

Dance with the Devil: Representations of Femininity, Masculinity, and the Boss-from-Hell in Two Parallel Films

ALANNA R. MILLER

Whether it is Facebook's COO Sheryl Sandberg telling us to "lean in" or comedian Amy Schumer satirizing women's tendency towards apology and conciliation, we are surrounded by advice and debate about how women should behave in the workplace (Brooks; Crosley). And this ongoing gender self-reflection has a parallel in cultural representations in film. Working women, especially married women with children, "hardly exist as film protagonists" until the 1980s, when representation started to increase to mirror 62 percent of women then working (Boozer 52-53). Although the increased visibility of women in films about the workplace can be praised, changing the number of women does not necessarily create a corresponding change in the perception nor the status of women, as the past year and the #MeToo moment, with many women coming forward with countless stories of sexual harassment, has shown (Gilbert; Johnson and Hawbaker; Zacharek, Dockterman, and Edwards). Changing the perception or status of women depends on changing our cultural understanding of gender.

Our cultural understanding of gender and how women should behave in the workplace is highly influenced by our cultural products. It is through mass media that we reinforce who we are as a culture (Carey 23). Carey discusses communication as a way in which culture is constructed and reinforced. Representations from cultural products, especially widely-circulated popular cultural products, are central to this construction of reality. "We create, express, and convey our knowledge of and attitudes toward reality through the construction of various symbol systems: art, science, journalism, religion, common sense, mythology" (30). Films should therefore be closely scrutinized for the messages they circulate to ascertain how specifically gender is constructed through culture.

The Popular Culture Studies Journal, Vol. 6, No. 1
Copyright © 2018

I use poststructural feminism and masculinity studies to analyze the gender messages in two parallel films about the workplace: David Frankel's beloved chick flick about a young woman trying to survive the fashion industry, *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), based on Lauren Weisberger's novel of the same name, and George Huang's biting black comedy about a young man trying to survive the movie industry, *Swimming with Sharks* (1994) (Frankel; Huang). The two films parallel each other in plot and details of production with the main difference lying in the gender of the protagonist. No other films about the workplace parallel each other in quite this way. While other films do deal with both bad working conditions, such as *9 to 5* (1980), or bad bosses, such as *Horrible Bosses* (2011), or workers that hate their jobs, such as *Office Space* (1999), often these films show revenge against the bosses or rebellion against the job, which neither of the selected films portray. The films selected here show the same protagonist journey of entering an industry, encountering challenges with work-life balance as well as a strong, overbearing boss, learning to thrive, before ultimately deciding a new path in life. It is also important that both films were based on the actual experiences of the writers in those industries. These films then expose the different messages men and women receive about their place in the workplace, given similar sets of circumstances. Through examination of two cultural products, we can uncover the myths and assumptions of gender that are further influencing the ongoing debate about gender in the workplace.

These messages, I argue, involve a different sacrifice of identity to gender roles for men and women. For men, identity is intrinsically tied to work, requiring a Faustian deal of identity-sacrifice for economic success through hyper-masculinity. For women, identity is reduced to the external of appearances, appearing, masquerade, and performing. These messages reinforce the workplace as a male space, potentially contributing to real world harassment and hostile work environments. Both messages demand conformity to gender roles in support of capitalism, which makes these messages similar to the Protestant religious messages Weber contended supported the capitalist system.

Poststructuralist Feminist Theory, Masculinity Studies, and Film

This study uses several of the underlying assumptions of poststructuralist feminism to examine representations of women in film. Specifically, this study is

built on the non-essentialist assumptions that gender is socially constructed and perpetuated through structures and cultural representations (Beauvoir 185-248). Fictional representations are central to the construction of gender. Film representations of femininity matter for two reasons: First, these portrayals reflect the underlying assumptions of the culture in which they were created (Allen 22). And second, these images, through the power of mass media, define reality. If gender is constructed through social agreement and interaction, mass media, through repeated affirmation of patterns for gender and pervasive presence in our social lives, take on the aura of reality. Lauretis noted that film, itself, presents the spectator with an array of meanings with which the spectator must reconcile with a constantly constructed notion of self. "As social beings, women are constructed through effects of language and representation. Just as the spectator, the term of the moving series of filmic images, is taken up and moved along successive positions of meaning, a woman (or man) is not an undivided identity, a stable unity of 'consciousness,' but the term of a shifting series of ideological positions" (Lauretis 14). Both in film and reality, men and women are presented with gendered ideologies which interpellate and demand response. This study seeks to examine what gender construction looks like within film because the spectator's experience is concurrently paralleling that process of construction. The representations of women in film circulate discourses through which we learn gender and perpetuate certain patterns of gender in real life. This analysis connects the process of gender construction in cultural representations to the ways existing poststructural feminist thought, such as that of Butler and Beauvoir, conceive gender constructions in real life. These films specifically are filmic representations of gender construction through Lacan's mirror stage and gender as performance and masquerade, all resulting in the creation of the gendered worker. Film constructs gender on screen, which interpellates women, contributing to the construction of gender off screen.

This study seeks to examine representations of both femininity and masculinity in film, and so it is important to note that men are also presented with socially constructed images of themselves through the media. Masculinity theorists generally agree on several assumptions: masculinity is not monolithic, there are no essential differences between men and women, and that both genders have an interest in studying and exposing gender as a construction (Gardiner 11-12).

Studies examining masculinity in film are frequently organized around a “crisis” in masculinity. However, theorists do not agree on the nature of this crisis. For some, it is the undermining of the traditional power inherent in masculinity (Gardiner 5). The problem with this interpretation of the crisis is both the assumption of a “golden age” of masculinity and equating masculinity with power (Gardiner 14; Seidler 210).

For other theorists, the crisis is men's inability to adhere to an oppressive sex role (Pleck, “The Myth of Masculinity,” 4). Much work in masculinity studies involves defining these roles and their restrictive social effect. Many theorists propose different typologies of the male sex role (for a more complete analysis of typologies and influences of these roles see Pleck, “The Male Sex Role” and “The Myth of Masculinity,” 139-42), but these typologies can be summarized as a more traditional and a more modern role. The more traditional role is concerned with strength, aggression, and lack of emotion, while the more modern role is more tied to economic achievement and organizational power (Pleck, “The Myth of Masculinity,” 140). These types are implicit in our ideas about what a man in the media.

Men in the Workplace in Film

More attention has been paid to representations of women than men in the workplace for obvious reasons. It is still considered unusual to see workplace films primarily featuring women, and thus it is an interesting subject of inquiry. An analysis by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media found that women were still vastly outnumbered as professionals by men in film and television. For example, only 3.4% of characters that are top-level business executives are women in top-grossing films and popular television shows from 2006 to 2011 (Smith, et al. 4). Often, in analyses of films about the workplace, the gender of characters is taken-for-granted as male. This, in itself, reflects the invisibility of masculinity; being masculine in the workplace is normal, reflecting a larger culture treating women in the workplace as marginal.

Films also reflect our cultural economic values. American culture tends to equate morality with economics, specifically in ideas such as the Protestant ethic (Weber 115-121) and the American Dream (Winn). Films such as *Working Girl* (1988) and *Wall Street* (1987) are moral tales, which impart the positive value of

work and capitalism (Winn). But *Wall Street* reflects the conflicting perception of morality in American business, where working class values are praised, but the upper class, despite their immorality, are still glamorized (Boozer 2; Winn 132-38). The most compelling character in *Wall Street* is its villain Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas). His quote, “Greed is good,” is the most recognized line of the film (Stone). Despite, the condemnation of Gekko in the film, he is still the charismatic center of it. In a less ambivalent portrayal of Wall Street, Scorsese’s *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013) glamorizes not just American business and acquisition of wealth, but an overt, graphic misogyny as an inherent part of that acquisition. And while the Gekko-esque main character Jordan Belfort (Leonardo DiCaprio) proclaims “There is no nobility in poverty,” the movie builds in his working-class roots to make even his illegal and exploitative acquisition of wealth palatable to the audience (Scorsese). Salek noted the ambivalence under this glamorization of wealth in his rhetorical analysis of the film, which also connects these messages to real world de-regulation of Wall Street and Donald Trump’s ascendancy to the White House:

Even though *The Wolf of Wall Street* may not be directly about the 2008 financial crisis and was written well before Trump ran for the presidency, the film and rhetoric from Belfort act as a homology for an ambivalent culture willing to look past unethical and amoral acts. Although Belfort may have been punished, his story has been glorified and retold by himself in two books, on his blog, and by a Hollywood filmmaker. (14)

In these films, it is money, not might, that makes right. Salek shows the cultural ambivalence towards the acquisition of wealth at the expense of morality and connects that ambivalence to real world glamorization of a lifestyle that places money above all. Considering the extreme misogyny of the Belfort character, it follows that misogyny then becomes a part of this glamorization.

Panayoitou noted men’s identity were tied to their job in films about the workplace (661). In her study of films about the workplace, she found two competing narratives: the macho manager and the organizational hero. The macho manager was constructed with an emphasis on financial success being linked to sexuality, the acquisition of “things” (including women as a thing), the importance of hard work, and the de-emphasis of the domestic sphere in a lack of a home-life (667-68). The organizational hero conversely attempts to maintain

authenticity within the organization (673-74). Panayoitou noted that there is a reinforcement of hegemonic masculinity because even in the resistance of the organization, women are largely absent (678). What Panayoitou does not note however is that in many of the films she examined, this resulted in an outright rejection of the organization altogether, such as in the main character becoming a construction worker in *Office Space* (1999) or the main character in *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) being turned into the authorities (Judge; Mamet). Although the organizational hero is frequently the protagonist in these films, they are also frequently ejected from the system or punished.

In general, films about the workplace portray the corporation as good for America, individual Americans, and the American family (Boozer 22). In particular, films about the workplace have reinforced the modern male sex type, presenting economic success as central to what it is to be a man. "In sum, through the corporate executive film, the Hollywood studio industry enlarged the myth of masculine accomplishment to include a form of career success marked by both professionalism and bureaucratic conformity" (Boozer 48). As Boozer noted, these films tie men's identity to their profession and their sense of worth to economic success. These films also encourage a loyalty to men's job, creating cultural value in blind allegiance to an organization driven by profit. All this ideological work supports a capitalist system, while also separating men from their home and personal life.

In another kind of film about the workplace, masculinity-in-crisis films typically reflect the idea that as a result of the changing world, men have lost their status and are struggling with their identity. The classic example is the film *Falling Down* (1993), where a middle class, white man who has lost his job and family goes on a violent rampage through Los Angeles simply to "get home" (Schumacher). This film, as with other masculinity-in-crisis films, is tied to men's economic power, therefore reinforcing the modern male sex type. In this instance, the result is a return to a violent, traditional male role. *The Full Monty* (1997) shows a group of unemployed factory workers who can only get their masculinity back through the display of the source of it-- the phallus (Tincknell and Chambers 148-52). Implicit in these films is also the threat by women and the women's movement (Baker 65; Tincknell and Chambers 154). The masculinity-in-crisis films imply the presence of women in the workplace threatens men's well-being and sense of identity because their sense of self is tied to their job.

Women in the Workplace in Film

Women in the workplace were rare in film until the 1980s. When women did appear working they tended to be either “shamed mothers” or highly sexualized (Boozer 61-63). Unlike what Friedan found in women's magazines, so-called women's films in wartime were more likely to feature waiting wives, than businesswomen (Haskell 192). Working women in early film tended to be historical figures, whose limited gains posed no real threat to the enduring male dominance (Haskell 181). The earliest career women in films were ambitious women that at some point in the film broke down, declaring that all they really wanted was to be a housewife (Walsh 138). *Mildred Pierce* (1945) and *Adam's Rib* (1949) provide interesting insight into the portrayal of businesswomen in earlier film. *Adam's Rib*, while posing questions about justice and gender (Lucia 1), still reinforces the stereotype of the “emotional” female lawyer against the “rational” male prosecutor and ends with the female lawyer chastised and ready for domesticity (Walsh 151). The protagonist in *Mildred Pierce* is most glamorized and sympathetic when she is most domestic (Lloyd and Johnson 15; Walsh 125). Walsh noted that when women succeed in business there is a price they must pay, according to these films. “A darkness shrouds female success; economic gain is paralleled by maternal failure” (Walsh 131). The main character eventually pays for her economic success with a corresponding failure in her role as a mother. Economic success and characters' roles as women are treated as mutually exclusive; happiness then only exists outside the workplace. Both films, though considered progressive, reinforce domesticity and female stereotypes.

Following feminism's second wave, portrayals of women in the workplace increased, but there was a tendency toward creating villains of those women (Boozer 67-70). *Working Girl* (1988) features the prototypical female executive villain, who schemes, lies, and manipulates people, frequently using her sexuality to do so (Nichols). It is important to point out, however, that the protagonist and the antagonist both scheme, lie, and manipulate people (Boozer 71-72). The key difference between the characters then is that the protagonist, who is more feminine than her boss and without the boss's power, is less threatening to the audience and therefore more sympathetic.

Women executive characters in the 1980s tended to learn the value of domestic life, making these films similar to the films that came before in advocating a return to domesticity. In *Baby Boom* (1987), the main character

chooses motherhood over career (Boozer 75), returning home where “she belongs.” This reflects what Devereaux calls the “recuperative strategy” of film: “This [character’s] return operates both within the narrative and externally, in the narrative’s effect on its female audience. Internally, the Hollywood narrative typically charts the course by which a woman in a non-normative role cedes her control to a man” (Devereaux 341). Thus, these films though seeming to provide new representations of women in the workplace, still retained a message of exclusion and non-belonging. These new career women of the 1980s left us with the conclusion that work and domestic spheres must be separated and that dangerous sexuality was something that still needed to be tamed by men (Kaplan 413).

These films about the workplace reinforce both men and women’s sex roles. Furthermore, they show the importance of economics to men and domesticity to women. Men’s identity is seen as derived from occupation. Alternatively, women are frequently encouraged out of the workplace. Work is seen as a threat to feminine identity. And women’s sexuality is frequently used in these films to undercut their economic success.

The Devil Wears Prada and Swimming with Sharks

In order to investigate some of the messages that men and women receive about gender in the workplace, I analyzed two films that parallel each other in many respects but differ in the gender of both the protagonist and antagonist. *The Devil Wears Prada*, based on a novel by the same name, features a newly graduated journalism student, Andrea “Andy” Sachs (Anne Hathaway), who gets a job working for the editor of a premiere fashion magazine in New York City, *Runway*. The only problem is her boss, Miranda Priestly (Meryl Streep), who is demanding, cold and cruel (Frankel). *Swimming with Sharks* features a newly graduated film student, Guy (Frank Whaley), who gets a job working for a senior vice president of a premiere movie studio in Los Angeles, Keystone Pictures. The only problem is his boss, Buddy Ackerman (Kevin Spacey), who is demanding, abusive, and cruel (Huang). (A role that Spacey seemed to reprise in 2011’s *Horrible Bosses* and the more recent sequel.) The similarities between these premises are striking, but the paths the protagonists take are strikingly different. While Andy, eventually disillusioned with the sacrifices required to be successful

in a highly competitive industry, decides to leave and pursue something else, Guy kidnaps and tortures Buddy before finally allying with him and being rewarded for doing so (Frankel; Huang).

Both of these stories take place in the media world, which are also institutions that create representations of reality, telling us who we are. Workplace conflict is a central feature of both films. In both films, the protagonists struggle to place their personal lives and professional lives in harmony. Another important similarity in these texts is that both stories were based on real world experiences. Lauren Weisberger, the author of the novel *The Devil Wears Prada*, famously based the novel on her experience working for Anna Wintour, editor of *Vogue*. And although Weisberger denies the worst parts of the Miranda Priestly character came from Wintour (Didcock 12), many in the fashion industry and documentaries since indicate there may be more truth to the fiction (Gordon 21; Le Marie 56). Also, some scholars see the movie as able to tap into particularly young female audiences' way of viewing the business world. York, in her analysis, argues that the film is uniquely suited to millennial women and is a "screen version of women's lives" (11). York's statement indicates audiences may respond to the film as a guide for surviving the workplace (Frankel).

George Huang, the screenwriter for *Swimming with Sharks*, based his script on his experience working for various producers in Hollywood. Although it is generally agreed upon by those in Hollywood on whom the Buddy Ackerman character is based, Huang has never indicated it was any one producer in particular (Carr 53; Creed 10; Kemp 19). These films were chosen because of these close similarities. No other workplace films, before or since, parallel these films as closely as they parallel each other. Additionally, the fact that the major difference in plot is the gender of the protagonist and antagonist allows me to focus specifically on gender messages.

There are limitations to my choices, however. The movies do not completely parallel each other in terms of production. The movies were released ten years apart. There could be a difference in the culture of the times. Considering how long differences in treatment and perception of men and women have existed, however, ten years is not a substantial period of time. It has been ten years since *The Devil Wears Prada* and issues of gender and work/life balance are still very much publicly discussed and debated (Gilbert; Slaughter). The bigger limitation is the difference between mainstream and independent film. *The Devil Wears Prada* was produced and distributed by a large studio, whereas *Swimming with Sharks*

was produced independently. This production difference could denote differences in aesthetics and message. However, the blurring of the line between independent film content and studio film content that has happened over the last two decades indicates this distinction is less and less important to analysis (Whitelaw 16; Roman 15). For the purposes of this study, however, the similarities between the plots of the films outweigh any difference related to differences in production or genre. Another limitation of this study is the use of only two films. An examination of two films is not a survey of all the possible messages on the subject. However, it is unusual to have two films so similar with the main differences being the gender of the main characters. Further examination of gender messages in other films about the workplace are outside the scope of this study but would be a useful subject of inquiry for future studies, along with audience reception of such messages.

The Birth of a Worker

Both films characterize the boss as a surrogate parent of the worker, which is similar to other findings in other studies examining films about the workplace (Cady; Lucia 69-74). Thus, the cultural representation of gender construction in the films begins at the same place gender construction begins in real life, as children. It is only through the social construction of the parents that we become a gender (Beauvoir 249-306). Beauvoir discussed the gendering of children through the behavior of the parents, through the forced independence of boy-children, glorification of the phallus, encouragement towards doll-play and narcissism for girl-children, and instilling passivity in girls and action in boys (252-53; 260-61). Children through the preferences and actions of parents assume gender roles, which become social norms, but are built on top of a neutral base.

Similarly, the child-characters begin the film as gender-neutral and become “gendered” through their work parents. Andy prefers the use of a male name to her female name, Andrea. The film opens with a montage of contrasts between feminine women and Andy. We see that what is portrayed as normal for women is to wear black lacy underwear, obsess about the clothes they wear, put on make-up and high-heels, and measure their food out carefully as to not gain weight. Women, according to the film, are therefore mostly sexuality and external appearance. Andy, on the other hand, does none of these things and is concerned

with none of those things exposing her as a non-feminine female. York in her analysis interprets this sequence as constructing Andy as an “everygirl,” but clearly the filmmakers are establishing a contrast here between normative and non-normative through setting her apart from the multiple examples shown (Frankel; York 14). This reduction of women to the appearance of femininity is also the reason Hollinger’s analysis of the film as a rejection of second-wave feminism doesn’t seem consistent. Hollinger interprets Miranda as the representation of second-wave feminism in her portrayal of the “hard-edged professional woman,” which Andy, as the representation of post-feminism, ultimately rejects (56). However, most of what Miranda enacts, and what Andy becomes compelled to do, is a performance of femininity. Thus, the emptiness of female performance is what is rejected, not second-wave feminism.

Guy, similarly, is gender-neutral. Guy's interaction with his love interest, Dawn (Michelle Forbes), a more masculine female, emphasizes this. While Dawn aggressively protects her parking space and territory from him, he simpers and apologizes for his ignorance. When they have drinks, Dawn swills her scotch on the rocks, while Guy sips his white wine. Guy is not portrayed as feminine per se but does not have the typical masculine traits implicit in gender roles.

As parents, Miranda and Buddy instill gender in their children. Shortly after the speech where Miranda tells Andy that she was disappointed in her, Andy decides she needs a make-over to keep her job. It is through Miranda's approving looks afterwards we know this is what Miranda wanted. Miranda's influence is nearly always indirect, or passive aggressive, an aggression style popularly associated with women. She only needs to pointedly look at Andy's comfortable work shoes to indicate Andy must change to high-heels.

Buddy more directly teaches Guy his gender and the central part of that gender is economic. In one tirade, Buddy tells Guy to “show a little back bone,” and “you gotta be a man to do this job” (Huang). Later, when discussing Dawn, Buddy gives him the following advice: “Shut up and listen. Women, they respond to one thing and one thing only: success. Now, this isn't just me talking; this is scientific-- sit down. This is scientific fact. It is primitive instinct for a woman like Dawn to choose a mate who can best provide for her needs, for her wants” (Huang). We see here that Buddy is clearly advocating essential differences between men and women, and these differences are reflected in their ability to work. Most importantly, he is reinforcing the modern male sex type of a man's value being tied to his job. It is through this speech Buddy convinces him that

Guy needs to be promoted to keep his girlfriend and the only way to do that is to follow Buddy.

It is through this parental influence that the bosses both manipulate and influence the identity of the main characters. One of the key developmental phases, according to Lacan, is the mirror stage, where a child begins to recognize their independence from their parent through visual recognition in the mirror (75-78). The mirror stage is the child's entrance into the symbolic order, producing a repression of otherness. The recognition is also a misrecognition producing a unified identity through identification with something outside self. This mirror recognition/misrecognition is one reproduced in cinema, creating the illusion of a unified subject covering the complexity of difference (Gledhill 167). The film-mirror as discussed here represses the difference of the spectator. In this instance, that same difference-repressed spectator then watches as the character becomes gendered and absorbed by the boss-parent's identity. As the spectator becomes a unified conforming subject, they then watch the protagonist do so, as well.

The entry into the workplace is portrayed in these films as a reverse mirror phase where the worker is integrated into the identity of the boss, particularly in terms of gender performance, in order to survive in the extremely competitive environment. Thus, a new misrecognition from identification is formed from an outside source, motivated by capitalist necessity. Hollinger calls Miranda the "all-powerful phallic mother" in her analysis (56). Andy's name becomes a central part of the struggle between her own identity and Miranda's. At the beginning of the film, Miranda refers to Andy as "the new Emily" or Emily, who is the other assistant (Emily Blunt) to imply she should be more like Emily, a glamorous, but selfish and stuck-up, young woman. She also is called "Miranda-girl" by others in the fashion world, showing her identity as dependent on Miranda. Guy, similarly, is known as "Buddy Ackerman's boy." Buddy strips him of that personality so he can replace it with another. One year into Guy's time with Buddy, he is the exact visage of Buddy. This is illustrated in a scene where Guy is sitting in Buddy's office chair, using Buddy's head-set and parroting Buddy's earlier tirade in order to berate a delivery man. Guy's loss of identity caused his hyper-masculine violence and the eventual alliance with Buddy at the end of the film. Andy, on the other hand, never completely loses her identity. In order to discover why, we must both examine the boss/parent character and their source of power.

Performing the Devil's Dance with the Devil's Pitchfork

Both boss characters enact gendered performances to exert their power over the protagonists. Feminist poststructuralist theory examines gender as a performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 183-95). Through performance, gender is not a category, but a continuous production (10). Butler noted that the anticipation of authority is what causes performance (*Gender Trouble* xv), meaning that the performance is in anticipation of future imagined sanctions. Buddy and Miranda's gendered performances create actual sanctions for Guy and Andy, exposing the audience to a concrete requirement for gender performance. According to Butler, most important to this performance is the heterosexual imperative (*Gender Trouble* 23-4). Thus, the performances are oriented towards traditional notions of heterosexual femininity and masculinity, specifically an emphasis on Andy's appearance and encouragement towards control and violence for Guy. This reduction of women to bodies is something Butler writes about: "The association of the body with the female works along magical relations of reciprocity whereby the female sex becomes restricted to its body, and the male body, fully disavowed, becomes, paradoxically, the incorporeal instrument of an ostensibly radical freedom" (*Gender Trouble* 16). And the equating of woman with appearing and male with doing is an old pattern in film noted by Mulvey.

Non-normative expressions, such as Guy and Andy's initial appearance in the film, problematize gender or create "gender trouble" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* xii) and thus must be taught to conform or driven from the workplace. In other words, performances that do not fit what is considered normal cause crises of identity in the inability to comprehend self for both the non-normative subject and those around the subject. Thus, it becomes a societal imperative to enforce normative performance.

This conceptualization of gender as performance is omnipresent in both films through the characters of Miranda and Buddy, consistent with Butler's repetitive embodied notion of performativity: "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being" (*Gender Trouble* 45). It is, in fact, the repetition of these messages that makes audiences susceptible to the gender performance as well. Miranda and Buddy perform the devil, it is a role they enact to get a desired effect from those over which they have power. But the characters perform the devil in very gender-specific ways.

The performances become most apparent when the performance is broken. Buddy puts on emotion, but a masculine, violent emotion. He will scream and throw things at Guy at one moment and, as soon as Guy is gone, calmly sit down and smile. As this performance is obviously a construction, the revealing of the unnaturalness to the audience could be a subversion of the naturalness of violence in masculinity. Something Butler calls for herself in her work (*Gender Trouble* 45-6). But such a subversion requires also an ability to understand the subject outside the very gendered system that constructed the subject. The audience cannot then benefit from this insight because they are presented with these messages within the gendered system of film. And the fact that Guy does not see this constructedness also makes the reality of that performance incomprehensible to him, causing him to internalize the violence, which he then enacts on Buddy. Buddy's performance of hypermasculinity and violence cripples Guy's identity, increasing his dependence on the stronger Buddy. The cycle the audience witnesses, however, shows how gender performance is learned.

Miranda is the opposite extreme. She wears masks to hide her emotions. Her masks evoke the notion of gendered performance as masquerade. Masquerade is a key part of female performance (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 62). The masquerade is always a "process of meaning construction requir[ing] that women reflect masculine power and everywhere reassure that power of the reality of its illusory autonomy" (61). For Butler, this means that women put on the masquerade or performance of what men are not. However, Doane, in looking specifically at film and female spectatorship, theorizes the mask as hiding any masculinity through a mask of femininity. "Womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed. ...the woman uses her own body as a disguise" (138-39). The masquerade simultaneously affirms femininity through enactment and is a threat to masculinity in its artifice.

Miranda's masquerade does not produce a version of femininity that is a challenge to masculinity, but rather an enactment of male-gendered performance and rejection of female performance to fit into a male space. Miranda's disguise is a reaction to the perceived emotional nature of women and male dominance of the workplace. Women in the business world are seen as having to "be like a man," and this is a version of that. But if we look more at her performance as a co-opting of male power, we can then again see parallels with Butler's discussion of female relationship to the phallus. "For women to 'be' the Phallus, means, then to reflect the power of the Phallus, to signify that power, to 'embody' the phallus, to supply

the site to which it penetrates, and to signify the Phallus through ‘being’ its Other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 59). Thus, Miranda’s enactment of masculine power becomes a confirmation of masculine power by reflecting it while at the same time re-affirming that power through the empty masquerade of that power, exposing the lack underneath.

The idea of wearing masks becomes very important in teaching Andy her gender. Make-up and clothes are portrayed as a key part of being a woman. Much of Andy's transformation is purely physical. This form of masking exposes both the heterosexual imperative within the performance by attempting to attract a male mate, as well as the emptiness of the performance. Performing female is performing a lack or absence of self. A nuanced example of this is a photo shoot Andy attends where the models wear animal masks meant to express: “the modern woman unleash[ing] the animal within to take on the big city” (Frankel). The implication here is that these women need to put on masks to take on the business world, which is represented by the city. The masks represent something that is supposed to be essential to them, but, in reality, it is just a mask. There is no animal within, but there is a necessary performance to survive. This shallow representation echoes Butler’s ultimate point about the masquerade: that it brings an emphasis on appearance and appearing (*Gender Trouble* 63).

For Miranda's world, the high-heeled shoe is a tool of power. High-heeled shoes establish women as part of the system, which Miranda runs. Andy's shoes are the first, and really only, thing Miranda insists Andy change right away. Andy identifies the girls at the magazine as “clackers” because of the sound their heels made on the marble. The advertising for the film even features a high-heel with a pitchfork as a stiletto. High-heels are citizenship. From this stand-point, it would appear that women's power is derived from sisterhood and solidarity. But a closer examination of the function of the high-heel exposes the lie in this logic. High-heels physically raise women higher off the ground and accentuate the most female parts through their positioning of the body. This illustrates a concentration on women's sexuality and appearance, a theme throughout the film. But most importantly, high-heels are unnatural and uncomfortable, yet women choose to put them on. Other scholars have noted high-heels’ symbolism of sexuality with a combination of a pocket (vagina) with spike (phallus) (Dundes 1516-7; Evans and Thornton 53). Here, again, we see that women’s power and performance is linked to appearance and sexuality and specifically heterosexuality. High-heels are a

symbol of the subservience of women, who choose to harm themselves in order to be a part of a man's world.

A Faustian Choice

Faust in German legend famously sold his soul to the devil to receive knowledge and treasure. Both characters in these films face a similar pact with their boss-from-hell. The Faustian choice both Andy and Guy face is not really selling their soul to the devil but selling their identity to a capitalist system and the gender roles dictated by it. Both Andy and Guy have love interests trying to pull them away from the system. On their first date, Dawn tries to convince Guy: "Look, if this time can be spent convincing you to do anything else with your life, to getting out while you are still whole. Then it is time well spent. Let me ask you a question. Why do you want this?" (Huang). Characters ask Guy what he wants no less than six times throughout the film. The entire film is built around this question. But it also is a deceptive question because, in the end, he really has no choice. After Guy kidnaps Buddy, Buddy reminds him that fairness has no place, not just in the business world, but in the world.

I don't make the rules, I play by them. What? Your job is unfair to you? Grow up. Way it goes. People use you? Life's unfair? Grow up. Way it goes. Your girlfriend doesn't love you? Tough [expletive]. Way it goes. Your wife gets raped and shot and they leave their unfinished beers..." (gets choked up) "...their stinkin' longnecks just lying there on the ground..." (recovers himself) "...So be it. Way it goes. (Huang)

The implication of this speech is that the system is not socially constructed but exists. It is life that made Buddy the way he is, not some boss that hazed him into it. Buddy's wife is many times alluded to throughout the film as the reason for his inhumanity and by extension hyper-masculinity. Buddy's house is introduced by showing, not the house itself, but a broken female figure, under which the key to Buddy's house lies, symbolizing that Buddy's hyper-masculinity is, in fact, derived from broken femininity.

Guy's final decision to cede his identity is symbolized in the decision of whether to shoot Buddy. The tipping point for Guy is the discovery that Dawn is going to sleep with Buddy to save Guy's job. Dawn appears at the end of the film

and tries to talk Guy out of shooting Buddy. Shooting Buddy would seem to be an annihilation of the identity he imposed on Guy, but Buddy realizes that the violence of such an act marks, in fact, an increase in his influence over Guy. The seeming choice is actually no choice at all. In shooting Buddy, he frees himself of Buddy, but has given into the violence; and in not shooting Buddy, Buddy will continue his influence over Guy. Either way it is an annihilation of Buddy's identity, similar to the non-choice of identity Butler describes as happening in the process of interpellation (*The Psychic Life of Power* 106-31): a choice between accepting oppression or annihilation of self. Buddy urges Guy to shoot: "And I'm trying to give Guy his [life]. ... All right, Guy. Let's finish this. Give it to me. Show me what you're made of. Show me what you've learned. Don't let me down, son. Everything I've taught you comes down to this" (Huang). This speech clearly shows that Buddy is trying to give birth to a son-figure who shares his hyper-masculine identity. In the end, it works. Guy doesn't shoot Buddy, but shoots Dawn instead. He not only fulfills his initiation through violence, but he annihilates his old identity by literally killing his last link to it. Throughout the film, Dawn symbolizes the last remnants of the Guy with whom she fell in love: the sincere, child-like Guy who works for the love of film-making and for the love of her. After shooting her and having proved himself to Buddy, however, the transformation is complete. Guy gets promoted and is successful, but the cost was ceding his identity completely to Buddy's hyper-masculinity and capitalist drive, acquisition of power for acquisition's sake, mirroring films such as *The Wolf of Wall Street*.

Andy has a similar conflict with her love interest, Nate (Adrian Grenier). But Andy's situation is complicated by the fact that she did not really change. Because in much of the film femininity is defined by external appearance, Andy is not required to change anything truly substantial. Instead, it is the act of conformity itself that is important. The first images of Andy show us everything we need to know. The film begins with a fogged mirror. Andy takes her hand and wipes away the fog to display an image of her brushing her teeth. The sequence says it all: she has power over her identity. She knows who she is. At the end of the film, she still knows who she is, but has a better haircut. This emphasis on physical transformation is one which is common in the chick flick genre of films, such as *Funny Face* (1957), *Moonstruck* (1987) or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (2002), but while those transformations were based in a heterosexual imperative to please a man (Hollinger 57), this transformation was a capitalistic imperative to conform

to workplace standards of femininity. We can already see Andy's position is vastly different from Guy's. Andy never needs Miranda to fill the void of identity that Buddy creates in Guy.

In any case, the film attempts to set up a choice between professional and personal life. The two are proposed as incompatible. Women cannot have it all and are reminded of that throughout the film. Miranda's husband leaves her presumably because she spends too much time at work, which makes her similar to the career women in films that came before (Boozer 75; Devereaux 341; Walsh 138). And so, women must make a choice, which is something both Nate and Miranda remind Andy. But when Miranda reminds Andy it is her mother-figure reminding her and therefore it carries more weight: "No, you chose. You chose to get ahead. You want this life? Those choices are necessary" (Frankel). At this point, Andy chooses to leave.

The key material point between these two endings is that Andy's "choice" is different than Guy's non-choice. Guy's identity is intrinsically linked to his job, whereas Andy's is not. The illusion of choice may be similar in that Andy, as she is, is barred from the workplace. Thus, her "choice" is to enact and embrace a foreign gender performance or retreat from public life. Both films, however, portray the "iron cage" of capitalism (Weber 121). This iron cage is the morality attached to work such that people's identity become tied to it. The films portray a gendered double standard in which the iron cage traps men into a gendered identity and bars women from participation. This double standard is expressed even within the same text. Dawn, the only woman in *Swimming with Sharks*, uses her sexuality or gender performance to get ahead, but then, as soon as she gains power, she takes a place outside the studio system and advocates against it. Nigel (Stanley Tucci), Miranda's male art director, is passed over for a job because of Miranda. Rather than getting mad, he keeps the faith:

NIGEL. When the time is right she'll pay me back.

ANDY. You sure about that?

NIGEL. No. But I hope for the best. I have to. (Frankel)

Nigel knows he has no choice, and has to work in the system. So the messages from the films is that men must sell their identity to survive, while women should leave.

Conclusion

These films pose answers to those in society that openly question our commitment to work weeks that stretch beyond sixty hours and failures of work/life balance (Slaughter). But those answers are just as troubling as the problem. The films show the workplace as a capitalist trap that annihilates identity. In both cases, the child-like protagonist was presented with the dilemma that conformity to gender norms and surrender of one's own identity is necessary for success. But the female protagonist was encouraged to leave, whereas the male protagonist couldn't leave. This portrayal is just another "recuperative strategy," (Devereaux 341) to steer the non-normative women away from the workplace. This further establishes a separate sphere of competition for men and women, as noted in most films about women in the workplace (Rothman, Powers, & Rothman 67-68), and also reinforces the sex segregation of work in the real world by normalizing the connection between the workplace and male identity through strong repeated mass media messages.

The performance of gender in these films supports existing poststructuralist feminist thought. But it is especially disturbing in the way the performance was portrayed as required. The messages of these films reinforce not the reality of gender roles, but the requirement that we enact them for success. For women, the roles were purely external, which dehumanizes women. Unlike other studies of the workplace, women's gender role is not portrayed as incompatible with work, but the conformity to gender performance is actually the true asset. This requirement to enact gender performance as part of a heterosexual imperative is particularly troubling at a time where we, as a society, are rediscovering the sexual harassment epidemic in our workplaces.

For men, the reliance on violence shown in the film is self-evidently damaging to society and male identity. The linking of male identity to economics, found in previous studies was also reflected here, which also is a dehumanization of men. Weber, in discussing the iron cage of capitalism, argues that it is the moral system of Protestantism that provides the motivation for supporting capitalism through hard work. I argue the moral gender system, supported by films such as these, does similar work.

These differences in messages could be a reflection of the intended audiences for the films. These films, although inspired by two writers' experience, are not a mere reflection of reality. They are part of a cultural system that gives men and

women gendered messages about how to behave in the workplace. *The Devil Wears Prada* is a chick lit film, marketed primarily to women, that tells women the workplace is not their sphere. As a chick flick, *The Devil Wears Prada* is part of a pattern that other scholars have found are “superficial sketches of female subjectivity that hype empowerment for women but have a ‘hollow quality’ because they take female equality as a given and associate women’s career achievement with loss and unhappiness” (Hollinger 56). Andy becomes the representation of women in the workplace and appears on the surface as the glamorized role model for women, but really reinforces the message that women do not belong in the workplace. And the message it is promoting with its protagonist’s actions is to privilege personal over professional because, according to the film, that is the more fulfilling life.

Swimming with Sharks could be interpreted as a masculinity-in-crisis film as it deals very plainly with an identity crisis. But we must ask ourselves, is it really masculinity that we should be worried about here? As evident in the film, masculinity is alive and well. In both films, it is humanity that is in crisis. The message of the films is the system cannot be fought; the films tell us we must change to adapt to it or we must give up our identities.

Works Cited

- Allen, Richard. "Analyzing Representations." *Imagining Women: Cultural Representations and Gender*, edited by Francis Bonner, Lizbeth Goodman, Richard Allen, Linda James, and Catherine King, Polity P, 1992, pp. 22-42.
- Baker, Brian Allen. *Masculinity in Fiction and Film: Representing Men in Popular Genres, 1945-2000*. Continuum, 2006.
- de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. Bantam Books, 1955.
- Boozer, Jack. *Career Movies: American Business and the Success Mystique*. U of Texas P, 2002.
- Brooks, Rosa. "Recline, Don't 'Lean in' (Why I Hate Sheryl Sandberg)." *The Washington Post*. 25 Feb. 2014, www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/she-the-people/wp/2014/02/25/recline-dont-lean-in-why-i-hate-sheryl-sandberg/.
- Butler, Judith. *The Psychic Life of Power*. Stanford UP, 1997.
- . *Gender Trouble*. Routledge, 1999.
- Cady, Kathryn. "Flexibility and Feminism: Attack on the Powersuited Woman." International Communication Association, 21 May 2008, Le Centre Sheraton, Montreal
- Carey, James W. *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society*. Unwin Hyman, 1989.
- Carr, Jay. "'Sharks' Sinks Its Teeth into Hollywood." *The Boston Globe*, 9 June 1995, p. 57.
- Creed, Barbara. "Welcome to the Feeding Frenzy." *The Age*, 2 Dec. 1995, p. 10.
- Crosley, Sloane. "Why Women Apologize and Should Stop." *The New York Times*. 23 June 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/23/opinion/when-an-apology-is-anything-but.html>.

- Devereaux, Mary. "Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers and the Gendered Spectator: New Aesthetics." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 48, no. 4, 1990, pp. 337-47.
- Didcock, Barry. "Devil You Know." *The Herald*, 12 Sept. 2009, p. 12.
- Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator." *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, New York UP, 2006, pp. 131-45.
- Dundes, Alan. "Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics." *MLN*, vol. 91, 1976, pp. 1500-33.
- Evans, Caroline, and Minna Thornton. "Fashion, Representation, and Femininity." *Feminist Review*, vol. 38, 1991, pp. 48-66.
- Frankel, David, director. *The Devil Wears Prada*. Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, 2006.
- Friedan, Betty. *The Feminine Mystique*. 1963. W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
- Gardiner, Judith Kegan. "Introduction." *Masculinity Studies and Feminist Theory: New Directions*, edited by Judith Kegan Gardiner, Columbia UP, 2002, pp. 1-30.
- Gilbert, Sophie. "The Movement of #MeToo." *The Atlantic*, 16 Oct. 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/10/the-movement-of-metoo/542979/>.
- Gledhill, Christine. "Pleasurable Negotiations." *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, New York UP, 2006, pp. 166-79.
- Gordon, Bryony. "The Devil Behind Her Prada." *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 June 2009, p. 21.
- Haskell, Molly. *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1974.
- Hollinger, Karen. *Feminist Film Studies*. Routledge, 2012.

- Huang, George, director. *Swimming With Sharks*. Cineville, 1994.
- Johnson, Christen A., and K.T. Hawbaker. "#MeToo: A Timeline of Events." *Chicago Tribune*, 15 Feb. 2018, <http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/ct-me-too-timeline-20171208-htmstory.html>.
- Judge, Mike, director. *Office Space*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1999.
- Kaplan, E. Ann. "Feminist Criticism and Television." *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, edited by Robert C. Allen, The U of North Carolina P, 1992, pp. 247-83.
- Kemp, Stuart. "The Star-makers." *The Observer*, 22 June 2008, p. 19.
- Lacan, Jacques, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Ecrits: The First Complete Edition in English*, translated by Bruce Fink, W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, pp. 75-81.
- Lauretis, Teresa de. *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Indiana UP, 1984.
- Le Marie, Trudie. "Fashion's a Devil of a Job." *Sunday Express*, 6 Oct. 2006, p. 56.
- Lloyd, Justine and Leslie Johnson. "The Three Faces of Eve: The Post-war Housewife, Melodrama, and Home." *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 7-25.
- Lucia, Cynthia. *Framing Female Lawyers: Women on Trial in Film*. U of Texas P, 2005.
- Mamet, David, director. *Glengarry Glen Ross*. New Line Cinema, 1992.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Screen*, vol. 16, no. 3, 1972, pp. 6-18.
- Nichols, Mike, director. *Working Girl*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1988.

- Panayoitou, Alexia. “‘Macho’ Managers and Organizational Heroes: Competing Masculinities in Popular Films.” *Organization*, vol. 17, no. 6, 2010, pp. 659-83.
- Pleck, Joseph H. “The Male Sex Role: Definitions, Problems and Sources of Change.” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 32, no. 3, 1976, pp. 155-64.
- Pleck, Joseph H. *The Myth of Masculinity*. The MIT P, 1981.
- Roman, Monica. “Welcome to Indiewood.” *Variety*, 16 July 1998, p. 15.
- Rothman, Stanley, Stephen Powers, and David Rothman. “Feminism in Films.” *Society*, vol. 30, no. 3, 1993, pp. 67-72.
- Salek, Thomas A. “Money Doesn’t Talk, It Swears: The Wolf of Wall Street as a Homology for America’s Ambivalent Attitude on Financial Excess.” *Communication Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 1, 2018, pp. 1-19.
- Schumacher, Joel, director. *Falling Down*. Warner Bros. Pictures, 1993.
- Scorsese, Martin, director. *The Wolf of Wall Street*. Paramount Picture, 2013.
- Slaughter, Anne-Marie. “A Toxic Work World.” *The New York Times*, 15 Sept. 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/20/opinion/sunday/a-toxic-work-world.html>.
- Smith, Stacey L., Marc Choueiti, Ashley Prescott, Katherine Pieper. “Gender Roles & Occupations: A Look at Character Attributes and Job-related Aspirations in Film and Television.” Geena Davis Institute on Gender and Media, http://annenbergl.usc.edu/sites/default/files/MDSCI_Gender_Roles_%26_Occupations_in_Film_and_Television.pdf
- Seidler, Victor J. “Men, Feminism and Power.” *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*, edited by Larry May and Robert A. Strikwerda, Littlefield Adas Quality Paperbacks, 1992, pp. 209-20.
- Stone, Oliver, director. *Wall Street*. Twentieth Century Fox, 1987.

- Tincknell, Estella and Deborah Chambers. "Performing the Crisis." *Journal of Popular Film and Television*, vol. 29, no. 4, 2002, pp. 146-55.
- Walsh, Andrea S. *Women's Films and the Female Experience, 1940-1950*. Praeger, 1984.
- Weber, Max. *The Protestant Ethic and the "Spirit" of Capitalism and Other Writings*. Penguin Books, 2002.
- Whitelaw, Anna. "Independently Wealthy." *The Age*, 4 Mar. 2006, p. 16.
- Winn, J. Emmett. *The American Dream and Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*. Continuum, 2007.
- York, Ashley Elaine. "From Chick Flicks to Millennial Blockbusters: Spinning Female-driven Narratives into Franchises." *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2010, pp. 3-25.
- Zacharek, Stephanie, Eliana Dockterman, and Haley Sweetland Edwards. "TIME Person of the Year 2017: The Silence Breakers." *Time*. 18 Dec. 2017, <http://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-2017-silence-breakers/>