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## Study of the Gender Representations within the Aliens Series

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STUDY OF THE GENDER REPRESENTATIONS

WITHIN THE *ALIEN* SERIES

BY

WHITNEY ANSPACH

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

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IN

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MASTER OF ARTS THESIS

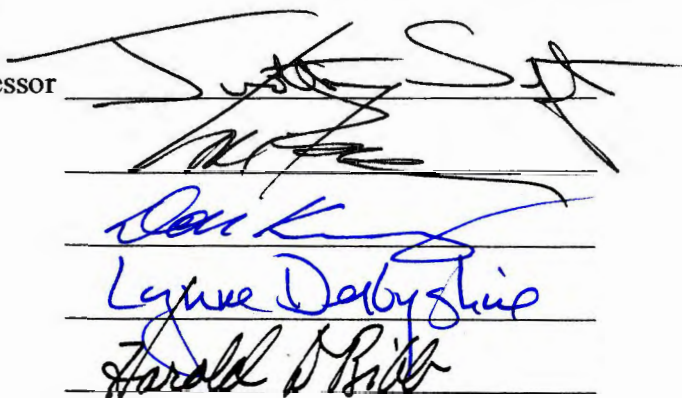
OF

WHITNEY ANSPACH

APPROVED:

Thesis Committee

Major Professor



The image shows four handwritten signatures on a set of four horizontal lines. The first signature is in black ink and is highly stylized. The second signature is also in black ink and is less stylized. The third signature is in blue ink and reads 'Lynne Daby Ship'. The fourth signature is in black ink and reads 'Harold P. Hill'.

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

UNIVERSITY OF RHODE ISLAND

2001

## Abstract

This study employed a detailed examination of and comparison between and among each of the four films within the *Alien* series to explore and demonstrate distinct differences in gender representation in the series. This study has also determined that there exists a relationship between these differing gender representations and concurrent changes in the gender norms of films created for the primary target audience the United States with secondary international audiences. This determination was aided by a detailed examination of the gender norms in multiple genres including science fiction, action, horror, and hybrid mixtures of these three. In addition, gender representations in other films contemporaneous with each film in the *Alien* series were examined in order to provide an additional basis of comparison for the gender representations within the *Alien* series. In all cases, each of the *Alien* series films was compared to films made during the same historical timeframe.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my friends and family for their support throughout my thesis experience. I wish to give special thanks to the following people who have gone above and beyond the call of duty and friendship during the past year: Dr. Lynne Derbyshire, S. Lyn Goeringer, Dr. Sandra Ketrow, Prof.

Judith Swift, and Dr. Stephen Wood.

## Preface

The purpose of this study is to examine possible gender representation differences within the four *Alien* films and to assess the probable causes for those differences. Rhetorical analysis will be used to examine the gender representation in the four films. Variances in gender representation will then be examined against changes in the gender norms of a selection of films, created for the prime target audience of the United States with secondary international audiences, during the period in which the films were made in order to assess the relationship between the two factors. To be specific, this study will attempt to determine the validity of the following two hypothesis:

1. There are differences in how gender is represented in the four *Alien* films.
2. There exists a relationship between these differing representations of gender and the changes in gender norms of films created for the prime target audience, the United States.

The *Alien* film series was selected primarily because of the opportunity it allows for examination of gender representation over a span of two decades.

Ridley Scott's 1979 film, *Alien* (1979), is considered a landmark Hollywood film in terms of positive, feminist portrayals of women (Grant, 1996; Penley, 1991).

The screenwriter for *Alien* (1979), Dan O'Bannon, designed each role to be acted by either a man or a woman (Penley, 1991) and helped to create a film with very

little gender oriented dialogue and action. Consequently, this was one of the first Hollywood films that allowed male and female characters equal opportunity to act as weak, strong, intelligent, and stupid. Thomas Doherty (1996) summarized the novelty of *Alien*'s (1979) gender blurring best in his comment, “. . .in this future world, the natural order of things really was upside down. Against all science fiction expectations, the prettiest babe on board is also the shrewdest operator” (p. 194).

However, in stark contrast to the overwhelmingly positive feminist reaction to Scott's “stunningly egalitarian” (Penley, 1991, p. 73) *Alien* (1979), James Cameron's sequel *Aliens* (1986) was vilified for its return to traditional gender roles (Greenberg, 1988; Penley, 1991; Wood, 2000). Blackmore (1996) summarizes the feminist critique of Cameron's *Aliens* (1979) stating, “*Aliens* is not about feminism, female empowerment, motherhood, or even colonialism: rather, it is about women who have been duped into serving the patriarchy” (p. 211).

Negative feminist critique only increased with each new release of *Alien* sequels, as the female hero of the film gradually adopted more stereotypically feminine traits (Doherty, 1996; Inness, 1999; Penley, 1991; Wood, 2000). Ridley Scott's hero in the first *Alien* (1979) did not display overt weakness or romantic intentions, however, by the third *Alien* film the hero was given a more traditional gender-specific role as a sexual object. The hero, Ripley, was highly sexualized through a romance with a male character and through an attempted gang rape that failed only through the chivalry of a male character.

The closing scenes of the third *Alien* film offered Ripley no choice but to take her own life as she finally succumbed to the Alien she had so successfully fought off in the previous films. Inness (1999) argues that the death of the *Alien* series' hero, Ripley, serves as a warning "to women who. . . might rebel against gender constraints" (p.113).

The fourth and final *Alien* film further displays Ripley's weakness by showing her lack of control over even her own death. The once strong female hero is cloned using her genes and those of the horrific alien she had fought in all of the previous films. The resulting character while physically strong is imprisoned, highly sexualized, and of dubious morality as she struggles with whether to side with the human race or the aliens.

This brief synopsis of the four *Alien* films offers an opportunity to observe the many overt changes in gender norms. These gender norms served to break down the boundaries in pop culture, that occurred during the 18 year span of the films. This study will attempt to ascertain to what extent external changes in gender norms, mirrored the differences in gender representation within the four *Alien* films. However, before any relationship between gender representation and gender norms can be established an understanding of the meaning of these concepts is needed.

"Gender" and "sex" do not mean the same thing. Understanding this point is imperative to understanding the focus of this study. Sex is defined as the biological and physiological characteristics that make a person male or female



(Canary & Dindia, 1998; Halpern, 2000; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart & Friedley, 1996). In contrast, gender is referred to as “the social construction of masculinity and femininity within a culture” (Stewart, Cooper, Stewart & Friedley, 1996, p. 4). Gender’s relationship to sex is perhaps best illustrated by Unger and Crawford’s (1992) statement, “. . .gender is what culture makes out of the ‘raw material’ of biological sex” (p.18).

Understanding the difference between the terms gender and sex is important because this study is examining the changes in the representation of the masculinity and femininity of the characters within the four *Alien* films, not the changes in the representation of male and female characters. For example, male characters’ dialogue, movements, and costuming will be examined in terms of masculinity and femininity instead of merely noting whether or not male characters are portrayed in the films.

Before any examination of gender representation can be undertaken, it is imperative to develop a definition of the concepts of masculinity and femininity. Similar to gender these terms are socially constructed by an ever-evolving culture that contains varied, similarly evolving, sub-cultures. Consequently arriving at an understanding of masculinity and femininity, otherwise referred to as gender norms, can prove to be a daunting task. For the purposes of this study, those definitions will be recognized as dynamic but discussed from the static perspective of research previously completed on previous time periods related to the production of each film in the series. Genre(s) formulas will be employed as tool

to assess how gender was commonly portrayed, otherwise referred to as the gender norms, in select genres during the period each *Alien* film was made. However before an examination of genre formulas and gender norms begins, perhaps it would be wise to review the issue of culture and media from a broader perspective.

Most cultural communication scholars agree that there is some relationship between media and culture, although there is little consensus as to what degree that relationship exists (Belton, 1996; Gauntlett, 1998; Grossberg, Wartella, & Whitney, 1998, Hall, 1997). For example Andre Bazin argues that scholars must first take into consideration the society in which the product was created before attempting to understand the product itself. Bazin stated:

The individual transcends society, but society is also and above all within him. So there can be no definitive criticism of genius or talent which does not first take into consideration the social determinism, the historical combination of circumstances, and the technical background which to a large extent determines it (quoted in Belton, 1996, p.1).

Employing Bazin's view of culture and media relations, the gender representation in the *Alien* series would be examined against the gender norms assessed through an analysis of the social history during the period the films were created. In addition, a discussion of the commercial factors behind filmmaking and technical aspects of film as a medium would be examined in terms of possible limitations of this paper's conclusion. However, by only examining the social,

commercial, and technical factors this type of analysis fails to account for the directors' and actors' intentions and aesthetic objectives for the film that could also impact how masculinity and femininity are represented.

The social constructionist approach offers a different way of viewing culture and media through the argument that media's true value is its ability to construct meanings through the representation of subjects. Consequently, as a tool used to create meanings, media becomes just as integral to the creation of culture as social history not merely a tool to reflect that event (Hall, 1997). This approach to media and culture lends itself to two distinct ways of studying the meanings created in society namely, semiotics and the discursive approach.

For the purposes of this study of film's reflection of cultural changes, semiotics or the study of how meaning is created through signs will not be examined in great length. However, an examination of the discursive approach is of particular interest as it focuses upon the effect representations have within society. Specifically, "the emphasis in the discursive approach is always on the historical specificity of a particular form. . .and how they [meanings] are deployed at particular times" (Hall, 1997, p. 6). This view of media's relationship to culture is especially interesting in terms of cultural analysis, because it assumes that media aids in the creation of culture yet it does so only as a tool of the people within that culture, and therefore allows for the examination of the film creator's intentions.

This study will apply this understanding of the relationship between media and culture to the relationship between and among the *Alien* series and the United

States' gender norms. However, throughout this study other possible explanations for gender representation phenomena will be continuously noted such as the financial interests of the film studio or the career aspirations of the actors. Through an examination of the changes in gender representation within a film series an increased understanding of the United States cultural attitudes concerning gender representation in film will hopefully be achieved. However, the sole study of one film series will admittedly result in a limited understanding of the United States' culture and evolving gender norms and may prove more useful as a tool to offer insights into the complex relationship between culture and film.

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## Chapter 1: *Alien* - Contradicting Gender Representations and Genre Expectations

*Genre: A recognizable type of movie, characterized by certain preestablished conventions. Some common American genres are westerns, thrillers, sci-fi movies, etc. A ready-made narrative form (Gianetti, 1996, p. 510).*

### **Genre:**

Sherrie Inness (1999) examined gender representation in Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) using the gender norms of the science fiction film genre in a chapter titled "Tough Women in Outer Space." Inness (1999) argues in favor of science fiction genre research because, "not only does science fiction reflect women's roles, but it has the potential to re-envision and even alter gender roles" (p. 104). This argument yields validation and justification for Inness' chapter and other similar works, however in terms of studying the film *Alien* (1979) there is one major problem - *Alien* (1979) does not belong in the science fiction genre.

The difficulty with studying *Alien* (1979) and other contemporary films like it is that they do not clearly belong into any one genre of film. Dan O'Bannon and Ronald Schusett, the screenwriters for *Alien* (1979), were inspired by the low-budget film *It! The Terror from Beyond Space* (1958) which attempted to meld science fiction technology into the horror plot line (Doherty, 1996). The horror framework appears to have dominated *Alien* (1979) and is evident in the marketing tag line of the film: "In space no one can hear you scream" (*Alien*, 1979) and in the

review of the film accompanying an advertisement in the *Washington Post*, “*Alien* will scare the peanuts right out of your M&M’s” (Kroll, 1979). Due to the dominant horror themes within *Alien* (1979) should the film be examined against the horror genre gender norms and disregard the science fiction setting of the film?

Bruce Kawin (1986) attempted to answer this question by applying *Alien* (1979) to a five step test he created to determine whether a film should be classified as science fiction or horror. The first step, “army vs. scientists” (Kawin, 1986, p. 246) concerns whether the film is for or against the destruction of the alien species. *Alien* (1979) is focussed upon the destruction of the alien species with the exception of the capitalistic company and the android. The second step, “violence vs. intelligence” (Kawin, 1986, p. 247) determines whether the alien species is violent or able to communicate and perhaps be nonviolent. Kawin (1986) argues, “the alien has its nature [violent or peaceful] because of each [horror and science fiction] genre’s implicit attitude toward the unknown” (p. 247). The alien in *Alien* (1979) is most definitely violent and unable or unwilling to communicate in any way with the human characters and therefore would be linked to the horror genre.

The other non-human lifeform in *Alien* (1979), Ash the android science officer, is able to communicate and be nonviolent throughout most of the film. Ash only becomes violent when he attempts to fulfill the orders given to him by the company which clearly states that the alien be brought to earth regardless of whether the crew dies in the process. Kawin (1986) notes this point in his analysis

although he does not agree that Ash's communication ability sways *Alien* (1979) into the science fiction genre. Kawin (1986) states, "*Alien*. . .is emphatically a horror film. . .because the scientist is a soulless robot rather than an authentic visionary. . ." (p. 248).

"Closing vs. opening" (Kawin, 1986, p. 247) is the third step in determining the genre of a film. Kawin (1986) states, "Most horror films are oriented toward the restoration of the status quo rather than toward any permanent opening [of the community]" (p. 247). Considering the violent nature of the alien species in *Alien* (1979) and the crew's desire to destroy it, it is not surprising that the crewmembers attempt to close future relationships and thereby once again aligns itself with the horror genre. Once again it should be noted that the company that the crew worked for and the android they secreted on the ship wanted to create a working relationship with the alien.

The fourth step, "inhuman vs. human" states that "Science fiction is open to the potential value of the inhuman. . .Horror is fascinated by transmutations between human and inhuman (wolfman, etc.), but the inhuman characteristics decisively mandate destruction [of the alien]" (Kawin, 1986, p. 247). The alien in *Alien* (1979) is humanoid in as much as it is bipedal, has teeth (presumably used for eating), and biological sex (male). However, the alien is also a parasitic life form that gestates inside unwilling hosts and kills the host during its birth. This inhuman reproduction process prompts the crew's self-defense mechanism and leads to the destruction of the alien. Similarly, the crew destroys the other



humanoid in the film, Ash an outwardly male android so human-like that no crewmember knew he was not human, when they realize that he will prohibit the crewmembers from trying to destroy the alien and thereby saving themselves.

Kawin's (1986) final step, "communication vs. silence" (p.247) links all the previous steps together in the final argument that:

What one can talk with, one can generally deal with. . . The opened community can be curious about and learn from the outsiders, while the closed community talks only among itself. Horror emphasizes the dread of knowing. . . while science fiction emphasizes the danger and responsibility of the closed mind" (p.247).

While the alien does make animalistic noises it generally does so when it is about to kill a member of crew. This timing of the alien's attempts at conversation is fairly prohibitive in terms of creating a learning community.

Perhaps a better example of "the dread of knowing" present in *Alien* (1979) is when the remaining crewmembers bring Ash back to life in order to ask him how to destroy the alien. Ash's response creates a sense of fear and apprehension on the part of the characters and viewers alike. Ash states:

You can't [destroy the alien]. You still don't understand what you are dealing with do you? The perfect organism. Its structural perfection is only matched by its hostility. . . A survivor (pause) unclouded by conscience, remorse, or delusions of morality. . . I

can't lie to you about your chances, but you have my sympathies

(*Alien* DVD, 1999).

Applying *Alien* (1979) to this test is useful in understanding how well the film fits within the horror genre even though it is set in space and populated with space aliens. Kawin (1986) concluded that *Alien* (1979) "is emphatically a horror film" (p. 248). This test's validity is even more apparent when you apply an undeniably science fiction film to it such as Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). There you see the stark difference in levels of intelligence, communication, humanness of the foreign being and how characters respond to the new relationship.

The opening sequences of *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) depict the ancestors of man starving and rummaging for food and bugs along side of animals, until one of the men is ravaged by a leopard. The men run away unable to help their friend or defend themselves, until the sudden appearance of a large, black, rectangle monolith. The leader of the group approaches the alien form and touches its smooth surface with his hands. However, the men begin to ignore it once they perceive that the alien form will not hurt them nor help them. Although, it is under the shadow of this alien form that the leader of the group learns how to use his opposable thumb to grasp a bone and use it as a tool to kill animals for food. Eventually the man uses the tool to kill attackers as well as animals and it is then that the alien form disappears.

This brief synopsis of the opening scenes in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) demonstrates how unlike Scott's alien in *Alien* (1979), Kubrick's alien communicates to the pre-historic men on an unconscious level and assists mankind by teaching them how to survive. Consequently, none of the pre-historic men try to destroy the inhuman alien form. Due to the non-violent nature of Kubrick's alien, its inhuman form, and its willingness to communicate in order to foster an open community with humans Kawin (1986) concludes *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) to be an example of "pure as well as great science fiction" (p. 249).

The difference between the two films is made even more curious considering Ridley Scott's fascination with Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and the influence it had upon the making of *Alien* (1979) (Scott, 1999). Throughout the making of *Alien* (1979) Scott repeatedly referred to *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) as a "masterpiece" (quoted in Landon, 1991, p. 93). Scott's admiration of Kubrick's film is also evident during the commentary on the making of *Alien* (1979) available on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary DVD edition. Scott stated, "2001: A Space Odyssey (1968) was and still is one of my favorite films" (*Alien* DVD, 1999). Although Scott admired and borrowed from Kubrick's groundbreaking science fiction film, he had very little exposure to any other science fiction films with the exception of *Star Wars* (1977) which he viewed as "a kind of art movie" (quoted in Landon, 1991, p. 93). This lack of experience with the science fiction genre may have freed Scott from any stringent cinematic

formulas and enabled him to make a pseudo-science fiction film outside of the science fiction genre.

As stated before, *Alien* (1979) does not clearly belong to any one genre of film. While Kawin's (1986) test concludes that *Alien* (1979) is a horror film it is difficult to distance viewers and reviewers from the fact that the film does take place in outer space and on distant planets (Arnold, 1979). This element of space travel essentially traps a horror film in the science fiction genre. The hybridity of the film genre *Alien* (1979) belongs to is not the focus of this study on gender representation, but it needs to be assessed in order to apply the discursive approach effectively to cultural criticism.

The discursive approach takes into account the historical specificity of an event such as the *Alien* (1979) film (Grossberg, 1984; Hall, 1991). Historical specificity refers to the meaning a signifier has at a moment in history. The signified meaning of the signifier is not constant. Therefore in order to analyze a text one must account for the text's meaning during the period it was created. For example, in order to assess the impact of the gender representation in *Alien* (1979) one must first acknowledge what the viewers and critics of the film compared *Alien* (1979) to during its debut and the gender norms within those films.

Utilizing this theoretical approach fosters the need to know which genre to compare *Alien* (1979) to considering the gender norms vary within different genres (Clover, 1992). Assuming that *Alien* (1979) is a hybrid genre film creates difficulties in assessing which gender norms to compare it to although

understanding more about film genres as ever-evolving concepts may serve to answer these questions.

Martin Flanagan (1999) explores the notion of genre evolution utilizing Bakhtin's concept that "genre is a narrative mode which is engaged in a 'truly historical struggle' taking place over centuries of literary development, and shaped by intertextual relations and interaction with human experience in the process of reception" (p.156). Flanagan (1999) argues that genres provide a narrative framework that allows films and filmmakers to convey a message that is narratively understandable and enjoyable to mass audiences. Consequently, in order to stay financially profitable film genres need to evolve in order to keep pace with audiences' definitions of an enjoyable film.

Eventually this evolution began to yield hybrid genres that contained at least two sets of narrative conventions. Science fiction films such as *Star Wars* (1977) and horror films such as *Jaws* (1975) set the stage for the hybrid genre evolution apparent in *Alien* (1979) and its sequels by creating a renaissance for the science fiction and horror genres. Until the late 1970s the science fiction and horror genre films attracted primarily young male audiences in small numbers (Clover, 1992; Doherty, 1996; Flanagan, 1999). As the number of female and older male viewers increased mega-budget, merchandisable films became "a central economic fact, structuring all life, thought and practice in Hollywood" (Flanagan, 1999, p.159). Therefore, *Alien's* (1979) hybridization of both the science fiction and horror genres was a timely and financially profitable move.

Understanding and concluding that *Alien* (1979) is indeed a hybrid genre film supplies this study with the vital, yet up until this point, missing operational definition of the gender norm variable. Each genre within the *Alien* series followed a formula for gender representation and those formulas or gender norms will be used for comparison against the gender representations within the *Alien* series. For example, the gender norms of multiple genres during 1979 will be compared to the gender representations found in *Alien* (1979).

### ***Gender Norms:***

There are two dominant schools of thought on gender norms within the science fiction genre and each school is distinct in focus and conclusions. One group of scholars (Bell-Metereau, 1985; Doherty, 1996; Inness, 1999) determines the gender norms within the science fiction genre by analyzing the costuming, dialogue, and actions (or external evidence of gender) of each character for dominant personality traits associated with masculinity or submissive personality traits associated with femininity. For example, Doherty (1996) posits:

In classical Hollywood cinema perhaps only the western outdid science fiction in its relegation of women to a peripheral and predictable status. . . Barred from full admission to the upper echelons of the space crew, women entered as novelty and decoration, sometimes even filling the role of scientific expert in an erotically charged white-coated and horn-rimmed-glasses way.

Like Raquel Welch in the biological exploration film *Fantastic Voyage* (1966), the space bimbo filled out a tight-fitting uniform to distract and entice. Though a woman of science, she was destined to lose her composure and succumb to a sheltering masculine shoulder at a crucial moment (pp. 193-4).

In contrast, a second group of scholars (Balsamo, 2000; Doane, 1990; Haraway, 1991) primarily view the science fiction genre in terms of how futuristic technology replaces-and aliens simulate-sexual reproduction. Psychoanalytical scholars argue that man's replication of the reproduction process is either in response to male fears of the female's power to reproduce or "otherness" (Bundtzen, 2000; Doane, 2000). One should note that the "being" men create using technology generally turns on them in disastrous ways. For example the super-computer, Hal, in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) is designed to keep the astronauts alive in space, entertain them, and complete their mission if they are incapacitated. However, Hal's awareness of the dangerous and curious nature of the astronaut's mission causes Hal to malfunction killing most of the astronauts.

The psychoanalytical focus on biological sex differences leads some scholars to ignore external evidence of gender representation in favor of internal evidence of being genetically human. Doane (1990) states:

...technology makes possible the destabilization of sexual identity as a category, there has also been a curious but fairly insistent history of representations of technology which work to fortify-

sometimes desperately-conventional understandings of the feminine. A certain anxiety concerning the technological is often allayed by a displacement of this anxiety onto the figure of the woman or the area of the feminine (p. 163).

Note Doane's employment of Freud's concept of anxiety displacement onto a member of the opposite sex. Most scholars in this school of thought apply Freud's theories which promote a stronger focus on the sex or sexual relations characters have in science fiction films rather than the masculinity or femininity of the characters. Sobchack (1990) argues:

Borrowing upon the psychoanalytical techniques of free association and dream analysis, such an approach should allow us to see how human sexuality and women return to the science fiction narrative in displaced and condensed forms. . .in their repressed and potent combination as a sign evoking male fear and desire-sex and women figure significantly, if covertly, in shaping the basic structure of the genre and initiating its major themes (p.104).

Sobchack's analysis of sex, women, and arguably the "basis structure of the [science fiction] genre" leads her to conclude, unlike Doherty, that gender norms within the genre are repressed. Sobchack (1990) states:

Generally, then, in the various overt dramas of science fiction film, the nature and function of human heterosexuality are either muted or transformed. While there are numerous boy-meets-girl



encounters across the galaxy and the genre, they tend to be chaste and safe in their dramatization and peripheral to narrative concern—no matter when the films were made. One gets the feeling that they are included either to satisfy the vague demands of formula or to answer the unspoken charges of homosexuality which echo around the edges of the genre (p. 105).

For the purposes of this study, the psychoanalytical view of the science fiction genre will be examined only peripherally. The gender norms posited by Doherty (1996) and his colleagues will be applied to the *Alien* series of films and its contemporaries. Therefore, a closer examination of what gender behaviors are expected of men and women in science fiction films is needed.

Inness (1999) cites Jane Fonda's character in *Barbarella* (1968) as the standard for female roles and their personalities in science fiction genre films up to the 1980's. Inness (1999) states:

This job [Queen of the Galaxy] . . . required Fonda to prance around in not much of anything and flaunt her body. *Barbarella* (1968) is typical of early science fiction films and novels, which frequently portrayed women as little more than curvaceous sex kittens, just waiting to seduce (or be rescued by) the next man who landed on their planet (p. 102).

Bell-Metereau (1985) suggests that not only are women in science fiction genre films helpless, weak, and submissive but they are also “more often than not

a hindrance at the crucial moment when the protagonist is trying to escape from or defeat the villains and monsters” (p.209). The submissive nature of women within this genre is made more obvious compared to the dominant attributes of the male characters.

Doherty (1996) offers insight into gender norms by describing the difference in characters men and women were permitted to play in science fiction films. Doherty (1996) states:

The sex roles are imbedded like concrete in the Eisenhower era . . . Two of the stock characters in science fiction cinema-the pilot and the scientific expert-were male-only employment opportunities whose demands for vehicular skill and abstract reasoning disqualified the maladroit and hysterical female from command authority (p. 194).

Being aware of science fiction’s genre formula for strong, male protagonists and weak, female victims, it is interesting that this genre eventually melded with horror in films such as *Alien* (1979). Horror genre films traditionally script female victims and male rescuers the protagonists of horror films have, since the mid-1970s, been primarily female (Clover, 1992).

Clover identifies the female protagonists of a horror genre film as a "Final Girl." Clover (1992) states:

The image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl.

She is the one who encounters the mutilated bodies of her friends and perceives the full extent of the proceeding horror and of her own peril; who is chased, cornered, wounded, whom we see scream, stagger, fall, rise, and scream again. She is abject terror personified. If her friends knew they were about to die only seconds before the event, the Final Girl lives with the knowledge for long minutes or hours. She alone looks death in the face, but she alone also finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or to kill him herself (ending B). But in either case, from 1974 on, the survivor figure has been female (p. 35).

Clover's (1992) analysis of the Final Girl phenomena attempts to explain how and why contemporary horror films cast women into the hero/survivor role against tradition and expectation. Clover (1992) argues:

The functions of monster and hero are far more frequently represented by males and the function of victim far more garishly by females [in horror films]. The fact that female monsters and female heroes, when they do appear, are masculine in dress and behavior, and that male victims are shown in feminine postures at the moment of their extremity, would seem to suggest that gender inheres in the function itself—that there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female, and something

about the monster and hero functions that wants expression in a male. Sex, in this universe, proceeds from gender, not the other way around. A figure does not cry and cower because she is a woman; she is a woman because she cries and cowers. And a figure is not a psycho-killer because he is a man; he is a man because he is a psycho-killer (pp. 12-3).

Due to the power of gender representation to designate which sex will be cast into a role, the Final Girl concept becomes even more curious. After all, if the hero role needs a male actor, why would the protagonist of contemporary horror films be female? In the preceding quote Clover (1992) alludes to how female protagonists adopt masculine traits in order to survive convincingly. Clover (1992) later elaborates upon the masculine nature of the Final Girl:

Her smartness, gravity, competence in mechanical and other practical matters, and sexual reluctance set her apart from the other girls and ally her, ironically, with the very boys she fears or rejects, not to speak of the killer himself. Lest we miss the point, it is spelled out in her name. . .Marti [*Hell Night* (1981)]. . .Laurie [*Halloween* (1978)], Stretch [*Texas Chainsaw Massacre II* (1986)]. . . (p. 40).

By representing the Final Girl in a borderline masculine/androgynous way, horror filmmakers are able to offer their viewers a female protagonist that the primarily male audience (in the early 1970s) can relate to. Viewers identified with

Jamie Lee Curtis' will to survive in *Halloween* (1978) so much that when Curtis' character is trapped in a closet with the killer just outside trying to get in, viewers did not question how a female victim could ingeniously reach for a coat hanger and bend it into a weapon to use against the killer (Clover, 1992).

Although horror genre filmmakers created female protagonists male viewers could identify with, they did not attempt to completely disrupt the stereotypical notions of gender representation. Frequently, in films such as *Halloween* (1978), filmmakers show the previously androgynous Final Girl in a state of undress. The purpose of this depiction Clover (1992) argues, ". . . serves to underscore her femaleness. . . so the Final Girl's 'tits and scream' serve more or less continuously to remind us that she really is female-even as, and despite the fact that, she in the end acquits herself 'like a man'" (p. 58).

The early days of horror films offered viewers an image, "of the woman [victim in the film] under attack by the forces of evil. In films she is usually a beautiful woman with long hair wearing a dress with a low-cut, tight fitting bodice that may be torn in places" (Russell, 1998, p. 209). A classic example of this damsel in distress is Fay Wray's character in the horror film *King Kong* (1933) (see appendix). In contrast Clover's description of the Final Girl is a welcome move towards a more egalitarian film genre. However it is obvious that, in both the horror and science fiction genre, there are still distinct gender norms that govern how men and women can be portrayed.

### *Examples of Gender Norms in the 1970s:*

Prior to examining how *Alien* (1979) measures up to the gender norms within either the science fiction or horror genre, it would be useful to take a closer look at two films made in the late 1970s that encompass some or all of the norms discussed in the previous section. *Star Wars* (1977) and *Jaws* (1975) are ideal examples of popular science fiction and horror films in the 1970s. In addition, an analysis of *Jaws* (1975) is exceptionally pertinent to this study because as the producer of *Alien* (1979), Walter Hill, states the writers of *Alien* (1979) basically wanted to create a "science fiction version of *Jaws*" (Flanagan, 1999, p. 159).

The popularity and impact of these films can be assessed in many ways, but the most obvious way is by examining domestic sales. George Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) is ranked #2 in all-time domestic gross sales (Kahn, 2001), with \$461 million in revenue-not accounting for inflation. The only other film to outgross *Star Wars* (1977) is James Cameron's *Titanic* (1997) that grossed \$601 million. When you account for inflation, *Star Wars*' (1977) domestic gross would equal roughly \$1.35 billion (Friedman, 2000), far surpassing any other film ever made. Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, ranked #13 in all-time domestic sales, surpasses *Titanic* (1997) with roughly \$877 million in domestic sales after accounting for inflation. Baktin's idea of genre evolution (Flanagan, 1996) implies that the overwhelming popularity of *Star Wars* (1977) and *Jaws* (1975) suggests that the gender representation within those films are not at odds with audience expectations and therefore conform to the formula of each film's genre.

In addition to *Jaws*' (1975) popularity as a horror genre film, the film is an excellent example of how the earlier traditional depictions of men and women in horror films were still welcomed in the mid 1970s. The stereotypical depictions of men and women are more prevalent in *Jaws* (1975) as compared to *Halloween* (1978) in part because it deviates from the employment of the Final Girl that Clover (1992) found so prevalent in late 1970s horror genre films. Consequently, *Jaws* (1975) was one of the first and last mega-blockbuster horror genre films to not offer female characters major roles as either primary victim or killer.

Although women were not used in the contemporary role of Final Girl, they certainly maintained their role as victims in *Jaws* (1975). The opening scene of *Jaws* (1975) is perhaps the most remembered scene in the entire film because of its fear inducing nature and due to the fact that stills from the scene were used in almost all of the marketing for the film (see appendix). The film opens with teenagers sitting around a bonfire on a beach. One of the teenage girls, a blonde named Chrissie (Susan Backlinie) rises and runs toward the water, saying that she is going swimming. Chrissie is followed by a drunk man who is eager for an intimate mid-night swim. When they reach the water, Chrissie takes off her clothing and runs further down the beach before plunging in naked. Her silhouetted image splashes at the surface, first viewed from a distance far underwater, and then from closer range. Meanwhile her drunken friend passes out on the shore.

A buoy's bell on the surface of the water rings at various almost ominous intervals. Then suddenly her nude body is pulled under and dragged helplessly on the surface of the water by an unseen shark, as she screams: "God help me!" (*Jaws*, 1975) Chrissie attempts to grab the ringing buoy, but is then attacked and submerged for the last time in a horrifying sequence. The scene closes with a shot of the water, which is still again and quiet.

This first scene employs the traditional usage of female characters in horror films by depicting Chrissie first as a sexual object and then as a terrorized, helpless victim. Chrissie is objectified for male viewing pleasure and "defeated" by the



“monster” in a way that does not deviate from her feminine appearance. In other words, Chrissie does put up the struggle that would be expected from a character of any sex in her situation, but she fails to think of any ingenious way to save herself as perhaps a male “hero” should and would. Imagine John Wayne in Chrissie’s position: his “true grit” would have undoubtedly allowed him to pick up the buoy and bludgeon the shark to death with it.

The other major female characters in *Jaws* (1975) act similarly and are represented according to their gender roles. The day after Chrissie was killed the beaches are still open (against the male sheriff’s wishes) and an unknowing yet protective mother gives her son permission to go out on his raft for “just ten more minutes” (*Jaws*, 1975). Her son Alex Kintner is suddenly attacked and killed by a shark. Consistent with traditional feminine emotional behavior and dress, a black-veiled Mrs. Kintner confronts the sheriff, Chief Brody, a couple of days following her son’s death. Mrs. Kintner approaches, removes her veil, and slaps Chief Brody across the face. As she holds back tears Mrs. Kintner screams:

I just found out that a girl got killed here last week and you knew it.

You knew there was a shark out there. You knew it was dangerous,

but you let people go swimming anyway. You knew all those

things, but still my boy is dead now. And there’s nothing you can

do about it. My boy is dead. I wanted you to know that (*Jaws*,

1975).

Now imagine it was Mr. Kintner instead of Mrs. Kintner. Would he be wearing a veil to hide his painful emotions? Would he have slapped Chief Brody? It is far more likely that a Mr. Kitner would have had an all-out fistfight with Chief Brody. Instead of confronting Chief Brody with Mrs. Kintner's grief, a Mr. Kintner would likely have pursued legal action. These hypothetical statements are created in order to imagine the different ways males and females are traditionally portrayed as victims. Mrs. Kintner a feminine woman is represented as a caring, protective mother and a weak "victim" only able to summon her emotions as a weapon versus any physical or legal retribution.

Similarly, the other major female character, Mrs. Ellen Brody, is portrayed as a loving wife and mother, and emotionally driven. After all, ". . .no director more values the traditional hearth than Steven Spielberg; each of his homes is ruled by benevolent, often sentimentally idealized mother figures" (O'Brien, 1990, p. 142). Ellen supportively gives Chief Brody a back and neck massage when she sees how tense he is watching swimmers after failing to close the beach following Chrissie's death.

Mrs. Ellen Brody also serves as a voice for her two sons when she tries to convince Mr. Brody to allow them to go boating. Ellen argues, "Martin, it's his birthday tomorrow . . .He's not gonna go in the water. I don't think he'll ever go in the water again after what happened yesterday [Alex Kintner's death]" (*Jaws*, 1975). Statements such as these, while expected from a "good" mother, serve to represent her as mentally weak and unaware of the true dangers that exist.

Ellen's inability to see the "big picture" is well contrasted with the ability of her husband during a later exchange over the dinner that she made for her husband and his new shark expert, Hooper. Ellen teases her husband in front of his new colleague saying, "Martin hates boats. Martin hates water. Martin sits in his car when we go on the ferry to the mainland. . .there's a clinical name for it, isn't there?" (*Jaws*, 1975). Martin responds, "Drowning!" (*Jaws*, 1975). Ellen is further represented as a lady by her dislike of the hired shark killer, Quint, due to his foul language and dirty limericks.

Hunting and killing sharks is not a job for a lady, therefore when the film proceeds to the climactic confrontation with the shark there are no women involved. Lev (2000) describes this point in *Jaws* (1975), "the nuclear family is replaced by an all-male fraternity which might be called 'the return of patriarchy'. In times of crisis, social heterogeneity is replaced by the leadership of the father" (p.48). Although the captain of the shark killing ship is an aged, hardened man named Quint, the true father of the boat is the ever-cautious Chief Brody.

Quint is over-masculinized by his constant references to sex, pretty women and killing. He shuns and belittles the computerized tools Hooper relies on saying, "Nowadays, these kids, they take out everything, radar, sonar, electric toothbrushes, ha, ha" (*Jaws*, 1975). In addition, he refuses to acknowledge Brody's suggestions for caution, such as getting a bigger boat and keeping radio contact with the island. Clover suggests that this unwillingness to tolerate new

technology or ideas as well as his rough, lewd demeanor mark men, such as Quint, as a victim. Clover (1992) wrote:

The man who stands for the former, the unreconstructed masculine, look more than a little like Rambo. Clearly Rambo (I refer to the general type) has his secure place in popular cinema. That place is not horror, however. If Rambo were to wander out of the action genre into a slasher [horror] film, he would end up dead. If he were to wander into an occult film, he would end up reformed—a kinder, gentler man, at last able to marry and communicate open-heartedly with his wife, children, parents, and neighbors (p. 99).

Hooper in contrast represents the “new man.” He could pass Quint’s archaic test of seaman knotsmanship, is schooled in the contemporary ways of studying sharks in “indestructible cages”, and is brave enough to be lowered into the ocean in a cage even after they had seen how large the shark was. These factors combine to depict Hooper as masculine but comically so. For example, to match Quint’s macho crushing of his beer can, Hooper single-handedly crushes his plastic coffee cup. However masculine, Hooper’s passion for studying sharks eliminated viewers from truly identifying with his fear or perhaps his character. This lack of identification may be in part due to the effort of Spielberg to create a sense of overwhelming fear of the shark and then audiences are introduced to someone (Hooper) who foolishly is more fascinated than frightened of the man-eating shark.

In contrast, Brody was scared of water and the shark and consequently seemed to understand the “big picture” of the danger they faced. Brody also had been depicted time and time again doing the “good thing” by trying to save people. Therefore, Brody made the perfect protagonist that viewers could identify with and root for. Consequently it is Brody who is left to do battle with the monster. In a courageous offensive, Brody heaves one of Hooper’s compressed air tanks into the shark’s mouth, once again, showing the innovativeness of a masculine survivor. As the shark circles for another attack, Brody grabs a rifle and takes aim at the explosive canister. Brody fires repeatedly until he finally hits the target and the shark explodes.

George Lucas’ *Star Wars* (1977) offers viewers a similarly satisfying ending combined with the gender norms viewers expect from a science fiction genre film. The only major female character, Princess Leia (Carrie Fisher), is not depicted as a “space bimbo” (Doherty, 1996) or a “hindrance at the crucial moment [of escape or triumph]” (Bell-Metereau, 1985). Princess Leia is able to use weapons, think innovatively, and possesses some leadership qualities. Therefore, it would seem that in terms of feminine gender norms *Star Wars* (1977) deviates from the traditional science fiction genre. That assumption would not be entirely correct.

Princess Leia spends the first few scenes in *Star Wars* (1977) secreting a message begging for rescue into a droid, being captured without putting up much fight, and doing all of this wearing a sheer, white gown. The gown is see-through

to the point that Carrie Fisher could not wear a bra and was required to tape down her breasts (*Star Wars Special Edition*, 1998). In addition to the femininity (and impracticability during a gunfight) of Leia's clothing, Leia's hair is braided into an elaborate hairstyle reminiscent of the hair on the Madam Alexander dolls popular during the 1970s (see appendix).

Leia appearance creates the impression that she is an uppity girl-child when she is brought to the dark, towering figure of Lord Darth Vader. Surrounded on three sides by tall, strong soldiers and facing the black helmeted Darth Vader, Leia puts on a show of strength saying, "I'm a member of the Imperial Senate on a diplomatic mission to Alderaan" (*Star Wars*, 1977). Vader responds dismissively, sending Leia off (to her new room). Vader said, "You are part of the Rebel Alliance and a traitor. Take her away!" (*Star Wars*, 1977).

Regardless of her uppity demeanor, Leia is unable to alter the impact of her feminine appearance that stuns Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) when he inadvertently receives Leia's plea for help. Awestruck Luke says, "Who is she? She's beautiful. . . It sounds like she's in trouble. I'd better play back the whole thing" (*Star Wars*, 1977). Luke's attraction to Leia sets off a number of events that eventually leads him on a rescue mission to save her.

Luke and Obi-Wan Kenobi (Sir Alec Guinness), the intended recipient of Princess Leia's message, hire a mercenary pilot Han Solo (Harrison Ford) to bring them to Princess Leia. When Luke finds Leia on an Imperial ship he uses bribes to enlist Han Solo's assistance. Luke says, "She's [Princess Leia] rich. . . rich,

powerful. Listen if you were to rescue her, the reward would be . . . more than you can imagine." Han replies, "I don't know. I can imagine quite a bit." Then agrees to help Luke (*Star Wars*, 1977). This exchange is reminiscent of the differences in moral character between Quint and Brody in *Jaws* (1975) with Han playing the part of Quint and Luke the part of Brody. Similarly, one can conclude Han Solo will not be the eventual hero of the film.

Princess Leia's uppity nature and innovativeness are displayed immediately following her introduction to Luke and Han. Leia chastises them when they all get trapped in a dead-end corridor with Imperial soldiers firing from the entrance. She says, "This is some rescue! . . . You came in here. Do you have a plan for getting out?" (*Star Wars*, 1977). Then Leia blasts a hole into a ventilation shaft with Luke's gun, opening an escape route into a garbage chute. Leia unceremoniously shoves Han saying, "Somebody has to save our skins. Into the garbage chute, flyboy!" (*Star Wars*, 1977).

However, aside from her innovativeness in times of pressure, Leia does not maintain her masculine, leadership role primarily because her sarcastic demeanor is softened by her appearance to the point that she ends up sounding more like a chastising wife than a soldier. For example, as soon as they enter the garbage room Han's hyper-masculinity act-before-thinking persona causes him to try to shoot the door which results in the gun-fire ricocheting off all of the walls, nearly killing them. Both Luke and Leia try to stop Han from shooting, but only Leia

follows up with a motherly admonishment saying, "Put that thing away you're going to get us all killed!" (*Star Wars*, 1977).

Eventually, with help from Luke's robots, they all get out of the garbage room and continue their escape to Han Solo's space-ship. During this effort Han and Leia have an exchange that serves to make both parties seem even more stereotypically masculine and feminine or perhaps stereotypically husband and wife. Han says, "If we just avoid any more female advice, we ought to be able to get out of here." Leia replies, "I don't know who you are or where you came from, but from now on, you do as I tell you. Okay?" Han Solo says, "Look, Your Worshipfulness! Let's get one thing straight. I take orders from just one person. Me." Leia gets the last word saying, "It's a wonder you're still alive." (*Star Wars*, 1977).

As noted before, obviously Princess Leia is not the traditional, feminine lady to be saved, rescued, and perhaps sexually conquered. However, it is important to note that she is not represented as overtly masculine or even androgynous as some critiques suggest. Sobchack (1990) argues:

For all her aristocratic presence as a princess, Leia is also represented as one of the boys. Whatever her narrative relations with Han Solo, her tough and wisecracking character is not about to let her tightly-coiled hair down nor expose her female flesh. . . She is simultaneously protected and desexed by her social position



(princesses are to fight for, not to sleep with) and by her acerbic and pragmatically critical attitude. (p. 106).

Princess Leia is not depicted as a “curvaceous sex kitten” (Inness, 1999) but she does not act nor is treated like “one of the boys” (Sobchack, 1990). For example when Luke and Leia are trapped on a ledge hanging over a bottomless shaft, pursued by Imperial soldiers, Luke takes a grappling hook and rope from his belt and “Tarzan-swings” himself and Leia to safety. However, not before Leia gives him a kiss “for luck.” Leia kissing Luke before he swings her to safety reveals the softness underneath Leia’s “wisecracking character” and reminds viewers of her probable role as a romantic partner for either Luke or Han Solo.

Viewers get another reminder of the romantic possibilities involving Princess Leia during an exchange between Luke and Han Solo. Luke asks Han Solo what he thinks about Leia and Han responds, “Trying not to kid.” Luke smiles and says, “Good.” This provokes Han’s masculine, competitive nature and he says, “Still she’s got a lot of spirit. Do you think a princess and a guy like me...?” Luke quickly interrupts with an emphatic “NO!” (*Star Wars*, 1977).

This exchange prompts the question that if, as Sobchack (1990) argues, Leia is desexed by her position as a princess and science fiction is generally chaste why do Luke and Han Solo begin to compete for her affection? A competition, by the way, that continues throughout most of the three *Star Wars* films. Are they merely engaging in yet another fight for the princess and do not desire physical intimacy with her? This argument is weakened especially in light of Leia’s

eventual commitment to Han Solo in the third and final film of the series *The Return of the Jedi* (1983).

By the climactic ending Leia's femininity as an object of affection and a weak woman to be rescued is firmly in the minds of the audience. Therefore it comes as no surprise when Princess Leia, the "head of the rebellion," has a male General debrief the rebels on their mission to destroy the Imperial battle station. Nor does it seem surprising that the mercenary, Han, refuses to be a part of what he refers to as "suicide" (*Star Wars*, 1977).

Han Solo's depressing assessment of the mission is shared by many of the rebels who prepare to die for their beliefs. In this pessimistic scene Luke, the natural leader, is alone in convincing people that the mission is not impossible. Lev (2000) discusses this phenomena, "One should also remember that Star Wars' rebellion in no way challenges gender, race, or class relations. White male humans are 'naturally' in positions of authority. The boy Luke grows up and takes his place as a responsible male leader" (p. 34).

During the final battle Leia moves into her socially expected role of the wife, sister, or daughter and waits for the soldiers to come home while Luke, with his innate abilities, accomplishes the impossible mission and saves the day. George Lucas also offers redemption to the selfish mercenary, Han Solo, by sending him back to help Luke complete the mission.

The end result is a science fiction genre film that in no ways challenges the expected gender roles of men or women. George Lucas responding to criticism

about the conservative nature of his characters and story line says, "I mean, there's a reason this film is so popular. It's not that I'm giving out propaganda nobody wants to hear" (Lev, 1998, p. 32). As frightening as that idea may be for women's rights advocates, *Star Wars* (1977) being the all-time best selling film ever to date, George Lucas certainly has support for his statement.

### ***Gender Representation in "Alien" (1979):***

Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) can not compare to the amazing popularity of Lucas' *Star Wars* (1977) or Spielberg's *Jaws* (1975). However, one should not infer that *Alien* (1979) was not a successful film. Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) ranks #36 of 136 top selling films during the 1970s, the same decade that introduced mega-blockbusters like *Star Wars* (1977), *Jaws* (1975), *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* (1979), and *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968).

Scott's *Alien* (1979) was accessible enough to viewers that it bested Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* (1979) for the 4<sup>th</sup> most profitable film in 1979 (Kahn, 2001) with \$78.9 million in domestic sales. Accounting for inflation, *Alien* (1979) grossed \$201 million in domestic sales (Friedman, 2000), almost \$13 million more than Ridley Scott's most recent film *Gladiator* (2000) which won the Best Picture and Best Male Actor Academy awards. Therefore, there is little doubt that viewers could relate to the representation of gender in *Alien* (1979). The remaining question is to what were viewers relating?

Similar to Princess Leia, Ripley is innovative and quick thinking. The difference is for the majority of the film Ripley is portrayed as androgynous, not needing to be saved by other characters or hindered by feminine clothing and artifacts. The *Washington Post's* Gary Arnold (1979) describes the notable differences between Ripley and previous female characters stating, “. . .the most courageous and resourceful heroine seen on the screen in years. . .Ripley's beautiful valor in the face of danger makes a mockery of the dippy blonde 'angels' [Charlie's Angels] and ponderous supergirls of television” (p. E9).

While film critics such as Arnold and scholars such as Penley (1991) saw Ripley's role as a positive representation of a strong woman, many critics viewed *Alien* (1979) differently. For example, *Newsweek's* Jack Kroll wrote, “[Ripley is] the classic B-movie woman's role—all the heaving and hysterics of noble women like Fay Wray, Faith Domergue, and Julie Adams” (quoted in Bell-Metereau, 1985, p. 212).

Bell-Metereau (1985) argues that critics such as Kroll struggled to fit Ripley into their conception of a woman's role in a science fiction film because her role greatly violates expectations. However, that argument does not properly address the point of greatest negative criticism of *Alien* (1979), the closing scene. The *Boston Globe's* Michael Blowen (1979) explains, “[Ridley] Scott does make a concession to feminism by casting Sigourney Weaver [Ripley] as the hero but he couldn't resist a sexist jab at the end when, with no motivation, she removes her trousers” (p. E16).

Critics of *Alien* (1979) from 1979 to the present have perpetually been fascinated with the closing scene in which Ripley is shown undressing for the hypersleep back to earth. Kavanagh (1990) addresses this issue stating:

The image [of Ripley undressing] presented to the viewer here is hardly sensational by any standards, and it seems senseless for a progressive criticism to construct from it a general condemnation of the film that denies all of the other effects of a fairly consistent feminist statement (p. 77).

Before discussing whether or not *Alien* (1979) does offer a “consistent feminist statement” perhaps a description of the scene in question would be helpful.

After destroying the *Nostromo*, and presumably the alien, by setting its self-destruct mechanism Ripley prepares the escape shuttle for the trip back to earth. Ripley places the cat, Jonesie, into hypersleep (a point that will be addressed later) and prepares herself for hypersleep by undressing. Ripley strips down to a tank-top and under-sized underwear that allow a view of the majority of her posterior and walks around the hypersleep pods flipping switches on the computers surrounding them. Ripley is startled by a sudden movement of the alien, who has stowed away unnoticed, during the process of turning on various pieces of machinery.

Ripley, keeping an eye on the resting alien, closes herself into a closet where a spacesuit is hanging. With the camera focused crotch level with Ripley, she puts one leg at a time into the spacesuit and then hugs the spacesuit around her

as if for protection. Finally Ripley puts on the helmet, grabs a harpoon-like gun and heads out of the closet to the shuttle control console. There she engages the engines and opens the airlock, sucking the alien out to towards open space. The alien then grabs onto the airlock doorjamb and stays in the shuttle until Ripley shoots it out with her gun.

As Kavanagh (1990) stated Ripley being depicted in her tanktop and underwear is not exactly controversial by the 1970s or present day standards. However, Ripley's costuming in this one scene does not exactly align her character with Fay Wray's character in *King Kong* (1933) either as Kroll (1979) argues. One merely needs to compare still publicity photos of both Weaver and Wray to see the different levels of femininity (see appendix). To fully be able to debate the gender representation in *Alien* (1979) one needs to look at the film as a whole rather than just that one scene that may depart from the rest of the film's message.

In order to understand the impact of the gender representation, one needs to address the historical specificity of that representation. While criticisms such as Jack Kroll's may seem short sighted and unsupported they do represent a viewer's reaction to *Alien* (1979) in 1979, the period for which the film was created. The differences in reaction to certain representations of gender within *Alien* (1979) as viewed in 1979 and present day are of great value when trying to understand the film's overall message concerning gender norms.

*Alien* (1979) is the first film set in space and in the future, to this author's knowledge, which employs the Final Girl concept that Clover (1992) found

prevalent in horror genre films in the late 1970s. Clover's (1992) concept of the Final Girl is extremely helpful in understanding both the masculine traits of bravery, rationality, and innovativeness that Ripley possesses and the contradictory sexual objectification of Ripley in the closing scene of the film. In addition, Clover's (1992) concept of the character's role defining the character's gender sheds light upon the depiction of the rest of the characters in *Alien* (1979).

Each character in *Alien* (1979) was written so male or female actors could portray any part (Penley, 1991). The end result was an overwhelming sense of tamed masculinity or androgyny on the part of all of the characters. Ridley Scott helped further the androgynous nature of the characters by controlling the costuming of the two female characters. The two women are not portrayed wearing any makeup nor do they have elaborate hairstyles. Lambert (Veronica Cartwright), in stark contrast to the elaborate Madam Alexander doll hair-do of Princess Leia, is shown toweling dry her short-cropped hair at a break table in the very beginning of the film. This type of behavior supports the idea that the female characters are just as utilitarian in their hygienic and clothing habits as the men, in addition, both male and female characters are shown wearing similar uniforms which consist of unisex white button-down shirts or olive green tee shirts.

As discussed in terms of gender norms in science fiction films, this type of androgynous representation was a huge break away from the "space bimbo [who] filled out a tight-fitting uniform to distract and intice" (Doherty, 1996, p. 134). In fact, Ridley Scott had to be pro-active in order to keep Sigourney Weaver's

character Ripley out of gender oriented clothing. Weaver recalled, "They gave me this costume that was light blue with a little pink trim. And Ridley came in, and he said, 'You look like fucking Jackie Onassis in space.' . . . he threw me this flight thing from NASA, and I put it on and it fit perfectly" (quoted in Abramowitz, 2000, p. 352).

That was not the only struggle for equality in costuming that Ridley Scott had to engage in either. The introductory scene in *Alien* (1979) depicts the characters in hypersleep pods that spring out from a center column, similar to spokes on a bicycle wheel. The camera pans into the hypersleep chamber and centers on a male character wearing only what appears to be corporate issued uniform boxer shorts. On either side of this man, you see the profiles of individual men on either side of him in similar dress and portions of other characters behind them. The camera lingers at the foot of the center male's pod offering a view of his entire body as he awakens and begins groggily to remove monitoring equipment from his chest and neck.

Ridley Scott originally wanted the characters to be portrayed in the nude during this scene because he explained, "To be totally realistic I always wanted the entire crew to be stark naked. Of course they would be if they were lying in any form of hypersleep (pause) they would be naked" (*Alien* DVD, 1999). With the first scene focussing on the full body of one male character as he awakes, sits up, and eventually stands to walk out of the hypersleep chamber, Scott realized that having the man naked would offer "a particularly extraordinary view" (*Alien*



DVD, 1999). Total nudity being prohibited by the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox Studio, Scott argued that female characters should also be topless and went so far as to film a scene depicting the two females topless. The studio overruled this as well, although the final version of the scene shows a portion of one woman with only a strip of material covering her breasts.

This scene, notable as support for the androgynous nature of the film as a whole, is a useful tool to contrast with the critical reaction of the closing scene in which Ripley is portrayed in her underwear. Bell-Metereau (1985) states:

The viewers who see this [closing scene with Ripley] as sexist do not comment on the parallel opening scene, in which we see Kane emerging from hypersleep in a similar state of seminudity. The two scenes are a framing device that creates suspense; the roving camera gives the audience the idea that the characters are not alone, and the nudity creates a greater sense of vulnerability (p. 221).

Bell-Metereau point is interesting because she is correct in that in each scene the camera focuses on Kane's and Ripley's crotch. However, Kane is not depicted bending over repeatedly and nor is his posterior hanging out of his underwear. In addition, Ridley Scott freely admits that he used the closing scene to give viewers the sex that the studio complained was missing. Scott states, "They [20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox] kept saying there is no sex in this movie. I said 'there doesn't need to be any (pause) but there is a good opportunity here to have a bit of,

you know, hinted at sexuality and Sigourney is certainly the person to project that” (*Alien* DVD, 1999).

Ripley’s sexual objectification in the closing scene also fulfills one of the requirements of Clover’s (1992) Final Girl characterization. As stated previously, Clover (1992) argues that the Final Girl needs to be objectified in some way in order to remind viewers that although she may “acquit herself like a man” (p. 58) she is still a woman to be had. Inness (1999) supports this view stating, “The final emphasis on Ripley’s sexuality does a great deal to limit the threat to gender norms posed by her tough persona. Ultimately, the film seems uncomfortable leaving viewers with an image of Ripley that is too tough” (p. 107).

Ros Jennings (1995) additionally argues that Scott’s depiction of Ripley in her underwear neutralizes her as a threat to the male domain of movie heroes and simultaneously created a “wholly intelligible form of femininity” (p. 197). While Bell-Metereau (1985) suggests that Scott created “a heroine and a social system that bear little resemblance to what we have come to expect from science fiction films” (p. 210). However, Ripley does closely resemble what viewers came to expect in a Final Girl horror film.

Ripley, like Brody in *Jaws* (1975), is able to see the big picture and unlike her crewmates she is aware of the danger an alien lifeform could create for them. Ripley, similar to Clover’s (1992) Final Girl, “. . . perceives the full extent of the proceeding horror and of her own peril” (p. 35). For example, Ripley is the one person who tries to follow proper quarantine policy when Dallas and Lambert

attempt to bring Kane onboard with the alien attached to his face. Though Ripley's strength and safety-first-compassion-later mentality in this scene creates a representation of her as non-feminine, it is notable that Ripley's orders are eventually ignored by Ash.

Although Ripley outranks everyone but Dallas, she struggles throughout the entire film to establish her authority with the crew. Ash's defiance, at first a seemingly sympathetic gesture towards Kane, continues until it is known that he is fighting for the alien's survival and not the crew's. Yet even before Ripley begins her struggle to control Ash, she struggles to assert herself with the mercenary mechanics Parker and Brett. The futility of her struggle for dominance is embodied in an early scene in which Parker drowns Ripley's words out with a steam blower.

Therefore, a contradictory view of Ripley's gender is created. Ripley possesses the masculine traits of critical thinking (being aware of the true danger), being in control of her emotions (refusing to let an infected Kane onboard), and the ability to survive by destroying the alien. However, Ripley also is feminized by her inability to gather the "troops" behind her, her eventual sexual objectification in the closing scene, and her moments of irrationality. For example, Ripley is shown rushing around in the final moments before the ship is set to self-destruct because she cannot find the cat Jonesie. Although Ripley's search and rescue of the cat certainly helped depict her as humane, it may also have served to remind

viewers that she was still feminine enough to perform seemingly irrational, emotional acts.

This analysis of Ripley's cat saving mission may appear to be reading too much into nothing but, since Ridley Scott admits to being surprised that nobody questioned Ripley's return to save the cat (*Alien* DVD, 1999), there is obviously support for the idea that the action was irrational and out of character for the androgynous/masculine Ripley. Perhaps the reason viewers unquestioningly accepted the cat saving mission is because the mission followed the formula for a science fiction genre film. Bell-Metereau (1985) argues the female character was generally present to hinder the hero at a crucial moment in the film, however since the hero in *Alien* (1979) is female the cat may have been employed to perform the hindrance functions traditionally performed by the female. If narratively viewers expected Ripley to have to save something during this point in the film then Jonesie was the logical choice for the damsel in distress.

In any case, Ripley's saving of Jonesie is merely one more example of the contradictory gender representation of her character in *Alien* (1979). If sex does proceed from gender in Final Girl films (Clover, 1992) then perhaps this contradictory gender representations makes sense. Afterall, even the male characters experience contradictory gender representation in certain scenes.

Dallas possesses the masculine quality of leadership and bravery as the captain of the ship in *Alien* (1979). Not only does every crewmember follow his orders with the minimum of hassle, Dallas also volunteers to hunt the alien himself

rather than put anyone else at risk. However at the moment of Dallas' death he is depicted frozen with fear, bent up in a fetal position as the alien attacks. This tendency to depict male victims such as Dallas in feminine or weak postures at their moment of death supports the concept that victims must possess some feminine quality (Clover, 1992). Brett and Lambert's deaths further support this argument as they both were depicted standing frozen with blank looks on their faces as the alien prepared to attack them. Even though Lambert is negatively regarded in contrast to the strong qualities Ripley possesses, Lambert in death is not any more feminine than Brett, the rough masculine mechanic.

In contrast, Parker's gender representation in death is quite different than the rest of his crewmembers. Parker actually possesses the masculine quality of bravery and gallantry in his moment of demise. Parker counter-attacks the alien, as it is attacking Lambert, in an attempt to save the damsel in distress and destroy the enemy. Unfortunately, direct and undiluted masculine force is not enough to conquer the alien and Parker is defeated.

Parker's style of death does raise questions about gender representation within the Final Girl films until one hears Ridley Scott's explanation. Apparently, Yaphet Kotto (Parker) was unaware that he was not going to be the hero of the film until the day of his death scene. Kotto argued with Scott telling him "I'm not going to die. This thing can't kill me" (*Alien* DVD, 1999). Scott had to convince him to die and perhaps allowed Kotto a last show of strength as a compromise to Kotto saving his masculine honor. In addition Parker's last burst of masculine

force allowed viewers another way of justifying a female survivor, by illustrating how it would take more ingenuity than strength to best the alien.

One should note that Parker was the expected hero of the film after all of the other males had been killed. Ridley Scott had whittled the crewmembers down to two women and an African American male creating the unexpected impression that the hero would be a minority. However, this progressive casting provoked criticism of political correctness. Stanley Kauffmann wrote, "the crew, just to keep things au courant, includes two women and a black" (quoted in Bell-Metereua, 1985, p. 211). Viewing the film 20 years later leaves the impression that Scott's casting choices were just one more joke on the viewing audience. The double crossing aspects popular in Scott's later films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) suggest that he enjoys making his audiences uncomfortable by giving them the unexpected (Kerman, 1991).

Still others suggest that Scott's choice of survivors was more of a political statement than a joke. Byers (1990) states, "There is, by the way, a dig at the predominantly white male power structure in the fact that the minority character and the women live the longest" (p.42). Whatever Scott's intentions, he created an "intelligible form of femininity" (Jennings, 1995, p. 197) that has served as the basis of comparison for the numerous female-leads that followed *Alien* (1979) including the three *Alien* sequels. The next chapter will discuss the changes in both the gender norms in the mid-1980s films and the gender representations within the sequel to Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986).

## Chapter 2: *Aliens* – The Controversial Exception to the Gender Norms

### **Genre:**

*Aliens* (1986) is essentially the same film as its predecessor *Alien* (1979). The film begins with a space-bound crew discovering and being attacked by an alien species. The crew is almost completely destroyed by the alien (multiple aliens in the case of *Aliens*) when Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) suggests that the remaining crewmembers destroy the alien using nuclear weapons. In both films this plan backfires because an alien manages to stow away on the escape vessel and threatens to kill again. That is, until Ripley manages to blow the alien out of an airlock and into space. Both *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) end with Ripley [and three other people in *Aliens* (1986)] entering hypersleep for the journey back home.

With such similarities between the two films there would appear to be little need for discussion about what genres the sequel *Aliens* (1986) belongs to, however there is. While there are remarkable similarities between the storyline of both *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) there exists a distinct difference in how each film arrives at a storybook ending. Unlike the process of elimination that allowed Ripley to emerge as the Final Girl in *Alien* (1979), *Aliens* (1986) begins with a clear focus on Ripley as the protagonist. The first half-hour of *Aliens* (1986) is devoted to giving background on Ripley, her experiences within the company, her family, and her dreams. Ripley is clearly the hero and focus of the film, a focus

that lends itself to dramatic differences in the representation of Ripley as a person and a woman.

These differences will be discussed at length later in this chapter, but first a continuation of the discussion of *Aliens*' (1986) genre is necessary. In order to compare gender representations to the gender norms of a genre one must first identify the genres to be discussed. The genre of the first film *Alien* (1979) has previously been discussed at length and, as just mentioned, *Aliens* (1986) borrows heavily upon its predecessor for its storyline. Consequently, it is for the same reasons that *Alien* (1979) was classified as both a science fiction and a horror genre film that *Aliens* (1986) also can be classified as such. Both films are essentially horror films in their treatment of new lifeforms but they are both set in space and therefore are frequently linked to the science fiction genre. The treatment of Ripley as a hero in *Aliens* (1986), as compared to Ripley as a survivor in *Alien* (1979), alludes to just one of the differences that accompanied director James Cameron's decision to add the action genre to the mix of horror and science fiction.

James Cameron had worked on two action dominated films, *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985) and *The Terminator* (1984), before writing and directing *Aliens* (1986) and his experiences certainly impacted his decision to create an action/horror/science fiction sequel to Scott's *Alien* (1979). Cameron stated, "I was writing *Rambo [First Blood, Part II]* (1985) at the time and I was getting into



the whole Vietnam thing, and it occurred to me that 'grunts in space' was a wonderful concept" (Blackmore, 1996, p. 215).

Not only was it "a wonderful concept," Cameron's addition of the action genre to *Alien's* (1979) already complicated genre mix assured his film would stand out from Scott's original. Prince (2000) stated:

He [Cameron] was keenly aware of the classic status that Ridley Scott's *Alien* had achieved and determined to find a different style and sensibility for his picture. Accordingly, rather than replicating the techno-Gothic horror design of Scott's film, he based his sequel on Vietnam and World War II combat movies, ensuring that his production would be clearly differentiated from its predecessor (p. 248).

Cameron's creation of a new "style and sensibility" was linked not only to the shifting public opinion of the Vietnam war but also the new dawn of conservatism popularly referred to as the Reagan era. Doherty (1996) argues:

*Aliens* rehabilitated the World War II combat film and, not incidentally, the U.S. military. Where Scott's *Alien* melded horror and science fiction and expressed Hollywood's post-Vietnam revision, *Aliens* yoked science fiction to action adventure and reflected the military's restoration to public esteem in the Reagan era (p. 191).

Cameron's adoption of conservative Reagan era values extended well beyond increased support of the military. *Aliens* (1986) reflected a return to traditional, conservative gender roles which further set Cameron's sequel apart from the "stunningly egalitarian" (Penley, 1991) gender representation in Scott's *Alien* (1979).

### *Gender Norms in the mid-1980s:*

Gender norms in science fiction genre films were surprisingly static during the eight years between the creation of *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). Mega-blockbuster science fiction series such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* continued to further represent women as objects to gaze at or rescue. Princess Leia, for example, continued to require rescue by Luke Skywalker and Han Solo in the third *Star Wars* film, *The Return of the Jedi* (1983). In addition, after discovering Luke was her brother Leia settled into her expected role of a "wife" to Han Solo. Meanwhile in the *Star Trek* sequel *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock* (1984) Lt. Uhura continued to wear her mini-skirts and hi-heeled boots while remaining in the relative safety of the communication desk on the starship Enterprise.

There were few changes in the gender norms in horror genre films during the early 1980s. The stasis in gender norms in horror films could be attributed to the fact that most major horror films during the period were sequels of the popular Final Girl films in the late 1970s. For example, *Halloween* had two sequels by 1983. Another popular Final Girl film, *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980), had also been made

into a series with the fifth film being released in 1985 (Prince, 2000). The success of the early Final Girl films such as *Halloween* (1978) and *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) most likely deterred directors and film studios from altering the formulaic treatment of gender norms.

In contrast, the action genre had gone through some dramatic changes in gender norms in the late 1970s to early 1980s (Tasker, 1993). However, those changes do not impact the *Alien* film series due to the fact that the action genre was not employed within the series before 1986. Therefore, for the purposes of this study only the gender norms of action genre films in the mid-1980s will be examined.

Female and male characters in action genre films are for the majority represented in a way that is very similar to their representation in science fiction genre films. For example in a film such as *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985) the leading male character is represented as the strong, smart hero that will save the day. This representation in *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985) was so powerful that the leading male character Rambo quickly became synonymous with masculinity and aggression (Tasker, 1993). In fact, President Ronald Reagan went so far as to adopt Rambo's masculine aggressive traits as a guide for United States foreign policy. Prince (2000) wrote:

President Ronald Reagan remarked, on the eve of the release of American hostages hijacked to Lebanon, 'I saw Rambo last night, and next time I'll know what to do'. David Rosenfelt, senior vice

president of marketing for Rambo's distributor, Tri-Star Pictures, assessed the effect of this coverage by noting that the film 'became a kind of rallying point for a new American self-assertiveness invoked by none other than the President of the United States' (p. 144).

Meanwhile the female character in *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985) is relegated to the role of an attractive sidekick that becomes a "hindrance at the crucial moment" (Bell-Metereau, 1985, p. 209) of escape. Tasker (1998) argues, "Though there have been some spectacular (and much debated) exceptions . . . the majority of big-budget action movie continue to focus on male protagonists and to position women in supportive, often romantic, roles" (p. 67).

The cinematic exceptions to this gender representation formula of action genre films, such as *The Terminator* (1984), mimic the gender norms in Final Girl horror genre films. In *The Terminator* (1984) the lead character is a tomboyish woman named Sarah Connor who learns that she will give birth to a messiah-like ruler who will lead the human-race to freedom against the oppressive robots which hold them in slavery. Sarah's tomboyish nature is most notable in her dress and lack of overt sexual desires that contrast greatly with other females in the film. Sarah's dress in the opening scene of the film displays her at her most feminine, wearing a restaurant uniform consisting of a checkered blouse and skirt. For the majority of the film, Sarah wears jeans, a non-descript shirt, and no obvious makeup creating a costume that serves to minimize her femininity and promote a

more androgynous appearance. Tasker (1993) discussed the impact of costuming on the overall gender representation of women in action films stating:

The tomboy hero(ines) of the action cinema share with Clover's *Final Girl* a peculiar gender status, and an ambivalent relationship to sexuality. The sense of a transitional state is sometimes played for eroticism – as if the 'masculine' clothing forms a disguise behind which the 'real' figure of the woman is glimpsed (p. 81).

Sarah's "ambivalent relationship to sexuality" is further strengthened in contrast to her roommate. Sarah's roommate and her roommate's boyfriend are hyper-sexualized during their brief appearances in the film, making and receiving lewd phone calls to and from each other. Sarah's roommate's appearance, which is almost a parody of femininity as she is constantly fixing her makeup and hair, also serves to differentiate Sarah's no nonsense dress from traditional depictions of femininity. In addition, Sarah's roommate's tendency towards casual sex is captured during the scene in which she is wearing headphones during sex with her boyfriend. In the tradition of *Final Girl* horror films, when a Terminator is sent back in time to kill Sarah before she can become pregnant with the human race's future savior Sarah's roommate and her roommate's boyfriend are among the first to be killed.

Luckily for Sarah, her future son sends one of his soldiers (Reese) back in time to try to save Sarah from the Terminator. Reese initially takes over the role of the protagonist rescuing Sarah while saying, "Do exactly as I say" (*The*

*Terminator*, 1984). However, Sarah quickly gets over the shock of being attacked by a man-killing robot and attempts to learn how to make explosives out of household cleaners. By the end of the film a reversal of gender expectations is evident when Sarah becomes the masculine rescuer trying to save an injured feminine Reese from the Terminator. Similar to the gender roles in Final Girl films, in these exceptions in action genre films there exists "something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female" (Clover, 1992, p. 12) and vice versa.

While Sarah's masculine rescue attempt is unsuccessful (Reese sacrifices himself in a last ditch effort to kill the Terminator), she does succeed in destroying the Terminator thereby saving herself and her unborn child fathered by Reese. Although Sarah remained strong throughout most of the film she was required for the sake of the plot and the Final Girl formula to remind viewers of her femininity during a sex scene with Reese.

Tasker (1993) discussed this gender representation requirement stating:

In crude terms, if images of men have often needed to compensate for the sexual presentation of the hero's body through emphasizing his activity, then images of women seem to need to compensate for the figure of the active heroine by emphasizing her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms (p. 19).

Employing Tasker's blunt assessment of gender differences in male and female protagonists to *The Terminator* (1984) results in an interesting

Understanding of the dichotomies present within the action genre. The two leading male characters', the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) and Reese (Michael Biehn), physical appearances are quite different although they are displayed similarly. Arnold Schwarzenegger, the former Mr. Universe, is introduced as the ultimate in masculinity complete with bulging muscles, an all black leather outfit, and numerous large weapons. In contrast, Michael Biehn is the average in shape male with average proportioned muscles, Salvation Army style clothing, and only a sawed-off shotgun.

However, regardless of their physical differences when both characters are displayed in states of partial undress their appearance is explained by their actions of cleaning their wounds. In contrast, Sarah's states of undress are unnecessary to the storyline unless one assumes that a love scene between her and Reese (with Reese almost completely in the unlit portion of the screen) was necessary to the understanding that Reese impregnated Sarah. The other notable scene with Sarah relatively undressed is one in which she is shown in a towel, calling her mother to let her know that she is safe. This action seems harmless however, not only is Sarah being put on display she depicted as emotionally weak by breaking one of Reese's rules to not tell anyone where she is.

Sarah being displayed in a towel as she breaks a logical rule that Reese created serves to remind viewers that no matter how tough she has become fighting for her life she is still a fragile female who needs her mommy. In addition, Tasker (1993) suggests Sarah being put on display in such a manner

helps to emphasize “her sexuality, her availability within traditional feminine terms” (p. 19). Once again mirroring the gender norms present in Final Girl films where the female protagonist’s “tits and scream serve more or less continuously to remind us that she really is female—even as, and despite the fact that, she in the end acquits herself ‘like a man’” (Clover, 1992, p. 58).

What is most notable about exceptions to the rule of gender norms in action genre films is that James Cameron wrote and directed two of the major and much debated exceptions, *The Terminator* (1984) and *Aliens* (1986). However, as noted earlier Cameron also wrote one of the mainstays of hyper-masculine, socially conservative films *Rambo: First Blood, Part II* (1985). Therefore, it is unsurprising that Cameron at times appears to “crack under the strain” (Penley, 1989, p. 133) of contradicting the dominant gender norms of the action film genre.

Consequently, both *The Terminator* (1984) and *Aliens* (1986) appear to be hybrid genre films in which the female protagonist is partially the ultimate Final Girl prepared for any danger and partially the stereotypical female sidekick who can only be counted on for needing to be rescued and being put on display. This hybridity of gender representations helped to create new gender norms for female led action genre films that continued throughout the remaining *Terminator* and *Alien* series of films. An examination of *Aliens* (1986) shows just how different Cameron’s gender representation of women was from his contemporaries such as Ridley Scott.



**Gender Representation in "Aliens" (1986):**

*I'm not Rambolina. I hope I won't be compared to that kind of role model. Officer Ripley is a reluctant participant in the whole adventure (Weaver quoted in Blackmore, 1996, p. 224).*

*Even in the horror variant like Aliens (1986), the family theme is present when Sigourney Weaver becomes a mother symbol, a feminine and feminist Rambo-like protector of young children against space monsters (O'Brien, 1990, p. 95).*

Partly because of *Aliens'* predecessor and partly because of the increasing usage of Final Girls and heroine (Clover), *Aliens* (1986) was not heralded for its depiction of a female hero and survivor, but was instead criticized for the way its gender representation differed from the original *Alien* (1979) film. The negative criticism primarily focused upon the creation of a maternal side of the protagonist Ripley (Penley, 1989) and ironically the addition of more masculinized depictions of women (Jennings, 1995). The issue of Ripley's maternal nature was the major point of contention, critics had with *Aliens* (1986) (Flanagan, 1999; Inness, 1999; Penley, 1989) the discussion of gender representation in *Aliens* (1986) should most likely begin there.

The big story in *Alien* (1979) was its break away from traditional gender roles and lack of romance between the characters. In contrast the big story with

*Aliens* (1986) was its return to traditional family values demonstrated through the romantic addition of Corporal Hicks and a child, Rebecca "Newt," as a futuristic foster family. Cameron added this maternal instinct to Ripley's character in order to explain to the audience why she would conceivably return to face the aliens again. Unlike Sylvester Stallone's character in the *Rambo* series, Cameron didn't think audiences could relate to Ripley if she returned only in hopes of regaining her career and gaining a sense of closure to the horror she survived in the first film. Cameron stated, "How is the audience going to relate to this person [Ripley] if they needlessly put themselves in danger?" (*Aliens* DVD, 1999). The first step in creating Ripley's maternal side was the creation of a previous child for Ripley, Amanda, who dies while waiting for Ripley to return from the disastrous voyage undertaken in the first film.

*Aliens* (1986) begins with Ripley being found after floating lost in space in hypersleep for over 57 years. Ripley discovers that she has missed most of her daughter Amanda's life after promising to be home for her 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. In addition, Ripley is told that her flight license is being revoked because she destroyed the Company's expensive freighter, *Nostromo*, for no reason they could see. Although the Company sent Ripley and her crew to find the alien on LV-426 they refuse to believe her story of horror because Ripley lacks proof. The Company has found no proof of alien life on LV-426 and Company representatives argue that they would be aware of any aliens because, in the 57 years Ripley has been asleep, the Company has sent roughly 70 families to the

planet in order to make the air breathable for others. Ripley is horror struck at the ramifications of children possibly being attacked by the aliens that killed her crew and numbly repeats the company representative's words, "families" (*Aliens*, 1986).

According to Cameron, it is only now when audiences can see Ripley's pain as a mother and her maternal concern for the colonists that they can truly relate to her return to face the aliens. Cameron argues, "The real reason [for returning to face the aliens] is the cathartic psychological reason. There has to be an inner motivation" (*Aliens* DVD, 1999). Ripley's motivation to face the aliens again is necessary because early in the film she is called upon to serve as an advisor to a group of heavily armed Marines that are going to LV-426 in order to investigate a sudden loss of contact with the planet.

Cameron offers viewers a glimpse at an equal opportunity future in which there are as many women and minorities in a Marine combat squad as there are white men. Penley (1991) states:

In attempt to repeat the equal opportunity camaraderie of the first film, Cameron's sequel includes a mixed squad of marines, in which the women are shown to be as tough as the men, maybe tougher. And Ripley is, again, the bravest and smartest member of the team (p. 133).

However, there exists a distinct difference in the type of "equal opportunity camaraderie" present in Scott's *Alien* (1979) and Cameron's *Aliens* (1986). In *Alien* (1979) both female characters were treated more or less as one of the guys.

Scott allowed Lambert and Ripley to be free from any sexual innuendoes or encounters and consequently created a remarkably androgynous film.

Cameron's *Aliens* (1986), however begins to mark differences between the sexes from the first words spoken amongst the Marines when they wake up from hypersleep. In response to a male Marine's gripe that "They don't pay us enough for this shit", Deitrich, a female medic says, "Not enough to wake up to your face, Drake" (*Aliens*, 1986).

This type of banter continues while the Marines and Ripley dress and eventually leads to the well-cited (Inness, 1999; Jennings, 1999; Penley, 1991) exchange between one male and one female Marine. The female Marine, Vasquez is rapidly depicted as a strong, masculine character. Vasquez is shown doing pull-ups in a T-shirt with the sleeves ripped off, offering a glimpse at her bulging biceps. The male Marine, Hudson, is depicted as Vasquez's opposite. Hudson introductory shot shows him complaining about the cold floor and jokingly asking the cigar-chewing Sarge for slippers. Then Hudson spots Vasquez doing her pull-ups and asks her, "Hey Vasquez. Have you ever been mistaken for a man?" to which Vasquez replies, "No. Have you?" (*Aliens*, 1986).

In order to limit Vasquez's masculinity, Cameron does include a male partner, Drake, for her who is immediately paired with her following Hudson and Vasquez's exchange. Dietrich is similarly limited in her masculine nature as a gun-toting Marine by the fact that she serves in the traditionally feminine role of the nurse or medic. Perhaps what is more interesting about the inclusion of other

strong women in Cameron's *Aliens* (1986) is that these women seem to serve more as a foil to Ripley's new-found softer, maternal side than as support for stronger representations of women.

Ripley's softer, more feminine instincts are immediately obvious to the Marines because when Corporal Hicks sees what he thinks is a child he immediately calls for Ripley and not Deitrich the medic. This ends up being a wise choice for Hicks because when the child tries to get away through an airshaft, only the lithely framed Ripley can fit into the shaft and eventually calm the child. The child, Newt, is brought back to the Marine's impromptu base and interrogated by a woefully uncompassionate male, Lieutenant Gorman, while being examined by Deitrich.

Both Lt. Gorman and Deitrich know that this girl is conceivably the last person alive in the colony and has undoubtedly seen her friends and family attacked and killed by the aliens yet Gorman and Deitrich do not seem to understand why Newt would not feel like talking. Deitrich shrugs when Ripley walks in saying, "Physically she's okay, borderline malnutrition but I don't think there is any permanent damage" (*Aliens*, 1986). Only Ripley the true woman seems to understand and sends Gorman and Deitrich away while she tries to mother Newt with hot chocolate and by cleaning Newt's face and hands.

Newt eventually opens up to Ripley and tells Ripley of the horror that she has experienced since the aliens were discovered. Ripley vows to protect Newt,

which some critics argue is done to further fit Ripley into the conservative traditional role of a mother. Doherty (1996) states:

Investing the tough cookie with maternal longings created a kind of gender equipoise, balancing the harsh male proclivity for violence with a softer, feminine nurturing side. . .Newt gives Ripley a culturally permissible way for a woman to fight and kill, not for her own satisfaction or career advancement but for her children (p.195).

Once Cameron has taken that first step into feminizing Ripley he could not leave her without a husband and that is exactly the role Hicks plays. Doherty (1996) argues:

Cameron softened her hard edges by making a full-blooded woman out of the bare-bones and rather severe careerist in Scott's *Alien*. Play out the touch of romance between Hicks and Ripley, add android Bishop as manservant, and the surviving *Aliens* trio formed a protean nuclear family, with Mom wearing the pants (p.195).

Hicks' eventual role as a foster father and husband to Newt and Ripley will be discussed later in this section, but first a further examination of Ripley's dramatic change in persona is needed. All of the discussion surrounding Ripley's new feminine side tends to overlook a vital point in terms of gender norms within the action/horror/science fiction genre. If Cameron made Ripley so feminine, how come she isn't killed? As previously mentioned, Ripley was without a doubt the clear focus of *Aliens* (1986) from the very first scene. Theoretically, as the clear

female protagonist, Ripley should follow the Final Girl pattern in other female led action and horror genre films. Following Clover's (1992) findings, Ripley should be androgynous in appearance (excepting the necessary "tits and scream" scene) and show little sexuality in terms of flirting or participating in sexual based conversations.

While Ripley for the majority of the film wears the same costume she wore in Scott's *Alien* (1979) (see appendix) she certainly engages in flirtatious behavior with Hicks. For example, in the closest thing to a love scene, Ripley says, "Hicks, I'm not going to end up like those others [alien hosts]. You'll take care of it won't you?" Hicks responds, "If it comes to that, I'll do us both. Listen lets make sure it doesn't come to that" (*Aliens*, 1986). Then Hicks introduces Ripley to his "personal friend" (*Aliens*, 1986) his massive gun and asks her to feel the weight. Then, similar to the cliché bar scene at a pool table, Hicks stands behind Ripley and shows her how to work his gun. This type of overt romantic behavior would have most certainly marked Ripley for death were she in a horror film such as *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* (1980) or *Halloween* (1978). In contrast, unlike the sexual promiscuity of the women in traditional horror films that marks them as a victim, it is the masculinity of the women in *Aliens* (1986) that marks them as potential victims. Green (1998) discusses this phenomena:

From that moment of discovery [of Newt] on Ripley is clearly defined secondarily as the best soldier on the screen, but primarily as Newt's mother, the only member of the group who can

communicate with a young girl. It is as a surrogate mother that Ripley becomes a whole person, after the trauma of her earlier experience with the hideous aliens (in *Alien*, in which she is the only survivor and the only wholly effectual member of the spaceship crew as well). It is as both mother and "wife" (to the wounded and helpless marine, Hicks) that she, unlike Vasquez, survives. The 'real woman' lives, for Hollywood can never allow a child to go unmothered. The ambiguous woman must die, for Vasquez is too far gone into "masculinity" to be recuperated for the sexual order (p.62).

Therefore, Ripley's budding relationship with Hicks is actually a positive move for Ripley because it tethers her to traditional femininity and saves her from being lost to a seemingly negative, ambiguous masculinity. However, Ripley's new femininity does not come free of charge. When Ripley "adopts" Newt she acquires a new weakness, a soft spot, that undoubtedly will be used against her later in the film. McCreadie (1990) disagrees stating, "Perhaps most important, she [Ripley] manages to display apparently newfound feelings of nurturing maternal love that in no way undercut her strength or dismantle her armor" (p. 74).

Perhaps McCreadie's (1990) claim is true when one looks at most of the interaction between Ripley and Newt. Ripley takes the role of mother seriously and censors what Newt can watch on the television (which was displaying the cocooned bodies the Marines found) and Ripley makes sure that Newt buckles her



seat belt before Ripley rams the vehicle through the wall of the aliens' lair.

Neither action seems to detract from Ripley's abilities to perform as the hero she is built up to be. That is until Newt is abducted by the aliens and Ripley decides to search for her even though the whole place is going to explode in eleven minutes.

Here Newt replaces the cat, Jonesie, in the first *Alien* (1979) by becoming a "hindrance at the crucial moment".

Penley (1989) states:

But this time there is a difference, one that is both improbable and symptomatic. Ripley develops a maternal instinct, risking her life to save the little girl who is the only survivor of a group of space colonists decimated by the aliens. . .Ripley is thus marked by a difference that is automatically taken to be a sign of femininity (we do not see Hicks, for example. . .acting irrationally in order to rescue a child who is probably already dead. . .What we get finally is a conservative moral lesson about maternity, futuristic or otherwise: mothers will be mothers, and they will always be women (p. 133).

Penley's (1989) criticism of Ripley's irrational attempt to save Newt is understandable until one reviews the genre formula of science fiction and action films. The formula of these genres all but demands that someone be saved during a pivotal part of the film (Bell-Metereau, 1985) therefore in *Alien* (1978) Ripley

had to save Jonesie just as Luke had to save Leia in *Star Wars* (1977). Therefore either Ripley or Hicks had to save Newt during the climatic part of *Aliens* (1986).

Here is an excellent example of how constantly examining gender representation can create certain biases on the part of researchers. Try to imagine Hicks attempting to save Newt while Ripley stayed injured but safe in the spaceship. Hicks would be viewed as a masculine and gallant hero rescuing a helpless little girl from danger after having made sure his love interest was safe. Instead Ripley is the irrational female who is risking her own life as well as the life of others to save her "daughter" who is probably already dead. Ironically, if Hicks had usurped Ripley in her role as hero film critics would have undoubtedly raked Cameron over hotter coals than Penley did.

Noting the contradictions and biases evident in most gender critiques, it is not surprising that one point that is notably absent from critiques of gender representation in *Aliens* (1986) is the gender representation of the "father" Hicks. Hicks was conveniently incapacitated in the final rescuing scene however he did play a major role in stopping the "manservant" Bishop from taking off without Ripley and Newt and also a major role in saving Ripley earlier in the film.

The Company representative, Burke, realizing that Ripley would not help him smuggle the aliens back to earth locked Ripley and Newt in a room with two pre-gestated aliens. Burke turned off the monitor hooked up to the camera in the room and removed Ripley's gun so she could not shoot out the shatterproof windows. Ripley, ever the ingenious hero, used a lighter to set off the fire alarm in

the room and thereby alerting Hicks of her danger. Hicks' heroic moment comes when he has a Marine shoot the shatterproof window as he dives through it into the room. Once in the room, Hicks saves Ripley from one alien while the other Marines kill the second one which was about to attack Newt.

Hicks further displayed his cool headed masculinity in the beginning of the film when he, unlike the other nervous soldiers, falls asleep on the harrowing free-fall drop to LV-426. In addition, it is Hicks who has to calm both the hyper-masculine Vasquez after her "partner," Drake, was killed by the aliens and the "hero" Ripley when she is too scared to stop the escape vehicle even though they are out of danger. Even when things are at their worst and it seems that aliens are surrounding the survivors on all sides, Hicks still has the quick thinking of a leader and gives Vasquez and Hudson a pep talk before he sends them to walk a perimeter.

Hicks' gender is somewhat feminized in both his eventual absence from the final fight against the aliens as well as his ability to work in a communal fashion and to not be hindered by male pride unlike Quint in *Jaws* (1975). For example, Hicks willingly relinquishes some of his authority to the more experienced Ripley. Though Hicks is nominally in charge, Ripley is the one who orders Hudson to relax and get blueprints of the compound. Ripley clears Bishop's request to further his analysis of the alien species. Ripley devises the plan to build a barricade around a portion of the compound to protect them against

the aliens. Hicks merely acknowledges Ripley's brilliant idea with a respectful tone saying, "Outstanding" (*Aliens*, 1986).

However, as Clover argues (1992) the Rambo-type man could never survive in anything less than a pure action genre film. Therefore, Hicks' softer form of masculinity perhaps stops him from becoming a victim much in the way Rambo, Quint, or even Vasquez would be and was. Hicks' softer side goes beyond his unabrasive leadership style and humble courage, he also is a caring foster father to Newt. Hicks is ever vigilant and gentle in his protection of Newt, admonishing her when she picks up a grenade saying, "Don't touch that! They're dangerous honey" (*Aliens*, 1986) and by picking her up so she can see what the other adults are doing on a table too high for her to see over. One could almost imagine Hicks putting Newt on his shoulders for a walk in the park.

However ignored Hicks' gender representation in *Aliens* (1986) is, what is most notable is how little it differentiates from the gender norms in Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984). The actor who plays Hicks [Michael Beihn] in Cameron's *Aliens* (1986) is actually the same actor who plays Reese in Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984). Therefore, it is almost comical that Cameron hired the same actor to play virtually the same role with virtually the same removal from the story in two consecutive films. What is even more notable is that no film critic has mentioned that Michael Beihn is dispatched in a similarly feminine fashion in both *Aliens* (1986) and *The Terminator* (1984).

In *The Terminator* (1984) Michael Beihn's character, Reese, is wounded and is half-carried, half-dragged by Linda Hamilton's character, Sarah, until he convinces Sarah to save herself and let him finish off the Terminator. Reese uses his last homemade pipe bomb to try to kill the Terminator and simultaneously sacrifices himself. In *Alien* (1986) Michael Beihn's character convinces Ripley to return to the ship before searching for the most likely dead Newt. However, as they attempt to return Hicks is badly burned in the chest by an alien's acid-like blood. Hicks almost gives up but Ripley won't let him and half-draws, half-carries him to the safety of the ship.

In the ship, Hicks regains some of his masculinity as he is shown tending to his own wounds and promising Ripley that he will not let Bishop leave without her. However, in a reversal of gender roles the injured Hicks who is staying in a relatively safe area asks the heavily armored Ripley to "hurry back" (*Aliens*, 1986).

In both films Michael Beihn's character become an odd collage of the traditional female sidekick role and the action hero. Perhaps this is why Sigourney Weaver stated, "I think I actually act for women. . .I'm more concerned with how other women respond to what I'm doing than I am that a man should look up at the screen and fall in love with me. . .maybe I'm acting for the women in men - the feminine side of men" (Blackmore, 1996, p. 213).

Apparently Weaver's has succeeded in her acting goals. Rushing (1989) wrote:

*Aliens*' producer Gale Anne Hurd, regards the movie as a feminist document, and enthuses over its reception: "I really appreciate the way audiences respond. They buy it. We don't get people even rednecks, leaving the theatre saying, "That was stupid. No woman would do that: You don't have to a liberal or ERA supporter to root for Ripley" (p. 10).

What is obvious is that James Cameron radically feminized the nonsense Ripley that Ridley Scott had created, which has resulted in an entirely new and much debatable exception to the gender norms viewers in the 1980s expected from their action, horror, and science fiction genre films.

The next chapter discusses the similarities and differences between the third film in the series *Alien3* (1992) and its predecessors. By the third film the *Alien* series had become a cinematic franchise and therefore 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox had become leery of changing the successful formulas that Scott and Cameron had created for Sigourney Weaver's character Ripley. Therefore, this next chapter focuses more strongly upon the business limitations and financial reasons for gender representations than previously done in this study.

### Chapter 3: Alien3 – Diluted Genres and Gender Representations

#### Genre:

“*Alien3*” can only be considered a failure if it is measured by the high standards set by its predecessors. And these are not just standards of ‘quality’; there are very specific narrative ‘rules’ that the third episode does not observe (Flanagan, 1999, p. 167).

David Fincher’s *Alien3* (1992) was a box-office failure compared to other films released during the early 1990s, such as Cameron’s *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991) which grossed domestically \$204.8 million [not accounting for inflation] (Kahn, 2001), and to the two predecessors within the *Alien* series. *Alien3* (1992) sold \$55.5 million worth of tickets domestically (Kahn, 2001) which after accounting for inflation only amounts to \$67.7 million (Friedman, 2000). Compare that figure to the \$131.4 million (Friedman, 2000) earned by *Aliens* (1986) and the \$201 million (Friedman, 2000) earned by *Alien* (1979) and the magnitude of *Alien3*’s (1992) failure to produce financially is evident.

Sigourney Weaver suggests that the failure of *Alien3* (1992) was due to lack of support of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, the studio that released all of the *Alien* films (Abramowitz, Unknown). Other critics argue that *Alien3*’s (1992) primary shortcoming was not its lack of studio support but instead in its lack of innovativeness as compared to its predecessors *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). The Washington Post’s film critic, Hal Hinson (1992), wrote:

There are a few narrative twists, but not enough new ideas to keep us guessing...Also, the butch glam queen she [Ripley] inaugurated in *Alien* has by now become a familiar type; like the Great Mother Alien in the second film, she has spawned a whole generation of Terminator dames. But in *Alien3*, the character seems rather old hat and, instead of staking her definitive claim on the archetype the actress joins the ranks of her imitators. These days, she's just another girl with a gun (p. D8).

In contrast, Flanagan (1999) suggests that the failure of *Alien3* (1992) may have been due to *Alien3*'s overly innovative usage of genre formulas. Flanagan (1999) argues:

To bring this dark tale to the screen, the studio selected David Fincher, a director of pop music promos with a highly developed visual sense, but no experience of the demands of features.

Fincher's inexperience shows not so much in how the film is presented - it is visually impressive - as in the way that the narrative lacks either the dreadful inevitability of *Alien* or the textbook build-up of *Aliens*. The movie aims for something more than the inspired reworkings of established genres that constitute the first two films, but fails precisely because of the absence of a firm generic framework (p. 165).



Fincher's *Alien3* (1992) contains all of the ingredients of a blockbuster sequel including a widely popular protagonist [Ripley], a cast of experienced actors [Sigourney Weaver, Charles Dutton, and Lance Henerikson], and a large budget of \$50 million (Kahn, 2001). However, the film violates too many of the expectations viewers had come to expect from an *Alien* film and consequently became a box-office failure. This leads to question: what were the genre formulas *Alien3* (1992) was supposed to follow?

Fincher inherited a cinematic franchise that evolved into a collage of the science fiction, horror, and action genres. In addition, Fincher inherited the premier female protagonist, Ripley, who was closely watched by film critics for any signs of change in her tough, no-nonsense demeanor (Jennings, 1999; Penley, 1991). Common sense would dictate that Fincher would closely follow in *Alien3* (1992) the genre precedent set by Ridley Scott and James Cameron. However, as the old adage says "Common sense is not common."

Flanagan (1999) wrote:

Taubin (1992) may be exaggerating when she declares that *Alien3* leans toward the avant-garde, but it certainly moves too far from the safety net of a recognizable genre to connect with its target audience. The first two films do not disregard or bypass genre in this way, but rather twist it to their own narrative ends (p. 165).

As Flanagan (1999) suggests, Fincher did not truly deviate from the science fiction, horror, action genre formulaic mix that he inherited from Cameron

and Scott, he merely diluted the formula until it became unrecognizable. For example, both Scott and Cameron used science fiction to highlight their plot and storylines. Scott and Cameron used their futuristic settings to arm their characters with hi-tech weaponry, spaceships, and computers. In contrast, Fincher's *Alien3* (1992) is set on a monastic-type prison world that lacks batteries for a flashlight, nevermind futuristic spaceships or weapons.

Although the New York Times (1992) advertisement for *Alien3* (1992) says, "It's edge-of-your-seat, nail-biting time again!" (p. C5), the horror aspect of *Alien3* (1992) is diluted too much to even promote staying in the theater. The first half of *Alien3* (1992) is the only portion of the film that even hints at suspense. During this portion of the film, Ripley tries to ascertain whether an alien managed to hitch a ride with her to her newest destination, a prison colony. However, as Hinson (1992) states, "Unfortunately, there's very little suspense in this because if he [the alien] didn't [tag along], well, there wouldn't be much of a movie" (p. D8).

Even with the alien there was not much of a movie because Fincher further diluted the horror/suspense aspect of the film by not offering any new or exciting way for the alien to hunt and kill. By the time Ripley and the remaining band of survivors began their attack on the alien the film had become an unsophisticated repeat of the first two films devoid of any surprises or shocks. Fincher then diluted the action portion of the film by failing to develop any of the characters to the point that the audience would care that the characters were about to attack an alien without any weapons. Even Ripley fell victim to Fincher's lack of character

development. Hinson (1992) states, "As a result [of Fincher and the screenwriters], there's nothing new to discover in either Ripley or her dilemma. Basically, she's dinner; if she doesn't get it, it's going to get her" (p. D8).

While Fincher did deviate from the successful genre formulas employed by Cameron and Scott he did develop more fully an underlying concept in all of the alien films, the concept of the characters being imprisoned. Doherty (1996) wrote,

*Alien3* adds another generic overlay: the claustrophobic environs of the prison movie, the narrative of confinement, endurance, and escape . . . As a social institution, the prison is perverse and punitive not only because it cages its inhabitants but because it segregates them by sex. In *Alien3* Ripley is the alien invader who disrupts the peace of the celibate, all-male environment . . . Only the threat of death from one alien diverts the men from the lure of sex with the other (pp.192-3).

Fincher's placement of Ripley in an all-male prison adds a new variable to the gender analysis of *Alien3* (1992). However, one could argue against Doherty's (1996) claim that the prison aspect of *Alien3* (1992) is a new innovation for the *Alien* series. After all, both the *Nostromo* in *Alien* (1979) and LV-426 in *Aliens* (1986) served as a prison for Ripley and her various crews. The *Nostromo* was the only inhabitable place for Ripley and her crew in *Alien* (1979) yet it was also infested with a deadly alien and therefore became a prison and eventually a coffin for most of the characters. Similarly, in *Aliens* (1986) Ripley, Newt, and the

marines are stranded on LV-426 when their transport ship crashes. The characters are forced to barricade themselves in defense against the aliens while they plan for escape.

Therefore, Fincher's innovation for the *Alien* series is not found in the creation of a prison for Ripley and her new crew. Instead, Fincher's innovation for the *Alien* series is the blatant depiction of the female protagonist, Ripley, as something radically different from males. The resulting film is an awkward mix of the genre imposed gender norms of the early 1970s science fiction and horror films and the more egalitarian gender norms that viewers came to expect from the *Alien* series.

### **Gender Norms in 1992:**

By 1992 the female protagonist was common place in horror, science fiction, and action genre films. The horror genre changed little since the second *Alien* film with *Final Girl* sequels being the dominant horror film. Jamie Lee Curtis' famous role in the *Halloween* series had been reprised numerous times with the fifth installment released in 1989. Similarly, the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* series has released its eighth film *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>, Part VIII: Jason Takes Manhattan* by 1989. Other *Final Girl* series such as *Nightmare on Elm Street*, which began in 1984, had been created and rapidly recycled into four sequels by 1989.

The number of female led science fiction/action genre films did not dramatically increase although, after Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984), *Aliens*

(1986) and *The Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991), the powerful female lead was in the minds of many. Prompting critics like Hinson (1992) to write, "...she [Ripley] has spawned a whole generation of Terminator dames" (p. D8).

The increasing popularity of strong representations of female characters was evident in even the pure action genre films such as *Lethal Weapon III* (1992). The action film series starring Danny Glover and Mel Gibson had until the third film primarily depicted women in the traditional action genre way...namely as a wife, a victim, a daughter, or a love interest. While the supporting lady, Officer Cole, in the third film was designed to play both Mel Gibson's love interest and eventual "hindrance at the crucial moment" she was overtly tougher than the usual supporting lady.

In a comical exchange with Mel Gibson's character Officer Cole enters in a competition over which one has more, bigger, and impressive scars. While this exchange obviously leads to a romantic interlude, the scene also serves as a reminder that women can be tough too. Officer Cole is even given the opportunity to illustrate her masculinity when she later rescues Mel Gibson. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, Officer Cole eventually returns to the woman's traditional role of damsel in distress and is curiously absent from the film's marketing (see appendix). These facts should not overshadow the fact that Officer Cole's character was a far cry from the nameless and clueless supporting women in earlier action film series such as Rambo.

Interestingly, while many of the female characters in the science fiction, horror, and action genres were being depicted stronger, smarter, and more courageous than ever before, Ripley was being depicted as weaker, slower, and more frightened than ever. *Alien3*'s (1992) marketing offers a glimpse at just how much Ripley had changed in terms of her strength and courage (see appendix). Inness (1999) argues, "While the others [*Alien* and *Aliens*] are based on showing Ripley's development as a tough hero, the last [*Alien3*] is structured around confining the threat posed by her toughness" (p. 112).

Inness (1999) cites the setting of the film (a prison colony), the attempted rape of Ripley, her newly shaved head, and the off-camera sex scene between Ripley and Dr. Clemens as support for her argument that Ripley's masculine side was being actively restrained in *Alien3* (1992). However, a closer examination and discussion of each of these variables is needed in order to ascertain the validity of such a claim. In addition, Ripley's gender representation within these variables needs to be compared to earlier depictions of her character.

*Alien3* (1992) opens with brief shots of Ripley and supposedly Hicks, Newt, and Bishop being automatically launched, while still in hypersleep, into an escape pod after a fire breaks out on-board their ship. Their ship's computer ominously displays the message, "Stasis Interrupted" (*Alien3*, 1992). The audience is then informed through text that Ripley and crew are landing on "Fiorina Fury 161. Outer-veil Mineral Ore Refinery. Double Y Chromosome-Work Correctional Facility. Maximum Security" (*Alien3*, 1992).

Ripley is then shown unconscious, in her now infamous tanktop and underwear outfit, being placed on a table by numerous male figures while one of the figures cuts away Ripley's underwear and tanktop. Inness (1992) argues, "The similarities to a rape scene are unmistakable" (p. 112). Inness' conclusion seems harsh until one considers the meaning of the phrase "Double Y Chromosome."

Human sex is noted medically by whether a human has two X chromosomes or one X chromosome and one Y chromosome (Halpern, 2000). To put it simply, a person with two X chromosomes will exhibit (barring no medical complications) the female reproductive organs. While a person with one X chromosome and one Y chromosome will exhibit male reproductive organs. Along with sexual reproductive organs some researchers believe that a person's biological sex will directly affect their behavior and communication abilities (Anderson, 1998).

For example because of their biological sex women are "'wired' from birth" (p. 88) to be more sensitive to non-verbal cues (Anderson, 1998). In contrast, men are better with spatial visualization enabling them to do things such as parallel-park better than women. In addition, researchers believe the Y chromosome leads men to compete for females and Goldsmith states, "...This competition expresses itself in various ways, often in aggressive interaction between males...with males becoming larger and more aggressive than females" (quoted in Anderson, 1999, p. 94).

Having just been informed that the male figures, who are cutting off an unconscious Ripley's underwear, have not only the usual one Y chromosome to make them large and aggressive but two, Inness' (1999) equation of the act to rape seems more reasonable. This leads to the question of why did Fincher create a setting for Ripley and the alien filled with double Y chromosome convicts?

As earlier mentioned, the function of this setting may have been to create a definite sense of difference between Ripley and the prisoners and between Ripley and masculinity. The double Y chromosome inmates would therefore function just as Inness (1999) had argued, as a creation meant to reduce some of the masculinity Ripley had gained through her previous films. How effective this added characteristic was, in actually minimizing Ripley's toughness, is debatable in light of this next scene.

After hearing a touching impromptu sermon an inmate gave for Newt and Hicks, who died in the accident, Ripley goes to the cafeteria to thank the inmate, Dillon. Sporting a newly shaved head, to avoid the lice epidemic on the colony, and a standard issue prison uniform Ripley boldly walks up to a table of inmates to thank Dillon. Dillon replies, "You don't want to know me lady. I am a murderer and a rapist of women." (*Alien3*, 1992). Ripley calmly says in return, "Really. Well I guess I must make you nervous" (*Alien3*, 1992) and then sits down right across from him.

This brief scene is notable because it establishes how the double Y chromosome effected Dillon and the other inmates by causing them to murder and



rape. This scene also reestablishes Ripley's tough, no-nonsense demeanor that was dominant in *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). Although, one would think that after spending the last hundred years or so being attacked by eight feet tall aliens with acid for blood, Ripley would not be too intimidated by an average size rapist and murderer.

Whether Ripley is scared or not, from the beginning of *Alien3* (1992) it is evident that she will undergo power struggles reminiscent of the ones she had with Parker and Brett in *Alien* (1979). Therefore, it is surprising that Bowman (1998) states, "By the time of *Alien3* (1992), Lt. Ripley had become completely defeminized, appearing in masculine attire and with shaved head, and living on terms of near-equality with a crew of 'double Y-chromosome' male convicts" (p. 35).

The only area in which Ripley lives on "terms of near-equality" with anyone on the prison colony is in dress and hair style. Since Ripley's clothing was left on her last ship and her underwear was removed in order to attend to her wounds, she wears the same prison uniform and boxer shorts as the rest of the men. In addition, because of an outbreak of lice, Ripley shaves her head with the rest of the inmates. Ripley's shaved head has garnered most of the attention of reviewers and critics of *Alien3* (1992) (Canby, 1992; Doherty, 1996; Inness, 1999; Jennings, 1995; Tasker, 1993).

Inness (1999) alone argues that Ripley's shaved head makes her more feminine and vulnerable appearing because Ripley is shown naked in a shower

immediately following her hair cut. Admittedly this would follow Clover's (1992) Final Girl concept that suggests that the audience needs to be reminded of the Final Girl's femininity after she does something masculine. Inness' (1999) knowledge of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox's intentions further supports her argument:

When the idea of showing Ripley with a bald pate was first suggested, the studio conveyed to Weaver that she would be allowed to be bald only if she appeared attractive. If she were unattractive, the bald look would have to go. The studio wanted Ripley to be tough, but no so tough that male viewers would not find her sexually desirable (p. 112).

However, many other critics view Ripley's shaved head as a further move towards the androgyny that marks a female protagonist in the horror and action genre films (Jennings, 1995; Tasker, 1993). Tasker (1998) argues:

The butch/androgynous/tomboy action heroine brings with her associations of same-sex desire, suggesting a lesbian body. . . If the shaven-headed image of Ripley produces her even more as a (butch) lesbian body than before, it is in this film that she has a (hetero)sexual encounter with disgraced doctor Clemens (Charles Dance) who is dispatched fairly shortly after. This equivocal play with gay and lesbian desire and identity has become a defining feature of the genre, though it is handled in diverse ways (pp. 71-72).

While critics like Tasker (1993) and Jennings (1995) differ with Inness (1999) on whether Ripley's shaved head makes her appear feminine, they all agree that Ripley's masculinity is more blatantly held in check in *Alien3* (1992) as compared to its predecessors. One of the major changes in Ripley's gender representation was the addition of a sex scene with the prison's doctor, Clemens. In *Aliens* (1986) Cameron developed Ripley's maternal and romantic instincts by introducing Newt and Hicks to the story. In contrast, by the time the opening credits finished in *Alien3* (1992), Fincher had killed off Newt and Hicks thereby removing "everything she [Ripley] had ever looked forward to having a normal life with" (Weaver quoted in Abramowitz, Unknown).

Dr. Clemens is the only person on the planet that is not a threat to Ripley (unlike the double Y chromosome prisoners) and is willing to believe her story about the aliens. Clemens' suspension of disbelief and treatment of Ripley is very similar to Hicks' behavior in *Aliens* (1986) and is contrasted against a Han Solo-like chauvinist for a prison superintendent. Superintendent Andrews repeatedly warns Ripley against the danger of promenading in front of the convicted rapist and murderers in the colony. However, Andrews' chauvinist nature comes out not in his worry for Ripley's safety but in the way he repeatedly tries to send her to her room the (infirmary). After telling Ripley to stay in the infirmary Andrews follows up with the comment, "That's a good girl" (*Alien3*, 1992).

The Superintendent's unwillingness to believe Ripley's story or think in new ways likens him to Quint in *Jaws* (1975) and therefore there is little surprise

that like Quint, Andrews is killed. After Ripley runs into the cafeteria to warn everyone about the alien Andrews merely screams, "Get this foolish woman back to the infirmary" (*Alien3*, 1992). The words barely leave Andrews' mouth before the aforementioned alien bursts through the ceiling and carries Andrews by the head back into the airshafts.

In contrast, Clemens, like Hicks before him, is a more sensitive male who is not only able to treat Ripley as an equal but also is willing to help her in anyway possible. However Clemens' sensitive nature is one of the many contradictions Fincher problematically includes in the diluted *Alien3* (1992). Following an off-camera sex scene with Clemens, Ripley notices that Clemens has a prison bar code on the back of his head. Later, Clemens discloses that he had been released from Fury 161 after serving time for medical malpractice. However, medical malpractice is quite different from the double Y chromosome crimes of rape and murder and yet Clemens was sent to Fury 161. This contradiction in levels of aggressiveness and sensitivity in males who are all supposed to be hyper masculine, double Y chromosome prisoners is merely the first confusing aspect of the gender representation in *Alien3* (1992).

The second and most evident contradiction within *Alien3* (1992) is found in the simple fact that Ridley Scott's severe careerist, non-romantic Ripley has sex. Cameron's addition of maternal instincts and flirtatiousness to Ripley's persona in *Aliens* (1986) had left Ripley open to the progression of a romantic interlude. Despite her lengthy hypersleep, Ripley's last romantic interest, Hicks, had just

died along with her foster daughter and therefore one would think there would be a moment of mourning for Ripley. Instead Ripley shed a few tears during the autopsy of Newt but there was not a single audible reference to Hicks by name in the entire film. The only time Hicks' name was on screen was during the opening sequence where his name is ominously typed out followed by the word, "DEAD" (*Alien3*, 1992). It is as if Ripley was making a conscious effort not to talk about her ~~ex~~-boyfriend while out on a first date with Clemens.

Most likely Fincher did want to push Ripley's earlier relationship with Hicks out of the minds of the audience so that Ripley did not seem cold and callous. The fact remains that Ripley did forget Hicks and quickly propositioned Clemens for sex. Doherty (1996) suggests that Ripley's proposition of Clemens was designed with ulterior motives in mind stating, "However, perhaps to salvage some of the feminism of the previous installments, she's not only an object of desire but a subject of one..." (p. 196).

Ripley's proposition of Clemens did not have that impact on many viewers such as Hinson who failed to see any strong representations in Ripley's proposition. Hinson (1992) wrote, "...which is more than you can say for her brief and entirely pointless liaison with the prison's medical officer" (p. D8). Hinson makes a valid point in that Ripley's new found sexual urges do little for the storyline except perhaps, as Doherty hints, align her more closely with the sexually aggressive double Y chromosome prisoners that surround her. In fact later in the film Dillon asks Ripley about her relationship with Clemens in a scene that is

reminiscent of two boys in a locker room. Ripley sheepishly shrugs off Dillon's inquiries with a mix a look of half-pride and half-embarrassment as she replies, "You must have been looking in a lot of key holes" (*Alien3*, 1992).

The entire interlude seems to be a problematic collage of what viewers had come to expect from Ripley (strength and aggressiveness) and what viewers had come to expect from traditional female characters such as Princess Leia or even Officer Murtaugh (screams and sex). The presence of Ripley's sexual urges becomes immediately more confusing when one realizes that Sigourney Weaver was the one "who demanded a love scene" (Jennings, 1995, p. 203). Why would a 5 foot 11 inch strong female actor with "liberal political values" (Abramowitz, Unknown) demand to be simultaneously the object and subject of desire?

The answer to that riddle is the question itself. Sigourney Weaver is a strong woman with an imposing physical presence and therefore is rarely cast in anything close to a romantic role. Since *Aliens* (1986) Sigourney Weaver had three major films: *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988), *Working Girl* (1988), *Ghostbusters* (1989). In *Gorillas in the Mist* (1988) Weaver portrays Diana Fossey's real-life struggle to study and preserve gorillas in the wild. Unlike other leading actresses' films set in the wild, such as Meryl Streep's *Out of Africa* (1985), Weaver was not cast against a romantic male star like Robert Redford. Instead Weaver extended her independent-female type cast by portraying a woman who succeeds virtually on her own.

Weaver's shot at romance fared little better in *Working Girl* (1988) in which she plays a domineering advertising guru whose main form of succeeding is backstabbing those around her such as Melanie Griffith's character. While Weaver's character in *Working Girl* (1988) is given a handsome boyfriend, Harrison Ford, they do not appear on camera together and the more feminine Melanie Griffith eventually steals Weaver's man.

*Ghostbusters* (1989) cast Weaver in the closest thing to a sexy woman and even then she is possessed in the end of the film by an evil being which turns her into a woman more strong and terrifying than the aliens she fought in *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986). Weaver's bad luck in casting led one interviewer to inquire why Weaver never acts in love stories. Weaver replied, "I'm still hoping that as I mature in this business, I'll be able to play some Simone Signoret parts. I mean, I know its preposterous, but I'm hoping that I'll actually be given a chance to do some love stories, because I find those really wonderful to do" (Abramowitz, Unknown).

Understanding Weaver's desire to be cast in a romantic role helps to clarify why she would demand to have a love scene with Clemens. As mentioned earlier, by having Ripley proposition Clemens, Ripley adopts the masculine traits of sexual aggressiveness and becomes the subject of desire. However, Ripley's sexual aggressiveness do not free her from being the object of desire that she was in the end of *Alien* (1979) or during her introduction to Hicks' gun in *Aliens*

(1986). The sex scene was off camera and is only alluded to in the following scene where Ripley and Clemens are lying in bed together.

Curiously, both Clemens and Ripley are shown wearing the same prison issued tanktops and boxer shorts although the camera focuses primarily on their head and shoulders. Jennings attributes this camera work to Fincher's experience with directing the famous gender-bending musician, Madonna's, videos (1995). Jennings (1995) elaborates:

The play with sexual difference and sameness is extended to the field of sexuality, and the iconography of two shaved heads on the pillow blurs the edges of sexual possibility. Conditioned by associated imagery of sexuality, at first glance it could be two gay men or two lesbians. It is, of course, a heterosexual couple, but a heterosexual couple where their representations are not governed by the binary division of masculine and feminine (p. 202).

Fincher's camera angles play with gender expectations and also serve to frame Ripley's face in a way reminiscent of actresses in the 1950s. Jennings (1995) states, "...given the beautiful way in which her [Ripley] close-ups are lit – they conjure up parallels with the likes of Garbo and Dietrich [see appendix], who were two stars who specialized in the head-fetish shot" (p. 203). By framing Ripley's head and shoulders in a way reminiscent of actresses of old, Fincher has once again made Ripley an object of desire reminding viewers about the Final



Girl's femininity immediately after she deviated from femininity by becoming the masculine subject of desire.

Fincher's knee-jerk reaction to confine as Inness (1999) states, "the threat posed by her [Ripley's] toughness" (p. 112) is almost as perpetual as the aliens' survival in the series. Unlike Scott and Cameron, Fincher seems determined in *Alien3* (1992) to add a feminine depiction of Ripley for every masculine act she performs. The end result is a further dilution of not only the genres Fincher adopted from Scott and Cameron but of the strong female protagonist as well. Few scenes capture Fincher's contradictory treatment of Ripley as well as the scene in which the double Y chromosome prisoners attempt to gang rape her.

Shortly following Ripley's visit and confrontation with Dillon in the prison cafeteria, the ever-helpful Clemens informs Ripley where she can find the android Bishop's remains so that she can try to access the escape pod's flight recorder in order to determine if an alien was on board. Ripley, mindless of the Superintendent's repeated warnings to not walk around the prisoners alone, goes out to the garbage dump and retrieves Bishop's torso and head. Ripley soon realizes that she is surrounded by the hyper-masculine, double Y chromosome prisoners and tries to run away rather than fight. The prisoners quickly subdue Ripley and prepare to rape her when Dillon suddenly appears and single-handedly fights all of the prisoners while telling Ripley to "Run along!" (*Alien3*, 1992). Ever tough, Ripley gets up and punches one of the prisoners, who is already on his hands and knees after being hit by Dillon, knocking him out.

Unlike the scene in *Aliens* (1986) in which Ripley is rescued by Hicks, in this rape scene Ripley demonstrates no ingenuity or any of the street smarts that had kept her alive to see this sequel. In *Aliens* (1986), Ripley sees that there is no way out of the medical lab where she and Newt are trapped with two aliens so she sets off the sprinkler with her lighter. In the rape scene Ripley knows that she is similarly surrounded, but rather than think of an ingenious way to call for help, such as screaming, she tries to run. The tough action hero Ripley in *Aliens* (1986) did not run from the Mother Alien into the other aliens. Instead Ripley used reason and a flame-thrower to get out of that situation. In *Alien3* (1992), Ripley's masculine ability to reason must have been siphoned into her libido because she does not even try to fight her attempted rapists. Bear in mind that Ripley did have a huge piece of metal, the android Bishop, in her arms and at least she could have swung him around like a purse. In addition, having Dillon show up and single-handedly incapacitate all of the prisoners, sends a message that one person could have fought his or her way out of danger, but that one person had to be a hyper-masculine, double Y chromosome male.

Once again Fincher used an odd type of check and balance to insure that Ripley did not stray over the line of appropriate feminine behavior. Fincher's treatment of Ripley is not in any way novel as seen in Clover's (1992) analysis of Final Girl films. However, the number of times Fincher choose to use Ripley's "tits and scream" (Clover, 1992, p. 58) to remind viewers that Ripley is still feminine is a record within the *Alien* film series. Fincher's achievement in

consistently feminizing Ripley and his dilution of the genre formulas in science fiction, horror, and action films combine to create an awkward film that does not quite resemble the preceding *Alien* films or the traditional representations of gender found in the *Rambo* or *Lethal Weapon* film series. Doherty (1996) summarized Fincher's contradictory achievement in *Alien3* (1992) best stating:

Where *Alien* unapologetically affirmed Ripley's strength and tenacity, where *Aliens* developed Ripley's maternal side as a progressive extension of the well-rounded woman warrior, *Alien3* can't decide whether it wants to eroticize or de-sex her, to celebrate her for being assertive or chastise her for being uppity (p. 196).

The ending in *Alien3* (1992) definitely tips the scales in favor of the chastising Ripley "for being uppity" because she is left with little alternative but to kill herself. Having discovered that the evil Company is planning on removing the Queen alien embryo from Ripley's chest and bring it back to Earth to use in their Weapons Division, Ripley decides that she would rather die than allow them potentially to destroy the Earth. Ripley's decision to kill herself further illustrates the extent that Ripley lost her previous masculine ability to be ingenious in a time of crisis.

Ripley was aware of the fact that she was impregnated with a Queen alien embryo for the last third portion of the film and yet she does nothing to try to save herself. Remember, this is the same woman who deciphered an alien distress message in *Alien* (1979); planned a detailed defense against an army of aliens and

used a full-body sized forklift to fight the Queen alien in *Aliens* (1986); and showed a man with an I.Q. of 85 how to operate a medical scanner in *Alien3* (1992). Ripley is somehow unable to imagine or plan to remove the alien embryo from her chest using the same medical facility used to diagnose her. The Ripley of old would have certainly considered this more practical option of survival rather than to just give up and beg Dillon to kill her. Unfortunately for Ripley, Dillon still had the masculine ability to reason and would not agree to kill her until she helped him kill the other alien that was already on the loose.

Ripley was forced to kill herself and the Queen alien inside of her before the foolish, capitalistic Company, could try to tame the alien species that had so devastated everyone Ripley had known in the past 60 years. However noble Ripley's sacrifice was meant to be some critics such as Inness (1999) viewed Ripley's death as a political statement. Inness (1999) wrote, "Her [Ripley's] death serves as a warning to women who, like Ripley, might rebel against gender constraints and adopt tough personas" (p. 113).

The idea that Ripley was just too tough or had too many masculine traits and abilities to be allowed to live in the 1990s is perhaps a valid concept in light of how films with strong female leads or co-stars end. Films such as *Lethal Weapon III* (1992) and *Terminator II: Judgement Day* (1991) end with the strong female characters firmly in their traditional places of committed romantic partner and rehabilitated yet loving mother. Doherty (1996) discusses this tendency in terms of *Alien3's* (1992) ending:

Her [Ripley's] alert intelligence and active initiative cannot be contained by marriage, the conventional wrap-up for female-centered narratives, yet neither can she be unleashed to roam free in an unchartered feminist galaxy...Perhaps the nihilistic finale lays bare a piercing critique of a twentieth-century planet Earth inhospitable to female life. More likely, it exposes a failure of artistic imagination (p. 198).

Doherty's (1996) point concerning the lack of imagination on the part of the filmmakers of *Alien3* (1992) is perhaps more credible than a concerted effort on the part of 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox to send a "warning to women" as Inness (1999) suggested. Sigourney Weaver, as discussed previously, played a larger than normal role in the making of *Alien3* (1992) and it was Weaver who decided to kill off Ripley. Weaver said, "No, I was very happy to die off. First of all, I had heard they were going to do this "Alien Versus Predator," and I wanted to get as far away from that as possible" (Thompson, 1997).

Therefore, the filmmakers of *Alien3* (1992) had a larger burden than the previous directors and writers of Alien films because they were given the challenge of how to kill off the archetypal female hero in a way that would not alienate viewers. Considering this fact, the filmmakers did a decent job of meeting the challenge. Although the overall impact of Ripley's death was a further weakening of what was once an abnormally strong character in the science fiction, horror, and action genres.

The next and final chapter addresses how 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox managed to bring Ripley back to life for a fourth *Alien* film and why Sigourney Weaver willingly agreed to the assignment. The financial and production aspects of filmmaking played a larger role than in any previous *Alien* film in the creation of gender representations in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) and consequently are more dominant topics than in previous chapters of this study.

#### Chapter 4: *Alien: Resurrection* – Re-Invigorating the *Alien* Franchise

When *Alien3* (1992) ended with Ripley's death the *Alien* film franchise seemed to be at an end. To many, including Sigourney Weaver, the death of Ripley and the aliens was a relief. Weaver stated:

...one of the reasons I died was really to liberate this series from Ripley, 'cause I didn't want her to keep waking up, "oh my god, there's a monster on board." I didn't want her to become like this figure of fun that no one ever listened to and kept waking up in one situation worse than the next. So for the sake of the series and also because I heard they were going to do "Alien vs. Predator", something that I thought sounded awful, I wanted out (Author Unknown, 1997).

Weaver's determination to bring the *Alien* series to an end before she and the series began to become a "figure of fun" was not shared by others within the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox corporation. Roughly five years after *Alien3* (1992), Weaver was lured back to 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox by a new script written by Joss Whedon, the acclaimed screenwriter of *Toy Story* (1995). Weaver related, "It was a good script because this regime at the studio is very committed and they're very proud of the *Alien* series and they weren't going to just rip-off the *Alien* series and make a lot of money" (Author Unknown, 1997).

In addition to Whedon's strong script, Winona Ryder had also agreed to act in the fourth installment of *Alien* thereby insuring a bit more credibility for Sigourney Weaver and the film. While relatively young (29 years old) Winona Ryder had established herself as a serious actress in dramatic roles such as *How to Make an American Quilt* (1995) and period pieces such as *Little Women* (1994). Ryder's tendency to lean towards serious films led even the studio interviewer to inquire as to her motivation for acting in an *Alien* film. Ryder responded, "I tend to go more towards period pieces because they happen to be better scripts. But I've always wanted to do a great sci-fi...I'd never read a good science fiction script, or a good action type movie script. They're always so incredibly bad and especially the female parts" (Author Unknown, 1997).

Ryder's comments suggest that the fourth *Alien* film intended to offer a strong representation of the female characters. How well the filmmakers succeeded in transferring those intentions onto the silver screen will be discussed later in the chapter. However, it is clear just from following the money that *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) was heavily weighted towards its female talent. The financial aspect of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) led one reviewer to question Weaver's motives for returning to the series. Thompson said, "A payday of \$12 million also helped Weaver see the new Ripley light, although she says 'under other circumstances it would have been easy for me to say no'" (1997).

Weaver's appreciation, for her larger than normal salary, is evident in the journal she wrote about making *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) for *Premiere*



*Magazine*. In one entry Weaver details the filming of an underwater action sequence. Weaver wrote, "I know they're paying me a lot of money... but I really can't do this... My mild claustrophobia has suddenly become my Achilles heel. Does Arnold [Schwarzenegger] have one? Does Sly [Sylvester Stallone]? Is this why I'm so much cheaper?" (Weaver, 1997).

Weaver's last question about why she is cheaper than Sylvester Stallone and Arnold Schwarzenegger was undoubtedly in reference to the extreme pay differences in male and female actors of any genre. For example, Stallone earned \$20 million for his lead role in *Judge Dredd* (1995) (Kahn, 2001) while Arnold Schwarzenegger earned \$25 million for his **supporting** role in *Batman & Robin* (1997) (Kahn, 2001). Female actors in contrast earned significantly less. Demi Moore was the highest paid actress in 1997 with \$12.5 million for her lead role in *Striptease* (Kahn, 2001). With \$12.5 million being the high in 1997 for female salaries, Weaver was undoubtedly appreciative of her \$12 million salary and perhaps a bit bitter.

This examination of the financial aspect behind the making of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) leads to the curious question of why 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox was willing to put so much money behind a film series whose last installment, *Alien3* (1992), was so unprofitable (see chapter 3). Clearly 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox was impressed by Whedon's new vision for the *Alien* cinematic franchise. *Alien: Resurrection*'s Producer Bill Badalato went on record stating, "This particular *Alien* has reinvigorated the genre and reinvigorated the franchise" (Author

Unknown, 1997). While there is little doubt that Whedon's script "reinvigorated the franchise," that was previously killed by Weaver, Whedon's ability to reinvigorate the genre is questionable primarily because the genre category *Alien: Resurrection's* (1997) belongs to is questionable.

### **Genre:**

Thompson quoted Weaver as saying, "If the movie is perceived as a horror film then that's not very satisfying...If it is perceived as a provocative science-fiction piece, we have done our jobs" (1997). This particular quote is helpful in understanding the genre intent of the filmmakers of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997). However this statement also raises some questions in light of other statements Weaver has made. Weaver said, "And I think so much of it [*Alien: Resurrection*] is original while the spirit of it is very much a cross between the first and second" (Author Unknown, 1997).

If *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) was as Weaver suggested "a cross between the first and second" *Alien* films, then *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) should have a strong genre background in the horror and action genre (see chapters 1 & 2) while still being set in space. Weaver also stated that she would be disappointed if *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) was viewed as a horror film and pleased if the film was viewed as a "provocative science fiction piece." Weaver's contradictory view of the genre of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is important to understand in order to

assess what gender norms the filmmakers were applying in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).

Perhaps the best way to assess whether *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is a horror or science fiction film is to revisit Bruce Kawin's (1986) five step test (see p. 2-4 chapter 1). The first step "army vs. scientists" (Kawin, 1986, p. 246) concerns whether the film is for or against the destruction of the alien species. In the first three *Alien* films the characters have overwhelmingly been for the destruction of the species. The few proponents for saving the aliens, in the first three films, were figureheads of an evil corporation who only wanted to save the aliens in order to use them as weapons. In contrast, only one character in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), Winona Ryder's character Call, is determined to destroy the aliens. The remaining characters are initially uninterested in destroying the aliens. A brief description of each of the characters will perhaps shed light on their motives.

The major characters of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) include: a greedy scientist who cloned Ripley in order to bring the aliens back to life; 5 mercenary space pirates who just want to abandon ship and go about their business; an army soldier who similarly just wants to survive; and a newly cloned Ripley who is now part alien and cannot decide whether to side with the aliens or the humans. All of the characters with the exception of Wren, the greedy scientist, eventually see Call's point of view when they realize that the Army controlled space ship they are on has a built in emergency function that reprograms its flight back to Earth. Only

with the threat of the aliens landing and destroying Earth do the mercenary space pirates, soldier, and Ripley become selfless and heroic and lead the film into the horror genre.

Kawin's (1986) second step, "violence vs. intelligence" (p. 247) determines whether the alien species is violent or able to communicate and perhaps be nonviolent. There was only one instance of attempted communication between the aliens and humans in the first three *Alien* films and that was in Cameron's *Aliens* (1986). In *Aliens* (1986) Ripley uses non-verbal cues to send the message to the Queen alien, "If you hurt my child [Newt], I will kill your eggs with my flame thrower." However, after one of the alien eggs begins to hatch the conversation ends with Ripley torching the entire room.

*Alien: Resurrection* (1997) offers far more communication and sophistication on the part of the aliens than ever before. The aliens in the fourth film communicate through screeches to each other and are depicted making plans to escape from the medical lab. The newly cloned Queen mother also becomes more verbal making mewling noises to her newborn son, which the son similarly makes. This newfound communicative ability on the part of the aliens may be in part due to the film's premise that the cloning of Ripley went wrong with part of the Queen alien remaining in her and part of her remaining in the Queen alien.

This premise allows for a more science fiction based approach to the film as well as a closer look at the life-styles of the aliens. For example, in one scene Ripley is pulled down into the "Viper Pit" (Weaver, 1997) and is swallowed into

what appears to be a sea of aliens. Following this full body hug by the aliens, Ripley is shown caressing and cuddling an alien with accompanying romantic music. Weaver discussed this scene in her journal writing:

Today we shoot the scene where the alien pulls me down into the Viper Pit and carries me off. I open my eyes and see him, sinking back into his arms. It's a novel experience for Ripley to surrender. I am supremely lucky because Jean-Pierre [Jeunet - French Director of *Alien: Resurrection*] really understands this relationship Ripley has with the alien. The French are great. You just can't shock them" (Weaver, 1997).

While Weaver's observation about the French may be credible, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) made it clear that Jeunet and Whedon were trying to shock viewers by reintroducing Ridley Scott's android surprise with a twist. Midway through the film, Ryder's character Call is shot in the chest by Wren and falls face first into an underwater room filled with aliens. Ripley and the other surviving characters assume that Call is dead until she suddenly appears on the other side of a locked door they were trying to open. Ripley demands to see Call's wound and discovers that, like Ash in *Alien* (1979) and Bishop in *Aliens* (1986) and *Alien3* (1992), Call is an android. An astonished Ripley proclaims, "I should have known. You are too humane to be human" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

This revelation concerning Call is pertinent in a discussion about the genre of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) primarily because of Kawin's (1986) assessment of

the genre of *Alien* (1979). Kawin (1986) states, “*Alien*...is emphatically a horror film...because the scientist is a soulless robot rather than an authentic visionary...” (p. 248). Applying Kawin’s (1986) reasoning to *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) and one could conclude that *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is emphatically a science fiction film because the mechanic [Call] is a humane and authentic visionary rather than a soulless robot. After all, Call is the only person that was trying to save the world throughout the entire film and it is only through Call’s persistence that the other characters eventually agree with her.

Call’s humaneness far surpasses that of Bishop in *Aliens* (1986) and *Alien3* (1992) in that she wishes to destroy the aliens and save the human race while Bishop is programmed to respect life so deeply that destroying anything living is reprehensible. An important realization is that Bishop could similarly place the second and third *Alien* films within the science fiction genre if applying Kawin’s (1986) reasoning. Although, unlike the previous three films, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) does create a new understanding of the aliens and their society.

Unfortunately any understanding of the aliens gained by the characters in the fourth *Alien* film is quickly pushed aside by the characters’ desire to survive. Therefore, like the first three films, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) leans toward the horror genre in its treatment of Kawin’s (1986) third step “closing vs. opening” (p. 247). This step determines whether the film tries to create a learning community with the new lifeforms or whether they try to kill the lifeforms. Given the vicious nature of the aliens it is easy to understand why the characters in *Alien:*

*Resurrection* (1997) do not try to create any lasting relationships with any of the aliens with the exception of the newly mixed Ripley.

Ripley's new genetic structure fulfills the second science fiction requirement in Kawin's (1986) five steps, "inhuman vs. human" (p. 247). As quoted in chapter one, Kawin (1986) stated, "Science fiction is open to the potential of the inhuman..." (p. 247). *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) contains a large argument for the creation of semi-human creatures. Not only is there a sense of awe concerning Ripley's new strength and useful acidic blood but there are also numerous references to the benefits Ripley's human genetic code brought to the aliens, such as a mammalian birthing process versus the parasitic process that killed off the hosts such as Kane in *Alien* (1979).

Unfortunately, the characters of the film did not have time to discover if they could try to tame the new version of the alien because of their impending Earth landing. Consequently, *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) straddled both the science fiction and horror genres by killing everything inhuman but Call and Ripley. Similarly, the fourth *Alien* film straddled both the science fiction and horror genres in the fifth and final step in Kawin's (1986) genre test, "communication vs. silence" (p. 247).

Kawin (1986) argued, "What one can talk with, one can generally deal with...The opened community can be curious about and learn from the outsiders, while the closed community talks only among itself" (p. 247). Only Ripley could talk to the aliens and learn their intentions and only Ripley and the scientists cared.

The remaining characters merely wanted to escape from the aliens or kill them. Therefore, the fourth *Alien* film leans once again into the horror genre. However, it is notable that this fourth film, which Weaver wanted to be viewed as a “provocative science fiction piece”, is the only one film in the entire *Alien* series that truly blurred the line between the horror and science fiction genres. *Alien: Resurrection*'s (1997) predecessors were primarily horror films in space and while Whedon, Weaver, and Jeunet did not entirely change the genre of the *Alien* franchise, they certainly “reinvigorated the [science fiction] genre” portion of the genre hybrid that controls the *Alien* franchise.

#### **Gender Norms of Genre(s):**

The science fiction/action hybrid genre's gender norms in 1997 did not differ greatly from science fiction's gender norms in previous years with females overwhelmingly being represented as weak and males being represented as strong. The one major difference in 1997 science fiction/action hybrid films was a new tendency to base the film's storyline around female characters and then create a male protagonist to either save or kill the female. Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element* (1997) and Roger Donaldson's *Species* (1995) are good examples of this new genre trend and incidentally were two of the highest grossing science fiction films in the late 1990s (Kahn, 2001).

Besson's premise for *The Fifth Element* (1997) is that every 5,000 years a door opens between two dimensions: our existence as we know it and an existence



filled with an anti-life force. The only weapon against this anti-life force is a temple with spaces for four inanimate blocks representing the elements of earth (earth, wind, fire, water) and a space for a fifth element that will animate the four elements into an undefeatable weapon. This fifth element is a super-being that has been lost for almost 5,000 years. Earth's scientists discover a single cell of the super-being and clone it into a female human form named Leeloo.

During the process of cloning Leeloo, Earth discovers that an unknown flying object is quickly approaching the planet and can not be stopped by the military. The scientists cage Leeloo while trying to ascertain how best to use her as a weapon against this on-coming threat. However, Leeloo breaks out of the cage and dives out of a window only to crash through the roof of a taxi driven by Bruce Willis' character, Korben. Korben decides to help the suddenly helpless super-being, Leeloo, find the four blocks representing the elements and save the world.

Leeloo's dress may have had some effect on Korben's willingness to help her considering her costume was quite revealing. Roger Ebert wrote, "Leeloo is clad in a garment that looks improvised from Ace bandages but gets no complaints from me (the costumes are by French couturier Jean-Paul Gaultier, whose favorite strategy as a designer is to start by covering the strategic places, and then stop)" (1997). Whatever the reason, Bruce Willis spends the remainder of the film fighting for and rescuing the surprisingly un-super super-being, Leeloo and

consequently erases any hope that the film's story had created for strong female representations.

Donaldson's *Species* (1995) similarly begins with a promise of a strong female lead and like *The Fifth Element* (1997) manages to dilute whatever strength the female lead could have had by representing her as an object to be desired but not respected. The premise of *Species* (1995) is that 20 years after the Earth's largest radio telescope relayed a message into space, containing information about Earth's inhabitants, Earth received a response. This response contained a DNA sequence and friendly instructions on how to combine it with human DNA. The result yielded a female girl, Sil, who was kept in a cage (like Leeloo) for observation until the scientists realized that Sil was growing quickly and had the capability to kill. Before the scientists could destroy Sil she (like Leeloo) broke out of her cage and escaped.

Unlike Leeloo in *The Fifth Element* (1997), Sil did not escape into the arms of a male hero and be kept safe throughout the rest of the film. On the contrary, Sil escapes onto a train and mimics human behavior she watches on the television in order to obtain food. Midway through the train ride Sil begins to metamorphosis into her alien form but due to its horrific shape that was designed by H.R. Giger, the creator of Scott's alien in *Alien* (1979), she decides to hide her true form by adopting an adult human, female appearance. Now as an adult alien and female, Sil does the most logical thing for an animal and perhaps a woman to do and begins searching for a mate to breed with.

Once again Sil relies on her knowledge gained by watching television to help her meet a male and the unsurprising result is that Sil begins dressing similar to a prostitute (see appendix). By mimicking human behaviors Sil does come awfully close to succeeding in her mission to breed, however, each time something occurs that forces her to kill the males before mating. Generally that something is linked to the fact that the scientists, military, and police departments are all out searching for and trying to kill Sil.

This violent and horrific aspect of Sil's heredity and breeding habits in *Species* (1995) can be explained by the psychoanalytical theories discussed in Chapter one. Sobchack (1990) wrote, "...in their repressed and potent combination as a sign evoking male fear and desire – sex and women figure significantly, if covertly, in shaping the basic structure of the genre and initiating its major themes" (p. 104). Therefore, unlike Leeloo's evolution from a super-being into the submissive role as a "hindrance at the crucial moment" (Bell-Metereau, 1985, p. 209) in *The Fifth Element* (1997) Sil evolves from an incredibly bright young girl into a monstrous symbol of "male fear and desire." Either way the status quo for gender norms in the science fiction/action hybrid genre is held steady and "imbedded like concrete in the Eisenhower era" (Doherty, 1996, p. 194).

The pure action genre's gender norms around 1997 had similar opportunities to offer strong representations of women and deviate from the status quo, Ridley Scott's film *G.I. Jane* (1997) came closest to succeeding. Tasker

(1998) wrote, "...the majority of big-budget action movies continue to focus on male protagonists and to position women in supportive, often romantic, roles" (p. 67). In contrast, Demi Moore in *G.I. Jane* (1997) was cast in the leading role, Jordan O'Neil, and was represented in a way that maintained her character's strength, poise, and independence.

In *G.I. Jane* (1997), O'Neil is given the opportunity to be the first ever female allowed to train to be an elite Navy SEAL. Only 40% of SEAL trainees complete the training and become a full-fledged Navy SEAL and O'Neil is determined to be in that 40%. However, O'Neil faces more struggles than the average trainee because the Master Chief that is overseeing the training, the base commander, and many other high ranking officials are determined to make sure she does not succeed. O'Neil does not make things easier for herself when she demands to be scored the same as the other trainees and not be given the "gender normed" standards set for the naturally weaker and slower female troops.

This brief synopsis illustrates just how different the gender representation is in Scott's *G.I. Jane* (1997) as compared to other action films of the past such as *Lethal Weapon III* (1992) or even *The Fifth Element* (1997). While Scott's film does offer a refreshing look at a strong female character, he adopts the Final Girl techniques of the horror genre to ensure that the audience remembers that Demi Moore/Jordan O'Neil is still an object to be desired. Scott's depictions of Moore's "tit's and scream" (Clover, 1992, p. 58) arrive early and frequently in *G.I. Jane* (1997).

Within the first half-hour of *G.I. Jane* (1997) O'Neil is shown taking a bubble bath and pondering whether to attempt to join the SEALs. Later in the film Moore is shown naked from the waist up while taking a shower. Curiously, the Master Chief is shown to the side of the screen watching O'Neil shower. His presence has the effect of creating a sense of double-voyeurism, where the audience can gaze at the nude Demi Moore and the Master Chief gazing at the nude Demi Moore. However curious, the overall effect of putting Demi Moore and her character on display is to remind viewers that "she really is female-even as, and despite the fact that, she in the end acquits herself 'like a man'" (Clover, 1992, p. 58).

Similar to the true Final Girl, O'Neil does "acquit herself like a man" and by doing so becomes the first female character in a pure action genre film to have saved the day. While many other hybrid genre films such as *Aliens* (1986) have portrayed a female character saving the day, no military based action genre film has ever done so to this author's knowledge before Ridley Scott's *G.I. Jane* (1997). However, one should note two major points about Scott's accomplishment. Firstly, Scott relied on the Final Girl formula as closely as one can without the horror factor. In addition to the "tit's and scream" aspect of the Final Girl, Scott employed the technique of giving the Final Girl an androgynous or masculine name, Jordan (Clover, 1992).

Secondly, Scott's genre accomplishment was ignored or missed by many. *G.I. Jane* (1997) did worse than *Alien3*'s (1992) dismal box office sales with only

\$48.2 million tickets sold domestically (Kahn, 2001) or \$51.1 million accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000). The lack of ticket sales does not necessarily indicate that viewers could not relate to the film's message or the genre formula used. However, employing Bakhtin's notion of genre evolution suggests that something in *G.I. Jane* (1997) did not meet the audience's expectations of the film based upon its genre formula (Flanagan, 1999).

Scott's new addition of the Final Girl formula into the pure action film genre would be the most obvious reason for the audience's displeasure. After all, if the reason for the audience's rejection of the film was the storyline, dialogue, or even lighting the offending culprit would have been fixed and a sequel would have been made. As of the summer of 2001, no talk of a *G.I. Jane* sequel has ever been discussed publicly or even rumored of in various media. Consequently, one can infer that viewers are not ready for strong representations of females in pure action genre films yet.

In stark contrast, viewers were more than prepared for strong Final Girls in horror genre films in the late 1990s. The only problem was a sudden shortage of horror genre films to view. By 1997 the horror genre film mainstays such as the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*, *Halloween*, and *Nightmare on Elm Street* series had either come to an end or had gone on hiatus. Only two major Hollywood horror genre films (or series) were released in 1996-1997, *Scream* (1996), *Scream II* (1997), and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997).

Wes Craven, the creator of the *Nightmare on Elm Street* series, created a parody of the horror genre films titled, *Scream* (1996). *Scream* (1996) is set in a small, affluent, community filled with teenage horror film fans. Craven introduces viewers to the obvious Final Girl with the androgynous name, Sydney, whose mother had been brutally killed a year prior to the beginning of the film and the sudden murder of two local teens. Craven includes numerous horror film cliches and also many remakes of *Nightmare on Elm Street's* scenes and costumes. The most interesting portion of *Scream* (1996), in terms of this study, comes when a group of teens are watching *Halloween* (1978) and discussing why Jamie Lee Curtis is always a virgin in her horror films.

One teen proceeds to give the others an impromptu lecture on the rules of the horror genre films. Randy says:

There are certain rules that one must abide by to successfully survive a horror movie. For instance, number one you can never have sex...sex equals death. Number two, you can never drink or do drugs – the sin factor. It's a sin – it's an extension of number one. And number three, never say "I'll be right back" cause you won't be back (*Scream*, 1996).

Craven proceeds to play with this horror film genre formula by depicting Sydney losing her virginity and then letting her survive. In addition, Craven adds a comedic value to Sydney's sex scene by cutting the scene with shots from the other teens watching *Halloween* (1978) downstairs. For example, as one teen says

“Here comes the obligatory tit shot” (*Scream*, 1996) Craven cuts to Sydney taking off her shirt and bra. However, one should note that for all of Craven’s parodies of the horror film genre, he does not deviate too far from the genre’s formula himself and consequently created a profitable film. *Scream*’s (1996) domestic gross was \$103 million (Kahn, 2001) or \$112.6 accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000). Craven’s film was so profitable that it was made into a sequel the following year titled, *Scream II* (1997) and managed to gross only \$1.5 million less than its predecessor (Kahn, 2001).

*Scream*’s (1996) profitability also opened the doors for the creation of other horror franchises such as *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997). Jim Gillespie’s *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) fully employed the Final Girl formula to success and sequels as well. *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) had a domestic gross of \$72.2 million (Kahn, 2001) or \$76.6 million accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000).

Similar to *Scream* (1996), *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) deviated from the Final Girl formula by allowing the lead character, Julie James, to lose her virginity and still survive. Unlike Craven’s addition of Sydney’s sex scene in the middle of the film to supposedly add suspense and doubt as to whether Sydney will survive, Gillespie adds Julie’s sex scene in the beginning moments of the film. In addition, Gillespie does not return to Julie’s overt sexuality until the final moments of the film when she is on the phone with her boyfriend.



In all other aspects, Julie is represented as the true Final Girl. Julie is the only one of the four teens who can see the big picture of their danger and discovers the identity of the killer. Julie remains androgynous, as a law student prone to wearing overalls, when compared to her friend, Helen, the winner of a local beauty contest and girlfriend of the town's star football player. Therefore, Julie is the only one that can find "the strength to either stay the killer long enough to be rescued (ending A) or kill him herself (ending B) (Clover, 1992, p. 35). In the case of *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997) Julie settled for ending A and left the door open for a sequel which was released the following year.

The changes in gender norms for the science fiction/action hybrid, pure action, and horror genre films were evident but not exceptionally ground breaking with the exception of Scott's *G.I. Jane* (1997). The primary points of interest in this new period of films are the increasing dominance of leading or co-starring female characters as seen in *The Fifth Element* (1997), *Species* (1995), and *G.I. Jane* (1997) and an increasing acceptability for leading females to have sexual relations as seen in *Scream* (1996) and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997).

### ***"Alien: Resurrection" Compared:***

Comparing *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) to any of the aforementioned films is an arduous and depressing task for any fan of the *Alien* series. Joss Whedon said:

"There's stuff I'm proud of, but some really big disappointments, *Alien:*

*Resurrection* being first and foremost among them" (Lee, 2001). The most

depressing aspect of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) can be found in an examination of the films ticket sales.

Whereas *Species*' (1995) domestic gross was \$60.1 million (Kahn, 2001) or \$67.3 accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000) and *The Fifth Element*'s domestic gross was \$63.5 million (Kahn, 2001) or \$67.4 million accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000), *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) only grossed \$47.7 million domestically (Kahn, 2001) or \$50.6 accounting for inflation (Friedman, 2000). To put *Alien: Resurrection*'s (1997) financial disappointment in true perspective consider that Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) grossed \$78.9 million domestically (Kahn, 2001) not accounting for inflation.

The other depressing aspects of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) can be found in the film itself. Ridley Scott's *Alien* (1979) introduced a refreshingly, relatively androgynous Ripley who was able to defeat the alien with little help from any male. James Cameron's *Alien* (1986) furthered Scott's vision for Ripley but softened her hard edges by giving her a family to fight for, rather than just her survival. David Fincher's *Alien3* (1992) had Ripley become sexually active and then suicidal to the point of succeeding. Jean-Pierre Jeunet and Joss Whedon found a way to bring Ripley back to life only to discover that she is no longer completely human. Although the aliens were never shown as particularly lustful creatures, Ripley's new alien genes are most likely to blame for her and the film series' new found fascination with sex and crass discussions about it. However,

being surrounded by sex-driven space pirates, rapists, and military men for the past 300 years probably plays a role in Ripley's increased libido as well.

*Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is unable to get past the first 15 minutes of the film without some reference to sex or sexual desire. Elgyn, the captain of the space pirate ship Betty, says to his co-pilot Hillard, "You know, no matter how many times you see it – the sight of a woman all strapped up in a chair like that" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1999). Then Elgyn just shakes his head in apparent admiration for the sight and asks Hillard to land in the military ship to which Hillard replies, "Darling, it is done" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1999). Elgyn is an appreciative master and thanks Hillard saying, "Good girl" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1999).

No where in any of the previous *Alien* films has there ever been such a blatant display of sexual desire or sexual overtones, not even in *Alien3* (1992) when Ripley is almost gang raped! Later in the film it is insinuated that Elgyn and Hillard had a romantic relationship but that insinuation comes in the form of a scene depicting an almost entirely naked Hillard laying on her stomach, moaning while Elgyn, wearing a shirt and shorts, rubs her feet. Considering the confusion that the creation of an off-screen sex scene involving Ripley and Clemens in *Alien3* (1992) caused amongst loyal viewers and critics of the *Alien* series (Hinson, 1992; Jennings, 1995), this scene alone turns the *Alien* series on its head.

Scenes such as the aforementioned were the standard in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) and they involved almost every major character in the film.

For example, when Elgyn meets with the military General Perez, to receive his payment for stealing 12 men in hypersleep out of a iron refinery ship, Perez says "Who is the new filly you got on board, Elgyn?" To which Elgyn replies, "Call [Winona Ryder]? Little girl playing pirates." Perez says, "She makes an impression." Which prompts Elgyn to say, "She is severely fuckable ain't she?" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

The reference to females in the *Alien* series as girls or little girls is far from a new experience (see chapter 3). Generally, as in the case of Superintendent Andrews in *Alien3* (1992) the lack of respect for women denotes a rapidly approaching death. However, never before has the lack of respect for Ripley or any other female in the *Alien* series been taken to the extreme of overt discussions of sexual intercourse. Therefore, one may assume, as is the case in most horror films (Clover, 1992), that these hyper-sexualized males will be killed quickly, and in the case of Elgyn and General Perez that is true. Interestingly, Hillard is also killed early in the film.

Hillard's death is eerily reminiscent of Chrissie's in *Jaws* (1975) in that she is grabbed under water by a partially unseen alien and dragged to an unseen and presumably horrific death. Therefore, like Chrissie, Hillard's role in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) is that of the traditional female character in horror films. First Hillard is represented as a sexual object and then as a terrorized, helpless victim. Hillard's death in no way challenges what viewers had come to expect from traditional feminine victims. Unlike Ripley or even Sydney in *Scream* (1996),

Hillard is unable to come up with any ingenious ways of escaping the grasp of the alien. For example, Hillard did have a machine gun strapped over her shoulder when the alien grabbed her leg. However, unlike the masculine Johner who shot and killed another alien under water in the same scene, Hillard is unable to or does not think of using her weapon and saving herself.

Hillard's death marks the last death of a major character in *Alien: Resurrection* that follows contemporary gender norms in science fiction/action/horror genre films. *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) contains one more death of a major character that does not follow the general formula and curiously one survivor that deviates from the norm as well. Christie, one of the more genteel pirates on-board the Betty, is the only male character to show signs of embarrassment at Johner's overt lust for Ripley. He is also the only male character to not show any sexual attraction to any of the women in the film.

Therefore, as a relatively androgynous character, Christie would be an excellent candidate for surviving a traditional horror film. In addition, to Christie's politically correct social behavior he twice employs an ingenious method to save all of the other characters. The first time occurs when the crew of the Betty are held at gun point by the Auriga's guards, Christie looks up and aims his gun in such a way that the bullet will bounce down and kill the guard behind him. With that guard dead, the crew is able to escape from the rest of the guards.

Christie uses this same method to explode a room full of alien eggs so that he and the rest of the cast can escape out of the underwater room they are trapped

in. Perhaps Christie's masculine ability to solve spatial problems (see chapter 3) is what marked him as a victim in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997). More likely, Christie's death was due to the fact that he is an African American and no African American has ever survived an *Alien* film. While the *Alien* series had created strong representations of female characters, the films continued to exclude African Americans from the list of survivors. This race issue is dominant in numerous other genres and film series (Tasker, 1993) and unfortunately is outside of the scope of this particular study.

In terms of gender norms, Christie's death is an unexpected phenomena for a film that relies upon the horror genre formula. Christie's death is made more interesting because of the similarity, yet distinct differences, between his death and Hillard's. Clover (1992) wrote, "...there is something about the victim function that wants manifestation in a female..." (p. 13). Both Hillard's and Christie's female manifestation came in the form of lack of ingenuity in a crisis. Hillard and Christie were similarly pulled to their death by an alien however the alien that pulled Christie was already dead.

Christie had strapped the paralyzed mechanic of the Betty, Vriess, to his back in order to bring Vriess through the underwater room. Unfortunately, after Christie cleared an escape for everyone he and Vriess got attacked by an alien while climbing the escape ladder. During the attack Christie was struck in the face with alien blood (acid) and let go of the ladder, leaving Vriess to hold both of them up with just his arms. Johner was able to kill the attacking alien and save Vriess

and Christie but the alien carcass still held onto Christie's boot. Here Christie mirrors Hillard's behavior by not exploring any ingenious options to free himself from the alien carcass that was threatening to pull him and Vriess back into the alien infested underwater room. Instead of screaming for help, Christie decides to sacrifice his life so that Vriess can live and cuts himself loose from Vriess and falls to his presumable death.

Christie's action of self-sacrifice is a truly distinguishing factor between his and Hillard's demise. The question remains as to whether Christie was allowed to die in a heroic way because of his sex or semi-masculine gender or was he merely following another formula within the *Alien* series. In addition to the *Alien* series' dismal record of allowing minorities to survive, in all of the films except *Aliens* (1986) an African American sacrifices himself to save a Caucasian character. As mentioned earlier within this chapter, the race factor in the *Alien* series is outside of the scope of this particular study however it should not be ignored as a possible limitation or explanation for gender representation anomalies within the *Alien* series.

Christie's death certainly violated the gender norms of the horror film genre, but perhaps not as much as the survival of the Betty's muscle-man, Johner. Clover (1992) wrote, "If Rambo were to wander out of the action genre into a slasher [horror] film, he would end up dead" (p. 99). Johner is, for all intents and purposes, a slightly more articulate version of Rambo and yet he survives while

Christie does not. Johner is the hyper-masculine crewmember on-board the *Betty* and character in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).

Johner's costuming hints at the violent and aggressive nature of his persona. His hair is cut in a slightly shaggy military crew cut and fails to draw attention away from the multiple facial scars that seem to line Johner's face from chin to forehead. In addition, Johner towers over everyone in the film wearing t-shirts with cut off sleeves or a grungy jacket. Johner's aggressive nature does not stop at his choice of clothing, however. Johner goes right after anything he wants throughout *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) and unfortunately for him the first thing he wanted was the newly cloned Ripley.

The crew from the *Betty*, minus Elgyn and Vriess, walks into the military ship's gym only to find Ripley practicing her basketball shots. Immediately Johner begins to moan, "Oh...OH!" to which the rest of the crew seems embarrassed and Hillard replies, "Oh, please!" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997). Johner says to Hillard, "You know I can't lay off the tall ones" and then to Ripley "How about a little one on one – What do you say?" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997). The newly cloned Ripley seems amused by Johner's behavior and silently dribbles the ball around him. Johner says, "You got some moves on you girl. Well if you don't want to play basketball, I know some other indoor sports. Come on give me the ball" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997). Ripley replies by slamming the ball into Johner's crotch and then knocks him out.



This scene, more than any other, captures Johner's overt sexual aggressiveness and overall crudeness. Like Quint in *Jaws* (1975) or even Han Solo in *Star Wars* (1977), Johner should have been marked for death if the screenwriter followed the formulas of either the science fiction or horror genres. Even if Joss Whedon had relied upon the action genre gender norms, Johner should either have been made the hero or killed for his lack of ingenuity or ability to see the big picture.

The fact that Johner was not blessed with the mental acumen to fully understand the big picture is represented in the next two scenes. The first scene takes place shortly after the survivors from the Betty, Wren and the Army soldier, DiStephano meet up with Ripley for a second time. Johner is obviously unable to grasp that his chances of getting intimate with the volatile new Ripley are miniscule and tries to strike up a conversation. Johner, in his best surfer voice, says "Hey Ripley, I heard you like ran into these things [aliens] before." Ripley replies, "That's right." Johner says, "Wow man! So like what did you do?" To which Ripley smiles and says, "I died." and quickly walks away from Johner (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

The second scene takes place when Ripley finds the room filled with the first seven failed clonings of her. Ripley was horrified to see that one of the horribly misshapen clones was still alive, begging to be killed, and decides to burn the entire room with a flame-thrower that the hyper-humane Call hands her. After Ripley storms out of the now entirely engulfed room, Johner looks in and says to

Christie “What’s the big deal? A fucking waste of ammo. Must be a chick thing” to which Christie just shakes his head at Johner (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

Christie’s reaction of disbelief at Johner’s statement gives support to reading the dialogue as being designed to further illustrate Johner’s close relationship to the Rambo-type action heroes and not a serious statement likening Ripley’s behavior to feminine gendered irrationality. This reading is further supported by examining a similar scene in the first *Alien* (1979) film in which Parker lights an entire room of the Nostromo on fire after hearing Ash’s disembodied head all but sentence him and the rest of the crew to death. Parker’s masculinity was never in question before or after the scene. In fact Ridley Scott’s commentary stated, “So now [Parker is] in really, I think, terrifying situation because big tough Yaphet suddenly has two women as part of his defense group. So boy, he must be feeling really vulnerable” (*Alien* DVD, 1979).

Overall, Johner is represented as a hyper-masculine, lust-filled, intellectually challenged male that should have for all intensive purposes been killed off early in the film or late in the film in an exceptionally gory way. Johner did not even play an active role in rescuing, killing, or protecting anyone in the final scenes in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) and consequently his survival is an enigma. Johner’s survival is even more curious than that of Christie’s because Christie’s death at least has a precedent whereas Johner’s survival is a novelty in the *Alien* series, horror, science fiction, and action films where he is not the hero. Perhaps Joss Whedon’s creation of Johner was meant to push the genre envelope

or perhaps expand the gender norms in the hybridized *Alien* series. It will be interesting to see if other hybrid genre films began to permit their form of John or Rambo to survive in future films.

To see how the much commented upon relationship (Hunter, 1997; Maslin, 1997) between Call and Ripley evolves in the inevitable sequel to *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) will be interesting. This curiosity is based primarily on the point of whether Ripley and Call will continue to interact in a way that critics suggest contains "a titillating whiff of a lesbians-in-space thing with Sigourney, but that certainly goes unrealized in the actual picture" (Hunter, 1997, p. B. 14).

In the first scene together, Call sneaks into Ripley's cell to kill her before the scientists can harvest the Queen alien embryo inside of her. Before Call stabs Ripley she notices a scar on Ripley's chest, peaking out from her low-cut tank top, and realizes that the embryo has already been removed. Ripley finally nonchalantly asks, "So are you going to kill me, or what?" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997). The hyper-humane Call offers to kill Ripley so that Ripley can stop living in a prison with alien blood flowing through her veins. Ripley responds by grabbing Call's hand that is holding a knife and stabbing her own hand while saying, "What makes you think that I would let you [kill me]?" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997).

While this exchange is interesting in terms of providing background into both Ripley and Call's personalities and strengths, the moments following this exchange garner the most attention. Ripley suddenly grabs Call by the neck and

lifts her while offering Call the same form of escape that Call had just offered her (see appendix). Ripley also kneels over Call, caresses Call's face with her hands, and finally rests her head against Call's and tells her to leave. This exchange prompted Janet Maslin (1997) to write, "Tauntingly flirtatious scenes between Ms. Ryder and Ms. Weaver give this film a sexual boldness that the others' action-adventure spirit lacked" (p. C10).

While both Weaver and Ryder admit that their characters, Ripley and Call, have a special relationship (Author Unknown, 1997) neither of them suggest that the relationship is in any way sexual in nature. Weaver discussed the relationship saying, "She [Ryder] plays someone who's very passionate, very idealistic, the way Ripley used to kind of be. And I think my character is touched by that" (Author Unknown, 1997).

Certainly Call more closely resembles the Ripley in the first three *Alien* films in her actions to try to save the Earth from the aliens, her unwillingness to take risks, and her costuming. *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) contains a scene very reminiscent of the scene in *Alien* (1979) where Ripley makes the decision to not allow Kane on-board with the alien attached to him. When the survivors in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) meet Ripley a second time, following the basketball court fight, Call tries to convince the others to leave Ripley. Call says, "No, wait a second, she was the host for these monsters...She's too much of a risk we have to leave her" (*Alien: Resurrection*, 1997). Similar to Ripley's experience in *Alien*

(1979) no one listens to Call and Ripley joins the group. Fortunately for them, Call was wrong about her judgement of Ripley.

Call's moral strength is not the only area in which she resembles the earlier versions of Ripley, Call also wears an outfit very similar to the blue jumpsuits worn by Ripley in the first two *Alien* films. In addition, Call has a no-nonsense, functional hairstyle, short and unpainted fingernails, and no evident make-up that creates a look that approximates the casual appearance of Ripley in the first two films.

In contrast, in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) Ripley's appearance is more revealing and manicured than ever before (see appendix). Weaver commented on her new look writing, "We shoot in 36 hours and my costume has not yet been finalized...Jean-Pierre [Jeunet] sent me a drawing of what looked like an angry dyke in a frog suit, emerging from the surf at Zuma Beach" (1997). It is unclear whether this drawing was used as Ripley's final costume, but this note definitely summarizes the overall intent of the film's director. Perhaps that is why in addition to Ripley's dark, sleeveless, skintight outfit, Weaver wore long, black painted fingernails. Although the nails could have been intended to link Ripley more closely with the aliens by likening her nails to their claws, they more than any other portion of Ripley's new look capture the change away from the original Ripley's masculine gendered behavior.

Weaver most likely was aware of Ripley's deviation from her previous strong, relatively androgynous representations. Perhaps this was why her response

to an interviewer's question on the strong representations of women within the *Alien* series was so agitated. Weaver said:

Let's see, I think that only thing feminist about *Alien: Resurrection* is that it's a big-budget picture with two strong female leads. And that's good enough for me. I don't see the *Alien* films as socio-political statements at all. What I think is horrifying is that in 1997, we're still talking about stuff like that. To consider that having a woman in a lead of a picture automatically makes it a feminist statement is appalling in itself (Thompson, 1997).

Weaver does have a point regarding the horrific aspect of immediately labeling a film starring a female as a feminist film, however as long as there are so few films out there with strong female leads critics and viewers alike will have a tendency to read more into them. Fortunately for Weaver, with the complete revision or destruction of the strong representation of women in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997), she will most likely not be subject to any more critiques of strong female protagonists. Unfortunately for viewers and critics alike, without major changes in storyline any future *Alien* film will most likely be merely an average Hollywood film filled with crass sexual innuendoes aimed at furthering the objectification of the females in the film while building up the masculine egos of the males.

## Conclusion

This study employed a detailed examination of and comparison between and among each of the four films within the *Alien* series to explore and demonstrate distinct differences in gender representation in the series. This study has also determined that there exists a relationship between these differing gender representations and concurrent changes in the gender norms of films created for the primary target audience the United States with secondary international audiences. This determination was aided by a detailed examination of the gender norms in multiple genres including science fiction, action, horror, and hybrid mixtures of these three. In addition, gender representations in other films contemporaneous with each film in the *Alien* series were examined in order to provide an additional basis of comparison for the gender representations within the *Alien* series. In all cases, each of the *Alien* series films was compared to films made during the same historical timeframe.

Chapter one examined the first *Alien* film in terms of the genre formulas the film followed and the gender representations within the film. In addition, chapter one detailed the purpose of genres and discussed what the gender norms were for the horror and science fiction genres. These examinations yielded a better understanding concerning the novelty of the gender representations within *Alien* (1979) and how the film conformed to the standard gender norms applicable to each of the genres extant [or present] in *Alien*.

Chapter two discussed the lack of changes in the gender norms for the horror and science fiction genres during the period of the making of *Aliens* and introduced the action genre's gender norms. Chapter two also discussed the impact and possible reasoning behind the addition of a third genre to the *Alien* series and found a significant difference between the gender representations within the first and second films in the *Alien* series. Through comparison with *Aliens'* (1986) contemporaries within the horror, science fiction, and action genres, this chapter illustrated that the changes in gender representation between *Alien* (1979) and *Aliens* (1986) mirrored the gender norms during the mid-1980s.

Chapter three similarly illustrated how the gender representations within *Alien3* (1992) mirrored the gender norms within the horror, science fiction, and action genres present in the early 1990s. In addition, this chapter focussed upon possible financial motives for the major differences between and among the gender representation in *Alien3* (1992) and its predecessors. Sigourney Weaver's statements concerning her career aspirations were assessed in order to discuss her role in the dilution of the strong female representations within the *Alien* series.

Chapter four further discussed the financial motivations for the dramatic changes in gender representation in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) as compared to its predecessors. Chapter four revisited the discussion in chapter one concerning Kawin's formula for the assessment of the genre of a film and applied those findings in order to assess the genre(s) of *Alien: Resurrection* (1997). After determining that *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) employed the genre formulas of the



horror, science fiction, and action, the gender norms of those genres during the late-1990s were examined. Chapter four concluded that *Alien: Resurrection* (1997) will not only be likely to lead the way for future *Alien* films, but also that this fourth film of the series marked a complete transition away from the relatively androgynous gender representations that made *Alien* (1979) a best-selling film.

These findings represent a contribution to the academic community as a baseline examination to assist future scholars in studying the complex relationships between gender representations and gender norms. However, there are limitations to the findings of this study in terms of scope and the extent to which the findings can be generalized to other films within comparable time periods and genres. As mentioned previously in the introduction, this particular study addresses only one film series and therefore is not representative of the treatment of gender in all films made during this period. This study also purposefully narrowed the scope of discussion to focus solely upon issues of gender, gender representation, and gender norms. Therefore, this study in no way encompasses an exhaustive review of the cultural or film production issues present in the *Alien* series.

The *Alien* series is rich with possibilities for future research in areas such as representations of race, technology, and religion. Future studies should also examine the possibility of applying other theoretical perspectives to the *Alien* series such as psychoanalytical, post-modern, semiotics, or Marxist theories. Future scholars may find the conclusions and observations in this study to be

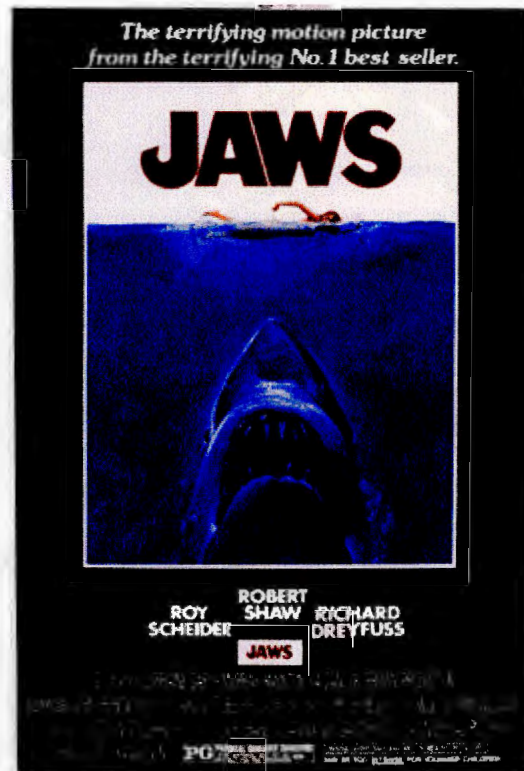
worth revisiting as well, particularly as our understanding of the complex relationship between film and gender evolves and grows in complexity. Scholarly work with yet to be evolved perspectives could be applied to this study to yield an entirely new interpretation of the *Alien* films and their depiction of gender norms and genres.

By that time the *Alien* series may have grown in terms of the number of sequels and will offer an even greater opportunity to study changes in gender representations and gender norms over time. Fan maintained web-sites are currently monitoring rumors concerning a fifth *Alien* film in the planning stages (Schmitz, 2000). Sigourney Weaver has fostered such rumors by stating, "I don't feel quite finished [with the *Alien* series]. So its funny. At this point I don't think any of us are on fire to do another one, but I wouldn't rule it out completely" (Head, 2001).

## Appendix



The classic damsel in distress, Fay Wray. (photo from: [www.shill.simplenet.com](http://www.shill.simplenet.com)).



Chrissie's impending death featured in marketing for *Jaws* (1975).  
(photo from: [www.filmsite.org](http://www.filmsite.org)).



Classic Madam Alexander Doll (photo from: [www.alexanderdoll.com](http://www.alexanderdoll.com)).



Ripley and her Nostromo crewmates in *Alien* (1979).  
(photo from: [members.nbc.com/cadaver\\_/epbimages/alien-pub-crew](http://members.nbc.com/cadaver_/epbimages/alien-pub-crew))

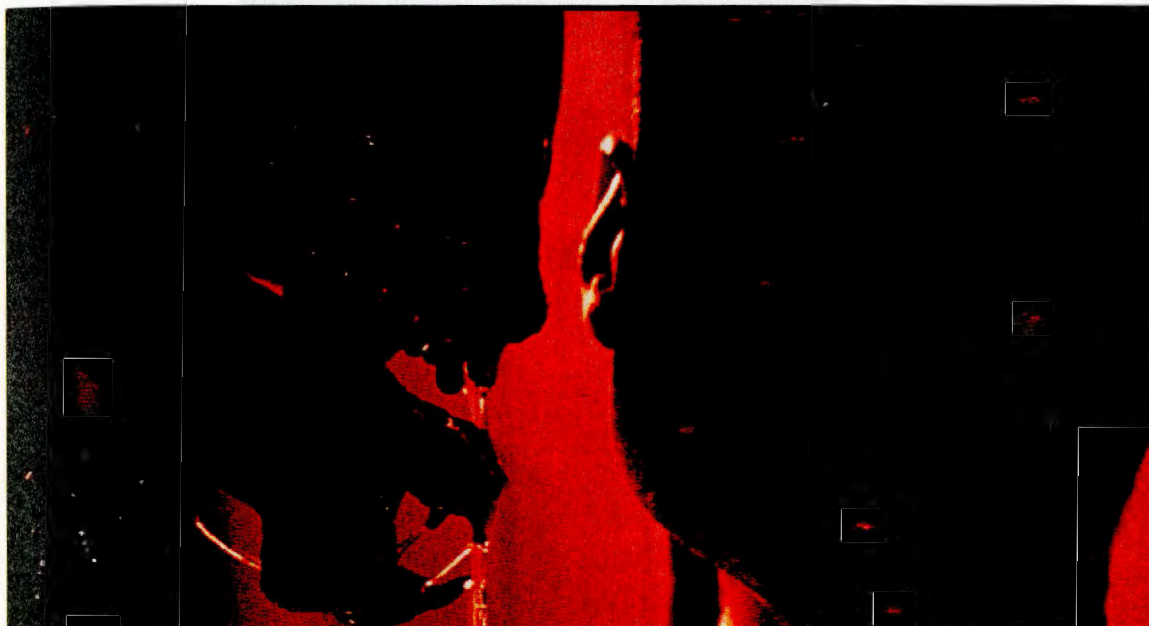


Ripley in *Aliens* publicity photo (photo from:  
<http://scifimovies.about.com/movies/scifimovies/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.uni%2Dc.dtu.dk/%7Eunikcm/Sigourney/Sigourney.html>).



The major characters in *Lethal Weapon III* (1992) minus Officer Cole.  
 (photo from: lw4.warnerbros.com).





*Alien3's* (1997) marketing introduces a more vulnerable Ripley. (photo from:  
<http://www.fury161.freemove.co.uk/gallery/c3.htm>)



Marlene Dietrich's famous face. (photo from: [www.puettner.com](http://www.puettner.com)).



Sil, in *Species* (1995), after stripping off her shirt to attract a mate.  
(photo from: [http://www.sciflicks.com/species/images/species\\_12.html](http://www.sciflicks.com/species/images/species_12.html))



Ripley and Call interact in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).



Ripley's new look in *Alien: Resurrection* (1997).  
(photo from: [www.mtbl.demon.co.uk](http://www.mtbl.demon.co.uk))

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