Invisible Victimization:

Minimizing Non-Violent Sexism in the Female Detective Film

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The female detective film, as a genre of crime cinema, has been critiqued for its tendencies to refeminize its female lead through a narrative of victimization at the hands of a serial killer. Imbued with masculine characteristics, the female detective is a spectacle of attraction which mirrors the spectacle of the violent serial killer. This mutually destructive relationship, in which the female detective is refeminized and the serial killer is caught or killed, has been examined as a method to alleviate fears of women in the workplace which stems from Film Noir. Refeminization is the process through which a female character, who does not conform to gender stereotypes, is pressured or traumatized into accepting a greater degree of feminine traits. This refeminization renders the female character less threatening to male characters, which decreases sexism directed toward them. Film Noir also reconciles the threat of women in the workplace by connecting women's power solely to their sexuality, as either an obviously threatening sexual woman or a kind motherly figure. As Philippa Gates says in her article "The Maritorious Melodrama: Film Noir with a Female Detective", women who work in a male profession are considered criminal because of their intrusion into the public male realm (24). Films such as *Blue Steel* (1989), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Copycat* (1995), and *Murder by Numbers* (2002) all demonstrate this pattern of similarities between the female detective and the serial killer as deviations to the norm that must be neutralized by one another. However, these films also present supporting male characters who exhibit benevolent and hostile sexist behaviour toward the female detective. This sexist behaviour, in relation to the brutality of the serial killer, becomes a subordinate issue which goes largely unexamined and unpunished. Although the serial killer is portrayed as the primary factor in the female detective's

refeminization, the sexist behaviour of tertiary male characters is also significant because it is a realistic yet overshadowed component in female victimization.

In the detective film “[t]he serial killer is both incredibly intelligent and brutally violent” (Gates, 2 “Melodrama”), and this subordinates the significance of the sexism of other male characters. The threat of the serial killer is elevated in these films to the point of mythology. Philip Jenkins, in “Chapter 2: The Reality of Serial Murder” and “Chapter 5: Serial Murder as Modern Mythology” of his book “Using Murder: The Social Construction of Serial Homicide,” explores how trends in filmmaking established a niche in the human serial murderer. Based on reality yet elevated to mythological proportions, serial homicide in cinema occupies the focus within the crime genre as an ultimate evil. The effect of this has been an increase in concern among the public about the frequency of serial homicide, where the hyperbolic nature of creative media has translated to a heightened expectation for cinematic serial killers to exist (120 “Modern Mythology”). By exposing the cinematic serial killer as an inflated threat toward women, the discussion surrounding the behaviour of other male characters toward the female detective can be examined more accurately.

In *Blue Steel* (1989), *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), *Copycat* (1995), and *Murder by Numbers* (2002), a female detective is pitted against a serial killer, or several serial killers. The films set up a severe yet uncommon threat which distracts the audience from the everyday sexism present on the screen. A demeaning comment or objectifying gaze becomes secondary when juxtaposed with a murder or physical attack. In these films, the male peers or authority figures exist as a realistic backdrop to the brutality of the killer and the victimization of the female detective. Their casual sexism and aggression are diminished because of the extremity of violence committed by the killer. While these men contribute to her refeminization, their behaviour is not extreme enough to be presented as a problem. Since the male characters are

not demonized, demonstrated by a lack of consequences or confrontations for their actions, their behaviour is further normalized in the narrative of the film. In all of these films male police officers are a source of discomfort and exclusion for the female detective. They are predominantly an unchecked and unpunished aspect of her victimization. As happens in many female detective films, when she is refeminized at the end of the film it is an acknowledgement that they were right. Her return to womanhood is an affirmation that she was an outsider all along and their exclusion of her was well-founded.

The varying degrees of sexism present in these films demands a clear understanding of sexism and how it is employed against women. Peter Glick and Susan T. Fiske state in their article “The Ambivalent Sexism Inventory: Differentiating Hostile and Benevolent Sexism” that sex- based prejudice is unique because of the necessarily intimate nature of male and female coexistence and because “women have been revered as well as reviled” (491) through history. Because of these juxtaposing extremes of celebration and hatred, sexism is shown to be “a special case of prejudice marked by a deep ambivalence, rather than a uniform antipathy, toward women” (491). Glick and Fiske suggest that sexism is comprised of two distinct yet correlated forms of sexist attitudes: benevolent sexism and hostile sexism.

Benevolent sexism venerates women for stereotypical traits they are expected to possess, such as kindness and good communication, and justifies patriarchal power structures because women must be protected and helped by their superior counterparts. Benevolent sexism is the admiration of women for conforming to sexist stereotypes, such as women being emotional, sensitive, delicate, nurturing, motherly, modest, chaste, and beautiful. In regard to benevolent sexism’s positive perception, Glick and Fiske state that “despite the positive feelings it may indicate for the perceiver, its underpinnings lie in traditional stereotyping and masculine dominance” (491-492) because it restricts women to domestic duties and stereotypical

personality traits. Benevolent sexism supports women only so far as their traits “relate to social–emotional, not agentic dimensions, so women are portrayed as being nice but incompetent” (Glick and Fiske 492). Benevolent sexism is the belief that women naturally perform typically female roles, such as childcare roles, better than men.

Hostile sexism is centered on how “women’s incompetence at agentic tasks characterize women as unfit to wield power over economic, legal, and political institutions” (492). Ideas of women’s weakness, incompetence, and general inferiority to men contribute to hiring and workplace discrimination, sexual crimes, and lack of socially sanctioned power for women. Hostile sexism is the condemnation of women for attempting to display stereotypically male traits, and the firm belief that women cannot genuinely or competently exude those traits, such as strength, objectivity, stability, and professionalism. Hostile sexism does not need to be violent, but based on anger or ignorance for demonstrations of women’s competence, and concentration on demonstrations that prove women’s incompetence. Hostile sexism is the belief that women can not perform typically male roles, such as law enforcement roles, as well as men, and that women are generally inferior.

In female detective films the attractiveness of the female detective and her refusal to conform to gender roles create conflicting feelings in sexist men. The female detectives Megan Turner (Jamie Lee Curtis) of *Blue Steel*, Clarice Starling (Jodie Foster) of *The Silence of the Lambs*, M.J. Monahan (Holly Hunter) of *Copycat*, and Cassie Mayweather (Sandra Bullock) of *Murder by Numbers* all fit conventional Hollywood ideals of beauty. The affirmation of their attractive value illustrates both benevolent and hostile sexism, because the conflicting positive and negative traits, beauty and masculinity, inspire discomfort in sexist men. These women “simultaneously fit into a desired subtype on one dimension but fit into a hated subtype on another” (Glick and Fiske 494). This means they are celebrated for their physical attractiveness

and degraded for their non-feminine job choice, providing examples of both benevolent and hostile sexism.

In his article, “Introduction, Pt. II: Serial Killer Film and Television”, Steven Jay Schneider states that the serial killer is “Uncanny by nature” (3). It is the killer’s ongoing hyperbolic state of violence which overshadows the ways other males in these films influence the female detectives in harmful ways. Turning the female detective into a victim is an effective tactic in reasserting femininity on her character, refeminizing her. The stalking and rape of Megan in *Blue Steel*, the attack on M. J. in *Copycat*, the teasing and strangulation of Cassie in *Murder by Numbers*, and the basement attack of Clarice and Lecter’s escape in *The Silence of the Lambs* all provide examples of refeminization through direct victimization by the killer. However, it is the more subtle and continuous interactions with male characters that reflect the more realistic environment women contend with in daily life. The equation of femaleness with victimhood is challenged by the female detective, so her victimhood must be re-established in order to restore her femininity and remove the threat to masculine territory. Since it is deemed socially unacceptable for men to overtly oppress women, because of anti-discrimination policies based on sex, the serial killer provides this service while allowing other male characters to compound the effect. The physical abuse the women face at the hands of the killers acts as a catalyst to push the women past the threshold of refeminization, but this refeminization is set up or supported by male coworkers and acquaintances.

The film *Blue Steel* provides examples of subtle workplace discrimination as well as benevolent and hostile sexism in women’s personal lives. Megan is repeatedly questioned by her coworkers about her personal life, denoted as pretty, and blamed for murders committed by a man obsessed with her. She is treated with exasperation and contempt by Assistant Chief Stanley Hoyt (Kevin Dunn) and Detective Nick Mann (Clancy Brown) after she shoots an armed

robber on her first day as a cop. The missing firearm from this incident instigates doubt of her ability to assess a situation and perform her job properly, and these doubts are validated through Megan's repeatedly ineffective and dangerous behaviour. Megan arrests the killer, Eugene (Ron Silver), without ample evidence or a confession which allows him to go free. Then she handcuffs Nick in a car to pursue Eugene alone, which nearly results in Nick's death. Near the end of the film, she knocks out a cop to steal his uniform and kill Eugene, which eventually leads to her being arrested in the final scene of the film. These illegal actions justify her sexist treatment by her male coworkers. At the end of the film it is shown that the doubts Hoyt and Nick had about Megan were warranted and accurate. Since their sexist remarks are not separated from these doubts, their views of Megan as incapable are arguably sexist as opposed to objective. Furthermore, their suspicions are proven correct in the film overall, validating their behaviour as justified instead of sexist.

Sexism in Megan's personal and professional life is placed as a secondary inconvenience in comparison to the threat of Eugene's violence. An example of this happens at Megan's friend Tracey's barbecue. Megan is introduced to Howard, a friend of Tracey's, in the hope they will have a romantic connection. Upon learning Megan is a cop Howard transforms from a friendly potential love interest into an awkward exemplar of sexism. He questions why Megan would want to be a cop, referring to her attractive appearance as a reason to choose a different profession. Glick and Fiske specifically mention that placing importance on the attractiveness of a woman implies a lack of competence in agentic action (493), and in this scene Howard mirrors the same comments made by Nick and Hoyt about Megan's appearance and professional capability. The film reinforces that Megan's only superior quality is her appearance, which demonstrates benevolent sexism, because of her ineptitude as a female police officer, hostile sexism. Not only are her social and professional problems shown as her

own fault, she is responsible for endangering Nick Mann's life. His life is put in danger twice in the film: when Megan cuffs him to the steering wheel on a stakeout, and when he is later shot by Eugene after sleeping with Megan. Her character is presented as dangerous to male law enforcement directly and indirectly.

Megan's attractive appearance is verbally acknowledged three times in *Blue Steel*. In addition, her attendance at a romantic dinner with Eugene, colourful clothing choices, and participation in intimate and sexual encounters maintain her status as a woman who does not belong in a masculine and dangerous profession. At the same time, she is a failed woman who drinks, smokes, seeks authoritative power, and does not cook. Her incompetence in the kitchen is also referenced three times in the film. Not only do these things masculinize her character, they have an infantilizing effect when she is regarded as a woman. Megan is portrayed as a helpless failure at life and, therefore, a victim due to daily incompetence. Her failure to catch Eugene through legal channels also speaks to her incompetence as a cop. Like many female detective films, "the heroine is offered simultaneously as a progressive image of femininity…and as a contained one because ultimately she is proven incompetent as a detective" (Gates, "Melodrama" 24). She is given power through the police system but is consistently shown as undeserving of that power, which leads to the end scene where she is arrested, presumably fired, and her authority is ultimately removed.

In the final scene, Megan is "literally helpless in the arms of the law, being lifted out of a car by a male cop, presumably to be booked for murder" (Mizejewski, 12). This ending implies that she will be punished by the system for knocking out a cop and going after the killer herself. Her operating outside the law is punishable, and only arises because of her failed attempts to operate and exercise power within the law. After running over the killer with a car, Megan sits catatonically in the driver's seat, and is retrieved by a male cop as the credits begin. It is not a

female cop, or a male and a female cop, who pulls Megan from the car. Only masculine power is represented in this final scene. This suggests that order has finally been restored, and masculinity has stepped in to do its job once again.

Early in the film, Megan's father Frank (Philip Bosco) displays anger and shame at his daughter becoming a police officer. Whereas fathers are commonly portrayed as proud of a son for this accomplishment, Frank shows disappointment in his daughter. He has a history of domestic violence against his wife Shirley (Louise Fletcher), and when Megan discovers fresh bruises on Shirley's arm, she realizes her father still beats her mother and arrests him. While driving him to the police station they have a simple and bafflingly ineffective conversation that, for reasons unexplained, leads to Megan and Frank returning to her parents' house without further incident. When they return Eugene is seated on the couch, presenting a more imminent danger than Frank, although only Megan is aware Eugene is armed and has committed several murders. For Megan and the audience, Frank's violence is immediately diminished by the presence of a killer in the home. During this scene, the audience is aware that Megan and both her parents are in danger, rendering Frank a possible victim and excusing his character from any punishment, explanation, or future commentary in the film.

In *Copycat*, there are several male characters which exhibit sexist behaviour. M.J. is a female detective partnered with Reuben Goetz (Dermot Mulroney), who in his first scene ignores a call from a woman he is romantically involved with, dubbing it unimportant. By means of Reuben's character, there is an abundance of narratively-sanctioned benevolent sexism. After Reuben's first interaction with Helen Hudson (Sigourney Weaver), the agoraphobic psychologist consulting on the case, he says she was sweet even though her behaviour is more accurately self-described as rude. Later in the film, Reuben exerts his authority when he says he will stay with Helen to protect her. These reactions to Helen denote an attitude that views her

as incapable and her actions inconsequential. Helen's rude behaviour is minimized the same way the woman on the phone is minimized, where Reuben's attraction to women renders their actions unimportant in relation to his attraction to them. A comment that he is not M.J.'s sexual partner "yet" is interpreted as confidence by Helen, but this implies he views M. J. as a sexual pursuit instead of a person. His assumption that they will inevitably become sexual partners in the future reduces her to a sexual conquest, similar to the woman who calls him in his first scene. When Reuben is murdered by a random hostage situation in the police station, his character becomes absolved of any wrongdoing because of this undeserved fate.

The detective Nicoletti (Will Patton), who had a previous romantic relationship with M. J., is another example of benevolent sexism. He asks M. J. out for dinner, and then reacts in anger when she and Reuben share take-out as they work on their case together. Later in the film, Nicoletti accuses Reuben of being involved with M. J. and they have a physical confrontation because Nicoletti believes Reuben would not be faithful. Nicoletti's territorial behaviour is more akin to the possession and control of benevolent sexism than respect or emotional connection. This protective conduct is shown to be based on sexist belief when he talks about "little hippy girls" wanting to be sexual and beautiful without worrying about their safety. His suggestion that Reuben is attracted to this type of woman leads to another physical altercation between the two men. By reducing this type of woman to a caricature, and then using it as an insult against a fellow male, Nicoletti exposes his own sexist tendencies. In reaction to Reuben's death, Nicoletti feels remorse and speaks with M. J. privately. He tells her he is sorry for the way he treated Reuben, and that he loves M. J. In this scene Nicoletti is shown to idolize M. J., which is the root of his protective behaviour. His hostile and benevolent sexism causes him to look down upon her ability to protect herself, and her right to refuse his advances, while simultaneously holding

her in high esteem because of his attraction to her. He also states it is the first time he has ever seen her cry, directly adding to her refeminization in the film.

M. J.'s co-worker Quinn (J. E. Freeman) is open in his hostile sexism. He refers to M. J. as a "pushy broad" when she confronts him about removing evidence and not informing her. Later in the film Quinn suggests getting another detective, Nicoletti, to help Reuben and M. J. and ignores her when she says she does not want Nicoletti's help. Quinn disregards M. J.'s answer and asks Nicoletti to sit in on a briefing, then orders M. J. to cease communication with Helen about the case. After Reuben's death M. J. talks with Quinn in a scene which is reminiscent of a little girl confessing to her father. M. J. stands with her head and shoulders slumped, hands behind her back, while Quinn sits behind his desk. This infantilizing display, coupled with Quinn's previously expressed disdain for M. J.'s authority, is an example of how sexism is justified in *Copycat*. Quinn, even with his established hostile sexism, is reaffirmed as a wise fatherly figure for M. J.

An example of how the serial killer minimizes sexist conduct is present in *Copycat* as well. In one scene, the killer Peter Foley (William McNamara) approaches his fifth victim after she gets into her car. She has just walked past a group of large male bikers, who have cat-called her and made her nervous about her safety. Foley exhibits some odd mannerisms but is predominantly normal. In comparison to the bikers, the killer's normal appearance puts her at ease. This provides a single scenic analogy for how sexism is eclipsed by more brutal violence: sexism toward women becomes a spectrum where the highest threat is registered while minor behaviours can be ignored.

In *Murder by Numbers*, Cassie's ex-boyfriend, District Attorney Al Swanson (Tom Verica), is the source of much of the hostile sexist content in the film, and his character is used to provide insight into Cassie's continuing emotional problems. It is revealed that Cassie has

engaged in sexual relationships with all of her male coworkers, and is professionally disregarded as a result. With his crude descriptions of her masculine behaviour, Swanson is presented as an unlikeable character that is nevertheless correct in his critique of Cassie.

Cassie is referred to by her male coworkers as a hyena because hyenas have a mock penis, and called a scorpion by Swanson because of its phallic-like stinger. Swanson also remarks that “She pees standing up” while in the company of her partner and the chief of police. Her partner, Sam Kennedy (Ben Chaplin), defends her in this scene, and he is the only male character to do so in the film. Whether or not Sam’s attitude is based on benevolent sexism remains unclear.

In another scene Cassie mentions Swanson once became physically aggressive with her, so she broke his nose with a ceramic cat. This information is never confirmed within the narrative, and because of Cassie’s social issues there is an insinuation that she is either lying about the incident or augmenting it somehow. The film allows space for the audience to doubt Cassie’s version of events due to her personal problems, and this reinforces the sexism of the male cops as a natural reaction to Cassie’s behaviour. This is directly contrasted with her past victimization by her ex-husband. She was stabbed and left for dead, which is shown in flashbacks as a form of verification. Any discrimination or lesser violence from other male characters, such as Swanson abusing her, is not shown to the audience, suggesting it is either unimportant or nonexistent.

Chief of Police Rod Cody (R. D. Call) takes on a fatherly role, chastising Cassie for identifying with the victim instead of the killer, which in law enforcement is believed to be the most efficient way to catch a killer, and physically removing her from her desk when she refuses to cease investigating the suspected killers. Rod displays benevolent sexism in his protective actions toward Cassie. Instead of acting professionally toward Cassie’s inappropriate conduct,

Rod makes allowances for her and tolerates disobedience as if she were an unruly child. His only confrontation with her is comparable to a father ordering his daughter off of the computer, which is reminiscent of M.J. and Quinn's relationship in *Copycat*.

Cassie is critiqued for her mental instability, identification with the victim, sexual aggressiveness, and unprofessionalism. Yet the men who perpetuate these problems, her everyday male victimizers, go uncriticised. The sex based discrimination Cassie faces from her coworkers contributes to the exacerbation of her mental and emotional state, so that when she is refeminized at the end of the film the implication is that her male coworkers' behaviour was warranted. Cassie is set up as a victim because of the attempted murder by her husband, which makes Cassie both hero and victim in the narrative. This doubling (Lindsay Steenberg, "The Forensic Women's Gothic: Postfeminism and Expertise") of roles is amplified by the ongoing victimization Cassie faces for her previous trauma. She is not only a past victim of crime, but a consistent victim of hostile sexism inspired by her own inappropriate behaviour. None of the secondary male characters are punished for their sexism because, as compared to the killing of a woman, these actions are negligible and ambiguously justified depending on Cassie's own social interactions.

Clarice faces sexism throughout *The Silence of the Lambs*, yet, unlike the other films, this sexism is highlighted as a key component of the film. *The Silence of the Lambs* is saturated with sexist attitudes from male characters which makes them impossible to ignore. Where the other films allow sexism to be overshadowed, *The Silence of the Lambs* challenges the viewer to recognize the significance of all sexist attitudes. However, there are sexist moments that do go unaddressed. There are intermittent scenes of groups of men watching Clarice, where the camera remains on these men as opposed to following her, to direct attention to this pattern. A group of men in an elevator, men in behavioural science offices, a group of jogging FBI trainees,

and a group of police at a funeral home all emphasize the inflicted sexual gaze upon Clarice. These lingering male eyes separate her, as a woman, from her male FBI superiors.

The Silence of the Lambs demonstrates the female detective being victimized by fellow law enforcement, professional men, and two very different serial killers. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) is the primary source of Clarice Starling's re-feminization, however other male characters consistently feminize her throughout the film. Despite Clarice not showing romantic interest in any of the male characters in *The Silence of the Lambs*, she is still the victim of unwanted sexual attention. Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn), Doctor Frederick Chilton (Anthony Heald), Miggs (Stuart Rudin), the entomologist Doctor Akin (Kenneth Utt), a group of male FBI cadets, several groups of police officers, and even Lecter view her with an innate sexuality that she does not purposefully promote. Her womanhood is automatically regarded as sexual, which renders her powerless to choose her own image. Despite most of these male characters having no ill intentions, their views of Clarice victimize her because those views are unwanted and not controlled by Clarice herself. Whereas Cassie in *Murder by Numbers* is sexually aggressive and promiscuous, and Megan of *Blue Steel* and M. J. of *Copycat* are shown to have sexual relationships with coworkers, Clarice is contrastingly asexual. The sexual potential of Clarice is something that is done to her, not instigated by her. This highlights how the men who encounter Clarice force femininity and sexuality upon her. This is not her intention, and demonstrates a loss of power on her part. This feminizes and victimizes Clarice's character because these men's views reduce her to a sexual object, even if Clarice's character is not directly represented as such.

Sexual or romantic proposals follow Clarice throughout the film. Upon first meeting Doctor Chilton, Lecter's doctor, Clarice is propositioned with dinner and a fun night out if she plans to stay in town overnight. He calls her attractive, to which she shyly averts her gaze.

Doctor Chilton goes so far as to state she was sent to turn Lecter on as a means of getting him to talk. When she visits the entomologists she is again asked if she would join one of the doctors for food.

Lecter fills a fatherly void in Clarice's life, and displays benevolent sexism as evidenced by his refusal to cooperate with previous male agents and his idolization of Clarice. During her first visit to the prison to meet with Lecter, he becomes protective of Clarice after neighbouring prisoner Miggs throws his semen at her. Despite being presented as a strong character, Clarice becomes infantilized as she is clearly affected by this sexual assault and Lecter is shown as her masculine defender. Moreover, Lecter makes Miggs swallow his tongue in a display of dominance through judgement and punishment. Lecter's interactions with Clarice denote benevolent sexism because he does not view her as a threat, but as an inferior mind he must aid with his knowledge. She is also portrayed as a vulnerable woman who Lecter must defend from other killers, because it is her victimization by Miggs that leads to Lecter offering her information.

Although Clarice's boss, Jack Crawford, makes no suggestion of a personal interaction with her, Lecter's probing questions about Crawford's possible desires influence the perception of Crawford's exchanges with Clarice, including his own lingering gaze and accentuated hand shake when he attends her graduation at the end of the film. Crawford's hostile sexism is exposed when he asks to speak with other law enforcement officials away from Clarice. When she confronts him he states it was for the manipulation of the officials, not her female sensitivity, yet this demonstration to other male caps reinforces their sexist behaviour, as Clarice points out.

Throughout the film, the camera demands the viewer to stare back, not only meeting the gaze of Clarice and her friend Ardelia Mapp (Kasi Lemmons) but also the gaze of Lecter, Gumb,

and several men who stare at Clarice through the lens of the camera. The final scene between Clarice and Jame Gumb (Ted Levine) is a further prompt for the audience to stare back, this time through the contrived desire for Clarice to see her invisible gazer. The audience is positioned to identify with Gumb as he gazes at her freely, yet the desire is not for him to continue to look at her. The desire is for Clarice to look back at him, to confront his gaze. In relation to the previous scenes where she was under the watch of other men, Clarice's life depends on her confronting him while he gazes at her. The film pushes Clarice to the limit of what is acceptable, from her demure avoidance to lethal defense. *The Silence of the Lambs* equates the danger of all sexist gazes, showing that there is little difference between the men gazing at her through the film and Gumb gazing at her in the final scene.

The serial killer "taps into personal fears and violates cultural taboos" (Schneider, 3), which reinforces the idea that the other men, the men who commit non-violent acts of sexism, are operating within the realm of cultural acceptance. *The Silence of the Lambs* challenges this notion by highlighting the sexist attitudes of the male characters, even going so far as to justify punishment for Dr. Chilton at the hands of Lecter. This is another key difference of *The Silence of the Lambs*, where Dr. Chilton's sexism is theoretically punished. However, Lecter stalking Dr. Chilton also adds to Clarice's refeminization by illustrating Lecter's newfound power. By lingering on the men who watch Clarice, and showing Clarice's uncomfortable reactions to unwanted male attention, the film does not excuse or justify benevolent or hostile sexism. Additionally, associating Gumb's gaze with the rest of the men throughout the film, *The Silence of the Lambs* confronts the potential danger of non-violent sexism. The use of two monstrous serial killers elevates the threshold for accepted sexism. Lecter and Gumb's extreme violence against women allows for further exploration of non-violent sexism: the greater the violent sexism, the more acts of non-violent sexism seem acceptable.

In her article, “Picturing the Female Dick: *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Blue Steel*,” Mizejewski states that “the female dick poses a substantial threat to heterosexuality” (6) which in turn poses a threat to the authority of masculinity. The female authority figure is dangerous for male authority because her “mere presence threatens to disrupt established power relations” (6), yet the men threatened are rarely criticized in any substantial way. Conversely, the female detectives are punished throughout their films, and shown as responsible for negative impacts on male characters. Philippa Gates mentions “the film noir starring a female detective suggest that the wife’s appropriation of male power in the marriage is dangerous to the husband’s future – and to that of society” (“Melodrama” 36). This can be seen in *Blue Steel* with Megan’s character, who places Nick in danger several times. M.J. in *Copycat* feels responsible for Reuben’s death, posing that if she had done her job better she could have saved him. It is also present in *Murder by Numbers* in the sense that Cassie is not good for her partners in neither an emotional nor professional capacity. *The Silence of the Lambs* includes a narrative where Clarice could arguably be blamed for the escape of Hannibal Lecter, and subsequently the murder of the police officers, Doctor Chilton, and all future victims. What these patterns denote is a justification for the hostile sexism these women face.

The contrast between sexism from male peers and the murder of women by a serial killer may render invisible any behaviour not classified as extreme and overtly violent. As Glick and Fiske discuss, benevolent sexism is based on restrictive stereotypes of women, and hostile sexism is based on women adopting traits stereotypical of men. Neither type of sexism is dependent on physical action nor overt declarations of hatred toward women. Benevolent and hostile sexism appear regularly from the female detective’s coworkers, friends, and acquaintances, yet is overshadowed by the monstrous behaviour of the serial killers. It is easy to be distracted by the serial killer because it is his “compulsion to commit acts of violence that

are as intimate as they are extreme that make him so compelling" (Schneider, 3). The sexism of other male characters is comparatively boring because the threat of the serial killer is made extreme, and this allows sexism to remain a secondary, non-vital, concern. The "fascinating and repulsive" effect of the serial killer that Schneider mentions (3) is essential to the minimization of sexism displayed by other male characters, and it is the justification of this 'lesser' sexism that presents a much more socially relevant problem.

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