SUBVERSIVE VOICES IN CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD:

THE RHETORIC OF RESISTANCE IN INDEPENDENT FILM NARRATIVES

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. First and foremost to my husband who not only supports my decision to continue my education but also serves as my brainstorming partner and my unofficial editor. Without his support, encouragement, and enthusiasm about my coursework, I would not have succeeded in my graduate work. Second, to Carolina and Ivy, my two daughters who I fell in love with over and over again while immersed in my graduate studies. My experiences with you both served as a starting point and inspiration for my academic study of motherhood and childrearing ideologies. And also, for my mother, who has supported me in every way for my entire life. This thesis is for all of you.

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ABSTRACT

Rachel Diana Davidson

SUBVERSIVE VOICES IN CONTEMPORARY MOTHERHOOD:

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Interpretive textual analysis, informed by a feminist perspective, is applied to five independent films written and directed by female filmmakers in order to understand to what extent the rhetorical construction of motherhood as presented in the films deviates from or supports a patriarchal Western vision. This study provides a rich textual analysis of *Amreeka* (2009), *Frozen River* (2008), *Waitress* (2006), *The Dead Girl* (2006), and *Lovely and Amazing* (2001); five films that each considers the role of contemporary mothering as a central part of its plot. Each film has been distributed within ten years of the inception of this study, is considered an independent film, has received some degree of critical acclaim, and is written and directed by a female filmmaker. Using a feminist critical interpretive lens, this study investigates the public and private sphere identification of the mothers, the mother-child relationships, and the family systems that work to unveil a vision of motherhood in contemporary independent film and identify the extent to which this vision challenges or adheres to traditional representations. The readings of these films rely on theoretical insights of feminist film criticism and feminist theory. In addition, feminist rhetorical perspectives provide the framework to reveal the broader cultural implications of the representation of contemporary motherhood in public discourse. The analysis reveals a subversive reading of contemporary mothering characterized by the rejection of domesticity and other traditional mothering ideologies. Informed by resistance theory, the findings suggest the female filmmakers utilize the symbolic inversion tactic as a tool to resist their subordinate status. The subversive

discourses give voice to female filmmakers attempting to negotiate power in a traditionally patriarchal forum by invoking a rhetoric of resistance. However, the rhetorical construction of the "indie" mother is characterized by maternal sacrifice and maternal autonomy which ultimately forces women to negotiate their mothering identity in relation to the hegemonic childrearing model of intensive mothering. The production of contradictory messages illustrates an attempt to adapt to existing conditions rather than transform the patriarchal system suggesting that independent film is a dynamic medium that both reflects hegemonic discourse while remaining open to ideological variance.

Catherine A. Dobris, Ph.D., Chair

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Representation of marginalized groups in public discourse is an issue that

generates robust academic dialogue between feminist scholars. As indicated by

Pietropaolo and Testaferri, "the question of representation has been one of the longest

fights sustained by feminists" (xi). In this context, the notion of representation refers to

the embodiment of cultural assumptions, stereotypes, and gender expectations that create

standards and practices for groups despite the individual. Individuals naturally accept

and adopt these standards and practices, not fully understanding the influence that their

daily exposure to public discourse has in constructing their identity and maintaining the

status quo. Consequently, much feminist scholarship critically analyzes how

marginalized groups, such as mothers, are represented in popular culture by exposing

oppressive ideologies embedded within public discourse.

Representations of motherhood in popular culture inscribe meaning and construct

reality for women who are exposed to them through a variety of cultural texts. As

Johnston and Swanson explain in "Invisible Mothers: A Content Analysis of

Motherhood Ideologies and Myths in Magazines," "culture tells us what it means to be a

mother, what behaviors and attitudes are appropriate for mothers, and how motherhood

should shape relationships and self-identity" (21). Further, they argue, "the construction

of motherhood, particularly in the form of dominant ideologies, may have little

correspondence to the lived social realities of mothers" (22). As such, much of what is

interpreted as mothering expectations in contemporary American society are collective

assumptions fostered by dominant ideologies embedded within various cultural texts.

Contemporary American cinema is a forum that provides rich cultural artifacts for feminist scholars to challenge common cultural assumptions by examining issues of representation in hopes of improving the lives of marginalized groups. Many feminist scholars consider female representation in cinema as an area worthy of scholarly attention (Barry; Dow; Erens; Faludi; Griffin; hooks; Humm; Thornman). Feminist scholar bell hooks practices cultural criticism of popular texts, such as film, as an option for rhetorical analysis. In her essay, "Sisterhood: Beyond Public and Private," hooks suggests, "the worlds of cinema, TV, and magazines do constitute something real in people's everyday lives" (826). Similarly, in *Feminist Film Theory*, Sue Thornman addresses film as "'the crucial terrain' on which feminist debates about culture, representation and identity have been fought" (2). Susan Faludi offers another feminist perspective of film in *Backlash: The Undeclared War on American Women*. She illuminates feminist backlash in popular culture and argues that popular media outlets, such as film, work as a hegemonic albatross impeding women's progress. Thornman, hooks, and Faludi, offer scholarly perspectives on the ability of film to translate Western depictions of gender and reinforce cultural stereotypes and expectations.

This study seeks to contribute to the feminist dialogue of motherhood representation in film. In this study, I will conduct an interpretive textual analysis, informed by a feminist perspective, of five contemporary independent films written and directed by female filmmakers in order to understand to what extent the rhetorical construction of motherhood as presented in the films deviates from or supports a patriarchal Western vision; a vision that bolsters traditional gender stereotypes and serves the interest of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. First, I will review the relevant

literature regarding visions of motherhood in Western culture. Second, I will overview the methodology I will be applying to the films. Third, I will set the rhetorical situation and discuss the premise of each film. Next, I will conduct a textual analysis of the five films highlighting major themes. Finally, I will provide insights my analysis reveals of mothering roles in contemporary independent film as told by female writers and directors.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Motherhood in Western Media

There has been a substantial body of academic scholarship focused on the rhetoric

of motherhood in western popular culture. Johnston and Swanson indicate, "culture

defines and rewards 'good mothers,' and it sanctions 'bad mothers'" (22). The rewards

and sanctions to which they refer to are no-where more prevalent than in popular culture.

Feminist analyses of contemporary mothering offer insight into how popular cultural

texts reinforce what it means to be a mother in American society.

Sociologist Sharon Hays identifies what she calls an ideology of intensive

mothering in her seminal text, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. She contends

the intensive mothering model is the dominant childrearing model in contemporary

Western culture. She combines a qualitative and quantitative approach to her research by

analyzing historical trends in childrearing, conducting a textual analysis of child-rearing

manuals and interviewing mothers. According to Hays, the five basic tenets of this

model include: the mother is the primary caretaker, the mother takes a child-centered

approach to childrearing, the primary caretakers view raising children as "emotionally

absorbing" and "labor intensive" (8), the primary caretakers understand childrearing as

expensive, and primary caretakers consult expert guided opinions on childrearing. Hays

claims this model places unrealistic expectations on mothers and "serves the interest not

only of men but also of capitalism, the state, the middle class, and whites" (xiii). Hays'

intensive mothering model provides a framework for understanding how Western trends

in childrearing practices influence mothering ideologies.

Many scholars agree with Hays' claim that the ideology of intensive mothering is deeply embedded in western culture. In *The Mommy Myth*, Douglas and Michaels survey various media outlets as forces that shape contemporary American motherhood. The authors critique television, movies, magazines, advertisements, and celebrity mothers and offer a framework for understanding the significant impact these mass mediated texts have in shaping ideals of motherhood. Influenced by these forces, they coin the phrase "the new momism" to refer to contemporary mothering expectations that move beyond Sharon Hays' intensive mothering model (4). Similar to Hays' perspective, the authors contend that the intensive mothering model embedded in American mass media is harmful to all mothers as most will never be able to live up to the expectations it projects on them.

Bassin, Honey and Kaplan explore contemporary mothering from various methodologies and theoretical frameworks in *Representations of Motherhood*. By doing so, the authors investigate the impact that popular culture has in producing contemporary ideals of motherhood. They describe motherhood as a paradoxical construction where a mother's identity and self –actualization are dialectically in tension with their social position. From this perspective, popular discourse produced by cultural institutions is instructive in the forming of contemporary mothers' lived realities.

Many feminist analyses on mothering focus on ideologies as presented in specific examples of advertising, books, television, and film. Kimberly N. Kline, author of "Midwife Attended Births in Prime-Time Television: Craziness, Controlling Bitches, and Ultimate Capitulation," uses qualitative textual analysis informed by Sonja K. Foss' generative rhetorical criticism approach to analyze three prime-time television series,

Dharma & Greg, *The Gilmore Girls*, and *Girlfriends*. Analyzing these shows, she attempts to understand how the presence of a midwife attended birth is undermined by the more traditional medical model. She argues, "increasing evidence that fictionalized accounts of important social issues can influence the ways people make sense of and make choices with regard to their health may suggest popular media representations of pregnancy and childbirth facilitate the cultural indulgence of the medical model and contestation of the midwifery model" (20). Kline first reviews the two different models that guide maternal care, the medical model and the midwifery model. She argues that the medical model has continued to prevail over the midwifery model due to ideological and cultural privilege. Aiding in this privilege are popular media representations of the midwifery model. Kline's reading suggests that the depiction of motherhood and childrearing ideologies in a television series has significant ideological bearing on the psyche of the mother.

Robin Silbergleid similarly explores the representation of single motherhood in a popular television series. In her essay, "Hip Mamas: Gilmore Girls and Ariel Gore," Silbergleid observes the hit television series *Gilmore Girls* as a "unique opportunity to think about the nature of motherhood and family in the popular sphere" (94). Central to the plot of this television show is the depiction of a single mother who became a teenage mother at the age of 16. Silbergleid argues the mother/daughter relationship portrayed epitomizes Douglas and Michaels' concept of the "new momism" as their interaction portrays an "idealized relationship" and "closes off sustained discussion of the complexities of teen motherhood and the harsh economic realities faced by most single mothers in contemporary American culture" (96). As such, Silbergleid's analysis

indicates a motherhood ideology that is not consistent with the lived realities of many single mothers in contemporary Western culture.

Katherine N. Kinnick explores cultural narratives of motherhood found in American media outlets such as television shows, popular magazines, and Disney princess stories in "Media Morality Tales and the Politics of Motherhood." Kinnick argues that stories told about motherhood in the media are more "ideologically diverse" than in years prior in that some popular narratives express liberal and feminist views over traditionally conservative perspectives (3). However, despite a contemporary trend in ideologically diverse narratives, media scholars contend that popular media reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Kinnick concludes that "media representations of mothers not only reflect deep cultural tensions about the 'proper' roles for women, but also demonstrate the media's ability to undercut or bolster a group's political power, and transmit values and stereotypes to future generations" (22). From Kinnick's feminist perspective, popular discourse is a means for perpetuating traditional myths about gender roles rather than reflecting the lived reality of contemporary mothers.

In "Rhetorical Visions of Motherhood: A Feminist Analysis of the *What to Expect Series*," Dobris and White-Mills examine a popular childrearing text and expose an erroneously constructed portrait of the contemporary mother. Their analysis reveals six themes that are "sometimes complementary and sometimes at odds with each other" (29). Despite the contradictory nature of the themes, the authors contend the best-selling book creates a "construction of 'woman' as middle income, heterosexual, married, educated and relatively young," and that this "is not only an inaccurate portrayal of most women and mothers in our culture, but is also potentially alienating and exclusionary to

those women who do not fit the stereotype" (33). This essay illustrates that child rearing

books and manuals also guide mothers in childcare and reinforce mothering expectations.

Similar to childrearing manuals, women's magazines also maintain and reinforce

mothering ideologies. Johnston and Swanson, authors of "Invisible Mothers: A Content

Analysis of Motherhood Ideologies and Myths in Magazines," argue little attention has

been directed toward the extent to which media plays in the construction of motherhood

ideologies. They conduct a content analysis of current women's magazines in order to

illuminate the cultural myths and ideologies that define contemporary mothering. The

authors first identify myths as the building blocks of ideologies. They identify common

myths of stay at home mothers and employed mothers. Then, the authors analyze the

representation of mothers in women's magazines. They contend that, "messages in

women's magazines may be less a reflection of society than a means for perpetuating

social myths of gender" (23). Johnston and Swanson detail three mothering paradigms,

the traditional model, the feminist model, and the neotraditionalist model. The authors

find that a traditional mothering paradigm is upheld in the magazines, which is

problematic because it "effectively limits mothers' ability to engage the public sphere

where social change occurs" (31). Johnston and Swanson's article indicates the myths

being told in popular magazines satisfy traditional gender roles, which has public sphere

implications.

Thus far, I have reviewed feminist analyses of contemporary motherhood that

illuminate dominant ideas of mothering in various cultural artifacts. These analyses

highlight the magnitude of dominant representations on "real life" mothers. The

good/bad dichotomy is reified in these representations and consequently, mothers

construct their identities based on the expectations embedded and expressed by the popular texts.

Investigating depictions of motherhood on film as a popular text can isolate representations that have significant impact on viewer's perceptions of motherhood. As indicated by Stephen Dine Young, author of "Movies as Equipment for Living: A Developmental Analysis of the Importance of Film in Everyday Life," "movie viewing is seen as an active and valued part of life, even if viewers are unaware of further ramifications" (459). Young's findings suggest film as a cultural artifact has bearing on the development of an individual's self identity. In addition to the personal impact, his findings also infer movies have societal impact by maintaining and reinforcing what is normalized in the texts. Therefore, motherhood representations in film not only shape mothering identities, but also define the societal parameters of acceptable mothering behavior.

Motherhood in American Cinema

Now that I have reviewed the literature on the rhetoric of mothering in contemporary American popular culture, I will turn to analyses of films that examine representations of motherhood reflected in American mainstream cinema. In "Race, Class, and the Pressure to Pass in American Maternal Melodrama: The Case of Stella Dallas," Allison Whitney explores race relations and mothering identity in an American film. She explains the "Americanization of the maternal melodrama" began in the 1930s "where maternal sacrifice became a high priority" (3). Whitney argues American melodrama depictions of motherhood are substantially different than European representations because of the mother's actual and perceived racial identity. With limited

representation in the film, Whitney illuminates portrayals of three female black characters in relation to the main mothering character, Stella Dallas, to illustrate the role of race in social relations. Whitney's reading of *Stella Dallas* points to deep-rooted historical racial ideologies that inform maternal representation on film. As such, Whitney's analysis illustrates how implicit Western ideologies inform mothering identity.

In her book titled *Motherhood and Representation: The Mother in Popular Culture and Melodrama*, E. Ann Kaplan argues that the mother is everywhere, but not always "the topic per se under consideration" (3). Because Kaplan contends that the representation of mother in popular culture has not received enough scholarly attention, she devotes all of the chapters in this text to exploring the depiction of mothers in film, literary texts, popular magazines, journalism, and writings by child care experts. The second part of the text is an exploration of maternal roles as depicted in early and contemporary popular fiction. Kaplan argues that images of motherhood inscribed in nineteenth century discourse had significant impact on twentieth century films. According to Kaplan, female sexuality and work are still constructed as antithetical to motherhood. Kaplan's book contributes to feminist scholarship in relation to mothering depictions in cinema that argue popular discourses "construct mothers on the level of lived reality" (7). According to Kaplan, this is problematic because the lived reality of mothers depicted in popular discourse is typically an inaccurate and flawed portrayal.

These inaccurate portrayals are further discussed by Kaplan in "Sex, Work, and Motherhood: Maternal Subjectivity in Recent Visual Culture." In this analysis, Kaplan investigates the intersection of work, sex, and motherhood in the films *The Good Mother* (1988), *Fatal Attraction* (1989), *Baby Boom* (1988), *Three Men and a Baby* (1988), *Look*

Who's Talking (1990), and *Postcards from the Edge* (1991). She argues that these films do not address the practical issues of work and single motherhood that is the lived reality for contemporary American single mothers. From Kaplan's perspective, these films represent a portrait of contemporary mothers where sex, work, and motherhood are incompatible. In these films, mothers are either portrayed as sexual with no career or if they have a successful career, they are not sexual. She contends that current trends in film still endorse the traditional nuclear family and what are needed are alternative representations of mothers where motherhood, sex, and work are compatible.

Angela Dancey similarly examines the interplay between motherhood and work in her analysis titled "Killer Instincts: Motherhood and Violence in *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Kill Bill*."   Dancey argues that although violence and brutality are centerpieces in each film, women's themes of "maternity, self-sacrifice, female friendship, domesticity, and choice (between love and children, love and career, career and children)" are favored over the manifest content (82). In these films, the lead characters are both action heroes and mothers and thus, share a "complex relationship with violence, one that reflects our current cultural confusion about motherhood" (82). Both characters "function as dramatic examples of how working motherhood potentially places children at risk" (83). Dancey contends that although the films transform the single mother from powerless to violent and destructive forces, the characters work to reinforce the traditional Western notion that children naturally belong with the mother and the mother is always the primary caretaker, two primary tenets of Hays' model of intensive mothering.

Lisa Renee Barry examines the representation of motherhood in film in her dissertation, *Re-focusing the Critical Lens: Reading Cinematic Single Motherhood Against the Frame*. Barry uses feminist film theory and criticism to analyze four American films, *Applause*, *Blonde Venus*, *Imitation of Life*, and *Baby Boom*. More specifically, Barry observes the depiction of the single mother in each of these films and explores the extent to whether the depictions reinforce traditional roles and beliefs about mothers. She finds that two contradictory readings of the films can serve as the dominant readings. The first reinforces traditional societal expectations and the second challenges traditional societal expectations. Barry draws on resistance theory, a theory not typically utilized in film analyses. Resistance theory is utilized to explain how marginalized individuals develop tactics that are designed to resist dominant ideologies. Barry observes cinema as a vehicle for translating dominance and patriarchal ideologies. She argues that single mothers represent a marginalized group and that their representation in film signifies a re-negotiation of power relations. Therefore, the application of resistance theory to film portrayals of motherhood illuminates the contradictory nature of motherhood representation in cinema.

While Barry's findings indicate contradiction in films that simultaneously challenge the status quo and reinforce dominant ideologies, some argue resistance to patriarchal ideals is merely superficial and closer readings reveal patriarchal standards are engrained in the latent content of films. One such example is Rachel Davidson's "Intensive Mothering on Film: Contradictions and Consequences in *Little Children*." In this analysis, Davidson employs feminist methodology grounded in bell hooks rhetorical theory to explore the feminist position and the vision of motherhood as presented in the

2006 film, *Little Children*. Davidson aligns the emerging themes with Hays' ideology of

intensive mothering. Davidson points out that although the film embodies central

characteristics of the dominant Western childrearing model, it simultaneously shows

resistance to the mainstream ideology by inverting moral suburban mothering behavior.

In her analysis, *Little Children* is compared to other contemporary American films that

similarly present mothers who challenge this dominant way of thinking, albeit suffer

consequences for deviating from its basic tenets. In each of the films, mothers seek

fulfillment outside of their mothering identity concomitantly showing frustration with the

intensive mothering model. However, the examples, including *Little Children*, indicate

restrictions of mothering options as a consequence of the imposition of this ideology.

Davidson argues the film portrays a vision of motherhood that encourages the exclusion

of women from the public sphere and devalues mother's work in the private sphere.

Davidson identifies the intensive mothering model as the ideology of domination that

supports white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. From this perspective, films that on the

surface appear to challenge the status quo actually reinforce patriarchal ideals by

sanctioning consequences for women's actions in the public and private spheres.

Thus far, all of the studies cited in the preceding portion of the literature review

evaluate American Hollywood films. With the sole exception of Barry's dissertation, the

feminist analyses on motherhood in film indicate American film is bound to patriarchy.

Although some resistance is apparent, close readings of films usually reinforce the

domination of men over marginalized groups thus signaling patriarchy is deeply

embedded within the fabric of our culture and is translated in American Hollywood films.

Motherhood in Independent Cinema

Although there is a healthy amount of literature devoted to analyses of motherhood in Hollywood films, there is a lack of scholarly attention devoted to depictions of motherhood in independent films. For this reason, representation of motherhood in independent film as told from a female perspective could provide a possible site for deviation from an American mainstream perspective. In order to establish alternative visions to Hollywood film, it is necessary to first explore the differences between independent film and Hollywood cinema.

Benshoff and Griffin, authors of *America on Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies*, offer a comparative look at Hollywood versus independent films. They explain that some define independent film as "made by minority filmmakers that tell stories and express viewpoints that are ignored or underexplored in Hollywood movies" (Benshoff and Griffin 24). Further, they declare, "independent, foreign, avant-garde, and documentary films tend to represent a broader spectrum of humanity than do Hollywood films" (24). Benshoff and Griffin suggest, "As might be expected, these types of films often differ from Hollywood films in the ways that they depict issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality (as well as a host of other topics that are often considered taboo by Hollywood filmmakers)" (24-25).   From their perspective, independent films are expected to differentiate themselves from Hollywood films, at the very least, by the way they portray topics of concern for marginalized groups. Because these issues are central to contemporary feminist thought, exploration and evaluation of independent film is an area worthy of feminist scholarly attention in order to understand the extent to which representation of marginalized individuals deviates from a traditional Hollywood perspective.

Holmlund offers an alternative perspective on independent filmmaking in *Contemporary American Independent Film*. In this text, Holmlund details the evolution of the independent film movement from its earliest days to current trends. Issues such as the relationship to mainstream Hollywood films and what qualifies as an independent film are examined. Holmlund and the text's contributors explore the current landscape of independent film and investigate the extent to which the industry still highlights the marginal, independent perspectives, or if independent films now cater to a mainstream audience. Because major Hollywood production studios are now involved in the independent film industry, Holmlund questions to what extent this involvement affects the ethos of the independent film movement. Holmlund contends, "historically independent films have offered a 'safe haven' for those ignored or neglected by the major studios, among them ethnic, racial, sexual, and political 'minorities'" (13). Although there is an apparent trend in independent film moving toward the mainstream, Holmlund argues "that creative imagination, determination, and courage continue to be present" (11). From Holmlund's perspective, independent film can be understood as a movement that does not necessarily cater exclusively to marginal perspectives and is not removed from the influence of the production forces of mainstream Hollywood cinema.

Benshoff, Griffin, and Holmlund offer varying perspectives on independent film, but do agree that there are connections between independent film and Hollywood film. Benshoff and Griffin suggest, "Hollywood and independent film practice might be best understood as the end points of a continuum of American fictional film production, and not as an either/or binary" (25). With many independent films being produced by independent arms of Hollywood production companies, it is important to look at

independent films and the degree to which the representational traditions set in place in

Hollywood films has crossed over to independent films. Due to the connections between

the two entities, independent film may have a comparable ideological impact as

Hollywood film.

Rationale for Study

Scholarly attention directed at portrayals of mothers in film fails to address the

representation of motherhood exclusively in contemporary independent films.

Independent film can arguably be a site of deviation from a Hollywood-influenced,

patriarchal depiction of gender and can provide unique cinematic expression that

highlights marginalized perspectives. For this reason, this study focuses solely on

independent films. In addition, feminist scholarship that addresses motherhood

ideologies in film, fails to consider the role of female voices and the extent to which their

vision provides an alternative to white, supremacist, capitalist patriarchy. According to

Kaplan, "Twentieth-century mother-representations in films are made (largely) by men"

(*Motherhood and Representation* 11). As such, isolating female visions of motherhood

in independent cinema represents a meaningful area that has not been explored.

The Personal Narrative Group indicates in *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist*

Theory and Personal Narratives, "many women's personal narratives unfold within the

framework of an apparent acceptance of social norms and expectations but nevertheless

describe strategies and activities that challenge those same norms" (7). In addition,

Pietropaolo and Testaferri explain in *Feminisms in the Cinema*:

> While it is still reasonable to mistrust representation in general because it
> implicitly signifies the authoritative look of an active subject upon a
> possible object, one should welcome the works of women filmmakers,
> especially when they perform the reflexive act of looking at themselves,

an act of representation which legitimately collapses the distance between
subject and object (Pietropaolo and Testaferri xi)

In other words, exploring texts created by women that construct and portray women is an area that can provide valuable insight into issues of representation.

Given the preceding literature review, this study is designed to investigate the purview of a woman's vision of motherhood, whose perspective is presumed to exemplify uniqueness of vision in independent cinematic text. Written and directed by female filmmakers, these films represent a personal narrative and as such are rich sources for textual analysis. Kaplan declares concern over the representation of the mother rather than "'the historical' or 'real life' mother, who is usually the object of study;" (*Motherhood and Representation* 6). Kaplan contends:

> How can any historical (i.e. "real life" mother) know whether what she
> thinks she wants really reflects her subjective desire, or whether she wants
> it because it serves patriarchy (that she has been constructed to want to
> please)? Since patriarchy wants women to want children, in other words,
> how can a woman distinguish her desire for the child from that imposed
> on her?" (4)

Similar to Kaplan, the concern in this study is with motherhood representation and the subsequent impact on the constructed reality of "real life" mothers. Based on the preceding literature review, the following research questions guide my study:

Research Question 1: How do female writers and directors rhetorically construct motherhood in contemporary independent films?

Research Question 2: To what extent does this representation of contemporary motherhood challenge or adhere to patriarchal ideology?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The primary research method for this study will be interpretive textual analysis. My research is guided by the theoretical insights that have influenced the broad areas of textual analysis and feminist methodology. In addition, feminist rhetorical perspectives provide this study's theoretical framework to reveal the broader cultural implications of representations of motherhood in contemporary independent films created by female filmmakers. I will conduct an interpretive textual analysis of the films, identifying common themes in the context of motherhood portrayals.

Textual Analysis

Relying on the most basic definition, textual analysis is a methodology for analyzing artifacts. In his book, *Textual Analysis: A Beginner's Guide*, McKee explains textual analysis is "a way for researchers to gather information about how other human beings make sense of the world" (1). Further, he states that textual analysis "seeks to understand the ways in which these forms of representation take place, the assumptions behind them and the kinds of sense-making about the world that they reveal" (McKee 17). Textual analysis, then, is an appropriate methodology for critics to utilize when they want to understand what messages cultural texts are sending and how individuals are likely interpreting those messages.

There are a variety of texts, or artifacts, critics may investigate. Many forms of traditional and non-traditional pieces of rhetoric are suitable for textual analysis. Some examples include, but not limited to, television programs, magazines, books, graffiti, and film. Popular culture artifacts, such as films, provide a rich text for critics to analyze about the nature of culture and the representations encouraged in particular contexts.

Textual Analysis and Film

   Textual analysis is a suitable method for analyzing film as a cultural text. Mayne argues that, "the preferred mode of analyzing the classical cinema has been through close reading of individual films. Textual analysis has been a crucial tool in feminist film criticism, for it emphasizes the importance of understanding cinematic representation in any evaluation of women in film" (88). When analyzing film, there are five main components that critics may evaluate. Those components are literary design, visual design, cinematography, editing, and sound design. Although all five elements contribute to the film's meaning, for the purpose of this study, I will be analyzing the literary design in each film. Benshoff and Griffin explain, "The literary design includes the story, the setting, the action, the characters, the characters' names, the dialog, the film's title, and any deeper subtexts or thematic meanings" (4). As I analyze the literary designs of each film, I will observe common themes expressed in the content and the form of the films.

   Textual analysis involves many different methodologies, depending on the context of the artifact. When analyzing popular culture artifacts, content analysis and interpretive textual analysis are the two main forms of textual analysis (Textual Analysis). Critics employing interpretive textual analysis can utilize various methodological approaches including semiotics, rhetorical analysis, ideological analysis, and psychoanalysis. These types of analyses, influenced by a wide range of theoretical frameworks, attempt to identify implicit social meanings that are embedded in the cultural texts. For example, in *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy and Popular Culture*, Janice Radway uses textual analysis to examine the romance genre novel and explore the extent to which female consumption of these texts function to perpetuate

patriarchy. Interpretive textual analysis is a means for a critic to identify how cultural

texts construct and maintain dominant ideologies. By maintaining dominant ideologies,

the cultural texts are impactful to those who use them and the expectations to which their

identities conform.

Feminism as a Critical Lens[1]

This study is informed by feminism as a perspective and as a method of criticism.

Feminism exists as a research method and as a political movement. Feminism, as a

political movement, is aimed at improving oppressive conditions for marginalized

groups. As a research method, feminist criticism can uncover the conventions that inhibit

marginalized groups from reaching their full capacity. Communication scholars

comprehend the world's problems as communication problems. From a feminist

perspective, utilizing a feminist lens is a means to solve those communication problems.

As suggested by bell hooks in *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*,

"…feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (1).

Similarly, as explained by Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, "The feminist movement has

opened our eyes to the deep and varied ways in which the ideals and institutions of the

worlds culture's are oppressive to women" (1). Feminist rhetorical scholar, Sonia

Johnson contends that feminism is simply another way of looking at the world and as

such, a means to open up new ways of thinking. Trinh T. Minh-ha understands feminism

as "a movement that contributes to the questioning and challenging of established

ideological systems" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 236). Utilizing these perspectives to frame

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[1] Portions of this section taken from a journaling assignment in W695: American Feminist Rhetoric at IUPUI, Fall 2009.

feminist thought, feminism is a way of bringing to light those cultural structures the inhibit women and other marginalized groups from reaching their full capacity.

Feminist film theory and feminist rhetorical theory provide a complementary framework to analyze the films in this study. Feminist film criticism has primarily been shaped and influenced by semiotics, Marxism, and psychoanalysis. Scholarship in this field generates feminist film theory and methodology specific to film as an artifact. Feminist rhetorical theory also values film as a meaningful cultural text with ideological impact. Mass mediated messages, such as film and television rhetorically construct meaning for those who engage it. For this study, issues in feminist film theory and feminist rhetorical theory have guided and influenced my research. Therefore, in addition to feminist rhetorical perspectives, some of the basic tenets of feminist film theory are reflected in this analysis. Perspectives in feminist rhetorical theory are used to illuminate the broader cultural implications and trends in the representations of motherhood in contemporary independent film created by female filmmakers.

Post-Structuralist Textual Analysis

Interpretive textual analysis is a grounded methodological approach where the critic allows the themes to emerge naturally from the text. Critics utilizing this approach can frame their research employing various methodologies. The methodology a critic chooses depends on the questions she is asking in the study. Post-structuralist textual analysis is practiced "to find out what were and what are the reasonable sense-making practices of cultures" (McKee 19). Further, critics utilizing a post-structuralist framework attempt to expose hegemonic underpinnings in cultural texts. The application of the methodology in this study utilizes post-structuralist textual analysis where the

sense-making practices of motherhood are observed. How do members of a marginalized

group make sense of motherhood ideologies and how are those translated in the public

discourse that they are creating? The post-structuralist perspective allows critics to

contemplate the sense-making practices of those individuals who produce public

discourse as well as those who engage it.

The work of post-structuralists such as Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Michel

Foucault, has been influential to academic feminism. In "Feminism, Foucault, and

"Subjects" of Power and Freedom," Jana Sawicki attributes Foucault's impact on

feminist scholarship to his practice of intervening in the "specific struggles of

disenfranchised and socially suspect groups such as prisoners, mental patients, and

homosexuals" (159). However, some feminist scholars argue Foucault's research was

"gender blind" in addressing issues of subjectification (Sawicki, Simons). Because this

study employs a post-structuralist approach to feminist scholarship, I will use feminist

rhetorical perspectives to fill the "gender blind" gap in this post-structuralist approach.

In order to identify how discourses of motherhood are encoded in the texts, I will

employ a feminist post-structuralist method of analysis. In this feminist post-structuralist

textual analysis, I will be examining the suggested subtext regarding contemporary

mothering, questioning the underlying meaning of sexuality and agency as displayed in

the public and private spheres. The post-structuralist approach paired with feminist

rhetorical perspectives offer a complimentary framework to identify the production of

meaning in the films thus exposing hegemonic underpinnings.

Feminist Rhetorical Theory

For more than 2500 years, the rhetorical discipline has been dominated by the contributions of white, privileged men. Due to this, perspectives outside of white, privileged men have not been acknowledged or accounted for in the development of theory or in the application of practice. In contemporary rhetorical theory, inclusion of marginalized perspectives on rhetorical thought have brought changes and new areas of scholarship to the rhetorical discipline. In *Woman Speak*, Foss and Foss detail several assumptions upon which the communication discipline have been founded. Some of those assumptions include: significant communication happens in the public sphere, significant communication is created by men, speechmaking is the most significant form of communication, suitable frameworks for assessing communication are derived from male perspectives, and significant communication texts are finished products. Contemporary feminist rhetorical scholars, such as Foss and Foss, work to challenge each of these assumptions. By challenging each of these assumptions, rhetorical theory helps to reconceptualize the foundations of the discipline and how rhetoric is understood and evaluated. Without feminist perspectives, differences in race, gender, ethnicity, and class might not be accounted for and disruption of the patriarchal system would not be possible.

The contributions of bell hooks and Cheris Kramarae have inspired new communication theories and adapted existing theories to incorporate those perspectives that have been misrepresented and under-represented in the rhetorical discipline for more than 2500 years. The feminist rhetorical perspectives of hooks and Kramarae offer an appropriate lens to frame the research questions for this study because their rhetorical

theories account for both the audience and the rhetor as possible sites for social

transformation.

Contemporary feminist rhetorical scholar, bell hooks, contributes much insight to

feminist scholarship. Hooks argues that feminism is not exclusively an academic

problem and as such, intentionally writes much of her work so that those outside of the

academy find her scholarship applicable to their everyday lives (*Feminism is for

Everybody*). Transformation is central to her rhetorical theory and is only possible if

those outside of the academy find her work accessible and practical in their lives. Hooks

practices cultural criticism as a rhetorical option in her rhetorical theory. She asserts that

television and film constitute something very real in individual's lives and that the

messages they receive in these cultural artifacts help to shape their identity

("Sisterhood"). Consequently, her feminist scholarship focuses on how to make

individuals more critical consumers of culture. Her rhetorical theory includes

indentifying the ideology of domination at work in the texts. The ideology of domination

is the patriarchal system working to colonize those that engage it. Once the ideology of

domination is identified, hooks suggests to replace this patriarchal structure with an

environment that values respect, mutuality, and equality.

Similar to hooks, feminist rhetorical theorist, Cheris Kramarae, works to

reconceptualize the rhetorical discipline. Kramarae understands feminism as disrupting

the system by altering linguistic systems. Her feminist rhetorical theory focuses on the

intersection of language and gender. She asserts that language maintains the status quo

and is beneficial to men and not women. This happens, in part, due to the function of

language in socially constructing gender. This social construction of gender includes

defining what is appropriate for males and females. Because of her focus on language construction, Kramarae does not use the term patriarchy because she believes using this term excludes the oppression of other marginalized groups. Kramarae insists that feminism is a system that works to benefit not only women, but any other group or individual subject to oppression. Kramarae's rhetorical theory addresses what she identifies as the mainstream view and the woman's view. In the mainstream view, communication is oppressive and normalizes the white man's perspective. The woman's view of communication is an alternative to the mainstream view where women are able to engage and have qualities as they so choose. Kramarae's rhetorical theory calls for women to develop unique qualities of communication that are not necessarily valued in the mainstream view. From her perspective, feminist rhetorical theory creates change when rhetor's can engage in her own individualized woman's world.

From this perspective, reality is rhetorically constructed and translated through various cultural vehicles. Kramarae focuses her rhetorical theory on how language rhetorically constructs gender and hooks asserts that mass media constructs gender but despite what each rhetorical theorist believes to be the oppressive vehicle translating patriarchal ideology, public discourse has significant influence on interpretations of truth and reality. For this reason, feminist rhetorical theorists attempt to make ideas that seem natural and conventional, appear purposely "strange." By doing so, they call attention to those apparatus' that create a constructed reality for individuals.

In order to identify how sense-making practices are at work in the texts, this study employs post-structuralist strategies of identifying examples of exnomination and structuring absences. Exnomination is a word coined by French cultural theorist Roland

Barthes. This term means "outside of naming" and as McKee describes, "the point was that dominant groups or ideas in society become so obvious or common sense that they don't have to draw attention to themselves by giving themselves a name" (106). In other words, examples of exnomination are understood as assumptions that certain values and ideas are so widely held that they cannot be challenged and need not be expressed. Essentially, these assumptions serve as the benchmark by which individuals are measured.

Elements expressed in the rhetorical theories of Kramarae and hooks can be compared to the post-structuralist methodology of finding examples of exnomination. In Kramarae's rhetorical theory, she details the mainstream world that features a language system dominated by "white men and their perspectives, thus constructing them as the standard or norm" (Foss et al. 41). As such, Kramarae contends that this normalization of white men's perspectives neglects women and women's perspectives. Similar to Kramarae's mainstream world, hooks' rhetorical theory highlights a patriarchal notion of colonization. Colonization is "the conquering of 'the minds and habits' of oppressed people so that they themselves internalize and accept their 'inherent inferiority'" (Foss et al. 84). Kramarae's notion of the mainstream world and hooks' concept of colonization can illuminate the dominant ideas and values not expressed in the texts. By highlighting those unexpressed values, the sense-making strategies of the filmmakers will be illuminated. Therefore, examples of exnomination will be identified utilizing hooks' and Kramarae's feminist rhetorical options.

Another post-structuralist textual strategy for identifying the sense-making practices at work in texts is referred to as structuring absences. The notion of structuring

absences refers to the process of excluding "certain kinds of representations and not draw attention to this" (McKee 110). In "Structuring Absences: Images of America Missing From the Hollywood Screen," Melvyn Stokes explains, "When the members of a nation view their cinema screens, the images they do not see are frequently as important as the ones that they do" (43). Further, he discusses how "the American film industry has ignored or structured out certain crucial aspects of the American experience in and through the motion pictures it has made" (43). Therefore, highlighting the representations not included in the texts can enhance a post-structuralist analysis.

Hooks' and Kramarae's rhetorical theories also create options for critics to identify structured absences. From hooks' perspective, "television and film are central texts for such analysis because they, more than any other media, determine how oppressed peoples are seen and how other groups respond to them" (Foss et al. 89). Representations not included in certain texts place an instructive hierarchical order in public discourse where some images are superior to others. This hierarchy works as a hegemonic principle in rhetoric and as such, can seem natural to those in participation. However, hooks "rejects hierarchy as a natural, unchangeable condition and seeks to eliminate the hierarchic principle from rhetoric" (Foss et al. 93). Similarly, Kramarae's rhetorical option of analyzing linguistic practices can be understood as questioning structured absences. Her rhetorical option encourages a critique of mainstream linguistic practices that when utilized, "identifies omissions and distortions concerning women" (56). In a society where linguistic practices rhetorically construct reality for individuals, observing representations not portrayed in the texts can also help to identify patterns of dominance.

To explore my first research question, how do female writers and directors rhetorically construct motherhood in contemporary independent films, I will observe examples of exnomination and structuring absences in the texts relevant to the representation of the mother's desires and identification with specific relevance to their role in the public and private spheres, their role within the mother-child relationship, and their role in the family unit.

To investigate my second research question, to what extent does this representation of contemporary motherhood challenge or adhere to patriarchal ideology, I will utilize hooks' and Kramarae's models for reconceptualizing traditional rhetorical theory. Traditional rhetorical theory is rooted in the notion that rhetoric is persuasion. Traditional public persuasion then, is designed to influence others and change the way the audience feels about the rhetor's message. Foss and Griffin propose an alternative to this persuasive model in their article "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric." Foss and Griffin, influenced by feminist rhetorical theorists define invitational rhetoric as "an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination" (5). Foss and Griffin propose invitational rhetoric as an alternative to rhetoric as persuasion where the rhetor offers a perspective and does not ask for approval from the audience. Invitational rhetoric does not seek to change or influence the audience, although change can sometimes be the result. Foss and Griffin assert, "invitational rhetoric provides a mode of communication for women and other marginalized groups to use in their efforts to transform systems of domination and oppression" (16). From this perspective, invitational rhetoric is a viable, non-patriarchal option to traditional public persuasion.

The rhetorical theories developed by hooks and Kramarae offer alternative rhetorical options to persuasive rhetoric and, as such, embody a form of invitational rhetoric. Hooks and Kramarae propose rhetorical models that emphasize public discourse engaging in intimacy, mutuality, and respect rather than fostering relationships of domination. Identifying examples of equality, mutuality, and respect in the texts will highlight any resistance to patriarchal ideology. Hooks' rhetorical theory involves "a commitment to non dominating and non exploitative communication as a means of creating a more humane world" (Foss et al. 93). Similarly, Kramarae's rhetorical theory offers a model that when enacted uses "language creatively to suggest and create alternatives to the mainstream world that is hostile to women (Foss et al. 62). This study utilizes post-structuralist textual methodology grounded in the feminist rhetorical perspectives of bell hooks and Cheris Kramarae in order to illuminate the constructed mother in the films as well as the extent to which this representation reinforces and maintains the status quo.

Artifact Selection Process

Before describing each of the films, I will explain the selection process employed for this study. I selected five films based on four criteria. First, for this study, it is important to analyze trends in representation that are current because a contemporary vision of motherhood is being investigated. As such, each of the films fulfills this criterion by having been made within ten years of the inception of this study. Second, the focus of this study is on maternal representation in film. Consequently, each of the films considers the role of contemporary mothering as a central part of its plot. Third, investigating the construction of female characters by female creators is an underexplored area of scholarly research. For this study, the films meet the third criterion of being

written and directed by a female filmmaker. Finally, independent films with some

critical acclaim ensure more potential for ideological impact. The films meet the final

criterion of qualifying as an independent film as well as having been nominated for or

won a Film Independent Spirit Award[2] as either a "Best Feature" or "Best Screenplay."

 After establishing these criteria, I searched for past nominees and winners on the

Film Independent Spirit Awards webpage. After compiling the past winners and

nominees since 2000, I refined this list by applying the other criteria and found five films

that fit all the parameters[3]- *Amreeka* (2009), *Frozen River* (2008), *Waitress* (2007), *The

Dead Girl* (2006), and *Lovely and Amazing* (2001). All of these films represent an

exploration of a world where a woman's identity is depicted beyond the discourse of

male and as such, are examples of films that potentially critique Hollywood patriarchal

conventions.

In addition to meeting the criteria established for my method, these five films are

united by themes that undergird the individuality of the mother characters as presented in

the central kernel, or major plot line. Controversial social issues are explored and are

reflected through the actions of the main mothering characters. Themes such as racism,

adultery, divorce, deceit, prostitution, and single motherhood are not only prevalent

through each of the films but are also central to the identification of the mothers. These

themes provide a unifying framework to introduce each film under investigation in this

study. After briefly describing the rhetorical situation for each film, I will connect the

themes as I review the films' basic premises in reverse chronological order.

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[2] The Film Independent Spirit Awards are organized by Film Independent, a non-profit arts organization. The organization's mission is to "champion the cause of independent film and support a community of artists who embody diversity, innovation, and uniqueness of vision" (spiritawards.com).
[3] Independent films released after the deadline to be considered a candidate for the 2010 Film Independent Spirit Awards were not considered for this study.

The Films: Understanding the Rhetorical Situation

  Amreeka, the 2009 film debut for writer and director Cherien Dabis, was honored at the Sundance Film Festival and won "Best Feature" at the 2010 Film Independent Spirit Awards. Cherien Dabis is a Palestinian American independent filmmaker. Though she was born in the United States, she was raised by her Palestinian-Jordanian immigrant parents. Much of the film is influenced by her experiences growing up as a young teenager during the Persian Gulf War. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* she explained how difficult it was to deal with the "stereotype-saturated TV news depictions of Arabs and the Arab world" (Johnson). Further she stated, "At the age of 14, I sort of made it my mission in life to change that representation" (Johnson). Later, she began to look into writing and directing film and television as an outlet for social change.

  Issues of racism, deceit, and single motherhood are explored in the comedy-drama, *Amreeka*. The film tells a story about Muna, a single mother who has immigrated from Palestine to the United States with her son, Fadi. Muna and Fadi, move in with relatives who reside in Illinois. Muna and Fadi settle in with her relatives after the September 11th terrorist attacks and as such, must deal with verbal harassment from neighbors and classmates due to their Middle Eastern heritage. While Fadi struggles to adjust in an American high school, Muna, desperate not to impose on her relatives, struggles to find employment in order to support herself and her son. She finds a job as a cook at a White Castle restaurant but she is ashamed to tell her son and her relatives. She chooses instead to tell everyone that she found a job as a teller at a bank in the same parking lot as the White Castle restaurant. Muna continues with this deceit throughout the film until an accident at White Castle, sparked by racist comments directed at her,

forces Muna to call her family for help. In the end, her family is not ashamed as indicated by the closing scene where the entire family enjoys an outing to see Muna at work in the White Castle drive-thru.

The 2008 American drama, *Frozen River*, was the debut film written and directed by American independent filmmaker, Courtney Hunt. Hunt received much critical acclaim for *Frozen River*, including an Oscar nomination and a nomination for "Best Feature" at the 2008 Film Independent Spirit Awards. In an article titled "Little Miss Darkness," Hunt accounted for her unconventional childhood by describing, "I was living with a single mother, she was making it the best way she could. It was not pretty; she'd have boyfriends, and maybe they'd be nice and maybe they wouldn't" (Schoemer). Her less than ideal upbringing impacted her dislike of Hollywood depictions of violence and of working class women (Schoemer). In *Frozen River*, she attempted to portray the main character, Ray Eddy, as a believable, "real life," working class mother.

Single motherhood is central to the identity of the main mother characters in *Frozen River*. *Frozen River* is a film about two working class, single mothers, Ray Eddy and Lila, both trying to make ends meet for their families. They do so by smuggling illegal aliens into the United States from Mohawk territory in Canada. Ray is a mother of two young boys, a fifteen-year-old named T.J. and a five-year-old named Ricky. Her husband, the boys' father, has left town with the money she had saved for the down payment on their new trailer home. Despite her married status, the film depicts Ray as the sole caretaker to T.J. and Ricky as her husband is absent during the entire film. Lila lives alone in a trailer in the Mohawk Territory. She has a one-year-old child who was stolen from her by her mother-in-law. Lila introduces Ray to the illegal immigrant trade

route across a frozen river from Mohawk territory near the Canadian border to the United

States. They make several runs and share the profits without getting caught. Near the

end of the film, Ray wants to make one more run so that she has the money to pay for her

family's new trailer home, but several obstacles arise and Ray eventually surrenders to

local law enforcement in order to save Lila from being excommunicated by her tribe.

The end of the film closes with Ray going to jail and Lila taking over the caretaking

responsibilities for T.J. and Ricky.

      Waitress is a 2006 American comedy written and directed by American actress,

director, and screenwriter, Adrienne Shelly. Shelly found success acting in several

independent films in the 90's and into the 2000's before she was murdered in 2006.

After Shelly's murder, The Adrienne Shelly Foundation was created in her honor that

supports young women pursuing filmmaking. As explained on The Adrienne Shelly

Foundation Website, Shelly "maintained her creative integrity and exhibited an original

voice" (The Adrienne Shelly Foundation). Shelly's biggest critical success was the film

Waitress, which Shelly had a supporting role, as well as wrote and directed the film.

Waitress received critical acclaim by film critics and was nominated for "Best

Screenplay" at the 2008 Film Independent Spirit Awards.

      Adultery and single motherhood are central to the development of the main

mother character in *Waitress*. *Waitress* portrays a female character named Jenna, a

waitress in a small town who has a special talent for making original, one-of-a-kind pies.

She is married to Earl, a controlling, possessive husband that is physically and verbally

abusive to Jenna. Jenna is distraught when she finds out she is pregnant because she was

secretly planning to leave her husband and does not feel she can raise a baby on her own.

Jenna, a woman who is very unhappy about her life situation, meets her new OBGYN,
Dr. Pomatter. Although they are both married, after a few visits, they begin a sexual
relationship and develop a strong bond throughout the nine months of her pregnancy. At
the end of the film, Jenna has an epiphany in the hospital after giving birth to a baby girl
that she names Lulu. Once she gives birth, she realizes Lulu is the only source of
fulfillment she needs. This is made apparent when after immediately giving birth she
asks her husband for a divorce and breaks off her affair with Dr. Pomatter. The film
closes with Jenna being awarded a $25,000 prize for winning a pie-baking contest with
Lulu safely fastened in her baby sling. Viewers are led to assume that Jenna takes this
money to purchase the diner where she works, turning it in to a pie shop. The final
scenes show Jenna with Lulu, now as a toddler, hand in hand with matching waitress
dresses skipping and singing on their way home from *Lulu's Pies*.

   The Dead Girl is a 2006 suspense/drama film written and directed by Karen
Moncrieff. *The Dead Girl* is the second film created by Moncrieff. *The Dead Girl*
received some critical success as it was nominated for three Film Independent Spirit
Awards. Although the film did not win any of the three nominations, Moncrieff was
recognized in the categories for "Best Director" and "Best Feature."

   Prostitution, deceit, and single motherhood are central to the plotline in *The Dead
Girl*. *The Dead Girl* is a film organized in five different vignettes. In each of these
vignettes, the characters are united by their involvement with a body of a murdered
woman. The vignettes are titled, in order, "The Stranger," "The Sister," "The Wife,"
"The Mother," and "The Dead Girl." At the beginning of the film, a middle-aged
woman, Arden, who is the sole caretaker of her mother, finds the body of the murdered

woman. The next vignette features a young forensics student, Leah, studying the case of the same murdered woman. Upon examination of the case, Leah hopes this murdered woman is her sister, Jenny, who had been reported missing many years earlier. The next story in the film depicts a housewife that suspects her husband is involved with the murder of this woman because she finds bloodied women's clothes and personal items hidden in a family storage unit. Rather than turning her husband in, the housewife decides to destroy all the evidence she finds that may incriminate him. In "The Mother" vignette, a mother, Malora, searches for information about her recently murdered daughter, Krista. When Malora locates one of her daughter's friends, Rosetta, Malora finds out Krista ran away from home because she had been sexually abused by her stepfather. In addition, Krista believed her mother knew of the abuse but chose to look the other way. Later, Rosetta informs Malora that Krista has a three-year-old daughter, Ashley. In the final short story, a mother, Krista, tries to get a birthday present to her young daughter who lives with a caretaker in a different city. Krista is a prostitute that lives in a hotel room with Rosetta. It is later revealed that they are involved in a lesbian relationship with each other. Krista has no means to get to her daughter on her birthday so she decides to hitchhike. While hitchhiking, she is abducted by the driver and murdered on the way. It is during this vignette that it is revealed to the audience that the murdered woman connecting each of these vignettes is Krista.

Lovely and Amazing is a 2001 American film written and directed by Nicole Holofcener. Nicole Holofcener received critical acclaim as the director of the films *Walking and Talking* (1996) and *Friends with Money* (2006) and has had success directing television series such as HBO's *Sex and the City* and *Six Feet Under*.

Holofcener's *Lovely and Amazing* was nominated for a 2002 Film Independent Award for

"Best Feature." *Lovely and Amazing* is a comedy-drama, similar to all of Holofcener's

previous films. Holofcener is noted as an artist that is inspired by the real life events

experienced by herself and her friends (Macdonald). All of her films focus on female

characters and as noted by film critic Calvin Wilson, "her stories generate momentum

through relationships and humor, not catastrophes and mayhem" (Wilson). Holofcener

has created an ensemble of films that depict relational issues that, from her perspective,

reflect a lived reality.

Issues of adultery and racial discord are central to the mother characters in this

film. *Lovely and Amazing* follows the family of Jane Marks, her two adult daughters,

Michelle and Elizabeth, and Jane's adopted African-American adolescent daughter,

Annie. Throughout the film each of the four female characters struggle with individual

insecurities. Jane, the matriarch of the family, pursues a liposuction procedure as she

obsesses about being young and thin. The liposuction procedure backfires when Jane

almost dies from complications after the cosmetic surgery. Michelle, a married mother of

a young daughter, justifies an affair with a seventeen-year-old boy because she does not

receive sexual attention from her husband, who is having an affair with Michelle's best

friend. Michelle is arrested at the end of the film for statutory rape after she is reported to

the police by the seventeen-year-old boy's mother. Elizabeth, an actress, is obsessed with

her appearance and justifies this obsession as a part of her job as an actress. Elizabeth

unintentionally drives away her lover because of her preoccupation with her appearance.

Annie, the African American adopted daughter of Jane, struggles with being an

overweight child and being black in her all-white adopted family. Throughout the film,

Annie wishes out loud to her mother and sisters that she had their color of skin and texture of their hair. The anti-climatic ending of the film, closes with Jane being released from the hospital, recovering from her near-death liposuction procedure and Michelle being released from jail.

All of the films selected for analysis in this study express "uniqueness of vision" that the Film Independent Spirit Awards recognize. The multi genre sample of films is united by the four criteria and by the depiction of the taboo social issues in relation to the mother roles. McKee suggests that a post-structuralist response to identifying the sense-making strategies illuminated by textual analysis is that cultures "seem to be making sense of the world differently; but really, underneath, they have common structures" (9). This study offers a close reading of five films that represent a unified construction of contemporary motherhood.

CHAPTER 4[4]

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The two research questions guiding this study are intended to identify how

contemporary motherhood is rhetorically constructed and to explore the extent to which

the "indie" mother is a product of patriarchal ideology. The overview of the findings and

analysis are outlined in this chapter and seek to investigate the research questions. First,

I highlight examples in the films that assist in constructing the "indie" mother. Second, I

evaluate these messages and utilize feminist rhetorical perspectives to discuss what the

narrative discourses infer about contemporary motherhood.

In order to explore research question one, I observe examples of exnomination

and structuring absences in the texts relevant to the representation of the mother's

identification. I explore three major areas interwoven in the subtext of the sample films

that reveal significant insight into the construction of the mothers: public and private

sphere identification, mother-child relationships, and family systems. The following

findings section is organized first by these themes and second by each film.

Public and Private Sphere Identification

Historically, women have been confined to the private or domestic sphere, and

have simultaneously been discouraged from participating in the public sphere. Feminist

scholars acknowledge this maintains biases in gender roles and gender expectations.

Foss and Foss confirm this historical notion when they highlight that significant

communication has traditionally occurred in the public sphere (*Woman Speak* 13-16).

The reasoning that undergirds this line of thinking is that, historically, the discourse that

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[4] In this chapter, profanity and culturally insensitive language is present in some of the transcriptions from the films. This language is transcribed exactly from the film narratives and is only used to illustrate research findings. The inclusion of this language is not intended to offend the reader.

has happened in the public sphere is traditionally deemed the most impactful and influential, thus the most studied. This idea presumes that those activities happening in the private sphere, where female gender roles are assigned, are less significant. Cheris Kramarae points out that communication theory tends to disregard "women's informal associations or talk within the home setting" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 42). Such private sphere activities are not understood as significant modes of communication and are subsequently devalued. Because of the traditionally gendered nature of the public and private spheres, public sphere activities have been valued over those activities that happen in the private sphere. Hooks claims, "The ways in which privacy is constructed and the meaning of public and private legitimize and uphold structures of domination, particularly sexism" (822). This public/private dichotomy often results in contradictory expectations for contemporary women. For example, Western mothers operate within two competing and contradictory logics: the ideology of intensive mothering, where childrearing is valued, and getting ahead in the public sphere, where childrearing is undervalued (Hays 131). An exploration of the relation between the mothers in the films and the public/private dichotomy can lend insight into the construction of motherhood. The following section is organized by each film in reverse chronological order and includes a description of the public and private sphere roles embodied by the main mother characters.

Amreeka

The public identification of Muna begins to take shape at the beginning of *Amreeka*. Before she and Fadi move to the U.S. from Palestine, Muna is shown working in a bank in less than stellar conditions. She appears to have a desk of her own, though

she shares office space with several other employees. Her desk space is cluttered with paper and the office appears to have no air conditioning. In one scene, for example, a co-worker's desk fan continues to blow away papers on Muna's desk. From this scene, the viewers are led to understand Muna is dissatisfied with her work environment because she appears to be flustered and perturbed with her working situation. Upon her arrival in the U.S., she has no money to support herself and Fadi. Although her sister's family takes her in, she feels a sense of urgency to find a job so that she can support her family. As such, she immediately begins searching for employment. Although Muna explains that she has "two degrees and ten years experience," she is not able to utilize her expertise to acquire a job in her field in the U.S. The only employment Muna finds is at a local White Castle fast food restaurant. She is ashamed of this and tells her family that she obtained a position at the bank adjacent to her actual place of employment.

In her interactions in the public sphere, Muna reveals herself as a gullible woman whose lack of English fluency causes misunderstandings. When interviewing for a position at a bank, she tells the bank manager, "I am from Palestine, do you know her?" In another scene when Muna is being trained by the White Castle manager, she says to a customer, "Welcome to the White Castle, would like a case of craving?" In scenes such as this, Muna's character creates comic relief and is portrayed as ignorant despite her advanced education even after she finds employment. Muna internalizes these negative messages and when her family finds out she had been working at White Castle they ask why she did not tell them the truth. Muna responds to their question by saying, "I don't know, I'm stupid."

In addition to her position at White Castle, Muna becomes an entrepreneur selling herbal pills to assist her in losing weight and to help bring in extra money. While surfing the Internet late one evening, Muna comes across an advertisement for a product with the tagline, "*work from home and lose weight*." Muna is enticed by both claims and seems unaware of American pyramidal schemes.   This brings another opportunity for comic relief. In one scene, a female customer orders a diet coke. Muna equates the female customer's order of a diet coke as a sign that the customer is trying to lose weight. Muna greets the customer:

> Muna: *Welcome to White Castle, how can I help you?*
> Female Customer: *I'll have the number four with chicken rings and a diet coke.*
> Muna: *You like to lose weight?*
> Female Customer: *Excuse me?*
> Muna: *You like me* [sic]*, we are fat and admit it. You need these* (as she shows her herbal pills).

Muna's manager, who overhears the exchange, quickly excuses her from her counter duties, and moves her to the grill.

In contrast to her persona in the public sphere, in the private sphere, Muna serves as a temperate moderator between her sister, Raghda, and her sister's husband, Nabeel, when their marriage is strained. During one scene after Nabeel had been sleeping alone in the basement, Muna appeals to him:

> Muna: *I need you to do something for me.*
> Nabeel: *What?*
> Muna: *Talk to Raghda. You can't live down here forever.*

Nabeel takes Muna's advice and talks to Raghda. Muna also encourages Raghda to support her husband. Both Nabeel and Raghda take Muna's advice and by the end of the movie, their marriage appears to be repaired.

In contrast to her moderator role, Muna is fervent when dealing with her teenage son. Muna is called to Fadi's high school when he gets into a physical altercation with a classmate. Later in the film, Fadi is incarcerated for attacking the same high school classmate who causes Muna to fall and hurt her back while working at White Castle. Fadi's cousin, Salma, drives Fadi to the boy's house and watches the altercation and the subsequent arrest. She goes to Muna in the middle of the night to get Fadi out of jail. Upon arriving at the jail, Muna is told by police officers that Fadi cannot be released until the next day. She tells her niece, "We have to get some help here, I'm not leaving my son here overnight." After her unsuccessful appeal to the police officers to release Fadi, she calls the school principal, Mr. Novotsky and he is eventually able to coerce the officers to release him. In each of these scenes, Muna is unsure of herself, emotional, and uneasy. Muna's character has two disparate identities in this film. In the public sphere, she is gullible and professionally unsuccessful and in the private sphere she is warm and wise when interacting with adults and insecure when interacting with Fadi. Fadi's negative behaviors force Muna in an unfamiliar American public sphere and this clash of Middle Eastern and Western cultures creates Muna's identity crisis in the public sphere.

Frozen River

Similar to Muna in *Amreeka*, Ray one of the mothers in *Frozen River* is deceitful to her family and other interested parties regarding her employment. Ray works out of necessity for the survival of her two sons. She is married, but her husband has recently disappeared, and Ray believes he has gambled away the family's money which had been saved to buy a mobile home. At the beginning of the film, half of the mobile home was being delivered by Mr. Versailles, the selling agent for the mobile home distribution

company. Mr. Versailles asks for the money to pay for the remainder of the double-wide
before he agrees to bring the second half of the trailer. Ray proceeds to lie to Mr.
Versailles about her ability to pay for the trailer:

> Ray: *Look, Mr. Versailles, I have a good job at Yankee Dollar. They're probably going to make me manager right after Christmas. I can definitely make the payments if you just leave the house.*
> Mr. Versailles: *Call me when you have the balloon payment.*

Because of the time constraint to pay for the trailer, Ray is under a significant amount of
pressure to produce the reminder of the money. T.J., her eldest son, aware of the
financial hardship this puts on the family, questions his mother about how she will be
able to pay for the trailer. T.J. overhears the exchange between his mother and Mr.
Versailes and offers to get a job to help pay for the trailer:

> T.J.: *I can get a job, you know.*
> Ray: *You're fifteen, T.J.*
> T.J.: *They won't ask me questions.*
> Ray: *You're finishing school.*
> T.J.: *You think we can make a living on what you make a Yankee Dollar?*
> Ray: *You're going to school.*

On a separate occasion, T.J. receives a phone call from the local rent-to-own store
threatening to repossess the family's television if a payment of $255.50 is not made by
Christmas Eve. To pay for this, Ray gets involved with illegal smuggling with Lila and
earns $2400 on her first run. With this money, she is able to make the $255.50 payment
to the local rent-to-own just before they repossess the family's television. After Ray pays
the money, she asks T.J. and her other son if they want to go out to eat. T.J. questions his
mother about where she received the money:

> T.J.: *Where'd you get that?*
> Ray: *Matt made me assistant manager.*
> T.J.: *No way.*
> Ray: *That's so hard to believe?*
> T.J.: *Well, it's been like two years.*
> Ray: *Exactly, that's why he gave me a bonus.*

Ray works part-time at a store called Yankee Dollar, where she is not valued as an employee by her supervisor. It is revealed in the film that she has been an employee for more than two years with no promotion and with no increase in hours beyond part time. She asks her supervisor, Matt, to increase her hours and he seems annoyed that she is even speaking to him. Ray asks:

> Ray: *Matt, can I talk to you for a minute?* [Matt keeps walking past her]. *I need to come on full time.*
> Matt: *I see you as a short-timer.*
> Ray: *And what is that?*
> Matt: *Not here for long, not really committed.*
> Ray: *When I started working here, you said it would be six months before I could come on full time. That was almost two years ago.*
> Matt: *That's my opinion.*
> Ray: *You know, I mean, at least I show up. Pat's always late, she's late now. She's late everyday.* [Pat walks in, Matt walks away from Ray].

Ray is devalued in her role as an employee and as such projects an insecure public sphere persona. This is one of two occasions in the film that Ray is shown working at Yankee Dollar. In contrast to these scenes, Ray is shown conducting her illegal activity four times in the film. During these scenes, Ray is more confident and almost arrogant in her interactions with other criminals. Ray's contrasting public personas point to her over-compensating in her human smuggling side job for the lack of respect she receives at Yankee Dollar.

The other mother in this film, Lila, is primarily depicted conducting the illegal work activity of human smuggling. Lila is an American Indian, native to the Mohawk Territory. Lila and Ray meet after Lila steals Ray's husband's car. Ray then follows Lila to her home, a camper, and threatens her with a gun. Lila seems to be unafraid of Ray, despite the gun, and tells her that she knows someone who will pay cash for the stolen car because the car has a rare button hatch that opens the trunk. Ray, intrigued by the money,

decides to go with Lila where she reluctantly ends up using the car Lila stole to smuggle

people into the United States.   In addition to the human smuggling, Lila attempts to get a

legitimate job at The Mohawk Territory tribal council answering phones. This lasts a

mere half a day as she gets frustrated that she cannot successfully complete the mundane

task of taking phone messages due to her poor vision. During her half day employment

at the Mohawk Territory Tribal Council, one employee innocently questions a message

Lila had written down for her and a frustrated Lila immediately walks out of the job.

Ray and Lila are sullen in their private lives. They both have tough exteriors and

do not enjoy a fulfilling work or private life. They are not taken seriously in the public

sphere and are unhappy in the private sphere. Ray struggles to feed and provide for her

sons, T.J. and Ricky. Lila endures poorer living conditions. She lives in an unheated

camper alone. It is revealed in the film that Lila's mother-in-law kidnapped her now one-

year-old son from the hospital after he was born. In both the public and private spheres,

Ray and Lila lack success and happiness.

Lovely and Amazing

Unlike Muna, Ray, and Lila, the mothers in *Lovely and Amazing* do not work

outside the home because it is not necessary to their financial welfare to do so. *Lovely*

and Amazing is the only film in this study that depicts traditional, stereotypical, upper-

middle class values. Both mothers, daughter Michelle and matriarch Jane appear to live a

comfortable lifestyle, though the viewers are unaware of the source of their wealth.

Michelle is a stay-at-home mother who is supported by her husband. At home, she

creates different pieces of art including miniature chairs and homemade wrapping paper.

In the beginning of the film, Michelle attempts to sell her miniature chairs at local

boutiques. In one scene, Michelle walks into an upscale boutique and while speaking

with the store manager, she runs into a high school friend who is now a pediatrician. In

front of her high school friend, the store manager tells Michelle they are not interested in

buying her miniature chairs. Michelle proceeds to call the store manager a "bitch." This

scene introduces viewers to Michelle's assertive and unapologetic personality.

In Michelle's attempt to work outside the home she is rejected for her work

completed in the private sphere. Not only is Michelle rejected by the store for her

creations, but her husband, Bill, is resentful towards her for the time she "wastes" making

her crafts. In one scene, Bill accidentally steps on one of Michelle's handmade miniature

chairs, which is emblematic of their crumbling marriage.

> Bill: *Oops.* [With a crunch sound].
> Michelle: *Why don't you just fucking stick a knife in my back.*
> Bill: *It was an accident.*
> Michelle: *This is the second time.*
> Bill: *It was on the floor.*
> Michelle: *I was working on it.*

Jane, on the other hand, does not attempt to enter the public sphere. She appears to be

financially comfortable as indicated by her large home and her voluntary liposuction

surgery, a cosmetic procedure that costs her $10,000.

In the private realm, Michelle and Jane are humorously depicted as superficial.

Jane is preoccupied with her physical appearance and even when her liposuction

procedure gives her a life-threatening infection that keeps her in the hospital, she spends

time worrying about whether or not the doctor that conducts the procedure finds her

attractive. Michelle is depicted as a mother that is devoted to her only child, Maddie, but

is preoccupied with her former teenage popularity as a high school homecoming queen

with a clear complexion and no shortage of male suitors. For example, when Michelle,

Annie, Maddie, and Elizabeth are eating lunch together, Annie requests more food.

Michelle responds:

> Michelle: *You're not going to understand this now, Annie, but being a fat teenager, would not be a fun thing.*
> Elizabeth: *Leave her alone.*
> Michelle: *You're just like mom…nobody wants to take control.*
> Annie: *Were you a fat teenager?*
> Elizabeth: *Are you kidding, she was the homecoming queen.*
> Annie: *What's that?*
> Elizabeth: [to Annie] *Don't listen to what she is saying, she doesn't know what she is talking about.*
> Michelle: *I do too. You should see what this kid eats.*

In addition, although she is married, Michelle seeks out affection and affirmation of her physical attractiveness from members of the opposite sex. For example, as she is getting into her vehicle with her daughter and leaving her mother's house, she smiles at a man hoping he will reciprocate her affability, but he does not. Moreover, Michelle does not live a child-centered existence, which is one of the basic tenets of intensive mothering. She is, however, obsessive about her role as a mother, wife, and sexual partner. For example, several times early in the film, the dialogue between Michelle and Bill revolves around their sex life, or lack thereof. On one occasion as they are lying together in bed Michelle informs Bill:

> Michelle: *A man flirted with me today. It was at the dry cleaners.*
> Bill: *You spend too much on dry cleaning. You should hand wash.*
> Michelle: *Is that really the point?*
> Bill: *What is the point?*
> Michelle: *Nobody wants my chairs.*
> Bill: *Did you try a lot of places?*
> Michelle: *One. Part of me is kind of relieved. I think deep down, I just want to keep them. Why does that make you mad?*
> Bill: *Because, you're not nine. You need to make a living.*
> Michelle: *That's probably why you don't want to sleep with me.*
> Bill: *Well, first of all you had that bladder infection. Then you had a yeast infection.*

Michelle: *Oh God. You make me sound so appealing. Why don't you just admit you're not attracted to me any more?*
Bill: *I'm still attracted to you. I am.*

The pair also argue about Michelle's lack of monetary contribution to the family's income. For example, in a heated argument Bill says to Michelle:

Bill: *You got a lot of nerve telling me how to act at work when you haven't had a job since I met you. You were supposed to contribute when Maddie went to school.*
Michelle: *I'm trying to sell my art Bill.*
Bill: *Fuck your art.*

Michelle, unable to sell her art in boutiques, decides out of frustration to get a job at a one-hour photo shop. Her boss is a seventeen-year-old high school boy who begins to give her attention. Michelle unapologetically accepts his advances and they begin an affair. Michelle is a mother whose public sphere identity is undervalued or non-existent and private sphere interactions indicate dissatisfaction with her domestic life.

Waitress

Although not rejected in the public sphere, in *Waitress*, Jenna operates in a servile position at the diner. She is ordered around by her boss and patrons in the pie shop. For example, one of her co-workers, Becky asks her to take one of her tables. Sitting at this table is Joe, the owner and frequent patron of the diner. Jenna agrees and greets Joe:

Jenna: *Hi Joe, how ya doin'* [sic] *today my friend. What can I getcha* [sic]*?*
Joe: *This is my pie diner. I own it.*
Jenna: *I know you do, Joe.*
Joe: *And I think it's warm in here. I know I'm warm.*
Jenna: *I'll tell Cal, hun.*
Joe: *They keep all my businesses warm on the inside. Gas station, supermarket, my laundromat, but this is my favorite business, Joe's Pie Shop. I'm Joe and I will not tolerate it being too damn warm in here.*
Jenna: *I hear ya* [sic] *Joe.*
Joe: *Turn the air on.*
Jenna: *Yes, siree, bub* [sic]*.*

Joe then proceeds to make a very demanding order. When she brings back part of his

order, he barks at her, "Hey, there's no salt and pepper on the table, I asked for salt and

pepper. And no ice in my juice glass. Can't you get nothin' [sic] I say right?" Despite

his progressively rude behavior, Jenna appears unbothered by his demeaning gripes. In

addition to this belittling interaction, Jenna is ordered around by her boss, Cal:

> Cal: *Don't you have customers?*
> Jenna: *How come you can't never say one nice thing ever? Like "how are you*
> *Jenna?" or "nice to see you today Jenna," or "great apple pie today Jenna."*
> *How come you always say, "Don't you have customers, get out of the kitchen, get*
> *back to work."*
> Cal: *Don't you have customers, get out of the kitchen, get back to work.* [Jenna
> salutes Cal and walks off].

Despite being ordered around, Jenna serves as the matriarch of the diner. She fixes the

problems of other waitresses and dispenses advice to patrons. Her co-workers often seek

her guidance when dealing with issues of relationships and personal care. For example,

before Dawn, another waitress and friend of Jenna's, goes on a date she asks Jenna to

help her with her make up so that she makes the best first impression. Jenna is also a

confidant to her other co-worker, Becky, when Becky begins an affair with Cal.

In the private sphere, Jenna experiences abuse in her relationship with her

husband, Earl. She tells Becky and Dawn that she is not in love with Earl and is

disgusted by him and his behavior. Jenna frequently imagines unique pies and gives each

innovative names. A few of the pies, "I don't want Earl's baby pie," "I hate my husband

pie," and "I can't have no affair because it's wrong and I don't want Earl to kill me pie,"

are inspired by her hatred of her husband. Earl is depicted as physically and verbally

abusive to Jenna, publicly and privately. He slaps her in public and shoves her around in

their home. Jenna, pregnant throughout the entire film, stumbles through her unhappy

private life until she meets Dr. Pomatter, her Obstetrician. Her happiness is revitalized

during her affair with Dr. Pomatter. In fact, the only time she is shown happy is when

she is with Dr. Pomatter. The only other occasion that she is portrayed as happy is when

she is making pies, in a kitchen and at the very end of the film after she gives birth to her

daughter.

Jenna is not cast in a "mother" role at the time of conception. Jenna exists in

opposition to traditional mother ideologies in the sense that she has no maternal drive to

be a mother nor is she happy about her pregnancy. When she first discovers that she is

pregnant she tells Becky and Dawn:

> Jenna: *I don't need no baby. I don't want no trouble. I just want to make pies. That's all I want to do, make pies.*
> Becky: *I thought you weren't sleeping with your husband no more.*
> Dawn: *He got her drunk one night.*
> Jenna: *I shouldn't drink. I do stupid things when I drink, like sleep with my husband. Oh no, looks like a pink line is forming, shit.*

In another scene, Jenna actually refers to herself as the "anti-mother" as she declares in a

note to her unborn child "Everybody deserves a good momma and a good wife. I don't

know what I have to give you." In her role in the public sphere, Jenna is portrayed as

unhappy, but complacent in her servile role to the diner and to her husband. Jenna's

public sphere identity conforms to a traditional feminine gender role as she is willingly

compliant to her male counterparts. However, Jenna's private sphere identity defies

traditional private sphere stereotypes when she has an affair with her doctor and does not

embrace her role as a mother.

The Dead Girl

There are four mothers depicted in *The Dead Girl*. Of these mothers, the only

mother that participates in the public sphere is a prostitute. This "working" mother is

eventually murdered in the closing scenes. The other mothers in the film are only

depicted in the private sphere. One mother is portrayed as disabled and verbally abusive

toward her adult daughter. In "The Stranger" vignette, an adult daughter, Arden, lives

with her invalid mother. She feeds, bathes, and even sleeps with her mother. When

Arden stumbles upon the body of a dead girl in a field by their house, she informs the

police. After the police question Arden, her mother says to her:

> Mother: *What did they say to you?*
> Arden: *Nothing.*
> Mother: *Twenty-five minutes of nothing?*
> Arden: *There's a dead girl. They just asked some questions.*
> Mother: *What are they asking you for? You don't know anything.*
> Arden: *I found her.*
> Mother: *And you called the police? You're the reason those bloodsuckers are out there swarming all over my yard, ringing my bell like they know me. Before I know it they're going to be pouring through my cupboards coming up my stairs.*
> Arden: *I just told them about the dead girl.*
> Mother: *You found her, so what* [yelling]. *You keep walking, you keep your mouth shut. You* [sic] *stupid.*

This conversation encapsulates the emotionally abusive relationship between Arden and

her mother. Arden and her mother are limited to the private sphere and have no presence

in the public sphere.

Another mother in the film with no involvement in the public sphere is in "The

Sister" vignette. In this vignette, the mother, Beverley is obsessed about the

disappearance of one of her daughters, Jenny. It is revealed that Jenny disappeared

fifteen years earlier at a state park and her body has never been discovered. The other

sister, Leah, now an adult, suffers emotionally because her mother cannot move past

Jenny's disappearance. When the family is at lunch, Leah tells her parents:

> Leah: *I want to have a memorial service for Jenny.*
> Beverley: *What?*
> Leah: *Jenny's dead and I want to have a memorial service for her.*

Beverley: *Why would you say that?*
Leah: *Because it's true.*
Father: *Honey, we don't know that.*
Beverley: [Interrupting the father] *She isn't dead, for all we know…*
Leah: [interrupting her mother] *She's dead. She didn't run away. She wasn't raised in the woods by wolves. She didn't hit her head and forget her name and where she lived, and she's not staying with some family of gypsies. Some man took her and did horrible things to her and hid her body so well that we'll never find her. It doesn't matter how many posters we hang* [beginning to cry] *or petitions we sign or which picture we put near Jenny's bench because no one's* [sic] *going to recognize her because she's dead and she's never coming back.*
Beverley: *If she were dead, don't you think I would know it in my heart. I know she's alive. I know she's out there somewhere. And the only way I'm never going to see her again is if we give up. Someone out there knows my baby. They know her. They just don't know we're looking for her. I will never give up on her. Just like I would never give up on you. Ever. Ever.*

This dialogue illuminates that Beverley's obsession consumes and shapes her private

sphere identity as a mother.

In "The Mother" vignette, the viewers witness another mother whose participation

is limited to the private sphere. Melora portrays a mother who at the beginning of the

vignette is identifying the body of her daughter Krista who had run away to Los Angeles

from her childhood home in Washington.   Melora explains to a Los Angeles detective:

Melora: *Well, it would have been about 1993, I think, no that's not right. Um…she was 16. She left home when she was 16 and that was the last time. I wrote to her and left messages when I had her number. She was very angry. She made it perfectly clear she didn't want me or her stepfather in her life.*
Detective: *Did you know she relocated to Los Angeles?*
Melora: *I thought she might go to Hollywood. She always spoke about wanting to be on TV when she was little but those are just dreams a child has.*

The remainder of the vignette revolves around Melora seeking out Krista's former home

and friends. In this film, Malora's private sphere identity is similar to all of the mothers

depicted in *The Dead Girl*.   The depictions of mothers are limited to the private sphere

and the only glimpse of motherhood in the public sphere is Krista, a prostitute.

Exploring the public and private sphere roles of the mothers in each of the films

reveals a glimpse into the identification of the "indie" mother. The mothering discourses

presented in the films suggests that a woman's only satisfying activity happens in the

private sphere. With the exception of *Lovely and Amazing* and *The Dead Girl*, mothers

in each of the films work and participate in the public sphere out of necessity, not out of

personal fulfillment. In addition, the mothers are devalued or punished for their

contributions in the public sphere. Some mothers are rejected or disrespected in the

public sphere and others suffer consequences such as incarceration and death. The

mothers that do work in the films are depicted as uneducated as indicated by the

vocabulary used and the occupations desired. Those occupations include a prostitute in

Los Angeles, an associate at a one-hour photo shop, a clerk at a discount dollar store, a

waitress in a small town diner, and an employee at a fast food restaurant. The link

between each of these mothers illuminates how their positions conform to traditional

gender expectations in the public and private spheres; ultimate fulfillment in the domestic

sphere and the discouragement from participating in the public sphere.

Representation of Mother-Child Relationships

In Western childrearing relationships, the mother-child bond is generally

understood as a phenomenon that occurs between the mother and her child. Some argue

that this process begins at birth and others argue that the bond is created at the time of

conception. Social theorist Sharon Hays argues that this mother-child bond is a socially

constructed myth associated with traditional ideals of contemporary mothering.

According to Hays, the mother-child bonding myth assumes that women are biologically

predisposed to want to nurture and care for their children and that fathers, along with

other potential caregivers, are not capable of caring for a child in the same way a mother

cares for her child. This is due, in part, to the idea that the mother-child bond is a naturally occurring phenomenon that other caregivers are not privy.

Ideas about the Western socialization of the mother-child relationship can be traced to 19th century American history. Harris points out that a generally accepted premise of the family was that the "'welfare of the child' was "dependent on the moral goodness of the parent" (35). Further, she details, because "the mother is thought to be the parent who retains moral goodness and can teach moral goodness through her affective relationship with her children," the mother increasingly became scrutinized by her relationship with her children (35). These premises are echoed in contemporary ideologies about parenting where a father's sole duty is to financially provide for a family while a mother's duty is to provide moral grounding in the domestic sphere.

In these five films, there are depictions of infant and preschool children, school age children, and adult children. The following section is organized by age group of the children in order to reconcile any similarities and differences in the relationship with the mothers. Observing the mother-child relationships in these films provides a glimpse into the construction of the "indie" mother and highlights current trends in the depiction of the mother-child bond.

Relationships with Infant and Preschool Children

The relationship between mothers and infant or preschool-age children are depicted as non-traditional in the sense that most of the mothers resist traditional motherhood ideologies. For example, Jenna does not embrace her maternal drive during her pregnancy. When she meets Dr. Pomatter for the first time, he tells her congratulations about her pregnancy and she responds negatively:

Jenna: *Thanks, but I don't want this baby.*
Dr. Pomatter: *Oh, well we don't perform…*
Jenna: *No, I'm keeping it. I'm just telling you I'm not so happy about it like everybody else might be. So maybe you could be sensitive and not congratulate me and make a big deal every time you see me. I'm having the baby and that's that. It's not a party though.*

Despite this, after Lulu is born, Jenna's bond with her daughter is strong enough to overcome every negative obstacle to happiness in Jenna's life. Essentially, from the perspective of the film, the birth of Jenna's baby appears to be the answer to all of her problems. Immediately after baby Lulu is born, Jenna divorces her abusive husband, ends her affair with Dr. Pomatter, wins a $25000 pie-baking contest, and opens her own pie store. Similar to Lulu, Ricky, Ray's five year-old son appears to be a source of joy for Ray. Ray is very angry, unhappy, and unpleasant throughout the film. Due to her constant unhappiness, it is clear that the only time she smiles or appears to be in a good mood during the film is when she is around Ricky.

In *The Dead Girl*, the prostitute, Krista, does not live with her three-year-old daughter Ashley. The audience does not see the mother and daughter together at any point during the film. What is revealed about their relationship is from the point of view of the prostitute and from a story told to Krista's mother, Malora by Rosetta, Krista's friend who is later revealed as her lover. During a lunch with Rosetta, she discloses to Malora that Krista has a daughter:

Rosetta: *One time Krista went totally straight, you know. No drugs, no hooking. She got a job at a nail salon. She was like a fucking Mormon and all she talked about was getting her shit together so she could bring her kid to come live with us. But then, Darryl said she would have to pay extra. So, then Krista got like three jobs and she was working, working, doing more drugs than ever because she wanted to stay awake, you know. So, she wound up getting nail polish on this white lady's wedding ring...*
Malora: *I'm sorry. Krista had a child?*

> Rosetta: *Yes. So then she gets fired from this nail place and she goes on this fucked up drug binge like you wouldn't believe. I didn't hear from her for like two weeks.*
> Malora: *Is it a girl or a boy?*
> Rosetta: *Girl. Ashley. She was really into that kid, you know. Like always sending her cards and writing notes and shit even though the girl can't read. It was like she didn't want her to grow up hating her.*

Ultimately, Krista is murdered on her quest to see Ashley on her birthday. Although the audience does not experience the relationship between Krista and Ashley firsthand, from this perspective it is clear to viewers that Krista experienced much fulfillment by being a mother to Ashley.

Each of these examples point to a mother's personal fulfillment that is derived almost solely from women's relationships to their infant and preschool-age children, regardless of the quality of the relationship. In each of the examples, the relationship between mothers and their young children are idealized in a way that reinforces the socially constructed myth of the mother-child bond. Prescribed in this myth is the notion that women experience ultimate gratification and are a more complete mother by the love that only their child can provide.

Relationships with School-Age Children

The depiction of the relationship between mothers and their school-age children differs greatly from the portrayals of the relationships between mothers and their infant children. In *Frozen River*, Ray and her fifteen year-old son, T.J., have frequent arguments. In one scene, Ray's son asks why she will not allow him to get a job so he will be able to supplement the family's income. This escalates into an argument and he disparagingly yells at her, "I bet I can make more than you do." This is one of many

arguments between the two. In contrast to the tumultuous relationship between Ray and T.J., Ray and Ricky, her five-year-old son, are never in conflict.

In *Amreeka*, Fadi becomes rebellious when he and Muna arrive in the United States. He gets into trouble at school for fighting, he uses marijuana, and is disrespectful and apathetic towards his mother. For example, Muna questions Fadi when he stays out late one evening:

> Muna: *You know I have to get up early.*
> Fadi: *Then go to sleep and get out of my grill.*
> Muna: *What is this 'get out of my grill'? Since when do you talk to me like this?*
> Fadi: *Since now.*

Despite Fadi's negative behavior, Muna is more preoccupied with covering up her prevaricating behavior than she is with her son's change in personality. However, as Fadi's behavior accelerates into negative experiences, Muna becomes concerned. Near the end of the film, she has a breakthrough with her teenage son. After a heated exchange, Fadi gives her a hug, a symbolic suggestion that he still needs her. She cries while embracing him. Fadi whispers to his mother:

> Fadi: *This place just sucks.*
> Muna: *Okay. It sucks. So what? Every place sucks. The important thing is that you can't let anyone make you question who you are. Do you understand? Look at me. Do you understand me?*
> Fadi: [whispering] *Sorry mom.*
> Muna: *It's ok. I'm sorry too.*

For a good portion of the film, Muna and Fadi's relationship is characterized by conflict and disrespect. However, when Muna begins to put Fadi's needs ahead of her own, his negative attitude begins to decrease.

In *Lovely and Amazing*, Michelle does not have a lot of direct interaction with her daughter, Maddie throughout the film. Despite being depicted in the same frame for

much of the film, especially in the private sphere, Michelle rarely speaks to her daughter.

When Michelle does speak to Maddie, she is usually yelling at her from another room

where Maddie is not present or in a few other occasions, she whispers to Maddie. For

example, after Michelle and Bill fight, Michelle gets in bed with her sleeping daughter

and whispers, "goodnight." Overall, Michelle seems emotionally disconnected from

Maddie, but connected to the idea of having a daughter. For example, she boasts to

friends and strangers on two separate occasions about the details of her natural childbirth

experience. She makes it clear that her natural childbirth is a source of pride for her as a

mother. Michelle's feelings for Maddie are highlighted when Michelle's relationship

with Maddie is threatened. At the end of the film, Michelle is taken to jail on a statutory

rape charge for having a relationship with her seventeen-year-old boss at the one-hour

photo shop. On the phone with her husband, Bill threatens to seek full custody of their

daughter and in response she declares to a stranger at the police station, "He wants to take

my daughter from me. I'd die…she's the best thing I ever did." Though Michelle and

Maddie do not appear to have a close relationship characterized by an open exchange of

dialogue, Michelle's role as Maddie's mother is clearly central to her self-identity.

Jane deals with race relations arising from being the adoptive mother of an

African American girl, Annie. Jane is warm and loving towards Annie. In one scene,

Jane is giving Annie a bath and Annie asks her mom about her upcoming procedure:

> Annie: *Mom, what's a liposuction [mispronouncing the word]?*
> Jane: *It's a procedure they do to make you look thinner.*
> Annie: *Why?*
> Jane: *So I can look better, feel better about myself. It's an improvement.*
> Annie: *I want to tear my skin off.*
> Jane: *What?*
> Annie: *I want it to be the same as yours.*
> Jane: *Your skin is gorgeous.*

Annie: *But I like yours.*
Jane: *But mine's wrinkled and old, saggy. Why would you want to have skin like mine?*

Interactions such as this one points out the racial issues that are at the forefront of Jane

and Annie's mother-daughter relationship. Later in the film, Jane signs Annie up for the

Big Sister program and Annie begins to spend time with an African American female,

Lorrainne. When Lorraine tells Elizabeth she no longer wants to be Annie's big sister

because Annie is too difficult to handle, she explains:

Lorraine: *It's not like she doesn't have any real sisters or anything. When I signed up to be a Big Sister, I thought I was going to get somebody poor from a bad family. This is just so weird.*
Elizabeth: *Why is it weird? She needs to have a relationship with someone who's black.*
Lorraine: *Well, this black somebody doesn't want to do it anymore.*

This is not the only instance where Jane asks another individual to be a caretaker for

Annie. Before Jane goes to the hospital for her liposuction procedure she asks Michelle

to take care of Annie. Michelle is hesitant to accept her mother's request.

Jane: *Will you take care of Annie while I'm in the hospital?*
Michelle: *I thought it was out-patient.*
Jane: *It is, but I won't be well enough to do anything for at least two days* [as Michelle rolls her eyes], *so that's how long she'd stay with you. Is that ok?*
Michelle: *Well, it's just a lot with two kids. Can Elizabeth do it?*
Jane: *You have no job and Maddie has a ton of play dates.*
Michelle: *Ok, ok, I'll do it, just don't expect that I do it with joy all over me.*
Jane: *I won't.*
Michelle: *It's a lot, that's all.*
Jane: *You mean, Annie's a lot.*
Michelle: *Mom, I'll do it. Ok.* [Michelle rubs her moms arm].

As indicated by this interaction, Michelle is not excited about taking care of Annie while

her mother is recovering. While she is watching Annie, conflict arises between the two.

In one scene, Annie is watching Michelle make hand-made wrapping paper and Annie

asks to visit her mother:

Annie: *Let's go visit mom.*
Michelle: *She's still in recovery. We'll go later.*
Annie: *I want to be there first thing.*
Michelle: *Well, we have to wait for Bill to get back.*
Annie: *Where is he?*
Michelle: *He went to help Donna get a stereo.*
Annie: *I want to go now.*
Michelle: *No, later.*
Annie: *You're not the boss of me.*
Michelle: *I am too, when mom's not here.*
Annie: *Fuck you.*
Michelle: *Fuck you.*

This is one of several occasions in which there is tension between Annie and Michelle.

After this dialogue, Elizabeth volunteers to stay with Annie at Jane's house upon Annie's

request, absolving Michelle of the responsibility to care for Annie.

In the majority of these examples, the relationships between mothers and school-

age children are characterized by conflict. Despite the conflict, many of the relationships

indicate the mothers can only be fulfilled by the love of their biological child thus

reinforcing traditional notions of the mother-child bond. This traditional notion is

challenged by the interactions between Michelle and Annie and perhaps can be attributed

to the fact that Annie is not Michelle's daughter and they do not share a biological

connection. In short, relationships between mothers and school-age children are

sometimes depicted as subversive but still work to reinforce the traditional mother-child

paradigm.

Relationships with Adult Children

Mother-child relationships are depicted as less than idyllic when dealing with

adult children. During "The Stranger" vignette in *The Dead Girl*, Arden, the adult

daughter of an abusive, invalid mother depicts a dysfunctional relationship between the

mother and daughter. The daughter is socially inept and can barely make eye contact

with other adults and behaves childishly when around others. Her mother is portrayed as

abusive to her daughter by making fun of her, telling her no one will love her, and calling

her a whore. For example, before Arden goes on a date she dies her hair. When her

mother sees her dyed hair she says, "You look like a two dollar hooker. [laughing].

You'd have to pay them." The mother then proceeds to throw a cup of milk in Arden's

face and announces out loud, "Oh Jesus, he took the wrong one. It should have been you

not my boy." After this emotional exchange, Arden packs a bag and leaves the house to

meet her date. In this film, "The Stranger" vignette introduces the viewer to the first of

several dysfunctional mother and adult daughter relationships.

In "The Sister" vignette, Beverley and Leah have a less than functional mother-

daughter relationship as it is apparent that Leah's personal life is suffering due to her

mother. Beverley is depicted as the root cause of Leah's personal torment. Leah

explains her depression to a psychiatrist when she indicates that she is not able to live a

fulfilling life until her mother allows her to grieve over Jenny. In addition, in the scene

following the lunch dialogue where Leah asks her mother for a memorial service for

Jenny, Leah, crying uncontrollably, is shown abusing prescription drugs. Interactions

such as these point to Leah's pursuit to numb herself from the pain caused by her

mother's inability to move on from Jenny's disappearance.

The Dead Girl depicts another dysfunctional mother and adult child relationship

in "The Mother" vignette. In "The Mother" vignette, Melora is depicted as frumpy and

nervous and is unaware that her daughter, Krista, became a prostitute after she ran away

from home. Krista's friend, Rosetta, Melora's only source of information regarding her

dead daughter, blames Melora for the terrible, brief life that her daughter endured.

> Melora: *Did Krista ever tell you where she came from?*
> Rosetta: *Washington? Some fucking place, I don't remember.*
> Melora: *Did she tell you why she ran away?*
> Rosetta: *She probably wasn't happy.*
> Melora: *Did she tell you why?*
> Rosetta: *Other than her stepfather sticking his dick in her? I don't think so. She probably thought, hey man, fuck it, if I'm going to do it, I might as well get paid. Her fucking mother was too much of a dishrag to do anything about it. You know, typical. The husband or the kids, they always choose the husband.*
> Melora: *Did she tell you that?*
> Rosetta: *What?*
> Melora: *That her mother knew and chose him?* [crying]

This dialogue sets up another dysfunctional mother-adult child relationship. Although the audience does not witness direct engagement between Malora and Krista, the story told by Rosetta paints a picture of the climate of the household in which Krista was raised. During this same dialogue, Rosetta tells Malora that Krista had a daughter, Ashley, who did not live with them. Malora asks Rosetta to take her where Ashley is staying. Malora is introduced to her granddaughter in what appears to be some kind of underground orphanage run out of an apartment by non-English speaking Hispanic women. Ashley is wearing a dirty tank top and is crying when Malora tells her, "Hi sweetheart, I'm your mommy's mommy. Do you want to come with me?" The Spanish speaking caretaker seems agitated by their presence as Rosetta tells Malora that the caretaker wants $200. Malora, without hesitation, pays the woman $200 and proceeds to remove Ashley from the apartment. The following scenes show Malora giving Ashley a bath and singing "You are my sunshine" to her. At the end of the vignette, Malora offers Rosetta a place to stay. She says:

> Malora: *I live alone now and if you wanted, you could come stay with me. Get back on your feet. There couldn't be any drugs in my house. That's something I just can't have. But, if you want, you are welcome to stay.*
> Rosetta: *I don't think so.* [walking away]

Malora: *Wait, wait, wait.* [opening her purse and handing her a deposit slip]. *There's my address. You can write me sometime.*

Fundamentally, each of the interactions with Malora and the other characters, reinforces traditional mothering stereotypes about women and parenting. For example, Malora assumes the role as Ashley's mother after Krista's death. Malora, without hesitation, takes responsibility for this little girl, immediately putting the needs of this little girl ahead of the needs of her own. The audience views a much calmer, confident Malora in the scene when she bathes Ashley. Additionally, Malora extends her mothering role to Rosetta by offering her a place to stay to help her get her life together.

Malora's relationship with Krista also reveals insight into the mother and adult child relationship. In "The Dead Girl" vignette, Krista is on a mission to deliver a birthday present to her daughter Ashley who lives at least an hour away in a town called Norwalk. She does not have a car so she asks her boyfriend/client, Tarlow, if he will drive her to Norwalk. Tarlow refuses to drive Krista to Norwalk due to his work schedule. Krista is sad because she will not be able to see her daughter. As she is sulking in her boyfriend's car, Krista tells a story about a childhood birthday memory:

Krista: *When I was a kid, every birthday we'd go through the Sears catalog and pick out what we wanted. We'd spend like days looking through this thing. And I'd look at each thing trying to decide was that the thing I most wanted. So, one year I decided I wanted this ventriloquism doll. Right, so I told my mom and I'm like really fucking excited about this ventriloquism doll. Okay. So, it's my birthday and my mom puts this big box right in front of me. And I'm like, cool. So I open it and she got me this weird puppet thing, like this big puppet thing with strings. And I felt sick. And I tried to pretend I was happy like, oh great. And it fucking went down like that every fucking year. And I couldn't figure it out like did I circle the wrong thing, did I give her the wrong page? No. No. I finally realized that my fucking mother couldn't buy anything that wasn't on fucking sale. You go to a store to get jeans and it doesn't matter which ones looked right, which ones fit the best, you had to get the ones on sale.*
Tarlow: *Maybe that's why you're so fucked up.*

Krista: *I just don't want my kid growing up like that. I want her to get what she wants. And not all the time so she gets spoiled. But sometimes, sometimes*[sic] *you should just get the thing that you really want on your actual birthday.*
Tarlow: *Jesus Christ, I'll take you to fucking Norwalk.*

From Krista's perspective, her mother was never able to meet her childhood expectations. As Tarlow suggests, perhaps the incompatibility of goals for Malora and Krista has created a negative outcome for Krista that is still impactful to her current life.

In *Lovely and Amazing*, Jane and Michelle have more of an intimate friendship than do Jane and Elizabeth. Jane and Michelle talk to each other about topics not typically discussed between mothers and daughters. For example, as they are shopping together one afternoon when Michelle asks her mom:

Michelle: *Did you ever cheat on dad?*
Jane: *No.*
Michelle: *Why not.*
Jane: *I don't know. We did this threesome thing once, but it was more of a joke than anything else.*
Michelle: [turning her nose up] *A threesome?*
Jane: *Don't even look at me that way, everybody was doing it.*
Michelle: *You know what, you shouldn't tell me shit like that.*
Jane: *Maybe you should try it and loosen up a little.*

In addition to frank talks about sexual experiences, they also discuss issues concerning mothering, since they are both mothers of young daughters. In one scene, Annie walks in eating cookies as Jane and Michelle are talking:

Jane: *Why are you eating all of those cookies before dinner?*
Annie: *They're the fat free ones.*
Michelle: *It doesn't make any difference, they're incredibly high in calories.*
Mom [looking at Jane in a denigrating way].
Jane: *Don't look at me, I didn't put them in her hand.*
Michelle: *You bought them.*
Jane: *She begged me.*
Michelle: *You're the mother.*
Jane: *Still.*
Annie: *I thought these weren't the bad kind.*

Scenes such as this reveal that Michelle belittles her mother. Michelle speaks to her

mother in a way that many would consider disrespectful. For example, Jane calls

Michelle after she thinks her doctor has flirted with her:

> Jane: *He just flirted with me.*
> Michelle: *You're diluted.*
> Jane: *I'm not kidding. I think he might like me.*
> Michelle: *What are you fourteen?*
> Jane: *Why couldn't he be interested in me?*
> Michelle: *The guy is your liposuction doctor. Leave it at that.*
> Jane: *Don't be so negative.*
> Michelle: *God, this is depressing me.*

In contrast, Jane and Elizabeth have more of a traditional mother-daughter relationship.

Jane counsels Elizabeth about her relationships. Just before Jane is about to go into

surgery, she asks Elizabeth how she and Paul, her steady boyfriend, are doing:

> Elizabeth: *I don't know, he won't give me a break.*
> Jane: *He's withholding.*
> Elizabeth: *Why do you say that?*
> Jane: *He knows what you need, he just won't give it to you.*
> Elizabeth: *He doesn't have the patience for my insecurities.*
> Jane: *Well, that's so manipulative. It's as if he wants you feeling uneasy.*
> Elizabeth: *See you later.* [As Jane is being wheeled into her surgery room]
> Jane: *Hey, good luck on your audition. If Kevin McCabe doesn't like you, he's a fag.*
> Elizabeth: *Bye mom.*

Elizabeth is warm and appreciative towards her mother and the support she gives her.

Jane summarizes her thoughts about her daughters to her doctor as he checks her stitches.

Jane explains her worry over the prospect of dying due to the complications of her

liposuction surgery. She does not know which of her daughters would take over the

caretaking responsibilities of Annie as Jane describes Michelle and Elizabeth,

respectively to her doctor, "one is really fucked up and the other one isn't married."

All of the mother and adult child relationships are presented as non-traditional and sometimes dysfunctional. Though dysfunction is not a key feature of traditional motherhood ideologies, the detrimental impact of mothering is a central feature. According to Hays, "every action of mothering is understood to have potentially damaging consequences" (7). This notion corresponds with the mother and adult child relationships where the adult children attribute their shortcomings both indirectly and directly to their mothers.

Observing the mother-child relationships in each of the films reveal varying expectations depending on the age of the child. The mothers of infant and pre-school age children have ideal mother-child relationships. This can be seen in the examples of Jenna and Lulu in *Waitress*, Ray and Ricky in *Frozen River*, and Malora, the biological grandmother who takes over the role of mother to Ashley in *The Dead Girl*. In these depictions, the young children create purpose and ultimate fulfillment for the mothers. In contrast, representations of the mother-child relationship when the children are school or adult age are depicted as less than idyllic. Themes of conflict are central to the relationships between Ray and T.J. in *Frozen River*, Muna and Fadi in *Amreeka*, and Michelle and Annie in *Lovely and Amazing*. In addition, the findings indicate that as children grow into adults, the relationships with the mothers are completely dysfunctional or non-existent. This is illustrated by the relationship between Arden and her mother in *The Dead Girl*, Leah and Beverley in *The Dead Girl*, and Michelle and Jane in *Lovely and Amazing*. Given this, this survey suggests that the older the child, the more dysfunctional the relationship with the mother. This finding does not parallel the model of intensive mothering. The dysfunctional relationships identified between mothers and

older children reveal tension about mother's roles as caretakers to adult children. These findings suggest a different set of expectations for mothers of grown children. This may be due to the fact that as a child grows into adulthood the less dependent they are on the mother. Perhaps this finding points to a mother's internal conflict grappling with her sense of purpose. The intensive mothering model offers mothers a framework for success when the children are young as mothers are rewarded for their adherence to this model. However, the findings suggest a mother is ultimately punished for her adherence to this model as children grow, indicating when children reach a certain age it is no longer socially appropriate to be a mother whose childrearing practices support a model of intensive mothering.

Family Systems

The family system depicted in this sample of films is the final unit of analysis in this study. Observing this unit of analysis uncovers how family systems are rhetorically constructed and how the mother is positioned in relation to her role in the family. Shaw and Lee indicate, "the family is a primary social unit that maintains other institutions and reinforces existing patterns of domination (378). Broadly speaking, family systems can be defined in two categories, extended and nuclear (Uzoka). Uzoka describes an extended family system as "a large cocoon that envelops the individual in the warmth of fraternal love and care, developing a network of social duties and responsibilities as well as material expectations and communal safeguards" (1096). In contrast, the nuclear family system is "described as consisting of the father and mother and any non-adult children from the marriage by birth or by legal adoption" (1096). Uzoka indicates that the concept of the nuclear family is most commonly associated with the Western family

and is a myth that "cannot be relied on to provide an effective framework for the understanding of the dynamics of family functioning" (1095). The most common conceptualization is a family consisting of a mother, father, and their biological children, all living under the same household. Although this was a typical living arrangement when the term surfaced in the United States around the 1950's, this is not the reality of many family arrangements in the U.S. today. Shaw and Lee explain, "In the United States, there is no 'normal' family, though such tends to be constructed as the nuclear family of the middle-class, White, married, heterosexual couple with children" (379). Uzoka's categorization of family systems provides a starting point or benchmark to understand the family structures at work in the films. The following section is organized by each film in reverse chronological order.

<div align="center">Amreeka</div>

In *Amreeka*, Muna and her son reside with her mother in Palestine and then upon emigrating to the U.S. live with her sister and her sister's family. Her sister's family consists of her husband, Nabeel, and their three biological daughters. With their large family size, Muna and Fadi are put in the same room sharing a bed, an undesirable living condition for a sixteen-year-old boy and his adult mother. While in Palestine, she is bitter towards her ex-husband but this bitterness ends up to be the driving force behind her decision to leave her home country for the U.S. While in the U.S. she befriends Fadi's school principal, Mr. Novotsky, and although it is inferred that a romantic relationship could be budding, the film ends ambiguously as to the outcome of their interest in each other. Despite the ambiguousness that is central to their relationship, Mr. Novotsky is depicted as more of a father figure to Fadi than his biological father or his

biological uncle, Nabeel. It is Mr. Novotsky who is able to get Fadi released from jail.
Mr. Novotsky also counsels Muna when Fadi's behavior escalates to physical violence
with a fellow classmate. The family structure in *Amreeka* supports an extended family
model rather than a nuclear framework.

<p style="text-align:center">*Frozen River*</p>

In *Frozen River*, Ray and her sons function as a non-nuclear family structure.
Their family structure is not only lower class but also does not include traditional mother
and father roles. For example, Ray barely makes enough money to fee her children. She
serves T.J. and Ricky dinner that consists of microwave popcorn and Tang for several
nights in a row leading up to the Christmas holiday because she does not have any extra
money for groceries. In addition, Ray relies on T.J. to take care of Ricky in her frequent
absence from the home. From the vantage point of the audience, T.J. appears to function
as a surrogate parent to his five-year-old brother in the absence of their biological mother
and father. T.J. takes care of Ricky, feeding him dinner, playing with him, and putting
him to bed. When T.J. asks Ray to allow him to get a job, Ray responds, "Your job is
looking after your brother, who's going to take care of him if you get a job?" In one
scene, Ray and T.J. are watching television and a commercial for a *Hot Wheels Blast and
Crash Track* comes on. T.J. informs Ray:

> T.J.: *That's what he* [Ricky] *wants.*
> Ray: *What?*
> T.J.: *For Christmas.*
> Ray: *What is it again?*
> T.J. *Hot Wheels Blast and Crash Track.*

Further, T.J. finds a way to purchase this gift for Ricky and have it under the tree so
Ricky can open it on Christmas morning. This is just one of several examples where T.J.

is depicted as a substitute parental-figure where he knows more about the needs of his brother than the biological mother and father.

The other mother in the film, Lila, is depicted in a less than desirable family situation. The father of Lila's baby's is only discussed once in the film. She tells Ray that her husband is dead and that "he's probably tangled in the river somewhere." Lila lives alone in an unheated trailer and sneaks glimpses of her son as she voyeuristically spies on her mother-in-law. In the end when Ray and Lila are confronted by state troopers and by Mohawk County officials, the women are given two options; Ray can turn herself in and be arrested or Lila can be excommunicated from the Mohawk Territory for a minimum of five years. This would mean that Lila would not be able to see her son until he is six years old. In the end, Ray turns herself in so that Lila can get her son back. In return, Ray asks Lila to stay with her sons until she gets out of jail. The closing scenes depict an awkward living situation with Lila and her baby knocking on the door answered by T.J. It is revealed to the viewers that Lila will be assuming the parental responsibility of T.J. and Ricky until Ray is released from jail. The family system at work in *Frozen River* is not characteristic of a nuclear family and represents a family that functions with extended caretakers with various parental responsibilities.

Waitress

The family structure in *Waitress* is a non-traditional and dysfunctional in her home. At home with Earl, she is subservient and unhappy and schemes the entire movie about ways to get out of her marriage. This is why she is so sad when she finds out she is pregnant with Earl's baby. She proclaims that the baby will tie her to Earl forever. When she finds out she is pregnant she says "I'm never gonna [sic] get away from Earl."

However, Jenna chooses to be a single mother once Lulu is born. When Jenna holds the

baby for the first time after she is born, the background figures consisting of Dr. Pomatter

and Earl, begin to get fuzzy and the background noise is muted as Jenna is looking at

Lulu lying in her arms. It is at this point Jenna realizes all she needs is Lulu. From this

vantage point, the viewers assume that Jenna feels that she needs the help of no others to

raise her daughter, which reinforces the traditional notion of the mother as the primary

caretaker.

<div align="center">

The Dead Girl

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Non-traditional family systems are also depicted in the *Dead Girl*. The only

depiction of a nuclear family is in "The Sister" vignette. However, the father is for the

most part silenced regarding Jenny's disappearance, the central issue of concern in this

vignette. He has two very brief lines and in the second line, he is verbally cut off by

Beverley, his wife. In addition, the mother, Beverley, is depicted as emotionally

unavailable to her living daughter's needs. Other vignettes portray failed marriages. In

"The Mother" vignette, Krista explains that she grew up in a "nuclear family" situation

but because she was molested by her stepfather she ran away to a life of drugs and

prostitution in Los Angeles. Also, in "The Dead Girl" vignette, the final vignette of the

film, it is revealed that Krista and Rosetta are involved with each other in a lesbian

relationship. Over the phone Krista says to Rosetta:

> Krista: *I'm not going to let anyone hurt you again, ever. You believe me, right baby?*
> Rosetta: *Uh huh.*
> Krista: *We're gonna* [sic] *get out of here.*
> Rosetta: *Where we gonna* [sic] *go?*
> Krista: *I don't know. Someplace where there's* [sic] *trees and sky and you can breathe the fucking air. Someplace that's not so fucked up. I'm gonna* [sic] *get my kid tomorrow and we're going to just go, ok. Hello? You there?*
> Rosetta: *Krista, I gotta* [sic] *go back to bed ok.*

> Krista: *Are you mad at me? Don't be mad at me because I fucking love you. Do you love me? Can't you just tell me you love me? I really need to hear it.*
> Rosetta: *I'm going to go back to bed.*
> Krista: *Whatever.*

In this scene it is revealed to the audience Krista and Rosetta have created a family system to which Krista plans to add her daughter, Ashley to their non-traditional family. All of the family systems in *The Dead Girl* are either depicted as non-traditional as some oppose heteronormativity assumed in nuclear models or they are disrupted nuclear models where dysfunction is the norm.

Lovely and Amazing

In *Lovely and Amazing*, there are two family constructions presented. The first is Michelle, Elizabeth, and Jane. This family is non-traditional in that it does not conform to the nuclear model. There is no patriarch and the relationships are characterized by non-traditional mother-child relationships. The second family depiction is that of Michelle, Bill, and Maddie. Although this representation does conform to the nuclear family model, it is characterized by deception, infidelity, and unfulfilling interpersonal relationships.

Non-traditional family systems are standard in all of the sample films reviewed in this study. The films depict non-traditional families and disruption in traditional nuclear families as dysfunctional. Dysfunction in family systems is brought to the forefront in *Lovely and Amazing, Waitress, The Dead Girl, Amreeka*, and *Frozen River*. The portrayal of single motherhood disrupts the traditional notion of the nuclear family. In addition, other factors such as sexual orientation, family trauma, physical and verbal abuse, and ethnicity also disrupt the vision of a stereotypical nuclear family. The depictions of family systems not conforming to the nuclear model creates a perception of

a cause and effect relationship between non-traditional systems and dysfunction. Absent from texts are depictions of traditional family constructs indicative of the nuclear family. There is an obvious absence of father figures in most of the films. The depiction of non-traditional surrogate mothers and fathers as well as depictions of less than ideal family situations are typical family constructions in the films.

Analysis

What is Missing?

For this study, I analyzed the public and private sphere identifications, the mother-child relationships, and the family systems. I observed examples of exnomination and structuring absences in the texts identifying what is missing and what is assumed. What is missing from the texts are images that express the compatibility of sex, work, and motherhood simultaneously. In this sample of films, women work in the public sphere out of necessity, not out of desire or personal fulfillment. Kaplan suggests that it is difficult to find American films, "that focus on the fact that many mothers want to work, for a whole series of reasons, including wanting a degree of independence within a marriage, needing fulfillment through work, and needing the social adult community one can find in a workplace" ("Sex, Work, and Motherhood" 261). The main mother characters in several of the films confirm this notion as their lower class and single motherhood status forces them to work out of necessity rather than out of joy. Kaplan contends, "part of the unconscious difficulty that still haunts the American imagination in relation to women is evident in the paucity of films dealing with motherhood and work" ("Sex, Work, and Motherhood" 257). Further, she argues, "film that address women's struggles to combine sex, work, and motherhood are even more absent" (257). This

analysis confirms this tradition in American film where mothers are employed but usually to the detriment of their children. For example, in *Frozen River*, Ray works unselfishly for the survival of her children, but in the end is taken to jail, thus removed, albeit temporarily from her childrearing duties. As a result, T.J. and Ricky are supervised for four months with a woman that they do not know. Muna holds a working class position and works out of necessity for the survival of her family. The conflict between Muna and one of Fadi's classmates at White Castle eventually leads to Fadi's incarceration. Krista is murdered due to her participation in her dangerous occupation, prostitution. Michelle's participation in the workforce leads to an affair and a statutory rape charge against her which may cause her to lose custody of her only daughter. Only the character of Jenna finds compatibility between sex, motherhood, and the public sphere. Jenna is pregnant, holds a job and is also sexually desirable by members of the opposite sex. However, when Lulu is born, though she continues to work, she is only shown working with Lulu by her side, consequently making the notion of working while raising a small child more acceptable. In these five films, the working conditions for the mothers reinforce an underlying theme that working mothers have a detrimental impact on their children.

Similar to a desire to work outside the home, the desire to have a romantic relationship disrupts the family structure and the mother-child relationships. As Kaplan points out in "The Case of the Missing Mother: Maternal Issues in Vidor's Stella Dallas," if the mother reveals her desire, she is characterized as The Bad Mother (sadistic, monstrous)" (82). For example, Michelle is depicted as a bad mother throughout the film as her drive to seek out attention and fulfillment from the opposite sex apparently outweighs her desire to interact with her daughter. In addition, it is

revealed to Malora in *The Dead Girl*, that Krista believed her mother abandoned her when Malora supposedly turned a blind eye to the abuse Krista received at the hands of Malora's husband. The romantic partnership between Malora and her husband appears to be the reason Krista left home to become a prostitute. However, in this study, romantic relationships are deemed acceptable if the mother is stereotypically attractive as is the case with Jenna in *Waitress*. Jenna's choice for autonomy is apparent when she decides her true love is Lulu and subsequently Jenna cuts ties with both heterosexual relationships in her life.

The romantic status or lack thereof of the mothers appears to threaten the mother-child relationship. An evaluation of the structured absences reveals traditional gendered expectations of motherhood. Mothers are allowed to work in the public sphere, however this choice is usually to the detriment of their children and can have negative consequences for their livelihood. In addition, a mother's choice to pursue a romantic relationship is only acceptable if the mother is stereotypically attractive and if she is not, her actions will lead to disastrous consequences for her family. These traditional motherhood expectations work to reinforce the idea that a mother's calling is limited to the domestic sphere.

What is Assumed?

Given what is missing in the texts leaves the viewers with several assumptions about the "indie" mother. Examples of exnomination include single motherhood, rejection of domesticity, middle class models of mothering, maternal sacrifice, and white mothering as normative mothering. The first obvious assumption about the "indie" mother is her status as a single mother. Hoerl and Kelly indicate that post-feminist

"discourses tend to ignore the material barriers to economic advancement that many women, including single mothers face" (361). In their analysis of *Knocked Up*, *Juno*, and *Waitress*, Hoerl and Kelly refer to what they identify as a "post-nuclear family" found in narratives that reconfigure the nuclear family but still "maintain fidelity to a neo-traditional model of motherhood" where white, middle class women remain appropriate models for contemporary mothering (362). This post-nuclear family is echoed in this study's sample films. In *Amreeka*, Muna chooses single motherhood when she leaves Bethlehem with Fadi. Though divorced from Fadi's father, Muna chooses to leave their home, their family, and her career to move to the United States. In *Waitress*, Jenna also chooses single motherhood. In *Frozen River*, Ray and Lila do not choose single motherhood, though they seem unbothered by the prospect of raising their children alone. Hoerl and Kelly point out that:

> The post-nuclear family model valorized in these films ultimately re-centers patriarchy by ignoring the structural inequities that leave families headed by single mothers the poorest demographic group in the nation. Thus, the post-nuclear family is not an alternative to patriarchy under liberal capitalism, but a set of cultural discourses that reinforces public policies that have blamed impoverished, single mothers for making poor choices (377)

This study confirms that the status of the mothers as single does not present images that challenge or disrupt the colonization of single mothers as a marginalized group and as such works to maintain domination.

The second "indie" mother assumption is the blatant rejection of domesticity. Mothers in these films uniformly reject the traditional idea of domesticity. Ray defies traditional mothering ideologies. She carries a gun throughout the film, conducts herself with criminals, shoots at Lila's trailer because she thinks her husband is inside, engages

in a fight with Lila, and gets incarcerated at the end of the film. However, Ray is

unselfish in the motives behind her non-traditional mothering behavior. Everything she

does throughout the movie is for her children. Jenna also rejects traditional notions of

domesticity and motherhood when she refuses to comprehend her pregnancy as a source

of enjoyment or satisfaction. Many examples in the sample films invert the normal

mothering behavior and thus challenge the underpinnings of patriarchal ideas about

mothering.

The third assumption is that appropriate mothering happens in the middle class.

Hays suggests "the new ideology of domesticity also served as a central symbol for the

distinctive identity of the American middle class, providing them with a claim to moral

superiority over both the frivolous rich and the promiscuous poor" (33). This analysis

reveals a further separation of class by reinforcing middle class values. The sample films

naturalize ideologies of status and class when it comes to the lower and upper classes.

Those who are working class are portrayed as social deviants or uneducated criminals as

is the case in *Frozen River* for Ray and Lila. The intensive mothering paradigm

encourages a middle class approach to childrearing and those mothers who operate

outside of this are socially sanctioned. In this sample of films, the mothers that endure

poverty and working class conditions suffer from physical and emotional abuse,

incarceration, and being removed from their caretaking responsibilities.

The fourth assumption points to the notion of maternal sacrifice for children and

other mothers. The reoccurring and central theme of maternal sacrifice suggests a return

to 1930's maternal melodrama where, according to Whitney, maternal sacrifice in film

was deemed a high priority (3). In *Waitress*, Jenna sacrifices her love for Dr. Pomatter

for the benefit of her relationship with Lulu. In *The Dead Girl*, Malora sacrifices her

current living situation to raise Ashley. In *Amreeka*, Muna sacrifices her career for the

betterment of Fadi's education. In *Frozen River*, Ray makes the ultimate sacrifice not for

her children, but for her partner, Lila. She makes this sacrifice not because Lila is her

friend but because Lila is a mother who deserves to have her one year-old son back. Ray

turns herself in to the police and encourages Lila to get her son back from her mother-in-

law. Kaplan explains that eighties images of motherhood in mainstream films including

Baby Boom and *Three Men and a Baby* are contradictory and declares, "they validate the

domestic sphere for women who have been successful in careers while also promoting

the woman who finds fulfillment only in mothering" ("Sex, Work, and Motherhood"

265). This analysis indicates that maternal sacrifice is the mother's desire and that

mothering is the only source of ultimate fulfillment. Linda Williams argues that maternal

melodrama frequently depict the "self-sacrificing mother" who "must make her sacrifice

that of the connection to her children-either for her or their own good" (479). I suggest

that the love stories in the sample films are narratives that endorse maternal sacrifice as

the highest priority for mothers.

The fifth and final assumption of the "indie" mother is that white mothering is

normative mothering. Examining the cultural and race issues highlight subtle differences

between white and non-white mothering. The race and cultural issues as presented in

Amreeka, *Lovely and Amazing*, and *Frozen River* suggest that the intersection of race,

class, and culture with motherhood illuminates the detrimental impact of non-white

mothering on children. For example, the relationship between Annie and Jane is one that

reveals Annie needs a mother figure that her family is unable to provide. This creates a

divisive environment where Annie cannot make friends her own age as well as within her

own family. Annie curses at Michelle, tells racist jokes to her African American Big

Sister, and runs away from home. Racial and cultural factors also affect the perception of

motherhood in *Amreeka*. Similarly to *Frozen River* and *Lovely and Amazing*, the

detrimental impact of mothering is illuminated by the consequences suffered by Muna

because she is deceitful to her son and family throughout the film. Consequently, she is

relatively unsuccessful in the public sphere and not desirable to the opposite sex. *Frozen

River* also depicts racial and cultural factors intersecting with motherhood. American

Indian Lila participates in illegal activity and is living in poverty. She does not gain

access to her infant son until Ray, a white mother, makes the ultimate sacrifice for Lila.

Because of Ray's sacrifice, Lila gets her son back. Furthermore, Lila assumes a white

mother role as she takes over Ray's role as mother to her sons. Highlighting these

examples points to the normative practice of white mothering and any deviation from this

framework is subject to undesirable consequences in the public and private spheres.

The identification of these five assumptions, which underlie the films analyzed in

this study, provides an image of the contemporary "indie" mother. The indie mother is

white, heterosexual, middle class, and rejects notions of traditional domesticity. She

chooses to raise her children alone and to not get involved in romantic relationships.

Also integral to the construction of the indie mother is the practice of maternal sacrifice.

Although the indie mother is one that shows resistance to traditional mothering

ideologies, she is valorized by the practice of maternal sacrifice and the embodiment of

other traits that suggest the support of the model of intensive mothering. This vision

rhetorically constructs an ideal prototype of a contemporary mother based on what is missing and what is assumed in the texts.

What Does this Mean?

Regardless of the paradigm or feminist framework from which a scholar operates, feminists are united by the goal of social change. To understand the extent to which the "indie" vision of motherhood is affected by patriarchal ideologies, a critic must evaluate not only how the vision challenges patriarchal norms, but whether or not these challenges embody the potential for empowerment.

Kramarae's and hooks' feminist rhetorical theories provide a framework to evaluate the extent that this representation of contemporary motherhood challenges or adheres to patriarchal ideology.   Kramarae suggests an alternative "woman-created" space where "women do not have to resist and cope with the mainstream world and can construct themselves and their relationships in ways different from those normalized by the mainstream" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 47). Kramarae details this supportive alternative by features such as interconnection, safety, holism, trust, mutuality, adaptability, and equal access to information. Hooks describes an alternative vision as one that encourages features such as equality, mutuality, and respect over traditional rhetorical theory, "which is to have their own perspectives prevail-or dominate-and to accomplish their own goals, often at the expense of the achievement of the goals of others" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 93). The feminist rhetorical theories discussed by hooks and Kramarae suggest alternatives to traditional public persuasion. Utilizing these alternatives as a framework for analysis, in the following section, I will first highlight the ways in which the texts challenge the status

quo followed by a discussion of the extent to which the texts adhere to patriarchal ideology.

Resisting Patriarchy

Because the films in this sample are essentially female narratives, the female filmmakers embody what hooks calls a transformed ethos "in that they have insights others do not because of the dual vision afforded by their marginal status" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 93). These marginalized rhetors have the potential to create challenging images and representations and as such, can enact social change due to their ability to "imagine alternatives and to create nondominating relations and cultures" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 94). In addition, these marginalized rhetors present their narratives in an independent forum. Independent film as a narrative forum allows the rhetors to express ideas outside of what is considered mainstream. As Shaw and Lee note, "As women have made societal gains, Hollywood filmmaking has also changed and become more inclusive of new norms about gender" (505). Further, they contend, "especially when women have more control over the film as in a number of independent movies, films become more reflective of women's actual lives and concerns" (506). In this sample of films, resistance to traditional childrearing ideologies appears to be the main expression of challenge to mainstream ideals. As such, these female filmmakers work to challenge traditional film discourse that is typically rendered the status quo in Hollywood film.

The female filmmakers present subversive narratives that challenge traditional gender norms by creating new images of family structuring, developing narrative discourse that is not inclusive of romantic interest, and depicting the harsh realities of single motherhood. First, the films offer alternative images of family structuring. Hooks

contends that "cultural criticism involves not simply challenging and resisting particular forms of representation but also inventing new images" (Foss, Foss, & Griffin 90). Unconventional family dynamics are depicted as an alternative to the nuclear family model. Not only is the absence of father figures commonplace, but the mothers in each of the films are not bothered by their single motherhood status. Further, the mothers are fulfilled by their child's love rather than the love of a significant other and do not seem bothered or concerned about filling this father role for their children. Given this, single motherhood appears to be an appropriate and desired parenting option for women. From this perspective, the benefits of autonomy for the mothers outweigh being involved in a monogamous romantic relationship with a man. All of the films depict single motherhood in some form, though not every mother chooses to be single. In some instances, single motherhood is chosen for them as is the case when Ray's husband leaves her. Nonetheless, each of the mothers are emotionally unaffected by the absence of the father.

Second, romance is not a central feature in the film narratives. Although some romantic relationships are depicted in some of the films peripherally, typically the family relationships are the centerpieces of the plot. Kaplan confirms that typical in most American films is the depiction of the lead character in a romantic relationship or interested in pursing a romantic relationship ("Sex, Work, and Motherhood"). Muna's disinterest in a romantic relationship is atypical of mainstream cinema. The two exceptions are *Lovely and Amazing* and *Waitress*. In *Lovely and Amazing*, both Michelle and Jane are interested in attracting attention from the opposite sex and Michelle even engages in an intimate relationship with her seventeen-year-old boss. However, the

relationship between Michelle and her boss and the subsequent consequences for her relationship are depicted as secondary plotlines. By the close of the film, the focus is on Michelle's relationship with her daughter, mother, and sister rather than the loss of her lover.   In *Waitress*, Jenna engages in a sexual relationship with Dr. Pomatter throughout the film but ultimately ends the relationship with him due to the birth of her daughter. Thus motherhood is portrayed as having more significance for her than her inappropriate relationship with her doctor. The idea that romance does not provide gratifying relationships for the mothers that engage in them challenges the patriarchal notion that men are the ultimate source of fulfillment for women.

Finally, the film narratives show realistic conditions for the typically economically challenged single mothers. Kaplan argues that movies rarely depict issues of single motherhood accurately. She contends, "It is difficult to find Hollywood films that address the fact that many mothers, especially single ones, simply have to work in order to support themselves and their children" (261). For example, in *Frozen River* Ray is a single mother that struggles in every aspect of her life, even putting gas in her vehicle. On her way to find her missing husband whom she suspects is taking refuge at a local bingo hall, she stops to get gas and asks the attendant to put in $2.74, counting through the change she finds in her car. Eventually she is ecstatic to accidentally find a $5 bill in her pocket and is able to increase her request to $7.74. This example illustrates one of several depictions of harsh and more realistic conditions that contemporary single mothers face.

Perpetuating Oppression

In contrast to the subversive challenges to patriarchal ideals, there are three ways that I found the films adhering to patriarchal ideology: limited depictions of women in the public sphere, devaluing of women's contributions in the private sphere, and reinforcing the basic tenets of intensive mothering. An ideology of intensive mothering is characterized by the following: women take a child-centered approach to childrearing, mothers are the primary caretakers, childrearing is emotionally absorbing and expensive, and mothers consult expert guided opinions on childrearing (Hays). First, there are limited depictions of mothers in the public sphere. Observing the public sphere roles held by the mothers in the films indicates the normalcy of women's participation in the male dominated public realm, however, participation is mostly in the capacity of servile or working class. This is presented in *Amreeka*, *Frozen River*, *Waitress*, and *The Dead Girl*. Further, the working conditions are generally not desirable conditions for the mothers. Muna is ashamed to work at White Castle in *Amreeka*, Jenna is ordered around in *Waitress*, and Ray is devalued at her place of employment in *Frozen River*. These public sphere depictions indicate issues of class as a point of distinction because the depiction of upper-middle class mothers is rare. In the films *Amreeka*, *Frozen River*, *Waitress*, *Lovely and Amazing*, and *The Dead Girl*, the working class status of mothers help to perpetuate patriarchal dominance.

Second, mothers are devalued in the private sphere. In some instances, the mothers devalue themselves in the private sphere. For example, in *Amreeka*, Muna puts $2500 in a tin of cookies, attempting to keep her savings safe when she travels to the United States. Muna is unaware that the tin of cookies is confiscated by airport officials and she does not realize they are gone until she begins unpacking. She asks Fadi, "How

could I leave without making sure they put everything back?" Fadi, trying to comfort his mother, tells her that Uncle Samer gave him $200 before they left Palestine. Muna responds, "Of course he did, he knows I'm stupid and can't do anything right." In other instances, some characters in the films treat mothers with disrespect in the private sphere. The mother-adult child relationships in these five films depict adult children who blame their mothers for negatively impacting their lives. Examples of the detrimental impact of mothering is depicted in *The Dead Girl* in "The Stranger" vignette, "The Sister" vignette, and "The Dead Girl" vignette. These examples portray mothers being devalued both by themselves and by their children.

Third, the findings highlight several themes that support the hegemonic model of intensive mothering. Mothers are portrayed as child-centered interacting with infant, preschool, and school age children. This tenet assumes that a good mother is one that puts the needs of her child ahead of her own desires. For example, in *Frozen River* when Ray decides to participate in illegal activities she does so to provide for her family, not out of her own selfish desires. In the same manner, in *Waitress*, although Jenna satisfies her romantic and sexual desires, by the time she delivers Lulu, her priority shifts from herself and her romantic involvements, to her baby. In *Amreeka*, Muna leaves her home country so that Fadi can have a better life. Examples such as these reinforce the notion that "good" mothers put their children first. Observing the non-traditional family systems portrayed in these films also demonstrates adherence to the concept of mother as the primary caretaker, another major tenet of the model of intensive mothering. As the findings indicate, single motherhood is a choice, although for some it is a circumstance, which is forced upon them. This choice often requires eliminating men and other

possible caretakers form childrearing responsibilities thus furthering the notion of mother

as the primary caretaker. For example, although Jenna resents the fact that she is

pregnant, she chooses to keep the baby with the underlying assumption that a mother who

does not want to be a mother is a better option than choosing to give the baby up for

adoption. These non-traditional family systems work to reinforce the mother as the only

suitable caretaker.

Although the films present a deviation from middle class values by depicting

many working class mothers as well as two upper class mothers, a middle class model of

mothering is encouraged as the appropriate framework for childrearing. Any deviation

from the middle class model is portrayed as inadequate and inappropriate. Jane and

Michelle serve as the upper class models of parenting and both suffer consequences for

inappropriate mothering. Michelle is punished for her affair although her husband, also

guilty of infidelity, escapes social censure. Jane almost dies in the hospital after

consequences arise from her liposuction surgery demonstrating that electing a selfish act

is punishable by a near death experience. Working and lower class mothers also suffer

consequences. Ray is arrested and removed from her childrearing responsibilities. Krista

is murdered on her way to see Ashley on her birthday. These are all examples indicating

how the films adhere to the status quo by reinforcing the intensive mothering model.

A Rhetoric of Resistance

In this study, the films successfully portray varied motherhood discourses

including addressing issues of race, class, and ethnicity. However, does the presence of

these issues pave the way for social change by affecting the viewer's consciousness? The

films attempt to challenge traditional mothering ideologies by subverting the discursive actions and behaviors that characterize the mothers in this study.

Resistance theory offers a theoretical framework for understanding these subversive narratives. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, Scott offers an alternative perspective to the hegemonic analysis in relation to appropriating power. He analyzes and describes the ideological resistance of marginalized groups and contends that "the powerless work within their subordinate status by developing a repertoire of tactics that are designed to resist, as much as possible domination by the powerful" (Barry 30). Barry applies Scott's resistance theory to the cinematic performance of single motherhood and determines that "single motherhood is resistive because society typically insists on a nuclear patriarchal family in which the mother is subordinate to the father" (31-32). From this perspective, resistance theory provides a meaningful contribution to a dialogue about public discourse created by subordinate groups. Resistance theory provides an explanation of how marginalized individuals develop tactics that are designed to resist dominant ideologies. One tactic that characterizes rhetorical resistance is symbolic inversion (Barry 33). Barry describes symbolic inversion as "a tactic whereby the powerless invert or reverse commonly held values, beliefs or norms" (33). Symbolic inversion is a narrative technique found in all of the five films in this study whereby the mothers do not necessarily function parallel to the dominant model of intensive mothering. I suggest that the filmmakers, who all operate from a subordinate group, utilize a symbolic inversion technique that creates a subversive vision of mothering.

Mothers who challenge authority and conventional beliefs about morality and domesticity characterize this subversive vision of contemporary motherhood. For example, Ray and Lila run an illegal human smuggling operation, albeit for the sake of their families. Jenna 'resents" her baby and refers to herself as the "anti-mother." Michelle and Jane put their own desires and needs ahead of their children's needs. These mothers invert the normal mothering behavior thereby calling into question the association of motherhood with domesticity and morality.

The association of mothers as moral providers for their children is grounded in cultural perceptions dating to the eighteenth century. In the mid-eighteenth century, mothers increasingly became viewed as moral educators of their children. Leslie Harris explains:

> The relation of women with morality can be attributed in part to the mid-eighteenth century Great Awakening, which encouraged women's participation as vehicles of the moral cause, and because the cultivation of morality belonged within the domestic sphere, women's participation was considered to be an extension of her natural role (31)

Further, she contends, "children, therefore, became increasingly linked to mothers because of the children's perceived need for moral education" (31). As such, social roles for mothers are defined in terms of their relationships with their children. This creates a mothering assumption that directly associates mothers with their children. This association binds mothers to children thereby maintaining the traditional social roles for mothers. Given this, the rising instances of non-traditional family structures actually maintain gender hierarchies by reinforcing traditional social roles for women. The absence of fathers as caretakers, however realistic in this depiction of contemporary Western family life, actually reinforces the idea that mothers must be the primary

caretakers of their children. For the most part, the mothers in the films reject this notion of morality in the domestic sphere. Both of the mothers in *Frozen River* are criminals, Muna lies to her family in *Amreeka*, Jenna curses her unborn baby in *Waitress*, and Michelle cheats on her husband with an underage boy in *Lovely and Amazing*. For the films in this study, immorality is the norm in the domestic sphere rather than the traditional notion of morality.

This study illustrates tension in the idea that morality functions solely in the domestic sphere. Each of the mothers participates in illegal activities or is deceitful to family members. The depiction of mothers is presented in opposition to traditional mothering ideologies and illustrates the idea that mothers are not expected to be the moral compasses for their families.

The rejection of domesticity, the challenge to morality in the domestic sphere, and the challenge of middle class childrearing indicate subversive narratives underlying the texts. Hoerl and Kelly explain that "within a post-feminist paradigm the meaning of choice is inverted such that even a woman's decision to reclaim her traditional gender roles is coded as a feminist expression of agency" (361). They point out in their study of *Waitress*, *Knocked Up*, and *Juno*, "women in these films express disdain for, discomfort with, or despair over the nuclear family" (368). The narratives in this study highlight a similar theme where the depictions of motherhood and family structures are subversive to traditional ideologies thus characterizing the rhetoric of resistance on the part of the female filmmakers. I suggest this rhetoric of resistance embodies hooks' and Kramarae's rhetorical visions where the realm for rhetoric includes the rhetor's ability to enact intrapersonal change by producing public discourse that decolonizes many mother's

realities; realities that are defined and shaped by an ideology of domination. In other words, my interpretation is that resistance to oppressive ideologies is achieved at the rhetor's individual level. My analysis demonstrates the utility of using principles of resistance theory as a lens to understand the extent to which marginalized rhetors appropriate power.

Maternal Autonomy as Liberation

Although feminism offers various methodologies, perspectives, and theoretical underpinnings, feminists are united by a common goal. The goal is for feminists to liberate oppression of marginalized groups by generating social change. The Personal Narratives Group explains, "individual agency is critical for feminist theory because it provides both the source of insight and the means of action which lead to social change" (6). Barry argues that "the ability to recognize subversive cues…provides a mean for liberation" (35). This study highlights subversive discourses where women's social agency is defined by a mother's insistence on single parenting. As such, maternal autonomy is a source for women's empowerment in the sample films. The films amplify the message that women do not need a partner or assistance in raising children because of their single motherhood status. This furthers the tenet of intensive mothering that indicates mothers are the only suitable primary caretakers of her children. Women do exercise choice in their option to parent alone. However, this choice is highlighted by the indication that a mother's fulfillment comes only from her child. From this perspective, maternal sacrifice is positioned as a means to gain the love of their child, thus securing ultimate personal fulfillment. Consequently, mothers are rewarded for their self-sacrificing behavior if it is for the benefit of their child. Although this changes the

traditional structure of the nuclear family to a non-traditional vision of a family, it further

confines women to a traditional mothering role. A mother's choice for autonomy and the

encouragement of maternal sacrifice reinforces that women are the only suitable primary

caretaker which in turn ensures a woman's rightful place in the domestic sphere and

perhaps excuses her from being taken seriously in the public sphere. This study

highlights the rewarding of mothers who make the right choices such as sacrificing for

their child before addressing her own needs and desires and sanctioning the mothers that

do the opposite. This reward system restores the myth of motherhood; a myth that is

undoubtedly white, middle class, and heterosexual.

This study is an example of how public rhetoric encourages mothering standards

for Western women. These standards reproduce a typical good/bad dichotomy where

mothers are measured based on their adherence or resistance to the intensive mothering

model. Women are either defined as a "good mother" that abides by this dominant

ideology or they are a "bad mother" that does not. Not only does this produce

contradictory messages in the texts but it is problematic because it greatly limits the

mothering options available for women.   The contradictory messages parallel

Campbell's premise in "The Rhetoric of Women's Liberation: An Oxymoron."

Campbell argues the nature of women's liberation exist as "dual and conflicting

exigencies" (85). The findings in this study support Campbell's assertion wherein

mothers are bound to contradictory mothering messages that further perpetuates their

own oppression. I suggest the films represent a subversive view of contemporary

mothering because mothers are placed in direct opposition to this patriarchal ideology,

offering what appears to be an alternative vision of motherhood to the dominant Western

model. The vision of motherhood in the films valorizes autonomy, which reinforces the intensive mothering model. Therefore, the model of intensive mothering still works as hegemonic framework that mothers are measured.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Limitations

The methodology utilized in this study reveals a subversive vision of motherhood

with contradictory and sometimes conflicting messages, but it does have its limitations.

Textual analysis is a stand alone methodology and is usually in the place of an actual

audience response. As Young indicates, "A direct focus on the audience leads to insights

that cannot be reached by textual analysis alone" (449). It is impossible to judge how this

vision of motherhood impacts the reality of "real life" mothers. As such, audience

studies would indicate the extent to which these representations were impactful to the

mothers who watch them. Further, as indicated by Van Zoonen, "the rather strong claims

feminist media studies have made about the cultural and political meaning of media

content seem hard to validate on the basis of textual analysis only" (105). Consequently,

the limitations of the methodology utilized in this study can lead to future directed

research. At the close of this study, I understand the sense-making practices of the

female rhetors from my readings of the film, but my study does not answer the question,

what is the meaning for the audience? Lewis argues, "If we are concerned with the

meaning and significance of popular culture in contemporary society, with how cultural

forms work ideologically or politically, then we need to understand cultural products (or

"texts") as they are understood by audiences" (47). Similar to this study, Hoerl and Kelly

utilize an intertextual narrative approach and explain that this type of interpretation

"explores how patterns across a series of related texts contribute to a structured meaning

system that constrains audiences' interpretive agency" (363). Hoerl and Kelly indicate in

their intertextual analysis of *Knocked Up*, *Juno*, and *Waitress*:

> Although no single scholarly interpretation is going to be shared by
> different audiences of any particular text, similar themes and images
> across popular media texts point to the cultural forms by which different
> audiences may come to recognize the shared values of a culture; likewise,
> repeated themes across texts may highlight or obscure the disagreements
> and conflicts over which different groups struggle (363)

Though this study was limited by the extent to which it can measure the impact on the lived reality of mothers, identifying the ideological impact is only possible after a textual exploration of the mothering discourses in the films.

The current study observes films across various genres including romantic comedy, suspense, drama, and murder-mystery. Throughout the course of my research, I read scholarly work in genre studies that I believe could be another logical extension of this study. Isolating themes found within the same genres would strengthen my exploration of mothering ideologies in independent films. In this study, I found the adherence to patriarchal ideology was more easily identified in the independent romantic comedy in this study, *Waitress*. The dramas were more in line with maternal melodramas where maternal sacrifice has traditionally been the norm. Given these subtle differences, an investigation into the similarities between genres would heighten the understanding and interpretation of mothering discourses in film.

For the current study, I sought out female narratives in order to understand a female vision of contemporary motherhood. However, at the close of this study, I find myself wondering how these female narratives would compare to alternative visions of motherhood. For example, it would a fruitful exploration to seek out other subversive texts such as portrayals of alternative parenting in public discourse including non-white and non-heterosexual parenting. Although the female narratives investigated in this study provide a unique glimpse at the construction of contemporary motherhood, alternative

perspectives from dominant and subordinate groups would allow for a deeper cultural understanding of contemporary motherhood.

Summary

A feminist rhetorical perspective complimented the post-structuralist textual analysis utilized in this study. I suggest the films represent a subversive view of contemporary mothering because mothers are placed in direct opposition to this patriarchal ideology, offering what appears to be an alternative vision of motherhood to the dominant Western model. The vision of motherhood in the films valorizes maternal autonomy and encourages maternal sacrifice.

This analysis highlights the view of the contemporary "indie" mother; a white, middle class mother who chooses to absolve childrearing responsibility from other interested and capable parties such as fathers, sisters, and extended family members. I argue the film's vision of motherhood encourages maternal sacrifice and valorizes maternal autonomy in order to compensate for those individuals that are not white, middle class women. This symbolic inversion characterizes the subversive discourses that give voice to female filmmakers that attempt to negotiate power by invoking a rhetoric of resistance. However, the rhetoric of resistance continues to reinforce women's traditional role in the domestic sphere. The idea that sex, motherhood, and work are understood to be incompatible suggest that the identity of a woman continues to be innately connected to the private sphere identity of a white, heterosexual mother. Even though in American culture women are increasingly present in the public, that public identity continues to be to be understood through the lens of the private identity of mother.

The analysis of the films demonstrates varied kinds of motherhood discourses with themes uniting the underlying subtext of what contemporary mothering means. Why do these discourses arise now? From my perspective, these subversive narratives are arising out of anxiety for changing family structures and resistance to the intensive mothering model. Shaw and Lee indicate that "as women have made societal gains, Hollywood filmmaking has also changed and become more inclusive of new norms about gender" (505). This analysis supports Shaw and Lee's assertion as a rhetoric of resistance is fore grounded in the independent cinematic narratives. I argue the female filmmakers use subversive narratives as a tool to resist marginalization and oppression however, regardless of the intent the end result is a (re)production of contradictory messages.

Mothering is a crucial cite of women's social agency (Simons). At the close of this study, some rhetorical space is offered as a site of resistance; however, the dominant patriarchal structure is not threatened. This analysis supports many feminist attitudes towards contemporary mothering that suggest "much if not most of current mothering and caretaking is carried out on terms defined by men in order to serve patriarchal purposes" (Simons 180). The female filmmakers open a rhetorical space for individuals to view mother's roles in the public and private spheres, the mother-child relationships, and the family systems. Although resistance theory offers a theoretical perspective to help us understand how marginalized rhetors resist oppressive ideologies, the production of contradictory messages illustrates that a rhetoric of resistance does not occur at a broader, societal level.

Conclusion

Film narrative discourse presents images and text that communicate cultural expectations for mothers. As indicated by The Personal Narratives Group, central to feminist theory is the notion that "the uncovering of women's oppression requires attention to systems of relationships in which individuals are embedded" (6). This study illuminates representations of motherhood in independent cinematic texts thereby calling attention to the way a marginalized group portrays a marginalized group. More specifically, I investigated the relationship between the female filmmaker and the creation and perpetuation of mothering ideologies and examining the dialectic tension between individuals and society created when individuals contemplate their gender roles and expectations manifested in popular discourse.

Social roles and gender roles are continuously changing. These changes are reflected in public discourse. The messages contribute to the changing cultural meanings about public and private sphere gender roles, appropriate mother-child relationships, and standard family structures. Rhetorical analysis of popular discourse is essential in mapping the cultural tensions of motherhood. I would like to suggest that the understanding of this progression can help explain the current tensions in motherhood ideologies. I suggest that film functions as a rhetorical device that translates current ideological tensions about mothering identity and traditional family structures. By idealizing the myth of motherhood, a white, middle class vision of motherhood prevails in contemporary film, which further encourages white privilege.

In this study, I utilized my knowledge as a feminist rhetorical scholar to initiate a larger discussion about motherhood representation in a vehicle that is not only intended to provide a unique image but also expected to offer an alternative venue to standard

Hollywood patriarchal depictions.   This study highlights the perpetuation of patriarchal

ideologies by marginalized groups. The analysis suggests that film is a dynamic medium

that both reflects hegemonic discourse but remains open to ideological variance. In order

to advance rhetorical theory, it is necessary to clarify how this analysis can engender

social change. Exploring how these narratives are resolved give us a richer

understanding of how film functions to maintain a gendered hierarchy.   The "indie"

mother as emblematic of the subversive voice in contemporary motherhood contributes to

the discussion of post-feminist discourse in female narratives. This analysis furthers the

understanding of the relationship between communication and gender and has

implications for contemporary female identity. Although the contemporary female

identity continues to be connected to the private sphere identity of the mother, this

analysis demonstrates the potential for ideological resistance by subordinate groups.

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      McDermott. Sony Pictures Classics, 2008. DVD.

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      and Emily Mortimer. Lions Gate Films, 2001. DVD.

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      Gay Harden. First Look Pictures, 2006. DVD.

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      controlling bitches, and ultimate capitulation." *Women and*

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      Louise." *Communication Education* 44.2 (1995): 165. Electronic.

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  the Importance of Film in Everyday Life." *Critical Studies in Media

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Rachel Diana Davidson

EDUCATION

M. A.   **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**, May 2011
               Major Area: Applied communication
               Concentration: Public Communication
               GPA: 4.0/4.0
               Thesis: *Subversive Voices in Contemporary Motherhood: The Rhetoric of Resistance in Independent Film Narratives*
               Advisor: Dr. Catherine A. Dobris

B. A.   **Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis**, December 2000
               Major: Communication Studies
               GPA: 3.265/4.0

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Research

Research Assistant, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
         Assisting Dr. Antoinette L. Laskey, Children's Health Services Research
         Assisting Dr. John Parrish-Sprowl, Department of Communication Studies
         Period of Purple Crying Project   2010-2011

Teaching

Associate Faculty, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis
         Department of Communication Studies   2009-2010

PAPER PRESENTATIONS

Davidson, R.D. (2009). *Serenity not found: A critical analysis of Joss Whedon's Firefly.*
         Paper presented at IUPUI Communication Studies Student Achievement Night,
         Indianapolis, Indiana, April.

Davidson, R.D. (2010). *Intensive mothering on film: Contradictions and consequences in Little Children*. Paper presented at IUPUI Women's History Month, March.

Davidson, R.D. (2010). *Serenity not found: A critical analysis of Joss Whedon's Firefly*. Competitively selected paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, April.

Davidson, R.D. (2010). *Intensive mothering on film: Contradictions and consequences in Little Children*. Competitively selected paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, San Francisco, California, November.

Davidson, R. D., Anderson, L.B. & Deering, E. N. (2011). *Dirty work in the classroom: Utilizing shared narratives as a taint management strategy*. Competitively selected paper presented at the 2011 Annual Meeting of the Central States Communication Association, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, April.

Davidson, R. D. (2011). *Subversive Voices in Contemporary Motherhood: The Rhetoric of Resistance in Independent Film Narratives*. Paper presented at IUPUI Communication Week, March.

Davidson, R.D., Anderson, L.B. & Deering, E.N. (2011). *Dirty work in the classroom: Utilizing shared narratives as a taint management strategy*. Paper presented at IUPUI Communication Studies Student Achievement Night, Indianapolis, Indiana, April.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS

Davidson, R. D. (under review, Women's Caucus, National Communication Association Annual Convention). *Challenging rhetorical theory in contemporary film: An exploration of invitational rhetoric in Sofia Coppola films*.

Davidson, R. D. & Deering, E. N. (in progress). *Exploring the intersection of gender and self: The enhancement of Women's Studies through the study of self disclosure.* [Conference outlets undecided]

Davidson, R.D. (under review, Ethnography Division, National Communication Association Annual Convention). *Intensive mothering as institutional voice: A case study exploring the organizational identity at The Ivy School*.

Davidson, R. D. & Anderson, L.B. (in progress). *Status matters: An Investigation of the recruitment and maintenance of introductory course faculty*. [Conference outlets undecided]

White-Mills, K., Davidson, R.D., & Dobris, C.A. (under revision) *Ambiguity and duality in contemporary mothering: Exploring online perspectives of child rearing authority*.

AWARDS AND HONORS

2011 Recipient, Best TLC Award: *Writing Back Into (Her) Story*
2011 Graduate Research Award Winner for *Rhetorical theory and practice: A critical evaluation of western rhetorical thought*
2011 Graduate Research Award Winner for *Dirty work in the classroom: Utilizing shared narratives as a taint management strategy*
2010 Recipient, Free NCA Membership, Awarded by the IUPUI Department of Communication Studies
2010 Graduate Research Award Winner for *Intensive mothering on film: Contradictions and consequences in Little Children*
2009 Graduate research award winner for *Give me convenience or give me death: A narrative analysis of Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*
2009 Graduate research award winner for *Serenity not found: A critical analysis of Joss Whedon's Firefly*
2000 Recipient, Burns-Wagener Scholarship for excellence in communication

TEACHING ASSIGNMENTS

Term	Course Number/Title	Enrollment
Fall 2009	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-15148	25
	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-18733	26
Spring 2010	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-20465	24
	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-23685	24
Fall 2010	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-1636	24
	S100 First Year Seminar-28959	24
Spring 2011	W105 Introduction to Women's Studies-26247	30
	R110 Fundamentals of Public Speaking-25320	23

INDEPENDENT COURSE DEVELOPMENT

2010 Women's Studies Themed Learning Community: *Writing Women Back Into (Her) Story* (S100-First Year Seminar and R110- Fundamentals of Public Speaking)

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

2010 Panel reviewer, Central States Communication Association, Women's Caucus
2010 Judge, IUPUI Dominata Classic Speech Competition
2010 Co-Director, Curtis Memorial Oratorical Contest

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

2011   Planner and moderator, *A Celebration of Hoosier Women at IUPUI* with invited guests, Mr. Mickey Maurer and Dr. Mercy Obeime
2011   Planner, IUPUI Democracy Plaza, *Gender and Education*
2011   Planner, IUPUI Communication Week
2010   Planner and moderator, IUPUI Democracy Plaza, *He Said, She Said, We Said: Constructing Gender Stereotypes on Campus*
2010   Planner and moderator, *A Celebration of Hoosier Women at IUPUI* with invited guests, Mr. Mickey Maurer and Ms. Patricia Miller
2010   Committee Member, IUPUI Communication Week

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE

2011   Chairperson, IUPUI Spring Speech Night, Preliminary Round
2011   Invited guest, IUPUI Alumni Conference, March
2010   Judge, IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Final Round
2010   Moderator, Deliberative Polling Project, Political Communication (R390)
2010   President, Graduate Communication Club
2010   Member, Spring Speech Night Committee
2009   Secretary, Graduate Communication Club
2009   Critic, IUPUI Fall Speech Night, Preliminary Round
2008   Member, Graduate Communication Club

PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND AFFILIATIONS

National Communication Association (NCA)
Central States Communication Association (CSCA)