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THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN FILM:  
A PSYCHOANALYTICAL READING

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## ABSTRACT

My thesis discusses the objectification of women in the films “Transformers,” “Transformers: Dark of the Moon,” and “Crash.” The two “Transformers” movies demonstrate the roles of gender and how the male gaze operates within a Hollywood action film. The director, Michael Bay, uses his female protagonists as a spectacle for the audience to consume; these female protagonists are in fact extraneous to the plot. “Crash,” directed by Paul Haggis, shows the racial side of objectification. A white cop sexually molests one of the leading black female characters. The police officer uses her as commodified object to antagonize her husband who can do nothing but helplessly watch.

My thesis uses the works of Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand de Saussure, and Jacques Lacan to explore the process film directors use to objectify women. Sigmund Freud’s reading of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* introduces his psychoanalytic concept of the Oedipus complex, where a young boy has sexual feelings for his mother and jealous hatred towards his father. Through his research of dreams, Freud then uses E.T.A. Hoffman’s short story, *The Sand-Man*, to draw a parallel between sexually repressed feelings and the loss of sight, which ultimately leads to his discourse in the fetish and the castration complex. Ferdinand de Saussure’s linguistic distinction between a signifier and a signified, a sound-image and a concept, has become integral to how we read texts. Jacques Lacan uses both Freud and Saussure as a lens to form his concept of the mirror stage in psychoanalytic identities. Lacan’s discussion takes an infant’s first recognition of itself in a mirror and introduces the phallus as a signifier for gender.

Laura Mulvey, Caroline Bainbridge, Luce Irigaray, Yvonne Tasker, Jackie Stacey, and Mary Ann Doane use psychoanalysis to discuss women’s roles within the phallogentrism of Hollywood, in which using the phallus as a signifier subordinates women subsequently to a secondary role as a mirror for men. Through Freud’s theory of repressed sexual feelings, these

female film analysts discuss the voyeuristic nature of male spectatorship. The male sees the female as a fetish. Lacan's mirror phase is then expanded upon to include the male spectator identifying with his ideal male ego on screen, which further exacerbates the objectification of women.

Lastly, Maura Shea, a film professor from The Pennsylvania State University, offers an alternative look at film and its production. She challenges the social issue of women's objectification; she sees men's roles as equally fetishistic. Most importantly, Professor Shea offers the possibility that the female protagonist's objectification may not be intensified. Michael Bay may have used his female characters as a spectacle, but we cannot assume every director wants to portray women in a similar manner.

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## Introduction

Whether we are aware of it or not, movies inhabit a great part of our lives. Films of all genres are used as jokes, as political messages, as an escape from reality, etc. The main characters equally serve as comical figures, romantics, heroes, or tragic figures. Films and characters both constitute a great percentage of our interaction with other people. When we enter a movie theater, we want the film and the actors to entertain us, frighten us, sadden us, and engage us emotionally. But once we exit the dark space of the theater, we expect to exit the 90-minute dream. The function of cinema is to give us a private look into another person's world, which allows us to escape our own reality.

Cinema and society function as a linked relationship. In order for Hollywood to remain successful, it produces films that align with the status quo. Society in return prescribes what the status quo is, thus demanding what movies should be made. Hollywood has always been a boy's club – a man-dominated industry. Although there have been a recent surge of female directors that have grown in popularity, men continue to dominate Hollywood. Because the industry and society are inextricably connected, society has adopted a masculine mentality. The status quo maintains the phallogentric ideal, which Hollywood then mirrors this ideal with its big blockbusters.

Within the masculine film apparatus, the status quo demands certain ideals to be upheld and other ideals to be diminished. One particular ideal consistently maintained is the devaluation of women. Because women are cinematically constructed as a spectacle to be looked at, the Hollywood business requires these women to be beautiful. Society supports this claim, again allowing the cycle to continue. The trouble is, as society situates women as objects of the gaze,

the value of women decreases. The longer the female protagonist is devalued into an object, the more society corrupts itself.

Chapter one establishes the framework for how women are turned into objects of the gaze and are consequently objectified. I begin with Sigmund Freud whose research into the human psyche utilizes symbols within a dream and attempts to understand their implications. He also reaches his research deductions through his explanation of stories. By taking Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and applying it to his theories of sexual desire, Freud indicates that young boys have an inherent sexual desire towards their mother and a jealous hatred towards their father. As the story goes, Oedipus unknowingly kills his father and marries his mother. Once he realizes that he has fulfilled the tragic oracle about him, Oedipus gauges his eyes out as punishment. Because of Freud's psychoanalysis of the Greek tragedy, the implications of *Oedipus Rex* remain an inherent fear instilled within all young boys. Freud uses E.T.A. Hoffman's short story, *The Sandman*, to take Oedipus's loss of sight one step further.

In Hoffman's *The Sandman*, the main character, Nathaniel, is warned about the Sand-Man, who is a monster that comes at night and throws sand in children's eyes who will not go to bed. Nathaniel almost gets his eyes taken by a detestable lawyer that he believes is the Sand-Man, if not for his father saving him. The father ends up being mysteriously killed in an explosion a year later. Towards the end of the story, Nathaniel sees the lawyer who he suspects of killing his father. Nathaniel enters into a state of madness and throws himself off a tower. Freud links Hoffman's tale with *Oedipus Rex* to create the castration complex. With his research on dreams, Freud connects the loss of sight with a fear of castration. Women then become an *unheimlich* or an unfamiliar entity because of their lack of a phallus. In order for men to feel comfortable towards women who represent the bleeding wound of castration, a fetish must be created. The fetish is a way for men to replace the lost penis by fetishizing the female body.

By using Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theory of signifier and signified, Jacques Lacan advances Freud's research to support his mirror phase theory. His mirror phase interprets a child looking at itself in a mirror and its misrecognition. Instead of seeing an accurate signified self-image, the child sees a signified image of a more complete human being. Lacan also applies Saussure's theory to signify gender. Within the mirror process, the phallus acts as a signifier. Due to women's lack of a penis, women represent an incomplete reflection of man. The mirror phase subsequently subordinates women as secondary and inferior to men.

Laura Mulvey uses Freud's and Lacan's theories to show how their psychoanalytical processes support the eroticization of women in film. Through Freud's fetishism, she illustrates that women become the object of the male spectator's gaze. Lacan's mirror phase is used to show how the male viewers project their ideal ego onto the male hero. The viewer then occupies two gazes, the one from his seat in the audience and the one from his male surrogate on screen. The male spectators see the female character as a beautiful spectacle, thus manifesting a perversion that transforms the viewers into voyeurs and Peeping Toms. Mulvey's argument finds resonance in the arguments Caroline Bainbridge, Luce Irigaray, Yvonne Tasker and other film analysts make. Luce Irigaray introduces her concept of "specula(riza)tion," which is a belief that women are trapped, similar to Lacan's argument, as a signified mirror for men (Bainbridge 18). Claude Lévi-Strauss expands the realm of objectification when he argues that women are commodified within the phallogocentric social apparatus. Chapter one concludes by examining the triangular spectatorship that occurs between the spectator, the male protagonist, and the female protagonist.

Chapter two reviews Michael Bay's "Transformers" and "Transformers: Dark of the Moon." The two Hollywood blockbusters have a beautiful lead female character that Bay exploits to grab the male viewer's attention. Through his well-known camera angles and lighting, the audience cannot help but turn the female into an object of the gaze. A few scenes are analyzed



that give the audience a full view of the female fetish on screen. Michael Bay is deliberate in his intentions of making both Megan Fox and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley purely a spectacle.

Chapter three discusses Paul Haggis's movie, "Crash," where a lead black female protagonist is sexually harassed by a white cop. Haggis uses this scene to put a racial twist on women's objectification. Unlike white women, black women have been turned into objects of the gaze for ages. Starting with Sarah Baartman, a 19<sup>th</sup> century slave from South Africa, the devaluation of the black female body still remains an unfortunate social standard. "Crash" emphasizes Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of commodification, which turns the female into a piece of property reflecting back upon her male owner. By sexually touching the black woman, the white cop challenges the ownership of the black husband. This confrontation parallels the racial hierarchy of power within society.

Lastly, chapter four consists of an interview with a film professor from The Pennsylvania State University. Maura Shea, who specializes in producing and editing, met with me on Monday, November 4<sup>th</sup> in 313 Williard Building on campus. She allowed me to interview her and record the conversation. Shea offers an interesting perspective. She says that in many cases it is not the director's intention to objectify the female lead. Although Michael Bay and Haggis do so for different purposes, she argues that the audience constructs women's objectification, not the director. Shea also offers the point that men too are objectified. She says that the leading male usually flashes his six-pack abs, not to advance the plot, but as a way to engage the female spectator. We ended our conversation with women's appreciation of the gaze. After telling her an anecdote of seeing three women dressed up in Playboy bunny costumes for Halloween, Shea proposed the idea that these women dressed up that way for the attention. She suggested that these women simply wanted to be looked at. They might have had no intention of going home with a man that night. They rather just wanted the attention.

The intent of this project is to bring women's objectification to the forefront of society. Most people are unaware that women are objectified in film, let alone, in every day life. The use of different scenes shows the diversity yet commonality of women as the object of the gaze. In my sophomore year at The Pennsylvania State University, I enrolled in an English class. I was not aware that I would end up discussing the police pat-down scene in "Crash." Throughout our class conversation, however, I kept returning to one question: "how could I not have realized this before?" I love to watch movies, especially ones that challenge me. Movies that reach deep down and pull out a part of you that you never thought was there are the ones that you remember. "Crash" did that for me. It opened my eyes to women's objectification in much more than just film. After I finished this class, I kept seeing women devalued everywhere. It was in advertising, television, paintings, and in every part of our culture. When I had to choose my thesis project, I realized that it was not a hard decision. I found women's objectification a pervasive and stimulating issue that is worth discussing. The issue is, however, that no one seems to notice. Everyone is caught up in the cycle of the status quo. Objectification is like the repressed fear of castration. Society knows it is there, but simply ignores it. As the problem remains dormant, it will continue to fester. Similar to the supposed post-racial paradigm, in which everyone believes we live because of the plethora of black female celebrities and a mixed-race President, gender and race remain issues that have not been resolved. And they will remain so until they are brought to the forefront and confronted head-on by society. This thesis, I hope, is one small step in the right direction.

## Chapter 1

### Psychoanalysis and the Social Mirror

What happened, therefore, was that the boy refused to take cognizance of the fact of his having perceived that a woman does not possess a penis. No, that could not be true: for if a woman had been castrated, then his own possession of a penis was in danger; and against that there rose in rebellion the portion of narcissism which Nature has, as a precaution, attached to that particular organ.  
-Sigmund Freud

We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image—whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term *imago*.  
-Jacques Lacan

The magic of the Hollywood style at its best (and of all the cinema which fell within its sphere of influence) arose, not exclusively, but in one important aspect, from its skilled and satisfying manipulation of visual pleasure.  
-Laura Mulvey

Sigmund Freud is one of the most celebrated psychoanalytic theorists to date. Although he was born into a poor family, Freud rose to success and fame through his extensive research on dreams and their subconscious implications. In “The Interpretation of Dreams,” Freud explores the concept of the Oedipus complex, which he takes from Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Rex*. In the story, an oracle foresees Oedipus killing his father and marrying his mother. In order to prevent this tragedy, his father, Laïus, and his mother, Jocasta, send him away to live with another family. Oedipus grows up and eventually learns of his fate. In order to prevent himself from killing his (unknown to him) foster father and marrying his foster mother, he leaves. While traveling, Oedipus kills his real father during a traveling skirmish and proceeds to defeat a sphinx. Out of gratitude for relieving them of the monster, the Thebans make Oedipus their king and offer him the hand of the queen, Jocasta, in marriage. A plague breaks out, which requires the Thebans to

seek advice from the oracle that gave Oedipus his prophecy. The reply comes demanding the murderer of Laius to be driven from the land. Through the revelation process of Laius's murder, Oedipus learns that he unknowingly fulfilled the oracle's prophecy. As the only punishment suitable for killing his father and marrying his mother, Oedipus blinds himself and forsakes his home.

Freud's interpretation of the Greek tragedy builds upon the punishment of losing one's eyes. Oedipus's misfortune lies in part "in the contrast between the supreme will of the gods and the vain attempts of mankind to escape the evil that threatens them" (Freud "Interpretation" 815). The spectator of the play is supposed to learn his own insignificance and submission to divine will. Another part of this play, however, lies in the sexual feelings towards the child's mother. Watching this play "moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon [Oedipus]" (Freud "Interpretation" 816). Freud investigates this sensation in his psychoanalysis scholarship. His Oedipus complex builds upon the subconscious desire of the young boy for his mother, and consequently, the "first hatred and [the] first murderous wish against [his] father" (Freud "Interpretation" 816). These incestuous thoughts call for immediate repression because of the uncomfortable feelings they evoke. More important, however, is the punishment that Oedipus inflicts on himself. Knowing that he has committed the worst of crimes, Oedipus takes away his sight. Oedipus's self-inflicted punishment exposes the audience's repressed subconscious desires, making them paradoxically open their eyes to their own childhood. By illuminating the existence of the Oedipus complex, the audience subsequently represses the feelings even farther.

In Freud's essay, "The Uncanny," he continues Ernst Jentsch's, a German psychologist, discussion of this aesthetic. Jentsch asserts that people greatly concern themselves with "what is beautiful, attractive and sublime—that is, with feelings of a positive nature" (Freud "Uncanny" 825). In other words, people associate with *heimlich* feelings. Freud uses the term *heimlich*,

which Daniel Sanders introduces in his book *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, to mean what is intimate, friendly, and comfortable (Freud “Uncanny” 826). In contrast, *unheimlich*, conversely denotes what is unfamiliar, or, the uncanny (Freud “Uncanny” 826). Ernst Jentsch “ascribes the essential factor in the production of the feeling of uncanniness to intellectual uncertainty; so that the uncanny would always, as it were, be something one does not know one’s way about in” (Freud “Uncanny” 826). In accordance with Jentsch’s definition, the inability to see evokes feelings of uncanniness. The *unheimlich* or uncanny also includes “what is frightening—to what arouses dread and horror” (Freud “Uncanny” 825). The loss of eyesight is frightening to embrace. It evokes feelings of uncertainty—unfamiliar, *unheimlich* sensations. Men, considering their repressed sexual feelings towards their mothers, transform the *heimlich* relationship into an *unheimlich* one. Such feelings of horror signal an immediate repression and disavowal.

Freud utilizes another story regarding eyesight in “The Uncanny.” He uses E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story *The Sandman*. In this tale, the main character, Nathaniel, is sent to bed early having been warned “that ‘the Sand-Man’ is coming” (Freud “Uncanny” 829). Sure enough, Nathaniel hears a visitor enter the house and visit with his father. Nathaniel, being like any curious young boy, inquires about the Sand-Man. Although his mother scoffs the matter away as trivial, his nurse tells him that the Sand-Man “is a wicked man who comes when children won’t go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes so that they jump out of their heads all bleeding” (Freud “Uncanny” 829). Nathaniel then decides to see who this visitor really is. One night, he hides in his father’s study, only to recognize the visitor as the Lawyer Coppelius, “a repulsive person whom the children were frightened of when he occasionally came to a meal; and now he identifie[s] this Coppelius with the dreaded Sand-Man” (Freud “Uncanny” 829). Nathaniel accidentally betrays his hidden presence almost resulting in Coppelius dropping “bits of red-hot coal from the fire into his eyes...but [Nathaniel’s] father begs him off and saves his

eyes” (Freud “Uncanny” 830). (Whether this event is a dream or a reality remains ambiguous in Hoffman’s story.) A year later during a visit from the Sand-Man, Nathaniel’s father is mysteriously killed by an explosion in his study. Coincidentally, the lawyer Coppelius is nowhere to be found.

Later in life Nathaniel, as a student, is convinced the lawyer Coppelius is an optician called Giuseppe Coppola. Upon Nathaniel’s refusal to buy glasses from Coppola, the optician says to him, “Not weather-glasses? not weather-glasses? also got fine eyes, fine eyes!” (Freud “Uncanny” 830). On another occasion, while he is walking through the city, Nathaniel climbs a tower with his betrothed. To see an object on the street below, he pulls out a spy-glass that he has bought earlier from Coppola. Looking through the spy-glass, Nathaniel enters into a state of hysteria shouting ‘ring of fire, spin about,’ a quote we previously learn alludes to the Sand-Man. The reader is led to believe that the object seen through the glass is indeed the lawyer Coppelius, which initiates his state of madness. Nathaniel then flings himself over the parapet of the tower and is killed instantly.

Freud tells us “that the feeling of something uncanny is directly attached to the figure of the Sand-Man, that is, to the idea of being robbed of one’s eyes” (Freud “Uncanny” 831). The uncanniness again parallels the sensations that *Oedipus Rex* evokes. The audience is forced to confront an *unheimlich*, and in most cases, repressed feeling regarding the loss of one’s sight. The study of these stories “has taught us that anxiety about one’s eyes, the fear of going blind, is often a substitute for the dread of being castrated” (Freud “Uncanny” 831). Far from being arbitrary, Freud argues that a relationship exists between the eye and the male organ seen in dreams, myths, and phantasies. The denial of the relationship between the eye and the phallus does not dispel “the impression that the threat of being castrated...excites a particularly violent and obscure emotion” (Freud “Uncanny” 832). Freud also points out an interesting correlation between the father’s death and the Sand-Man. He ascribes the monster as a “disturber of love,” constantly

getting in the way of Nathaniel and happiness (Freud “Uncanny” 832). The Sand-Man and the father at first seem like two distinct people. By replacing the Sand-Man, however, with the father, we return to the Oedipus complex where castration is expected at the hands of the father in order to protect the mother from the boy’s sexual desires. Through this association, Freud parallels “the uncanny effect of the Sand-Man to the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood” (Freud “Uncanny” 832).

In his essay, “Fetishism,” Freud declares “that the fetish is a substitute for a penis” (Freud 842). He qualifies this statement by reassuring us that the penis is no ordinary phallus; rather, it is a “quite special penis that had been extremely important in early childhood but had later been lost” (Freud “Fetishism” 842). The main design of a fetish is to maintain the thought of having a phallus. In regards to women, “the fetish is a substitute for the woman’s (the mother’s) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up” (Freud “Fetishism” 842). The boy refuses to accept the female’s loss of the phallus because it subsequently reminds him that his own penis can be taken. A compromise must be reached. This subconscious agreement turns the female genitals into a “*stigma indelible*”<sup>1</sup>, which serves as a “token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it” (Freud “Fetishism” 843). Freud expands the fetish by offering the possibility of other objects chosen as substitutes. These objects may consist of a foot, a shoe, a piece of underwear, etc. The underwear in particular might “crystallize the moment of undressing,” representing the last few moments of the fetish until the marked female genital region is shown (Freud “Fetishism” 843).

Jacques Lacan is considered the French Freud. Known for being a difficult and polemic writer, Lacan takes his 30 years of Freudian scholarship and develops Freud’s ideas within psychoanalysis. Lacan studied medicine during his time in Paris, specifically focusing on

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<sup>1</sup> Indelible mark

paranoia and erotomania<sup>2</sup>. Although he only published one book, his *Écrits (Writings)*, it is 900 pages of his essays and conference papers (Leitch “Jacques” 1158). Even in his literary scholarship, Lacan is celebrated in “his 1955 seminar on Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘Purloined Letter,’” in which he demonstrates an important lesson in psychoanalysis regarding narratives with missing information in the plot (Leitch “Jacques” 1158).

The French Freud breaks up the psyche into three parts: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. The most significant of these three lies within the Imaginary. Here, the human being’s fascination with form originates (Leitch “Jacques” 1159). In his acclaimed essay, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” he introduces the mirror phase. When an infant looks at itself in a mirror, it undergoes misrecognition of its actual form; it “forgets how weak it is and identifies jubilantly with the wholeness of the reflected form” (Leitch “Jacques” 1159). In other words, the infant perceives itself as a more ideal version of itself. Lacan refers to the “other” as designating a “mirror image, a counterpart or competitor, [or] another person” (Leitch “Jacques” 1161). Since his patriarchal theories closely follow Freud’s, Lacan’s use of the “other” also includes women. Thus, within this mirror phase, Lacan uses the phallus in relation to the *imago*<sup>3</sup>.

One of the lens through which Lacan focuses his theories is Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure was a linguist who was instrumental in changing the way we view language. His fundamental breakthrough came in the differentiation between signifier and signified. The signifier is the sound-image, and the signified is the concept (Leitch “Ferdinand” 847). For instance, the verbal word “tree” is a signifier and the actual tree itself, the physical entity, is the signified. Saussure adds here that language “exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community” (Saussure 850). Simply put, language is socially constructed which

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<sup>2</sup> Delusions of love

<sup>3</sup> Likeness, statue



disables any one person from arbitrarily signifying something according to his or her individual will. In Lacan's essay, "The Signification of the Phallus," he ascribes the phallus as a signifier. This phallus then "indicate[s] the structures that will govern the relations between the sexes" (Lacan 1188). Thus, through the mirror phase, women occupy the "other" and are signified as such because of their lack of a phallus.

Laura Mulvey, a British writer and filmmaker, is regarded as one of the most "incisive contemporary feminists cultural theorists" (Leitch "Laura" 2081). Viewing the female gender through the lens of both Freud and Lacan, she challenges the traditional viewing practices of the male gaze. Mulvey uses Hollywood films to explore "how the male unconscious shapes the erotic pleasure involved in looking" (Leitch "Laura" 2082). By combining Freud's and Lacan's theories, she believes cinema has two different views. In the first view, she uses Freud's theory of the gaze involving scopophilia<sup>4</sup>: "[men] enjoy making others the object of a controlling gaze" (Leitch "Laura" 2082). The second view uses Lacan's mirror stage: "[men] derive pleasure from identifying with an ideal image on the screen" (Leitch "Laura" 2082). In her famous essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Mulvey uses the theories of Freud and Lacan to illustrate how the female becomes eroticized within film.

Lacan's mirror operates as a social lens. By the signifying value of the phallus, the female is the signified "other." Mulvey uses this signifier of phallocentrism<sup>5</sup> as a socially constructed identification. Phallocentrism paradoxically "depends on the image of the castrated wom[an] to give order and meaning to its world" (Mulvey 2084). Luce Irigaray, a French

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<sup>4</sup> Pleasure in looking

<sup>5</sup> Mulvey defines phallocentrism as a system in which "sexual difference is defined as the difference between having and lacking the phallus; the term has come to refer to the patriarchal cultural system as a whole insofar as that system privileges the phallus as the symbol and source of power. Because of that privilege, women suffer "penis envy" and men suffer the "castration complex" (the fear of every male child that his desire for his mother will be punished by castration by his father; more generally, the fear of becoming "castrated" like women that leads men to cling to masculinity); both terms are originally from the theories of Sigmund Freud" (2084).

feminist who voices alternative versions of feminine sexuality, has developed a term called “specula(riza)tion.” “Specula(riza)tion” “is founded on her belief that the feminine has been trapped within a mirroring function within phallogentrism” (Bainbridge 18). In Saussure’s linguistic construction, we define an object by what it is not; defining objects in the negative allows us to give them meaning. The phallic signifier thus depends upon the female as its signified, indirectly giving the female the more important position to be held. There can be nothing to signify if the woman is not “tied to her place as bearer of meaning” (Mulvey 2085). Without the female, the phallus is an arbitrary label. Despite the newfound importance in their values ascribed by Saussure’s linguistic distinction, women still remain secondary in society.

As Mulvey claims, the Hollywood narrative cinema is a male operated and constructed apparatus. Like any business, Hollywood needs a marketable product to attract audiences, which eventually leads to utilizing visual pleasure. By maintaining a monopoly on producing films in the 1950s, Hollywood “code[s] the erotic into language of the dominant patriarchal” and social order that still exists today (Mulvey 2085). Mulvey here refers back to Freud’s essay, “Three Essays on Sexuality,” where Freud associates “scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (2086). She warns that this pleasure in looking “can become fixated into a perversion, producing obsessive voyeurs<sup>6</sup> and Peeping Toms whose only sexual satisfaction can come from watching, in an active controlling sense, an objectified other” (Mulvey 2086). Mulvey incorporates Lacan’s mirror phase onto the image on the screen as a “reflected body of the self, but its misrecognition as superior projects this body outside itself as an ideal ego” (2087). During this misrecognition, the viewer sees its Hollywood *imago* on screen and identifies with it. Joan Copjec defines this misrecognition as narcissistic. He says the *imago*

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<sup>6</sup> Voyeur: n. A person who likes seeing and talking and writing about something that is considered to be private.

Voyeurism: n. The practice of obtaining sexual gratification by looking at sexual objects or acts, especially secretly.

on screen “seems not only perfectly to represent the subject, it seems to be an image of the subject’s perfection...the subject falls in love with its own image as the image of its ideal self” (442). Copjec expands upon Lacan’s theory as well to describe the spectator projecting his idealized identification onto the male hero.

Male viewers always relate to one male protagonist on screen. In most cases, it is the leading male. These “star” ideal egos “provide a focus or centre both to screen space and screen story where they act out a complex process of likeness and difference (the glamorous impersonates the ordinary)” (Mulvey 2087). As a marketable product, the Hollywood system depends on this star system to draw spectators and capture their fascination. The leading female protagonist, operating in the phallogentric apparatus, serves only one purpose. Mulvey coins the desire of looking at the female as “to-be-looked-at-ness” (2088). Through this form of identification, the female antagonizes the diegesis<sup>7</sup> of the film. In her singular role as a spectacle, the female body “freeze[s] the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation” (Mulvey 2088). Budd Boetticher, an American film director known for his westerns, claims that the female operates as an affective influence on the male. He states, “she is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance” (Mulvey 2088-89). The female only operates as the signified and bearer of meaning. Yvonne Tasker, in her book, *Spectacular Bodies: Gender, Genre and the Action Cinema*, asserts that “vulnerability is expressed through the mobilisation of traits associated with femininity, most particularly a softness or lack of definition[,] which might allow the body to be fatally penetrated” (17). The female not only operates as a soft spot for the male, but also for the spectators to look at during the film.

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<sup>7</sup> The ongoing story or narrative.

The viewer is unaware that a triangular spectatorship is formed. The woman functions on two sides of the triangle, “as [the] erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as the erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, [with] a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen” (Mulvey 2089). The male spectator watches his glamorized surrogate on screen while simultaneously watching the female showgirl. The male spectator projects his own identification onto his male counterpart, consequently seeing as the male hero does. As the broad-chested, square-jawed hero saves the female from harm—whether from a ferocious dragon or from a path of unrighteousness—the male spectator also feels like he is rescuing the damsel in distress. Using Freud’s fetishism theory, Mulvey incorporates the demystification or saving of the female as a way to disarm the castration threat. The saving of the *unheimlich* female eases the male’s repressed anxiety. As the audience member feels inclusive in the hero’s actions, the normal division of the spectator’s reality and the film’s reality is disrupted. The darkness of the theater, isolating one person from the next, “gives the spectator the illusion of looking into a private world” (Mulvey 2087). The atmosphere of the theater allows the two realities to blur together.

The movie industry has been structured around the erotic male gaze, objectifying the female. Kaja Silverman, an American film theorist, argues that women are “little more than a constructed body in Hollywood cinema,” which holds true in so far as phallocentrism remains the central trope (Bainbridge 14). The cyclical social and cinema construction has led to male audiences learning to associate sexual desires with the male gaze. In general, Hollywood exploits male sexual desire for financial gain by using the female as a fetish. By perpetuating the objectification of women, however, society has been molded to crave it in every film. One form of objectification is what Luce Irigaray calls commodification. She endorses the idea that women are objectified into a commodity. As the spectator watches the movie, the female “body submit[s] itself to specularization, a speculation, that transforms it into a value-bearing object, a

standardized sign, an exchangeable signifier, a 'likeness' with reference to an authoritative model," which, as Mulvey clarifies of Freud's and Lacan's arguments, is man (Bainbridge 19).

The commodified female acts as a possession that reflects back upon her male ownership.

By synthesizing Freud's castration complex, Lacan's mirror phase, and Mulvey's argument on female eroticism in film, the spectator's gaze is masculinized – a male gaze. Mary Ann Doane advocates that owning and activating "the gaze, given our language and structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine position'" (Bainbridge 40). The rigidity of the status quo thus subordinates all femininity, and gives any position of power to masculinity. In regards to the leading character on screen, the idea of masculine power remains true as well. Caroline Bainbridge suggests a grid, where the horizontal axis indicates female relations with respect to the vertical axis of genealogical relations (11). The origin point, or (0,0), operates as true masculinity. For a female character to have dominance in the film, she operates in either two ways within the male apparatus. She must strip away her feminine qualities to adhere to masculinity because a woman cannot survive in the masculine-created film without being masculine herself. Susan Streitfield illustrates this change with the analogy of a female lawyer in a male-dominated courtroom. As the lawyer proceeds during the trial, the "political disgust invoked by the attitudes of the men in the courtroom is arguably accompanied by a sense of indignation" at seeing a female operate within their domain (Bainbridge 58).

Even with the exemplification of Angelina Jolie's character, Lara Croft, who is a dominating lead female, she still adheres to the status quo of the perpetuated sexual gaze. In "Tomb Raider," a scene arises where the characters must journey into the arctic tundra to find the missing piece of the puzzle. In comparison to the men, Jolie is dressed quite differently. Not only is she in a brighter color, differentiating herself by shade, but also she is in clothing that tightly fits her body. The men are in bulky clothing leaving the audience unable to distinguish any of their body stature; Croft's clothing accentuates every curve of her body. She leaves no room for

imagination as the male spectator's eyes follow her every body movement. Lara Croft operates in both relations to the grid. She strips away her femininity, only revealing it at rare moments in regards to her father, and adopts more masculine qualities in order to survive. She still feeds the male spectator's voyeuristic hunger by wearing tight clothing. As Jackie Stacey explains in her essay, "Feminine Fascinations: A Question of Identification," no matter where the female is within the Hollywood machine, she is subordinated and trapped within the "patriarchal forms of identity" (131).

Stacey advances that "visual economy and narrative trajectory of Hollywood cinema...are typically organised around the masculine desire of the protagonist and the spectator" (132). Because every important role of cinema is masculine, what is left for the female spectator? The gaze, the spectators, the plot, and the characters all operate within the "hom(m)osexual"<sup>8</sup> apparatus. Susan Bainbridge offers two possible avenues for women to take. One position for women is to "indulge in the masochism of over-identification" and accept that their *imago* will be flaunted on the big screen (38). Or, women can "engage with [their] own narcissism of becoming one's own object of desire" and enjoy the fact that they are what men crave (Bainbridge 38). One correlation between these two avenues, however, is that the female protagonist must also fit into the Hollywood stereotype of being a glamorized character.

A professor once told me that men do not look at girls who wear glasses. I later found that Mary Ann Doane was the one who coined the phrase: "guys seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses" (503). As unfortunate as this quote may be, it maintains the Hollywood status quo. Doane reflects Mulvey's assertion that the glamorized imitate the ordinary. In order for the spectator, both male and female, to identify with their cinematic surrogate, an ideal ego must be shown on screen. The glasses behave as a cover that protects the wearer from the gaze. Doane

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<sup>8</sup> "Hommo" being the French word for "male" (Bainbridge 19).

observes that “a heavily marked condensation of motifs concerned with repressed sexuality, knowledge, visibility and vision, intellectuality, and desire” encompass the secondary lens of the glasses (503). The glasses also threaten the fetish; they put a secondary lens onto the female. With the secondary lens, two processes happen. The glasses reflect back the image of the intelligent male spectator, which, as Doane explains marks a masculine quality. Once the female removes the glasses, the male spectator subconsciously believes he has saved her and she is once again “transformed into spectacle, the very picture of desire” (Doane 503). Rather than the removal of clothing to evoke the male’s voyeuristic gaze, the glasses become the object of focus, changing the identification towards the character. The secondary lens represents intellectuality and visibility, which is what the Hollywood apparatus wants to avoid. The status quo must remain as it is, with no change in the cycle that both culture and film perpetuate. The status quo, of course, is the economic engine of Hollywood.

## Chapter 2

### “Transformers”: Subordinating the Heroine in Action Films

We like girls. We like sex with girls. We like their rosey lips, their hard nipples, bums, soft thighs. We like tits and fanny, you know? We can call it “appreciating the female form” all day long, but no matter how you say it, the truth is, we like ogling hot women.  
-Katie Fitch

Emily Fitch from AfterEllen.com could not be more correct when she says that we as a society enjoy looking at women. Michael Bay, a famous film director, embodies this voyeuristic fetish in his movies “Transformers” and “Transformers: Dark of the Moon.” Bay has risen to popularity in the last 15 years for his high-grossing action films. He is known to have big explosions and intense fighting scenes. A few of his credentials include “The Island” (2005), “Bad Boys II” (2003), “Armageddon” (1998), “Pearl Harbor” (2001), and his “Transformers” Trilogy (2007-2011). Various techniques that Bay implements in his films are intense slow motion shots of characters, the camera moving throughout the scene (he rarely uses static shots), shots of aircrafts against a setting sun (usually involving helicopters), shots that capture a character running or moving towards the camera (a scene always shot in slow-motion). Even some of the actors who have worked with him have commented on how he emphasizes the action scenes or the “visually-interesting moments” rather than his characters (*Michael*).

Bay’s “Transformers” was released on July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, as a kick-off for the Fourth of July holiday. The movie had a budget of \$150 million, which Bay needed for all of the special effects and action sequences. He easily was able to break-even within the first six days of release, grossing \$155.4 million. “Transformers,” in its opening weekend, brought in \$70.5 million, which ranked second overall to “Independence Day’s” opening weekend and 23<sup>rd</sup> best among all



movies (Gray). The Paramount and DreamWorks film appealed to all audiences. DreamWorks spokesman Marvin Levy stated that “it was designed for a broad audience, with the initial thought that the first people to see it would overwhelmingly be young males. But right out of the box office it has reached a broad audience” (Gray). In accordance with Levy’s assumptions, the film did pertain to an audience of all ages.

The movie, however, received mixed reviews. Those who have long been “Transformers” fans both loved and hated the movie. Kirk Honeycutt, from *The Hollywood Reporter*, regards the movie as a “wet dream for fanboys, with vehicles that whiz and whirl into alien robots, spectacular sci-fi stunt chases, glistening military hardware, overheated computer software and brainy, hot girls who love Popular Mechanics.” Rebecca Murray, a member of the *San Diego Film Critics Society*, states that “‘Transformers’ puts the fun back into moviegoing, blending comedy with the robot action and adding a dash of romance along with eye candy for both sexes into a film that never takes itself seriously yet doesn’t poke fun at or offend those who grew up loving the toys.” Other reviews have not been so kind. One critic from *CinePassion* saw the film “morph[ing] from Army-enlisting ad to toy ad (on its way passing through a panoply of car ads, computer ads, beer ads) without every becoming a movie” (Croce). None of these reviews, however, confront the serious issue of female subjugation. Film critics acknowledge that Megan Fox is eye-candy, but fail to offer any in depth analysis of how she is constructed as that spectacle.

Of all the techniques that Bay is known to use, two stuck out to me. These were his use of over-the-top visuals (i.e. key events taking place at sunset or dramatic events taking place behind actors doing routine acts) and shots where the camera spins in a circle around characters. A key moment that incorporates both of these two styles is when Sam Witwicky, played by Shia LaBeouf, and Mikaela Barnes, played by Megan Fox, are driven to a hilltop by Witwicky’s rogue alien car, Bumblebee. At the time, the two are unaware of the automobile being anything more than a car. Before this scene, however, Bay had established Sam’s crush on the popular, jock-

following teenage heartthrob that is Mikaela Barnes. Sam had seen her walking home and decided to give her a ride. Unknown to him, Sam's car decides to heat things up a bit and takes the two to a romantic destination as encouragement for Sam to engage Mikaela. To help Sam out, Bumblebee "breaks down" in order to give the two a chance to be together. This romantic gesture is where the problematic moment occurs.

Mikaela exits the car, putting up some of her hair so it does not inhibit her diagnosing why the car has stopped. Michael Bay incorporates the first of his known techniques and swirls the camera in from behind her, approaching from the right side of the car. Even though he eventually gets both characters into the camera lens, the one character that the spectators focus on as they draw closer is solely Mikaela. Bay gives the audience a full six seconds of only her. The camera zooms, isolates her, drawing the viewer's attention and our subconscious gaze to her in this scene. Once Sam enters the shot, he becomes a peripheral character. The lens remains focused on Mikaela and continues to hold until the camera angle changes to Sam's perspective.

At this time, the spectators see that both characters are a little over heated from the sun. This perspiration adds to the sexual effect that Bay creates for Mikaela. She not only is in a small shirt that comes down to her mid-stomach area, but also she is wearing a low-hip jean skirt. Both Sam and the audience then fully see her as a sexual object; "she holds the look, plays to, and signifies male desire" (Mulvey 2088). In the midst of Mikaela telling Sam that his distributor cap is a little loose, she is in a bent-over position. She forms a curved shape with her back and upper torso as she adjusts the cap. Bay takes this moment to pan up and down her stomach and lower back. The way the audience sees Mikaela is constructed by the way Bay utilizes the camera. Sigmund Freud captures Bay's constructed affect with the camera when he says, "the story-teller has a *peculiarly* directive power of us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions" ("Uncanny" 840). The camera angle switches back from the right side of the car, capturing both characters in the shot, to a point-of-view shot from Sam.

Hopping from point to point, the spectator gets multiple views of the scene. Each shot amplifies Mikaela's sexual attributes, thus objectifying her for the audience and Sam. When the camera is placed on the right side of the car, the viewer is able to see both characters. The audience here returns to Mulvey's triangular spectatorship, which constructs a gaze from the spectator, to the male protagonist, and to the female protagonist. The one leg of the triangle consists of the male viewers looking at Mikaela as a sexualized piece of meat with her short skirt and three-sizes-too-small tank top. The audience turns her into a fetish from the male (or Bay's?) constructed gaze. For the other leg of the triangle, as the male viewer watches Sam watch Mikaela, Sam turns her into a sexualized commodity from his voyeuristic gaze. Bay helps the audience see what Sam does by slowly panning over her body while she is busy adjusting the car. She transforms from being the character Mikaela Barnes to a fantastical sexualized object that both the audience and Sam Witwicky can fantasize about.

A question that arises while analyzing this scene is the intent. Is Bay deliberately trying to make the audience focus solely on Mikaela as a "key event taking place at sunset?" (*Michael*). Bay positions this scene on a hilltop with a low-set California sun. The aesthetic qualities of the surrounding area create the perfect romantic getaway, which fixates the spectator's attention on the couple. But with the way Bay swirls in with the camera and has it transfixed on Mikaela, the audience subconsciously understands that there is some intended motivation. As a culture, is there a demand to be fed this sexualized eye-candy? Is there an instruction manual while making a film ordering that there be a beautiful female protagonist? Is it a culturally created hunger for men to have women shown like this? Or is it just an added flare that Bay decided to throw in for his own personal enjoyment? Far more important, does the audience know that they are objectifying women?

The second movie is "Transformers: Dark of the Moon." The third movie of the franchise was again directed by Michael Bay. It was released in theaters on June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2011. For its opening

six-day total, “Transformers: Dark of the Moon” grossed an estimated \$175.6 million, being the 15<sup>th</sup> placed highest-grossing six-day launch movie. For a budget of \$195 million, Bay certainly out-did himself this time in comparison with the other two in the franchise. “Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen,” the second in the three, demanded a budget of \$200 million and has generated a lifetime worldwide gross of \$836,303,693 while “Transformers: Dark of the Moon” has brought in a lifetime worldwide gross of \$1,123,794,079 (“Transformers: Dark”). Whether or not the substitution of Rosie Huntington-Whiteley for Megan Fox played any significant financial difference is debatable. For the third film, Bay added two cast members to the movie, Miss Whiteley, known for being a Victoria’s Secret Angel, and Patrick Dempsey, who is known for his role as a heartthrob doctor in the show, “Grey’s Anatomy.” Rosie Huntington-Whiteley takes on the new role of Sam Witwicky’s girlfriend, Carly, in the high-stakes, action-filled blockbuster.

The movie, similar to the others in the franchise, received mixed reviews. The overwhelming computer generated imagery seems to be a hit or a miss. Lisa Ann Cockrel, from *Christianity Today*, says, “Transformers 3 is the archetype of a summer blockbuster – all explosions and chest-swelling bravado and snarky sidekicks and big guns and hot chicks and hero shots.” Another critique that calls attention to male sexism comes from Peter Canavese, a writer for *Groucho Reviews*. He points out that the film is “intensely juvenile, casually sexist, and blatantly stupid in ways that few if any over the age of ‘T for Teen’ or bereft of a Y chromosome could enjoy.” Interestingly enough, however, this movie draws more attention to the objectified female. Caroline Heldman, from *The Society Pages*, addresses Whiteley’s role: “Carly wears stiletto heels, even when running from murderous machines (except when filmmakers slip up and her flats are visible), and she is pristine in her white-jacket after an hour-long battle that leaves the men filthy.” Carly does seem to remain clean throughout the movie in comparison to the grime colored male characters. She parallels Lara Croft’s light-colored, skin-tight outfit in contrast to the bulky black coats of Croft’s male companions. As Carly is displayed in a lighter

color than that of her male counterparts, the white color illuminates her as the spectacle and focuses the male spectator's attention on her during intense scenes. As Heldman describes her, Carly remains pristine in her white outfit to remind us of the purity that the female represents. She is similar to Mikaela in allowing Bay to make an easy, objectified use of her body.

The first scene of the movie opens with the audience following Carly up a flight of stairs. Bay utilizes the first 22 seconds for only one thing – Carly's buttocks. The camera lens remains steadfast on her behind as she ascends the staircase, holding the viewer's gaze to that region. Most importantly, Carly is walking up the stairs in one of Sam's dress shirts and a tight pair of underwear. She is not only becoming a sexualized object under the male gaze at the start, but also, she is teasing the audience. By having the shirt just low enough in the back, there is a sense of peek-a-boo occurring. Bay is playing a game with the male's voyeuristic pleasure. The shot also includes her legs. The legs of a woman can be just as sexually satisfying to look at as the actual "fanny," which is similar to a Monroe-like image. But this opening scene instantly informs the audience that Carly is to be thought of as the beautiful, yet, object of the gaze. Even with Mikaela's blonde replacement, the objectification remains the same, if not stronger, by the increased number of scenes that Bay gives to "visually-interesting moments" (*Michael*).

Heather Hogan, from AfterEllen.com, observes that "one of the main [tenets] of objectification theory according to good ol' Martha Nussbaum is called 'interchangeability.' If one human being is interchangeable with another human being, you're objectifying it." Regarding the change from Mikaela to Carly, Nussbaum could not be more correct. From this scene, the spectators are instantly turned on to the idea that Carly will be their voyeuristic pleasure for the remainder of the film. Bay seems to have raised the stakes to have a more attractive—attractive in the sense of having a stronger grasp of viewer attention—female character. Hogan also states that "the problem with 'Transformers' is that the main female lead is nothing more than a hot body"

(Hogan). From what Bay has shown in the previous “Transformers” movies, the female characters are consistently seen as figures of the gaze rather than as an important asset to the plot.

The second moment that illustrates the objectification of women occurs towards the middle of the movie. In this scene, Dylan, played by the teenage girl heartthrob Patrick Dempsey, meets Sam for the first time. Sam has decided to come and visit Carly at work where Dylan gives him a tour of the facility. The three arrive at a particular car on the tour, a 1939 Delahaye 165 Cabriolet. Dylan begins to talk about the car. He tells Sam to “look at the curves. Elegant, isn’t it? Beautiful. Sensual. Built to evoke the body of the ideal woman.” But the interesting thing about this moment is that the camera is not positioned on the car. As Dylan says, “Look at the curves. Elegant, isn’t it?” the camera starts from Carly’s legs and pans up the rest of her body. The audience recognizes that he is not talking about the car, but is speaking about Carly herself. The moment is emphasized when a quick shot is brought back to Dylan, who is not looking at the car but at Carly. Dylan is illustrating the sexual, or “sensual,” nature of the female’s body. As the camera crawls up Carly’s body, each word from Dylan describes her as if she were a car – specifically the Delahaye. If Bay were to keep the camera on the car as Dylan talks to Sam, this moment would not have the same impact. Thus, Dylan and Bay reduce Carly to an object of the gaze, especially since she is in a tight white dress that accentuates her curves. It is as if the audience does not get a sufficient understanding from the first 22 seconds of the movie, and Dylan is instructing them on how to properly “appreciate” the female form. Hogan reminds us that Carly poses as if she were in a car magazine and “let[s] the camera crawl all over her.” She is transformed from a woman to a possession, “the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle,” which Dylan condescendingly instructs Sam how to correctly appreciate it (Mulvey 2088).

Michael Bay relies on objectifying women on the big screen. These three scenes exemplify the objectification of women in various media-like pieces of advertising albeit in magazines, television, and movies; a sad reminder that media portrayals approximate the

objectification of women in everyday life. Women are reduced from their autonomous human form to an object that men can look at for sexual gratification. Megan Fox played the role of a hard-raised girl, which offers a secondary addition to her objectification. Carly, although she does not have Mikaela's bad girl sex appeal, transcends Mikaela by dressing in white and with Bay's many scenes exploiting her. Bay succeeds in illustrating how Carly becomes more of a possession to be gazed upon. The first initial scene begins the molding of the audience's mind around the idea that she is a beautiful, fetishized object that everyone needs to see right away. The audience is not expecting a seductive ascension up a flight of stairs into the bedroom. They especially are not ready for the tease that her clothes create. Then, in the car scene, the audience gets another taste of Carly. Bay uses the camera to allow the male spectator's eyes to crawl up the sensual curves of an "ideal woman." By offering his viewers such a sensational taste at the beginning scenes, Bay accentuates the men's lustful voyeuristic desires. Dylan teaches the audience how to appreciate the objectified possession that Carly embodies. Bay perpetuates the voyeuristic desire by sculpting the audience's subconscious desire to see more of the "hot female lead."

The significance of normalized objectification thus demands popular culture to hunger for it – a subconscious hunger that must be fed with each new cinematic experience. This hunger in film audiences has in turn transcended the confines of film culture. Advertising, which only is able to "offer partial pleasures, preliminaries to the excitement of the moment of" seeing the ideal ego on screen, now embodies the art of objectification to its fullest (Stacey 138). People are unaware of the prolific yet traumatizing effects that it has. Caroline Heldman writes, "normalization of female objectification cause girls/women to think of themselves as objects, which has been linked to higher rates of depression and eating disorders, compromised cognitive and sexual function, decreased self-esteem, and decreased personal and political efficacy." Female objectification is widespread in our culture. It affects everyone and has become so ingrained in us that we have become numb to any social ramifications that it presents. For

example, when Michael Bay objectifies the two different female leads in “Transformers” and “Transformers: Dark of the Moon,” he uses the gaze as if it were a fundamental requirement to make the films. He also constructs a desire to create the fetish in the third movie with the initial voyeuristic tease within the first 22 seconds. This cultural paradigm does not seem to be something that people are cognizant of. Movie critics address the teenage action that either attracts or repels potential audiences. But they are silent when it comes to the objectification of the teenage heartthrobs as if it were commonplace. No one has had the veil lifted from his or her own visual lens to see the abundance of this cultural phenomenon. Society accepts women exposing “their rosey lips, their hard nipples, bums, [and] soft thighs” (Hogan). But we fail to understand the influences that result from the normalization of female objectification.



## Chapter 3

### **“Crash”: A Fender Bending Confrontation of Racial Commodification**

Historically, black women's bodies have often been the subject of voyeuristic consumption, the consumption not only of black women's sexuality, but also of black women's trauma and pain.

-Desiree Lewis

From the degrading showcasing of Sarah Baartman to Thandie Newton's inappropriate police pat down on the big screen, black women's sexual objectification has remained a strong theme throughout time. Today, with the reelection of a mixed-race president, society has espoused the idea of a post-racial paradigm. But with the voyeuristic perpetuation of black females, such a paradigm does not exist. The fantastical idea of post-racial society superficially covers our culture like fairy dust. The “ever after” assumption of transcending racial distinctions remains intact because of the lack of contestation. As black people continue to experience the underbelly of a divided society and then acquiesce to its social injustices, the fairy dust of a post-racial paradigm remains untouched. Through examining the black female body as a recipient of sexual voyeuristic gratification, the portrayed image of a progressed society is hollow.

Sarah Baartman, better known as “Hottentot Venus,” was a slave from Cape Town, South Africa. She is the first popularized black woman objectified for her bodily differences; she had an “unusually large buttocks and genitals” (Davie). Baartman was taken by European colonists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to use as a mirrored reflection of inferiority. At that time, Europeans were obsessed with their own superiority. In order to feed such a cannibalistic ego, they showcased Baartman to highlight and mock her abnormalities. Her black skin, large buttocks, and overly sized genitals

gave Europeans the evidence they craved for the inferiority of “others.”<sup>9</sup> The display of Hottentot Venus in London and Paris drew “attention to the oversignification of the black female body by encouraging the viewer to reflect on how its meaning is inextricably linked to the meaning invested in white bodies, male bodies, and especially, white male bodies” (Lewis 12). She constituted the dark underbelly of society; she was the darker disfiguration of a superior white body. Once the grandeur of her “otherness” wore off, she resorted to the only thing that an uneducated black woman could do at the time besides slavery – prostitution. Unable to survive the abuse to her body, Baartman quickly died soon after. But even after her death, she was displayed for the world to see. A French scientist, Georges Cuvier, made a plaster cast of her body, removed her skeleton, brain, and genitals to later display them at the *Musee de l’Homme* in Paris (Davie).

Her body was used to illustrate the “impure, savage and embodied evil” in comparison to the “pure, holy and civilized” European whiteness (‘Pro’ Sobopha 120). This otherness “thus suggests that the factors of beauty, sexuality, and disability are merely cultural concepts, which are often projected onto particular bodies, viewed and constructed as ‘deviant’” (Hobson 90). Lasting 160 years after her death, the castings of her body, skeleton, brain, and genitals were in jars for the world to marvel at. Venus, the Greek goddess of love, was a cruel and ironic name for Sarah Baartman. It is a term that represents majestic and divine love or admiration. But Baartman’s admiration was not in any sense divine; instead, it consisted of mockery and oppression from her otherness. She was the “butt” of the joke. She was the freak in the glass case that people pointed at and looked upon in horror. She was so bizarre that her parts were cut out and preserved for future generations to see. Sarah Baartman is only the beginning of a long, perpetuating social construction.

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<sup>9</sup> Other – n. Something disturbingly or threateningly different; alien; exotic.

During the time Baartman was displayed throughout Europe, slaveholders in the United States were similarly devaluing their slaves. Black female slaves were considered a more profitable enterprise because of their sexual appeal and their ability to increase the master's stock through childbearing. In general, slave women fell into one of three distinct stereotypes: the "Mammy" or "Aunt Jemima" role is an "obese African American woman, of dark complexion, with extremely large breasts and buttocks," who typically cared for the master's children (Bennett). Although her body appeared similar to Baartman's, the slaveholders did not find the "Mammy" figure sexually appealing; they rather thought of her as an asexual maternal figure (Bennett). The opposite of the "Mammy" figure lies in the "Sapphire" role. "Sapphire" is characterized as "the wise-cracking, balls-crushing, emasculating woman" (Bennett). While "Mammy" inhabits the role as mother, "Sapphire" strives to assert herself as the masculine presence. The third stereotype is the "Jezebel" figure; she lies between the two other polarizing stereotypes. "Jezebel," a position typically held by a lighter-skinned slave, "is depicted as erotically appealing and openly seductive" (Bennett). She is ascribed a harsher stereotype because her mulatto blood marks her as having an insatiable sexual appetite. The "Jezebel" figure was seen as the temptress of the white master. Although she is given the worst connotation, the "Jezebel" was the real victim. It was her white master who imposed his sexual desires on her. Regardless of the category into which the black female slave fell, she was nothing more than property. Black women today still suffer from the lingering effects of these stereotypes.

A cinematic representation of the modern black woman's objectification is exemplified in the movie "Crash," which received outstanding critical reviews for its examination of racial conflict in America. The Canadian director, Paul Haggis, forces his audiences to confront many social and moral issues that society typically ignores on a daily basis. The film was released on May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Despite the budget of the movie being only \$6.5 million, the total worldwide gross

reached an impressive \$98,410,061.00. More important, “Crash” received six Academy Award nominations. The movie won three of those six in “Best Picture,” “Best Original Screenplay,” and in “Editing” (“Crash”). The film contains multiple character perspectives that all intertwine with each other. With each storyline, we see the viewpoint of a different ethnicity: an affluent white family, two thug black gangsters, a Latina family, a middle-eastern family, etc. Despite the multitude of lenses throughout the film, one lens remains constant – racism. The movie’s title satirizes the collision of multiple perspectives all dealing with racism in the Los Angeles metropolis area. At the beginning of the film, one particular scene especially embodies the ideas of both racism and objectification. This scene also exhibits a white “master” devaluing a “Jezebel-like” woman. John Ryan, a Los Angeles Police Officer, pulls over a black SUV. Before signaling the car, we see from his point-of-view a woman performing fellatio on the driver, which gives John the initial justification to stop the car.

As the scene continues, we see that the two people pulled over are a non-white couple. Ryan asks the husband, Cameron Thayer, to step out of the car to undergo a few sobriety tests. But, once Cameron’s intoxicated wife, Christine, exits the car, a Baartman-like, exhibit ensues. Christine verbally antagonizes John, provoking him to search her too. As he inappropriately frisks her, Mulvey’s triangular viewpoint is created. John sensually touches Christine while the camera jumps from a close-up of Christine’s body to Cameron’s face. Mary Ann Doane illustrates how “the woman’s beauty, her very desirability, becomes a function of certain practices of imaging – framing, lighting, camera movement, angle” (497). In addition to the visuality of cinema, there are also “other diegetic factors such as the soundtrack...and the way diegetic time and space are represented also contribute to the construction of [the] film’s textuality. (Bainbridge 12). Keeping this in mind, the musical effect of the soundtrack contributes to the female’s objectification. When the shot zooms out, the audience is watching Christine while simultaneously watching Cameron. What John achieves as he caresses Christine’s buttocks and thighs is objectification. By

touching her in intimate places, we see him doing this for the purposes of antagonizing Cameron as well as exhibiting his power as a white master over his “Jezebel.” John is fulfilling a few of Martha C. Nussbaum’s classifications of objectification. The first aspect that he touches on is ownership by treating her as “something that is owned by another” (Nussbaum 257). Caroline Bainbridge explains Cameron’s humiliation by stating that “commodities are used as mirrors to reflect back to the masculine subject an image of himself” (36). As he sexually touches Christine, John reflects Cameron’s own image of being a black man and his lack of control in the situation. With the camera zooms out we complete the last leg of the triangle. By our omnipresence, the severity of Christine’s objectification and discomfort is truly felt.

Most people do not know what or how to pinpoint the uncomfortable feeling they get when they watch this scene. The answer is two-fold: the first and main aspect that creates the uneasiness is objectification. As we watch this scene, it is as if the air we breathe becomes denser and we start to feel it closing in around us. As John slowly inches his hands up Christine’s legs, starting from the ankles, the full realization that he is sexually and possessively objectifying her sinks in. We feel uncomfortable because John brings us along with him; not only his hands, but also our figurative hands, are climbing Christine’s legs up underneath her cocktail dress. A second aspect of Nussbaum’s objectification is “violability” (257). As John’s hands creep up the inside of Christine’s dress, he treats her “as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that is permissible to break up, smash, break into” (Nussbaum 257). We are equally taking part in objectifying her to fulfill John’s, and subconsciously our own, sexual voyeuristic desire, which is generated from experiencing “a [subconscious] pleasure in seeing what is prohibited in relation to the female body” (Doane 497). We are unable to look away. The camera lens has our eyes strained on every inch of Christine’s legs. We cannot shut our eyes. We are unable to stop John’s hands; we are unable to pull our own figurative hands away because we are equally involved in using Christine’s body to spite Cameron. Guilt from witnessing the scene and voyeuristically

participating in John's actions is produced. Despite watching the scene from behind the camera, we experience every aspect of it. We feel the tension rising just as his hands do. Finally, when the camera zooms out, we can take a deep breathe as if the wider camera angle reminds us to inhale again. Christine has now been commodified; she is a subject that the male spectator can feast on with his voyeuristic hunger. She is a possession to be owned, reflecting back upon Cameron. The scene begins with Christine performing a sexual act on Cameron, which triggers our subconscious sexual desire. Then by the end, it has manifested into the forefront of our consciousness and, subsequently, generates the feelings of discomfort.

The second aspect that creates the uneasy sensation occurs at the end of the scene. Dillon asks Cameron if he would like to admit defeat and take a warning or to pick a fight and be arrested. Cameron chooses the former in order to end the humiliation as soon as possible. We can see that by admitting defeat, he feels helpless and ashamed. Watching the end of the scene, we too want it to end as soon as possible. We feel Cameron's humiliation from our own involvement in the scene. More important, we finally realize that the racial divide between the couple and the police officer was a major factor underlying the scene. The white cop now gives the black man an option to admit defeat or fight a losing battle. In other words, the white man is playing a game with the black man. The white master enacts his sexual desires on "Jezebel" to show his dominance. This scene "demands a certain discomfort for the audience, and forces the viewer to confront his or her own political position(s) (or lack of political position)" (Lauretis 329). John knows that he has full control of the situation. He understands that he has full control over Cameron. With the possibility of either ending the humiliation or further perpetuating it, Cameron decides to go along with the status quo and take the warning. Rather than trying to fight back, the black man capitulates.

Despite "Crash" calling attention to racial injustice, it still is a major studio-released film. Caroline Bainbridge brings to our attention that "it would seem that mainstream movies for the

masses, designed for entertainment, insist on the maintenance of the sexual *status quo*” (31). The movie illustrates a significant problem that exists in our culture; it also shows our lack of a solution for it. Even though no solutions are found in the movie, and we do not see the black couple take a stand against white supremacy (the white master), the movie illustrates these various issues that have manifested themselves in our society. As long as the issue of female objectification lies uncontested, the oppression and social issue that began with Baartman-like exhibits over two hundred years ago will continue.

## Chapter 4

### Maura Shea Interview

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, I had the pleasure of interviewing Maura Shea, an associate film professor at The Pennsylvania State University. The interview was conducted in her office, located at 313 Williard Building on campus. Maura Shea specializes in editing and producing films rather than directing them. She and her husband, Rod Bingaman, who is a senior lecturer in the Department of Film-Video and Media Studies at Penn State, have their own production company called Ma & Pa Pictures. Although Shea has produced four feature-length romantic comedies with her husband, she also has worked on professional films. A few include Jay Craven's independent film, "Where the River Flows North," an award-winning documentary such as "Malcolm X: Make it Plain," and she even has worked on two segments of "Sesame Street." Before she came to Penn State, Shea was a lecturer of film production and sound design at Boston University. During her time there, she directed and produced an award-winning short drama called "Under Control."

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the objectification of women, I decided to interview someone who had experience in making films. I wanted to get inside the mind of someone who looks through the camera similar to the spectator, but is affected differently. Maura Shea opened my eyes to a few things that I had not thought of. One in particular is the equal objectification in men. Actors like Channing Tatum and Ryan Gosling, although it is not necessary, show off their six-pack abs to satisfy women's sexual hunger. Shea told me that in order to be the lead male protagonist, the actor must be able to flash his body to attract the female audience. Another key point is the intent of the director. Michael Bay knows objectification will



draw a big audience, consequently drawing more money towards the film. Shea disagreed with my assumption that objectification is a widespread phenomenon. Michael Bay may have used it in his movie, but a typical director has no preconception to objectify his or her leading female protagonist. In fact, Shea said that the audience rather than the director creates objectification. After I told her my bar story, she again challenges my assumptions about women. Shea argues that the girls in the Playboy bunny costumes may not have wanted to go home with guys that night; they simply wanted to be looked at. The interview with Maura Shea opened my eyes to a few aspects to film that I had not addressed. I am thankful for her giving me a secondary lens through which I can get a better understanding of whether or not women are objectified and where it might take place.

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ME: Objectifying females, is it cultural? Coming from your background of a producing and editing standpoint, is there anything that, subconsciously, you would do?

MAURA: The objectification is told through a specific character's "POV." It's subjective objectification in that, the camera is showing the shots because [of] the character, and it sounds like it's established that it's the way the character is seeing it. As opposed to the way the filmmaker is seeing it. And there are plenty of films that do that—that chose to shoot women—and there are some not as often. You know, there are not a lot of unattractive men who are in films either. I guess Shia LaBeouf is not quite on Megan Fox's "hotness scale," but [he] certainly tried to "up" his game and make him more of the prototypical...you know. Ryan

Goslings' abs are what they are. For guys right now, if you don't flash your six-pack you're not going to get the leading man. And sometimes it doesn't even play in to the movie. But I think there's a difference to saying this character is objectifying in which case it's cultural. That's the way a young guy would look at Megan Fox. Would she dress in skimpy clothes as a real person? Frankly, probably. They don't make any superhero outfit that doesn't show off the six-pack abs. Women, whether culturally or otherwise, want to be attractive. They're not going to want to wear baggy clothes. That's part of that strength of women. "I can be sexy and in control." I think that the visual gaze thing for me depends on where it comes from. Is it from the filmmaker or the character? The character...people look at attractive people. Frankly, the way that men look at attractive women and women at attractive men its just...[the way it is].

ME: "Magic Mike." This movie seemed to be popular because it was primarily Channing Tatum and Matt Bomer in almost no clothing. Could this be a reflection of men's gaze at women?

MAURA: I don't know if it's cultural or biological but, viewing, it's why they say men watch more pornography than women. This sort of viewing experience is sort of a male gaze. You don't talk about the female gaze a lot. It's not like we don't like to look at men a whole lot. But it doesn't have the same resonance. Show girls for girls. I think budget has a lot to do with how women are depicted in film. When I think about the strong female characters, they tend to be in films where they are somewhat smaller. I mean Sandra Bullock makes big budget films but she's also non-threatening. Sometimes she is the girl-next-door. She's not "super hot." She is an attractive person. But, it is in a more nonthreatening way. I mean like Meryl Streep, [the] greatest actress of our time, she can be attractive but not

in any classical way. She's the Dustin Hoffman. There are very few of those—George Clooney, Brad Pitt—who are attractive and can act. There are women [like] Sandra Bullock. She also gets those few roles that actually require something more than...you know, [looks]. I guess Nicole Kidman would be someone who is classically attractive but also has the acting chops. But even she's gone so far in plastic surgery to try and maintain her youth. I think it's harder. There are not as many parts. That's for sure. You get to be the "Pepper" in "Iron Man." She's always there. Gwyneth Paltrow can certainly act. But she's mostly there because if they didn't have some woman they'd eventually get grief. But again it's the market that they're going for. The market is 15 to 25-year-old men. So you're not going to put Sandra Bullock in that movie. That wouldn't make any sense.

ME: When you have the character like Pepper or a dominant female, is it something women innately gravitate to or repel away from? Do women want to aspire to that personality?

MAURA: To me, I look not at the character but at the actors. So it was, "I wish I could act like that." I guess that I always saw that behind the layer. When I was real little I wanted to be Melanie in "Gone With The Wind" because she was so good. I didn't want to be Scarlet because she was a [brat]. I wouldn't have used those words at the time. So I guess when I was younger I looked more at the character but I think in that sort of role-model world, that has changed somewhat. Kids growing up they...because there's this reality TV, everyone's a character and also a real person. So, you don't look at fictional characters in quite the same way. There's always that level of knowing it's the real person. Everything they do is also reported on. Every actor carries this baggage of what they do in real

life. I've seen that with my kids when they really like somebody and they want to see all of their movies and they find out, "Oh my god! They got found smoking pot."

ME: A perfect example these days is Miley Cyrus. Her transformation from Hannah Montana to her persona now is drastic. But I understand when you say there is this baggage.

MAURA: Like everyone is both a character of themselves and a real person and then the characters they play. Whether part of that is just saturation of media and whatnot that goes on. I think people look at characters in the same way as role models as we used to, more so, in isolated moments.

ME: Film is an escape. Do these female characters provide an escape from reality?

MAURA: Certainly. That's what makes a movie enjoyable. When you kind of lose yourself and really feel like you're experiencing someone else's reality or experience. It partly informs the kind of movies [people are going to go see]. I pick and chose because I don't want to have some of the experiences that are, you know; I don't really want to see a film about a serial killer. I do try and pick and chose what I see because, if I'm going to invest my time, I'm going to want to be [entertained]. I just don't want to have that experience (of "Se7en")<sup>10</sup> all the time. Shelley Duvall from "The Shining" annoys a lot of people because she ends up whimpering and screaming through most of the movie. But [Duvall's] daughter said that she feels people are unfair to [Duvall]. They felt bad that no one liked her character. It's not her acting. Her husband is crazy and she's trapped with

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<sup>10</sup> Maura had elaborated beforehand that one of the makers of "Seven" was a Penn State graduate. Being so, he made man visits and spoke numerous times about his movie, in which, Shea has seen dozens of times and cannot stand watching it anymore.

him and she doesn't know what to do. And that's a case where they could look at it and empathize with her.

ME: Are women trapped within certain roles? Mother, matriarch, the bad girl, the whore...?

MAURA: I think in certain kinds of movies certainly. I think that's where, however many hundreds of movies made each year, and they do fit into categories. And, I think every Spiderman has to have the girlfriend and yes, the girlfriend now from the girlfriend twenty years ago is a bit stronger and more of a person and all that. [But,] strides have been made within that. You're still going to have the *femme fatale*, the sexualized woman, and the black widow not to be trusted. I think there are archetypes.

There are for men too. I just think they're less...interesting. I think it varies by the kind of movie. There are fewer parts. You're either young or you're old. But there's very little in between. In life, women either have to play up or play down. Because, if you're going to have those archetypal roles, they are [going] to be filled by a certain kind of person. It's why films like bridesmaids...no one fits the right category. The most sexualized person in the movie is Melissa McCarthy. That's why people embraced it so. It's also non-threatening in a lot of ways. Women are very judgmental. Not so much the type of roles but the age casting. You get these guys my age, 50s and 60s and they have to have the women playing their wives and lovers...and they're not gold-diggers, they're 20. Just ridiculous. "Ageism" more for women than anything else.

ME: On the projects that you've worked on, have you ever dealt with this kind of issue?

MAURA: My husband and I've made four films. This latest one, we have lots of female characters; it's the first one where men are driving the story. And we [Shea and her husband] certainly talk. There are suggestions that I'd give my husband about things that I think would help. A picture set in 1932 we really felt the women's roles could sort of tweak to current gender roles but not really. We weren't trying to make it anachronistic. The girl was in college and she really wanted to get married. That's what was on her mind. That was part of the site. That was how she went about getting her boyfriend to ask her to marry him. That<sup>11</sup> would be a bit more 2000s. Our current picture is set in 1967, which is before the whole women's movements. We try to have fun within the time period but also be conscious of [things]. I don't think we have any truly passive women in our films.

ME: Have you ever been in a moment where you wanted to capture the sexuality of a female character to capture the guy's attention?

MAURA: Not directly. You want your actresses and guys to look good. We used a lot of the same people in our films. Frankly, in our third, the woman doesn't come off all that great. People are conflicted. She's not the whore but she's not always nice to her intended fiancé. She gets cold feet and runs off. I don't think we in any of our films.... They're comedies and they're fairly PG13. We just don't ever seem to go there. In the 60s picture, the girls are wearing hot pants. We want them to look attractive but there's no exploitation.

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<sup>11</sup> "That" refers to how despite the film's setting taking place in the 30s, Shea and her husband tweaked the social timeframe to have their protagonist notify her fiancé of her desire to get married. In the 30s, women were not as free in communication as they would be in the 00s.

ME: O.K. So, you're not trying to do anything specific like capture the eye of the male protagonist. But, is [the objectification] then all crafted by the camera and the audience watching? Or an indirect result?

MAURA: Films are spectator sports. What we talk a lot about in film class is POV and perspective; what you want the audience to know and what you don't want them to know. The bad thing is, when students put POV shots and [we're] like, "Well whose POV is that?" "Why are you showing us that?" [But] if you're showing shots of women's body, and it's not coming from a character within the scene, then it is exploitative. 'Cause you're just doing it to show the audience. You should never say wow that's a really cool shot. But shots should flow from the narrative. So the idea of perspective [is] objective vs. subjective camera. The gaze shots are subjective. You should be thinking about what a pig he is for staring at her ass instead of "wow that's a nice ass." Your reaction to that shot is partly whether the filmmaker has decided to make it an exploitative shot.

ME: This passed weekend, I was at the bar celebrating Halloween. Three girls in Playboy bunny costumes walked in. It was obvious that every guy at the bar had turned his head when he saw these three beautiful girls enter. Be it luck or mere coincidence, I ended up being positioned behind these three ladies. I say luck because not out of my own selfish advantage to gaze at the women. I say luck, rather, because I could then observe when and who all looked at the women. Were these women asking for it or was it a construction of our society to eye up these girls?

MAURA: Film is just another version of that. [But] it's caught [by a camera]. The girls on Halloween, it's gratifying to them to be noticed. I think they know they're being noticed just for how they look. Whether that means anything else besides, "I like

being noticed for how I look,” that’s where you can get into trouble. But what does that mean? Maybe that’s all that [it] means. People often say women dress for other women more than men because women are very judgmental. Film in the essence is just to look. You can’t do much else but watch. So when you take this essence of, “I just want to be watched to feel pretty,” that it doesn’t mean anything else. I think it’s that next step in our society that nobody quite knows how to navigate. It doesn’t mean she wants you to take her home. It just means she wants you to look at her butt. That’s why it’s fantasy. You can’t go passed the voyeuristic part of it I guess. It makes it hard because they’re so many options of voyeurism. Why are “selfies” so popular? Why are ugly “selfies” so popular? The whole film and what is a film and what people will watch quality wise is all history.



## Conclusion

The normalization of female objectification in society encourages Hollywood to continue offering it as a spectacle. Laura Mulvey uses Freud and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories to critique women's prescribed roles within film. Although Mulvey's essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," was written in the 1970s, her argument of the male gaze remains prevalent in today's society. For example, advertising now embodies the art of objectification to its fullest. Every female model in a magazine or commercial advertisement is doctored to perfection. People are unaware of the prolific yet traumatizing effects that it has. Caroline Heldman speculates that "normalization of female objectification cause girls/women to think of themselves as objects, which has been linked to higher rates of depression and eating disorders, compromised cognitive and sexual function, decreased self-esteem, and decreased personal and political efficacy." Female objectification affects everyone and has thoroughly embedded itself within society and, worst of all, we are unaware of its social ramifications.

Michael Bay's objectification of the two different female protagonists seemed to be something that was fundamentally necessary in the construction of his films. This cultural paradigm, however, is not something that people are cognizant of. Movie critics address the teenage action aspect that either attracts or repels potential audiences. They do not address the objectification of the female heartthrobs, as if it were normal. No one has lifted the veil from his or her own visual lens to see the abundance of this cultural phenomenon. We accept women exposing "their rosey lips, their hard nipples, bums, [and] soft thighs" (Hogan). But we do not understand the influences that result from the objectification.

In contrast, black women's anguish began long before white women's. They were the true social mirrors that reflected the uncleanness of race. Sarah Baartman, with her abnormal body proportions, began the paradigm for female objectification for black women and—ironically

for the white Europeans mocking her—for white women as well. Black women also were sectioned into stereotypes during slavery, which has survived until today. These ascribed roles only exacerbate the ways in which the black female is objectified within film. In Bay's "Transformers" film, we are introduced to the male spectator being the sexual voyeur and the acceptance of objectifying the female lead. Haggis, on the other hand, does something different with "Crash." Haggis uses the white master's objectification of the "Jezebel" figure as a way to involve every audience member rather than specifically the men. His intent is to show that men are not the only ones involved in the female protagonist's objectification. All audience members take part in the act. The car scene from "Crash" evokes guilt and discomfort in all of its spectators. These sensations are part of the repression that Freud discusses within the Oedipus complex. They may not be the fear of castration, but these feelings are what the audience experiences when they acknowledge their mistake. We as the audience realize the guilt and discomfort and, to avoid it, we repress it. Scenes like those in "Transformers" maintain the status quo, which we are able to accept and then discard. The scene from "Crash," however, makes us confront objectification head-on.

The intent of this project was not to slander our society but to uncover a blemish that prevents us from moving forward. Gender and race have been a significant epidemic that our culture has battled for ages. With various female superstars and a mixed-race President, we have lost sight of the battle yet to be won. I hope to recollect our efforts through one social medium at a time to resolve the objectification of women or, at the least, to make this social epidemic widely known. It is a problem that has manifested itself in almost every aspect of our culture – music, film, advertising, etc. The only way to begin the purging of this social cancer is to first create awareness. The cycle must be broken or else women's subordination will remain an accepted and perpetual trope in society.

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## ACADEMIC VITA

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The Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College, 2010-2014  
B.A. English and Spanish, Honors in English  
Thesis: The Objectification of Women in Film  
Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Iyunolu Osagie

The University of Alicante, Alicante, Spain (Study Abroad), Fall 2012

### Honors:

Schreyer Honors College Inductee, Spring 2013

### Community Involvement:

Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon, 2011-2012, 2013-2014  
Penn State Habitat for Humanity - Community Restoration, Vero Beach, FL, Spring 2013  
Penn State Fresh Start - Community Betterment Activities, Fall 2010  
Penn State Career Fair – Admissions Support, Fall 2010

### Professional Experience:

Bureau of Consumer Protection, Office of Attorney General, Summer 2013

### Associations:

Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (Morale), 2013-2014  
Penn State Chapter Habitat for Humanity – Vero Beach, FL, Spring 2013  
Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon (Rules & Regulations), 2011-2012  
Penn State One Stage Revolution Acting Company, Fall 2011