THESIS

A CINEMA OF FATAL ATTRACTIONS:

VIEWING GENRE THROUGH BORDERLINE PERSONALITY DISORDER

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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Genre study is often criticized for simply producing classificatory labels and focusing on a narrow group of films such as the Western and the musical. This thesis argues that the proper role of the critic is to move beyond such categorizing exercises and to bring relevance and renewed value to genre theories. In order to question the relatively rigid and canonical nature of film genre studies and the commonly assumed notion that one knows a genre when he or she sees it, this study looks at cinematic representations of borderline personality disorder (BPD).

While work has been done on cinematic representations of mental illness, little research has focused on the portrayal of specific psychological disorders, particularly how such portrayals function generically. BPD was chosen for its high lifetime prevalence, which may be as high as 5.9 percent in the United States, as well as for its occurrence in feature-length motion pictures. Typically these films, including Fatal Attraction (1987) and *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), would be generically classified as dissimilar, but through this study a corpus of films portraying BPD is put forth as examples of the BPD genre. To accomplish this, this study follows Tom Gunning's assertion that the focus of analysis should not only be the corpus of films, but also the discourse surrounding those films. These external texts are referred to in this paper as paratexts, in keeping with Gérard Genette and Jonathan Grey's terminology. Therefore, the films' titles, title sequences, and posters were included in the analysis. The films were examined utilizing Rick Altman's semantic/syntactic/pragmatic approach to genre analysis.

By viewing these films and their paratexts through a BPD genre lens, conventions and audience expectations characteristic of the BPD genre are explored. Like BPD, genre is recognized through the meeting of criteria, but not all instances meet all the same criteria or in the same way, and as such they need not relate to their genre in the same manner. Also, texts may be comorbid with other genres or exist in a continuum. Genre may be understood as functioning like BPD and its use in this study shows renewed application beyond traditional genre analysis.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

An important exchange between the characters of Dan Gallagher (Michael Douglas) and Alex Forrester (Glenn Close) in Adrian Lyne's *Fatal Attraction* (1987) highlights the way in which many mainstream films frame borderline personality disorder. The scene occurs approximately twenty-eight minutes into the film. After their initially adulterous rendezvous, Dan and Alex are at the latter's apartment, where she is preparing a dinner of spaghetti and he is uncorking a bottle of wine. Music from *Madame Butterfly* drifts in and Alex tells Dan that he can change the tape if he would like. Dan says no, as the opera goes perfectly with the meal. Alex reveals that it is her favorite opera and her partner agrees, going on about how it was the first he had ever seen and how the suicide at the end, provoked by the sailor leaving, terrified him as a child. This revelation leads Dan to disclose that the fear brought on during the end of this opera caused him to hide, which led his father to comfort him: the only kindness Dan can recall his father showing him as a child. Dan moves off screen and the camera lingers on a close-up of Alex's face as she watches him; then her gaze drifts upward and her eyes, distant, suggest that she is lost in thought. They proceed to eat dinner and Alex alludes to the fact that all the interesting men are married. Dan tells her that she is "terrific," but is quick to remind her that he is married and has a child.

The scene cuts to a shot of them lying naked in bed. Dan jumps up and Alex asks him where he is going. He tells her he has to go. Alex expresses her dissatisfaction, complaining about the way he runs away every time they make love. Telling him that he is not going to leave, she grabs his shirt and rips it open. She begins to slap him and then lies down in bed in frustration. Her tone becomes sarcastic and angrier as she clutches the sheets. Dan continues to put his clothes on and tells Alex that he thought they would have a good time and that she knew

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the rules. Not wanting to hear him "pathetically" justify himself, Alex grows angrier until she yells at him to get out and literally kicks him out of her room. The scene then cuts to Dan in the living room about to leave. Alex walks out with her hands behind her back. She asks him to come over and "say good-bye nicely." He walks over and hugs her, at which point they exchange apologetic words. When she runs her hands down his face, he notices that they are wet. Looking down at them, he realizes to his horror that she has slit her wrists.

In seven minutes of screen time, this scene from *Fatal Attraction* crystallizes some of the characteristics of borderline personality disorder (BPD) as well as the manner in which mainstream cultural productions often portray the disorder. According to Joel Paris (181), one of the most significant features of BPD is parasuicidal behavior, which can be manifested as suicidal attempts or acts of self-harm with no intent of suicide. The above moments from *Fatal Attraction* underscore this aspect of BPD by employing *Madame Butterfly,* which not only provides the conventional connection between mental illness and creativity but also gives grounds for Dan to mention suicide and the distress that is engendered by such thought. As a result Alex can exploit this information through her illness by using parasuicidal behavior as manipulation to keep Dan from leaving. BPD is shown not only through self-injury and manipulation, but also through Alex's rapidly fluctuating mood and view of Dan. In a matter of minutes, Alex goes from embracing Dan to kicking him away to embracing him again. She verbally expresses sadness and dissatisfaction in his departure and wishes that he would stay; though within seconds calls his behavior "pathetic" and says she would have more respect for him if he would just tell her to "fuck off." The point here is that this film represents a character who exhibits commonly stereotyped signs of BPD, which, if filtered through this frame instead

of that provided by the generic label of "thriller," renders *Fatal Attraction* as a text of different associative connotations.

The inefficacy of established labels is also shown in Roger Ebert's original review of *Fatal Attraction* from September 18, 1987, in which he labels it a "psychological thriller," but later calls it a "melodrama" and likens it to a "horror-movie" à la *Friday the 13th* through the addition of "gruesome Hollywood horror formulas" (Ebert, "Fatal Attraction"). So what is problematic with this? The obvious conflation of generic conventions has perhaps made the audience expectations and enjoyment of *Fatal Attraction* inconsistent. This inconsistency of audience reception will be a key point of investigation within this present study. Perhaps, as evidenced by the multitude of labels and emphasis on the psychological aspect, this film and films like it (including *Play Misty for Me* [1971] and *Dream Lover* [1994]) are best explained through a different generic lens. From a reframing of genre and development of a new genre type, this corpus of films may be better elucidated in terms of filmic conventions and subsequently of pragmatics.

The goal of this study is to question the fairly rigid and canonical structure of film genre theory and interrogate a body of films which in its own right may possess the characteristics necessary to form an internally and externally legitimate genre on the basis of intrafilmic components as well as extrafilmic discourse, which are shared amongst the films in this study. The films utilized in this study are at present commonly placed under separate genre labels with some films sharing generic labels, but a new generic label will be created for those that share enough commonalities. These films are all assumed to portray borderline personality disorder and it is through this shared premise that they are all brought together. As these films have previously been presumed to depict BPD, this study will analyze the manner in which the

disorder is portrayed and the means utilized to do so. Therefore, the generic conventions will be brought to the forefront and a greater understanding of the way in which those who are mentally ill are portrayed cinematically will be achieved. Because the commonalities amongst these films are linked to audience expectations, the study becomes more than a simple exercise in noting patterns. This is in accord with what Tom Ryall stated of genre criticism:

> By and large, genre criticism has confined itself to producing taxonomies . . . stopping short of what are the interesting and informative questions about generic groupings. The key to understanding the theoretical foundations of the concept of genre lies in pushing beyond such classificatory exercises and confronting the crucial distinction between . . . observing similarities between films [and moving] towards a more generalised theoretical activity in which our conclusions . . . would link the established genres . . . under the more general concepts of 'convention' and 'expectation', and would explore the variety of questions associated with the area of 'reading' film (27).

As a result, this study will not only examine the corpus of films which are hypothesized internally and externally to be generically related, but also scrutinize the manner in which genre more generally functions on both of those levels to create coherence in production and understanding.

Many films exceed the boundaries of their more or less accepted genre classifications and share crucial similarities with other films that fall under different generic categories. One group of films that are generically categorized separately from one another yet share pivotal characteristics is that group which represents mental illness either explicitly or implicitly. This study looks at that group, particularly films that portray characters that are openly diagnosed as or that meet the criteria of borderline personality disorder.

Most work on genre films looks at a narrow group of genres—Westerns and musicals in particular—with a focus on the studio era of Hollywood (e.g., Altman, Cawelti, Feuer, Gallagher, Moine, Pye, Ryall, Schatz, Tudor). In noting this, Altman has said that "most writing about film genre has been unduly reductive" (145). For that reason, expanding the focus of genre study will help to remedy this concern. It will showcase the manner in which genre theories are applicable to other groups of film thereby increasing its relevance all the while necessarily interrogating and developing it through the process.

While work has been done looking at films that portray mental illness (e.g., Levers, Pirkis et al., Robinson, Wedding et al.), little has been achieved with regard to looking at conventions that transcend genre and apply to one specific disorder. Also, previous work centers on disorders such as schizophrenia and psychopathy as well as psychiatric institutions—all things that are more prominent in popular discourse (whether or not discussed accurately) than a disorder like borderline personality. Borderline personality disorder has an estimated lifetime prevalence of 5.9 percent in the United States as compared to 0.4 percent for schizophrenia and 1.4 percent for bipolar disorder (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 13). From this it is clear that it is a substantially more common disorder yet it is less known and more misunderstood.

Borderline Personality Disorder: An Unruly Case for Genre

Contrary to previous estimates of lifetime prevalence of 1-2 percent, it is concluded from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions study that the lifetime prevalence of borderline personality disorder (BPD) is 5.9 percent or 18 million people (in the United States of America). Also garnered from their study is that there is no significant

difference in the rate of prevalence between women and men (6.2 percent and 5.6 percent respectively) as compared to a ratio 3:1 as previously estimated (Grant et al. 533).

While BPD is one of the most discussed conditions in modern psychiatry, it is the only one (aside from eponymous ones) whose label gives no clue to what exactly it is. The current usage of the term is derived from the earliest uses of it which, as the name suggest, are: "(a) a condition that approximated another, already well-established disorder, or (b) a condition that occupied a region between two rather indistinctly boundaried levels of mental functioning" (Stone 1). In utilizing the former definition, BPD was viewed as bordering on schizophrenia while in the latter it was looked upon as a disorder that fell between neurosis and psychosis. The use of the term, since its inception in the early decades of the twentieth century, has been inconsistent and the subject of debate within the psychiatric community. As implicit in the name, BPD has caused controversy in psychiatric taxonomy as it encroaches upon other disorders and is often comorbid with others.

BPD's history and definition are unruly in nature. The classification difficulties of the disorder associate with the classificatory practices of genre. BPD illustrates the manner in which taxonomy can shift and become unclear; whereby essentializing impedes the negotiation of new and/or proper groupings. The utilization of BPD not only allows for insight into a potentially different genre, but also allows for a different perspective on genre where it is seen to function similarly to the disorder. In this way BPD becomes a theoretical metaphor for genre in the dual definitions of "borderline." As a result, it can be seen that genre does not need to be a distinct category, but, rather, it may border upon or between other genres and have comorbidity.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, Fourth Edition Text Revision (DSM-IV-TR), structures psychiatric disorders into five axes and places BPD into Axis II, which

includes other personality disorders and intellectual disabilities. The DSM-IV-TR lists nine

criteria for BPD with at least five needing to be present for a diagnosis:

1. Frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment;

2. A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation;

3. Identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self;

4. Impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (i.e., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating), excluding suicidal or self-mutilating behavior (covered in Criterion 5);

5. Recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, or threats, or self-mutilating behavior;

6. Affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days);

7. Chronic feelings of emptiness;

8. Inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights); and

9. Transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms. (710)

These diagnostic criteria will be used when analyzing the corpus of films. The characters will be

viewed to see if they exhibit this behavior to determine if they may be diagnosable as having

BPD. The films will also be examined for any other clues to these criteria, such as other

characters mentioning that the characters in question possess these behaviors.

The disorder is one in which self-harm is salient with an estimated self-injury, non-suicidal intent rate of 60-80 percent. It is also estimated that more than 70 percent of those diagnosed will attempt suicide at least once while 8-10 percent of individuals with BPD will die from suicide (a rate 50 times that of the general population) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration 20).

Even as a negatively portrayed disorder, BPD has been argued to have a very positive prognosis. SAMHSA's report states that "up to three-quarters of individuals diagnosed with BPD will experience measurable improvement with treatment, with many of the most debilitating and high-risk symptoms abating significantly" (25). This is supported by the McLean Study of Adult Development, "a multifaceted longitudinal study of the course of borderline personality disorder," which reported in a 2003 study that after two years of inpatient treatment 34.5% met the criteria for remission, 49.4% at four years, 68.6% at six years, and 73.5% over the entire study; only 5.9% of those with remissions experienced recurrences (Zanarini et al. 274). Also, the 2002 Collaborative Longitudinal Personality Disorders Study, which was "designed to provide comprehensive data on several aspects of short and longer-term outcome of subjects meeting criteria for one (or more) of four DSM-IV axis II conditions," concluded that BPD had a stability rate of 41 percent, therefore meaning that 59 percent of those diagnosed with the disorder met fewer than five criteria for BPD (Shea et al. 2039). What is gathered from these studies is that BPD can be managed and the lives of those who are diagnosed as such need not end tragically. However, what is also essential to the literature and research is the role of treatment; without the acknowledgment of needing help and then actively seeking it, the results can be catastrophic with the person potentially committing suicide.

Within the body of films for this study, treatment is not a central component. It is rarely portrayed; though the younger the character, the more likely treatment is to be represented. In *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), psychiatric treatment is key to the plot as much of the narrative takes place in a psychiatric hospital, but little effective treatment is actually shown. Two films that have been noted to potentially possess BPD characters who are teenagers are *The Crush* (1993) and *Mad Love* (1995). In the former film, the character Adrian ends up in a psychiatric hospital by the end of the narrative; however, her falling for her psychiatrist shows that little if any improvement has been made in her condition. *Mad Love* showcases the character of Casey in the psychiatric ward in the middle section of the film, though her boyfriend, Matt, helps her escape. There are several references throughout the film to her disorder (her mother says she is clinically depressed, but says she needs medication to control her fluctuating moods and her behavior appears to be more in line with BPD). In the end, Matt recognizes the extent of Casey's disorder and returns her home and to the hospital. There is no hint of how her treatment turns out or if she even stays. In films with older characters, such as *Play Misty for Me* (1971) and *Fatal Attraction* (1987), the characters are vilified for their obsession (intimate relationship centered; focused on the lead male). They are portrayed as murderous and therefore deserving of death.

Representations of Mental Illness in Film: From Negativity to Negation

In an increasingly visual culture, according to Stephen Harper, people are likely to form their understanding of psychological disorders through film (59). Portrayals of mental illness in media are widespread and found to be predominantly negative in their perpetuation of stereotypes. The most common representation of the mentally ill is as exceptionally dangerous

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and violent (Davidson 6; Levers 13; Pirkis et al. 2; Wahl 56). As Levers states in the concluding words of her study:

> Visual representation is a powerful means of communication; visual stereotypes reflect the attitudes of the culture and also shape and reshape the perceptions of the viewer. . . . Throughout history, artists have depicted this 'culture of insanity' in stereotypical imagery, but today's media of mass communication . . . are so pervasive that the negative effects of stigma propagation through them becomes especially dangerous. (16)

These images not only shape the perceptions of the average viewer, whose overall attitudes and views have been shown to be greatly influenced by the media, which viewers believe to be a more accurate portrayal than the real-world in terms of receiving information about mental illness (Davidson 6; Pirkis et al. 2-3, Wahl 3), but also the perceptions of those who are mentally ill. If the mass media are the prime means of receiving information about these disorders, it may be the main way by which those who are suffering with these disorders are receiving the information as well. As Naomi Kondo states in her reflective work on filmic representations of schizophrenia, as a person with schizophrenia, "sometimes these films even make me wonder about myself, if on some level I have a secret evil side, a side tied to my illness" (251). These thoughts and feelings are claimed by Wahl to be shared amongst many who are presented with negative information about themselves through the media (106). This leads to a questioning of one's own being. As such, one may look at him or herself differently or fear being viewed by others differently, and thus are likely to have lowered self-esteem (Wahl 106). The negative media portrayal has been shown to reduce the likelihood of the mentally ill to seek treatment (Pirkis et al. 2-3; Wahl 102). This denial of treatment can have devastating effects from difficulties with functioning at work, to failures in interpersonal relationships, to personal harm.

Further, negative portrayals not only may add to sufferer self-stigmatization, but Wahl claims that it leads to lack of public support for mental health resources (96). He even goes so far as to argue that media portrayals aid in the public's call for psychiatric services and funding to be inhibited (1). As such, the negative representations found within the media can be seen as significantly influencing the positive existence of personal treatment and popular understanding. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the ways in which media, such as film, portray mental illness even if those portrayed are not explicitly labeled as being mentally ill within the text.

Film Genre: Convention, Construction, and Socio-Cultural Function

While the word "genre" comes from the French for "kind" or "type," sharing its etymological root with the Latin word *genus,* its scholastic and theoretical meaning and utility are contested. This variation in definition particularly surfaces when examining the differing roles genre plays in film versus literature. Traditionally, in literature genre has a more defined role as it is generally determined based on formal distinctions such as the novel, poetry, drama, or nonfiction prose; whereas in film genre is most often related to theme or content, rather than style or structure. Therefore, the definition of genre does not transfer well from film to literature or vice versa (Ryall 27). Similarly, one might conjecture that work done in regards to literary genre would not be applicable to film genre. In looking at Jonathan Culler's writings on literature and genre, however, there is much applicability to film.

Culler defines genre as "a conventional function of language, a particular relation to the world which serves as norm or expectation to guide the reader in his encounter with the text. . . the sets of expectations which have enabled readers to naturalize texts and give them a relation to the world or, if one prefer to look at it in another way, the possible functions of language which

were available to writers at any given period" (136). He further clarifies genre beyond taxonomy by stating that it "is not simply a taxonomic class. . . . A taxonomy, if it is to have any theoretical value, must be motivated . . .If a theory of genres is to be more than a taxonomy it must attempt to explain what features are constitutive of functional categories which have governed the reading and writing of literature" (136-137). In Culler's words several pertinent concepts are highlighted. The first aspect of genre that is mentioned is convention: this is pivotal to genre formation and returns to nearly all discussions of genre. Generic works are described as conventional since it is through shared methods that texts are grouped. Next is the connection of genre with the real world: the manner in which this functions is debatable. This association may be one simply of believability, which ties in with expectation, or it may involve deeper issues of control. The latter is a question of whether genre is ritual or genre is ideology whereby the text either reflects the public's perspectives or reinforces hegemonic ideals respectively. Subsequently, Culler points to the importance of expectation elicited by generic texts as well as the role genre plays for both production and reception. These expectations relate back to genre's connection to the real world as well as to the conventions generally assumed to be possessed by a particular genre. When someone consumes a text that they presume to be of a particular genre, they expect it to follow whatever conventions are popularly held as belonging to that genre. These assumptions reciprocally guide the actions of production, where the goal is not only one of creation, but one of successful reception. Therefore, the expectations of the presumed audience must be met to a particular extent with little room for negotiation, it would seem, when creating a genre text. Describing the reason why genre study is looked down upon; Culler explains it often is utilized merely for simple categorization. For genre to be of any use, it needs

to be employed for more than just classification exercises; it must be appropriated to explain the production and reception of texts.

Before delving too deeply into the most pertinent controversies surrounding genre and film, its definition should be further explored. Considering genre films specifically, Barry Keith Grant states that, "genre movies are those commercial feature films which, through repetition and variation, tell familiar stories with familiar characters in familiar situations . . . They have been exceptionally significant in establishing the popular sense of cinema as a cultural and economic institution, particularly in the United States, where Hollywood studios early on adopted an industrial model based on mass production" (qtd. in Neale 9). The issue with Grant's definition is the inclusion of "commercial" in the definition which necessarily excludes independent films (unless independents are considered commercial due to the revised nature of media ownership) as well as the emphasis on the United States, which leads to the omission of foreign cinema, which potentially provide much to the understanding of already established and studied genres in a transcultural context. There is no useful reason to limit the study of genre to one national context, particularly since stepping further out will allow for a fuller conception of generic conventions and whether they are culturally specific and in which ways. It also enables an evaluation of the exchange of generic conventions transculturally, which further allows for the explication of conventions.

When interrogating the idea of genre, Andrew Tudor states that films within a genre have "in common certain themes, certain typical actions, [and] certain characteristic mannerisms" and then utilizes Jim Kitses's definition of genre which is "a varied and flexible structure, a thematically fertile and ambiguous world of historical material shot through with archetypal elements which are themselves ever in flux" (qtd. in Tudor 4). Tudor adds the idea of intention,

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which he immediately problematizes. The problem, as Tudor discusses, with employing genre in criticism is that the films analyzed for their conventions and themes have already been isolated from other films as possessing generic qualities. As he states: "we are caught in a circle that first requires that the films be isolated, for which purposes a criterion is necessary, but the criterion is, in turn, meant to emerge from the empirically established common characteristics of the films" (5). As a result, Tudor posits two solutions. His first solution is to categorize films based on previously established criteria depending upon critical purpose thereby leading back to the redundancy of genre. His second solution is to rely upon popular cultural agreement as to what composes a particular genre and analyze it from there. The latter solution is one to which Tudor attributes most uses of genre. If this "solution" is contingent upon common consensus then it would be connected to the ritualistic view of genre and, therefore, find support from those who advocate the more anthropological utilization of genre. For Tudor genre is "what we collectively believe it to be" (7) and it is for that reason the genre is useful for exploring sociological and psychological contexts.

Iconography, or "the particular visual imagery associated with particular genres," is the third element of Ryall's generic model (29). He argues that it controls the reading of any particular genre film through "the continuity of 'patterns of visual imagery, of recurrent objects and figures in dynamic relationship'"(Colin McArthur qtd. in Ryall 32). Schatz defines iconography as it relates to film as "the process of *narrative and visual coding* that results from the repetition of a popular film story" (22; italics in original) He further distinguishes between the types of icons utilized within film by stating that "A *generic icon . . .* assumes significance not only through its usage within individual genre films but also as that usage relates to the generic system itself" (22; italics in original). Consequently, the images upon the screen gain

meaning through intertextuality and repetitive recognition. An object or occurrence represents something due to its association with the particular genre. The manner in which images function within a film is dependent upon the generic expectations or, rather, the "film 'converts' the images to its own conventional language" (Tudor 5). The utility of iconography arises not only from the detection of patterns across films, but also from its ability to provide, as Panofsky wrote, "insight into the manner in which under varying historical conditions, specific *themes* or *concepts* were expressed by *objects* and *events"* (qtd. in Alloway 4; italics in original). Alloway also argues that iconography is a way in which to map the dissipating, easily forgotten landscape of film (6). So it is a way in which to connect films, usually generically, in a coherent and memorable manner. These images connect not only through film, but also with instances of themselves. It is through these connections that images begin to embody connotative meaning.

What iconography provides for the present study is, first, a fundamental visual link amongst the body of films. The second contribution afforded by iconography is a conceptual understanding of the manner in which generic tropes of this corpus express BPD. Through an understanding of iconography the argument can be further made that these films portray BPD in a particular and common way. Furthermore, in relation to other genres' iconography, the iconography of the present study can be compared to analyze how certain meanings and expectations are constructed by these films.

Altman states that "If one of the attractions of the very notion of genre is its ability to celebrate connections among the various players in the film game, then any short span of genre film production and reception is the ideal object of genre theory, because it is there that the various forces are most clearly aligned, and the overall power of generic terms apparently at its height" (Altman 53). What is generally in consensus is that the influence of genre, as well as its

origin of variability, is most likely found in its ability to traverse from the production side of a text to the reception side; therefore, genre needs to be evaluated historically from inception to consumption (Altman 14-15; Gunning; Moine 5, 28; Neale 12, 17-18; Schatz 14).

Todorov discusses the issue of literary texts as fiction: that they "cannot be subjected to the test of truth." Rather, fiction's relation to reality is its possession of *verisimilitude* which occurs in two forms: "*rules of the genre*" and "*public opinion*" (18-19). This first type of verisimilitude arises when the text conforms to the expectations set forth by the genre; it is probable due to its form. The latter kind of verisimilitude encompasses all text types and judges them based on how they conform to popular discourse, which itself may not be a true reflection of "reality." Though Todorov's concept of verisimilitude was constructed for the written word, it is applicable to film, particularly genre film with its dependence on conventions and expectations. Furthermore, Jonathan Culler differentiates five levels of *vraisemblance*, or ways in which a text can come into contact with other texts thereby naturalizing it through intertextually manifested intersubjectivity. The first is the naturally given text that requires no justification as it evokes the "real world." Second, is the cultural text defined by generalizations and collectively held knowledge. Third, are the genre texts. Fourth, are the texts that explicitly state their *vraisemblance*. And lastly, are texts that take other texts as their basis and cite them or parody them (Culler 140). Again, these concepts were designed for literature, but can be easily applied to film when examining the ways in which films are naturalized or made intelligible. Of particular utility is the idea of intertextuality: the relationship amongst texts. This is especially valuable to the construction and theorizing of genres.

Genre's connection to reality relates to its social role and whether or not genres reflect and reinforce particular socio-cultural facets. Schatz argues that genre films are "social ritual"

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and thereby "function to stop time, to portray our culture in a stable and invariable ideological position" (31). He further states that "If genres develop and survive because they repeatedly flesh out and reexamine cultural conflicts, then we must consider the possibility that genres function as much to challenge and criticize as to reinforce the values that inform them. . . .the genre's fundamental impulse is to continually *renegotiate* the tenets of American ideology. And what is so fascinating and confounding about Hollywood genre films is their capacity to 'play it both ways,' to both criticize and reinforce the values, beliefs, and ideals of our culture within the same narrative context" (35; emphasis in original). However, what is important to note is the use of the words "possibility" and "capacity" when positing that films may challenge ideology therefore making it most likely that these films neglect to do so. This ability may be more common in specific genres or to latter stages of generic evolution. This ritualistic view of genre puts the construction of genre and, therefore, power in the hands of the audience. The opposing view is an ideological one which has a perspective in which industry and government have the power and thus impose ideology upon the audience (Adorno & Horkheimer). In ritual, films play out "imaginative solutions" to real problems while in the ideological view of film the same situations are read as "deceptive non-solutions" accepted by the audience designed to serve industrial purposes (Altman 27). These two opposing views call into question the role of genre as a unifying measure; how this unity is achieved and where the power to do so lies are at the core. Ritual versus ideology is not only a concern of power, but also one of temporality.

Problematizing issues of genre's role to reflect and/or criticize ideology is the question of historicizing genre. Schatz's view of genres as ritual place genre under the transhistorical analysis of genre as myth, as stable and unchanging, free from the contextual constraints of production. This view sees genre as a continuation of the generic type throughout time and as

one that embodies universal ideals (Altman 19-20; Moine 79-83). The transhistorical approach

gives genres "essential qualities" and "It is precisely the notion that genres have essential

qualities that makes it possible to align them with archetypes and myths and to treat them as

expressive of broad and perdurable human concerns" (Altman 20). Conversely, it is much more

evident and much more accepted that genres exist in history. The development of genres over

time is apparent to critics and therefore they have generated schemes by which to describe the

stages of said development. One such metaphor for genre progress is that of a living being's life

cycle. For example, John Cawelti states that genres "move from an initial period of articulation

and discovery, through a phase of conscious self-awareness on the part of both creators and

audiences, to a time when generic patterns have become so well-known that people become tired

of their predictability" (244). Brian Taves similarly describes the cycle as one from "a time of

comparative innocence" to a period of "experience . . . and disillusionment" (73-74). Altman

summarizes these various life cycle metaphors as ones "whereby genres are regularly said to

develop, to react, to become self-conscious, and to self-destruct" (21).

But as Altman notes, this view of genre history is still contained, free to move, if only

like a train confined to previously laid tracks (22). Therefore, there is little room for movement

and negotiation amongst these films given this theoretical framework. What this means, then, is

that underlying all these films are crucial similarities that can be brought to the fore regardless of

the context in which they were produced. Consequently, these similarities can be analyzed for

their transhistorical persistence and value.

It is not enough to say what genre is or how it is; it is also necessary to discuss why genre

comes to be in the manner that it does. For, as Altman states, "in order to be recognized as a

genre, films must have both a common topic . . . and a common structure, a common way of

configuring that topic" (23). Hence, it is not enough for a film to share the same topic with another film, it must also be constructed in a similar manner (it does not suffice to share the same structural components, if the subject matter is not the same then the films do not share a genre). Above it was discussed what genre films may reflect. Therefore, each of these films has a purpose and in belonging to a genre that purpose is assumed to be similar amongst the films within said genre. And if the purpose is similar, the form is presumed to be similar, as "the form of an individual film is the ensemble of choices intended to realize the point of the purpose of the film" (Carroll 141). This is where shared conventions arise or, as conceptualized by Altman, a shared use of semantics and syntax. Though he is utilizing linguistics terminology, this does not mean that film is viewed as a language. He explains the use of these terms:

> At times we invoke generic terminology because multiple texts share the same building blocks (these *semantic* elements might be common topics, shared plots, key scenes, character types, familiar objects or recognizable shots and sounds). At other times we recognize generic affiliation because a group of texts organize those building blocks in a similar manner (as seen through such shared *syntactic* aspects as plot structure, character relationships or image and sound montage) (89).

This is reconciled with Carroll's perspective that film is not a language in that he claims that film does not, by nature, have a grammar, but that does not mean that a grammar is not created (i.e., form) for a particular film nor can films not share similar syntax (form). Once films begin to share similar semantics and syntax (form), they begin to form a genre. The key is that they need not have been created in the first place to conform to a particular set of rules or code. This occurred for other reasons; for intelligibility in a way different from language. Therefore, that reason is what is explored for the purposes of this present genre study: in what ways and for what

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reasons do these films share similar semantics and syntax? This reason is Altman's subsequently added third component to his genre approach: pragmatics.

The pragmatic component acknowledges that a text has a multitude of users and, by extension, uses. Therefore, it "necessarily abandons the linearity of the linguistic model on which it was originally based" (210) and assumes indeterminacy of users found within consumption as well as production. Altman's analytical model views the interaction of meaning not as unilateral between sender and receiver, but a T-shaped, triadic arrangement between sender, receiver, and fellow receivers (171). This triadic model and triadic approach "treats genres as a site of struggle and co-operation among multiple users. . .[Pragmatic analysis] treats reading as . . . involving not only hegemonic complicity across user groups but also a feedback system connecting user groups. . . [It] assumes a constant. . .cross-fertilization process whereby the interests of one group may appear in the actions of another. . . .[It] sometimes destabilizes meaning by showing just how dependent it is on particular uses of a text or genre, at other times it succeeds in revealing the meaning-grounding institutions that make meaning seem to arise directly out of semantics and syntax" (211). This is the contextual element that relies not only on the film and perhaps its genre, but on the discourse that takes place beyond the film itself. This discourse may depend on the film, such as reviews, or it may be everyday cultural discourse that informs the understanding of the film. Therefore, a proper evaluation of a text, and its genre, as something that is variously read, requires an analysis of the context. The context of films can be gathered from the paratextual material (Gray). These paratexts will not determine the context for all viewers, but can provide a base for the assumed popular audience.

The purpose and development of genre says little about how the audience actually engages with genre except the manner in which meaning is gathered amongst a body of films.

Altman, however, proposes reasons for audience pleasure in genre film viewing. His first concept is that of "generic crossroads," whereby the films provide a moment or multiple moments of opposition in which one direction offers a culturally accepted option while the other offers "generic pleasure" at the loss of societal norms. Altman argues that those who enjoy the particular genre in question will prefer the genre choice at the expense of the culturally sanctioned one. He states that "Operating in a Pavlovian manner, a film's repeated invitations to generic processing train those who accept them both to enjoy generic pleasure and to disdain the cultural positions presented as alternative" (Altman 151). He also claims that genre films "regularly rely on actors and actions defined by their eccentricity with respect to some cultural circle" (149). For this reason, these films habitually present characters and situations outside of the norms. The narratives rely on opposition. In this present study, the corpus of films relies heavily on opposition and deviation. Audience enjoyment in this may be generically bound, but character motivation may be psychologically explained. If intrafilmic motivations are reframed, then spectator behavior may be reevaluated and interrogated. This may muddle the clear distinction Altman makes between generic and cultural choices.

Tom Gunning states that: "as historians of film genres we need to take as our subject of research not simply a body of film but a body of discourse which operated on both the production and reception of those films in an effective manner. . . .a historian of genres is not simply articulating a critical discourse out of a viewing of films, but researching the discourses that helped bring those films into being and which shaped the ways they were seen and understood" (52). Following Gunning's lead, I have taken as my texts of analysis not only films, but the discourse surrounding those films. This discourse included film promotion and film reception. Above I noted that Altman stated that films need to share both a common topic and

structure to be considered a genre (23). It is through the analysis of the primary texts, as well as the secondary, that this task will be achieved and the formation of a genre will be justified.

As the discourse surrounding film is pivotal, it was also essential to the selection of the primary texts. What is meant by this is that those films that have been previously marked as featuring characters that appear to fit the criteria of BPD were incorporated into this study. As such, this study relied on previous assumptive lists. The primary texts were first selected as identified from the previous research whereby these films have characters that are explicitly identified as having BPD or are assumed to by those who have done the previous research, for example those identified in the mental illness and film texts written by Robinson (2003) and Wedding, Boyd, and Niemiec (2010). Additional films were provided by way of popular discourse, which posits that certain films possess characters with BPD for varying reasons. This discourse was made available via Internet searches and one such list of probable films is from the site *Gettinbetter.com,* which has a page that provides a list of films and television programs with explanations of why the webhost believes they present BPD. The sample was filtered appropriately through viewing, eliminating those films that did not possess characteristics that may allude to BPD. This filtering process was based on the nine BPD criteria as mentioned above (DSM-VI). The films were analyzed for their depictions of these diagnostic criteria as manifested through action, dialogue, and scenic elements. This analysis rested on preconceived notions as to what a BPD film might look like, based on the diagnostic criteria as well as the previous literature which emphasizes negative, rather than positive, portrayals. Therefore it is inevitable that the weight of analysis will be on the more stereotypical representations of the disorder and mental illness in general. However, the films were also evaluated for the ways in which they disrupt the conventional and often unrealistic portrayals and put forth a more

authentic depiction. Regardless of the optimism and validity of portrayal, nevertheless, those

films that did arise through generic association became a part of the study and it is through

viewing and coding that this inclusion occurred. The films in the final corpus are: *A Perfect*

Murder (1998), *An Education* (2009), *Bad Influence* (1990), *Basic Instinct* (1992), *Black Snake*

Moan (2007), *Black Swan* (2010), *Blue Sky* (1994), *Dream Lover* (1994), *Expired* (2007), *Fatal*

Attraction (1987), *Fear* (1996), *Gia* (1998), *Girl, Interrupted* (1999), *Interiors* (1978), *Lonely*

Hearts (2006), *Mad Love* (1995), *Malicious* (1995), *Margot at the Wedding* (2007), *Mommie*

Dearest (1981), *Notes on a Scandal* (2006), *Obsessed* (2009), *Original Sin* (2001), *Play Misty*

for Me (1971), *Prozac Nation* (2005), *Romeo is Bleeding* (1994), *Savage Grace* (2007),

Secretary (2002), *Single White Female* (1992), *The Crush* (1993), and *White Oleander* (2002).

The films were analyzed for their connections to BPD whether it is explicit (the outright mention

of the disorder) or implicit (the characters exhibit behavior the meet the criteria of diagnosis).

 These texts were also analyzed for any tropes utilized that may elicit an association with BPD

and any tropes that crossover from text to text. Furthermore, the various film techniques were

examined for any associations and crossover. These techniques include mise-en-scène, shots,

sound, music, and editing. In regards to mise-en-scène, everything that appears before the

camera was considered. This included the sets utilized for each film, taking into account what

kinds of locations are emphasized as well as the variety or lack thereof. Coupled with location is

the décor of each location, particularly the use of color and any contrasting architectural and/or

decorative elements. Aside from setting, mise-en-scène was analyzed for overall use of lighting

which relates to further use of color as seen in other scenic components such as costume. Since

BPD is a disorder that highlights contradictions and opposition, the films were also viewed for

the manner in which space and shots are manipulated to accent any antagonisms or polarities as

well as other attributes of BPD. Correspondingly, the employment of sound and music was analyzed for their connections to BPD in addition to their commonality across the corpus of films. Finally, consideration was given to the films' editing, particularly for creating juxtapositions and emphasizing opposition. All of these various cinematic techniques were compared amongst the body of films in the present study to determine the generic conventions.

Once the primary texts were obtained, another sample of texts was obtained which discuss these films so as to have a sample of discourse around these portrayals. These secondary texts included newspaper, magazine, and journal articles as well as new media texts such as blogs and message board posts. Promotional material was included with these texts. This grouping of secondary texts will be referred to as the *paratexts,* to borrow Jonathan Gray's term for all the texts that are "intrinsically part of" the primary text. This concept began in literary criticism and was most well defined by literary theorist Gérard Genette. The concept sees the main text as one that is surrounded by other material from the title to promotional materials. Genette defines the paratext as "a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that—whether well or poorly understood and achieved—is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it" (Genette 2). Gray argues that paratexts "create," "manage," and "fill" the primary texts "with many of the meanings that we associate with them" (9). It is through these texts that most people are introduced to films and build their presumptions about them. "Entryway paratexts," such as promotional material and reviews, "control and determine our entrance to a text" (35). Paratexts also serve to "inflect or redirect the text following initial interaction" as "in medias res paratexts" (35). This latter type of paratext in found throughout subsequent discourse about the text. Both types of paratextuality can also be performed by genre whereby viewing films within a particular

genre provides entrance into a later film or reflexively informs previously viewed films. In this manner, the paratexts of one film can also influence the reception of generically similar films. Therefore, the paratexts as well as films were evaluated for similarities.

Utilizing Altman's (*Film/Genre* 50-68) work linking cinematic promotional material, namely posters, with genre and generic expectations as manifested within (potential) audiences, I looked at the ways in which the films' marketing elicits and/or alludes to genre through linguistic and visual choices. The commonalities amongst these films' promotional material as well as the exceptionalities were compared to the diagnostic criteria of BPD to further implicate the films as presenting BPD and belonging to an internally as well as externally constructed genre. As Genette defines the paratext as "more than a boundary or a sealed border" but "rather, a threshold, or, a 'vestibule' that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside or turning back" (1), the next chapter will begin analysis with the paratexts. Once the paratextual material is explored, the following chapter will examine the corpus of films through Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to argue for a BPD genre. Finally, the last chapter will employ Altman's addition to his methodology for genre criticism, pragmatics, to comment upon this study's implications for both mental illness representation and film genre.

CHAPTER TWO: PARATEXTS

"I don't want there to be any boundaries between us"

Vincent Cassel, *Black Swan.*

In keeping with Gunning's notion that proper genre study involves not only the films, but the various discourses surrounding them, this present study begins by looking at some of those external texts. The manner in which borderline personality disorder (BPD) and generic expectancies are expressed expand beyond the internal structures of the films themselves to the external texts: the paratexts. To explore the industry's external representation of the films, I analyzed the films' titles and posters. Both of these can be regarded as beginning points of filmic understanding for potential audiences or what Gray calls "entryway paratexts." These are "Paratexts that grab the viewer before he or she reaches the text and try to control the viewer's entrance to the text" (Gray 23). In this way the film title and poster can be understood as influencing and guiding the viewer's desires, expectations, and understandings with regard to the film they were designed for and as such they should be viewed as important pieces of audience reception.

What's in a Name? Finding Meaning in Film Titles and Title Sequences

One of the first entrances into a text is its title. According to Leo Hoek, a title is "a set of linguistic signs . . . that may appear at the head of a text to designate it, to indicate its subject matter as a whole, and to entice the targeted public" (qtd. in Genette 76). From this definition the functions of the title are put forth. However, Genette questions the necessity of all three functions claiming that only the first—designation—is obligatory (76). Subsequently he states that there are the descriptive function (either thematic, rhematic, mixed, or ambiguous), the

connotative function, and the final, questionable temptation function (93). Though these considerations have been written about literary titles, the importance of title as paratext holds true for film and Genette's claims can be applied.

Before proceeding any further, it is important to note that the only titles analyzed were the US English titles. A further point of inquiry would be to look into the various permutations of the titles as seen through the literal and not so literal translations of the titles into other languages and what is gained and/or lost in such transformations in terms of audience expectations.

As Robert Marich claims: "An evocative title can be the most effective single element of creative material" (22) because it is the one element that is consistently displayed through various means of advertising such as billboards, television ads, and print ads. The title is also circulated through other means of publicity besides advertising between the production company and potential audience, for the title is used to sell the film to distribution sites such as theatres and subsequent retailers as well as spread amongst the general public all of whom may or may not ever see the film. This highlights the importance of the title, as Genette explains:

> The title is directed at many more people than the text, people who by one route or another receive it and transmit it and thereby have a hand in circulating it. For if the text is an object to be read, the title (like, moreover, the name of the author) is an object to be circulated - or, if you prefer, a subject of conversation (75)

Therefore, the title is constructed with a wider appeal in mind than perhaps the actual text it designates and can be seen as both separate from and part of the text to which it refers. It needs to be interesting yet simple enough to circulate, but also reveal enough and have adequate draw to get an audience to the text. With these considerations in mind, I examined the titles of the films in this study.

The first way in which the titles were analyzed was their choice of wording, free from any contextual constraints such as stylization within promotional material or within the film. In this way, the titles were evaluated for both denotative and connotative meanings and subsequently the expectations potentially created in terms of genre and narrative.

Wes D. Gehring states that "Regardless of the medium, a good heading simultaneously can be an audience hook, a story summary, or a simple statement that resonates with multiple meanings" (61). Examples of such functions are found within this study's corpus with titles such as *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Margot at the Wedding* (2007), and *Expired* (2007) correlating with Gehring's title functions respectively. Focusing on the first of these titles, *Fatal Attraction,* the simultaneity of these objectives can be observed as the title serves to captivate and lure the audience through its intriguing choice of words which concurrently works with a brief insight into the plot: some relationship will prove to be lethal as there will likely be seduction followed by destruction. Finally, though a basic plot can be inferred from the title, it is still simple and open enough to allow the audience to speculate upon what exactly is the attraction and why it will be fatal (it could be that the attractant is murderous; being attracted to the attractant causes some external source of destruction out of disapproval or jealousy; the attractant might lead to a world of trouble that causes death; or the attractant might not even be human, such as an attraction to drugs, crime, or some other dangerous lifestyle that leads to fatality). This final point gestures toward the difficulty of both creating and analyzing a title: the various experiences of audiences lead them to decode titles differently and not always in the manner preferred by the producer. As Robert Marich states "One goal of the title is to impart the correct genre to the main target audience" (32). This can be particularly tricky when simultaneously he argues that catchy one-word magazine-esque titles are trendy, as are two-word titles (22). In this study's corpus,

this point is true with the one word titles: *Expired, Gia* (1998)*, Obsessed* (2009)*, Interiors* (1978)*, Malicious* (1995)*, Fear* (1996)*,* and *Secretary* (2002); and the two word titles: *The Crush* (1993)*, An Education* (2009)*, Black Swan* (2010)*, Basic Instinct* (1992)*, Mommie Dearest* (1981)*, Blue Sky* (1994)*, Bad Influence* (1990)*, Prozac Nation* (2005)*, Lonely Hearts* (2006)*, Original Sin* (2001)*, Savage Grace* (2007)*, White Oleander* (2002)*, Mad Love* (1995)*, Girl, Interrupted* (1999)*, Fatal Attraction,* and *Dream Lover* (1994)*.* To illustrate the above point, take the title *Expired*: by definition it means something that has run out and come to an end. When considering what this film could be about, it could be a comedy about any various jobs that deal with things that expire—grocery store, library, DMV—or it could be a horror film with the expiration being people's lives. In this case, the difference in genre is drastic and with the title *Expired* the film could fall under a multitude of genres, so the genre is not clear, but perhaps the target audience is. It would seem with the connotations of death this film would not be targeted towards children—the connotations might point towards a young adult audience with such a word and probable plots. However, if one of the important goals of a title is to clearly identify a genre, this title fails to do so and, I argue, many of the other titles in the corpus fail to clearly evoke genre identification as well. This is important because unclear genre or, perhaps more accurately, the multiple genre suggestion of these films reveals not only the way in which these films all operate similarly generically, but also the impreciseness of genre.

When a value could be placed on a title—that is, whether it evoked negative or positive connotations—the title carried negative associations. These titles were: *Expired, Obsessed, Malicious, Fear, Bad Influence, Original Sin, Fatal Attraction, A Perfect Murder* (1998)*, Notes on a Scandal* (2006)*,* and *Romeo is Bleeding* (1994)*.* Titles that carried slight negative connotations were: *Lonely Hearts, Mad Love,* and *Girl, Interrupted*. The titles *The Crush* and

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Basic Instinct depend on the manner in which they are read—what kind of "crush?" (an infatuation with someone or a squeezing force?) What is one's "basic instinct?" Is it to survive? Survival could go be looked at in many ways.

With regard to positively valenced titles, the only clearly positive title is *Blue Sky* as it is difficult to argue that such a title could have, upon first encounter, negative connotations. It seems obvious that this title evokes a sense of hopefulness and optimism through its arrangement of words. However, it could be read as negative if the film ended up being about someone called Sky who was depressed, but this reading is unlikely to be someone's first interpretation of the title. The other two titles that could be read as positive are *Dream Lover* and *An Education,* but, of course, one should always be careful what one wishes for and lessons often occur in the least ideal of circumstances, so the positive connotations of these titles are questionable.

What was found within the corpus's titles were references to relationships/love (*The Crush, Mommie Dearest, Lonely Hearts, Mad Love, Fatal Attraction, Dream Lover, Romeo is Bleeding,* and *Margot at the Wedding* [2007]) and violence/disturbance (*Expired, Malicious, Fear, The Crush, Fatal Attraction, A Perfect Murder, Girl, Interrupted, Obsessed* and *Romeo is Bleeding*). Additionally, there were appeals to gendered identity (*Gia, Interiors, Secretary, Girl, Interrupted, Single White Female* [1992]*,* and *Play Misty for Me* [1971]). There were also examples of opposition with the titles *Savage Grace* (wild and untamed versus elegant and refined)*, Fatal Attraction* (violence/death versus love/sex)*,* and *White Oleander* (a flower that is fragrant and beautiful yet resilient and extremely poisonous). These themes of relationships/love, violence/disturbance, identity, and opposition are central to the symptomatology of BPD and, therefore, it is not surprising to see them expressed within these titles.

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Next, the representation of the titles within the films was evaluated; that is, the stylization of the text in conjunction with any background audio and/or visual elements which might impact the reading of the title. The purpose of this is to interrogate how expectation is managed through stylization of the title once in the theatre. Above it was stated that many of the titles were open for interpretation due to the various meanings and genres attributed to them, so it will be explored here if the title sequence helps to clarify the preferred meaning of the title so as to aid in guiding expectation for the duration of the film. This was seen as particularly relevant due to the claim that the title sequence is considered part of the plot (Lacey 17) and is, therefore, part of the narrative and its set up of expectations.

The title sequence can be used to clarify the expectations associated with a title that could be read in a multitude of ways, as in the case of *Expired*. In this film's opening, after production credits are shown, actor names are depicted as car horns and alarms are heard and the camera tracks in and pans across the title which appears on a parking meter thereby visually demonstrating that this film will have something to do with this type of expiration—perhaps someone in meter enforcement or someone who cannot seem to make it to his or her car in time to beat a ticket (see figure 1). Also, the utilization of the street noise and camera movement is not serious in tone indicating that this film will likely be comedic. However, the title itself still carries a negative association which probably means that this is not a lighthearted comedy, but, rather, one with heavier themes such as someone whose patience or tolerance has "expired" (it is difficult to imagine someone cheerful about receiving parking tickets or someone just whistling along fancy-free handing out tickets with no problems).

Fig. 1. Title reveal for *Expired* showing title on parking meter.

Black Swan's opening, though brief, does give some insight into what the film will be about: the screen is black while classical music is playing; once the title is shown in white capital letters, laughing is heard in a slight echoic, transient manner. This eerie opening leads to the assumption that this film will be dark. The interplay of classical music and creepy laughing lends to a sense of psychological thrill and unease perhaps to the point of horror—this is not a light film as the title itself also suggests.

Clarity can also be given by straightforwardly presenting the audience with background information regarding the basis of the film, as is done with *Gia*. Before the title is revealed, biographical information is presented, thus demonstrating both what/who "Gia" is and that one of the genres of this film is biography/biopic and a likely other one is drama. This sets the audience's expectancies differently than if it was completely fictitious. The opening states: "Gia Marie Carangi was born in Philadelphia in 1960. In the early eighties she became a legend in the fashion industry. Her story is told here in the words of the people who knew her and the words of her own journal." What is missing from this is any mention of her own direct contribution to the

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filmmaking process aside from her journal, which creates the assumption that she is either missing or deceased. Therefore, the audience from the onset prepares for conflict and tragedy within the narrative as well as situates a general setting: the eighties and the fashion industry, both of which bring a multitude of connotations.

The use of music during the opening credits can help to guide expectations especially when combined with the title. Both *The Crush* and *Mad Love* utilize rock music, and are the only films in the corpus to do so, during their beginning moments. This type of music is known for its youthful appeal through its disregard to order and obedience which the titles of these films also evoke. The idea of a "crush" is usually associated with obsessive youth and a "love" that is "mad" could be related to young exuberance and recklessness. *An Education* similarly uses youth-targeted music which helps to reinforce that this film is about a teen, an assumption that is furthered by the chalkboard-like visuals during the opening (see figure 2). However, the music also, and perhaps more importantly, functions to situate the film historically: it is music from the 1960s rather than music contemporary to the film's production and release as is the case with *The Crush* and *Mad Love.*

The presentation of audio-visual material in conjunction with the title does not always lead to fuller comprehension. In the example of *Black Snake Moan* (2007)*,* the title comes approximately ten minutes into the film after a substantial amount of action has occurred and the potential character with BPD, Rae, is introduced showcasing many of her symptoms. However, the presentation of the title does little to explain her behavior or what will happen next, a criticism of borderline personality disorder's name itself. Likewise, the narrative thus far does not demonstrate why this particular title was chosen beside the fact that it comes from a blues song title ("That Black Snake Moan" by Blind Lemon Jefferson, a title the audience is probably

unfamiliar with, but likely able to generically identify) and the film is set in the South with the

opening moments incorporating blues music. Gehring states that "Inventive titles lifted from

another medium sometimes involve music" (61). That is the case with this film and *Romeo is

Bleeding,* which takes its name from a Tom Waits song. For *Black Snake Moan* the title choice

is likely due not only to the character Lazarus's blues playing, but also the suggestive

connotations of the title which could be applied in several ways mostly revolving around

sexuality, power, control, and fear—all themes within this film. So, even given a name for

something often does little to assist in understanding it, though a name is necessary to designate

for reference as Genette states. However, if given a more complete story one may be able to

better understand why a name was chosen even if that name does not aid in understanding what

it refers to, as I argue is the case with *Black Snake Moan*—it is possible to comprehend why it

was picked as the title, but it being the title does little to help understand the motivations and

actions of the film's characters.

Fig. 2. Title reveal for *An Education* with chalkboard-like visual of books on shelves.

Consequently, there does not appear to be any standard representation of titles intrafilmically with regard to this corpus. This is not that surprising because there is no norm to title presentation within film as there is for books and the extent of opening credits and title presentation varies across the range of genres and films. Many films follow the convention of the black screen with quick revealing of production information and title, while many others jump right into cinematic action and superimpose the production information and title over it. There are still even others that go through the effort of creating a specific opening credit sequence separate from the plot and more than a solid background. This seems to be a personal choice of the production team and often a quirk of the director—for example, Woody Allen's three films considered for this corpus, *Interiors, Anything Else* (2003)*, and *Vicky Cristina Barcelona* (2008), all opened with black screens and white font with the latter two films incorporating music. This inconsistency with title presentation is related to BPD as the time and nature of both presentation of criteria and diagnosis vary across people.

So before the inconsistency amongst the corpus is attributed to the various genres attached to the films, I will compare and contrast the title sequence of films that have been assigned the same genres. First, *Fatal Attraction* and *Single White Female* will be compared, which were classified as "thriller - psycho/stalker/blank from hell" by Box Office Mojo, as both "drama" and "thriller" by IMDb, and "thriller," subgenre "psychological thriller" by All Movie. Therefore, external to this study these two films have been generically categorized the same, however their title sequences are quite dissimilar. *Fatal Attraction* opens in silence with a black screen, white lettering appearing to present production credits as well as star actors, then in a similar, unremarkable manner the title appears—just white capital letters on a black screen with no audio (see figure 3). In *Single White Female,* conversely, laughter is heard while production

credits are presented in black lower case font in white rectangles over a black background; then, while music begins to play, a young girl is shown putting on lipstick and then puts it on another a girl while actors' names are presented below; it is revealed that the girls are twins who eventually turn to look at a mirror (the camera) then one kisses the other's cheek and then it goes black where the title is shown—black lower case in a white rectangle on a black screen (see figure 4).

Fig. 3. Title reveal for *Fatal Attraction*.

Fig. 4. Title reveal for *Single White Female*.

Another example is *Interiors* and *Notes on a Scandal* which garnered "drama" classifications from all three sites with the addition of subgenre "psychological drama" from All Movie. *Interiors* opens immediately, after the initial production information, with the title in white font over a black screen in silence—one would miss it if they were not vigilantly looking for it, making the title seem unimportant at least once the viewer was in front of the screen. In almost a completely opposite title sequence, *Notes on a Scandal* begins with classical music, a woman sitting on a park bench, production information and actors superimposed over, then a female voice-over stating: "People have always trusted me with their secrets, but who do I trust with mine? You, only you." A pen writes on paper next to cigarettes in an ashtray. The camera then pans across notebooks with the title, superimposed over, revealed one word at a time— "Scandal" in red font with all other words in white (see figure 5).
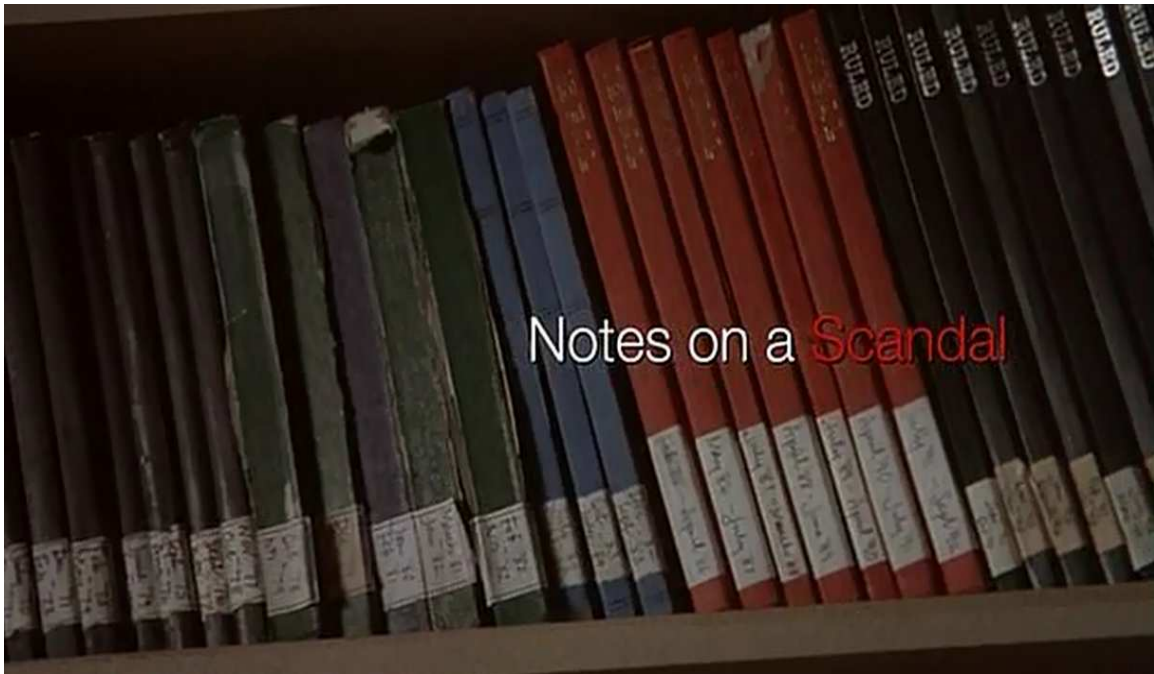
Fig. 5. Title reveal for *Notes on a Scandal* showing title superimposed on notebooks with "Notes on a" in white font and "Scandal" in red.

Finally, *Prozac Nation* and *Girl, Interrupted,* both based on autobiographical books, have received their "drama" designation from IMDb and All Movie with subgenre classifications of "psychological drama" and "coming-of-age" from All Movie (*Prozac Nation* is not listed on Box Office Mojo). *Prozac Nation* begins with string music as production and actor information is presented. Letters are shown breaking and floating around the screen. Then the title is formed with the background changing into a close-up of a typewriter page with the word "My" visible behind the film's title so the screen reads as "My Prozac Nation" (see figure 6). This sequence is separate from cinematic action and associates it with its textual predecessor—the autobiography—beginning it similar to a book. In contrast, *Girl, Interrupted* opens in what appears to be the narrative with initially the sound of dripping water and clanging metal, a view of a window, then pipes with Simon and Garfunkel's "Bookends" playing. The camera tilts down the pipes and the title is superimposed over the pipes in white font suggestive of

handwriting (see figure 7). Shortly after a voice-over begins and the film's main characters are shown in the same basement setting as the opening of the film. As such, it situates the audience already within the story rather than at the beginning which is clarified moments later when the narrative moves back in time in the story setting the expectation that the plot will not chronologically tell the story.

Fig. 6. Title reveal for *Prozac Nation* showing typewriter page background with the word "My" visible.

Fig. 7. Title reveal for *Girl, Interrupted* showing title superimposed on crossed pipes.

Advertising Madness: Film Posters

As a means of advertising, the film poster plays a pivotal role in connecting the audience with the text (film). While the film title is one of the first entrances into a text, the film poster is one of the first presentations of the title as well as a potential source of other paratextual information such as cast and crew, associated works, and critical acclaim (awards, reviews). The film poster is also one of the initial sites of narrative assumptions on the part of viewers/potential audiences not only through the inclusion of paratextual information, but also through the visual and verbal structure of the poster; that is, through which imagery and tagline(s) are chosen and how they are represented in terms of color, contrast, position, font, etc. These various aspects of the film posters are analyzed for their relation to the diagnostic criteria for BPD; that is, the manner in which the criteria are made manifest either explicitly or implicitly within the film posters—this can be visual, verbal, or both.

As visual communication, specifically advertising, film posters are constructed with the audience in mind—they are created to, as Robert Marich states, "give a face to a film . . . and make it appealing" (4). According to Finola Kerrigan "The objective of producing a poster is to create 'want to see' in the mind of the consumer through communicating the essence of the film and highlighting the unique selling proposition such as cast, genre or other element" (131). Therefore the audience is key and by looking at film posters one is able to analyze the ways in which appeals are made to bring people into the theatre. Similarly, "Advertising . . . need[s] to convey an overall point of view to make an impression on moviegoers. It's not enough to simply elicit emotional responses or pique interest with intriguing scenes if they are disconnected. Moviegoers want a sense of story, so communicating a central theme is crucial" (Marich 15). Since a "sense of story" is a sense of the narrative and the narrative is by definition diachronic, a diachronic dimension based on cues within the synchronic text can be added to create a narrative, a narrative that is often implied in synchronic texts such as advertisements (Lacey 102). Since film posters are advertisements, the implied narrative that the audience is expected to decode should be assumed to be present within them just as in other forms of advertisement. This is by no means an intensive rhetorical analysis, but rather a brief survey. As such I will first go over the general corpus's poster presentation of violence, impulsivity, relationships, and perception, before going into an in-depth analysis of three film posters: *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 8)*, Black Swan* (fig. 9)*,* and *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 10)*.*

Violence is illustrated through presentations of splits as well as through images of weaponry. Splits can be found in *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 23), *Black Swan* (fig. 14), *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 27 & 28) and *Mommie Dearest* (fig. 34). These ruptures demonstrate destruction. Weapons are visible in *Play Misty for Me* (fig. 39) (knife) and *Romeo is Bleeding*

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(fig. 41) (gun). The "I" in *Basic Instinct* (fig. 12) is stylized like a sharp object—perhaps a knife or ice pick. The use of red coloring also implies a sense of violence or harm. The split in *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 23) is red. One of the *Black Swan* posters (fig. 15) has the left hand colored red. *Lonely Hearts* (fig. 29) is colored similarly to blood: splotchy red. The title fonts, at least partially, of *Bad Influence* (fig. 11)*, Basic Instinct* (fig. 12)*, Black Snake Moan* (fig. 13)*, Black Swan* (fig. 16)*, Dream Lover* (fig. 20)*, Expired* (fig. 22)*, Fatal Attraction* (fig. 23)*, Gia* (fig. 25)*, Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 28)*, Lonely Hearts* (fig. 29)*, Mad Love* (fig. 31)*, Malicious* (fig. 32)*, Notes on a Scandal* (fig. 35)*, Romeo is Bleeding* (fig. 41)*, Savage Grace* (fig. 42)*, and *Single White Female* (fig. 45) are red.

There is also reference to violence and death in taglines. They are as follows (emphasis added to highlight violent implication): *The Crush* (fig. 19): "He thought it was just a crush. He was *dead* wrong;" *Single White Female* (fig. 45): "Allie's new roommate is about to borrow a few things without asking. Her clothes. Her boyfriend. *Her life*. Living with a roommate can be *murder*;" *Basic Instinct* (fig. 12)*:* "A *brutal murder*. A brilliant *killer*. A cop who can't resist the *danger*;"*Obsessed* (fig. 36): "All's fair when love is *war*;" *Blue Sky* (fig. 18): "In a world of secrets, love is the most powerful *weapon*;*" Romeo is Bleeding* (fig. 41): "You know the best part about makin' it with a cop, Jack? You got two *guns*." and "You can dig one *grave* or you can dig two;" *Gia* (fig. 25): "Too beautiful to *die*. Too wild to live."

Similarly, impulsivity is demonstrated through substance use and reckless behavior. Cigarettes are shown in *Savage Grace* (fig. 43) and *Romeo is Bleeding* (fig. 41) while *Prozac Nation* (fig. 40) shows pills and a bottle of wine. In both posters for *Mad Love* (fig. 30 & 31) the female is shown standing in the car with her arms out—an act that would not be considered safe, but impulsive and reckless. Some taglines also allude to impulsivity: *Original Sin* (fig. 37):

"Lead us into temptation;" *Lonely Hearts* (fig. 29): "The notorious true crime that shocked a nation" (crime may also be considered violence depending on the nature of the crime); *Basic Instinct* (fig. 12)*:* "A brutal murder. A brilliant killer. A cop who *can't resist* the danger;" *Gia* (fig. 25): "Too beautiful to die. *Too wild* to live."

Relationships are most often depicted through embraces, especially unequal ones where one's gaze is averted and the other's is either to the audience or at least visible. The unequal embraces imply who is in control and who is the likely person within the film to exhibit signs of BPD. In *Mad Love* (fig. 30)*, An Education* (fig. 21)*,* and *Expired* (fig. 22)*,* the couples have their heads together with the females in the first two and the male in the latter having their hands on their partners' heads in a possessive manner. This could mark them as the likely candidates for having BPD (this proves to be true for *Mad Love* and *Expired*). The embraces and gazes in *Basic Instinct* (fig. 12) and *Fear* (fig. 24) showcase a threatening possessiveness with their partners' backs to the viewer and them staring sternly. *Bad Influence* (fig. 11) has a similar pose with a man holding a woman with her back to the viewer, but another man is standing next to him also staring at the viewer. The second man is standing slightly behind the first man who is holding the exposed-back woman suggesting that he has power over the man who is seizing the woman signifying he is the "bad influence." *Original Sin* (fig. 37) shows the likely one with BPD being held with her gaze looking off, though still visible and still possessive, but owning her partner with her body sexually having him wrap his arms around her, grasping on. Moving in a similar direction is *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 23) where the man is holding the woman, but she is looking away completely—neither of their faces is visible. Here it is unclear who the "predator" is and who is the "prey;" a more thorough analysis of this poster will be done below.

The state of relationships is additionally illustrated through the proximity of persons in union with gaze. In *Obsessed* (fig. 36) there is a couple to the left standing face to face, with the man looking up and off towards the viewer while the woman, whose arm the title makes space for to expose her wedding ring, is looking back over her shoulder toward another woman who is shown to the right and in the background similarly looking back at them. This sets up the assumption that not only are the two on the left married and the threat is the woman on the right, but that the conflict will be between the two women rather than the man stepping in (he does not even completely fit within the frame of the poster). *A Perfect Murder's* (fig. 38) poster shows a side view of a woman smiling with a man, who also appears to be smiling, behind her. They are both looking down and seem to be happy and in love; however, both their left hands are visible and only she is wearing a wedding ring. In the background, and several times the size of the couple, is a man facing the same direction as the couple, but with his face turned toward the viewer with a serious expression. He is assumed to be the husband of the wife having the affair and since he is the one holding the gaze, it would be expected that he is the one plotting the "perfect murder" of either his cheating wife or her cuckolding lover.

Relationships are also represented through the superimposition of persons upon others such as in *The Crush* (fig. 19) with a man visible in the girl's sunglasses as she gazes towards the viewer or *Dream Lover* (fig. 20) with the female staring at the viewer and the man's face placed in a fraction of the size over her left cheek gazing off vacantly. Though these images are not possessive in a physical sense like an embrace, they are still suggestive of power through the manner in which the male is subsumed within the female's gaze: she is targeting him and his diverted gaze makes him seem like unsuspecting prey.

Unhealthy relationships are also illustrated through acts of dominance/submission. In *Black Snake Moan* (fig. 13) a girl on her knees is wrapped in chains which are held by a man standing up behind her, though both are staring at the viewer, while in *Secretary* (fig. 44) a young woman, again staring forward, holds an envelope in her mouth and a mug in her hand as she leans over a desk with a man watching in the background. Both of these posters clearly demonstrate dominance and objectification with the female gazing back in approval. In any other instance this would be problematic and it is here as well, but in the context of this study it can be understood that these two young women are likely the ones exhibiting signs of BPD through both their need for (sexual) approval and their masochistic tendencies. These are not only symptoms of the disorder, but abuse—sexual and physical—is commonly believed to be a cause of BPD.

The unequal and disturbed nature of relationships are reflected within the posters' taglines: *Secretary* (fig. 44): "The story of a demanding boss and the woman who loves his demands;" *Dream Lover* (fig. 20): "Having the woman of your dreams can make your life a nightmare;" *A Perfect Murder* (fig. 38): "A powerful husband. An unfaithful wife. A jealous lover. All of them have a motive. Each of them has a plan;" *White Oleander* (fig. 46): "Where does a mother end and a daughter begin?" *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 23)*: "*On the other side of drinks, dinner and a one night stand, lies a terrifying love story;" *Fear* (fig. 24): "Together forever. Or else;" *Margot at the Wedding* (fig. 33): "One family, infinite degrees of separation;" *Obsessed* (fig. 36): "All's fair when love is war."

Very few balanced relationships were presented within the posters; however, a few did show them. In *Blue Sky* (fig. 18) a couple is presented, face to face, holding hands with her eyes closed and him looking down at her, his wedding ring visible; behind them are white clouds and

where their arms are, it begins to fade into cloud-like mist. This poster's image is as positive as its title. Finally, *Mad Love* (fig. 31) has a young couple cheek to cheek smiling to the camera: the sort of image one would capture when asking a couple to pose for the camera.

The only posters to show a single person rather than two or more were: *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 27)*, Black Swan* (fig. 14, 15, 16, & 17)*, Prozac Nation* (fig. 40)*, Gia* (fig. 25 & 26)*, Mommie Dearest* (fig. 34)*,* and *Malicious* (fig. 32)*. This sets up the expectations that these films' plots will center on a single person rather than a relationship or relationships, or, at least, that the important aspect of the narrative is that single character and her actions. *Gia* (fig. 25 & 26) and *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 27 & 28) state on their posters that they are based on true stories so the presentation of only one person makes it clear whose story it is and who exactly the title characters are. *Prozac Nation* is based on the autobiography of the same name so anyone who was aware of the book would associate the girl on the poster with the girl in the book. The titles *Black Swan* and *Mommie Dearest* are both single nouns making it logical that their posters would present who the "black swan" and "mommie dearest" are clarifying any questions these titles by themselves cause. Similarly, *Malicious*, being an adjective, can appropriately be illustrated by showing who is being described as such especially if this person is by their very nature "malicious" regardless of whoever they are around making additional people unnecessary.

Instability, fluctuation, and opposition are primarily shown through the contrasting use of color within the posters. The prominent colors are black and white with every poster utilizing those two colors to some extent. The *Gia* (fig. 25 & 26) posters use only the colors black and white except on the first poster with the title being in red. The *Black Swan* (fig. 14, 15, 16, & 17) posters use black and white almost exclusively with the only other prominent colors being the portrayed female's natural tones (skin, lips, eyes, hair). *Obsessed* (fig. 36) uses mostly black and

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white with the couple positioned together dressed in all black and the font in black and white. The woman standing off on her own is dressed in red, a color, when worn, known for seduction. Therefore, this poster sets expectation up not only through the strong contrast of black and white (also racially as the couple is black and the woman in red is white with blonde hair), but through the addition of the sexual element.

The poster for *Savage Grace* (fig. 43) makes use of contrast not only through "Savage" being black and "Grace" white, but with the upper ("Savage") frame being both darker in tone and content than the lower ("Grace") frame. The upper frame shows a woman with a cigarette in her hand, looking down in a wealthy, snobby manner almost as if gazing down to the lower frame; her background is greens and blues with some black. The lower frame shows a boy in profile with much paler skin than the woman above with a light background that suggests the beach or someplace bright and sandy. Not only do the two frames of this poster contrast in terms of color tone and the portion of the title placed within each, but the age of each person present also contrasts. The woman is noticeably older than the boy and the use of color, their poses, and the title suggest that this boy may be this woman's victim in some fashion; she is clearly marked as the "villain" and he is the "innocent."

Black and white are not the only colors employed to illustrate contrast. For *Notes on a Scandal* (fig. 35)*,* while black and white are used, the salient colors are red and yellow with both the title and the woman in the left background colored red and the woman in the right foreground yellow. The foregrounded woman is in profile facing left while the backgrounded woman is gazing toward the viewer with slightly more than half her face visible. Yellow is a caution color—it is the color of warning and penalty flags and cards in a variety of sports, the color of various warning signs found on the road and in a range of environments, and the traffic light

color cautioning vehicles that they need to stop soon—and when read with this poster's tagline, "one woman's mistake is another's opportunity," it can be presumed that this yellow colored woman is the one who made the "mistake," the one connected to the "scandal." Therefore, the red hued woman is the opportunistic one and red can have opposing meanings: red is the color of both love and evil. Not only are the two women different colors, but the foregrounded woman is completely unobstructed, while the backgrounded woman is blocked by the woman in the forefront and is shadowed save her eye-line. This shows that she is not only signified as "dark," but that her entire perceptual focus is put forward and before her is this other woman. So if the backgrounded woman is the one marked as having BPD, she will likely use and express her opposing sides, put all her attention upon, and manipulate the foregrounded woman in some manner. As above, contrast is also shown in age with the foregrounded woman quite a bit younger than the backgrounded and her coloring being lighter than the older person setting expectation that she will be the prey.

In general it can be assumed that the person staring at the viewer or whose gaze is most visible is the one whose mental state is being called into question. As shown above, some of these gazes are threatening or aggressive so these people are being connoted as psychologically damaged and most likely psychopathic. However, those whose gazes are more natural or neutral invite the audience to at least consider these characters' actions and motivations within a more human construct. Also, the superimposition of one person onto another, particularly onto some portion of their head, sets up the expectation that the foregrounded person is the target of the backgrounded one in terms of mental focus and inevitable physical action.

The following two taglines suggest issues with identity and perception: *White Oleander* (fig. 46): "Where does a mother end and a daughter begin?" and *Mommie Dearest* (fig. 34): "A

star...a legend...and a mother...The illusion of perfection." There were also taglines that referred to problems with mental states more generally: *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 27 & 28): "Sometimes the only way to stay sane is to go a little crazy;" *Gia* (fig. 26): "Everyone saw the beauty. No one saw the pain;" *Malicious* (fig. 32): "Ignore her, and she'll never go away;" *Romeo is Bleeding* (fig. 41): "I wish I had a million dollars. I'd buy myself some happiness." While these deal explicitly with psychological issues, all the above taglines related to the other themes found within the posters imply an unhealthy mental state—violence and disturbed relationships are symptoms of psychological distress.

Overall, these posters set up expectation relationally, that these films will revolve around interactions, particularly unequal, unhealthy ones focused on control and possession. The simultaneous reference and allusion to violence through violent imagery, wording, and coloring also sets many of these films up for conflict and potential death. The utilization of these elements overlap posters—that is, these do not appear as all or nothing: some posters showcase unhealthy relationships and violence, some single people and violence, some just violence or unhealthy relationships, etc. There are also references to impulsivity and perception which heighten the sense of disordered psychology amongst the films. The above findings fall into the four behavioral dimensions of BPD: poorly regulated emotions, impulsivity, impaired perception and reasoning, and markedly disturbed relationships (Friedel 2). Each of the above do not fit squarely into each of these categories—for instance, violence may be the result of all four dimensions— but each behavioral dimension is at least represented within the posters. To demonstrate the ways in which the various elements come together in these posters, a more in-depth analysis is necessary.

The above discussion of posters illustrates general elements across the corpus while not dwelling upon how single posters create expectation within audiences through the unification of elements. It is beyond the scope of this current study to expound upon each film poster's composition and construction of expectation. Rather, to take specific examples to demonstrate similarity and difference amongst the body of film posters, I will now give a detailed explication of *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 8)*, Black Swan* (fig. 9)*,* and *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 10) for their representation of "splits" within their posters as well as their cinematic depiction of BPD: *Fatal Attraction* is commonly cited as the quintessential example of BPD, though extreme, with the character of Alex; *Black Swan* is perhaps the most recently cited film with the character, Nina, and perhaps even her mother, Erica, exhibiting clear signs of psychological distress which may be linked to BPD; *Girl, Interrupted* explicitly diagnoses the character of Susanna as BPD. These three films also portray different manifestations of BPD, so an evaluation of the similarities and differences amongst the posters was done so as to determine if these paratexts set up expectations comparatively. Each poster was concurrently compared to the film's actual plot to determine if the assumptions present within the poster were met cinematically.

In the first poster, *Fatal Attraction* (fig. 8)*,* there is a medium shot of a heterosexual couple: he is embracing her as she looks away. They both are looking away, averting their gaze and making their identity difficult to know if it were not for their names at the top of the poster. This signifies that their individual identities are less important than their relationship. A wedding ring is visible on his left hand so this relationship may be an affair. The purplish area reflects the "attraction" part of the title (it is a similar color), and from this image, one would not assume the man to be an innocent victim as he is the one holding her and he is married. The split occurs right down the middle in a vertical, jagged, v-shaped manner. It is incomplete and violent

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in its depiction like a stab wound. The red background enhances the violent nature and corresponds to the only other red feature on the poster: the "fatal" part of the title. One cannot tell who is at fault by this poster, or really who will be victimized. This may be due to the fact that often posters are commissioned and completed before the film is finalized and with this film the ending was changed quite significantly. Originally the female, Alex, committed suicide, but the ending was reshot to have her killed. According to Glenn Close (Alex) in a *Movieline* interview with Martha Frankel, in the original ending Alex "kills herself, but makes sure that his [Dan's] prints are all over the knife, and he gets arrested. . . . But audiences wanted some kind of cathartic ending, so we went back months later and shot the ending that's in the movie now" ("Glenn Close: Close Call"). Regardless of when in the filming process this poster was made, it would have been known that Alex would end up dead and the stab in the poster does occur across her body. What is also clear is the split in the relationship. This splitting links with the second criteria of BPD: A pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation. It may also relate to the first criteria of frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment which is justified through Alex's behavior within the film's story. The violent nature of the rip is apparent— inappropriate anger or difficulty controlling anger is symptomatic of BPD as is recurrent suicidal behavior, gestures, threats or self-injuring behavior such as cutting. All of these diagnostic criteria feature prominently in the narrative of this film.

Unlike the last poster, identity is important in the *Black Swan* (fig. 9) poster as we can clearly see who the star of this film is in this close up. The image is also not inviting—it is cold, pale, and broken—which evokes the horror and thriller genres. The crack can be associated with the title—like a cracking egg—which signifies fragility, emergence, something lying beneath, a

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change in identity. The crack in the head also elicits the idea that this character is mentally damaged. Together this gives the viewer a sense that this character has some sort of identity rupture. A symptom of BPD is identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self. Further, a broken mind can be associated with hallucinations—another sign of BPD: transient, stress-related paranoid ideation, delusions or severe dissociative symptoms. Throughout this film, mirrors and reflections are prominent, thus highlighting the importance of identity and the perception of it. The character of Nina, who is featured on the poster, is also delusional—cracking mentally, perceptually. Destruction is found within the film with Nina exhibiting signs of self-injuring behavior (which is outside her conscious awareness—a sign of dissociation) and bouts of anger leading to the final scenes of the film where she fights Lily/a hallucination of herself and breaks a mirror ultimately stabbing herself. So here, again, identity mixed with dissociation is underscored as her rival transforms into herself causing a mirror to be shattered and become the implement of her own demise.

Finally, in this extreme close-up of *Girl, Interrupted* (fig. 10), there is a tear across the center of the face. Identity is not the focus as it is unclear who exactly this person is (save the actor's name). The generic "girl" in the title reiterates this. This shot also invites the viewer in for greater involvement and identification compared to the other posters—which is arguably confirmed through the narrative of the film, which involves several characters with whom the viewer can identify, and the very nature of the genre, drama, as opposed to thriller, is more inviting and sympathetic. In this the split disrupts the senses—it is expressive and perceptual—perception is "interrupted." The film's main character, the one shown in the poster, Susanna exhibits fluctuating self-image, moods, and attitudes toward others helping to justify her diagnosis—she is actually diagnosed as having BPD in the film. She is shown as being apathetic

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and quietly viewing others, unable to express what she feels or thinks, or as volatile and biting, having no problem expressing her disdain and opinion. She also emphasizes the difficulties in perception and thinking in her ability to maintain normal acuity and focus. Her perception and focus issues are introduced early on when she says that "the laws of physics can be suspended" and shows her view of plausibility thus illustrating that her mind does not function in the realm of what is considered "normal" or "real." Susanna is also easily distracted by external happenings and frequently drifts into flashbacks which can be defined as visual hallucination. This is also visually illustrated in Susanna's regularly blank or distant facial expressions. Her torn psyche is moreover shown in her choice of the word "ambivalent" which means to be torn between two opposing aspects. Susanna's perception of others and the value of socializing also fluctuate with her view of reality. The whiteness in the tear also associates with "chronic feelings of emptiness," which is a symptom of BPD.

The above three examples, through their depiction of splits, present three different narrative expectations all related to BPD. Though implying perhaps different genres, similar elements are used by these posters to evoke these assumptions. When viewed from a psychological lens, which the splits allow for, these three film posters share key similarities in the characteristics that the people portrayed are suggested to possess. As such, generic boundaries can be called into question—what questions should exactly be asked when trying to pinpoint a genre on the basis of a singular image? Which aspects are emphasized and which are subordinated? The union of all the elements within these three posters would suggest that the films are all generically psychological though the only similar genre classification the three share is from IMDb with drama, while they all do have "psychological" as part of a subgenre classification from All Movie with psychological thriller for *Fatal Attraction* and *Black Swan*

and psychological drama for *Girl, Interrupted.* Though it could be argued that "drama" is usually emotionally and psychologically driven, and BPD is a part of Cluster B: dramatic, emotional, or erratic disorders, so "drama" is perhaps the most fitting shared genre to have. These three film posters as well as the general overview above set forth some of the conventions that are found within and shared amongst this corpus and connect it to BPD. These elements and themes are what will help to semantically and syntactically form this BPD genre.

Since they are created by those who are also responsible for the texts they promote, "paratexts often tell us how producers or distributors would prefer for us to interpret a text . . . and how they want us to make sense of their characters and plots" (Gray 72); that is, they "offer 'proper' and 'preferred' interpretations" (72). This is the case with regard to the above paratexts as they were produced by or at least commissioned by those who created the films. Therefore, these paratexts can be viewed as industry discourse in the genre process. Genre also functions in the interpretive process similar to paratexts, according to Gray, "by providing an initial context and reading strategy for the text" (35). Paratexts and genre are further important due to their reach and level of meaning particularly to those who are not eventual viewers of the text the paratexts address. Gray argues that to focus only on what a text means to its close viewers is "a trap into which media studies analysis often falls" (79). Furthermore, for casual or non-viewers, "paratextual frames are likely to rise in importance, precisely because there is less countervailing textuality on offer from the film . . . itself to challenge the paratextual frames" (79). So for many the paratexts are the only or prevailing interaction with the main text. However, for a genre to be argued paratextual analysis is not enough; the films must be examined as well. The next chapter will apply Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to the study's corpus to explore how the BPD expectations set forth by the paratexts are exhibited by the films.
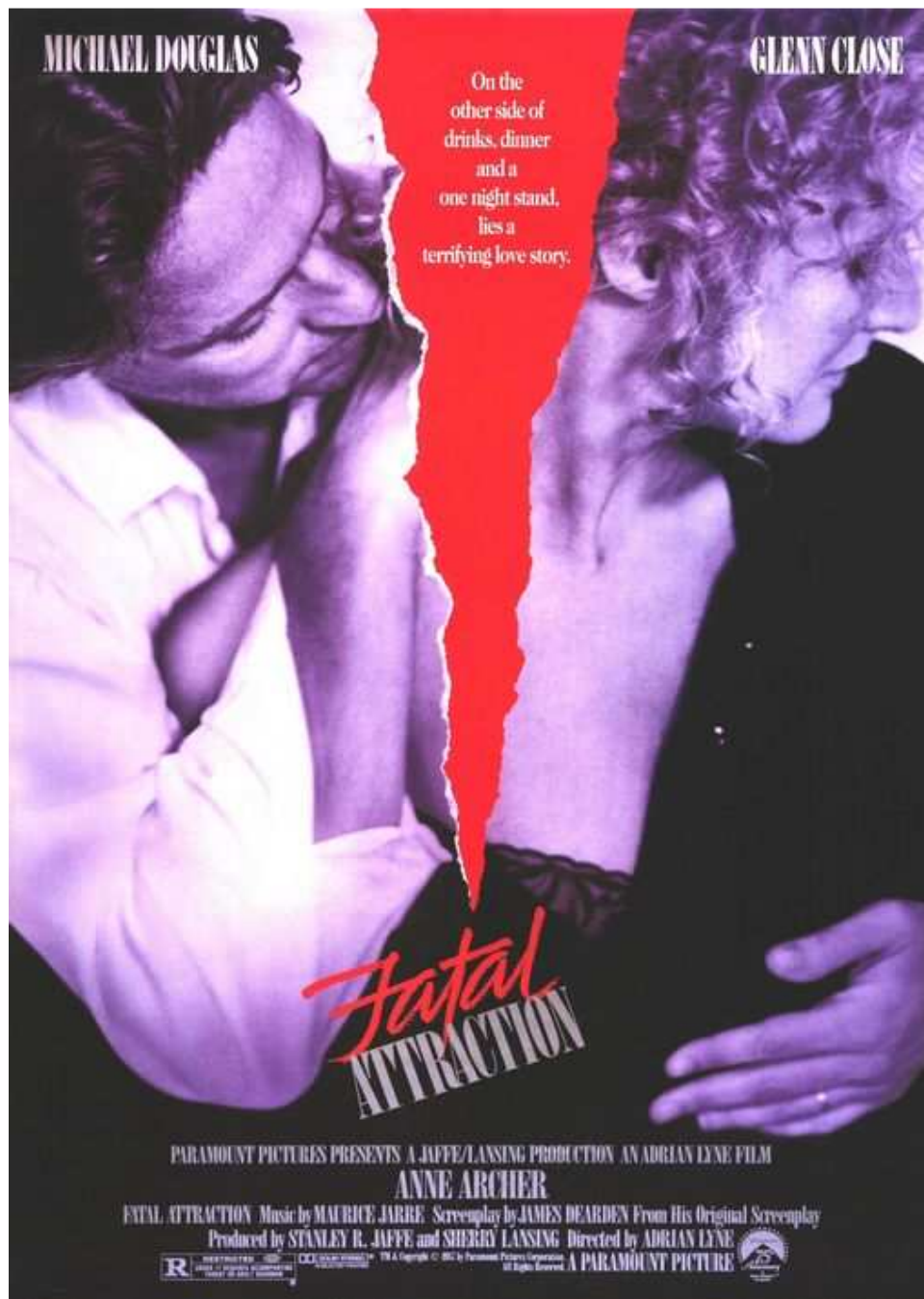
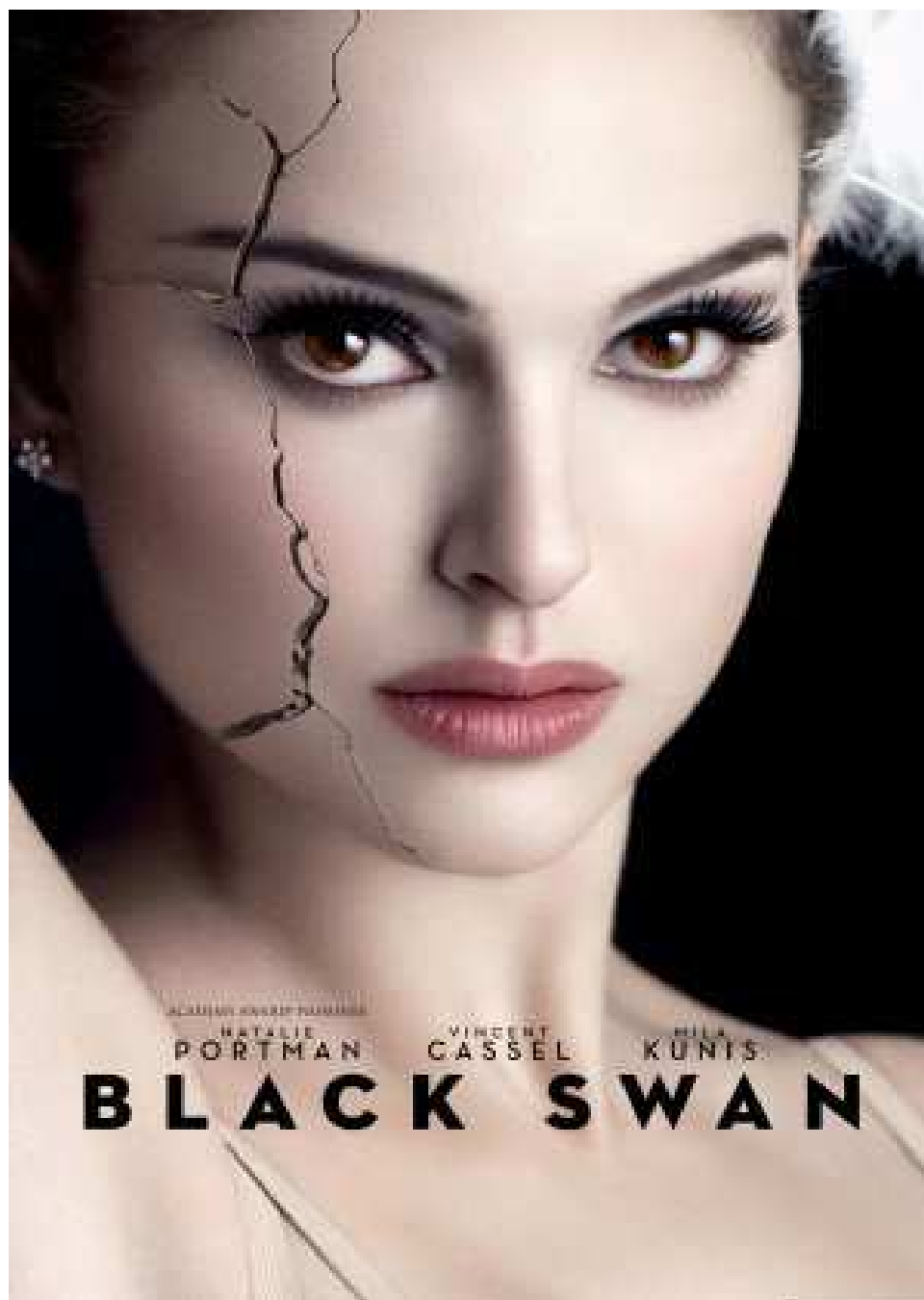Fig. 8. *Fatal Attraction* film poster from *IMP Awards*. n.p., 2012. Web. 4 Apr. 2012.

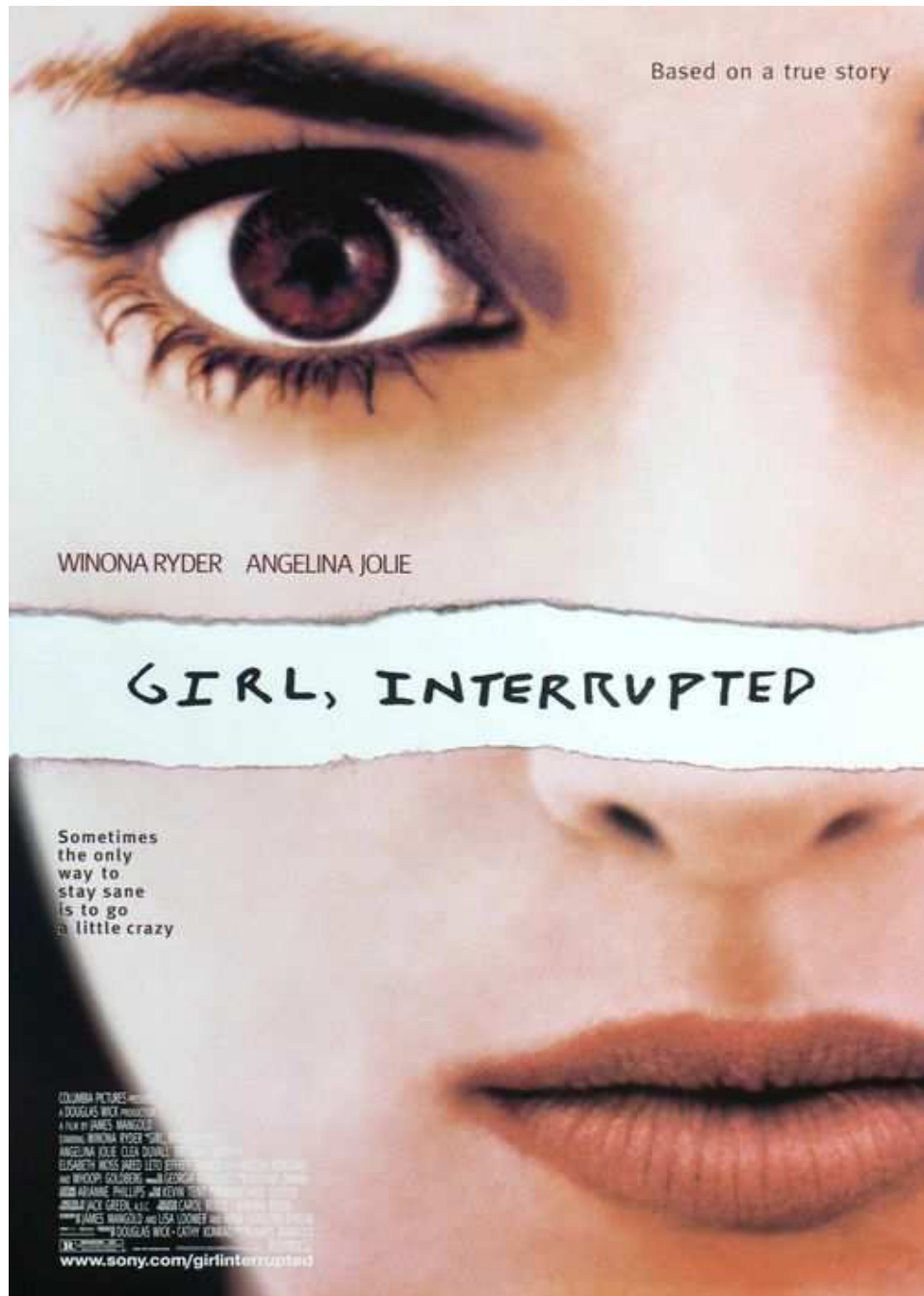Fig. 9. *Black Swan* film poster from *Movie Poster DB*. n.p., 2012. Web. 12 Apr. 2012.

Based on a true story

WINONA RYDER   ANGELINA JOLIE

GIRL, INTERRUPTED

Sometimes
the only
way to
stay sane
is to go
a little crazy

www.sony.com/girlinterrupted

Fig. 10. *Girl, Interrupted* film poster from *IMP Awards.* n.p., 2012. Web. 4 Apr. 2012.
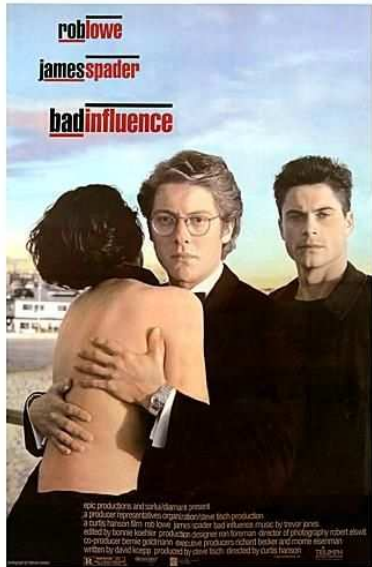
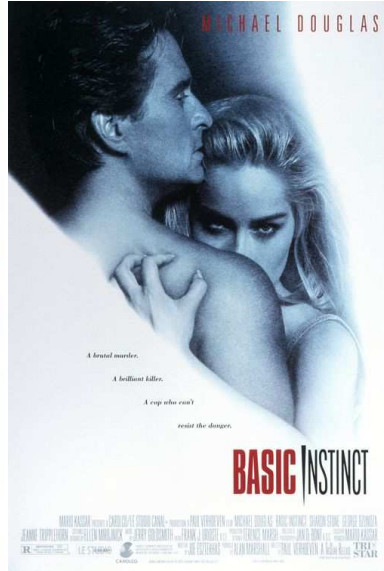Fig. 11. *Bad Influence.*   Fig. 12. *Basic Instinct.*   Fig. 13. *Black Snake Moan.*
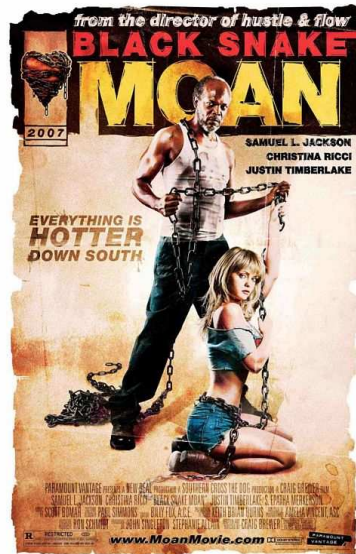

Fig. 14. *Black Swan.*   Fig. 15. *Black Swan.*   Fig. 16. *Black Swan.*

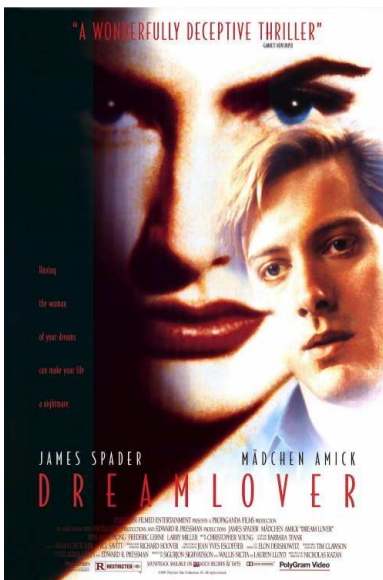Fig. 17. *Black Swan.*   Fig. 18. *Blue Sky.*   Fig. 19. *The Crush.*
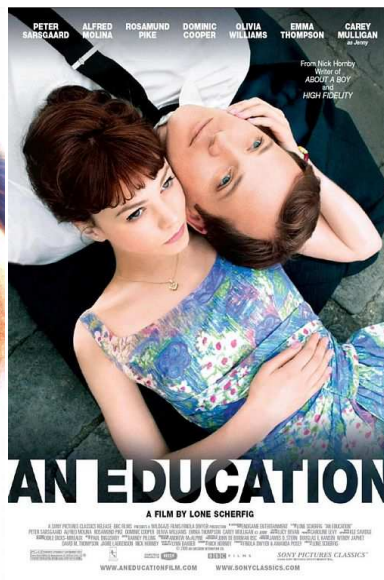

Fig. 20. *Dream Lover.*   Fig. 21. *An Education.*   Fig. 22. *Expired.*
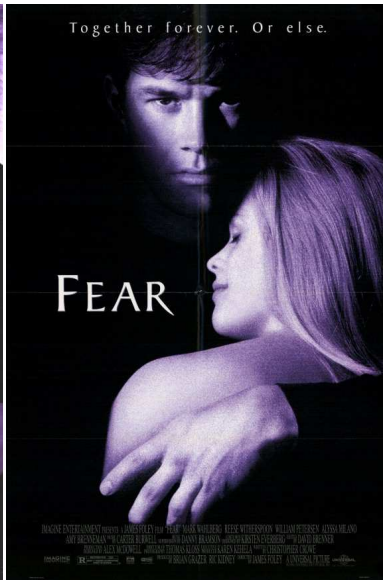
Fig. 23. *Fatal Attraction.*   Fig. 24. *Fear.*   Fig. 25. *Gia.*
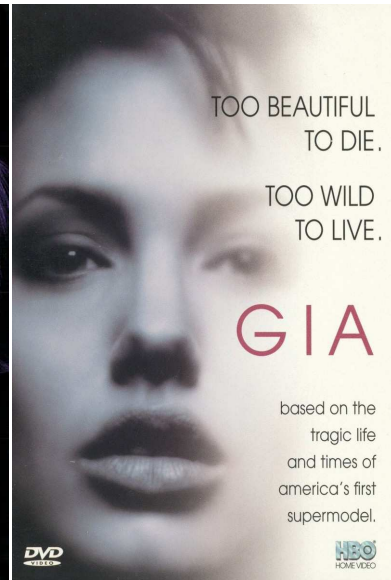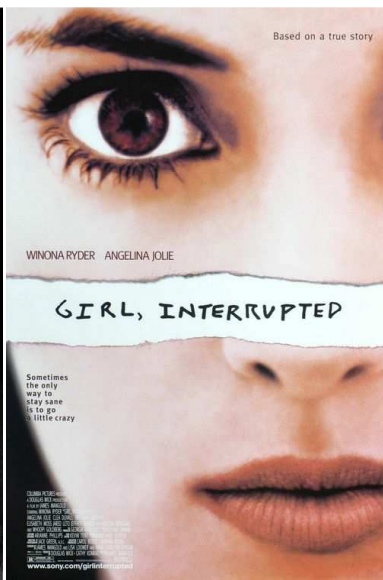
Fig. 26. *Gia.*   Fig. 27. *Girl, Interrupted.*   Fig. 28. *Girl, Interrupted.*
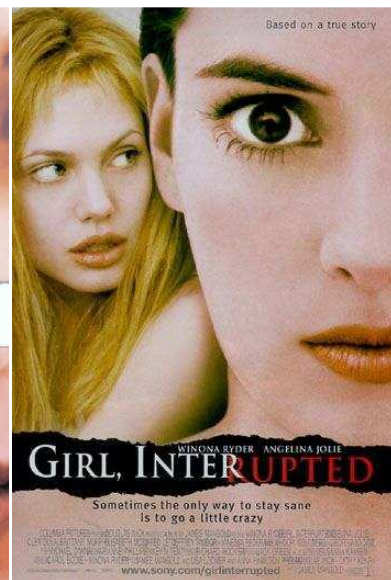
Fig. 29. *Lonely Hearts.*   Fig. 30. *Mad Love.*   Fig. 31. *Mad Love.*
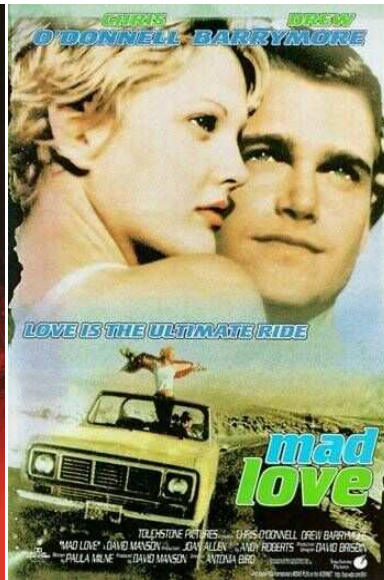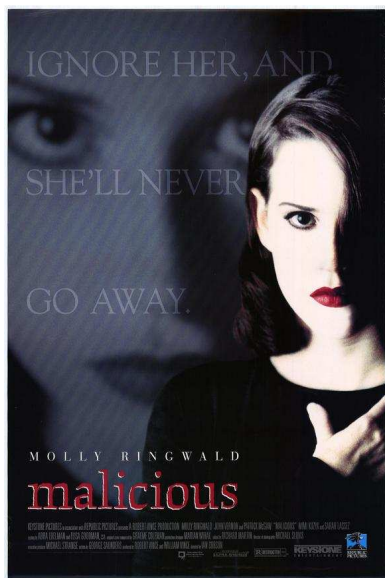
Fig. 32. *Malicious.*   Fig. 33. *Margot at the Wedding.*   Fig. 34. *Mommie Dearest.*
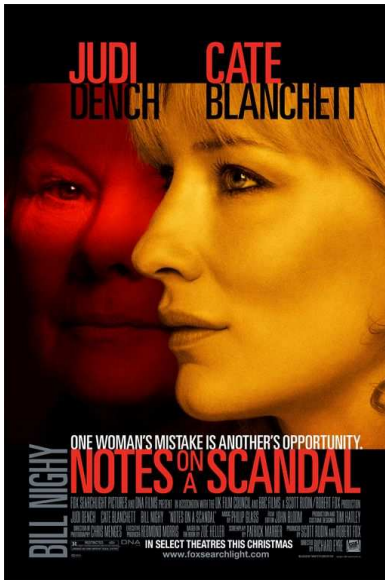
Fig. 35. *Notes on a Scandal.*   Fig. 36. *Obsessed.*   Fig. 37. *Original Sin.*

Fig. 38. *A Perfect Murder.*   Fig. 39. *Play Misty for Me.*   Fig. 40. *Prozac Nation.*

Fig. 41. *Romeo is Bleeding.*   Fig. 42. *Savage Grace.*   Fig. 43. *Savage Grace.*

Fig. 44. *Secretary.*   Fig. 45. *Single White Female.*   Fig. 46. *White Oleander.*

CHAPTER THREE: FILMS

"Sometimes everything's a clue, and what you think is paranoia is actually heightened

awareness"

Fredric Lehne, *Dream Lover*.

According to Altman, at times audiences recognize genre because of semantics, other

times because of syntactics (*Film/Genre* 89). Further, critics often examine films and genre

utilizing one—either semantics or syntactics—though Altman argues that "the term *genre* takes

on its full force only when semantic and syntactic similarities are simultaneously operative. In
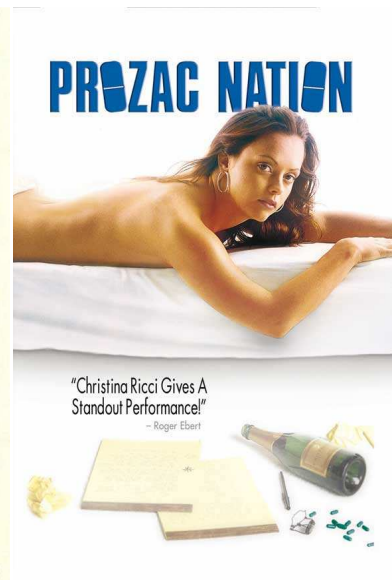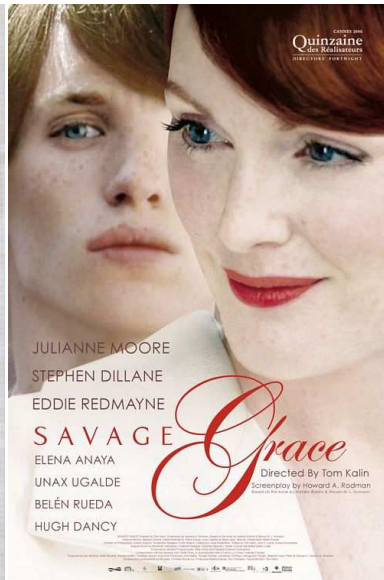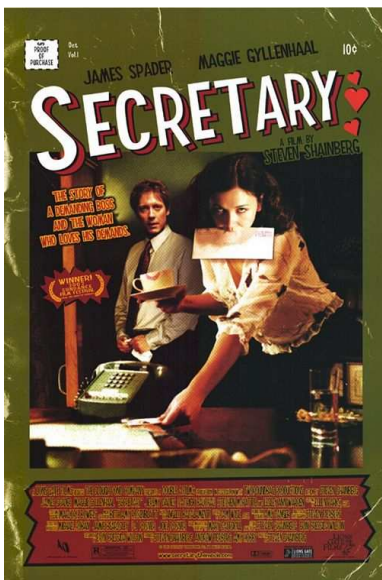
other words, instead of seeing these as alternative treatments, we need to see semantic and

syntactic approaches as co-ordinated" (*Film/Genre* 90). Therefore, this study's corpus was

evaluated first semantically then syntactically so as to interrogate the possibility of a shared

genre. This process is in line with Altman's claim that "genres are made and not born" (*The

American Film Musical* 115). Similarly, it is argued that "borderlines are made, not born"

(Robinson, *DSM IV Personality Disorders Explained* 74), so the process of genre creation may

be thought of in terms similar to the development of the disorder. This similarity between genre

and BPD will be explored after the possibility of a BPD genre is developed.

All the Semantic Pieces

Since BPD is not expressed identically across all who possess it, it follows that not all

films within this study need to present all elements similarly; some films will be more similar

than others, but this does not negate their belonging to the same genre. This follows Altman's

claim that "not all genre films relate to their genre in the same way or to the same extent" (*The

American Film Musical* 97), and as such, the following may appear to resonate more with some

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films in the corpus than with others. However, these various semantic elements are found to some extent in all the films in this study and when an exception seems to exist, explanation is given. Even if a film does not appear to conform to the generic claims made at a given point, when read in light of the claim it can be understood generically. These differences, which will be discussed further below, can be attributed to varying levels of genericity which, in this study, are related to the differing presentations and severities of BPD. In this section semantic elements will be considered.

Amongst this study's films, the overriding plot is one in which a character is invited into a situation where his or her preoccupations are made manifest and tension ensues. While tension and opposition are not unique elements amongst films, this corpus's focus is on conflict of a psychological nature. This opposition is most often created between two main characters where one character functions to trigger the manifestation of psychological distress of the other, though the existence of one main character is also possible as is the case in *Black Swan, Gia, Girl, Interrupted* and *Prozac Nation.* The conflict in these films follow a character who exhibits criteria leading to a probable diagnosis of BPD and the symptomatology associated with this disorder causes many of the events that develop the plot. That is, because of these symptoms the plot progresses. So if the characters lacked these symptoms, the plots would not develop in the manner that they do; the crux of the narrative depends on these characters' disturbed psychological state.

These films deal with the difficulties presented within relationships which are framed as being driven and/or complicated due to vanity, lust, envy, and/or greed. The pursuit of and submission to these sins are what are shown to be the demise of the relationships. It is because of lustful obsession or greedy desire that the relationships are complicated and ultimately fail.

Lust, mixed with envy, is what fuels character action in films such as *Fatal Attraction,*

Malicious, and *Obsessed.* In *Dream Lover, Original Sin,* and *A Perfect Murder* greed aids in the

progression of the plot and complicates the relationships. Similarly, in *Bad Influence* and *An*

Education it appears that vanity, lust, and greed define the actions of the characters. In the films

where the narrative focus may not appear to be on relationships, such as *Girl, Interrupted,*

Prozac Nation, Gia, and *Black Swan*, the emphasis on the protagonist's own intrapersonal

relationship is manifested interpersonally as well. For example, in *Girl, Interrupted* Susanna's

personal psychological experience is portrayed through her interactions with others and it is

through these interactions that much of her condition is revealed. Likewise, Nina's relationships

in *Black Swan* underscore that her presentation of mental illness is likely an effect of such

relationships in combination with her own obsessive nature.

These films all exhibit violence in some manner. This violence is initially exhibited by

the character with BPD and can be targeted towards him or herself, others, or both. The most

basic form of violence is mention of violence rather than visual portrayal. This is usually

presented in discussions of what the character with BPD has done in the past either to him or

herself or to others. An example of the mention of violence is when Pauline states that Margot

tried to murder her when they were little in *Margot at the Wedding.* Violence also occurs in the

various means of self-harm whether it is cutting or drug overdose; what makes it violence is

intent to do harm. Finally, the presentation of violence toward others is common and is often

directed toward the character with BPD's object of affection or anyone who is in the way of

obtaining that person. This violence is explained by the character Lizzie in *Prozac Nation*: "I

understand now how people sometimes want to kill their lovers, eat their lovers, inhale the ashes

of their dead lovers. It's the only way to possess another person."

The end of the plot is the abolishment of tension most often through death or the denial/acceptance of one's mental state through perpetuity of behavior; rarely do these films end in change. This may be due to popular understanding of psychological disorders not as illness in the same sense that physical injury and disease are, and, therefore, cannot be treated similarly. According to Stephen Lawrie, for the public, "Psychiatric disorders are often attributed to a cognitive or moral failing and/or to heredity factors for which there is no treatment" (129). If this is the popular view of psychological disorders, then it follows that the only plausible endings to a story about someone who has a psychological disorder is to have them continue to have the disorder or to have them die as a means to eliminate it.

As these films were selected for their exhibition of BPD there is within all of them a character that presents BPD criteria. For a character to be viewed as having a personality disorder a few things must be considered. According to the *DSM-IV-TR*:

Only when personality traits are inflexible and maladaptive and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute Personality Disorders. The essential feature of a Personality Disorder is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture and is manifested in at least two of the following areas: cognition, affectivity, interpersonal functioning, or impulse control (Criterion A). This enduring pattern is inflexible and pervasive across a broad range of personal and social situations (Criterion B) and leads to clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (Criterion C). The pattern is stable and of long duration, and its onset can be traced back at least to adolescence or early adulthood (Criterion D). The pattern is not better accounted for as a manifestation or consequence of another mental disorder

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(Criterion E) and is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication, exposure to a toxin) or a general medical condition (e.g., head trauma) (686)

For a diagnosis of BPD, at least five of the following nine criteria must be met:

1. frantic efforts to avoid real or imagined abandonment

2. a pattern of unstable and intense interpersonal relationships characterized by alternating between extremes of idealization and devaluation

3. identity disturbance: markedly and persistently unstable self-image or sense of self

4. impulsivity in at least two areas that are potentially self-damaging (e.g., spending, sex, substance abuse, reckless driving, binge eating).

5. recurrent suicidal behavior. gestures or threats. or self-mutilating behavior

6. affective instability due to a marked reactivity of mood (e.g., intense episodic dysphoria, irritability, or anxiety usually lasting a few hours and only rarely more than a few days)

7. chronic feelings of emptiness

8. inappropriate, intense anger or difficulty controlling anger (e.g., frequent displays of temper, constant anger, recurrent physical fights)

9. transient, stress-related paranoid ideation or severe dissociative symptoms (710)

Basically this can be understood as an unstable character that fluctuates with regard to mood and perception of self and other that partakes in impulsive, destructive behavior. This instability and fluctuation may vary in terms of intensity as well as symptomatic area of focus though all films present an unstable character. The goals of this character are presented as self-serving, targeting others to fulfill vanity, lust, envy, or greed. Therefore, the fluctuations are demonstrated as either a manipulative tactic to achieve these goals or a consequence of not achieving these goals. What

also appears to be key is that the character with BPD exists in relation to at least one other person. This other person is necessary as a target and/or trigger for the oscillating cognition and behavior. Further, the deadly sins of vanity, lust, envy, and greed are best and fully realized in relation to others. While the non-BPD character is often the one who invites the character with BPD into his or her life, they are presented as the victim of the character with BPD. Ultimately, as is seen in most of the films, these seemingly sinful motivations lead to the character with BPD exhibiting wrath in the form violent behavior towards others and self. The final act of violence, resulting in death, is perpetrated upon the character with BPD either by him or herself or another.

Within the corpus of BPD films, there are a few objects that appear with great frequency: cigarettes, telephones, and weapons. Attached to these objects are cultural associations that extend beyond the material presence of the objects themselves. The three objects connect these films generically through iconography and can be further associated with BPD. These three areas of iconography call the audience to consider psychological phenomena through the symbolic use of the objects (Wedding, Boyd, & Niemiec 5). It is through their association with the psychological that make these objects generically relevant and semantic elements of the BPD genre.

The first of these objects are those related to substance abuse, most commonly and perhaps most noticeably smoking. Smoking, particularly by women, has evolved in its meaning over the last century. According to Lorraine Greaves "the cultural meaning of women's smoking as it relates to gender relations has moved from a symbol of being *bought* by men (prostitute), to being *like* men (lesbian/mannish/androgynous), to being *able to attract* men (glamourous/heterosexual)" (269; emphasis in original). These various associations are demonstrated within these films. After Nina is "seduced" by Thomas during rehearsal (his word)

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in *Black Swan*, she is offered a cigarette by Lily. Though he utilizes this term, he possesses all of the control relating this scene with the first association: being bought by men. This is further supported by the narrative as Nina is susceptible to Thomas's requests. The "being like men" association of smoking is represented by Barbara in *Notes on a Scandal.* Not only does her character lack an overtly feminine appearance, but her proclivity for female company leads one to assume that she is a lesbian. The last meaning of cigarette smoking is illustrated by *Fatal Attraction* where the first appearance of Alex has her sitting at the bar smoking. This is where she draws the attention of the male characters thereby demonstrating her ability to attract men. All three of these meanings feature in the corpus, but the most common, and the most capable of being applicable to men as well, are the association with being bought and being able to attract. These two concepts also connect with BPD through their interpersonal dependency and the filmic link with greed and lust.

Nearly every film in this corpus showcases cigarette smoking by the character with BPD. According to Elliot and Smith, those with BPD utilize smoking "as a desperate coping strategy" (14). This is similar to the use of other substances which fall under the diagnostic criteria of impulsivity. The utilization of addictive substances is viewed as impulsive behavior acted upon to avoid dysphoria or other negative symptoms. The films in this study do show the characters with BPD partaking in the use of other substances such as alcohol and illicit drugs.

Most of these films also showcase the characters drinking alcohol. This may not seem exceptional, but the use of alcohol is important in these films because it highlights pivotal moments. Often the two main characters meet someplace where alcohol is served such as a bar as in *Bad Influence, Fatal Attraction,* and *Play Misty for Me*, or at a party as in *Malicious,* or at an art gallery as in *Dream Lover* where Lena has wine spilled on her. In *Black Swan,* Nina

notices a wound on her finger while holding a flute of champagne and is later invited back to Thomas's place for a drink. This invitation for a drink is regularly used to continue the interaction between the characters as done in *Fatal Attraction* and *Obsessed.*

Though not as prevalent as smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol, there is also the use of illicit drugs. In *Basic Instinct* cocaine is taken by the characters. Lily offers Nina ecstasy then puts it in her drink when she refuses in *Black Swan.* Jay mentions that he took drugs during college in *Expired.* In *Gia,* drug addiction led to Gia's demise. Susanna overdoses on aspirin and alcohol in *Girl, Interrupted* and also smokes marijuana. The girls in the psychiatric hospital also hoard and trade the medication they are given. In *Interiors* it is mentioned that Flyn takes drugs. Casey is said to have overdosed in *Mad Love.* Margot smokes marijuana and steals pills in *Margot at the Wedding* and Lizzie also smokes marijuana and does ecstasy in *Prozac Nation.* The importance of this behavior is demonstrated by the claim that "Alcohol and substance abuse (including cigarette smoking) are associated with suicidal behavior among inpatients across psychiatric diagnoses" (Soloff 344). While these films do not all present suicidal behavior, as will be argued below this violence is externalized so as to have it inflicted upon the person with BPD by another person. The use of substances marks the person as both non-sympathetic and the ultimate casualty (villains generally smoke and drink, not innocent heroes). This is another sign of sin as the person with BPD acts as a glutton. Though from a BPD perspective, these are acts of impulsivity taken up to self-soothe similar to more violent acts of self-harm.

While the characters with BPD are shown to self-soothe, they are often also depicted on the phone. As a common object, the phone represents the binarism within BPD. As Ned Schantz describes it: "the phone accommodates an old and deep cinematic desire to be in two or more places at once, to transcend the limits of our individuality" (23). It is a regular occurrence

in these films for the phone to be ringing, for characters to be calling one another, and for characters to be asking and/or telling each other that they will call. This underscores the importance of relationships within these films as the characters exhibit a need to stay connected at all times while demonstrating the disrupted nature of communication amongst characters as there is disagreement about appropriate amount as well as the literal mediation and disconnection of communication through a phone. According to Schantz the phone is female (31). In this corpus, however, even the men utilize and depend upon the phone. For instance, Jay in *Expired* uses his phone for intimacy, dialing for phone sex which is suggested as his only human contact before he becomes involved with Claire. The need to stay connected relates to the fear of abandonment criteria of BPD. It is argued that the dependency of those with BPD leads them to "request or demand more contact . . . than is easy or appropriate to give" (Zanarini 33) and this lack of boundaries can be exhausting. However, modern technology, such as voice mail and email, can provide those with BPD with extra contact (34). As an iconic object, phones emphasize the psychological nature of these films thus distinguishing them from other films. Since phone use indicates that characters are not physically together, any interaction through the medium is cerebral, quite literally as the phone is positioned to the head. Moreover, the control or lack of control one has over telecommunication can be seen as psychological. Schantz further describes the phone as "the somewhat wobbly vehicle that, in its inherent vulnerability to interception, delay, misunderstanding, or disguise, dependably delivers the conditions of instability that make narrative possible" (23). This "instability" is essential for this corpus. For example, in *Fatal Attraction* Alex continually calls Dan to the point that he has to change his phone number. Her obsessive ringing and his rejection of her calls is shown to take a toll on her as she is shown alone in her apartment with only the phone, her mood erratic. Similarly, in

Prozac Nation, Lizzie constantly calls Rafe, but he will not answer causing her to say "why won't he pick up the phone? I'd never do this to him." Again, the character with BPD is presented as needing contact with the object of their attention, but that object refuses leading to psychological torment. So the abundance of phone use can be seen as an externalization of the BPD fear of abandonment, as an effort to avoid being alone. It further demonstrates the lack of boundaries exhibited by those with BPD and their extreme dependency. And, ultimately, it highlights the importance of relationships in these films as these characters are constantly connected even when they are physically separated.

The abundance of telephone use may also be suggestive of "hearing voices." This is obviously more rooted in reality and less delusional than full auditory hallucination which is reflective of the degree of psychosis present within BPD as compared to a disorder like schizophrenia. However, the obsessive nature of reaching for nonphysical communication and the desire for auditory stimulation where there is seemingly no control for either the desire or the satiation as it requires cooperation from another that is demonstrated by telephonic activity suggests psychological distress. The hearing of voices, according to Lisa Blackman and Valerie Walkerdine, "signify within many media representations as an indication that the person has lost the ability to control his or her own behaviour. The voices signify that the person is a risk, having lost the ability to distinguish self and other, and is consequently viewed as a danger to both him or herself and the public at large" (126). This perceived danger leads to the next common object, weapons.

These weapons need not always be targeted towards others, but may often be utilized for self-harm. Since the characters with BPD are presented as exhibiting anger towards others as well as themselves, a common instrument of violence is the knife. Sharp objects are commonly

used to threaten others and are then able to be turned on themselves. Those with BPD who use sharp objects may even have sharp objects used against them. Guns are not usually used by those with BPD, but may be used to kill them. This is an important distinguishing point, that in these films the character with BPD chooses sharp objects if a weapon is chosen which reflects the BPD criteria of self-harm since self-injury cannot be achieved through the use of a gun. If self-injurious behavior would be achieved through the use of sharp objects, it would follow that those who participate in such behavior would have access to and would be most comfortable using such instruments. For example, Alex in *Fatal Attraction* is explicitly shown to injure herself by slitting her wrists. In the final scenes of the film, she confronts Dan and Beth with a knife in her hand which she uses to cut into her own leg. Sharp objects are used as weapons in *Basic Instinct, Play Misty for Me,* and *Single White Female*. Self-injury is shown in *Prozac Nation, Savage Grace,* and *Secretary* in addition to *Fatal Attraction.* In *Gia* the eponymous character uses a switchblade to carve her obsession's name into her flesh. A bit similar is in *Fear* and *Malicious* with the characters with BPD having the objects of their attention's names tattooed into them: this is a type of injury created by a sharp object and in the former film he is shown to engrave the name himself.

While not always presented as objects, this corpus commonly has artistic elements. Generally the characters with BPD are associated with various forms of art in some manner be it that it is their profession, hobby, or patronage. There are also explicit references to art. With regard to music, in *Black Snake Moan* Lazarus plays and sings blues music and gets Rae to sing and play guitar; *Black Swan* is about ballet, specifically *Swan Lake*; in *The Crush* Adrian plays the piano; and in *An Education* Jenny plays the cello and David claims to be a cultured music and art lover. Dave in *Play Misty for Me* is a radio DJ and Evelyn calls in regularly to request the

song "Misty." Similarly, operas are referred to in these films. In *Notes on a Scandal* Barbara, while listening to Sheba and her husband argue, compares the situation to an opera by stating that "the opera was well into its final act." Also in this film when sitting on the bench in the final scene, Barbara asks the woman if she likes music (Handel's *Water Music*). *Madame Butterfly* is referenced in both *Fatal Attraction* and *Play Misty for Me*. In *Fatal Attraction* the opera is both Alex and Dan's favorite and Alex listens to it when she is shown sitting on the floor switching the light on and off. Evelyn says "it's Madame Butterfly time" when she has planned an evening for her and Dave. This is an important opera to be referenced as it is about a woman who kills herself because of the love she has for a man. The inclusion of this opera reinforces the preoccupation these women have towards these men and sets up the expectation that they will be killed at the end of the film.

Writing is also a creative endeavor within this study's films. *Basic Instinct's* Catherine, *Girl, Interrupted's* Susanna, *Interior's* Renata, *Margot at the Wedding's* Margot, and *Prozac Nation's* Lizzie are all referred to as writers. The plot of *Basic Instinct* revolves around Catherine's novels and the real life realization of the murders depicted within her books. In the film, the conflict is suggested as being fodder for her writing. For Lizzie in *Prozac Nation,* her psychological distress has caused her writer's block which by the end of the film she is able to alleviate through therapy and medication. Barbara in *Notes on a Scandal* also writes regularly in her journals as a means of therapeutic release. A book release party is the setting for Alex, who works at a publishing company, and Dan's initial meeting in *Fatal Attraction.* Finally, in *Play Misty for Me,* when living with Tobie, Evelyn calls herself Annabel, a direct reference to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee," another text about love and death.

Another creative venture is acting. *Mommie Dearest* is about the famous actor Joan Crawford. Flyn in *Interiors* acts and Joey reads manuscripts, but contemplates going back into acting. In *Original Sin* Julia loves theatre, is considered an actor, and participates in Carnival. When Luis confronts Julia he states that it was "Like a play. All of it. Lies." In *Blue Sky* Carly acts and dances and also buys creative things for her family: clarinet, camera, and baton. A bit similar to acting, *Gia* is about modeling which also incorporates photography. Ingrid in *White Oleander* was a photographer while her daughter, Astrid, creates artistic suitcases which depict key moments in her life. *Interior's* Eve did interior decorating, Nina's mother, Erica, in *Black Swan* is an artist, *Notes on a Scandal's* Sheba teaches art, and *A Perfect Murder's* Emily has an affair with the painter David. In *Dream Lover* Ray and Lena meet at an art gallery, and the painting of Dave plays an iconic role in *Play Misty for Me*. The association of mental illness with creativity and artistry is a common one.

An association with art gives the characters a purpose without overly connecting them with a specific profession. Those with mental illnesses are often portrayed in the media, including film, as lacking clear and stable careers (Wahl 123). Art is not only relatively vague and disconnected from others; it is a risky and inconsistent professional path to follow. This idea is demonstrated within these films as the characters mention what they aspire to be or would like to pursue, if the characters even discuss their careers at all. For example, Susanna in *Girl, Interrupted* would like to be a writer while Lizzie in *Prozac Nation* attends university for journalism, but suffers writer's block and is unable to fully attend to her craft.

Structuring Instability: Syntactics

Some films might fit syntactical elements, such as narrative strategy, less perfectly as set out below, but reading them from that point of view allows them to be understood in terms of the genre and to discover their generic operations. It must also be kept in mind that, as Altman states, "only in relation to other texts does any text deliver up a meaning" (*The American Film Musical* 110). This means that it is through the conflation of multiple films of the same genre that the elements functioning within a given text can be illuminated. I now move in this section to the syntactical definition of the BPD genre whereby the above elements are characteristically arranged and managed. Here, narrative strategy and character relationship to plot will be examined as well as use of opposing imagery.

The narrative strategy is one of oscillation while simultaneously expressing stagnation. This demonstrates the "stably unstable" nature of BPD. This rhythm is structured around character interaction with interactions causing shifts in the narrative. It is the character with BPD's perception of or goals with regard to these interactions that drive the narrative. Further, it is the character's BPD symptomatology that progresses the plot. Through the expression of various BPD symptoms, which vary depending on the character, the narrative is able to develop. The black and white, push and pull, back and forth nature of BPD is the narrative strategy utilized by these films.

One of the common key scenes is the introduction of the character with BPD and the invitation of that character into the life or lives of the other character(s). This sets up the expectation that the character with BPD will affect the other character(s), most likely negatively. The introduction scene is usually done in a public place so the character with BPD is not first seen in an intimate setting thus not marking them as a character with whom the audience should

necessarily identify with. The first character introduced in these films is commonly the character who invites the character with BPD into their life and that character is initially shown in their home (e.g. Dan in *Fatal Attraction,* Matt in *Mad Love,* Derek in *Obsessed,* Dave in *Play Misty for Me,* and Allie in *Single White Female*). This early association of the non-BPD character with their home not only serves to make them sympathetic characters, but begins the narrative at a stable point from which the insertion of the character with BPD will disrupt. In contrast to the private introduction of the non-BPD character, the public introduction of the character with BPD functions to distance the character and highlight that this character is initially separate from the private sphere. However, through the invitation scene, the character is allowed to enter into the private and disrupt the stability which was shown at the beginning of the narrative. It is important that the plot operate in this order, moving from the private to the public so as to create the expectation in the audience that the character with BPD will impose his or her instability upon the initial stability within the story. This is further foreseen when the private scene is a happy one that does not justify the public one. For instance, Dan in *Fatal Attraction* is shown to be happily married with a loving wife and young daughter. He is also depicted as successful in his career. Therefore, his initial meeting, and subsequent rendezvous, with Alex are not warranted by an unhappy home life. The introduction and invitation also occurs in films that do not portray two main characters. In *Black Swan* and *Girl, Interrupted* both Nina and Susanna, respectively, are in conflict with themselves and are, therefore, presented in opposing settings. For Nina this means she is shown both at the ballet studio and at home, while Susanna is shown at home and at the psychiatric hospital. The back and forth between these two locations demonstrates the opposition within their psyches. They introduce and invite themselves into conflict with the assistance of those around them. This will be discussed further below.

Once the character with BPD is introduced and invited into the lives of the other characters, conflict inevitably occurs. Initially, the relationship is pleasant, but then it turns and the non-BPD character wants out of the relationship they have with the character with BPD. These films then showcase an attempt to separate which the character with BPD does not allow. The non-BPD character finds out that the character with BPD has psychological problems (these depend on the specific character, but usually are related to obsession or lies). However, the non-BPD character realizes that they are in too deep and that the character with BPD will not let go.

One of the most pivotal scenes in these films is the ending. The most common conclusion has the character with BPD dying, usually being killed by another character, though suicide and "natural" death are also options. The next type of ending is one in which there is a return to the beginning, where the character with BPD appears to have gone through the events without change as the ending literally mirrors scenes from the opening of the film. Finally, though rare, there is the possibility to end in a less pessimistic manner though it is far from a "happy ending."

Bad Influence, Dream Lover, Fatal Attraction, Fear, Lonely Hearts, Malicious, Obsessed, A Perfect Murder, Play Misty for Me, Romeo is Bleeding, Savage Grace, and *Single White Female* all end with the character with BPD being killed. The manner in which the homicide is committed varies: shooting in *Bad Influence, Fatal Attraction, A Perfect Murder,* and *Romeo is Bleeding*; stabbing in *Savage Grace* and *Single White Female*; strangulation in *Dream Lover*; electric chair in *Lonely Hearts*; and fall in *Fear* (out of the window after being stabbed with a peace pipe), *Malicious* (out of the window), *Obsessed* (from one storey to another, onto a table having a chandelier fall on top of), and *Play Misty for Me* (out of the window).

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As noted before, the original ending to *Fatal Attraction* had the character of Alex commit suicide though this did not test well amongst audiences so it was reshot to have her killed instead. According to Paul Soloff, "Recurrent suicidal behavior has been termed the 'behavioral specialty of the borderline patient'" (333). It has been reported that 70% of those with BPD have attempted suicide, with a completion rate of up to 10% (333). These statistics illustrate both how serious and prevalent self-harm is amongst those with BPD. What the *Fatal Attraction* example demonstrates is a discomfort as well as a disapproval of suicide as an appropriate ending. So where self-harm even to the extent of suicide may be a plausible outcome for those who have BPD, it is not one that audiences expect or want to see. Therefore, this self-harm must be inflicted upon the character from an external source turning it into "justifiable homicide," an act of self-defense, rather than murder. Also, suicide is often viewed as causing more questions than answers and most mainstream film audiences prefer films that end conclusively, leaving few open ends unless those open ends are ones that are left hopeful or positive. Suicide does not afford the opportunity for explanation or justice if that is what is felt is needed. Suicide is shown or, rather, alluded to in two of this study's films: *Black Swan* and *Interiors*. In *Interiors,* the character Eve is shown walking out into the waves of the ocean not to be seen again. Nina in *Black Swan* is depicted as stabbing herself during a delusional altercation with herself/Lily and during her performance on stage the blood is shown through her costume, but the audience is left seeing her fall behind the set where she lies in her blood. It is assumed that she dies due to her collapse and the popular ending to *Swan Lake* in which the characters commit suicide as well as the final camera focus on the lights. There is also explicit suicide as well as mention of suicide in *Girl, Interrupted*, but it is not of the character with BPD.

The films that end in a more cyclical manner are *Basic Instinct, Black Snake Moan, Blue Sky, The Crush, An Education, Expired, Girl, Interrupted, Margot at the Wedding, Notes on a Scandal,* and *Original Sin. Basic Instinct* ends with the same scene that it opens with: a couple in bed. The opening has the woman murder the man with an ice pick while the ending in an act of suspense has the woman reaching over yet not grabbing anything. The final shot is of an ice pick under the bed, however, leaving the audience to assume the intent and inevitability of the scene. *Notes on a Scandal* also ends with the same scene that it began with, this time a woman sitting on a park bench. In the opening she is shown there alone while in the ending she is shown conversing with another woman: the very thing she, Barbara, is shown to do elsewhere in the narrative. This demonstrates that Barbara will continue the behavior that she has by the end of the film pursued at least twice with, first, Jennifer and then Sheba. *Blue Sky* ends with Carly getting a new hairstyle just as she did at the beginning of the film. *Margot at the Wedding* ends with Margot chasing after the bus to join Claude therefore showing them riding side-by-side just as they do in the opening of the film. A bit different from the others, *Original Sin* ends with Julia and Luis in Morocco showing that Julia was able to escape prison and convince Luis to stay with her. Furthermore, she is shown still cheating at cards, which suggests that she is likely to continue her previous behavior and little was learned from previous events.

The ending to *Expired* has Claire back at her job checking parking meters just as she was at the beginning. Even though Claire is not the potential character with BPD (Jay is) this return to the opening scene shows a return to the way things were at the beginning before Claire and Jay became involved. This is further underscored by the scene before the last in which Jay is shown trying to call, but receives no answer, as well as the scene before this one in which Claire appears to be done with Jay. Moreover, in the final scene, as Claire is shown working, she asks

in voice-over "what did your love do?" additionally highlighting that their relationship is over and things are as they were at the beginning. Even though the ending mirrors the beginning in *Expired,* there could arguably be a change implied by Claire's voice-over and Jay's calling attempt; however, none of this is shown and the audience is left to assume that the relationship has left Jay unchanged or at least unimportant.

The ending to *The Crush* does have Adrian committed to a psychiatric hospital where she expresses remorse for her previous actions which would suggest a positive move in the narrative. However, as the film ends it is revealed that she is now "crushing" on her doctor demonstrating that the only thing that has changed is the setting and object of her obsession. Though in *An Education* the character of Jenny appears to have changed by the ending, the character who may have BPD, David, shows no sign of change and it is revealed that his behavior is repetitive. His lack of appearance and explanation at the end implies, it could be argued, that his behavior will continue since he is not called into question or responsibility; he is released.

While nearly the entire narrative of *Girl, Interrupted* takes place within the confines of a psychiatric hospital and the character of Susanna is released stating that she was "Declared healthy and sent back into the world. My final diagnosis: A recovered borderline," I argue that the film's ending is still cyclical as it shows Susanna leaving the hospital in the same taxi that she arrived in. This frames the film in such a manner as to show that nothing has changed: the world is exactly the same as it was when Susanna entered the hospital and as such she may be as well. The words she utters directly after those above are: "What that means, l still don't know. Was I ever crazy? Maybe. Or maybe life is." This calls into question her entire mental state as well as her diagnosis. Further, Susanna's frequent flashbacks as well as her sense perception could cast doubt over the whole narrative, including this final scene.

In almost a similar manner, *Black Snake Moan* has the character of Rae in her own confinement, but the ending of the film has her and Ronnie together again with him having a panic attack and her experiencing a flashback. Here, even though Rae is clearly suffering as she has through the entire film, she is tasked with comforting Ronnie through his anxiety as she did at the beginning of the narrative. She does appear to have learned some coping strategies from her time with Lazarus: as her anxiety goes up and she enters her flashback, she grasps the jewelry chain around her which seems to be able to calm her. She then holds Ronnie and sings to him; music she shared with Lazarus. So by the end of this film little seems to have changed as both Rae and Ronnie are psychologically distressed, as they were at the beginning, and Rae is still treated animalistically through the donning of chains suggesting that the only way to "tame" her behavior is through confinement (she is perhaps, arguably, similarly confined through her marriage to Ronnie where he places chains upon her).

This return to the beginning as exemplified by the endings of these films demonstrate BPD either realistically through a perspective of oscillation or negatively through a perspective of stagnancy. When viewed as oscillation, these films can be viewed as illustrating the fluctuating aspects of BPD whereby the beginning and end are simply the same point, but there is meaningful variation in between. As such, if the narrative were to continue, so would the oscillation; the narrative just conveniently begins and ends at a similar point for congruency. Conversely, stagnation would view these films as starting and finishing at the point with everything in between being inconsequential. A continuation of the narrative would extend the stationary plot indefinitely so that if the conclusion were to be inserted at any point along the plot, the state of the characters and their resulting actions would not differ depending on which

point was chosen. This latter view sees BPD as "stably unstable" (Silk et al. 43). This will be developed more fully below as the corpus's narrative strategy is examined.

Not all the films in the corpus ended in violence or a return to the beginning: *Mad Love, Prozac Nation, Secretary,* and *White Oleander* are the four exceptions. In these films, the circumstances of the character with BPD are changed, though the endings are not the traditional Hollywood happy ending. In *Mad Love* Casey is eventually taken to the hospital by her boyfriend Matt after their spree where he realizes that she indeed is suffering psychological distress. The last time he sees her is when she is being escorted into the hospital by her parents. The final scene of the film shows Matt reading a letter from Casey where she states (literally in voice-over) that she has moved to Chicago where the noise is no longer that which was in her head and that she is proud of the love they had. A flashback of their time together is shown as Matt reads the letter. So it is gathered from this final scene that Casey is doing better, or at least she claims to be as she is not shown; all the audience gets is the voice-over just as all Matt gets is the letter. Therefore, there is no way of knowing for sure that Casey is in fact understanding and handling her psychological state especially when considering that previously in the narrative she was the one who was in denial about her issues. Whether or not Casey is mentally stable aside, the film ends with the split of the couple illustrating that someone with BPD cannot simultaneously be in a relationship and be treated, and that the only way for the person with BPD to stabilize is for them to be removed.

In a unique ending, *Secretary* has Lee and Grey marry and together seemingly happily. Lee is treated sadistically and animalistically throughout the film, where she trades one abuse (self) for another (Grey). The progression of the plot appears to present an acceptance of one's self (Lee even listens to a tape called "How to Come Out as a Dominant/Submissive"), but the

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abuse by Grey further ingrains Lee's psychological state. Since Lee is shown as coping through

self-harm, this may be more akin to a cyclical ending as her mental state is not shown to have

changed; only the expression of it has.

Since the character with BPD is often invited into the life of another and then expelled in

some manner, these films require the presence of two main characters: the one with BPD and the

one that he or she affects. This relationship propels the narrative from the key scenes of

introduction/invitation to ending. For films with more of a singular focus, this dual character

relationship can be achieved through a combination of multiple secondary characters and self

(expressed through voice-over and flashback [*Girl, Interrupted* and *Prozac Nation*] or

hallucination [*Black Swan*]). From this the character's opposition is made externally manifest in

their perception of self which embodies their own anxieties along with the opinions and concerns

of the society around them. It is because of these relationships that the plot progresses.

In the films where the focus is on a single character, it is that character's struggles with

self which are often demonstrated externally through various interpersonal relationships that

progress the plot. *Black Swan, Girl, Interrupted,* and *Prozac Nation* importantly showcase self-

harm in their narratives. Self-injury is reported by those with BPD to help regulate intense

dysphoria and distress, and researchers have reported a relationship between self-injury and

dissociation which leads to the suggestion that such behavior is done to relieve these symptoms

such as depersonalization (Paris 184). The link between self-harm and dissociation is salient for

these films because I am arguing that the characters with BPD are utilizing their dissociation to

create a pseudo second main character to which they are working against. The fact that all three

main characters in these films, Nina, Susanna, and Lizzie, employ self-harm supports the claim

that they are experiencing dissociation. This of course is coupled with the techniques of

analepsis (flashback) and voice-over, and the sense of character hallucination.

Girl, Interrupted and *Prozac Nation* utilize analepsis and voice-over to help create a

sense that the characters of Susanna and Lizzie are fighting themselves and that this contention is

what is progressing the plot. The cinematic techniques of analepsis and voice-over are used to

help advance the plot and reveal aspects of the story that would otherwise be unknown. It is

through homodiegetic external analepsis that the audience is able to understand Susanna's

mental state not only through her act of flashing back, but through the revealing of past events

that both impact how she is now as well as further exemplify her attitude and behavior through

the way she was then. Voice-over acts as a route of access to the minds of the characters with

BPD. It helps to progress the plot and provide information perhaps otherwise not had. The use

of voice-over also creates a separation from the character displayed since the audio is non-

diegetic. Since it is a narration technique seen separate from the character shown, it further

creates a split in the character.

Hallucination functions in *Black Swan* by questioning what Nina perceives. These

hallucinations, a product of her mind, work against Nina themselves as they distract her and

cause her to act erratically. There are several occasions in which she sees herself; thus the film

literally creates another character which is her. In one of the last scenes of the film, Nina is

shown fighting what she believes to be herself, again reinforcing the idea that her opposing

character is herself. The development of this opposition is aided by the other characters in the

film, namely her mother, Erica, the director, Thomas, and her competition, Lily.

Within this corpus there is a use of contrasting imagery, namely the use of black and

white and fire and water. This is considered a syntactical characteristic because it is only through

the use of both contrasting elements that meaning is given. It is common for the characters with BPD to wear either black or white and for the settings to be extreme in tone (either stark white or dark). Alex in *Fatal Attraction* is portrayed as wearing either black or white and her apartment is nearly all white. When Dan and his family are first shown they are all clothed in white and are often shown in that color. Encountering Alex for the first time, she is wearing black. This suggests that the Gallagher family is "innocent" and Alex is the villain, though her back and forth in dress color highlights her fluctuation in thought, mood, and behavior. Another clear example of the use of black and white is *Black Swan* in which all characters and settings are black, white, and shades of grey, except for Nina's room which incorporates pink. The color pink illustrates her naïveté, virginity, childlike oppression, and the mix of white with red which she inevitably wears at the end of the film. The lack of color underscores the BPD propensity for "black and white" thinking. The opposition of fire and water affords a similar suggestion. Through this contrast the extreme fluctuations are further made visible. In *Fatal Attraction,* Alex and Dan meet for the second time in the rain and it seems innocent enough as she offers her umbrella since his breaks. When they go back to her place for their affair, there are barrels filled with fire. This film goes back and forth between presenting rain and these barrels. Fire and water are also demonstrating through Alex's smoking and the use of the tap in the kitchen. As noted above, most of these films have the characters with BPD smoke and they often do so in contrast to liquid, whether it is rain, a pool, or a bath such as Nina's smoking with Lily which is immediately followed by Nina in the bath. Hedy in *Single White Female* is shown in the shower and bath on several occasions and this is contrasted with the end of the film which presents the flames of the basement furnace. *Mad Love* demonstrates the most apparent example of this juxtaposition in a clear cut from a waterfall to a fire. The union of these two opposing poles, fire

and water, are exemplified in *Fatal Attraction* with the rabbit in the boiling pot and the whistling tea kettle near the end.

It is through the aforementioned semantic and syntactic elements that this corpus operates and differs from other generic definitions. The perspectival emphasis for this study is psychological so that if these films appear to share elements with other genres, the defining characteristic is the stress of the psychological. When viewed through this BPD lens as described above these films can be understood as belonging to this genre. It is not problematic for these films to also be considered as part of another genre. The goal is to argue that they also possess the semantic and syntactic characteristics necessary to be read in light of the genre defined here and that these generic elements were embedded within the films. What this means for the concept of genre and these films pragmatically will be explored below.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRAGMATICS

"I can use it anyway I want. It's a sword, cuts both ways"

Faye Dunaway, *Mommie Dearest*.

The previous two chapters have put forth the overarching conventions found amongst the corpus's paratexts and films. In this chapter I will be utilizing those findings to examine the pragmatics of this study. After putting forth his semantic/syntactic approach to genre, Altman realized that different audiences might perceive genres differently due to variation in recognition of semantic and syntactic elements (*Film/Genre* 207). Altman added pragmatics to semantics and syntactics so as to have an approach that "addresses the fact that every text has multiple users; considers why different users develop different readings; theorizes the relationship among those users; and actively considers the effect of multiple conflicting uses on the production, labelling, and display of films and genres alike" (Altman *Film/Genre* 214). To attend to the pragmatics of this study, the paratextual and cinematic will be united with critical discourse so as to extrapolate the various uses of these texts. The use of film reviews aligns with Steve Neale's assertion that various discourses, including the press, play a role in the construction of a film's "narrative image" ("Questions of Genre" 48-49). Furthermore, Jason Mittell argues that genres should be regarded as "discursive practices" whereby constitution is achieved through definition, interpretation, and evaluation (8). Therefore, the meaning and use of this study's genre is not understood to be solely within each individual cinematic text, but, rather, between them collectively and their paratexts, including critical discourse. To arrive at the pragmatics of this study, first, what this corpus reveals with regard to mental illness will be considered before moving into a discussion of genre implications. Finally, the limitations and suggestions for future research will be reviewed.

Making Sense of Madness

The purpose of this study is not to criticize the portrayal of mental illness within film, though the nature of the corpus necessitates it pragmatically. I will present the common themes with regard to mental illness as they are manifest within these films and consider how they function stereotypically. As such, the mentally ill as bestial, immoral, possessed, violent, creative, and untreatable as well as negative conceptions of the mental health profession will be discussed as perpetuated by the media because of historical understandings of mental illness (Wahl 114).

It is argued that those with mental illnesses are commonly portrayed as "less than human" (Wahl 47) harkening back to animalistic perceptions and treatments of those deemed mad. Wahl states that it was believed that the insane were incapable of recovering and would only get worse until they were mentally "little more than animals" (118). While it is claimed that this bestial characteristic is made visible through appearance, in this corpus this assertion is not true. Within these films the characters with BPD do not present the stereotypical appearance of madness: disheveled hair and clothing, wide eyed, awkward in movement and speech, and an overall sense of unattractiveness. Rather, it is quite the opposite as these characters are regarded as appealing, attractive, and capable of seduction. In this way they present a different manner of bestial through their ability to charm. However, those with BPD are portrayed as immoral being motivated by sinful desires. Western media, including film, maintains elements of the medieval association between madness and immorality (Harper 32). The lack of virtues within these characters likens them to beasts that are driven by "basic instincts." Rob Gonsalves even describes Lizzie of *Prozac Nation* as "a young woman who has no idea how to get it together and behave like a human being" ("Prozac Nation"). From this statement it is revealed that this

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character's behavior is not viewed as being compatible with humanity. As an additional example, Margot in *Margot at the Wedding*, Lisa in *Obsessed*, Evelyn in *Play Misty for Me*, and Barbara in *Savage Grace* are all referred to as "monsters" in film reviews (Moore "Margot at the Wedding"; Williams "Obsessed DVD"; Greenspun "Play Misty for Me"; Burr "Savage Grace' Studies a Crime of Decadence"). Numerous other references are made associating the characters with BPD to non-human creatures, but to forego creating a list they will not be cited though a few will be mentioned below when discussing the link to possession. The connection to the primitive, bestial, and immoral is also exhibited paratextually through the film titles. For instance, *Basic Instinct*, *Fatal Attraction*, *Malicious, Obsessed, Original Sin*, and *Savage Grace* all suggest base desires and actions. *Fear* and *Black Snake Moan*, which is named after a song about fear, both evoke a primitive and universal emotion brought about by terror and the unknown: things that are generally below human. *Black Snake Moan* also explicitly mentions an animal in its title as does *Black Swan* with both titles using the color black to suggest darkness and, again, fear.

These characters further exhibit animalistic behavior through their killing of animals. This occurs with surprising frequency amongst these films. For example, Alex in *Fatal Attraction* famously kills the young Ellen's pet bunny by boiling it. The killing of the non-BPD characters' pets by the character with BPD also occurs in *Single White Female* (a dog), *Malicious* (a cat), and *Fear* (a dog), while in *Original Sin* the character with BPD kills her own pet bird. The killing of animals, particularly pets, is not a common occurrence in films so the prevalence of it amongst this corpus speaks to the level of depravity associated with these characters. The fact that they are able to so easily kill an innocent pet makes them seem like a wild animal that has made its way onto the property and viciously attacked the pet. Also, these

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acts are perpetrated to further their agendas, agendas that the audience is likely to perceive as immoral in the first place.

The treatment of the characters with BPD also demonstrates the link between mental illness and the bestial. It is often suggested that the only way to control the character with BPD is through animalistic constraint. For instance, in *Black Snake Moan* the only way, apparently, for Rae to be "cured" is for Lazarus to chain her. In Amber Wilkinson's review of the film she comments on Lazarus's method of "curing" Rae: "And how does he go about this? I know, you're thinking rehab, maybe, or a visit to the local shrink. But no. Clearly the best way to fix this little girl right up is to chain her to the radiator" ("Black Snake Moan"). Similarly, in *Secretary* Lee's psychological problems are kept in check by appeasing them through sado-masochistic abuse; that is, by being disciplined. In these two examples the women with BPD are only portrayed as being able to be "tamed" through disciplinary treatment that would be acted upon an animal. This is the type of treatment that would have been utilized in mental institutions previously when those who were mentally ill were viewed as beasts and therefore should be treated as such. These films perpetuate these conceptions even if those viewing the films do not hold those beliefs as demonstrated through reviews like Wilkinson's above. Nick Rogers, in his review of *Secretary*, states that Lee was "released from psychiatric care before she's really ready" ("Heroes of the Zeroes: Secretary"). With regard to the same film, Ross Anthony argues that "it seemed a commentary on how those with serious issues find a way to make themselves happy, not by working out their issues, but by working with them. If this is the case, then this commentary isn't very inspirational, at best bittersweet" ("Makin' Typo's: Secretary"). This again seems to reflect an understanding of mental illness in an animalistic context. To work *out* issues and problems would be human, it would be rational. To work *with* something would be

more primitive. Also, when dealing with an animal instinctual drives cannot be worked *out* logically through conversation and common understanding. Rather, rewards and punishment are utilized to work *with* their natural instincts.

Other stereotypes of madness have been found within this corpus of films besides those related to animalism. According to Cross, "psychiatry has failed to distance itself from traditional notions of possession, violence, and creativity" (198) and these three concepts are located within these films. With regard to possession, the immorality of the characters with BPD and evil references within reviews exemplify this notion. To illustrate, Alex of *Bad Influence* has been called "demonic" (Gleiberman "Bad Influence") and "El Diablo" (Kempley "Bad Influence") while Margot of *Margot at the Wedding* was labeled "a monster" (Moore "Margot at the Wedding"); Barbara of *Notes on a Scandal* "vampiric" (Biancolli "Notes on a Scandal: Gothic Thriller Full of Sordid Trysts"), a "gorgon" and a "vampiress" (Croce "Children of the Future, Children of the Past"); and Lisa of *Obsessed* a "she-devil" (Goldsmith "Obsessed: Crazy Right Now"). This concept of possession is also demonstrated in their charming and seductive nature whereby they are able to lure others in, attempting to possess them. Further, this possession turns into obsession as the characters with BPD become obsessed with the object they are trying to possess. Herein lays traces of the belief that madness can be caught if it does not kill you; that once in the clutches of the madman one will become mad, like being bitten by a vampire. The idea of possession was demonstrated through the possessive body positions depicted within the film posters. Further, the gazes portrayed within the posters not only worked to suggest the mad possession within the characters, but to position them animalistically as if they were predators stalking their prey. This leads to the next traditional notion of mental illness: violence.

According to Wahl the representation of those with psychological disorders as violent not only appears often, but is characteristic of media portrayals (65). Wahl (80) and Walker et al. (176) claim that those with psychological disorders are not violent or dangerous, at least not any more than any other group of people. Rather, it is substance abuse that is reported as the leading cause of violence (Wahl 81; Walker et al. 176). As noted in the previous chapter, one of the semantic elements within this corpus was substance abuse: namely cigarettes, but also alcohol and illicit drugs. The explicit and conventional abuse of substances by those with BPD within these films might help to explain these characters' violent behavior. Also, to further distance these films from misconceived stereotypes, they agree with other claims made by Wahl. He argues that in contrast to many media portrayals, those with mental illnesses are more of a threat to themselves than others (80). Moreover, media often depict those with psychological disorders as violent towards strangers when actually violence is more likely to occur towards known parties (82). Both of these claims are represented within this study's films. Self-harm is found in *Black Swan, Girl, Interrupted, Prozac Nation,* and *Secretary*; suicidal attempts/gestures are in *Fatal Attraction, Savage Grace, Prozac Nation, Girl, Interrupted,* and *Mad Love*; and suicide occurs in *Interiors* (after an attempt) and presumably in *Black Swan*. According to Fuery, "Another variation of the animality is the suicidal mad person whose madness positions them outside the rational social order" (37). Therefore, these acts of self-harm could be read as further associating the characters with BPD with the bestial. This is because acts of self-harm are generally understood as irrational and not the behavior of a logical human being. However, as previously stated, self-harm is highly prevalent amongst those with BPD and is often considered one of the defining diagnostic criteria. As such, if Fuery's posited association with the animalistic is true, this is problematic even though animals are not known to purposely harm

themselves. This association seems to be illogical as animals generally do anything to protect themselves with humans being the only beings that kill themselves.

To Wahl's next point, the violence not inflicted upon themselves is generally directed towards their lover or their lover's family, not just random people. When intending to use criminal behavior to achieve their goal the entire time, such as in *Lonely Hearts* or *Original Sin*, the characters with BPD intimate themselves with their victims first. In this way the link between mental illness and violence is not eradicated or any longer so clearly distanced. The evil of mental illness is now something closer. This may reflect a very specific fear. Many of these films are regarded as morality tales and, therefore, the notion that madness is brought upon through sin is reinforced. Having the person with BPD, the predator, be someone known illustrates that sin and evil is willingly and intimately welcomed into these "victims'" lives. If the characters with BPD were strangers, then there would really be no lesson aside from locking the doors or not going out at night. By ascribing the characters with mental illness with evil traits, they begin to embody what results when one partakes in immoral behavior. Therefore, madness as punishment is perpetuated as the mad character possesses ill traits and the non-mad character and the audience is able to learn whatever lesson the narrative is trying to put forth: not indulge in some sin whether it is lust or greed, or to simply just be more careful when letting people into one's life.

Stephen Harper argues that Wahl's and anti-stigma groups' concerns about media portrayals of those with mental illnesses as violent is flawed. He claims that there is evidence, or at least that the correlation cannot be denied, that those with psychological disorders are in fact more prone to violence than those who are not mentally ill (43). Harper argues that violence is enacted as a reaction to social oppression and lack of power (46). However, in this study the

characters with BPD are not presented as lacking, at least not materialistically. They appear to be well off financially through their appearance and property. Beyond the material, the films do not allow for much insight as little to no information on their past is presented. When these characters do discuss their past, they are often found out to be lying. Trauma might be attempted to be covered up through these lies, but through the act of lying these characters are presented negatively and unsympathetically. Occasionally some light is shone upon the characters' pasts. For instance, "Hedy" in *Single White Female* is revealed to have lost a twin when she was a child. Rae in *Black Snake Moan* has some flashbacks that suggest she was abused in some manner and Lizzie in *Prozac Nation* was abandoned by her father at an early age. Insight into the characters' pasts reveals abuse, which helps to explain why these characters would develop BPD. However, this character development rarely occurs within these films.

While not necessarily a negative stereotype as it is a positive attribute to be creative, the link between creativity and mental illness becomes problematic when these characters are only associated with ill defined work. What this perpetuates is the idea that those with psychological disorders are unable to function in organized society and employment and therefore must be relegated to freelance and solitary work that is unsteady and does not contribute to society the way other jobs do.

The portrayal of the psychiatric profession is also stereotypical. Within these films mental health professionals are depicted negatively mostly through their lack of effect. The most extreme example of negative portrayal is Beth Garner in *Basic Instinct*, a psychologist portrayed as untrustworthy through her connection to the suspected murderer and as a potential suspect herself. At the end of *The Crush,* Adrian is in a psychiatric hospital, but her obsessive behavior persists with her focus now on her therapist. This demonstrates that not only is this doctor

ineffective, but he is causing his patient to exhibit her symptoms towards him thereby

exacerbating her condition. Ray was wrongfully committed to a mental institution in *Dream

Lover*. This further propagates the popular notion that it is easy and common to be found

criminally insane rather than guilty. It also preys on the fear that one can be driven to madness to

the point that institutionalization is needed, and beyond one's control, by someone who is mad.

The beginning of *Secretary* has Lee returning home from a psychiatric hospital to which she

immediately returns to self-harming behavior. In *Girl, Interrupted* when Lisa returns to the

hospital she finds out that her best friend, whom Susanna replaces, has just committed suicide

and later upon release Daisy also commits suicide. These two films demonstrate the perceived

incompetence and irrelevance of the psychiatric profession since treatment appears to do nothing

to save these women from harming themselves. Lizzie in *Prozac Nation* even attempts to kill

herself while in the bathroom at her therapists. The incompetence of the mental health

profession is also illustrated through the ease of Casey's escape from the hospital in *Mad Love.*

Fortunately, by the end of this film she is returned to the hospital to resume treatment. All of

these representations of the mental health profession perpetuate the misconception that mental

illnesses are not treatable and that "shrinks" are "quacks" anyways. Therefore, not only should

those with mental illnesses be viewed as untreatable, but those who are suffering from mental

illnesses should not bother seeking help because they will only be drugged up and nothing will

come of it except being marked as "crazy." These portrayals also encourage the perception that

those in the mental health profession are the most critical and unsympathetic of those with

mental illnesses. Lawrie's research suggests that "doctors stigmatise psychiatric patients more

than the general public do" (129). This places much of the blame of stereotypes and

stigmatization upon those who claim to be working to help those who are suffering. The final

reason for continued mental illness portrayal according to Wahl is "lack of consumer feedback" which he attributes not only to the general audience, but to mental health professionals (128-130). He argues that this is due to both a reluctance to address the media for fear of misinterpretation and a lack of importance when time can be better spent on "more substantive" issues (129). Therefore it can be assumed that until mental health professionals take steps to change the way in which they refer to their patients and advocate for them, they will continue to be portrayed negatively. And when someone has a disorder that is already so negatively viewed, he or she is unlikely to seek help from someone who is presented as caring little about him or her.

Through the various depictions discussed it may come as no surprise that the characters with BPD have been described as unlikeable. This unappealing portrayal is another complaint of the representation of those with mental illness. For instance, with regard to *Basic Instinct* Rita Kempley stated, "These actors seem driven less by real emotions than Eveready bunny batteries" ("Basic Instinct") and Emanuel Levy said that "By the end, as the body count mounts, you don't care, because the characters were not engaging in the first place" ("Basic Instinct"). Peter Stack claimed that *Girl, Interrupted*'s "biggest muddle is that Susanna is the character viewers may care about least" ("Sappy 'Girl' Lacks Character Development"). For *Margot at the Wedding,* Roger Moore wrote that "We don't know anybody involved or even anybody like this. There isn't a pleasant, wholly likable character in the cast" ("Margot at the Wedding"). Dennis Schwartz states of Lizzie in *Prozac Nation* that "She's such an obnoxious character, that even those closest to her find her almost impossible to put up with. If they can't stand her, why should I?" ("Prozac Nation") However, maybe that is the point. It is a valid argument that those with mental illnesses are often not portrayed in a sympathetic manner, but, in reality, are those suffering from

psychological disorders always pleasant and likeable? I would venture to say no. It would seem that those with mental illnesses would be more likely to be unpleasant to be around and for good reason, particularly those with a disorder like BPD. BPD causes such erratic fluctuations within the sufferer that puts not only the person with the disorder on edge, but those around him or her as well. The quick-to-react nature of those with BPD would cause those around them to always need to be on guard about what they say and do: to walk on egg shells is how it has been described. Of course, this does not negate the fact that there can be and are a lot of pleasant times with those who have BPD. It just means that it is not unrealistic to portray them in such a manner that many people would find unappealing. As Rick Groen stated about *Margot at the Wedding*:

> Most of us have known a Margot or three (they come in both sexes), and to know them is to dearly want to avoid them. Therein lays the problem here: After a while, we don't wish to be around either her or her troubled relations. That's because, although Baumbach has portrayed the family with acute accuracy, all this realism doesn't lead anywhere. And verisimilitude, unattached to any character development or thematic revelation, even of the painful variety, is just way too much similitude ("A Wedding in Shades of Grey").

Consequently, for Groen this unappealing portrayal is realistic. The problem is that nothing comes of this portrayal. In this film, Margot returns to/continues her behavior by mirroring her actions from the beginning of the film. That the character continues her behavior is the revelation, however. These characters are not thought to be able to overcome their disorders. They are perpetually confined to their psychological states, fated to continue them until they die. Unless other options are presented, this infinite cycle broken only by death will persist. The surprising thing is that critical discourse seems to disapprove of these two outcomes. Therefore,

the continuation of this dual option must be imposed by the industry and/or desired by the general audience. The fact that these films have been following this pattern for at least the past four decades, since *Play Misty for Me*, might suggest the industry's comfort with the formula; it is known to sell so why risk anything by changing it? Also, the test audience disapproved of the initial ending to *Fatal Attraction* as discussed previously. Of course that was twenty-five years ago and still involved the death of the character with BPD. This just may be in line with Wahl's reasoning for why media perpetuate misconceptions about mental illness. The first of these reasons is profit (110). If this formula works and is profitable, there is no reason to mess with it now. This also relates to the historical reasons whereby the media just reflect societal understandings that have been circulated and accepted (114).

As I have previously noted and discussed, this study's films have a limited range of endings: they generally end with the character with BPD dying or returning to/continuing his or her behavior through a mirroring of the opening scenes of the film. These two endings perpetuate stereotypical understandings of mental illness whereby those who have a psychological disorder are thought to be untreatable. This notion is even simply expressed through the manner in which those suffering from mental distress are referred: they often are labeled by their disorder rather than as having a disorder, such as being [a] schizophrenic instead of having schizophrenia. This association between the person and their disorder is rarely seen in other illnesses. For example, one would not refer to someone with cancer as cancerous. Much work has been done to disassociate those with physical and mental disabilities from those disabilities so as to encourage people not to call those with varying disabilities "disabled," but rather that they have a disability. This is so people are not defined by their medical issues. However, those with psychological disorders are still regularly associated directly with their disorder whether it is being called

schizophrenic, bipolar, or even depressed. These psychological disorders stand in for the person's entire state of being whereas a physical ailment is more easily disconnected from the person. Also, since these disorders seem to have a strong effect on the sufferer's behavior they might appear to make sense as defining adjectives. The lack of visibility also may make the separation between person and disorder difficult as there is no physical manifestation of a psychological disorder: there is nothing to physically remove or mend. Therefore, all of these ideas help to perpetuate the notion that mental illnesses are not treatable. Further, according to Lawrie, psychological disorders are often attributed to "a cognitive or moral failing and/or to heredity factors for which there is no treatment" (129). As such, it would make sense that the only plausible ending would have the person with a mental illness either continuing his or her psychologically disordered behavior or dying.

However, these endings have not been found favorably by critics. According to Ann Hornaday, for *An Education* "the only false note is struck in the movie's final three minutes." The ending to *Basic Instinct* is also problematic, with Janet Maslin stating that "The $3 million reportedly paid for Mr. Eszterhas's screenplay did not buy a coherent ending" ("Basic Instinct") and Emanuel Levy arguing that the film "violates its genre's conventions with too many false moves and an incoherent resolution; it's never clear how seriously the film's last image should be taken" ("Basic Instinct"). James Berardinelli described *Original Sin* "as the latest feature to fall victim to IES - idiotic ending syndrome" ("Original Sin"). Therefore, these formulaic endings, in keeping with the genre, are reported to be incoherent and nonsensical when, generally, the rest of the film is well received. The historical precedent on how to deal with these characters is unsatisfying, at least to critics. These films may be successful because the first portions of them are well done and attract audiences, but the endings are what become predictable and let down

the rest of the film. Unfortunately, no alternatives are ever offered to rectify this issue. If no solutions are posited, just complaints, then the producers of these films will continue making them as they do because they work even if they are getting stale and unsurprising. This relates to Wahl's "lack of consumer feedback" (128) in which producers maintain textual structures due to lack of constructive criticism. An aspect of genre is predictability and apparently for this genre, according to critics, it is a plot that ends illogically and unrealistically. This may make sense since these films are dealing with madness which by its definition is the loss of sense. The fact that these endings are being recognized as ridiculous may suggest the progression of the genre into a self-reflexive and even parodic state whereby these endings are turned to almost ironically. If so, this could be construed as a comment on the genre as well as popular understandings of psychological distress. By insisting on such predictable and illogical endings these films may be attempting to point out how ridiculous it is that these assumptions are still believed. Of course an acknowledgement on the part of film critics does not necessitate this acknowledgement on the part of the general audience or the industry; this commentary may suggest such conceptions, however.

Of course, the role of the film critic varies from critic to critic. Some take their position more objectively, attributing little judgment to their short overview of plot and themes. Others indulge their subjectivity looking at each review as a challenge to criticize and exercise their use of biting and/or humorous language. This variety of critical approaches reflects the range of audience engagement. There are those who view films and think little more than what occurred and a general positive or negative feeling about it. Then there are those who delve deeper in their reactions to various filmic elements whether it is in a traditionally critical manner (e.g., the reviews at *TV Guide*) or in a more sarcastic fashion (e.g., the critics at EFilmCritic.com).

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Regardless, these various critical strategies can be seen as reflective of the general audience as well as the various sources of critical information that the general audience accesses. In all likelihood, the differing types of audiences would be attracted to the critics that have a similar style to their reading strategy thereby reinforcing and perpetuating already existing conceptions of film. In this way critical reviews function as paratexts in guiding audience knowledge and expectations of films.

It should be noted that this is not a critique of all cinematic representations of mental illness, but, rather, only those that ascribe to the genre put forth in this study. What is discussed here may have further implications, though the generalizations presented are meant to apply only to the suggested genre. This is because I argue that the present study's genre functions uniquely in its presentation of mental illness thereby warranting special attention. Through this presentation, these films are able to be understood as belonging to the same genre as discussed previously. Just as Elliot and Smith argue that "BPD plays out differently in each person [and that] there's no such thing as 'typical' or 'most' in the BPD world" (2), not all films relate to their genre in the same manner. A genre classification allows for the film to be understood in light of that genre and the other films within that category.

A Generic Prescription

According to Cross, there is a popular assumption that "you know a lunatic when you see one" (200). This claim is similar to the genre assumptions that Altman notes within American pragmatism. Within this perspective there is little need to theorize about genre as there are no problems to solve because "we all know a genre when we see one" (*Film/Genre* 216). However, as discussed above, this reliance on straightforward appearance is problematic. Within this

study's corpus the characters with BPD do not fit the stereotypical physical representation of those with mental illness. This problematizes the unquestioning reliance on being able to visually notice difference in such a superficial manner. Those who may not appear to possess a mental illness with regard to stereotypical criteria might in fact actually be suffering from a psychological disorder. The reverse may also be true. What this means for genre is that a brief and superficial judgment may be given but this may be ignoring deeper, more integral components of the text. Allegiance to canonical notions of genre might be useful for certain films, but a quick judgment based on initial appearance may cause the true and/or most critical genre from being exposed. By examining the text and its paratexts, it may be able to be understood within itself and with regard to the other texts that share generic elements. These similar texts are discovered through the paratexts as well as through noting similarities amongst texts through experiencing them.

This is achieved by utilizing the paratexts to discover what features should be focused upon. For this study this led to BPD through references to psychological-related elements. Within critical reviews there were mentions of the psychological through motive (or lack thereof) and madness. Jonathan Rosenbaum refers to *Single White Female* as a "psychological case study" ("Single White Female"). Both *TV Guide* ("The Crush: Review") and Michael Dequina ("The Crush") claim that Adrian in *The Crush* has psychosis. Evelyn in *Play Misty for Me* is argued to be both "psychotic" by Roger Greenspun ("Play Misty for Me") and a "psychopath" by Rob Gonsalves ("Play Misty for Me"). Throughout the reviews the characters were regularly called "psychos" and "crazy" and such language calls for a psychological reading. There also was reference through simple genre identification. For example, *TV Guide* gave the label of "psychological thriller" to *Basic Instinct* and *Fatal Attraction* ("Basic Instinct: Review";

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"Fatal Attraction: Review"). These and all the various other ways in which the psychological was touched upon as discussed above warranted these films to be viewed through that perspective. The specificities of the psychological that were mentioned in the reviews and portrayed in the posters and films are what constitute their understanding through the lens of BPD. This is due to the diagnostic criteria of the disorder which aligned with the elements found within the films. Since the paratexts as well as the films were signaling for a psychological reading, the use of psychological classification is justified. Through this, not only can character motivation and behavior be better understood, but also the narrative structure and film techniques which are utilized to make manifest the psychological and its popular understandings. In this way it functions generically, whereby through genre the intersection of various perspectives and interests is located. It is here that socio-cultural understanding can begin to be dissected as the industry meets the audience and everyone in between.

Like a psychiatric diagnosis, genre needs to meet criteria: all need not be met for a genre to be present, but enough must be met for it to be noticeable. The criteria are the various semantic and syntactic elements that constitute the genre, such as those discussed in the previous chapter. Since these criteria, or conventions, can be met in a variety of ways, not all films relate to their genre in the same manner, just like not all people with a psychological disorder present it the same. Therefore, just because two films are not identical in their generic conventions does not mean that they are not a part of the same genre and cannot be understood together. It may be the conventions that are omitted rather than are chosen that bring to light the most critically salient information. In other words, looking at how and why generically similar films differ might be more fruitful than examining the ways in which they are alike.

The medical concept of comorbidity, or the presence of two or more conditions simultaneously, holds applicability to both BPD and genre. Those with BPD, according to Elliot and Smith, almost always carry one or more additional personality disorder diagnoses (35). They may also be diagnosed with an eating disorder, substance abuse disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, or other disorder. Similarly, just because one genre is present does not mean that another one is not. The presence of multiple genres may influence one another, calling certain elements to be emphasized, for instance. In this corpus many films were considered part of multiple genres such as both "thriller" and "drama." Also, by attributing them to the genre of this study all the films were necessarily being argued to be a part of another genre beside their more traditional classifications. This concept accords with the idea of genre hybridity and processes of genre creation whereby the joining of categories generate popularly accepted genre classifications. All of these processes may be similar to the various ways in which new disorders are distinguished and understood. For example, BPD was historical understood as a disorder bordering on schizophrenia and then as a disorder between neurosis and psychosis. So from a genre perspective, BPD would be a genre that almost contained all the conventions of schizophrenia and/or a genre that had elements of neurosis and elements of psychosis, being more than the former, but not quite full blown of the latter.

Many in the psychiatric field argue that mental disorders occur in a continuum. Zanarini, for instance, posits a continuum of borderline psychopathology with three subtypes of varying severity (19). In terms of genre, there are different degrees of genre identification. Not only do some texts possess more generic elements than others, but the salience of these elements is greater. *Fatal Attraction* can be understood perhaps as the quintessential BPD film, with a film like *An Education* at the opposite end of the BPD genre spectrum. Both films possess the

semantic and syntactic elements needed to be considered a BPD film, but *Fatal Attraction* has more and they are made more prominent. Also, the focus on BPD in *Fatal Attraction* dominates any other significant genre.

Similar to the narrative strategy of these BPD films, genre functions through oscillation to stability of type or arrives at death. This is at least the common understanding of genre development. Any serious treatment to the genre would most likely result in the transformation of it causing it to lose the very elements that defined it. In this way, these films can be viewed as demonstrating the way in which genre processes are understood. The endings that reflect the beginnings are not always exactly the same, they differ in minute ways, but the core elements are still there.

In considering the possession of *verisimilitude*, this corpus has conformed to Todorov's two forms: "*rules of the genre*" and "*public opinion*" (18-19). Neither of these may be a true reflection of "reality" just as the mentally ill mind may misconstrue reality to create a new sense. Therefore, verisimilitude can be thought of as a kind of madness predicated on often misguided and nonsensical conventions and expectations. These films have mirrored and reinforced popular understandings which are inscribed into the generic formula, as ridiculous as it is often cited. So do mental illness expectations and presuppositions structure genre or vice versa? That is, does content influence genre or does genre influence content and, subsequently, the external understanding of it? This, of course, is a chicken-and-the-egg question, but it is clear that within this study the films possessed semantic and syntactic elements related to BPD. Such attributes would imply that the genre was influenced rather than influential. On the other hand, stereotypical understandings of mental illness that are propagated within this genre cannot be

ignored. While BPD can be viewed as generically structuring the corpus, the overriding beliefs of mental illness are imposed upon it.

Through this study the two uses of genre, ideological and ritualistic, cannot be considered to be mutually exclusive. Within this corpus these two functions are apparent and operate to activate and reinforce one another. The ritualistic or mythic view of genre perceives genre as a cultural expression that offers "solutions to real social problems and inherent cultural tensions" (Moine 79). This is achieved through the exposure of inherent conflict and opposition within the narratives. By participating in genre as myth, viewers recognize themselves as members of society through their acknowledgment of societal rules. For this study those societal rules are stereotypical notions of morality. Morality also serves ideological functions whereby genre operates to enforce the status quo through conformity to social norms. It is through the genre as myth perspective that anxieties related to fears and misconceptions of mental illness are worked out, though done through stereotypes and perpetual reinforcement. The presentation of only two "solutions" corresponds to an ideological perspective whereby choice is eradicated and the ability to work out conflict is only an illusion. These conceptions, however, are based in traditional understandings that did not necessarily develop from an oppressive authority, but, rather, from popular mythology. The tensions associated with madness are both mythically and ideologically based. The stereotypical assumptions related to popular beliefs of madness embody cultural and ideological tensions. These include the causes and contagiousness of madness, the behaviors of those with psychological disorders as violent and generally immoral, and the untreatable nature of mental illness. All of these areas of concern, uncertainty, and misinformation are inflected with this study's films in both manners. This means that the mythic and ideological perspectives of genre can and do coexist within genre. Such a notion should not

be surprising since outside of genre these two concepts influence one another so it makes sense that they would within a text like film as well. Therefore, instead of viewing texts as absolutely one approach or another, they should be viewed as how these two are present and work together.

A Limitation-Accepting and Future-Looking Ending (No Death or Return to Beginning)

This study took as its aim to look at a body of films that had been generically classified dissimilar, but shared key elements that warranted their generic unity. By analyzing both the texts and their paratexts, I evaluated these films for the ways in which BPD was made manifest and utilized generically both semantically and syntactically. The pragmatics of this study was discussed in which the representation of madness was considered as well as the manner in which genre functions similarly to BPD. The limitations of this study suggest areas for future research.

The first limitation and area of future research is the production history of the films. A full record of the production of these films would allow for a better understanding of the myriad contextual influences bearing upon the creation of these texts. This would involve exploring the texts upon which the films were based, the historio-cultural events that may have impacted production, test audiences and any changes they may have caused, and any other salient contextual issues that would influence the final text.

This study was limited by the scope of the corpus in terms of the number of films viewed as well as the global range. A more comprehensive study would incorporate an even greater number of films to further generic claims since validity increases with sample size. For instance, films that were not viewed for this study, but were claimed to include characters with BPD include: *Blue Valentine* (2010), *Body of Evidence* (1993), *Revolutionary Road* (2008), *Sliver* (1993), *(500) Days of Summer* (2009), *The Last Seduction* (1994), and The Talented Mr. Ripley

(1999). The manner in which those with BPD are represented could also be expanded beyond film into other media such as television to examine if their portrayal functions similarly and generically. It has been noted that characters with BPD can be found in *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-), *The Tudors* (2007-2010), *In Treatment* (2008-), *Nurse Jackie* (2009-), *Mad Men* (2007-), and *Big Love* (2006-2011) (Schreiber). Television operates differently from film as a domestic medium whereby audiences invest more time with characters. This additional time might allow for deeper audience connection and sympathy as well as development of character complexity within the text. An evaluation of televisual texts would allow for an explication of this presumptive greater character consideration.

This study has also been limited by its national context. In the future not only could international films, such as the Canadian *Borderline* (2008) and French *Betty Blue* (1986), be analyzed but international paratexts as well. This would involve analyzing the ways in which posters vary across nations and the differences amongst titles. Since paratexts help set up expectations and genres themselves can act as paratexts, the differences and similarities amongst international paratexts might expose key aspects of the ways in which genre is utilized and understood. A focus on only one national context might cause cultural preoccupations to be hidden or obscured. By incorporating international texts, cultural attitudes could be foregrounded through comparison of how BPD is viewed. This might present BPD in a different light thereby highlighting prejudices or it might reiterate representation speaking to a more universal understanding of the disorder and subsequently genre. Additionally, commercial cinema was the main focus of this study. A look at non-mainstream film, locally and internationally, might provide greater insight into the interior of characters' lives.

Finally, other mental illnesses could be explored in the future to see if they function the same way generically (semantically/syntactically/pragmatically); that is, if they operate in a similar manner to BPD where the specificities of the disorder influence the structure of the genre. These disorders could be those that are commonly associated with the individual such as schizophrenia in which the sufferer is often labeled "a schizophrenic." Further, the use of psychiatric terms could be evaluated for accuracy and whether or not the structure of the text follows the true or inaccurate meaning of the terms. For instance, are films about "schizophrenics," "psychotics," and "narcissists" truly depicting schizophrenia, psychosis, and narcissistic personality disorder? An analysis of various disorders would explore if they are treated differently within our culture. That is, whether certain mental illnesses are portrayed more sympathetically, accurately, or positively and what reasons could explain discrepancies amongst representation. Though media portrayals associate the individual with his or her illness, there is room for pragmatic dealing of critical issues.

In completing this study, I hope that film genre theory's rigid and canonical structure was not only questioned, but that new relevance was brought to genre theory through the analysis of films and their paratextual material. By joining texts with their paratexts, generic components and unity are made arguable semantically and syntactically allowing for pragmatic evaluation. Applying BPD to this corpus of films enabled the viewing of these films through a generic lens structured by the disorder and the reading of the films in relation to one another as generically similar texts. BPD, defined as an unstable disorder with diagnosis depending on multiple criteria, when connected to genre theory interrogates and brings renewed significance to film genre theory. Hopefully, through further genre study and pragmatic focus, the attractions in this cinema will not be so fatal.

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