers respond to different kinds of mediated constructions of crime and criminality, for example, those that emerge across televisual news texts. Since such processes arguably carry significant implications in terms of criminological policy and practice, it is possible that my work could make useful contributions beyond the field of audience studies for which it was originally designed.

The aim of this project has been to examine the ways in which the female serial killer is constructed within contemporary media culture, and to better understand how and why viewers engage with these constructions in a particular way. My findings from the analysis and interpretation of data undertaken here demonstrate that spectatorial investments are psychosocially constructed and performed, and are also motivated - consciously and unconsciously - by viewers' own biographical experiences. I have shown that my participants do not read the three films included in the study as 'ideal, acultural viewers... but in relation to complex and already constituted dynamics' (Walkerdine 1986: 168). Whilst this thesis has, on one hand, confirmed that our film-viewing encounters are to a certain extent 'already and always beyond words' (Barker and Mathijis 2008: 189), on the other hand, it has shown that a more nuanced understanding of this complex

process is possible. Despite the title of the Hollywood movie that purports to tell Aileen Wuornos' story, then, it would seem that the extent to which it has ultimately made her (into) a *Monster* remains open to discussion.

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Filmography

Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer [Nick Broomfield, 2003, UK]
Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer [Nick Broomfield, 1993, UK]
American Psycho [Mary Harron, 2000, Canada]
Baise-Moi [Virginie Despentes, 2002, France]
Basic Instinct [Paul Verhoeven, 1992, USA]
Bathory [Juroj Jakubisko, 2009, Slovakia/USA]
Belle [Edward Bass, 2010, USA]
Butterfly Kiss [Michael Winterbottom, 1995, UK]
Charles Manson Superstar [Nikolas Schreck, 1989, USA]
Copycat [Jon Amiel, 1995, USA]
Dahmer [David Jacobson, 2002, USA]
Fatal Attraction [Adrian Lyne, 1987, USA]
Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer [John McNaughton, 1986, USA]
In the Light of the Moon [Chuck Parello, 2000, USA]
Karla [Joel Bender, 2006, USA]
Labyrinth [Jim Henson, 1986, UK]
Manson Family, The [Jim van Bebber, 2005, USA]
Monster [Patty Jenkins, 2003, USA]
Mum and Dad [Steven Sheil, 2008, UK]
Natural Born Killers [Oliver Stone, 1994, USA]
Peeping Tom [Michael Powell, 1960, UK]
Phenomena [Dario Argento, 1986, Italy]
See No Evil: The Moors Murderers [Gregory Dark, 2006, USA]
Serial Killers: The Real Life Hannibal Lecters [Sean Buckley, 2001, UK]

Serial Killers: Profiling the Criminal Mind [1999, USA]

Serial Mom [John Waters, 1994, USA]

Silence of the Lambs, The [Jonathan Demme, 1991, USA]

Ted Bundy [Matthew Bright, 2002, USA]

Ted Bundy: Natural Porn Killer [Sascha Olofson, 2006, UK]

Thelma and Louise [Ridley Scott, 1991, USA]

Appendix A: Participant Proforma

FULL NAME	
DATE OF BIRTH	
SEX [MALE/FEMALE]	
CONTACT PHONE NUMBER	
CONTACT EMAIL	
CURRENT OCCUPATION	
EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS	
POLITICAL AFFILIATION	

Appendix B: Letter to Participants

Dear Participant

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in my PhD research.

Please find below a brief description of my research project, and a summary of what this is likely to involve for you as a participant.

TITLE OF PhD

- *Cinematic Constructions of the Female Serial Killer: A Psychosocial Audience Study*

AIMS OF PhD

- To explore the ways in which the female serial killer is represented in three chosen films. These films are *Monster* (2003), *Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992) and *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003)
- To analyse how and why viewers are unconsciously motivated to “invest” in the films in a particular way, based upon their own individual biographical experiences

WHAT WILL IT INVOLVE FOR YOU?

- Attending a mutually convenient showing of the films at a date and location to be arranged between us
- Participating in a series of FOUR in-depth interviews with me: two interviews will take place before the film showing, and two afterwards. Dates/times will be arranged between us
- All interviews will be recorded. All interview data will be treated as confidential

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

Cardiff University Consent Form - Confidential Data

The aim of this project is to look at how the female serial killer is represented in three chosen films and to analyse how and why viewers react to the films in a particular way. The films are *Monster* (2003), *Aileen: The Selling of a Serial Killer* (1992) and *Aileen: Life and Death of a Serial Killer* (2003). I understand that my participation in this project will involve taking part in four separate interviews with the researcher and watching three films. The interviews will require me to talk about my life experiences and may therefore be time-consuming. There is no specified time set for each interview, but each session is likely to require a **maximum** of approximately three hours of my time. The interviews and the film screenings will be organised to take place over a period of approximately six weeks. A full schedule of dates and times, etc will be arranged in advance between myself and the Researcher.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with the Researcher.

I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the Researcher can trace this information back to me individually. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time and I can have access to the information at any time.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by Rachel Cohen, School of Journalism Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Matt Hills.

Signed:

Date:

Appendix D: Biographical (“Pen”) Portraits for Participants

Alice

Alice is 52 years old, educated to O’ Level, and works as Box Office Manager for a local venue. She was born in the Midlands and still lives in the same local area. Alice is the youngest of four children - her Dad died in 2001, and her Mum in 2007 - and she met her husband (Pete) when both were in their early twenties. They are still together, despite a few tumultuous years, and have a son (James) aged 21, with whom both have a good relationship.

Angela

Angela is 19 years old, and a full-time Theology undergraduate. She currently lives in Cardiff, and was born in Herefordshire, where her parents own a farm. Angela is very close to her Mum, Dad and younger sister; she has had two fairly long-term boyfriends, and is currently single.

Beccy

Beccy is 20 years old, and is a full-time undergraduate Language and Communications student. Her Mum died when Beccy was 7 years old, and her Dad has since remarried. Despite some initial difficulties, family relationships are now fairly good. Beccy separated from her first long-term boyfriend during the period of our interview sessions.

Colin

Colin is 29 years old, has a BA (Hons) in Film Studies, and works as a retail manager for a UK supermarket chain. He was born in Cambridge and moved to London - where he continues to live - aged 21, to attend University. Colin is homosexual, and lives with his partner of seven years. His parents separated when Colin was twelve: they have both since re-married, and Colin now has a good relationship with both couples, despite some very difficult periods. Colin suffers from mild depressive illness: he made three suicide attempts as a teenager, and has undergone CBT for this. His Mum has severe long-term clinical depression and is often unwell.

Daniel

Daniel is 65 years old, and educated to degree level (B.Ed). He is a retired Drama teacher, now works as freelance education consultant in the Arts, and has many years' experience as a theatrical director. Daniel is married to wife Fiona, and they have three grown-up children, who have now left the family home. He was born in London and lived there until the early 1980s, then moved to Swansea, where he still lives. Following the death of his father when Daniel was about six years old, he and his brother were raised by their mother and grandmother.

Darren

Darren is 38 years old, educated to CSE level and works as a Contracts Supervisor for a national car parking company. He has a good relationship with his family, is single, and still lives at home with his parents. Darren served two months in prison in 1996 for violent assault.

Denise

Denise is 24 years old, educated to A' Level and works as a personal trainer at a local gym: she was born near Cardiff and continues to live in the same area. Denise lives with her fiancé and, at the time of our interviews, was planning her wedding. Despite some intense family difficulties, she now has good relationships with her Mum, Dad and half-sister (they share the same father).

Harry

Harry is 49 years old, and is a full-time (mature) Media Studies undergraduate, with a previous career background in Sales. He is divorced and lives with his long-term girlfriend of eight years. Harry has two daughters, one from his first marriage and another from a subsequent relationship: he is very close to both and sees them regularly.

Gavin

Gavin is 19 years old, and a full-time Media Studies Undergraduate. He currently lives in Cardiff, and was born in Kent, where he spent his childhood. Gavin is currently single, and has a good relationship with his Mum, Dad and older sister.

Jane

Jane is 27 years old, has a BA in Linguistics, and an MA in Applied Linguistics. She was born in Plymouth, and moved to Bristol to attend University aged 19. Jane currently works as an International Student Support officer for a local FE College, and lives with her boyfriend of eight years. She has a good relationship with her Mum, Dad, two sisters and two brothers, and communicates regularly with them.

Jim

Jim is 51 years old, educated to O' Level, and works as Operations Manager for a travel visa outsourcing company. He was born in Liverpool and moved to London (where he lives today) aged eighteen. Jim's Dad died when Jim was 12 years old: his Mum suffered from severe depressive illness and was hospitalised at various times throughout his childhood. Jim is currently single.

Larry

Larry is 42 years old, educated to A'Level, and currently works as a marketing manager for a telecommunications company. He is divorced with two sons, and currently lives near Cardiff with his long-term girlfriend. He has a good communicative relationship with his ex-wife, and sees his sons regularly.

Mandy

Mandy is 42 years old and educated to CSE level: she is a housewife and works as a helper at a local primary school. She has been married (to Simon) for 22 years and they have three sons. Mandy's Mum died very suddenly when Mandy was aged 15: her Dad has since remarried, and

relations with him and his new wife are still troubled. Simon was almost killed in a road accident in 1992, but has since made a full recovery.

Susie

Susie is 29 years old, lives in Swansea where she works as a domestic cleaner, and is taking an Open University degree in Geology. She is a lesbian, and lives with her partner (Cathy) of eight years.

Appendix E: Transcription Conventions

Originally developed by Gail Jefferson (Maxwell Atkinson and Heritage 1999), the transcriptions of my data utilise the following conventions:

- (0.5) Number in brackets indicates a time gap in tenths of a second
- (.) A dot enclosed in brackets indicates a pause in the talk of less than two-tenths of a second
- = 'Equals' sign indicates 'latching' between utterances
- [] Square brackets between adjacent lines of concurrent speech indicate the onset and end of a spate of overlapping talk
- (()) A description enclosed in a double bracket indicates a non-verbal activity
- A dash indicates the sharp cut-off of the prior sound or word
- : Colons indicate that the speaker has stretched the preceding sound or letter
- (inaudible) Indicates speech that is difficult to make out. Details may also be given with regards to the nature of this speech (e.g. shouting)
- Under Underlined fragments indicate speaker emphasis
- CAPITALS Words in capitals mark a section of speech noticeably louder than that surrounding it
- ◦ Degree signs are used to indicate that the talk they encompass is spoken noticeably quieter than the surrounding talk