

**WOMEN IN FILM:  
HOW HAS MARILYN MONROE BEEN PORTRAYED BY FILM CRITICS?**

**THESIS**

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**By**

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## DEDICATION

This is dedicated in honor of my family-  
my parents Floyd and Dana Thompson and  
my brother Shawn Thompson

and in loving memory of my grandparents  
James and Elizabeth Pearl Thompson and  
Lt. Col. (Ret.) Dan P. and Beatrice Alethea McGill.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

We are mesmerized by what we see. We are willing to stand in line, hour after hour just to gaze at them on screen. We want to have some part in this phenomenon, no matter how great or small that part may be. Perhaps no other form of art or entertainment has had such a grand effect on America and American culture as that of the film industry. We are not quite sure how to accept these characters we see on screen. Are they real? They must be real...or are they merely figments of our wildest fantasies? Contrary to what we have been programmed to believe, stars are not discovered the way that we see them on screen or in public. Endless meetings and planning are part of what we see. There are numerous staff members who deal with the smallest details of a stars' image. They trim, nip-and-tuck, safety pin, tug and squeeze whatever they have to for the star to be acceptable in our culture. The practice of the production team has made stars of yesterday and today a mere commodity. Simple economic principles come into play here as we see supply and demand- the production team supplies what the audience demands. The myth that is the star is made readily available to those who consume.

## **Objectives and Methodology**

The topic of this graduate research project is the portrayal of women in film, with a specific emphasis on Marilyn Monroe. The researcher expects to find the answer to the following questions:

1. How have women been portrayed in film?
2. How has Marilyn Monroe been portrayed in film?
3. How has Marilyn Monroe been rated by film critics?

The author has chosen this research topic in order to find the roots of the myth and the reasons as to why female film stars are and have been portrayed as they are, especially Marilyn Monroe. We have been captivated by this myth, this term, this commodity that is Marilyn Monroe. It is the author's goal to discover why even years after her death Monroe is an ever-present image in our culture. Monroe served her role as star as a fantasy to her audience. Men wanted her and women wanted to be her. Norma Jean Baker was transformed into Marilyn Monroe. The brunette was bleached into the blonde bombshell that we all know. When her name is spoken, the image of a mere person does not materialize in the mind, but rather a lifetime of triumph and heartbreak, love and scandal. How did the term Marilyn Monroe come to signify so much? The researcher wants to know if the Monroe that film critics saw during her career was the same Monroe that we see as a culture today.

The researcher has chosen to conduct an historical reception study for purposes of this research. An historical reception study is the research of old texts which relies on reviews. The researcher will look at reviews/critiques of Monroe's films from a select

group of reputable publications including *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Yorker*. In this study, the terms “review” and “critique” are used interchangeably.

### **Thesis Organization**

Chapter I gives the audience the basic premises for the research and sets the stage for entire thesis.

Chapter II explains the ideas of the leading feminist film theorists Molly Haskell, Laura Mulvey, and Richard Dyer. There appears in this chapter a digression to Freudian theory with the discussion of Mulvey’s theory. Also included is the science of feminist film theory in which the audience will look at the ideas E. Ann Kaplan.

Chapter III explains how women have been portrayed in film. This is a very general look at their portrayal and does not include how Marilyn Monroe was portrayed.

Chapter IV is a biography of Monroe. An understanding of her life outside of film is essential for an understanding of her portrayal in film.

Chapter V gives the reader an explanation of the methodology used for the research. The historical reception study is explained in detail.

Chapter VI is the analysis of the film reviews/critiques of the 11 films. The four aforementioned publications were used for this analysis.

Chapter VII gives the implications, and contributions of this research. Recommendations for further study are also given.



## CHAPTER II

### FEMINIST FILM THEORY

The roots of this research are grounded in feminist film theory. Leading theorists have proven useful in studies of Monroe throughout the years. They have given us a basis for which to view the portrayal of females, particularly Monroe. However, there has yet to be a study that examines the Monroe myth. Just how is it that Monroe has had such staying power in our culture? I suspect that the ways in which our chosen film critics saw her is not the way in which we see her today. Thus is the great importance of this research. Important in feminist film theory are the evaluations of Molly Haskell (1973), Laura Mulvey (1975) and Richard Dyer (1986).

*From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (1973) is Haskell's work that gave substance and reason to the theory of feminist film. The book looks at the ways in which women have been portrayed in film in past years. Haskell traces the birth of the images of women approach in film critique in the early 1970s. The author argues time and again that women have and are being exploited in the film industry by the roles in which they are cast. She believes that there has been a slow degeneration in screen roles for women.

As mentioned previously, Haskell applies the images-of-women approach to criticism. "Here we are today, with an unparalleled freedom of expression, and a record

number of women performing, achieving, choosing to fulfill themselves, and we are insulted with the worst- the most abused, neglected, and dehumanized-screen heroines in film history,” Haskell was quoted (*Contemporary Authors Online*, 2002, ¶ 1). She looks at women in film throughout the decades and Monroe enters in the 1950s. Haskell had strong feelings as to what Monroe did for the advancement, or in her opinion, the damage that she did for future actresses. It seemed as though innocence was no longer charming, thus the advent of the good girl/bad girl image. She also looks at the exploitation of Monroe’s dumb blonde image by some directors. Haskell believes that Monroe exploited her sexuality and made a fool of herself over men. As she did this, she aroused jealousy and contempt. Because of this, many women have canonized her as a martyr to male chauvinism.

In studying Haskell’s approach to film theory, we realize that her analysis is of great benefit to our research. Her historical study gives one the insight as to how roles for women have for the most part become increasingly negative. This fact is a great basis for the research. However, for specific purposes of this research, Haskell’s approach does not answer all of our questions. One criticism of Haskell’s approach is that she greatly contradicts herself in saying that despite the humiliation that female film stars face, there is a great threat faced by these less than human roles due to the images of the stars who portray them. For example, in discussing stars such as Bette Davis, Joan Crawford, Katharine Hepburn, and several others, she concludes that “the images we retain of them are not those of subjugation or humiliation; rather, we remember their immediate victories, we retain images of intelligence and personal style and forcefulness” (Rabinowitz, 1990, ¶ 8). More importantly to this specific research, Haskell does not tell

us why Monroe has retained her iconic status to this date. Though the drawbacks of Haskell's research certainly do not make her approach unreliable, it is most definitely necessary that more research be done in order to divulge the roots of the myth.

Mulvey (1975) facilitates the use of psychoanalytic theory and says that an advantage of using this form of critique was the ability to have a clearer understanding of the status-quo. Her approach uses psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon in *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). Mulvey says the female role in film is twofold: she is symbolic of "castration threat" and she elevates the "child to the symbolic" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 28). In order that a complete understanding of Mulvey's approach may be achieved, one must first digress somewhat into Freudian theory.

One must look at the psychological basis from which fetishism and voyeurism stem according to Freud. The following explanation has been gathered from E. Ann Kaplan's *Women and Film, Both Sides of the Camera* (1983). Sigmund Freud gave us the idea of the Oedipal complex. Freud believes that the myth is the representation of the inevitable fantasy of the typical growing child. The following explanation has given past and present feminist film theorists a basis from which to operate in their criticism. In the pre-Oedipal phase, the male child is considered to be one with his mother and has no recognition of her as Other. As the male child moves from the pre-Oedipal phase to the phallic phase, he becomes aware of the presence of the father. In the positive Oedipal phase, the male child loves mother and hates father, as father is a direct threat; he takes mother for himself. This phase ends upon cognizance that his mother is castrated, as he imagines that originally all humans must have had a penis. This discovery sends the male child away from his mother and towards his father because the association with a

castrated being could endanger his own organ. Identification is finally made with the father whom the child strives to be like and begins the search for someone like his mother. Ironically, Freud does not give as much consideration to the Oedipal crisis of the female child. It seems that the female child turns away from the mother as a result of penis envy. She blames her mother for her castration. The female child thus tries to get from the father what she is lacking from her mother. She sees a correlation between a child and penis and thus begins the quest for someone like her father with which to bear a child. Kaplan gives reference to Nancy Chodrow's *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (1978). In this study Chodrow argues that because the female child is not able to replace a mother, as the male child is able to do with his wife, the female child remains pre-Oedipally attached to the mother through adulthood.

It seems that this Oedipal crisis on the part of the male is therefore the root of pleasure for males viewing film. For example, if one looks at the Freudian term fetishism, the viewer will see that it is a reference to the perversion by which men strive to discover the penis in the woman. This grants them erotic satisfaction. The underlying fear of castration is a large part of male fetishism in regards to the cinema because any sort of sexual excitement is impossible with someone who does not have a penis or something that is representative of one. In terms of the cinema, the female body in its entirety may be fetishized in order to overcome this fear. Another way in which pleasure is found on the part of the male in cinema is through the means of voyeurism and exhibitionism. Voyeurism as defined by Freud is received erotic pleasure from watching someone without being seen, for example, the case of the "Peeping Tom." Exhibitionism

is erotic pleasure from showing off one's body or parts of the body to another person. The pleasure is derived from being seen or seeing one's own body on the screen. Voyeurism is a perversion that is active on the part of the male viewer in terms of the female body being the object of the male gaze. Exhibitionism on the other hand, is a passive practice.

Mulvey looks at the triangular apparatus in which women are looked at in film. The gaze to which she continually refers comes from the camera itself, the male characters within the narrative, and the male audience members. This is why the female body is fetishized and the male is the constant voyeur (Rabinowitz, 1990).

Mulvey's approach is quite important to our analysis on Monroe in that her constant "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Rabinowitz, 1990, ¶ 2) was one of Monroe's character traits. Mulvey was once quoted as saying that "the cinematic codes have structured our absences to such an extent that the only choice allowed to us is to identify either with Marilyn Monroe or the man behind me hitting the back of my seat with his knee" (Rabinowitz, 1990, ¶ 3). Psychoanalytic theory is an excellent means of breaking down audience perceptions, but the usage of Mulvey's theory ends there for purposes of our research. Mulvey is not able to tell us how Monroe reached star status or exactly what audiences thought of Monroe. She is not able to offer any basis for change. In other words, due to the fact that she does employ the use of psychoanalytic theory, she reaches a point at which she is able to explain feminist film theory in any greater detail.

Dyer (1986) does get a bit closer to aiding in our research, in part because of an emphasis on cultural studies in the 1980s, rather than the popular psychoanalytic studies of the 1970s. He says that Monroe's symbolic meaning far outruns what actually

happens in her films. She was understood through her sexuality, first and foremost. In the 1950s there were specific ideas as to what sexuality actually meant. Monroe acted on those specific ideas. Due to the fact that they mattered so much, she was taken to the forefront as a sex symbol. Dyer echoes Mulvey in pointing out the fact that she is always set up for the camera as an object of the male gaze. Still we must conduct further research in order to have a more complete understanding on Monroe and her image.

### **The Science of Feminist Film Theory**

Throughout this research, the author has found that one of the most valuable sources of information in analysis of feminist film theory has been that of the aforementioned Kaplan writing, *Women & Film, Both Sides of the Camera* (1983). Kaplan gives an astounding analysis of the essentials of understanding the basis of feminist film theory. Pulling from areas of history, philosophy, and psychology, she gives an accurate, scientific description of the ways in which women have been portrayed in film through the years. Though the date of publication was some 20 years ago, the basis upon which she built her research is so very strong that it still remains not only a permanent fixture in feminist film theory, but also a milestone for film theorists and women alike.

Kaplan begins her definition of terms in the writing with the significance of the classical (dominant, Hollywood) cinema. She defines this type of cinema as a feature-length narrative film with sound that is both made and distributed by the Hollywood studio system. Central themes to the classical cinema are genres of film, stars, producers, and directors. It seems that these elements are seen from product to product, time and again. The genres, stars and producers are differentiated from the directors in that the

first three have everything to do with selling. For example, the public demands particular stars and particular genres of movies. Producers thus strive to provide what the public viewing audience wants. Kaplan believes that directors and authorship are variable elements in the world of film. Directors, she says, are responsible for some of the contradictions within the system, due to the fact that their relationship is directly connected with the commercialism of the whole. They do, however, play a large part in the system, both financially and ideologically. For purposes of this research, it should be mentioned that their ideological implications seem far more reaching, in that the ideology of the film is reflected through the director.

Delving a bit further into Kaplan's beliefs, we look at the idea of authorship. This concept gives autonomy to particular directors. This idea actually arose in the 1950's in France, thus many times the word *auteur* is used. It became practice for the director's work to be looked at critically for common features, features that were said to reflect the individual's special "world view" (Kaplan, 1983, p. 12). Encompassing the four elements of the classical cinema is that of the cinematic apparatus as a whole. This concept refers to all elements of the cinema, including the economic, technical, psychological, and ideological dimensions. Some film critics have put more of an emphasis on the position of the spectator. The viewer seems to create the film as it is watched. A particular pleasure arises on the part of the viewer from what is seen on the screen. This occurs because of the apparent dependence of the cinema on the psychoanalytic mechanisms of fetishism and voyeurism, which will both be looked at in greater detail.

Through this explanation, Kaplan brings to light a very important aspect of the cinema. Often referred to as the male gaze, scopophilia, sexual pleasure in looking, is extremely relevant to cinema and this research. Critics of psychoanalysis argue that the dream state very similar to that of the state of early childhood occurs in the cinema. In no other art form is this regression so prevalent as it is in film. Reasons for this regression include the darkness of the room in which a film is normally viewed, the control of the spectators gaze by the aperture of the camera and the projector, and the fact that one is watching a series of images in motion rather than ones that are static. The act of gazing in cinema helps create the pleasure that as we have thus far discussed has erotic origins. Kaplan says the gaze is built upon the ideas of sexual difference as defined by culture. Once again, Mulvey's idea of the three looks, or gazes, comes into play. There is the gaze within the film itself, in which the men gaze at the women. The women are thus, objects of the gaze. The second is that of the male spectator; he is automatically identified with the gaze of the male in the film itself. Thus the woman is once again objectified on the screen. Finally there is the gaze of the camera in terms of the actual filming of the woman.

Kaplan also explains the terms of image, ideology, and representation, as they apply to feminist film criticism. The images, or what the audience sees when viewing a film is the most important aspect of this and other feminist film research; if the images did not exist, society would have no basis upon which to make its comparisons between the constructed world of films and what is reality. Image can be defined for purposes of this research in two ways. First, it can be viewed in accordance with the types of role that are played by characters. For example, a typical female character may be that of the



housewife or the prostitute. There is a comparison made by society between the representation and what is actually a role in society. A problem arises, however, when there is a failure to realize that the image is a construction, a representation only, and not necessarily reality. The other means by which the image is defined has a less scientific base and stems more from the practice of cinematography. It deals with filming, the distance of the subject from the camera, point of view, etc. Thus, an ideology is not a reference to beliefs that a society consciously holds, but rather to myths that the society actually lives by. Representation is the actual image that Hollywood manufactures for the viewers. As an audience we fail to realize that what we see on screen is actually constructed, rather we see the images as natural and real. In this lapse of reality, the viewer is able to engage in the mechanisms of pleasurable cinema, fetishism and voyeurism.

Discussed previously is how Monroe fits into the realm of feminist film theory through the ideas of Mulvey, Haskell, and Dyer. She has been loved and hated by audience members and critics alike for decades. However, new research must be conducted in order to discover the answers to the present research questions. Before a stringent analysis of Monroe's portrayal in film and portrayal by her critics can be conducted, one must first answer the broad question as to how the female gender has been portrayed in film throughout the past years.

## CHAPTER III

### HOW WOMEN HAVE BEEN PORTRAYED IN FILM

We have thus far looked at the scientific reasoning behind the ways in which women are portrayed in film. To the average viewer, however, Freudian theory does not immediately come to mind when watching Susan Sarandon in *Thelma and Louise* (1991) or Marilyn in *Some Like it Hot* (1959). It seems that the greater part of the audience accepts what they see as natural and lifelike. Apparently there is an overwhelming assumption that just because a particular role for a woman exists, it must be true to life—a role for a woman could not possibly be created. In other words, the roles designed for women must have been based upon something that truly existed at one time or in the present. As our theorists tell us, the roles are a part of what our culture has accepted as right and true. There is no distinction between what we see in everyday life in regards to the role that women play in our society and what we as an audience see on the big screen. As discussed previously, we see the traditional role of the wife and mother not only in American homes but on the screen as well. This is once again due to audience need and want to be voyeurs of the female sex. Now it is important that we study just how women are portrayed and categorized in film and how our culture perceives them. There are particular classes or genres of film into which women have been placed and continue to find themselves.

## **Women in film**

*Reel Knockouts* (2001), edited by Martha McCaughey and Neal King, gives the world of women in film a wonderful resource for which to look at a commonly unthought of genre of film: violent women. Women linked to violence in film have appeared time and time again since the days of classic Hollywood horror films and film noir to the more modern road films of the 1990s (McCaughey and King, 2001). No matter when this female violence appeared throughout film history, however, there has undoubtedly been a black and white issue dealing with how they are perceived. Violent women are either terribly villainous or able to save the world from any type of harm. No matter the case, whether the violent acts are committed for good or evil, the outcome is the same: any act of violence committed by a woman “because done by a woman, falls below the standards of human decency” (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 2). Our culture has been programmed to see women in reference to nonviolence and the spread of happiness rather than fighting or killing. It is perfectly permissible for men on the other hand to be equated with aggression and violence. Ironically, even our society’s own feminist subculture chooses when it wishes to accept or reject these female stereotypes. McCaughey and King point out the fact that most feminists oppose violence and think it patriarchal and oppressive. Still they many times enjoy movie scenes in which a woman is able to defend herself, save the world throughout the course of her day, get revenge, and ultimately get away with it. This double standard is what continues to make the world of females in film extremely confusing for both the female stars and for the audience.

They seem to believe that in more recent times, it has been a bit more acceptable for women to be portrayed in films with some sort of so-called mean, violent aspect. We assume that this is permissible because of the change of belief in our culture. For example, the 1990s brought about the resurgence of *Terminator* (19 ). In this case we see the female body as a symbol of strength in direct result of the growing movement for better health and fitness at that time.

McCaughey and King say that another cultural shift was in that of the anti-rape movement. Women were no longer going to be the victims of male power and violence. Through wide media coverage, the nation understood that women were going to fight for themselves and each other. A perfect example of this would be the film *Thelma and Louise*; a woman is ready and willing to kill the man who attempts to assault and presumably try to rape her friend.

We also saw changes as women were flooding the workforce. Females began to feel and be less dependent on men. These professionals demanded better wages and would not tolerate sexual harassment in the workplace. "The feminist movement...also made those professional women seem tougher, meaner, mouthier, and more likely to pick up weapons when attacked" (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 5). Keep in mind that the type of strong/violent women (our culture seems to use these descriptions interchangeably at times) discussed were true to life. They existed. What were the implications for women in film? Our culture placed "violent women (as heroes or villains in its movies)" (McCaughy and King, 2001, p. 5). What resulted from this portrayal of women in film was a result of years of critics complaining that women in movies were objectified by men. The critics finally got what they asked for. Finally women were seen

as strong and ready to defend themselves. The reality was quite the contrary, however. There were still many sects of critics that criticized the women in film behaving badly as an inaccurate reflection of women in general. In other words, they were criticized for not being the passive, nice women that they were supposed to be. Still others believed that the portrayal of these violent women was just too male-like. In short, women are left in the same position of inaccurate portrayal as they have been since the inception of film: the role they play is ambiguous.

McCaughy and King's explanation as to why many feminist film critics and the like do not believe that it is permissible for women in film to be portrayed as violent is that "the violent female characters are too unrealistic, too sexy, too emotional, and too co-opted" (McCaughy and King, 2001, p.12). They examine these four charges that have been made by feminist critics and many others over the years.

### **Women in the Movies are Too Unrealistic**

Women in film with super-human strength have become targets for criticism. Many critics believe that roles for women that entail a type of physical strength is just another way of giving in to the objectified male fantasies. Women are in a sense a part of the "phallic crowd" (McCaughy and King, 2001, p. 13). Once again we as an audience are not sure how to differentiate the lines between what we see on screen and what is reality. Could women with true physical strength actually exist in our world? Men are wondering if the physical strength that is portrayed on screen could actually become something enacted upon them by a woman in real life. Women lose again in the sense that even the feminists do not believe that this unrealistic portrayal of women is helping in the feminist cause. If anything, it seems that the cause is set back due to the

discrediting of a so-called unrealistic woman in film. Following are several interesting and impactful quotes from well-known women in film found in *Reel Knockouts* (2001). Susan Sarandon, a lead actor from *Thelma and Louise*, said the following: “What we see in the media is closer to a man’s idea of what women are. Women want to see things that are more surprising and truthful-not so sugarcoated” (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 13). This appears to be correct in terms of what women want to see. Hardly is a woman able to physically overcome a man in a battle of strength, a sign of a role being sugarcoated. Neither is Sarandon’s character in *Thelma and Louise* in which she does murder a man for attacking her best friend. However, there comes the decision that must be made as to whether or not giving women what they want in film is actually contributing to a continued objectified male fantasy. Is the risk worth setting back the feminist movement?

“Women want a variety of fantasies. It’s nice to lose yourself in another woman’s life, but it has to be a real woman, not a man’s creation,” said actor Sandra Bullock (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 13). Here we have a female actress focusing on the fantasies of the female viewer. Upon reading this quote, the author of this research does not believe that the fantasies alluded to by Bullock have anything to do with sexual fantasy. Ironically, in terms of male fantasy in film, the majority of times, one is alluding to sexualized, objectified image of a woman. Martha Coolidge, a female director feels that people want to see more realistic roles for women.

I think women want to see women portrayed in a more realistic way, that’s all. It doesn’t mean that you can’t have bad guys as women, but I kind of resent that the

big breakthrough was, 'Hey, let's make the really bad guys women. That fulfills another male fantasy: Women as Monster.' (p. 13)

Coolidge brings to light a very valid point. Would it be possible for there to be a happy medium for the portrayal of women? In essence, Coolidge is saying that it is completely permissible for women to be portrayed as evil or violent. Basically, there are certain truths in roles that portray women in contradiction to the typical passiveness that normally haunts female actors. However, it is not at all permissible to portray women as the root of all that is unclean and impure. This practice only sets women back in film and more importantly in society as they become yet another type of male fantasy, the female monster. Some actresses have put an end to any type of negative portrayal in their careers whatsoever: "This is a business run by guys who have fantasies about women and who want women to be a certain way. My way of dealing with it is to not be a part of it," (McCaughey and King, 2001, p.14) said actor Mariel Hemingway.

McCaughey and King include an excerpt from an interview with actor Jodie Foster about her role as FBI agent Clarice Starling in *The Silence of the Lambs* (1991). The interview is an example of the happy medium that was mentioned earlier. Foster stated the following:

I think that here's something very important about having a woman hero who's a true woman hero in the most archetypal sense of the word, and yet doesn't have to clothe herself in men's clothing. She's not six-foot-two; she doesn't kill the dragon by being mightier. She actually does it because of her instinct, because of her brain, and because somehow she's seen something, a detail that other people have missed. And that's a real side of female heroism that should be applauded

and should be respected...Clarice is a real female hero, not a bad imitation of a male hero. (p. 14).

Foster goes on to explain in an additional interview the importance of having female characters that are real to viewers. "Male fantasy is interesting terrain...Nobody is saying 'Don't make movies about male fantasy,' or 'Don't make movies about women who are complex and evil.' The thing to stress is that you want to create characters that are real" (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 14).

The only remaining question is what 'real' actually means. Are we to create characters that are real to the male viewing audience or characters that are real to the women playing them. Even more importantly, what about creating characters that are real to the female viewing audience? Where is the pleasure for women?

"I would like to see more "real women" portrayed in movies-vulnerable, strong, sexy, intelligent and full of the contradictions common to most women," (McCaughey and King, 2001, p. 13) said actor Natasha Richardson. In analyzing this quote by Richardson, there is a certain sense that Hollywood might be "getting it," understanding that females are not objects to be ogled, that women need roles that challenge the stereotypes that have followed them for years.

### **Women Movies are Too Sexy**

Sharon Stone is famous for her role as murderer Catherine Tramell in the film *Basic Instinct* (1992). She literally gets away with murder, several of them. Is she so unbelievable because she is attractive? Many find it hard to believe that any role played by a Hollywood beauty cannot possibly be representative of a killer character. If one were to overlook the fact that Stone's character was very attractive, one would notice that



fact that Tramell was a savvy businesswoman and an intelligent, successful writer.

“Maybe violent women fail even when they succeed” (McCaughy and King, 2001, p.16).

Besides being criticized for aspects of physical beauty, many strong women in movies are criticized for the fact that they become phallic symbols as well. For instance a female playing the role of a police officer seemingly becomes an object of the male fantasy when she is carrying a gun. This gun is not merely a means of self-defense for the female but it automatically becomes a phallic symbol in the film. McCaughey and King wonder if the fact that a female character is sexy detracts from her toughness. It very well may, but in a totally different but related aspect of the film world, movies with unattractive stars historically do not fare as well at the box office as those who have the “sexy” cast.

### **Women in Film are Too Emotional**

Is FBI agent Starling not as talented and intelligent an agent because she is fearful of what she will find while trying to catch a killer? Fear knows no gender, so it is doubtful that this emotion is to be a hindrance to her job. Many critics feel that maternal instincts are very detrimental to the feminist film cause. However, it seems unrealistic to rid a female character of maternal instincts due to the fact that the female is the only gender that is able to be maternal. It seems fitting that these emotional instincts would either be accepted because the character is a female or be incorporated into the overall character (McCaughy and King, 2001).

### **Women in Film are too Co-opted**

McCaughy and King address the point that in addition to being too unrealistic, too sexy and too emotional, female characters in movies are also too co-opted. They tell us that some critics have noticed an upholding of the law by female cop characters that is

much more rigorous than that of their male counterparts. Some feminists believe that this is just another way to make females give into a patriarchal system that constantly tries to repress women. Criticism has also come out of white females characters overseeing groups of minority men, as does the character of Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1986). Does this inadvertently portray white female characters as racist? We are basically right back where we started. We remain programmed to believe that women can only play a certain type of role and that role must be defined by strict, black and white guidelines.

### **Genres of Women in Film**

#### **Woman as Stripper**

Women have long been given the role as strippers in film. Immediately our Freudian theory of the male gaze is brought to mind, as is the picture of a scantily clad woman dancing on a stage with hordes of men gazing at her. The other gaze of the camera stealthily follows her across the stage, as do the eyes of the men in the audience. The three male gazes are blatantly present. The woman is objectified for the world to see. Jeffery A. Brown says in his writing, *If Looks Could Kill: Power, Revenge and Stripper Movies* (2001) that the stripper character is the ultimate example of Mulvey's (1975) "famous concept of feminine value as 'to-be-looked-at-ness.'" Mulvey describes the ways in which woman is displayed as follows:

[T]he woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. For instance, the device of the showgirl [or even more obviously, the stripper]

allows two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. (p. 27).

Brown raises an interesting point as to with whom the power lies in the stripper genre. Normally one would speculate that the power is totally within the hands of the male. However, in these types of films, the power seems to be with the stripper herself. In most cases, the male spectator in the film is blinded by the erotic nature of the female, almost entranced. This power that she holds over him is the ultimate cause of his downfall and sometimes even his death. Historically, films such as *The Blue Angel* (1936), *The Stripper* (1963), *Showgirls* (1995), and *Striptease* (1996) have dealt with this apparent trance that the male falls into. Some critics however, believe that these female strippers are not really females at all. Rather they are men in drag (Brown, 2001). Symbolically, these females represent the male in that they are usually mentally strong women, as well as physically strong creatures that are able to fight off the male attacker or defend a stripper friend from an attack. Carol J. Clover (1992) calls the heroine in these types of films “Final Girl” and she is always symbolically androgynous. For example, the character may have a boy’s name and is able to physically overcome a possible male attacker. With this strength, she becomes masculine. Another scholar, Peter Lehman (1993), believes that by a character avenging any wrongdoing, which usually occurs in the stripper-revenge/rape-revenge films, it is suggested that “avenging women are really men.” Brown does not agree with the two above-mentioned scholars in that he believes that the women are inherently female as they should be.

They exercise power over the men, both physical and visual/sexual power, in a manner that at least semiotically validates the possibility of female on-screen

heroics...To describe tough female characters as performing masculinity to the point of becoming 'men-in drag' undercuts the stereotype-breaking potential of these figures. (p. 58).

The final point that Brown makes is the semiotic device of the phallic symbol. Guns and pistols, stilettos and feathers are all symbols within a typical stripper film. Once again we see the scopophilia of the male during the ritual dance as he first realizes the lack of penis and substitutes the phallus with another symbol. Mulvey says that "Woman as representation signifies castration, inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat" (Mulvey, 1975). Brown tells us that the fetishization does not negate the castration anxiety, but rather it exacerbates the anxiety. The phallic woman that the men see is feared, yet wanted.

#### **Woman as the Lawman(woman)**

Not until the late eighties and early nineties did the female law officer emerge as an independent rather than a partner to a male cop or his love interest. Carol M. Dole describes this new officer in her writing *The Gun and the Badge, Hollywood and the Female Lawman* (2001). Dole tells us that the women she discusses are "triple empowered: by their central position in the narrative, by the symbolically potent gun, and by their status as officers of the law" (Dole, 2001, p.78). Once again we have the conflict for the woman cast in the role of the law enforcer, as well as the inherent problem that comes along with this casting for the entire gender. The audience's expectations of the "good woman-modest, faithful, virtuous, cooperative, and deserving of protection-come most clearly into conflict with expectations for the action hero-fearless, independent, physically dominant, and the protector of others" (Dole, 2001, p. 79).

Many early female law officers of the 1970's were "hard women" who spoke their minds bluntly, did not mind shooting their guns, and were sexually assertive. Dole brings to our attention five films from the 1980s and 1990s that are of particular interest: *Fatal Beauty* (1987), *Betrayed* (1988) *Impulse* (1990), *Blue Steel* (1990), *V.I. Warshawski* (1991). All five films seem to keep women in accordance to their traditional role of femininity and all that comes with this. However, it also seems that these movies were successful in not placing women in battle against men unlike woman as stripper films. The main characters in the films are not seen as aggressive but rather as defensive-defensive in a way that they are protecting the weak. Ironically, however, the weak do not include males, but rather "women and children, ideally female children" (Dole, ?). One character joins the police force to protect women such as her mother who have abusive husbands and another protects a young girl whose mother and stepfather are trying to murder her. An important point that Dole makes is that unlike many of the male cop films of the same period, the female cops do not have spouses. Having a husband would most probably put the female in a position of higher power than her husband, thus directly challenging the role of female as an integral part of the family unit. A lack of spouse also makes the female cop sexually available to males. For example, in *Blue Steel*, the female cop is unknowingly dating the exact murderer she is tracking. In *Betrayed*, the cop finds herself falling in love with the leader of an extremist group she is infiltrating. Obviously this sexual availability adds an element of danger that we do not witness in male cop films. Back to the recurring and ever-present theme of castration anxiety, it seems that these films bring out the possession of the phallic gun to the

forefront. However, wittiness and jokes about this theme take some of the pressure off of the women having the phallus and the men being threatened.

Many times the films that put female cops in the lead were unsuccessful at the box office for some reason or another. One film that did surpass box office expectations and earned Jodie Foster an Oscar for Best Actress was *Silence of the Lambs*. This milestone drama won praise from male and female critics alike. In fact, Foster said that she was happy to have played the role of a feminist hero. How was this film different from the other female cop films of the past? Dole believes that the film “diffuses the threat” (Dole, 2001, p. 87) of the female penis through a number of clever strategies. Clarice Starling (Foster) defends females in the film, like the female cop characters that came before her. She is also seen as the daughter, as her father was also a cop. The daughter image remains as we see distorted father figures in her “professional mentor, Jack Crawford, [and] her intellectual mentor Hannibal Lector” (Dole, 2001, p. 87). This is where the likenesses to the past films end, however. The frequent sexual vulnerability that we have witnessed in the past is not part of Starling’s character. She absolutely will not act as a sex object. Her power is limited by her small size, which signals a lack of physical power. She is presented from the very beginning of the film as a potential victim and constant student frequently addressing her male superiors as ‘sir’. Starling’s phallic gun is never used except in self-defense against man, which once again makes her less of a threat. It was even mentioned by Dole that the character does not even scream when it seems appropriate to do so in a horror film. Starling is an intelligent, goal-oriented female who is able to think on her feet.

Ironically, the movie's success was dependent on the fact that the power of a female cop had to be hidden, or shrunken in ratio to the overkill of power that we have seen in the past. Starling had to be played as a more demure version of what we expect to see from a cinematic female cop in order that her phallic status not offend or become a threat to the male viewing audience.

In summary, McCaughy and King reiterate the fact that in general, women are portrayed unfairly in film. Not only are they victims of the male gaze, but women are also chastised by their own feminist counterparts. The points made in *Reel Knockouts* grant the researcher a grand basis with which to view women in film on a more specific level. That is, to view Marilyn Monroe specifically as she was portrayed in film and more importantly by her critics.

## CHAPTER IV

### MARILYN MONROE

In order to understand the ways in which Monroe was portrayed, thus understanding the ways in which our culture and critics perceived her, one must look at an in-depth history of her life. Her biography is extremely important to this research because as we shall see, it seems that her life greatly affected the ways in which her audience, both male and female, saw her.

Though it is written in many texts that her last name was Baker, more recent publications list her birth certificate name as Norma Jeane Mortensen (McDonough, 2002). Her mother Gladys Baker had previously been married to a man by the last name of Mortensen, but Marilyn always denied that he was her father. Norma Jeane was born on June 1, 1926 (Cunningham, 1998). Gladys Baker sent the baby to a foster home before she was a mere two weeks old. By January of 1935, Gladys Baker was diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic and sent to the Norwalk State Asylum (McDonough, 2002). She would spend the rest of her life in and out of hospitals. Grace McKee, a good friend of Gladys', took care of Norma Jeane momentarily, but because she was a single woman, she took her to the Los Angeles Orphans Home Society. In 1937, McKee married and once again assumed custody of the young girl. However, Norma Jeane was moved between foster homes and the orphanage over the next few years. Ana Lower, an aunt of McKee, was one of Norma Jeane's foster mothers. Later in life, Marilyn was quoted, as



saying that Lower was “the first person in the world I ever really loved. She was the only person who loved and understood me” (Cunningham, 1998, p. 108).

In the first of many failed relationships with men, Norma Jean married James Dougherty when she was a mere sixteen years of age (McDonough, 2002). While working on an assembly line job at the Radioplane Company in Burbank, she was photographed for a story for *Yank* magazine dealing with the help that women were providing on the home front during World War II. It was at this point that her modeling career was launched. She was soon signed to the Blue Book Model Agency, at which time a strenuous six months was taken in order to straighten her wavy hair and bleach it blonde. On July 17, 1946, Norma Jean signed her first studio contract with Twentieth Century Fox. Norma Jeane Mortensen then decided to change her name to Marilyn after a beautiful Broadway star and Monroe as it was her mother’s maiden name. Marilyn Monroe as we know her was officially born. Amidst all of this, Monroe divorced James Dougherty, the first of three divorces she would have. She was able to land a few small film roles over the next couple of years, but nothing that was extremely memorable. In fact, in 1947 her contract with Fox was not renewed (McDonough, 2002).

In apparent desperate need for money, Monroe signed a release form for photographer Tom Kelley as “Mona Monroe” (Cunningham, 1998). She posed nude on a red velvet drape and was paid \$50. Many feel that these photos deemed her as a true pin-up girl. After the photos, Monroe signed with MGM for a small role in the melodrama *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950). In the same year, Fox agreed to sign her for another short-term contract in which she was to play a role as a starlet in *All About Eve* (1950). The following year brought an extended seven-year contract. Soon she was cast in every film

that had a role for a blonde and was featured in Collier's magazine as "Hollywood's 1951 Model Blonde" (Cunningham, 1998). Nearing the end of 1951, Monroe was 25 and began spending time with baseball hero Joe DiMaggio. The year 1952 was extremely busy for Monroe in that she had roles in seven films. There was also controversy when it was discovered that Monroe was the woman in a nude calendar photo-the photos that she had taken with Tom Kelley. The public did not scorn her for the most part and actually triumphed in the fact that she had taken the job due to her poverty. *Photoplay Magazine* named her as the "Fastest Rising Star of 1952" (Cunningham, 1998).

Monroe found success in *Niagara* when it was released in 1953. In it she played a beautiful young wife who plots to kill her older and jealous husband. Other big roles followed, including *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953) and *How to Marry a Millionaire* (1953). At the age of 28, she married Joe DiMaggio. After her now famous publicity stunt for the *The Seven Year Itch* (1955) in which she stands over a subway grating and a breeze blows up her white dress, DiMaggio was infuriated. Monroe filed for divorce after only eight months of marriage and the divorce was final the following year. The end of 1954 brought the opening of *River of No Return* (1954). For a time in 1954 and most of 1955, Monroe pulled herself out of the Hollywood spotlight and began Marilyn Monroe Productions with photographer Milton Greene. Nearly a year passed before she returned to the spotlight. During this hiatus she sought the help of a psychiatrist for the many emotional problems she was known to have had (McDonough, 2002). By the spring of 1955, Monroe was ready to rid herself of the "shallow blonde" image that had followed her since the beginning of her career. She began studying at the famous Actor's Studio in New York City under coach Lee Strasberg. Monroe was ready to return to

Hollywood by 1956 and she soon began shooting for *Bus Stop* (1956). To the surprise of many, Monroe married playwright Arthur Miller on June 29, 1956 and converted to Judaism (McDonough, 2002). While in London, the couple announced her latest project, *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957). She was to costar with acting legend Sir Laurence Olivier.

The following year would prove to be a terrible one for her. Her partnership with Greene fell apart and she suffered a miscarriage. The miscarriage prompted her first suicide attempt. In 1958, Monroe began shooting the most successful on-screen comedy to date, *Some Like it Hot* (1959), for which she received a Golden Globe award for Best Actress in a Comedy. Later, she was admitted to the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital for 'nervous exhaustion' (McDonough, 2002). Miller literally wrote his wife a screenplay and she began filming the *The Misfits* in 1960. By 1961, she was granted a divorce from Miller. Shortly after the divorce, she was admitted to the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic of New York Hospital. She was hospitalized twice more that year and was unable to work (McDonough, 2002). The end of this year brought a meeting with President Kennedy at the home of Bing Crosby (Cunningham, 1998). It seemed that 1962 would be a bit better for Monroe. She moved to a home in Brentwood and continued to meet with President Kennedy and his younger brother Robert. Later, she was invited to sing her infamous rendition of "Happy Birthday" to the President. Monroe won a Golden Globe Award for World's Film Favorite in March and began filming *Something's Got to Give* (1962) the next month (McDonough, 2002). She was, however, in very poor emotional and physical condition. Monroe was sued by the studio for her inability to show up or produce work on the set. Later the charges were dropped and the studio made plans to

finish the film by the end of the year. On August 4, 1962, U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy made a visit to Monroe. A doctor who accompanied him had to give her a tranquilizer to calm her. The following day Marilyn Monroe's dead body was found in her Brentwood home, a telephone in one hand, and an empty bottle of sleeping pills in the other (McDonough, 2002). The world had lost an icon.

## CHAPTER V

### METHODOLOGY: AN HISTORICAL RECEPTION STUDY

The research that has been done thus far has been interesting and intriguing. However, little research has been done on film critics' portrayal of Marilyn Monroe. A study of this will help us better understand how critics received her as an actress, an icon, a sex symbol, etc.

The researcher has chosen to conduct an historical reception study of film critiques from *The New York Times*, *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines, and the *New Yorker*. An historical reception study is the research of old texts which relies on reviews. The aforementioned periodicals were chosen due to the fact that at the time of showing of many of Monroe's movies, film was mostly written for the masses. It was a form of middlebrow entertainment meant for all to enjoy. The film critiques used for this research were also written for the average film viewing audience.

The sample will be critiques of a select number of Monroe's movies, approximately 11. The 11 films were chosen because as a group they were a precise reflection of her career from the beginning to the height of her popularity. A thorough analysis of the critiques from all four of the periodicals will be presented in the next chapter. *The New York Times* was the only periodical of the four that reviewed *Niagara* and *Newsweek* did not review *The Misfits*. There was no evidence found concerning reasons for this.

other form of analyzing. As previously discussed using Haskell's images-of-women approach or Mulvey's psychoanalytical approach leaves the researcher with many unanswered questions. The advantage of using the reception study lies in the fact that one has access to meaning creation. For purposes of this study, the meaning created would be what Monroe actually meant to real people in the 1950's.

The second aspect that one must decide is exactly what a reception study entails. A reception study is one in which a particular text is studied. The study looks at the creation of meaning upon reception. A researcher is able to view the meaning that real people glean from a particular text. In order to do this, one must use ethnographical observations. This can be done through the use of survey-based observations on a particular group of people. There are serious complications found in using a reception study when conducting research. One problem that arises is the fact that audience members are extremely difficult to find, not to mention the difficulty in finding reliable audience members. For example, if one were to conduct an historical reception study using Monroe's movie *Monkey Business* (1952), one would have to go in search of an audience that had actually viewed the movie. Aside from the obvious difficulty of scouring the country in attempts to find a scientifically acceptable sample size, there also arises the problem with human error. It would be nearly impossible for every audience member to recall feelings and reactions to a film that was seen over 50 years in the past, thus information gleaned from this study would obviously be flawed. It is not likely that an entire audience of people would accurately remember the reception of the text. The human mind is faulty, thus it is most probably not able to give and a true depiction of the reception.

Janet Staiger's well-written study, *Interpreting Films, Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (1992) was the basis of interpretation for this particular study. Staiger gives the advantages of using the historical reception study. She tells us in an explanation of the use-value of the reception study that these types of studies view the "history of the interactions between real readers and texts, actual spectators and films" (Staiger, 1992, p. 8). They also attempt to explain how audiences *have* understood films and not how they *might* have comprehended them. In short, Jonathan Culler summarizes reception studies as "not a way of interpreting works but an attempt to understand their changing intelligibility by identifying the codes and interpretative assumptions that give them meaning for different audiences at different periods" (Culler, 1981, p.13). Staiger chooses this type of study because it is more accurate. A researcher does not run into the psychological pitfalls of the using human reception and this is the only class of study that looks at writing detailed impressions of text.

The importance found in this research lies in the fact that we are not looking at how audiences of Monroe's time or of present day perceived her films. Rather we are looking at the ways in which her contemporaries and her critics received her. The following chapter is an analysis by the author of film critiques from the above-mentioned reputable sources. Despite her staying power as a global icon, it will be apparent to the reader that serious consumers of film or film critics did not take her seriously as an artist or an actress. It is questionable as to whether or not they took her seriously as a human being.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REVIEWS

Volunteer or victim, pinup girl or artist, lost or cunning? Did Marilyn Monroe have a plan? Was her dumb blonde persona just that? As an icon for the ages, Monroe has a seemingly timeless quality that continues to make men of all ages swoon and many types of women want to be her. Was the innocence merged with just enough sex appeal to make the public wonder a façade, or was this her true personality? Perhaps we will never know just where this phenomenon occurred or was created. We do know, however, that Monroe has remained with us for over 40 years after her death. Her staying power in the industry is obviously nothing to be scoffed at. Though very few have ever accused her of being an Oscar-caliber actress, it does not appear that her magic will soon leave us.

It has been said by many in the film industry that a critic can make or break the career of an artist. To some extent this is true; the opinions of one writer or minute group of writers have been known to cause an upheaval at the box office, for either good or bad. For the purposes of this research the author will be conducting a critical analysis of film reviews. The aforementioned reviews will cover 11 of Monroe's movies from approximately 1952-1961. As previously stated, reviews or critiques are from the following sources, *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Yorker*.



***Monkey Business, 1952***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

**Director:     *Howard Hawks***

**Producer:    *Sol C. Siegel***

Bosley Crowther (1952) of *The New York Times* described this film as being “not a message picture nor a compound of high dramatic art. It is, to be quick about it, what is known as a ‘screwball comedy’” (p. 6). He goes on to say that the “smart chimpanzee is probably the most accomplished performer in the show” (Crowther, 1952, p. 6). Monroe is mentioned only briefly as a secretary who willingly throws herself into the mix of this absurd comedy.

A September 22, 1952 *Time* review also does little more than mention Monroe as the secretary in the film. Irony is found, however, in the fact that one Monroe interaction from the film is mentioned. A character asks Monroe to type something. We are already witnesses to the image of her as a dumb blonde.

Neither was *Newsweek* impressed with this film nor were they affected by Monroe’s small performance. One again sex appeal, not talent rears its ugly head as the critic explains why the secretary can “neither type nor take dictation,” but this is “explainable on the basis that she is played by Marilyn Monroe, the big illustrated calendar girl” (“New Films,” 1952, p. 101).

We see more of the same underlying sexual references made in the review from *The New Yorker*. We are told that Monroe “is on hand to demonstrate that the young ladies who loll across the full-color pages in *Esquire* are not necessarily figments of an overwrought artistic imagination” (McCarten, 1952, p.136).

In all four of the chosen reviews there is no mention of anything remotely positive concerning this film in terms of Monroe's acting ability. This could be due to the fact that seemingly, none of the critics was impressed with the film as a whole. Also, Monroe's role in the film was not as major a role as she would have in the future, thus leaving less room for critique of her performance. However, it is obvious that the brief encounter that the world has had with Monroe to this point has made an impression, one of physical beauty and sex appeal.

***Niagara, 1953***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

***Director: Henry Hathaway***

***Producer: Charles Brackett***

*The New York Times* is swift to point out the fact that Twentieth Century-Fox has taken advantage of the "grandeur" of both Niagara Falls and the "grandeur that is Marilyn Monroe" (Weiler, 1953, p.3). There is of course the typical chase scene in which Monroe runs helplessly from her pursuer, to be saved in the nick of time. The author of this review tells us that Monroe is most probably not perfect at her craft at this point in her career. However, he does not fail to mention that directors and cameramen do not seem the slightest bit concerned with this. In fact, it seems that they have "caught every possible curve in the intimacy of the boudoir and in equally revealing tight dresses" (Weiler, 1953, p.3). Miss Monroe is able to be seductive "even when she walks" (Weiler, 1953, p.3). The closing of the review sums up the feelings of the critic: "As has been noted. '*Niagara*' may not be the place to visit under these circumstances but the falls and Miss Monroe's are something to see" (Weiler, 1953, p.3).

Once again, Monroe is portrayed as candy for the senses, seemingly the male senses. The male gaze is obvious once again. Please note that *The New York Times* is the only periodical of the chosen four that reviewed this film.

***Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, 1953***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

***Director: Howard Hawks***

***Producer: Sol C. Siegel***

*The New York Times* critic Bosley Crowther tells it like he sees it once more. He sardonically refers to the opening of the film as one that “bumped and gyrated” (Crowther, 1952, p.2). There is not much beneath the title of the film except the story of “two dumb dolls” (Crowther, 1952, p.2), Monroe being one of the aforementioned dolls. He goes on to say that there is little to no class to the picture but has rather humorous moments. One of the moments he makes mention of is Monroe’s “finding it difficult to squeeze her way through a porthole” (Crowther, 1952, p.2). Of course the cause for this difficulty is due to “anatomical reasons” (Crowther, 1952, p.2). We feel the male voyeuristic nature when Crowther says that there is some unknown reason that we continue to look at Monroe during the film, despite the fact that she has “little or nothing to do” (Crowther, 1952, p.2).

*Time* says that though the film was flat for all intents and purposes, there are “three-dimensional attractions” (“The New Pictures,” 1953, p.88). Monroe has in this critic’s opinion done her best acting to date as she “dances, or rather undulates all over, flutters the heaviest eyelids in show business, and breathlessly delivers lines” (“The New Pictures,” 1953, p.88). Ironically, nothing is mentioned as to how she acted in this movie,

even though, according to the critic, this was her best performance since the beginning of her short career.

The “jumbo sex package” (“New Films,” 1953, p.76) that Twentieth Century-Fox presents certainly gets the attention of *Newsweek*. This review gives the most substantial critique of the movies thus far, but this is not saying much. The film, we are told, “may easily be viewed as a form of drama or as a piece of erotic anthropology” (“New Films,” 1953, p.76). The drama critique never really surfaces for the reader but rather the critique lends itself to the description of eroticism. As anthropology the film assumes that the general public “likes sex on the overt side” (“New Films,” 1953, p.77). One critic tells us that Monroe is so much herself that she seems to be parodying her past manifestations. She constantly keeps some body part in motion. Despite the Hollywood censors rules on bumping and grinding, Monroe was not “prevented from giving with the business” (“New Films,” 1953, p.77) of moving.

John McCarten of *The New Yorker* makes it known that although Monroe is “pleasantly configured” (McCarten, 1953, p. 46) she has no more than a “glancing acquaintance with the business of acting” (McCarten, 1953, p. 46). There are many so-called anatomical jokes throughout the film. This is made possible by apparent costume design in that the short dresses worn by Monroe were not consistent with the sack-like dresses of the flapper era in which the movie takes place. Through all of the flashy lights and sounds of the film, it is a “simple exhibition of the elasticity of the female frame” (McCarten, 1953, p. 46).

Clearly, as seen previously, all four of the reviews illustrate a sexpot with little or no acting talent. At this point, Monroe is on her way to a seemingly successful career in

film. From the tone of the reviews, however, it is doubtful that we will see her taken seriously as an actress.

***How To Marry a Millionaire, 1953***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

**Director: Jean Negulesco**

**Producer: Nunnally Johnson**

Crowther of *The New York Times* jumps into his critique of this comedy. He says that “around a frivolous story of the maneuverings of three dumb blondes to hook themselves wealthy husbands” (Crowther, 1953, p.1), the audience will be greatly disappointed as the package is wrapped in such a manner as to attract moviegoers, but has a less than pleasing gift inside. The “chucklesome account” (Crowther, 1953, p.1) of these three, beautiful blonde models leaves much to be desired. The “famously shaped Miss Monroe does compensate” (Crowther, 1953, p.1) for what the movie lacks. Her character makes the audience laugh as she continually runs into things due to her reluctance to wear eyeglasses.

*Time* gives a far less harsh review of the actual script and focuses instead on the logistics of how the film was made. It does mention Monroe, however. “Marilyn Monroe ... is pert and comfortable as a not-so-dumb-blonde who doesn’t like to wear glasses for fear that men won’t make passes” (“The New Pictures,” 1953, p. 114). This is after all the premise of the film.

*Newsweek* says that this “sexy, gold-digger comedy.... is a broad film about broads” (“New Films,” 1953, p. 104). The overall mood of the review is light and upbeat and of course describes the physicality of Monroe. It makes mention of two scenes in particular in which we see Monroe. One is that which she wears a bathing suit that is

“calculated to fetch almost any sort of fetishist” (“New Films,” 1953, p. 104). The other shows her in a beautiful satin ball gown, in multiples, “thanks to a whole series of mirrors. The general Monroe effect is thereby raised to something like the *nth* power” (“New Films,” 1953, p. 104).

McCarten of *The New Yorker* is cynical as always in his review. He says that “despite [the girls’] impressive physiques” there is not much to the film and the actresses “leave the grand design rather blurred” (McCarten, 1953, p. 133). The stars are commonly referred to as huntresses, once again money-grubbing females who cannot support themselves. “When *How to Marry a Millionaire* finds time to stop ogling the ladies” (McCarten, 1953, p. 133) it does focus somewhat on the other marketable males of the film.

The trend is continuing to this point. Some of the critics have changed from respective publications, but the consensus remains the same. There are far more mentions of her physicality than of the craft that she was attempting to cultivate.

#### ***River of No Return, 1954***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

**Director: Otto Preminger**

**Producer: Stanley Rubin**

Crowther’s *Times* review sounds almost X-Rated at first reading. “It is a toss-up whether the scenery or the adornment of Marilyn Monroe is the feature of greater attraction in” (Crowther, 1954, p.2) this film. Male co-star Robert Mitchum “has to ward off temptation in the shape-and we mean shape! -of Miss Monroe” (Crowther, 1954, p.2). He goes on to describe the ways in which Monroe is watered down throughout the film, literally.

Mr. Mitchum's and the audience's attention is directed to Miss Monroe through frequent and liberal posing of her in full and significant views... But for rafting on the river, she is garbed in a sort of dude rancher's duds, which cling rather closely to her figure when she is liberally soaked in spray. (Crowther, 1954, p.2)

At one point, Monroe is so completely soaked that she must wrap herself in a blanket and nothing more. Mitchum has the daunting task of massaging her so that she does not take ill.

*Time* makes mention of similar Monroe situations in the movie, including her being drenched, undressed, and covered by a blanket. "The one thing likely to take moviegoers' eyes off Marilyn is the other scenery" ("The New Pictures," 1954, p.89) and the review goes on to describe the mountains and landforms of the national parks in which the movie was filmed. The review does quote publicity men from the studio saying that Monroe "unveils a deep emotional insight and a tender dramatic gift never before displayed" ("The New Pictures," 1954, p.89).

*Newsweek* gives an unexpectedly "good" review of this one. Good in comparison to the others that have previously been viewed. "*River of No Return* offers the physical attractions of Marilyn Monroe and the Banff and Jasper National Parks...Miss Monroe, furthermore, is unexpectedly and pleasantly competent as a dramatic actress" ("New Films," 1954, p.100). Though this is probably one of the best, most positive review that Monroe had received to this date, the cynicism remains. "She displays an ability to act. When she is directed to shiver after being fetched from the river, she shivers convincingly. She performs, in the sense of registering emotion even when she is not

speaking lines, with surprising naturalness. And she sings four songs in a pleasant husky voice” (“New Films,” 1954, p.100).

McCarten says in *The New Yorker* that when the mountains in this film “become too obtrusive, the camera cuts them dead in favor of the splendors of Miss Monroe, who goes about done up, variously in spangles, buckskin, and blankets” (McCarten, 1954, p.70). In his opinion, besides the “splendors of Miss Monroe” and the beautiful nature scenery, the movie “is something of a stinker” (McCarten, 1954, p.70).

Monroe’s anatomy is referred to and directly correlated with the mountainous scenery of this film. A glimpse of compliment concerning her acting was seen by the researcher. The so-called compliment was quickly followed by sarcasm.

### ***The Seven Year Itch, 1955***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

***Director: Billy Wilder***

***Producers: Charles K. Feldman and Billy Wilder***

The primal urges of the male libido are the premise of this film says *The New York Times*. Monroe “without any real dimensions, is the focus of attention in this film” (Crowther, 1955, p.1). She brings a “certain physical something or other” (Crowther, 1955, p.1) to the movie, despite what the director had in mind.

From the moment she steps into the picture, in a garment that drapes her shapely form as though she had been skillfully poured into it (with about a quart and a half to spare), the famous screen star with the silver-blond tresses and the ingenuously wide-eyed stare that emanates one suggestion. And that suggestion rather dominates the film. It is well-why define it? Miss Monroe clearly plays the title role (Crowther, 1955, p.1).



The only mention of the actual acting that Monroe does in the film does not hesitate to tell us “we merely commend her for her diligence when we say that it leaves much-very much to be desired” (Crowther, 1955, p.1).

The *Time* review was not much better than the prior. The film “blends naiveté with sex- [Monroe] dunks potato chips in champagne, begs for ‘more sugar’ in her martini, artlessly boasts of posing in the nude, feels that it is all right to do ‘anything’ with Ewell since there is no danger of his wanting to marry her” (“The New Pictures,” 1955, p.100).

*Newsweek* gives a mere mention of Monroe and mainly focuses on the star Ewell. The review does say that she is “perfectly cast, and frequently funny herself” (“New Films,” 1955, p.94).

McCarten feels that the Broadway play turned film was reduced to the status of a burlesque show when Monroe’s character arrives. “Several stimulating views of Marilyn Monroe” are a “substitute for the comedy” (McCarten, 1955, p.123) that was originally intended.

There is only a slight difference in this set of reviews in that the *Newsweek* critique is rather neutral in regards to Monroe rather than so blatantly portraying her as a sex object.

### ***Bus Stop, 1956***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

***Director: Joshua Logan***

***Producer: Buddy Adler***

“Hold on to your chairs, everybody, and get set for a rattling surprise. Marilyn Monroe has finally proved herself as and actress in ‘Bus Stop’. She and the picture are swell” (Crowther, 1956, p.2).

Crowther says that director Logan was able to get Monroe do much more than “wiggle and put and pop her big eyes and play the synthetic vamp” (Crowther, 1956, p.2) in the film. Rather Monroe was bale to play the “tinseled floozie, the semimoronic doll” (Crowther, 1956, p.2). We are reassured that just because Monroe does create “a real character” does not mean that she is “lacking in vitality, humor, or attractiveness” (Crowther, 1956, p.2). The remainder of the review is dedicated to the men of the film. This is the last that we read of Monroe in this critique.

Our *Time* reviewer is somewhat positive in that we are told “Bus Stop is a rowdy little comedy that makes an engaging showcase for Marilyn Monroe’s growing sureness as a comedienne” (“The New Pictures,” 1956, p.74). Very little is said about her until the end of the review, however. “Actress Monroe, robbed of her usual glamour by bleached makeup and unmoistened lips, generates enough sex to console the nation’s Venus-worshippers, and her comedy turns stand well...” (“The New Pictures,” 1956, p.74).

“ ‘Marilyn ACTS!’ screams a publicity blurb. And so she does, suddenly turning years of wishful thinking into reality” (“New Films,” 1956, p.90). This *Newsweek* review says that Monroe’s character “has stripped on many a stage, put more mileage on her zippers than all of the buses traveling through town” (“New Films,” 1956, p.90). Yet again, nothing is mentioned as to what Monroe does to finally act in this film.

McCarten of *The New Yorker* writes that the attempts at comedy are humorous but hardly sufficient. Monroe plays a character a “doll, who has knocked around rather

extensively” (McCarten, 1956, p.76). He believes that Monroe does have “a nice sense of the humorous possibilities of her role” (McCarten, 1956, p.76).

At this time, we as an audience do see some improvements as to comments on her acting ability. Quickly, though, readers realize that this is short lived.

### ***The Prince and the Showgirl, 1957***

***Warner Brothers***

***Director and Producer: Sir Laurence Olivier***

Crowther finds the pair of Monroe and Sir Laurence Olivier a strange one to say the least. Apparently, he was not the only one that found the match to be an oddity. “Miss Monroe in a skin tight white creation” (Crowther, 1957, p.2) does not have to do much in the film. Rather, she “mainly has to giggle, wiggle, breathe deeply and flirt. She does not make the showgirl a person, simply another of her pretty oddities” (Crowther, 1957, p.2). Reviewer Crowther believes her character to be “dull” (Crowther, 1957, p.2) and seems to write with disappointment as to the fact that a scene taken out for advertisements in which Olivier is kissing Monroe’s shoulder is taken out of the movie.

*Time* says that Monroe is “lifted to the probably ceiling of her serious career as a comedienne” and “her most persuasive line is just plain ‘Gosh!’” (“The New Pictures,” 1957, p.84) Her figure is of course brought out and is apparently “more voluptuous than most 1911 showgirls” (“The New Pictures,” 1957, p.84). In this critic’s opinion, Monroe is more directed by Olivier rather than being his costar.

“Numbskull in Blonde” is the title of the *Newsweek* review. “Olivier plays comedy with style. Miss Monroe plays it like a little girl being funny for visitors” (“Numbskull in Blonde,” 1957, p.111).

The following passage concludes the feelings of the author:

Moviegoers who have not seen Miss Monroe before may feel for a while that they are watching a comic talent. Those who are familiar with her will immediately recognize the performance from the past and soon come to long for something new. People who go just to watch her move around will not, of course, be disappointed. She is here more opulent and unbuttoned than ever, and is quite active all the time ("Numbskull in Blonde," 1957, p.111).

McCarten makes no mention of anything remotely sexual or physical about Monroe. This point is brought to light because at this point it seems almost foreign that something of her physicality would not have been at least alluded to. He does write, however, "none of her activities" in the film "are particularly funny, or even interesting" (McCarten, 1957, p. 74).

It seems that the critics, with the exception of McCarten, are appalled that Olivier would stoop to Monroe's level and act in a film with her. Time and again the commentary is negative.

### ***Some Like it Hot, 1959***

***Released through United Artists***

***Director and Producer: Billy Wilder***

Critic A.H. Weiler from *The New York Times* and the audience seemed to receive this movie very well in terms of its comedic attributes. Of course, no film review would be complete without blatant references to Monroe's body.

As the band's somewhat simple singer-ukulele player, Miss Monroe, whose figure simply cannot be overlooked, contributes more assets than the obvious ones to this madcap romp. As a pushover for gin and the tonic effect of saxophone

players, she sings a couple of numbers...and also proves to be the epitome of the dumb blonde and a talented comedienne (Weiler, 1959, p.1).

*Time* gives the film a mostly positive review in that the comedic talents of the cast are commended. After a short synopsis of the film, the review goes into a strong critique of what else but Monroe.

For the rest of the movie, Curtis and Lemmon are rarely out of their dresses, Marilyn is rarely in hers. Clad in negligee and open mouth, she crawls into Lemmon's upper berth to thank 'her' for a favor, notices with innocent surprise: 'You poor thing, you're trembling all over' ("The New Pictures," 1959, p.95).

Ironically, mention is made of the fact that Monroe is not as fit as she has been in the past. "As for Marilyn, she's been trimmer, slimmer and sexier in earlier pictures" ("The New Pictures," 1959, p.95).

*Newsweek* focuses its review more on the male counterparts in this film. Monroe is actually barely mentioned. "As for Miss Monroe, she is, as usual, an extremely effective female impersonator, herself" ("Wonderfully Wacky," 1959, p. 113). This is an obvious pun on the fact that Curtis and Lemmon are female impersonators throughout most of the film.

At this point in Monroe's career, we are not sure if *The New Yorker* critic McCarten is tired of her or not. She is mentioned once through a slight description of her character, "a dipsomaniacal singer, played in sprightly style by Marilyn Monroe" (McCarten, 1959, p. 142).

Perhaps one of most remembered films of all time, Monroe will always be connected with this one. The monotony continues and she is still the epitome of sex and all of its manifestations.

***Let's Make Love, 1960***

***Twentieth Century-Fox***

***Director: George Cukor***

***Producer: Jerry Wald***

Crowther believes that Monroe is placed in the same “cliché-clogged” (Crowther, 1960, p.1) roles that she usually cast. “Meanwhile, not much is happening with a rather untidy Miss Monroe. She is fumbling with things on the sidelines, batting her eyes and singing songs. This old Monroe dynamism is lacking in the things she is given to do...” (Crowther, 1960, p.1).

“ ‘*Let's Make Love*' brings Marilyn Monroe on-screen with an entrance that should make historians of the drama forget Bernhardt's exits” (“The New Pictures,” 1960, p. 88). Monroe enters the film while grasping to a “shiny fire pole” (“The New Pictures,” 1960, p. 88). She is “rigged out in black tights. Languorously she slides down the pole, uncoils, arranges her lips in Schlitz position and mummurs, ‘My name is Lolita. And I'm not supposed to. Play. With boys’” (“The New Pictures,” 1960, p. 88). This *Time* critic believes “there is a lot of Marilyn to admire these days, but it is still in fine fettle; at 34 she makes 21 look ridiculous. The smile that reassures nervous males... has never been more dazzling” (“The New Pictures,” 1960, p. 88).

“As every red-blooded American boy...knows, Marilyn Monroe is the embodiment of sex and multiple vitamin innocence” (“Suddenly Last Summit,” 1960, p. 72). The critic from *Newsweek* wastes no time. Monroe gets no more acknowledgements

from the review until the very end and she does receive slight kudos for her comedic performance.

Brendan Gill of *The New Yorker* is quick to tell readers “although she works as hard as ever, she doesn’t accomplish much this time. Some of the blame is hers-what the *Tribune* has peculiarly called her ‘flare for comedy’ is more of a flicker than a flame” (Gill, 1960, p. 169). Character descriptions include “a wide-eyed young girl” with “an opulent body and tiny singing voice” (Gill, 1960, p. 169). She is also “not very bright but extremely good hearted and flagrantly voluptuous” (Gill, 1960, p. 169).

The tone of this set of reviews basically tells us that she might not have a bit of sense but at least she is sexually attractive. It is doubtful that we may expect anything more from future reviews.

### ***The Misfits, 1961***

***Released through United Artists***

***Director: John Huston***

***Producer: Frank E. Taylor***

Crowther says that all of the characters in the film are “unreliable, wild, and slightly kookie” (Crowther, 1961, p.2). They are also “shallow and inconsequential” (Crowther, 1961, p.2). Monroe’s character is seen as being “inclined to adore all living creatures and have a quivering revulsion to pain” (Crowther, 1961, p.2). Aside from a description of character, he gives his feelings on Monroe’s performance. “And Miss Monroe-well, she is completely blank and unfathomable as a new divorcee who shed her husband...” (Crowther, 1961, p.2).

No mention is made of Monroe's performance or ever-popular physical attributes in the *Time* review. The critic spends most of the time explaining that this was an obvious retelling of the failed relationship between Miller and Monroe.

Roger Angell of the *The New Yorker* believes that the casting of the film is "impeccable" (Angell, 1961, p.86) .

In a part literally made for her, Miss Monroe displays a gentleness and a tired, childlike grace that are appropriate and moving and, very evidently, a reflection of herself. If she is not consistently an actress here, she is an actress at moments, notably in one scene of sad, sensual alcoholic collapse (Angell, 1961, p.86).

One wonders if anything overtly negative can be said about a role that was so widely known to be written for her. Though she is not made into a sex object by the reviews, the commentary remains negative.

It is quite obvious after reading through the reviews that reception by Monroe's critics is overwhelmingly negative. Her acting ability, or lack thereof, according to her critics, is criticized time and time again. Aside from the constant attacks on her talent, she is constantly made the object of the male gaze. Monroe is treated as a sex object and nothing more. Please note that *Newsweek* did not review this film.



## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Implications**

This study sought to find out how Marilyn Monroe has been portrayed by film critics. This research is unique and important in that it does look at Monroe's reception by film critics rather than her reception by her fans. In order that a thorough analysis of this research may be conducted we must look at each research question and objective of the study on an individual basis.

How have women been portrayed in film? Through this research it has been reiterated time and again that women have been portrayed negatively in film. It seems that regardless of genre, women are constantly seen as sex objects through the triangular gaze of the male spectator. McCaughy and King (2001) give an incredible description of the ways that women have been presented to audiences for decades. Ironically, when women are given roles that are seen as being more aggressive, they are again criticized for being too masculine. Still more surprising is the fact that even feminist film critics sometimes have a tendency to criticize females who have accepted these stronger, less demure roles.

How has Marilyn Monroe been portrayed in film? It is obvious from the analysis of the film critiques that Monroe was portrayed as the very clichéd dumb blonde. There

were very few times in her career that she was able to display any type of acting ability. This was in all likelihood due to the overshadowing effects of the roles in which she was cast. It became so normal for her to play these types of roles that it became difficult to discern her characters from the real Marilyn Monroe. She was typecast based upon the fact that she made box office profits for the studios due to her appeal to the gaze of the male spectator.

How has Marilyn Monroe been rated by film critics? Once again we must digress to the film reviews. One must be mindful that only a sample of her movies were studied for purposes of this research, but the commentary was so overwhelmingly negative that it is doubtful that she would have received any more positive acclaim from other roles. In a qualitative study such as this we must interpret the results of the study in relative terms. It is obvious that the reviews were negative for the most part.

Seeing that the consensus from the critics is so overwhelmingly negative brings to the surface other important implications. In analyzing the reviews, numerous strikes are made at Monroe's acting ability. As stated before, for the most part they did not believe that Monroe had any to speak of. However, this leads one to question just what quality of acting standard that Monroe was held to by this set of critics? Of course their standards are never blatantly written for the reader. It seems that the majority of women in film were seen merely as objects to be viewed rather than artists, just as our past scholars have told us. The standards that Monroe and others were held to were hardly standards at all. They were expected to sing, dance, and look pretty on camera. This was a large part of their star status. In all of the reviews studied for this research, Monroe has met the expectations of the critics. She dances, sings, and looks pretty for the camera. Though

from a researcher's standpoint the reception from the critics is negative, it does not seem that the critics have a problem with the fact that these are the standards that Monroe is held to and she reaches them every time. The fact that she is able to wiggle and gyrate on screen is acceptable because she is Marilyn Monroe. There is really not much else that was expected of her, or from many other actresses of the time for that matter. In Monroe's specific case she rose to all of the standards set for her by the critics. As a researcher, I wonder why it is, then, that there are so many blows were made at her acting ability if she did give them what they expected? It is my opinion that there lies a great discrepancy in the roles in which the chosen critics played. As stated before, they wrote for a predominantly middlebrow audience. One would think that in doing this, Monroe, an American girl from very modest upbringing would have been a favorite to write about in that readers could relate to her. Obviously the audience did relate with Monroe. They saw her as an enigma, but one that had to struggle like regular people, nevertheless. The critics, on the other hand, were not impressed with much of anything that she did even when she reached the level of acting that was expected of her. One gets the feeling that there was somewhat of a culture clash brewing in the reviews. Seemingly, the critics were not writing for the middlebrow audience but rather for a set of highbrow peers. Would the critics have held stars such as Katharine Hepburn and Joan Crawford to the same standards as Monroe? It is my suspicion that if the standards were indeed different it would be because of the roles in which the above mentioned were cast, as that of the princess or business woman, not the ditzy blonde.

Ironically, we see that the consensus at which the critics arrived is very similar to the consensus at which Haskell, Mulvey and Dyer arrived years later. Her acting ability

was close to nothingness, thus what can be observed with the human gaze is instead scrutinized: her overt sexuality. Time and again we see her sexuality being made the issue at hand: “As has been noted. ‘*Niagara*’ may not be the place to visit under these circumstances but the falls and Miss Monroe’s are something to see” (Weiler, 1953, p.3). Audiences throughout the years have seen Monroe as this beautiful, mythical creature who just happened to be in movies, but as stated before, they were able to relate to her because of the “humanness” that they saw in her. There were the two sides that will probably always intrigue us as an audience. She was a star and she was a person at times. In the end, however, it was her star status that gave her staying power. As a researcher, this tells me that her profession, acting, was not at all what made her an icon in our culture. Her work did not make an impact in the fame that she gained. Her work was merely a vehicle in which to carry her to her star status. When she arrived, her sexuality and our culture’s readiness to consume it was what made her stay in our minds for such a long period of time. One critic felt that in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, Monroe had done her best acting to date as she “dances, or rather undulates all over, flutters the heaviest eyelids in show business, and breathlessly delivers lines” (“The New Pictures,” 1953, p.88). The cynicism and the sexual commentary are evident here as they were in nearly every review studied for this research.

### **Contributions**

In finding the answers to these questions I feel that I have contributed a better understanding of the extent to which women have been negatively portrayed in film throughout the years. More importantly, I believe that I have conducted a study that lends itself to a better understanding of the enigma that is Marilyn Monroe. It is obvious

that she has had a fan base that spans decades. However, this research proves the fact that her fans must have enjoyed something more about her than acting ability. Her sex appeal coupled with the roles in which she was cast created an icon that was nearly indiscernible from real life. The fact that an historical reception study using film critiques rather than actual film audience members makes this research extremely unique to the field.

### **Weaknesses and Recommendations**

As with any study, there are always topics that can be studied further in order to make the research more accurate. A possible weakness of this study is the fact that it is subjective. The film reviews were the sole analysis of the researcher. Another research may have interpreted the critiques in a much different manner. One other weakness is the fact that 11 of Monroe's films were used for this study. Perhaps the results would have been more accurate had all of her films studied, from first film to last.

I do believe that the results of this research do create other interesting areas of study in this area. It is my recommendation that the results be taken as a beginning for other studies. It would be extremely interesting to see a comparison of Monroe to a male star with her same iconic status. One wonders if the gaze of the spectator would become quite as sexually biased if the gaze were on a male rather than a female. Another interesting avenue of study would be that of comparing the star status of other female stars of Monroe's time such as Joan Crawford and Katharine Hepburn in order to determine any differences audience/critic reception. One might also wish to study whether or not male stars of the time were held to the same acting standard as Monroe. I believe that many would question whether or not such actors as John Wayne

and James Dean would be held to the same standards. Neither gained great acclaim for the roles that they played, but they remain permanent fixtures in our culture. Still questioning further, one might wonder if they were held to different standards because they were males.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the overwhelming negativity that was discovered in the film reviews, the consensus that was reached by the critics is in direct contradiction to what we see as a society today. Marilyn Monroe is a fixture of American culture. As a star, Monroe and others like her play a particular role in our culture. They are a commodity. For the most part, we as audience members have great difficulty in distinguishing the roles or types of roles that these stars play from the actual star. We fail to remember many times that these stars are people who have jobs. They are playing particular roles in order to make a living. But once again, however, it is evident that Monroe's profession is not what made her consumable for audiences.

It is apparent that no matter the opinions of critics in well-known periodicals, Monroe has a staying power that is nearly unexplainable. She remains an icon. According to Haugstead (2001), American Movie Classics received some million-dollar publicity on May 20, 2001, when Dateline NBC ran a segment on AMC's documentary Marilyn Monroe: The Final Days. The following day, NBC's Today Show gave more information. Representatives from AMC said that it took one and one half months to get clearance for every clip used. They had to deal with the estate of Frank Sinatra, whose song was used as a title of Monroe's last film, as well as Monroe's own estate. Since her death in 1962, her image has been used to sell almost everything. On March 22, 2001, a

subsidiary of e-Bay, Butterfields, auctioned off five pictures from the photo shoot that produced her legendary Playboy centerfold. Her estate was worried that the buyer or buyers could license her likeness for things like Marilyn Monroe beer, etc. A 1999 auction of 1, 000 Monroe items raised a total of \$13.4 million. Obviously, her image is enduring according to Kirby (2000).

One may wonder if she would have been such a fixture in our society had she not died at such a young age. If age had made her look worn and less physically attractive, would present day audiences still collect Marilyn paraphernalia? The answer to that question will never be known. One thing is certain, however. It does not appear that the image of this Hollywood goddess will ever die.

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