OPEN ACCESS

Journal of Advanced Research in Women's Studies
ISSN 2783-7122

Electra in the 1990s: The Electra Complex in 1990s Cinema

Emma S. Paulley

School of Creative Industries, University of Wolverhampton, UK

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Electra Complex,
Female Filmmakers,
Male/Female Gaze,
Poison Ivy (1992),
The Crush (1993)

ABSTRACT

This article considers existing scholarship that applies Jung's Electra complex within 1990s' American cinema. The Electra complex was coined by Jung in 1913 as the female equivalent of Freud's Oedipus complex (1899). The primary focus will be a cycle of 1990s Hollywood films that represents a teenage girl (teen fatale) and her relationship with an older man, either her own father or a father figure. The central argument of this article is that most male filmmakers unconsciously employ Oedipal anxieties within Electran narratives and use techniques such as a male gaze to sexualise the teen fatale. The research methodology used for this article include, contextual analysis, dialogue analysis and psychoanalysis to examine the subjectivity of the characters from a sociocultural and theoretical position. Ancillary methods have been used to examine the filmmaker's conscious/unconscious motivations by reviewing interviews given at the time of release and on the film's anniversaries.

1. Introduction - Defining the Teen Fatale

Teen fatales, fille fatales, Lolitas, nymphets and interlopers are all terms to describe the teenage version of the femme fatale (Linda Ruth Williams 2011, John Kenneth Muir 2011). A teen fatale is a female teenager who is obsessed with a father figure and is willing to injure or murder any other female competition for this desire. The character is linked to film noir and the French term femme fatale translates as 'deadly woman'. She is a vamp, a spider-woman, she will use sex as a weapon to entrap, manipulate and control the male lead in the films into her doing. By the end of the film, she will often be killed off or put into an asylum due to her behaviour. Katherine Farrimond's (2018) study attempts to define the essence of the character by commenting that, "the femme fatale is an important figure for a feminist understanding of contemporary popular culture because her complex relationship with patriarchal and feminist understandings of female power forces to the surface broader concerns about the representation of women" (2018, p. 10). This was true of the first vamps of the 1920s, the 1940s-1950s classic film noirs, the 1980s erotic thrillers, and the teens of the 1990s. The teen fatale aims to seduce, manipulate and corrupt the father/father figure for her own needs. Father/daughter incestuous relationships are not a new concept as it has been well explored in film. Primarily, narratives will generally focus on the father's/father figure's sexual intentions towards the daughter/teenage girl.

*Corresponding author's E-mail address: e_paulley@hotmail.com

Cite this article as:
Paulley, S. E., (2025). Electra in the 1990s: The Electra Complex in 1990s Cinema. *Journal of Advanced Research in Women's Studies,* *3*(1): 26-43. https://doi.org/10.33422/jarws.v3i1.864

2. Historical and Cultural Context

The aim of this article is to analyse 1990s films within the erotic thriller sub-genre where girl characters are represented in a sexualised, dominant manner and are feared by male and female characters. The article will examine the narratives of female-directed films *Poison Ivy* (1992) (Katt Shea) and contrast them with similar 1990 films that feature teen fatales directed by males such as *The Crush* (1993) (Alan Shapiro). This will address a gap in the research concerning the ways in which female directors embed Electra tropes into their narratives or behaviours into female characters to represent female sexual development and subjectivity. There are many factors as to why suggestions of the Electra complex in film manifest during the 1990s historic period, including, for example, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and reports of men/fathers in crisis (Simkin 2005, Rowe Karlyn 2011, Lupold 2014 and Farrimond 2018), the rise of the teenage girl through girl (sometimes written as 'grrrl') power and the third wave of feminism (Hentges 2006, Hopkins 2022), and the growth of teenage girls being violent (Lupold 2014, Lindop 2015). These historical factors relate to the unconscious as they threaten patriarchy and present a shift in power and control. The aim is to identify potential 'Electra'-type visual and narrative tropes to question the unconscious male and conscious female thoughts of filmmakers and spectators about teenage girls. The article will further examine the ways in which the main female characters are represented and how the spectator might experience the female perspective through the use of certain filmmaking techniques.

3. Theoretical Framework - The Male Gaze

Feminist film theory was influenced by second wave feminism during the 1970s as theorists analysed how women were represented on screen. The way women were filmed, reinforcing or challenging gender archetypes and stereotypes and the female perspective were some of the elements of feminist film theory. One of the biggest influences was Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze (1975) suggests that the male culture of filmmaking is an unconscious form of sexualising women given that mainstream Hollywood filmmakers were mostly male. In contrast, as is also argued here, a female gaze has concurrently emerged, thus constituting a conscious decision by filmmakers (both male and female) to reject the male gaze associated with classic Hollywood, and focus on the female character's subjectivity rather than presenting her as a sexual passive object. The female gaze is a term used when discussing the perspective from female spectators and female production teams such as writers, director and producer. However, according to Joey Soloway (2016) and Iris Brey (2020) male filmmakers may equally project a female gaze, and not all films made from female filmmakers fall into the category of a female gaze just because they are made by women. Female filmmakers may follow the traditional 'male' constitutes of filmmaking and inadvertently apply the unconscious male gaze. The article will investigate films directed by male and female filmmakers to analyse how a 'female gaze' changes the way that young female characters are represented.

According to Mulvey (1975), who drew on Freudian and Lacanian theory, the woman's body can signify 'unpleasure' as she lacks a penis. Using psychoanalysis, this can evoke the threat of castration and castration anxiety within the male unconscious. As she explains, to escape this anxiety, certain classic narratives render the woman as a guilty object who needs to be either punished through death or saved through marriage turning her into the wife archetypal character. The woman can also be turned into a fetish object through fetishistic or sadistic scopophilia. Relatedly, John Belton (2005) examines 'women as psychological terror' by stating "as an institution that supported male dominance and patriarchy, classical Hollywood cinema attempted to alleviate this anxiety through a process known as disavowal in which the female's castrated status was denied. This denial could be achieved either through her

fetishization or through her devaluation, or both" (2005, p. 241). The focus is her overemphasised beauty and her body rather than the threat itself. Belton concludes "through the process of *devaluation,* woman was seen as a guilty object - her 'castration' serving as the symbol of her punishment" (2005, p. 241 original emphasis). Katherine Farrimond examines the gaze and the teen fatale by stating, "what is significant is that the gaze of the adult male on the teenage girl in these films is that of the sympathetic on the mysterious: the films do not invite sympathy or identification with either *Poison Ivy's* Ivy or *The Crush's* Adrian, and so their bodies can be appealing or threatening, or both, but never provoke compassion" (2018, p. 73). This is something to investigate further as *Poison Ivy* which is directed by Katt Shea and how the teen fatale is presented on scene from a woman's viewpoint. Farrimond does not acknowledge the female gaze and how having a female director could lead to different representations in the film. The author discusses the films as if they are the same, both from the male gaze but the main character in *Poison Ivy* is Sylvie, she is the narrator and it is her story. In *The Crush,* Shapiro films Adrian so she is in control of the sexualised camera gaze as well as the male gaze. Alexandra West (2018) textually analyses certain scenes in the film, and states that when Adrian is wearing swimsuits, she is "drawing attention to her body and willingly objectifying it. In fact, the camera becomes Adrian's perceived or desired gaze as the events progress [...] within this space, the audience is able to view Adrian's intent" (2018, p. 46). The male directed film uses the camera/male gaze to his advantage to seduce the male characters and the viewer.

4. The Evolving Concept of the Female Gaze

The female gaze has entered public awareness but still is a difficult term to define. A common misconception about the male gaze is that the female gaze correspondingly involves the sexualisation/objectification of men on screen but this is not the case. In cinematic contexts, the female gaze involves the perspective of female and male filmmakers and how they represent female characters in active roles as opposed to Mulvey's male gaze, which examines how male dominated Hollywood depicts women as sexualised objects and passive in the narrative. Having female characters in active roles influence the female spectator's gaze and how they identify them. The concept of the female gaze is still evolving and leaves a gap in the research, especially in relation to 1990s films and the rise of third wave feminism. It can also be used when discussing the perspective from a female production team such as writers, director and producer. Paula Marantz Cohen (2010) and Natalie Perfetti-Oates (2015) also discuss the female gaze in the chick flick/ romantic comedy sub-genres. Both authors refer to contemporary cinema in their analyses, even though it is not of the same sub-genre as erotic thriller. Bracha L. Ettinger (1995) analyses the work of Lacan's gaze and challenges it using her own Matrixial Gaze. This forms an alternative viewpoint to the male gaze and the phallocentric approach discussed by Mulvey. Ettinger's theory offers a connection between all human's experiences and uses the womb symbolically as a spaced borderspace. The theory allows for the feminine perspective and character trans-subjectively rather than pure otherness. The theory's aim is not to replace phallocentric filmmaking but to acknowledge it and co-exist.. Ettinger states "The matrixial gaze thrills us while fragmenting, scattering, and joining grains together and turning us into witnesses; it enchants us while reducing us into particles and participating in a drama wider than our individual selves" (Ettinger 2020a, p. 283).

5. Psychoanalytic Approaches - Freud's Oedipus Complex

To fully understand the Electra complex within psychoanalysis and use it effectively in film analysis, a discussion of the Oedipus complex (the more famous predecessor of the concept), must be acknowledged. The Oedipus complex is one of Freud's most well-known

psychoanalytic theories and he first discussed the concept in *Interpretations of Dreams* (1899) though the term was not established until 1910. The theory examines the young boy's (between 3-5 years old) unconscious sexual affection for his mother (opposite sex) and a fear and rivalry with his father (same sex). Freud used the theory to document the feelings a boy may experience within the various psychosexual stages of development; the boy must transition through the primal urges of the id when he is consumed with sexual impulses for his mother prior to development of the ego (the rational conscious self). During the phallic stage of development, the boy's awareness of his genitals will impact the boy as he will notice that his father bears a penis like he does but his mother is penis-less. This can cause unconscious castration anxiety within the boy as he will assume his mother has lost or had her penis removed and he will be castrated for his sexual desires towards his mother by the father. Freud's theory suggests that the formation of the superego acts as a defence mechanism to put a stop to Oedipal anxieties. This leaves the ego free from tension and conflict. The boy may use repression to block Oedipal impulses and desires. According to Freud, "the essence of repression lies simply in the turning something away, and keeping it at a distance, from the conscious" (Freud, 1915b, p. 147). For instance, a person may repress traumatic events from their childhood. The memories will be buried in the unconscious and can subsequently manifest themselves in neuroses (mental illness). An example of repressed memories relates to Freud's account of the primal scene. This is when a young child witnesses their parents having sex. The child is unaware of what is going on and thinks that the father is attacking the mother, leading to her castration. The resolution of the Oedipus complex, in terms of heterosexuality, comes when the boy identifies with the father rather than the mother, and in doing so, the boy will be able to have mature romantic heterosexual relationships in the future. If the complex is unresolved, the boy may develop a mother-fixation which could hamper his sexual relationships in adulthood. He may form an attachment to his mother, which, within current popular culture is referenced by the term a 'mama's boy'. The theory can be applied to characters in films such as; *Strangers on a Train* (1951) by Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho* (1960) by Alfred Hitchcock, *The Grifters* (1990) by Stephen Frears and *Only God Forgives* (2013) by Nicolas Winding Refn.

In film, this phase can be presented by Mulvey's male gaze (1975), who states, "in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness"* (1975, p11). Mulvey continues, "Woman displayed as sexual object is the *leitmotif* of erotic spectacle [...] she holds the look, and plays to and signifies male desire" (1975, p19). Male filmmakers can unconsciously present the female characters as being 'Other', a sex object and passive. To escape castration anxiety, spectators are forced to identify with the active male protagonist, the hero in the narrative. The female character, a damsel in distress, a prize to be won will be the male protagonist's love interest. The film will end with the pair supporting heterosexual beliefs and falling in love/kissing or having sex/getting married.

Freud claimed that the Oedipus complex should be used for both girls and boys but girls would experience it differently. A girl will also become aware that she does not have a penis at the same time a boy will, and she will also assume she has lost it, resulting in an erroneous belief of female castration. This can lead to a state of resentment and envy, which is directed at the girl's mother, who can become competition for the affections of her father. The girl will compete with the mother and have an unconscious desire to replace her and take the role of the sexual partner of the father, a scenario which Freud described as the 'feminine Oedipus attitude or negative Oedipus complex'. To resolve the feminine Oedipus attitude, Freud suggested that the girl will unconsciously repress the feelings towards her father during ego development. Consequently, the girl will identify with the mother and imitate her behaviour and personality.

The need for a penis is replaced with the need of a child. The superego forms and the girl will accept her gender role of someday becoming a wife and mother in keeping with social expectations of the time. Freud states, "whereas in boys the Oedipus complex is destroyed by the castration complex, in girls it is made possible and led up to by the castration complex" (1925j, p. 256). If there is no resolution, much like a boy, the girl can develop a father fixation, known in current popular culture as being a 'daddy's girl', which will affect her relationships in the future. Poet and novelist Sylvia Plath is often linked to the theory due to her 1962 poem entitled "Daddy" about her father who passed away when she was eight years old. Freud himself has admitted that he had less of an understanding of the girl's psychosexual development and sexuality. His viewpoints were often criticised due to his opposition to feminist theory and women's rights. He saw women as inferior to men and having weaker superegos as the Oedipus complex is never fully resolved, and stated in a 1925 paper entitled *The Psychical Consequences of the Anatomic Distinction Between the Sexes*, that "women oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own" (1925j, pp. 243–258).

5.1 Carl Jung's Electra Complex

Freud and Swiss theorist Carl Jung met in person in 1907 and became good friends and collaborators. After six years, the men's collaboration came to an end due to disagreements on viewpoints and approaches to psychoanalysis, which included discussion of the Electra complex, commonly referred to as a Freudian term but it was Jung who coined the phrase in 1913. Jung based the term on the Greek mythology within Sophocles' play *Electra* much like Freud used the play of Oedipus Rex. The plot of the play focuses on the murder of King Agamemnon by his wife Queen Clytemnestra and her new lover Aegisthus (who was Agamemnon's cousin) when he returned from an expedition to Troy with his brother Menelaus to reclaim his wife, Helen. Part of Clytemnestra's plot to murder Agamemnon was due to him sacrificing their eldest daughter (Iphigenia) to Artemis, Goddess of the hunt, to support his mission to Troy. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus took over the throne and planned to kill Orestres (Agamemon and Clytemnestra's infant son), who was rescued by his sister Electra and sent away to protect him. Electra heavily mourned the murder of her father, violently hated her mother and her lover and eagerly awaited the time for her brother's return to help her seek vengeance. David Grene (2013) states that, "the character Electra has remained iconic throughout Western literature and art, from antiquity to the present, as a symbol of a daughter's devotion to her father (and hatred of her mother and stepfather), single-minded loyalty to her brother, and long-suffering determination to punish political and/of familial crimes" (2013, p. 138). Orestres, in disguise, returns to the kingdom with his friend Pylades. They pretend that Orestes has been killed and present Electra with an urn of his ashes. Due to her emotional state, Orestres reveals himself to Electra, who is happy to have her brother back. Electra believes a killing for a killing is the only way to rectify justice for her father. She instructs the two men to enter the palace and murder Clytemnestras then kill Aegisthus when he returns. Jung used this myth to acknowledge a girl's feelings of love and affection towards the father and hate and rivalry with the mother. Freud dismissed the term the Electra complex in 1920 and he did not believe separating the Oedipus complex by gender to be useful.

Jung divided the theory into three stages; the first, similar to the Oedipus theory, features a young girl aged around three who will have affections for the mother, and Jung suggested these affections will be more intense than the feelings possessed by a young boy within the Oedipus complex. The second stage sees the girl transfer her affections to the father as the mother does not have a penis. The girl will be possessive over the father and have jealousy and rivalry towards the mother. The third stage, marked as 'the return' sees the girl aged around 6-7 identify with the mother and accept her gender roles. This is the natural resolution to the Electra

complex. Jung formulated the Electra complex as he believed that Freud's Oedipus complex was too male-orientated and that it would fill the gap in the theory of girls' psychosexual development. Freud addressed Jung's addition of the Electra complex in an article entitled 'Female Sexuality' (1931) stating, "we are right in rejecting the term 'Electra complex' which seeks to emphasize the analogy between the attitude of the sexes. It is only in the male child that we find the fateful combination of love for the one parent and simultaneous hatred for the other as a rival" (1931, p229 Original emphasis).

6. Methodology - Research Approach

To analyse the male unconscious/female conscious, female gaze and Electra-type narratives, the article will engage theoretically with certain aspects of psychoanalysis including Sigmund Freud's Oedipus complex and Carl Jung's Electra complex as in each of the films considered, the teen fatales/teenage girl character have a fixation on father figures. These techniques will be applied when assessing if the male filmmakers have embedded Electra narratives and the male gaze unconsciously and female filmmakers have embedded Electra narratives and the female gaze consciously. The article utilises both secondary research concerning female filmmakers as well as qualitative textual analysis to identify conscious and unconscious tropes embedded by filmmakers. The aim is to establish the presence of such tropes, with a focus on characterisation as signalled via figure behaviour and motivation, lighting, framing, editing, mise-en-scène, sound and dialogue. By using these methods, the article will contribute to feminist film theory and the understanding of how filmmakers conscious or unconscious can impact the representation of female characters.

6.1 Film Analysis Methods

The films have been chosen based on the narrative involving a teenage girl who tries to seduce a father figure in keeping with the Electra complex and produced within the 1990s. The narratives may also have the teenage girl demonstrating violent behaviour and trying to eliminate the mother figure or adult female character. A comparison will be drawn in terms of the gendered filmmaking processes such as if the writers or/and directors are male or female, if the narratives are loosely based on true events and how the characters are presented through different filmmaking techniques. This will enable an analysis to be made on the conscious or unconscious use of the Electra complex and the teen fatale and further understanding of these themes within the 1990s.

Textual analysis is a method that can be used to interpret the messages consciously or unconsciously embedded into film texts by the filmmakers. Using different analytical techniques, the viewer can receive messages relating to the intended emotions that are meant to be felt but also underlying meanings can be accessed through the viewer's own life experiences and knowledge of culture. Within this article, the director's use of camera angles and framing will be analysed to assess if the film is presenting a male or a female gaze. If the film is from the male gaze, the director may use close up shots to sexualise the teen fatale or use fragmented framing which focuses on the teenage girls breasts or thighs and ultimately cuts off her head through the frame. This technique may be used unconsciously and results in objectification of the character/actress rather than showing subjectivity. Point of View shots (POV) are used by filmmakers to place the audience in the role of the character in the first person. POV's can also increase the identification the audience has with a character who is a protagonist or invoke terror or fear from the eyes of the antagonist. The female gaze may use POV's to consciously demonstrate the female viewpoint and how they look at themselves or at others, notably other female characters.

Mise-en-scène is a technique within film analysis which examines deeper-meanings within the frame of the film such as setting, lighting, props, facial expressions and body language. By 'reading' these elements of the film, viewers can analyse any symbolism the filmmakers have added such as the genre of the film, the atmosphere of the scene, the emotional or psychological state of a character and their social status. The characters within the films will be analysed using mise-en-scène; especially the teen fatale and how she is presented on the screen.

The use of dialogue and voice-overs are important elements when analysing the films as what a character says and the way they say it can give the viewer an insight into their personality and motivations. Voice-overs are commonly used in films to inform the viewer of the character's inner thoughts. By doing so, the viewer is more likely to identify with the character providing the voice over as they are usually the main character. Using a range of film analysis techniques will provide a comprehensive investigation into how filmmakers have used Electra narratives and the character of the teen fatale.

7. Qualitative Research and the Filmmakers Unconscious/Conscious

One way to gain information about the unconscious thoughts of the filmmakers and reception of the films mentioned is to use qualitative research in the form of interviews and reviews. Reviews from when the films were released can give information on contemporaneous culture and how the characters were perceived. References will be made to interviews given by the filmmakers and actors at the time of release and later interviews to see if their opinions on the characters/narratives have changed. Instead of conducting my own interviews with the filmmakers, secondary sources will be used as they will give a more authentic set of answers. The filmmaker's unconscious is more likely to be revealed than if they are asked a structured set of questions tailored towards the Electra complex. Katt Shea is the most accessible filmmaker as she has given multiple interviews about her films.

7.1 Film Analysis - Poison Ivy (1992)

Poison Ivy (1992) is a key focus for this article as it initiated the 1990s cycle of teen fatale erotic thrillers featuring the Electra complex. The story was written by executive producer Melissa Goddard and Peter Morgan who loosely based it on true life events from Goddard's childhood when a friend came to stay with her family for a time and seduced her stepfather, Mike Medavoy. Katt Shea disclosed in an interview with Ethan Alter for Yahoo Entertainment that "The story is true in spirit, not in actual fact. For example, her mother was sick like Georgie, but Ivy didn't actually kill her. And the real Ivy also didn't die in the end!" (Alter, 2022). The original story was based in Hollywood as Goddard's stepfather was a producer but Shea (the director) wanted the film to feel more realistic. Goddard and Morgan pitched the story to production company New Line who passed the project onto Shea and her then husband Andy Ruben. New Line wanted to cash in on the success of the erotic thriller sub-genre and *Fatal Attraction* (1987) with a teen fatale seducing a married man.

The narrative unfolds from Sylvie's (Sara Gilbert) perspective as she provides a voice over at the beginning and the end of the film. We see Ivy (Drew Barrymore) from Sylvie's female gaze through the use of point of view shots (POV). When the girls introduce themselves, they bond over their shared hatred of Sylvie's father Darryl (Tom Skerrit). Sylvie is in trouble for calling in a bomb threat at the TV station Darryl is an anchor for. Ivy responds "I'm gonna break this to you real slow. Your dad's an asshole." This could be a way for the girls to bond but also shows that Ivy is not immediately attracted to Darryl. When the viewer first sees Darryl, he is in his car massaging his cheek with his hand. He threatens to beat Sylvie by stating, "I ought to slap you good." He is visibly upset by Sylvie's prank and raises his voice to her to show his

dominance as her father. He tries to reach Sylvie on an emotional level so she can see the ramifications of her actions by stating, "They're trying to get rid of me. Whose side are you on? Sylvie, you hurt me." This strategy works as Sylvie apologises, and also shows the viewer that Darryl's job is at stake which is built upon further in the narrative. Darryl's job status allows the family to live in a luxury home compared to that of Ivy who comes from a poor background. This is one of the reasons Ivy wants to inhabit the Coopers' home and family as it is highlighted in the dialogue on multiple occasions that Ivy is less fortunate. As Darryl pulls out in the car, he nearly hits a van. The driver yells out "You rich fuckhead", to which Darryl responds "I worked for it!" This shows that Darryl may not have also come from money but that he has worked his way up and is proud of his wealth.

Ivy forces a meeting with Darryl after she knocks on the car window and leans into the car to reach the air conditioner. Her cleavage is eye level with Darryl. She asks for a lift home which Darryl initially declines, but Sylvie begs him to take her home, stating that she is her best friend even though the pair have just met. Sylvie has to think of a name for Ivy as she hadn't mentioned it before. The camera cuts to Ivy's tattoo of a cross with Ivy around it, promoting her to say Ivy. Throughout the entire film, Ivy's real name is never mentioned. In a later scene, Sylvie asks Ivy for her real name but she responds, "I like Ivy. It sort of gives me the chance to start over." This implies that Ivy has a troubled past and is happy to become someone new. It is a character trait of the interloper, Mary Papas (2023) states that when writing an interloper character, they need to be "likeable and rootable" (Papas, 2023) which is true for Ivy. The interloper must have characteristics the lead character does not, "If the leading character is cautious, then the interloper must be impulsive. If the leading character is emotional, then the interloper must be logical" (Papas, 2023). This is true for Sylvie and Ivy as Sylvie is cautious and emotional where Ivy is impulsive and logical.

Back in the car scene, Ivy requests to sit in the front seat, foreshadowing Ivy's confidence and how comfortable she is in assuming a dominant position. During the car journey, Darryl's exhibits signs of stress as the character is facing many life pressures, he believes the TV station is trying to replace him with a younger anchor, and he has a sick wife, Georgie (Cheryl Ladd) at home. Darryl's facial expressions show pain in his jaw, Ivy enquires into this and Sylvie intervenes that it is TMJ (temporomandibular joint) - through the narrative, the viewer learns that it is stress related. When the girls are talking, Sylvie asks Ivy about condoms for a school project. When Darryl naively asks about the conversation, Ivy playfully states, "It's not like we're supposed to screw around or anything" and sticks out her tongue at Darryl. The camera cuts to a POV shot from Darryl as he unconsciously looks at Ivy's thighs in her short skirt and continues to look down her bare legs. The scene can also be read as foreshadowing as Darryl is unconsciously sexually attracted to Ivy shown through a POV male gaze. This is keeping with Mulvey's (1975) theory as the male spectator is connected to the male characters through the gaze. In a later scene, Sylvie discloses to Ivy that Darryl is her adopted father as her biological father was black which is confirmed as a lie further in the film. The viewer learns more about Ivy as she compares father stating "My dad didn't want me anywhere around. He'd get pissed if you tried to talk to him. He'd throw stuff at me, like food or spitballs." Ivy seems disappointed that her father does not care for her as much as Darryl does for Sylvie based on the necklace he bought for her. This disappointment and rejection by her own father may be why she seduces Darryl in the film. Ivy discloses that she found hundreds of Hustler magazines in her father's room. Sylvie examines fashion choices as a way to gain attention from her father stating, "I bet that's why you look so sexy...so that your dad would notice you." Ivy states that it didn't work as her father left, furthering the need for acceptance from a father figure like Darryl due to her Electra complex.

Through dialogue with Georgie, the viewer learns that Ivy is from a poor background, has a scholarship to attend the same school as Sylvie and lives with her aunt. Ivy states, "I know. I'm kind of out of place there. I'm always out of place...especially here. Your home is really beautiful." Ivy is clearly impressed by the Coopers' lavish lifestyle and home which is different from her own home life and falls into the interloper trait as she wants what others have and to fit in with others in better circumstances than her own. Ivy reveals her troubled backstory through a sympathetic monologue that her mother died in her 40s and was a drug addict who rejected her need for motherly love and care. The filmmakers have written the character of Ivy to be unconsciously/consciously looking for a replacement family. This element of the backstory gives the viewer Ivy's motivations as an interloper. The viewer learns of the strained relationship between Georgie and Sylvie which is something the girls' bond over. Sylvie states to Ivy, "My mom sleeps a lot. She's got emphysema. I think it's to get attention. She spends her life dying." Georgie is represented as being protective over her daughter but also passive due to her supposed health condition. In an upbeat montage, the viewer is shown how the girls' friendship has developed to Sylvie buying Ivy things, Ivy has moved into the family home, shares a bed with Sylvie and Georgie has given her some of her clothes. The women of the family have fully accepted Ivy, but there are scenes of Darryl watching Ivy, such as in a mirror reflection or through a window, viewing her from a safe distance as a voyeur. Darryl is stated as being a recovering alcoholic, showing his flawed personality and life stresses such as a consuming career and ailing wife. In one scene, he smashes a mirrored elevator switch and bloodies his hand, in a moment of contemplation to a co-worker, he mutters, "She promised she'd never leave me. Now she can barely breathe enough to say I love you. What am I without her?"; this scene shows the character is going through a crisis of masculine authority. Ivy sees Darryl without his hairpiece, something he is clearly embarrassed about; Ivy is tactile throughout holding and kissing his bandaged hand and stroking his hair and face. This attention and affection are solely lacking from all aspects of his life.

In the party scene, Ivy's plan starts to unfold as she double booked Sylvie so she would be out of the way. Sylvie dresses like a young girl for the party which is the exact opposite to Ivy. Wearing one of Georgie's cocktail dresses, she moves around the party looking like Georgie's double. Her hair is now straightened and styled making her look more mature. Georgie is having a crisis of her own as she hides upstairs away from the party and looks at old photos of her and Darryl when she was well and showing their love for each other. Georgie dresses up for the party, a shell of her former self but catches Ivy and Darryl dancing intimately in the dark. Ivy uses manipulation to get herself out of situations by telling people what they want to hear which helps her keep her dominance in the Cooper household. Ivy and Darryl have their first sexual encounter on the bed next to Georgie. The camera first focuses on their hands as Ivy caresses his hair and, as he moves his hands up her leg, Ivy who is in full control of the encounter, seductively moves her dress to allow Darryl access. The scene initially unfolds from the male gaze and sexualises Ivy's body but as soon as she moans the camera changes to behind Ivy and focuses on Darryl as he stops and has a moment of realisation of his actions and looks at Georgie. Ivy turns round to Georgie and covers her up much like a mother caring for her child. She has started to take the mother's role in the household. In the next scene, Sylvie returns home and goes to bed with Ivy already asleep. Ivy awakes and cuddles into Sylvie and looks at her necklace and states "My father never gave me anything real." She tightly holds the necklace symbolically taking the father's love away from Sylvie.

The film uses repeated motifs of previous dialogue and situations to establish the point that Ivy is in control. Darryl goes to pick up the girls from school but appears unfazed when told that Sylvie did not attend school. Ivy is wearing Georgie's coat which is bright red, her power colour. There is tension between Ivy and Darryl resulting in the dialogue with Ivy stating,

"You're not my father" in which Darryl responds, "That's right. I'm not." Ivy mishears Darryl and thinks he said 'you hurt me', similar to the initial scene with Sylvie. Ivy uses the same emotional level to help soften Darryl, as if he is the child now. When Darryl first meets Ivy, she has just been sprayed with a sprinkler which is shown from Darryl's perspective through a point of view shot. Ivy's body is fragmented by the camera as the shot is through the car door, such that her torso is in frame, thereby sexualising her body. When they decide to have sex for the first time in the woods, it's raining, which may be a convention of the erotic thriller subgenre. Though a body double was used for the sex scene in place of Drew Barrymore (then 17 years old), she does erotically kiss Tom Skerritt (then 59 years old). Katt Shea remembered filming the scene by stating, "[Drew] was just like, 'Oh boy, let's do it!' Meanwhile, Tom is going: 'Oh my god, oh my god.' His discomfort is so palpable in the film." (Alter, 2022). The age gap between the two actors was 42 years.

In a later scene, Georgie contemplates suicide when looking out her bedroom balcony and playing the piano recording Sylvie made for her and looks like a ghost haunting her own home in a flowing white gown, a melodramatic woman haunted by her previous life. Ivy soothes Georgie by rubbing her back asking, "You think about it sometimes, don't you?", Georgie replies "Sometimes." Ivy pushes Georgie, who begins to fall. She grabs Ivy's hand with panic in her face, not wanting to die. In a close up shot of their hands, the viewers see Ivy release her grip on Georgie's hand. A close up on Georgie's face reveals her fear and shock of falling. Ivy looks genuinely upset and the death seems more of a mercy killing like the dog at the beginning of the film rather than a malicious attack. Towards the end of the film, Ivy and Darryl have sex in the living room, Sylvie hallucinates that Ivy is her mother and the scene acts as a primal scene. Sylvie runs off in horror at seeing the couple together. In the end scene, Ivy dresses like Georgie and hangs out the bedroom window. Sylvie hallucinates that Ivy is her mother again, this time telling her that she loves her. The hallucination is broken when the two share a kiss and Ivy puts her tongue in her mouth. Ivy's true intentions are revealed, "We can all be together now. We can all be a family." In a repeated motif, Sylvie pushes Ivy from the same window that Georgie was pushed from. Holding onto the necklace admired in a previous scene, Ivy falls to her death and the film ends, the threat has been eliminated, the necklace being symbolic of the love and wealth that she craved. Production of the film faced issues such as having three different drafts of the script with four endings (Halpern Benenson, 1992). In the original story, Ivy got away with all her crimes and hitchhiked her way to her next victim (Trailer from Hell Youtube, 2013). Shea states:

> We changed the ending of Melissa's story to have Ivy die, but I didn't really want that. In reality the girl got away with it and I thought that's how it should have been portrayed but the exec at New Line got her way and Ivy died. [...] We didn't even shoot the ending until after the movie was edited because I was still fighting for her to live while we were shooting. I do like the ending we shot, but I just didn't feel it was realistic, those kind of people get away with stuff.
>
> (Trainwreck'd Society, 2017)

The character of Ivy is not represented as a good person, but through the dialogue, narrative and character development, the viewer understands her motivations. She is presented as a sympathetic character who is looking for a family, part of her Electra complex as she was neglected by her own family. She is an opportunist who can manipulate situations into her favour. As much as she 'destroys' the family, she also offers each of them things that they need. Sylvie needs a friend, sisterhood, attention and closure on her mother's illness (real or imagined

by Georgie), Darryl is in crisis as he is replaced at work, lost his wife due to her illness and has a strained relationship with his daughter. He needs to feel desired and like a 'man' again. Georgie has a loss of ego and is no longer the woman she used to be, while her relationship with Sylvie is distant and unstable. She wants a daughter like Ivy whom she can dress up in her image and offer her affection and understanding. The nuclear unit is broken so it is easy for Ivy to enter the family and bring them short lived joy for a time, but with ultimately negative effects. This may be as the narrative is from the female perspective, which is evident from the closing voice-over, "I still think about her. I guess I still love her. She might have been even more alone than I was. I miss her."

7.2 Film Analysis - The Crush (1993)

The Crush (1993) features a young girl with an Electra complex in the character of Adrian Forrester (Alicia Silverstone in her first role), a 14-year-old girl who develops a dangerous and obsessive crush on 28-year-old journalist Nick Elliott (Cary Elwes). *The Crush* was written and directed by Alan Shapiro who loosely based the film on true life events that happened to him in 1982 when he was a tenant in a guesthouse of the wealthy Bleecher family. Shapiro intended to spend time writing screenplays that would develop his career in Hollywood (much like the character of Nick who is a journalist), this is where he met Darian Bleecher. Shapiro stated in production notes that Darian was "a brilliant young woman" who developed a crush on him and refused to take "no" for an answer" (Brian Lowry, 1993). Years later, he turned the experience into a feature film, keeping the girl's name the same resulting in a lawsuit from the girl's parents. Darian Bleecher and her parents, Michael and Susan sued director Alan Shapiro, producer James G. Robinson, production company Morgan Creek Productions and distributor Warner Bros for libel. The case was dismissed in 1995 and settled out of court, and Shapiro was allowed to change the main character's name after the film's release (Plainsite, 1995).

At the beginning of the film, the narrative focuses on Nick as he is the film's main character/'hero'. There is a montage of him trying to find an apartment to make it as a writer like his grandfather before him. The search is unsuccessful until an unlikely meeting with the titular Adrian. Nick is driving and distracted looking at maps when Adrian skates into the road, causing him to brake abruptly. The camera zooms erratically into Nick's shocked face and repeats the same motion as it zooms into Adrian's face with a lingering shot of her eyes concealed by sunglasses. Nick is dumbfounded by the accident that could have happened or by the beauty of Adrian. The camera cuts back to Adrian's face in a close up as she looks over her sunglasses, whilst chewing gum. The shot is reminiscent of the original poster for Stanley Kubrick's *Lolita* (1962), hinting at the story due to unfold. Lolita is often misread as a young girl seducing an adult male. The encounter has an immediate effect on Nick who is awestruck by the young girl. The camera cuts back to Adrian who is wearing short denim hot pants and a cropped white top as she skates away, the camera panning the length of her body, signifying her youth. A sign outside of Adrian's lavish home indicates that there is a guest house for rent in which Nick enquires about, meeting Adrian's mother Liv (Gwynyth Walsh). Through the dialogue, the viewer learns Liv is "always in court "meaning she may be a lawyer and the father Cliff (Kurtwood Smith) "spends more time in airports than at home." The conversation is interrupted by Adrian playing piano offscreen. Her mother describes her as being 'headstrong'. Both the parents have successful careers which can afford Adrian everything she wants but they are passive in her needs for attention. In the film, Adrian is presented as being intelligent and ambitious. She only seems interested in Nick when her only friend Cheyenne (Amber Benson) describes him as 'old'. Nick is presented as professional, hardworking and resourceful. Later in the dialogue, Adrian tells Nick that her parents passed her through two years in school due to her intelligence and she struggles making friends. Alexandra West (2018) comments on

Adrian's lifestyle by stating, "The film does not shy away from showing Adrian's girlhood existence, which clearly is not of her choosing but rather one that has been forced on her [by her parents]" (West 2018, p. 44). Adrian's flirtatious manner leads to Nick asking "Are you sure you're only 14?", Adrian responds, "Almost 15." This gives the viewer the impression that she tries to act older than she is and enforces the fact that she is a pre-teen. This is in keeping with the Electra complex as girls will try to look older to seduce the father/father figure character. West continues to analyse Adrian's behaviour by stating, "Adrian sees Nick as her escape from this patriarchal nightmare of 'good-girl-ness.' Using her emerging feminine wiles to seduce and secure Nick as a romantic partner would, in her mind, allow her the agency to leave the family home and exist without prior expectations" (West 2018, p. 44). Adrian's flirtation is innocent at first with her spying on Nick whilst he is getting dressed, wanting to have a childhood photo of him and buying him a present, though her controlling nature is revealed later in the film.

Through the narrative, it transpires that Adrian rewrote Nick's article which got him the cover story. Adrian excels in everything she does, she is up to date with current affairs and plays piano in a professional manner. Nick begins to cross the line with Adrian by stating "If you were 10 years older…" to which Adrian responds "You'd what?" which is inappropriate behaviour on Nick's part. After the pair agree to be friends, Adrian says "please don't be afraid of me" before kissing Nick passionately, and he responds by withdrawing after coming to his senses. The film presents Nick as a naive hero/victim where he is also the adult in the situation. The viewer is meant to sympathise with him in his dangerous predicament as Adrian is presented as the monstrous pre-teen girl/villain. If Nick had shown Adrian adult/paternal authority and set boundaries from the beginning such as not allowing her to walk into the guesthouse whenever she wanted, it could be argued that Nick's lack of adult reinforcement and lenient behaviour contributed to the situation. John Kenneth Muir (2011) and Alexandra West (2018) both highlight this point when analysing the film. Nick's half-hearted attempt to stop Adrian's crush fails as she pursues Nick in later scenes by sunbathing close to the guest house. The camera in a faux POV slowly panning her body from her thighs to her face as she is wearing a bikini and lowers her top straps in an alluring manner. This is not a true POV shot as seen before, as it is too close to actually be the character's gaze. The shot is to sexualise Alicia Silverstone. Through the filmmaking process, the male gaze is used to sexualise and villainize the young girl's femininity.

In the BBQ scene, Adrian is threatened by Amy (Jennifer Rubin), Nick's co-worker growing relationship with him. She belittles Amy in a passive aggressive manner by discussing her small breasts suggesting that she has an inferior beauty. Amy warns Nick to be cautious with Adrian and her affections. This warning shows the paternal authority Nick needs to exercise as he is the adult and she is a child. Adrian demonstrates 'love bombing' techniques to get Nick's attention, love bombing is a form of behaviour in which a person will shower another person with affection in order to build a (romantic) relationship with them. The love bomber will demand more time from the person and limited time spent with family and friends. "Love bombing is considered a deliberate and manipulative tactic that is deployed in order to gain the upper hand over a new partner and increase his or her dependence on the bomber. Because of this, it is often attributed to individuals who are high in narcissism or other antisocial traits or those who engage in domestic violence" (Psychology Today, 2024). Love bombing is often linked to grooming and sex trafficking. In the film, Adrian displays narcissistic personality disorder as she focuses on her own self-importance and lacks empathy for others, she's the predator and Nick is the prey. Nick's questionable behaviour continues as he crosses the line by entering Adrian's bedroom looking for his childhood photo. The room is that of a young girl, as Adrian is a young girl. The room shows her interests in horse jumping and insects. Nick

looks out of place in her personal space. There is a POV shot from Nick as he pulls out a pair of Adrian's used underwear from under her bed with his shoe that seems predatory and forbidden behaviour. After finding a hand stitched cushion with their initials on, Nick hides in the closet whilst Adrian undresses, the camera focusing on her unbuttoning her top. This is not a POV shot at all but one for the viewer's eyes only. Adrian exposes herself fully to Nick once she realises, he is hiding. Nick is a voyeur watching her but so is the viewer. Shapiro discussed how Warner Bros wanted more nudity to be shown in the film, forcing the director to hire a body double for Silverstone, who was 16 at the time. Through the use of a POV shot of the body double's nude buttocks, the viewer is forced to sexualise the woman's body through the male gaze. Shapiro remembers, "I got a call the next day from the studio saying, what is wrong with me? 'How come I don't see any tits? (IndieWire, 2023). The scene of the body double breasts was shot but eventually cut from the film. Shapiro continued:

> It all revolved around sex. They wanted as much sex as possible from Alicia. I mean, obviously, it wasn't a porno, but they wanted it as titillating as possible. She kind of went for that. She got it. This is 1992; this is pre-#MeToo. It was like they could have said anything. I mean, the law prohibited them from shooting a minor but they would have if it wasn't illegal.
>
> (IndieWire, 2023)

Cliff, Adrian's father, has lovingly restored a full-sized carousel in the attic which was bought after Adrian was born in the hopes of building her a playroom. Cliff discusses with Nick how Adrian has developed over the year, "This past year, she's really, uh… blossomed...physically, I mean." Nick replies "Mmm. I noticed." Cliff discusses how he is worried about the day when a boyfriend comes to the door. He aggressively notes how he might cut off the boy's 'hard-on' whilst picking up a jaw curved pliers and manically laughing. These are signs of an overprotective castrating father who wants to keep Adrian in a child-like state. Adrian still calls her parents mommy and daddy in a way to manipulate them into believing she is still a small child. In a later scene, Adrian is on the swing, with the camera placed below her so the viewer can see up her skirt. The viewer is forced to view her as a sexual object. Alexandra West comments on the scene by stating, "The camera's under-angle is not only a hyper male gaze, but also one that is expected when an attractive young girl in a thriller is on a swing. Simply placing the shot from the side would not have been enough" (West, 2018, p 46). Nick tries to talk to Adrian about them being friends and nothing more but Adrian seizes power and threatens Nick with his indiscretions, Nick realises he is no longer in control of the situation. West continues "Through this exchange, Nick's own feelings are challenged by Adrian's refusal to accept them and the audience's expectations are challenged because they have been part of Adrian's sexualisation through the camera's gaze" (West, 2018, p. 47). Shapiro's intentions are clear that pre-teen femininity should be feared, this may be due to his own closeness to the real-life events that inspired the film.

Adrian's acts of violence begin to escalate when Nick's freshly painted car is vandalised with the word 'cocksucker'. Nick speaks to the parents about Adrian writing on his freshly painted car. The parents defend their daughter, and when asked, Adrian denies the offence by acting innocently. She kisses her mother on the cheek and her father on the lips before leaving, reasserting her control over her passive parents. Adrian's destructive behaviour rapidly increases from childish vandalism to grievous bodily harm when Cheyenne is injured in a horsing accident which is caused by Adrian who tampered with her saddle. She punishes Cheyenne for arranging to talk to Nick about Adrian. When Cheyenne falls from the horse,

Adrian gives a sly smile insinuating that she gained pleasure from watching her friend being hurt. Later in the narrative, Nick finds a shrine Adrian had made underneath the guesthouse after Adrian tried to derail his career. He ignores her whilst trying to save his job. She continues 'love bombing' him with constant phone calls, trying to get his attention. The music in the scene is dramatic as Nick changes the locks and Adrian becomes physically frustrated instead of the previous passive aggressive behaviour. Amy is the next target of Adrian's wrath for having a sexual relationship with Nick as she is locked in the dark room and a wasp's nest is placed over the air conditioning. Adrian delusionally believes that Amy being in the hospital has brought her and Nick closer together. It is later disclosed in the dialogue that Adrian's former camp counsellor and crush, died from poisoning, presumably at the hands of Adrian as she had the knowledge and opportunity. Poisoning is seen as a woman's crime in reality as it requires no physical strength to perform, plus there is easy access as the traditional role as caregivers to poison food and drinks. Afton Lorraine Woodward (2016) examines the role of female poisoner, both in reality and in the arts by stating, "poison is traditionally, though not always, a female mode of attack [...] the subtle and seductive art of poison is often used as a storytelling device to comment upon the nature, and especially the flaws, of women" (Woodward, 2016). Adrian's destructive behaviour continues as she causes a scene at Nick's works benefit before he missed her riding competition. The scene demonstrates Adrian's delusional state as she walks in, kisses Nick and slaps him across the face in front of a crowd of people. Once away from others, Adrian continues to try to kiss Nick causing him to physically restrain her, and resulting in her screaming. This damages Nick's reputation in front of his boss and colleagues and he is later arrested for the sexual assault of Adrian. The camera changes from steady to handheld to add gravity to the situation, making it more realistic and showing Nick's confused and anxious state of mind. Adrian gives an emotional statement about the fabricated sexual assault to her parents, doctors and police. Her appearance is dishevelled and her lip is bleeding, stating: "He just wouldn't take no as an answer. He threw me down and um, hit me and he just kept hitting me and I was crying and he kept hitting me and yelling. I was so scared." The police reveal to Nick that they found semen inside of Adrian and it matches his blood type. In the film, rape is used as a revenge tactic by Adrian and presents Nick further into victimhood as he loses his job and his accommodation. This trope is used to condemn Adrian as the ultimate evil by Sharpio but also further propels harmful rape myths such as women are lying (especially teenage girls) through victim blaming which was common during the 1990s Media.

The Crush is less forthcoming with why Adrian is the way she is, unlike *Poison Ivy*. The film focuses more on her becoming more unhinged through the narrative and the dramatic effects a 14-year-old girl can have on a man's life. Adrian's facade of the innocent 'good' girl is exposed in the climax of the film when she focuses her violent tendencies towards Nick in the final confrontation. She attacks with a stick until he falls from the banister of the stairs. This is the first physical harm the viewer sees from her. The ending takes on horror conventions as Cheyenne is bound to the carousel and Cliff tries to strangle Nick, misinterpreting the situation. Adrian emerges from the shadows in slow motion with the stick, like Alex Forrest emerges from the bath at the end of *Fatal Attraction*. In a hero's moment, Nick punches Adrian in the face, sending her flying across the room. The viewer is meant to celebrate this action as Adrian is portrayed as a monster instead of a 14-year-old girl. Adrian is institutionalised in a psychiatric hospital and begins a new obsessive crush on her doctor whilst Nick continues his life with his job and relationship with Amy intact. This is a rare occasion where the teen fatale lives and is able to continue her destructive behaviour. Shapiro discussed the character of Adrian before the film's release to Fangoria magazine, stating:

> This deals much more with a real, three-dimensional character. It's Lolita, Fatal Attraction, a young Gloria Swanson from Sunset Boulevard. She's a really neat character, who kind of creeps up on us; we don't quite realize at first how far this kid's actually gonna go, and she keeps going! So I think the audience is going to have a lot of fun with her. And she is also able to make the transition, within a scene, from little girl to voluptuous woman. She's extremely sensual and childlike and menacing all in the same film.
>
> (Steve Newton, Fangoria #122 1993, p. 64 Original emphasis)

8. Conclusion

Poison Ivy and *The Crush* both represent the teen fatale from different standpoints. Both girls are represented as being villainous and violent with backgrounds that heavily influence their behaviours. In *Poison Ivy*, the narrative is from Sylvie's perspective, she is the main character. Ivy's motivations are made clear to the audience through a conscious use of the Electra complex and female gaze, promoting a more rounded and some may say sympathetic character. In *The Crush,* the main character is Nick, the narrative is from his perspective and Adrian is demonised for being beautiful, wealthy, intelligent and spoiled with psychopathic tendencies. Portraying Adrian from the male gaze and unconsciously embedding the Electra complex adds to social anxieties of teenage girls within the 1990s and the fall of the nuclear family and the loss of patriarchal authority. In keeping with Mulvey's male gaze, even films with an Electra narrative may utilise the Oedipus gaze through the unconscious direction of male filmmakers.

The ways in which the teen fatale characters are portrayed can be read as a reflection of 1990s culture and how society blurred the line between teenagers and adults, sexualising girls in a problematic manner. It is argued that this unconscious aspect of 1990s-era filmmaking arises through castration anxiety leading to narratives that punish female characters for being powerful and creating a threat against them through fetishistic and sadistic scopophilia. This article has analysed how some female directors consciously deploy Electra tropes, to represent the teen fatale through third-wave ideologies, female power and to reject the male culture of filmmaking through the female gaze. The male directed films can be considered anti-feminist and misogynistic by using the teen fatale which is in keeping with a backlash towards powerful female characters who corrupt male counterparts. The teen fatale is completely driven by desire and defying patriarchal authority but in *Poison Ivy* (which is directed by a female director), she is punished by death for her actions. Katt Shea has stated in interviews that she wanted Ivy to live in the end but was forced to kill her off by the studio. Shea states "when I shot the movie there was really no ending for it because the ending I really wanted which had Ivy getting away with everything and just hitchhiking and you knew that she was going to find her next victim was thrown out by New Line because they really thought that she couldn't get away with it and she had to die in the end" (Trailer from Hell Youtube, 2013). The *Poison Ivy* franchise may have been very different if Shea's original ending was granted by the New Line Cinema.

As much as the teen fatale was punished for her actions, the focus of the film is Sylvie and her friendship/relationship/rivalry with Ivy instead of *The Crush* where Nick is the main character and the film is about his struggles with a teen fatale. The 1990s was a progressive time as more women were active within the film industry and were consciously making differences and challenging how male filmmakers portrayed female characters. As sensational as these films are, they did pave the way for other female filmmakers to make films and female stories to be told. This article has analysed this time period, using psychoanalysis and feminist film theory

to highlight the difference the male gaze and the female gaze can have on narratives, subjectivity of the characters and gender representation. Though this research is based primarily on the 1990s, the methods can be used in contemporary cinema, more discussions and teaching of the ungendered female gaze approach of filmmaking will enable modern filmmakers to have greater awareness of the techniques they use within filmmaking and their impact on the representation of female characters.

References

Alter, Ethan. (2022). *Yahoo! Entertainment -'Poison Ivy' director explains why Drew Barrymore's 1992 erotic thriller couldn't be made today*. [online] [Accessed on 13th February 2024]

https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/drew-barrymore-poison-ivy-katt-shea-sara-gilbert-144553745.html?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvLnVrLw&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAErLY3sJi2kRfWWTkX9hIpiiB5bKfRc-1gDtLfvkR6qLytNrQcJfz0deY2rXMgPgL6RCHYILKGXGPRu0rzbJIEOVSBRMd1YI3CGKi7FZz9rcsFVt52gTwXXaJ0nBwfG56fez3_DPWLxyvqzpCUwHmRf4MIkO3EQcoQc9ehAhD6Cq

Belton, John. (2005). *American Cinema American Culture.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Brey, Iris. (2020). *Le regard féminin - Une révolution à l'écran.* Paris: Editions de l'Olivier.

Farrimond, Katherine. (2018). *The Contemporary Femme Fatale: Gender, Genre and American Cinema.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ettinger, Bracha L. (2000). *Art Working 1985 - 1999*. Brussels: Palais des Beaux Arts and Ghent: Ludion.

Freud, Sigmund. (1915b). *Repression*. Standard Edition, vol. XIV. London: Hogarth.

Freud, Sigmund. (1925j). Some Psychical Consequences of the Anatomical Distinction Between the Sexes. *SE* 19, 243–258.

Freud, Sigmund. (1931). "Female Sexuality." In SE, 21:223-243.

Freud. Sigmund, Ritchie. Robertson, and Joyce. Crick. (1999). *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Original print 1913.

Grene, David. (2013). *Electra: Introduction.* In Grene, David, Glenn W. Most, Mark Griffith, Richmond Lattimore (ed.) *Sophocles II: Ajax, The Women of Trachis, Electra, Philoctetes, The Trackers,* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, pp. 133 - 207.

Halpern Benenson, Laurie. (1992) "How 'Poison Ivy' Got Its Sting: The studio wanted a teen-age 'Fatal Attraction.' Katt Shea's movie may be more than that. 'Poison Ivy': Art or Exploitation?". *New York Times*, 3 May. https://www.nytimes.com/1992/05/03/archives/film-how-poison-ivy-got-its-sting.html (Accessed on 13th February 2024).

Hentges, Sarah. (2006). *Pictures of Girlhood: Modern Female Adolescence on Film*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.

Hopkins, Susan. (2022). *Poison Ivy, Wild Things* and Other Erotic Teen Thrillers of the 1990s: The Class-Shamed "Evil" Other of Hypersexualized Girl Power. In Mythili Rajiva and Stephanie Patrick. (eds). *The Forgotten Victims of Sexual Violence in Film, Television and New Media: Turning to the Margins.* Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.

Lindop, Samantha. (2015). What Are (Fatal) Little Girls Made of?. In Samathan Lindop, (ed.) *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 93-128.

Lowry, Brian. (1993). *Variety - The Crush Film Review*. [online] [accessed 15th February 2024] https://variety.com/1993/film/reviews/the-crush-2-1200432089/

Lupold, Eva. (2014). "Adolescence in Action: Screening Narratives of Girl Killers." *Girlhood Studies.* **7**, pp. 6-24. DOI:10.3167/ghs.2014.070202

Muir John, Kenneth. (2011). *Horror Films of the 1990s.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland.

Mulvey, Laura. (1975) "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Screen, Vol. 16, No. 3, pp. 6–18. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6

Newton, Steve. (1993), "In the Grip of The Crush", *Fangoria* #112, pp. 62-64.

Papas, Mary. (2023). *Medium - Creative Writing: Leading Character vs Interloper*. [online] [accessed on 13th February 2024]. https://medium.com/the-daily-cuppa/creative-writing-leading-character-vs-interloper-d9add5bc6c28

Plainsite. (1995). *Darian Bleecher, et al v. Alan Shapiro, et al. State Civil Lawsuit Superior Court of California, County of Los Angeles, Case No. SC026592.* [online] [accessed 15th February 2024] https://www.plainsite.org/dockets/2yrjprawr/superior-court-of-california-county-of-los-angeles/darian-bleecher-et-al-v-alan-shapiro-et-al/

Psychology Today. (2024). *Love Bombing.* [online] [accessed 15th February] https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/love-bombing

Karlyn, Kathleen Rowe. (2011). *Unruly Girls, Unrepentant Mothers: Redefining Feminism on Screen.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Simkin, Stevie. (2005). *Early Modern Tragedy and the Cinema of Violence.* Verlag: Springer Palgrave Macmillan.

Soloway, Joey. (2016). TIFF Talks - *Joey Soloway on The Female Gaze | MASTER CLASS | TIFF 2016.* [online video] [accessed 26th August 2021]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pnBvppooD9I

Trainwreck'd Society. (2017). *Katt Shea [interview].* [online] [accessed 13th February 2024). https://trainwreckdsociety.com/2017/10/30/katt-shea-interview/

West, Alexander. (2018). *The 1990s Teen Horror Cycle Final Girls and a New Hollywood Formula.* Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company.

Williams, Linda Ruth. (2011). Walking the Line with the Fille Fatale. In Murray Pomerance, and Barton, R. Palmer. (eds.) *A Little Solitaire: John Frankenheimer and American Film.* New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, pp. 157-169.

Woodward, Afron Lorraine. (2016). *The New Inquiry - Plants, Domesticity, and the Female Poisoner*. [online] [accessed on 14th March]. https://thenewinquiry.com/blog/lady-science-no-26-lady-wrangler-and-poisoners/

Youtube. (2013). *Trailer from Hell - Katt Shea on Poison Ivy.* [online] [accessed 13th February 2024] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tR6oF7FIlNE&t=38s

Filmography

Crush, The (1993) Film. Directed by Alan Shapiro. USA: Morgan Creek Entertainment.

Fatal Attraction (1987) Film. Directed by Adrian Lyne. USA: Paramount Pictures.

Grifters, The (1990). Film. Directed by Stephen Frears. USA/Canada: Cineplex Odeon Films.

Only God Forgives (2013). Film. Directed by Nicolas Winding Refn. Denmark/France, USA, Sweden/Belgium/Thailand: Space Rocket Nation.

Lolita (1997) Film. Directed by Adrian Lyne. France/USA: Guild.

Poison Ivy (1992) Film. Directed by Katt Shea. USA: New Line Cinema.

Psycho (1960) Film. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Shamley Productions.

Strangers on a Train (1951) Film. Directed by Alfred Hitchcock. USA: Warner Bros.

Wicked (1998) Film. Directed by Michael Steinberg. USA: Flipped Out Productions.