

KEY TRENDS IN AMERICAN FILM

Session Two

Women-in-Danger Films

Department of Film and Audiovisual Culture

Dr. Richard Nowell

Agenda

14:15 – 15:50

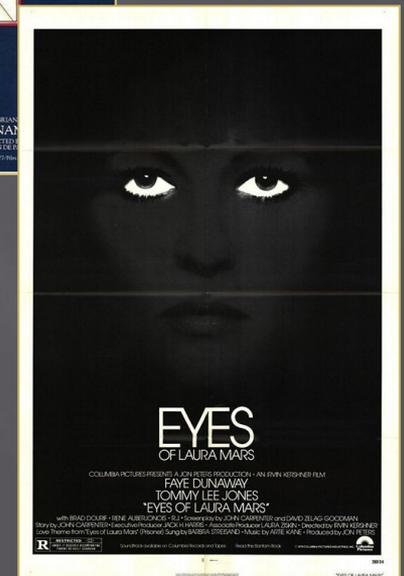
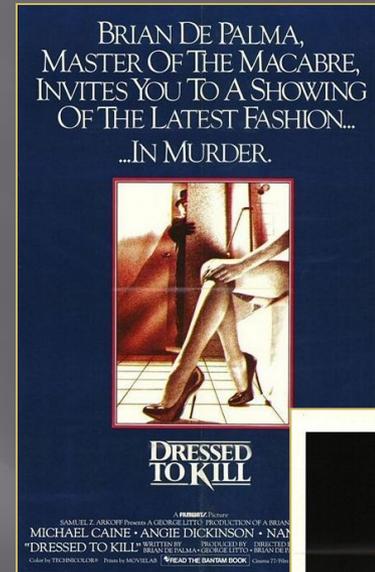
Eyes of Laura Mars (1978)

15:50 – 16:05

Break

16:05 – 17:25

Hollywood Women-in-danger Films

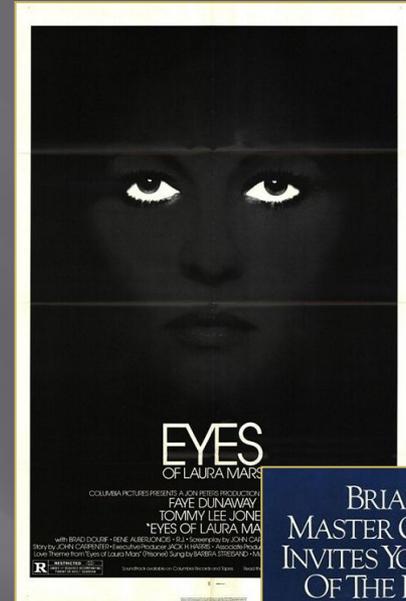


Focus

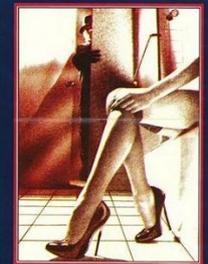
The critical reception of women-in-danger films

Socio-political discourses underpinning their reception and production

Women-in-danger films Reconsidered as topical “Women’s Cinema”



BRIAN DE PALMA,
MASTER OF THE MACABRE,
INVITES YOU TO A SHOWING
OF THE LATEST FASHION...
...IN MURDER.



A **PARAMOUNT** Presentation
SAMUEL Z. ARKOFF Presents A COLUMBIA PICTURES PRODUCTION OF A BRIAN DE PALMA FILM
MICHAEL CAINE • ANGIE DICKINSON • NANCY ALLEN In
"DRESSED TO KILL" WRITTEN BY BRUCE MITCHELL PRODUCED BY BRUCE MITCHELL DIRECTED BY BRIAN DE PALMA
Color by TECHNICOLOR® Photo by MOVIELAB® READ THE BANTAM BOOK® ©1980 Paramount Pictures, Inc.

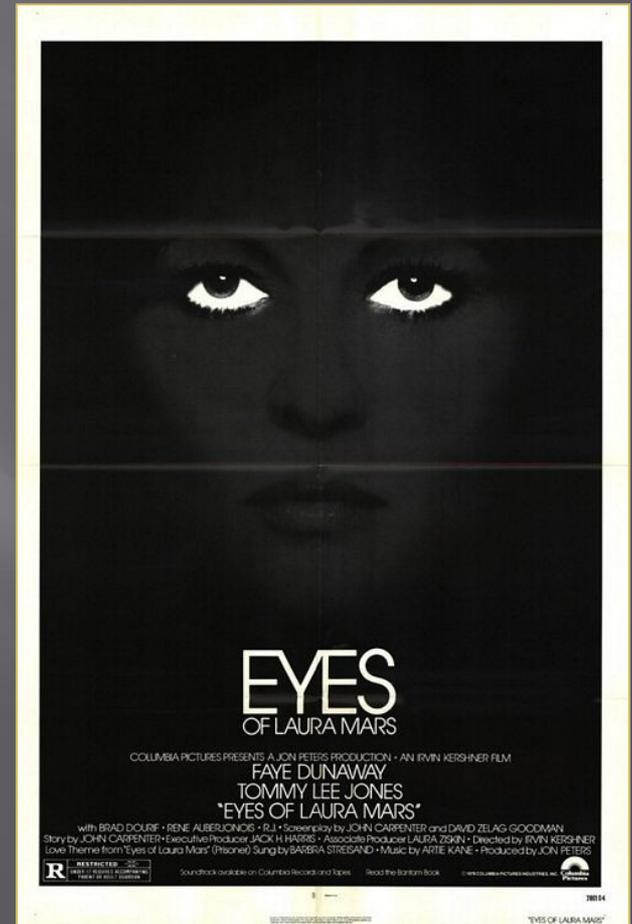
Eyes of Laura Mars (1978): Screening Questions

How are women portrayed in this film?

How are men portrayed in this film?

What does this film suggest is the relationship between the media industries and violence against women?

What steps do the makers of this film take to insulate it from cries of misogyny?

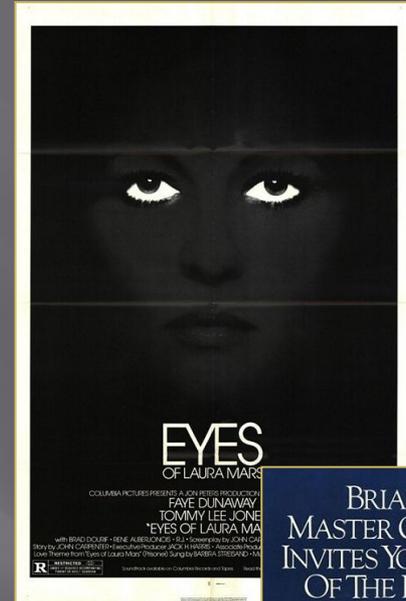


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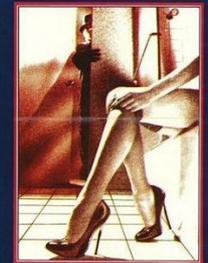
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The *Dressed to Kill* Controversy

What does Lyons' suggest were the main concerns of the feminist groups that protested against *Dressed to Kill* and other films?

What are some of the assumptions that underpin the feminists denunciation of *Dressed to Kill*?

MYTH: Violence is sexy or erotic.
MYTH: Violence is entertaining.
MYTH: Women are innate victims.
MYTH: Women are appropriate targets.
MYTH: Women fantasize about rape.
MYTH: Women expect and like to be victimized.
MYTH: Victims are responsible for their own abuse.

These myths are perpetuated by Filmways' "Dressed to Kill" and the ads promoting it. This film glamorizes violence against women, while every day women across the country are brutally attacked, even murdered; and millions more live in the fear of such violence. This is not sexy; this is not entertaining.

The real-life victimization of women is a daily occurrence, yet Filmways considers this fit entertainment. More than 1 out of every 3 women in L.A. will be attacked in her lifetime, yet Filmways exploits the victimization of women in all of their ads for this film. No woman wishes to be attacked, certainly not murdered; yet the title alone, "Dressed to Kill," links sex and violence and suggests that women ask to be victims.

We neither advocate nor support censorship. Rather we ask that Filmways as well as the entertainment and advertising industry at large exercise corporate responsibility by not using abusive and sex-violent images. Advertising and the media have tremendous influence on our attitudes and behavior. By continuing to exploit the victimization of women, they have made the image of the victimized, vulnerable woman so familiar that it has become accepted as normal in our culture. THIS MUST BE STOPPED!

Write and Call: Filmways Pictures, Inc.
9033 Wilshire Blvd.
Beverly Hills, CA 90211
278-8118

Protest violence against women wherever you see it.

VIOLENCE IS NOT SEXY



The second before she screams will be the most frightening moment of your life.

DRESSED TO KILL

Sponsored by:
HAWAII Feminist Women's Health Center
LA NOW Long Beach NOW
Hollywood NOW LA Men's Collective
Palos Verdes - South Bay NOW
CSU - Northridge Women's Center
Pasadena YMCA Rape Hotline
Southern California Rape Hotline Alliance

Cornerstones of the Feminists' outrage

Films like DTK trivialize, sexualize violence against women

In so doing, they encourage real-life male-on-female violence

Assumptions

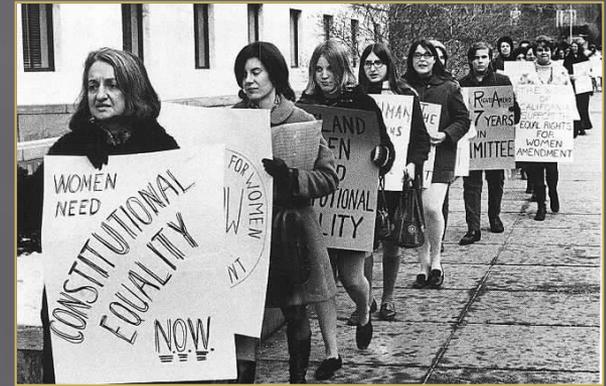
1. Target audience and viewers are exclusively male
2. The male audience does not identify with female characters
3. Viewers root for the killer and sympathize with his motives
4. Filmmakers advocate (rather than condemn) violence

Governing Discourses

Three discourses underpinning hostility

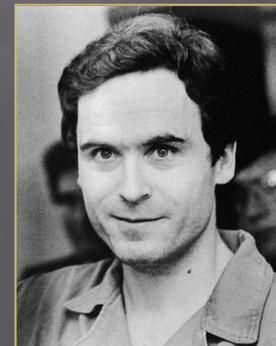
1. Sociological

Phillip Jenkins: shows that FBI was casting serial murder as systemic “femicide”



2. Spectatorial

Linda Williams: violent content recast as a pornographic pleasure for male viewers



3. Institutional

Hollywood attacked for its supposed sexism; for objectifying women on-screen

The Cultural Battle of the Sexes

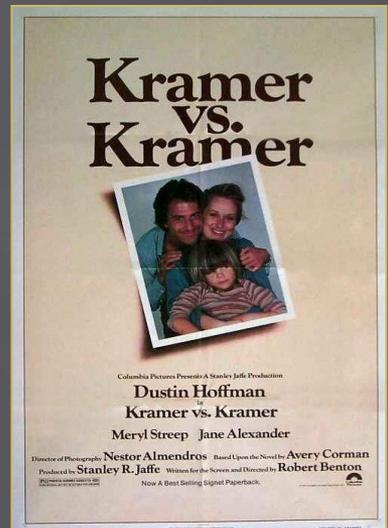
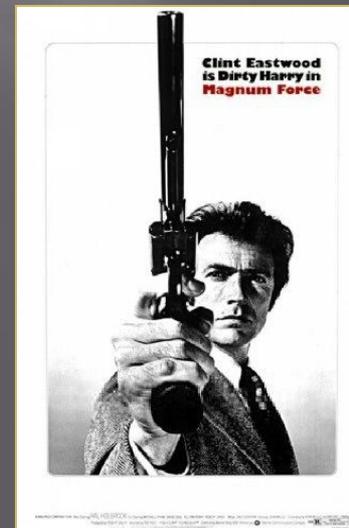
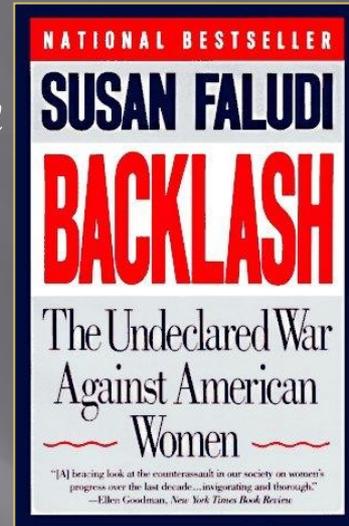
Arguments crystallized in *Backlash*

Founding Myths

1. Gender equality already reached
2. Feminism therefore obsolete

Backlash Culture Promotes

1. Glorification of male power
2. Societal damage caused by feminists & independent women
3. Traditional gender roles



Two Crystallizing Controversies

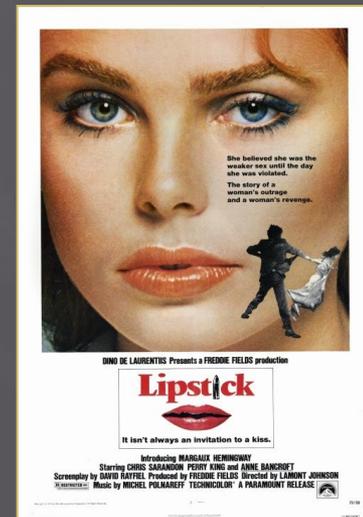
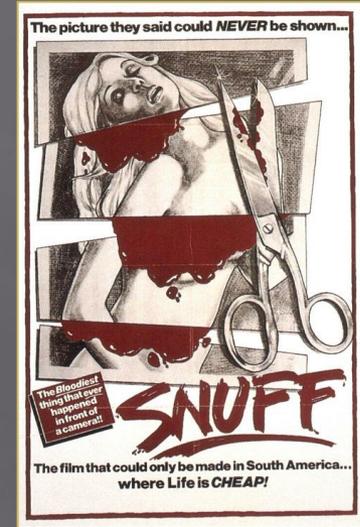
1976: discourses converge around two films

1. *Snuff* is promoted as featuring filmmakers actually murdering an actress on the screen

2. *Lipstick* is promoted on the rape and revenge of a model by a photographer

Both films framed as implicating the culture industries in the brutalization of women

Links culture industries to a misogynistic maniac, and therefore not the victims



Robin Wood and *Eyes of a Stranger*

What positions on violence against women does Wood suggest are taken in *Eyes of a Stranger*?

What elements of the film does Wood invoke in support of this argument?

How does Wood suggest *Eyes of A Stranger* compares to other films of its type?



The Case of *Eyes of a Stranger*

Same subject matter treated differently: the film critiques male-on-female violence

Film encourages victim identification

Presents sympathetic female characters

Condemns pervasive sexism of which a rapist-killer is an extreme manifestation

Claims this film is the exception that makes the rule ... but is it just an exception?

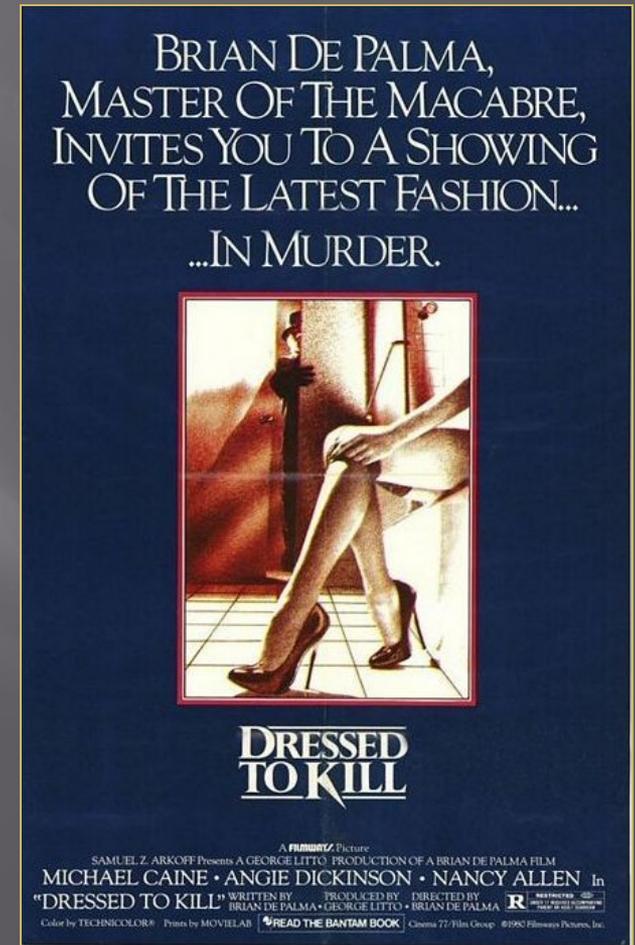


Dressed to Kill (1980)

How did you respond to the violence in this movie?

Which characters did you find likable and which less so?

Does this film hate women?



The Case of *Dressed to Kill*

Focuses on women's emotions, fears, and frustrations

Presents men as selfish, bullish, or violent

Suggest hope might exist in the next generation

Also presented misogyny as a society-wide problem (albeit in deeply racist terms)

Pictures movie-making as a way of countering violence against women



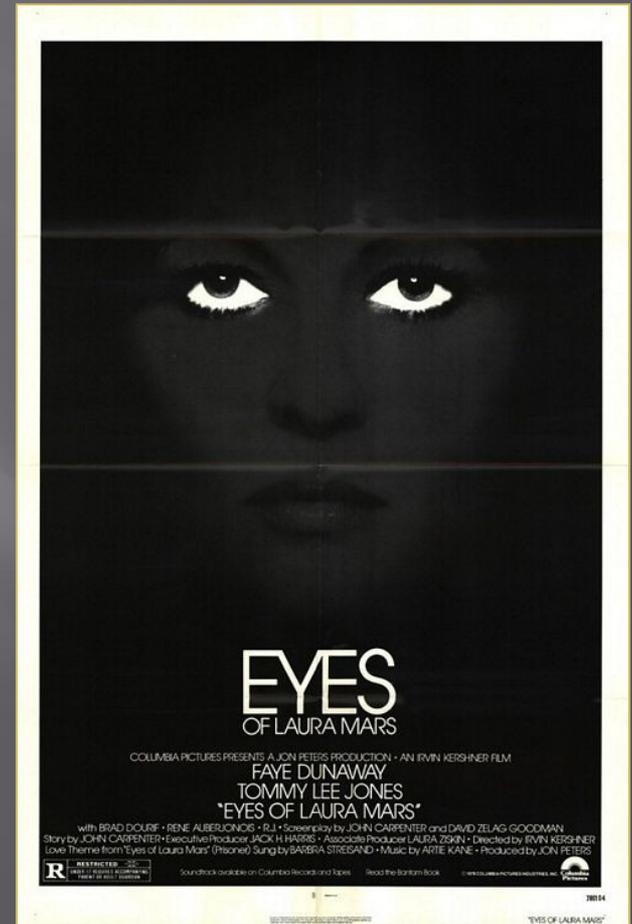
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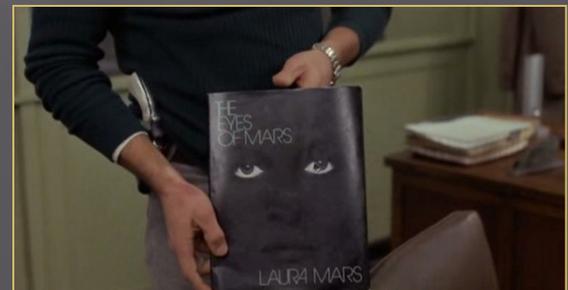
Eyes of Laura Mars: Self-reflexive Critique of misogyny and critical hostility

Portrays independent women as innocent victims of male psychological and social ills

Portrays (straight) men as threatening, violent, and deeply hateful of female autonomy

Links victimization and the media (photography and Hollywood) as feminine

Links critics of the movie and the killer via their shared hatred of “Laura Mars”/“Eyes”



Why alienate half of the movie-going public?

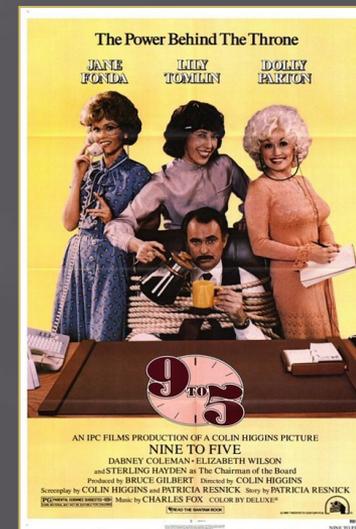
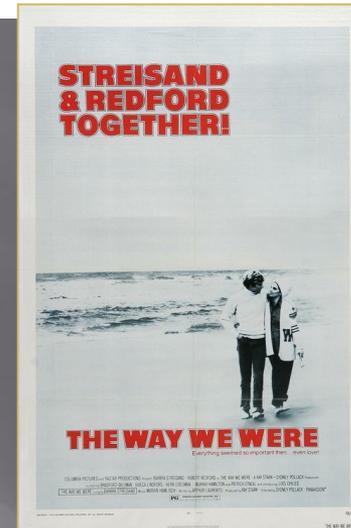
Hollywood courts females in 1970s

Focuses on women's interpersonal, psychic, and professional lives

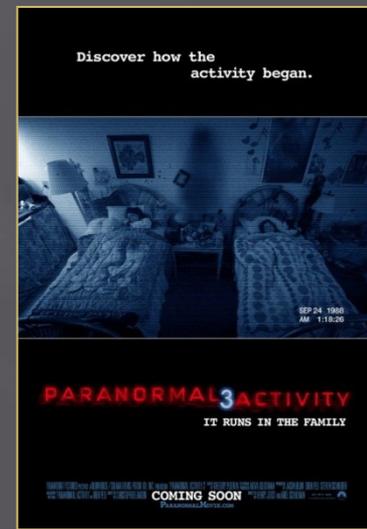
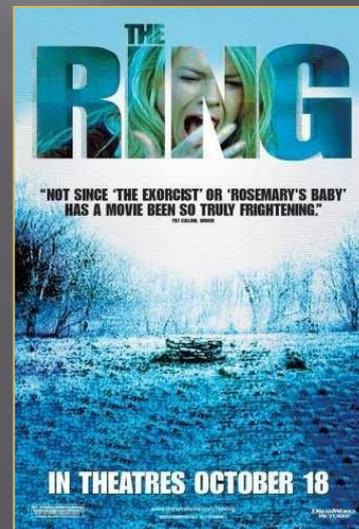
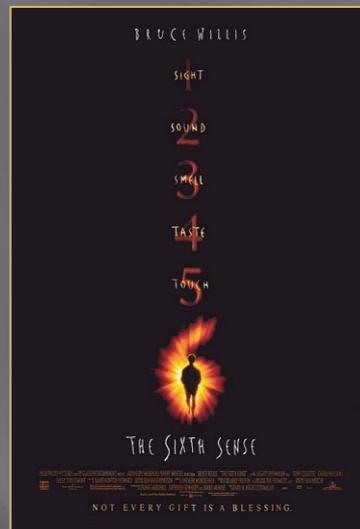
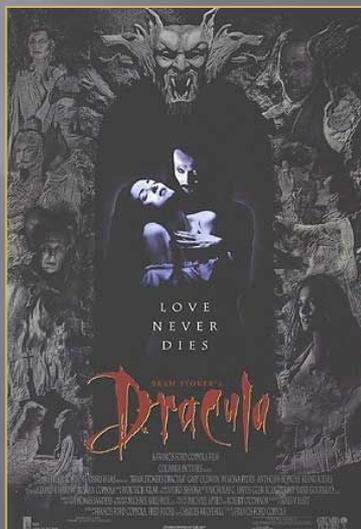
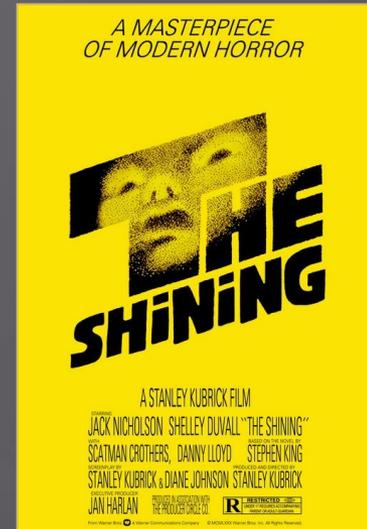
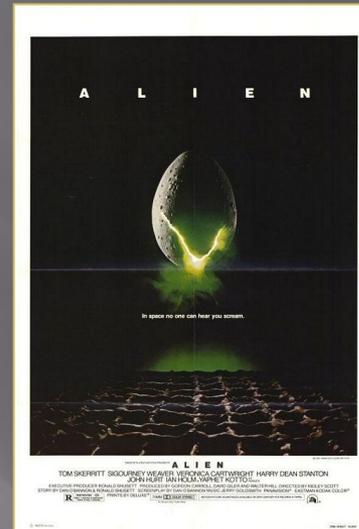
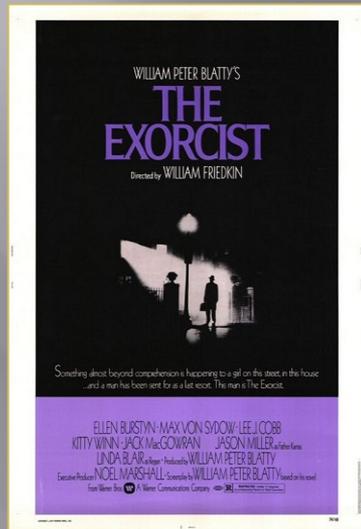
Pictured men as a potential hazard

Heroines in media jobs linked
culture industries to women

Topicalized the standard practice of angling horror and thrillers to women



After all most costly American scary movies are made for women too ...



Columbia Pictures Framing of *Eyes of Laura Mars*

“A thrilling vision of romance and terror,”

“A romantic thriller,”

“A powerful love story,”

“A subliminal mystery, a tragic love story, and a revelation about the nature of the movie medium itself.”

Framing the Hollywood Women-in-Danger Film

Marketing materials primed viewers to interpret these films as:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZOR8hNJOOr0>
(1.40)

Female-friendly critiques of misogyny

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am3edy5HH7E>

1. Addressed women directly

2. Spotlighted connections to female-oriented trends

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skhTOes0vn0>

3. Posited the figure of the female cultural practitioner to imply female authorship

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=669e2gtkUBw>

Summary

Feminists argued the films celebrated violence against women, arguing they represented a backlash against female empowerment

Where Wood suggests EOAS was an exceptional critique, Hollywood releases can be read as attempts to critique misogyny

Films tended to picture men as a threat, and women as unjustly threatened, in order to protect the idea of female autonomy

The films often flagged up this material by including media in the films – usually having heroines working in the culture industries

These strategies were intended to attract female audiences