To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by James Van Dyke entitled "If We Work Within the System, We'll Prevail: A Genre Analysis of the Social Problem Made-for-Television/Cable Movie." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Communications.

Ronald Taylor, Ph.D.
Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Herbert H. Howard, Ph.D.

Sam Swan, Ph.D.

Barbara Moore, Ph.D.

Charles Maland, Ph.D.

Accepted for the Council:

Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of the Graduate School

IF WE WORK WITHIN THE SYSTEM WE'LL PREVAIL:

A GENRE ANALYSIS OF THE SOCIAL PROBLEM MADE-FOR-TELEVISION/CABLE MOVIE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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James Van Dyke

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to Joyce Wolburg,

whose patience, kindness, help, and love

saw me through the many months

it took to get this work into its final form.

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Dissertations are group projects. This one is no exception.

Dr. Ronald Taylor served above and beyond the call of duty as my chair. I cannot thank him enough for his endless patience as we mulled over countless permutations of this dissertation. He helped me to clarify my often fuzzy thinking, and every change he suggested made the work better.

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There are not enough words with which to adequately thank the members of my committee, each of whom spent more time working with me than I imagined they could shoehorn into their busy schedules. Any errors that remain in this text are mine, and mine alone.

ABSTRACT

More than 2,500 made-for-television/cable movies have been shown since the form originated in the 1960s. Made-for-television movies comprise about 25 percent of the big three networks' (ABC, CBS, and NBC) prime time schedule and substantial amounts of some cable networks' programming.

Approximately 17 percent of made-for-television/cable movies can be categorized into the social problem genre. Social problem television/cable movies are characterized by narratives that examine a problem that faces contemporary society. The problem is explored within the context of a family, but is generalized to society through the conventions of the use of explicit dialogue, multiple examples, identification with characters, and geographical and temporal setting.

The study examined twelve made-for-television/cable movies that were produced between 1989 and 1993, and which were shown on network television and cable during 1992 and 1993. The movies were studied from the perspectives of genre analysis and feminist theory.

The twelve movies examined social problems that were grouped into categories of "feminine issues" and "other issues." The six feminine issues movies covered rape, incest, and physical abuse. Within these movies, women tend to be the victims and men the perpetrators of the crimes. The six other issues movies dealt with abortion rights, capital punishment, education reform, parental rights, sexual orientation, and tobacco liability.

The twelve movies were found to be heavily dependent on dialogue. It was largely through dialogue that the movies' ideological viewpoints were most often spelled out; they have a distinct position on right and wrong, and they suggest ways that social problems can be solved. In a majority of the twelve movies, social problems are resolved through the judicial system: victims take their abusers to court, where justice eventually prevails. However, justice is not immediate. Frequently the laws must be changed by activists -- who function as the heads of small groups of heroes-- so that victims can be rewarded and victimizers punished. The overall tone of the movies is that the existing government/social system works in the best interests of Americans, and that the system is flexible enough to be self-righting.

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INTRODUCTION

During calendar year 1992, seven television and cable networks -- ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, Lifetime, TNT, and USA -- telecast thousands of hours of made-for-television and made-for-cable movies. Additional, often older, television/cable movies ran in syndication and on other cable networks such as the Family Channel. Among those thousands of hours were 262 made-for-television/cable movies which had had their premieres during 1991 (and which were being repeated) and those premiering in 1992. At the same time, an equal or greater number of earlier made-for-television/cable movies were repeated or rerun. This production of movies for television is comparable in rough terms to the number of theatrical films distributed by Hollywood during the same period of time. During 1991 279 theatrical releases were handled by the major and independent Hollywood distributors; in 1992 the number dropped somewhat to 261 (Cohn, p. 6).

Movies made specifically to be shown on television are a major part of the programming of both over-the-air and cable networks. During the 1991-1992 television season, approximately 250 new made-for-television movies were scheduled to air (Waters, p. 74). Since the early 1960s, when the first made-for-television movies were shown, more than 2,500 have been produced and aired (Edgerton 1991, p. 115). Cable networks account for a substantial share of these movies: the USA Network, one of the top producers of made-for-cable movies, premieres two new movies each month and shows each one three times, and has telecast more than 60 original movies between the 1989 and 1992 programming seasons (Tucker, p. 39). Turner Network Television (TNT) has produced approximately 85

made-for-cable m[illegible] 8 ("TNT sees stars," p. 23).

[illegible]f movies made specifically to be shown on the over-the-
[illegible]ttle has been written about them from either a scholarly
[illegible]rature dealing with theatrical films is enormous, and the
[illegible]s about television programs is too vast to be easily
[illegible]ion/cable movies seem to have fallen through the
[illegible]th film and television critics. This study is intended
[illegible]y defining one particular genre of television/cable
[illegible] problem genre -- and to help further the argument that made-for-television/cable movies deserve serious, academic study.

Organization of the Study

Chapter 1 outlines the nature of the made-for-television/cable movie. It provides an extended definition of a movie made for television or cable, deals with ratings, gives a brief history of the form, and briefly examines time constraints and budgets.

Chapter 2 explains the structure of the made-for-television/cable movie. It looks at the use of film and videotape, notes running times, and describes the importance of commercial breaks on the form. It also describes the relationship between television/cable movies and the Hollywood cinema by examining and comparing television movie and theatrical film style, realism, ideology, melodrama, individual action, and heroes. The Hollywood social problem film, the genre most closely related to the social problem

television/cable movie, is examined: the characteristics of the genre are spelled out, and the decline of the genre is noted. The made-for-television/cable social problem movie is then explicated. It is described through the way it constructs social reality and portrays issues.

Chapter 3 explains two theoretical and research perspectives used to study made-for-television/cable movies: genre analysis and feminist criticism. The coding scheme for the analysis of the movies is described and a set of research questions is provided. The number of movies chosen and the rationale for selecting them is detailed.

Chapter 4 is a description of twelve made-for-television/cable movies, which leads to a better definition of the genre of the social problem television/cable movie.

Chapter 5 offers analysis and conclusions. It compares the television/cable social problem movie and the Hollywood social problem film, tells us what has been learned about the social problem made-for-television/cable movies, and offers suggestions about directions for additional research.

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE MADE-FOR-TELEVISION/CABLE MOVIE

Introduction

This chapter lays the groundwork for the rest of the dissertation by explaining basic information about the form of the made-for-television/cable movie. It provides an extended definition of the term "made-for-television/cable movie." It looks at ratings as an indication of the popularity of the movies. The chapter contains a brief history of television/cable movies. It also looks at the production of television and cable movies, and notes time and budgetary constraints upon them.

Definition

Deciding what constitutes a "made-for-television/cable" movie is not as easy a task as it would first appear to be: no "definitive" scholarly or popular definition exists. For this dissertation, a made-for-television/cable movie is defined as a narrative movie, either fictional or based on fact, in which a complete story is told within a two- to five-hour running time. The narrative is punctuated by commercial breaks that control the presentation of the story. The narrative stands by itself; i.e., viewers don't have to refer to other movies or television programs in order to make sense of the dramatic action. The movie itself can

be part of a series of television/cable movies (e.g., "Sunday Night at the Movies") or a one-time special.

For example, in a Perry Mason made-for-television movie, the narrative is constructed so that even if a viewer doesn't know who Perry Mason is (which would be the case with few viewers), the viewer could rapidly figure out that Mason is an attorney and the hero of the story.

Definitions by critics and scholars overlap somewhat, and no one definition is broad enough to encompass the range of movies that were being produced between 1988 and 1993, the years covered by this study. One scholar (Waller, pp. 3-4) defines a made-for-television movie as

> a single, "unique" narrative program, generally 90 or 120 minutes long, complete in itself, initially telecast on one evening during prime-time viewing hours, and tailored to accommodate commercial interruptions.

This definition, while usable, excludes two-part made-for-television/cable movies.

Edgerton (1991, p. 126) calls a made-for-television movie a "self-contained filmed or videotaped narrative for television of four hours or fewer that is scheduled over no more than two prime time evenings." This definition fails to acknowledge the five-hour, two-part television/cable movies that are currently being produced and telecast. And, by implication, it categorizes movies that run on three or more evenings as miniseries.

A key element in the definition is that all the movies made for commercial television networks and many for cable networks are punctuated by commercials. Movies shown without commercial interruptions -- such as those produced for the Public Broadcasting

System (PBS) and by premium cable networks such as HBO and Showtime -- are excluded from this study. These movies are more like theatrical releases in structure; made-for-television/cable movies more closely resemble television programs. Without commercials, the dramatic action can continue without the need for the small climaxes of action that precede each commercial break.

A definition should be inclusive enough to tell what a thing is not. Therefore, made-for-television/cable movies are not simply programs that take up two-hour chunks of prime time: they are not "plays produced on videotape, extended episodes of TV series, or so-called 'movies' that are simply a handful of TV episodes strung together" (Maltin 1992, p. xvi). An example of the latter is the 1988 'movie' Supercarrier, which was in reality two episodes of the series Supercarrier edited together (Connor & Furtaw, p. 680). The series ran on ABC between March and August 1988 (Brooks & Marsh, p. 862).

Maltin's comment about the "extended episodes of TV series" is somewhat problematical. Although Maltin uses this phrase, his Movie and Video Guide 1993 lists eighteen Perry Mason made-for-television movies which had been telecast between 1985 and 1991 (pp. 948-949). The Perry Mason series of movies is almost always advertised as made-for-television in TV Guide. Because of the importance of TV Guide in the industry, the working definition of the television/cable movie includes those two-hour programs advertised in TV Guide as made-for-television movies. In other words, if TV Guide calls it a made-for-television/cable movie, and if it's advertised as a made-for-television/cable movie, then it's a made-for-television/cable movie.

Thus, the list of made-for-television/cable movies which premiered and/or aired

during calendar years 1992 and 1993 includes such series-based movies as Matlock: The Vacation and Columbo: A Bird in the Hand, both of which aired on ABC. Neither of these movies was made by editing together two existing episodes of Matlock or Columbo; both were produced as stand-alone movies to fit a two-hour time slot. On the other hand, not all two-hour episodes of Columbo and Matlock are advertised as made-for-television movies. Some are simply called two-hour special episodes, which may be what Maltin means by "extended episodes of TV series."

Columbo is a special case which points out the difficulty of definitions. Maltin lists no Columbo movies at all, treating them by omission as series episodes. This is unusual, for there are no differences in structure between a Perry Mason made-for-television movie and a Columbo made-for-television movie. Brooks and Marsh (p. 178) note that star Peter Falk "continued to film an occasional new episode after 1977" and that production of Columbo movies as part of the "ABC Mystery Movie" series began in 1989. If anything, there are more Columbo movies than Perry Mason movies. Variety ("Made-for," pp. 42-48) lists nineteen Columbo movies of varying years as airing between September 1, 1991 and August 31, 1992. The ratings of Columbo movies can be quite high: Columbo: No Time To Die drew a 16.5 rating/27 share during its CBS network premiere on March 15, 1992.

Something else a television/cable movie is not is an individual episode of an anthology series (Marill 1980, p. 10) or a miniseries, which the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences defines as being shown in "three broadcast parts" and which "typically presents a historical saga or a literary epic in more than four hours" (Edgerton 1991, p. 126).

The definition of television/cable movie as used here is broad enough to include a series pilot if the pilot is advertised as a made-for-television/cable movie in an advertisement in TV Guide. Thus, the pilot for the comedy P.S. I. Luv U. -- which aired on CBS on September 15, 1991 as a made-for-television movie and on the following Saturday became a regularly scheduled although short-lived series -- counts as a made-for-television/cable movie. So does Knight Rider 2000, a fantasy movie that NBC aired on May 19, 1991 and which continues to be rerun on cable. Knight Rider 2000 points out the difficulty of devising a short definition. The Knight Rider series ran on NBC from 1982 to 1986 (Brooks & Marsh, p. 479); the movie is based on the earlier series but updates the story, introduces new characters, and is not compiled from earlier episodes. Brooks and Marsh categorize it as a "prime time series reunion telecast" (p. 1113); however, it fits all the qualifications of being a made-for-television/cable movie.

But not all pilots are movies. Walker, Texas Ranger is an example of a two-hour pilot that was not advertised as a made-for-television movie. The pilot premiered on April 21, 1993. The advertisement for it in TV Guide simply called it a "series premier special 2 hour preview" (TV Guide, April 17-23, 1993, p. 187).

To summarize: a made-for-television/cable movie is a narrative movie, either fictional or based on fact, in which a complete story is told within a two- to five-hour running time. The narrative is punctuated by commercial breaks that control the presentation of the story. The narrative stands by itself; i.e. viewers don't have to refer to other movies or television programs in order to make sense of the dramatic action.

Ratings

It has often been difficult to assess the popularity of the original made-for-cable movies shown on Lifetime, TNT, and the USA Network. Individual program ratings -- the standard measure of popularity -- are compiled by Nielsen for the over-the-air networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) but not for programs on cable. Until Broadcasting & Cable in March 1993 began listing ratings data for the top forty programs airing on cable stations each week, only monthly ratings by cable network were available. For example, during October 1992 (a cable sweeps month), the USA Network averaged a 2.3 rating, while its original made-for-cable movies had an average rating of 3.0 (Dempsey, p. 31). While a rating of 3.0 is low on network television terms -- television movies shown on the networks frequently garnered ratings of 15.0 and went as high as a 23.9 rating during the 1991-1992 season -- it indicates that USA's made-for-cable movies are popular enough (and profitable enough) to ensure their continued production.

Because the availability of cable ratings is limited to only the top forty weekly programs aired since February 1993, this section will concentrate on ratings since then. This period of time corresponds to the airing of most of the movies examined by this study.

Broadcasting & Cable began to list ratings information for programs on cable stations in the March 1, 1993 issue (the same issue was the first to reflect the name change from Broadcasting). Thus, ratings information for cable programming is now available on a weekly basis, beginning with the week of February 15, 1993. The highest-rated made-for-cable movie in 1993 is the USA Network movie Alistair MacLean's "Death Train." The

April 14 showing drew a 4.4 rating and was seen in 2.567 million households ("40 top cable," p. 49). The USA Network's prime time programming for the week of April 12-18 drew an average 2.6 rating and 4.3 share; USA was viewed in 1.597 million households that week ("Top 5 basic," p. 45). Clearly, 'Death Train' drew viewers to the USA Network, with roughly one million additional households tuning in for the movie.

Assessing the popularity of the made-for-television movies broadcast by the over-the-air networks is easier because Nielsen concentrates its national ratings on these networks. During 1992, for example, forty-five made-for-television movies on ABC, CBS, and NBC were popular enough to draw ratings of greater than 15.0 and shares in the neighborhood of 25 percent. Further, ten of those forty-five movies were ranked within the top five programs for the weeks in which they were broadcast.

Fox Network made-for-television movies have traditionally done less well in the ratings: the most popular Fox made-for is Doing Time on Maple Drive, which drew a 9.4 rating/15 share during its premiere on March 16, 1992. The least popular during the 1991-1992 season was Bad Attitudes with a 4.2 rating/6 share.

The highest-rated made-for-television movie of the 1992-1993 season was ABC's two-part, five-hour biopic The Jacksons: An American Dream, which pulled a 21.1 rating/31 share during its first night and a 23.9 rating/36 share its second. This made The Jacksons: An American Dream Part 2 the only made-for-television movie to be ranked as the number one program during any week in 1992. The movie aired during the November sweeps.

The NBC made-for-television movie Day-O holds down the low end of ratings on the traditional "big three" networks. Day-O, a Walt Disney Television-produced fantasy

about a pregnant woman who is revisited by her imaginary childhood playmate, premiered on May 3, 1992 to a 5.3 rating/10 share. It ranked a dismal 78th that week. Despite the low rating, Walt Disney Television has agreed to produce five 'family-oriented' made-for-television movies for ABC during the 1993-1994 and 1994-1995 television seasons ("NBC: bowled," p. 27).

CBS holds the dubious honor of having the lowest-rated made-for-television movie repeat during the 1991-1992 television season. Its repeat of Run Till You Fall on May 30, 1992 generated a tiny 3.7 rating/8 share ("Made-for", p. 46). This drop-off in ratings is the usual pattern when a made-for-television movie is repeated. When CBS broadcast Gunsmoke: To the Last Man on January 10, 1992, it drew a respectable 14.2 rating/24 share, and ranked 28th in popularity that week. But when it was repeated on July 25, 1992, its rating dropped to 6.8, its share fell to 14, and its ranking declined to 62nd for the week.

A Brief History

The body of scholarly literature on television/cable movies is not extensive. Nevertheless, one aspect that has been covered in some detail is the historical development of television movies.

There is a minor academic disagreement about what should be considered the first made-for-television movie. Edgerton (1991, p. 115) dismisses several "television films" from the 1950s, including Walt Disney's Davy Crockett, King of the Wild Frontier, which was "initially broadcast as three separate segments" during the 1954-1955 television season.

Davy Crockett was edited down to ninety-three minutes from three one-hour episodes and released to theaters through Disney's Buena Vista distribution arm on May 25, 1955 (Maltin 1984, p. 122).

The argument is made more complex by the fact that what was intended to be the first made-for-television movie became a theatrical release instead. The Killers, directed by veteran film director Don Siegel and very loosely adapted from a short story by Ernest Hemingway, was considered too violent for showing on television (Marill 1980, pp. 11-12; Maltin 1992, p. 650). The Killers is primarily known today for being Ronald Reagan's final film (Maltin 1992, p. 650). Siegel also directed what turned out to be the second made-for-television movie to actually air. The Hanged Man, a "chase melodrama" produced by Universal Television, was broadcast on November 18, 1964 (Marill 1980, pp. 11-12).

The 1960s. By Edgerton's survey, the first true made-for-television movie -- almost by default after the diversion of The Killers to the theatrical circuit -- was See How They Run, a "routine crime melodrama" that aired as part of NBC's anthology series "Project 120" on October 17, 1964 (Edgerton 1991, p. 116). This movie was produced by Universal Television, the studio which produced the majority of the early made-for-television movies (Marill 1987, p. 369).

Gomery, on the other hand, designates another NBC movie as the first made-for-television movie. Universal Television's Fame is the Name of the Game was promoted as a "world premiere" on "NBC Saturday Night at the Movies" during Thanksgiving weekend 1966 (Gomery, p. 203; Edgerton 1991, p. 117). What distinguishes See How They Run and

Fame is the Name of the Game is that Fame was one of a regularly-scheduled series of movies (Gomery, p. 203), while NBC's "Project 120" aired just two movies, See How They Run and The Hanged Man, before being canceled (Edgerton 1991, p. 116). Marill's 1980 listing of made-for-television movies (p. 12) designates Fame is the Name of the Game as the fourth made-for-television movie; thus, Gomery dismisses without explanation not only See How They Run, but also The Hanged Man and Columbia Pictures Television's Scalplock, a western that aired April 10, 1966 (Marill 1987, p. 363). No made-for-television movies were aired during calendar year 1965.

The 1970s. Made-for-television movies "came of age" during the 1970s (Edgerton 1991, p. 117), when "escapist fare ... [gave] way, for the most part, to more mature themes" (Marill 1987, p. 7). These "more mature themes" frequently involved the examination of issues and problems facing contemporary society; in effect, the television movie was on the verge of becoming the television equivalent of the Hollywood social problem film.

A turning point in their acceptance with audiences came with the broadcast of Brian's Song on ABC on November 30, 1971. The movie (which was not a social problem movie) was "a tale of friendship between two running backs who played for the Chicago Bears," Brian Piccolo and Gale Sayers. It was a rousing success, drawing a 32.9 rating/48 share (Gomery, p. 198). The size of the audience catapulted Brian's Song onto the list of the ten most popular films shown on television, putting this television movie in the company of the popular theatrical films The Wizard of Oz, The Birds, Bridge Over the River Kwai, and Born Free (Gomery, p. 197).

Brian's Song was a joint project of Screen Gems and Columbia Pictures Television. It was the first television movie to win prestigious awards, garnering an Emmy as the Best Dramatic Program of the television season. Additional Emmys were awarded to William Blinn for Best Teleplay and to Jack Warden for Best Performance. The movie's stars, James Caan and Billy Dee Williams, were nominated for Emmys as well (Marill 1987, pp. 53-54).

It was also during 1971 that the first two-part, four-hour made-for-television movie was shown. Vanished was produced by Universal Television and shown on March 8 and 9, 1971. The movie was based on the novel of the same name (Marill 1980, pp. 57-58). Its two-part form would recur frequently during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.

Made-for-television movies continued to increase in popularity throughout the 1970s. By the 1971-1972 season, the networks were scheduling more made-for-television movies than theatrical movies (Gomery, p. 203). "The yearly output of television movies soared from approximately 50 in 1970 to 120 by 1975 and around 150 by 1980," with ABC's popular "Movie of the Week" alone requiring one new television movie during each week of the thirty-nine week season, a demand that continued for six years (Edgerton 1991, p. 121). During this decade CBS and NBC also aired weekly made-for-television movies. During the 1975-1976 season, 32 percent of all the movies and films airing on the networks were made specifically for television; this percentage increased to 57 percent during the 1978-1979 season (Edgerton 1985, p. 161). The percentage seems stable nowadays: during the network sweeps month of May 1993, the over-the-air networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, and Fox) broadcast forty-four movies and films during prime time. Of the forty-four, twenty-six were made-for-televisions movies (59 percent) and eighteen were theatrical films (41

percent). The twenty-six made-for-television movies included five two-part movies.

Ratings continued to be high for made-for-television movies during the 1970s, especially for movies dealing with social or issues-related themes. Two of the top five made-for-television movies of all time, in terms of audience size, were broadcast during the '70s. Helter Skelter, a two-part movie produced by Lorimar Productions (Marill 1987, p. 182) focused on the mass murders led by Charles Manson. The movie was broadcast on CBS on April 1 and 2, 1976. Although not a social problem movie, it became the top audience draw of the 1970s, racking up a 35.2 rating/57 share for the first part and a 37.5 rating/60 share for the second part.

The other 1970s movie to be placed in the all-time top five is Little Ladies of the Night, an ABC movie from Spelling-Goldberg Productions. Its subject is teenaged prostitutes, and the story is told from the viewpoint that teen prostitution is a social problem. It aired on January 16, 1977, drawing a 36.9 rating/53 share (Edgerton 1991, p. 125). Little Ladies is available on video cassette under the title Diamond Alley (Maltin 1992, p. 713).

The 1980s. The trend toward increasing popularity continued during the 1980s. The most popular made-for-television movie of all time aired during this decade. ABC Circle Film's The Day After examined the problems faced by survivors of the nuclear bombing of Kansas City. It pulled a 46 rating/62 share on November 20, 1983 (Edgerton 1991, p. 125). The movie was directed by Nicholas Meyer, an experienced theatrical film director who crossed over to television movies (and who continued in theatrical films, directing among others Star Trek II in 1982 and Star Trek VI in 1991). The Day After was seen by an

estimated audience of 100 million people (Waller, p. 3) and was at the time a subject of discussion by large numbers of people.

The following year, NBC's The Burning Bed, based on the real-life case of a woman who immolated her abusive husband, was broadcast on October 8, 1984. It landed in the number three spot of audience popularity with a 36.2 rating/52 share (Edgerton 1991, p. 125). The movie was produced for Tisch-Avnet Productions, Inc. (Marill 1987, p. 56). The Burning Bed dealt with the issue of spouse abuse as both an individual case and as a social problem that faces many people.

It was also during the 1980s that sources other than ABC, CBS, and NBC sought to capitalize on the ratings and commercial successes of made-for-television movies. The Fox Network, which went on the air in October 1986, began showing made-for-television movies on Monday's "Fox Night at the Movies" in 1988 (Hilmes, p. 185) and continues to do so in 1993.

Turner Network Television (TNT), which began cable-casting in October 1988, premiered its first made-for-cable movie, the biopic Margaret Bourke-White, on April 25, 1989. The movie was retitled Double Exposure: The Story of Margaret Bourke-White for its video release (Brod, p. 66).

The USA Network was not far behind TNT, beginning a series of twenty-four new made-for-cable movies just two days after TNT on April 27, 1989. The USA Network's first made-for-cable movie was The Forgotten (Weinstein, pp. 31-32). The Forgotten is one of several television/cable movies that use the Vietnam War as a plot device. In this thriller, a group of American POWs are released from captivity in North Vietnam after seventeen

years, only to find themselves stalked by mysterious United States government assassins (Marill 1987, p. 418).

The 1990s. It appears that made-for-television/cable movies will continue to be popular with audiences and television/cable networks during the 1990s. Typically, the ratings for television movies aired in a given week show a wide gap between the least- and most-popular. During the first week of February 1993, for example, the low end of the ratings was represented by the 7.7 rating/12 share of the repeat of the 1991 "NBC Movie of the Week" I Still Dream of Jeannie, a spin-off of the 1960s sitcom. The high end was the 19.9 rating/29 share of Skylark, a 1993 "Hallmark Hall of Fame" production on the "CBS Sunday Movie." Skylark is the sequel to 1991's Sarah, Plain and Tall, "the highest-rated TV movie of the 1990-91 season and the highest-rated 'Hallmark Hall of Fame' presentation in the prestigious series' 41-year history" (Fretts, p. 22). Skylark was the fourth most-popular program that week, while Jeannie came in at number 80 (Broadcasting, February 15, 1993, p. 18).

Eight made-for-television movies aired on ABC, CBS, and NBC during the first week of May 1993 (Fox ran a theatrical film in its Monday movie slot). The movies accounted for 27.3 percent of the entire prime time network schedule, or eighteen of sixty-six prime time hours. The figure is somewhat higher than Schulze's estimate (p. 36) that made-for-television movies comprised about 20 percent of the network prime time schedule in the early 1980s. The fact that May is a network sweeps month may have something to do with this higher than expected percentage, although the same figures for February 1993 (also

a sweeps month) show made-for-television movies taking up 24.2 percent of the primetime schedule.

Ratings for made-for-television movies continued to be quite high during the 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 television seasons. In fact, the ratings of television movies are on par with or higher than the ratings of theatrical films shown on television. The top ten theatrical films shown on television between September 1, 1991 and August 31, 1992 are shown in Table 1 ("Theatrical movie," p. 124).

TABLE 1

TOP TEN THEATRICAL FILMS FOR 1991-1992

TITLE	RATING/SHARE
Kindergarten Cop	21.4 rating/30 share
E.T. - The Extra-Terrestrial	18.4 rating/34 share
Tremors	17.1 rating/26 share
Field of Dreams (repeat)	15.9 rating/25 share
When Harry Met Sally	15.7 rating/26 share
Rain Man	15.6 rating/24 share
Beaches	15.3 rating/23 share
Back to the Future III	15.2 rating/23 share
Lethal Weapon (repeat)	15.2 rating/24 share
Bird on a Wire	15.1 rating/24 share

The top ten made-for-television movies during the same period, ("Made for," p. 42) are shown in Table 2.

A comparison of theatrical film and made-for-television movie ratings clearly shows

that among the top ten films and movies, television movies draw larger rating figures (average rating = 18.75) and larger share figures (average share = 28.7), and thus larger audiences than theatrical films (average rating = 16.49, average share = 25.9).

However, ratings don't tell the whole story. Theatrical films have been available to viewers through three additional "windows" -- at the theater, on cable, and on videocassette -- before they're shown on network television.

TABLE 2

TOP TEN MADE-FOR-TELEVISION MOVIES 1991-1992

TITLE	RATING/SHARE
In a Child's Name Part 2	21.9 rating/33 share
Danielle Steel's 'Daddy'	19.6 rating/30 share
A Woman Scorned: The Betty Broderick Story	19.5 rating/30 share
O Pioneers!	18.9 rating/29 share
Danielle Steel's 'Palomino'	18.4 rating/28 share
Wild Texas Wind	18.0 rating/27 share
Luck of the Draw: The Gambler Returns Part 1	18.0 rating/28 share
Stay the Night Part 2	17.9 rating/28 share
In a Child's Name Part 1	17.8 rating/27 share
Woman With a Past	17.5 rating/27 share

Production

Time Constraints. The production techniques of television/cable movies are

constrained by time and money. Shooting schedules are tight, averaging just eleven days during the 1970s (Gomery, p. 205) and expanding to about three weeks during the 1980s (Gitlin 1983, p. 158) as production became more complex. During the 1970s preproduction work was often completed in two weeks, including time allotted for

> script revisions, selection of locations and crews, and any hassles over casting the stars. No time was set aside for rehearsals .... Post production necessitated another week or two. In fact the step was merely mechanical because so few additional takes were allowed, and only shots noted in the script were covered (Gomery, p. 205).

The apparent record-holder for speed of production is The People vs. Jean Harris, a 1981 movie about

> the murder trial of private-school headmistress Jean Harris, convicted of the slaying of her lover, "Scarsdale Diet" Dr. Herman Tarnower, recreated in record time for a movie (TV or otherwise), premiering five weeks after the fact (Maltin 1992, p. 945).

However, this five-week production time was challenged by In the Line of Duty: Ambush in Waco, a movie that recreates the events that led to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) raid on the Branch Davidian religious cult compound. NBC premiered the movie on May 23, just thirty-four days after the end of the siege on April 19. The movie was filmed during the fifty-one-day standoff (Svetkey, pp. 36-37). Ambush in Waco drew an 18.8 rating/30 share and was ranked number seven in popularity; it was the most popular television movie that week. This is a substantially quicker production pace than that of the typical theatrically-released movie, which "takes about nine months to make"

(Wells, p. 22).

Budgets. Besides tight shooting schedules, made-for-television/cable movies are constrained by budgets that averaged about $2.5 million during the 1989-1990 television season (Edgerton 1991, p. 125). But budgets vary by network, and the amount of money spent on a television/cable movie is generally increasing. The USA Network spends an average of approximately $2 million on a made-for-cable movie (Huff, p. 42), while the Fox Network has budgeted the first five made-for-television movies from its reorganized Fox West Pictures Inc. at between $3 million and $4 million (Lowry, p. 16). The license fees ABC, CBS, and NBC pay the producers of made-for-television movies are reportedly in the $2 million to $2.7 million range (Gitlin 1983, p. 148; Huff, p. 42), around 90 percent of the actual production cost.

Budgets can run considerably higher, however. TNT has increased the amount it spends on its original made-for-cable movies slated to air during 1993 and 1994 from an average of $2.7 million to between $4.5 million and $5.5 million (Coe, p. 14). Further, the budget for Gettysburg climbed from $10 million ("Lore for," p. 32) to $13.5 million (Coe, p. 14) to a reported $20 million before the movie was re-edited into a four-hour-and-eight minute (plus intermission) theatrical film and released on October 8, 1993 (Svetkey, pp. 30-31). Gettysburg was tentatively scheduled to air during Fall 1993 or during the first quarter of 1994 ("TNT sees stars," p. 23), but has since been rescheduled as a three-part, six-hour miniseries sometime in 1994 (Svetkey, p. 31).

Sinatra, a two-part, five-hour biopic produced for CBS by Frank Sinatra's daughter

Tina, cost a reported $18.5 million (Harris, p. 37) and appears to be the most expensive television/cable movie yet produced. These figures compare to an average production cost, exclusive of marketing expenses, of $18.5 million for theatrical releases (Edgerton 1991, p. 125). However, theatrical releases frequently run to $40 million and blockbusters can go into the $60 million to $90 million range.

New big-dollar deals indicate that the future of the made-for-television/cable movie is secure. The Lifetime Network plans "at least six original TV movies a year" during future seasons. The six movies will be produced by Lifetime's parent organizations Viacom and Capital Cities/ABC, which together own one-third of the network, and Hearst, which owns the remaining two-thirds (Dempsey, p. 37).

MCA Television has unveiled plans for its "Universal Action Network." MCA will release twenty-four two-hour movies, produced specifically for first-run syndication. The president of MCA Television, Shelley Schwab, told Variety that the movies will be filmed on budgets of $3 million to $5 million each. Six producer-directors will each contribute four movies to the "ad-hoc action network" (Benson, pp. 29-30).

Like MCA Television, the Fox Network is aiming its new generation of made-for-television action movies at the "young, predominantly male viewers" which Fox research indicates comprise more than 50 percent of its average audience. Fox will put up $2 million of each movies' $3 million budget. The remainder will be financed by Alliance Entertainment, which will distribute the movies outside the United States for broadcast and home video (Dempsey, p. 23).

The USA Network has begun a new series of big-budget made-for-cable movies, of

which the highly-rated Alistair MacLean's "Death Train" is the first. Movies produced under the "USA Pictures" banner will be budgeted at between $5 million and $10 million, well above the typical USA budget of about $2 million. The movies are international co-productions and will be distributed theatrically overseas. "Death Train" was produced by the USA Network, British Lion Screen Entertainment, Yorkshire Television, and Jadran Films of Croatia; it was filmed on location in Croatia. British Lion will distribute "Death Train" in Europe and Asia in 1993 (Dempsey, p. 40). The movie was released on videocassette in the U.S. in late October 1993 under the title Detonator and with an R-rating, which implies footage not seen on cable was added (Winecoff, p. 77).

Alliance Communications of Toronto, perhaps the leading producer of the Canadian made-for-television movies shown on American networks, has acquired world-wide distribution rights to the Harlequin Enterprises catalogue of more than 16,000 book titles. Alliance will use the Harlequin library to produce a series of made-for-television movies geared to the international (and probably largely female) market. The first six movies are scheduled for release during Summer 1994; the movies will be broadcast in the United States by CBS. Each of the initial run of movies is budgeted at $2.5 million (U.S.). Plans call for thirteen romance movies based on the Harlequin library to be made each year (Murray, p. 26).

The increasing expense of producing made-for-television/cable movies is leading to deals between network and cable sources for the sharing of production costs. HBO and NBC in 1992 agreed to jointly produce the movie Blind Side. The movie was first shown on HBO and then ran with commercials and toned-down language on NBC ("HBO, NBC," p. 40).

The actual air dates were January 30, 1993 on HBO and April 26, 1993 on NBC. Showtime and CBS also entered into a similar deal, with CBS agreeing to produce an R-rated version of the movie Double Jeopardy for Showtime and a "softer incarnation" for itself ("More movies," p. 26). Double Jeopardy ran on Showtime in 1992 and was scheduled on CBS on October 24, 1993.

The structure of the cable business allows more programming flexibility for made-for-cable movies than the over-the-air networks enjoy for their made-for-television movies. A cable network can program a movie many more times than the two or three showings an over-the-air network is limited to. In fact, a cable network can show a movie two or three times a week for a month or more, and then bring the movie back for additional showings after a hiatus of a few months. The over-the-air networks rarely run a movie more than once during a calender year, although there are exceptions. Additional showings of a made-for-cable movie allow a cable network additional time to make a profit on the movie, and means that the network can survive with much smaller audiences than the over-the-air networks require.

Summary

The nature of the made-for-television/cable movie is characterized by increasing complexity as years pass. Beginning in the 1960s, the television movie grew during the 1970s and 1980s to be a major part of prime time programming; during the 1980s cable networks began to use original movies as a part of their programming. The 1990s appear to

be characterized as a time of an increasing commitment, especially by cable, to the made-for movie. Networks are planning to spend more money on each movie they finance, in the hopes of drawing larger audiences. Importantly, the made-for-television/cable movie is being seen by its producers as marketable not only in the United States but overseas.

CHAPTER II

STRUCTURE OF MADE-FOR-TELEVISION/CABLE MOVIES

Aspects of Structure

Made-for-television/cable movies, although in many ways similar to theatrical films, adhere to strict stylistic conventions dictated by television. These conventions, which have evolved over the thirty years that television/cable movies have been made, distinguish television/cable movies from theatrical films, and help viewers rapidly (if unconsciously) understand they're watching a movie made for television or cable.

This chapter examines many of the conventions. It looks into the use of film and videotape, running times, commercial breaks, and constraints. It examines the relationship of the television/cable movie to Hollywood films in terms of cinematic style, realism, ideology, melodrama, and industrial action. The chapter also looks at the Hollywood social problem film's characteristics and the decline of the genre, showing that television/cable social problem movies are similar in the use of incompatible values, construction of social reality, and portrayal of issues.

Film v. Videotape. Most made-for-television/cable movies are shot on film, like theatrical releases. But some movies are shot entirely on videotape, to either speed up the production time or to make the movie look more like a documentary. An example of the

former is Victory at Entebbe, a docudrama about the Israeli military rescue of hostages in Entebbe, Uganda. The rescue took place on July 4, 1976; the movie was broadcast on December 13, 1976, about five months later (Marill 1980, p. 248). An example of the latter use of videotape is Without Warning: Terror in the Towers, broadcast on May 26, 1993 on NBC. The movie deals with the terrorist bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City in February 1993. The docudramatic segments are seamlessly blended with news footage taken at the time of the bombing. This technique is also used in Miss America: Behind the Crown, a movie examined in some detail later in this dissertation. Videotaped news footage of Carolyn Sapp being crowned Miss America 1992 is intercut with videotaped scenes recreated for the movie's narrative.

Running Times. Made-for-television/cable movies have in general been produced in two lengths to fit television's "standard" ninety-minute and two-hour formats. Taking into account commercials and promotional announcements, and time allotted to a program's opening and closing, a movie that fits the ninety-minute time slot in real time runs around seventy-eight minutes; a two-hour movie has a running time of between ninety-three and 100 minutes (Marill 1987, p. 9). While there has been some variation across time -- 1983's The Day After ran 145 minutes and some 1960s movies were as short as seventy-four minutes -- the 100-minute (more or less) movie came to be the industry standard during the 1980s. It continues to be so today.

The evolution of television/cable movies during the past few years requires a special note about running time. What used to be called a two-part made-for-television movie in the

1970s is often billed in the 1990s as a miniseries, and the running time of a two-part made-for is sometimes stretched to five hours. During the 1992-1993 television season, both Sinatra and The Jacksons: An American Dream were constructed so that the first night ran three hours and the second night two hours; both were advertised as miniseries. During the previous season, 1991-1992, the four-hour two-parters The Gambler Returns: Luck of the Draw and In a Child's Name were advertised as miniseries. But so was the "long form" four-part, six-hour A Woman Named Jackie, which shows that the networks themselves now define "miniseries" as any made-for-television movie shown in two or more parts.

This is not to say, however, that all made-for-television/cable movies adhere to standardized time frames. Some are forced to. Television/cable movies longer than 100 minutes are often edited down for reruns, syndication, or home video release. The Day After, for example, was cut by twenty-three minutes (to approximately 122 minutes) for its network repeat. The home videotape and foreign theatrical release run 126 minutes -- longer than the network repeat but not as long as the original -- while the videodisc version is available at the original running time (Maltin 1992, p. 279). Likewise, Which Way Home, a 1990 television/cable movie about the rescue of orphans in Cambodia in 1979, had an original running time of 140 minutes (Maltin 1992, p. 1380). This made-for-New Zealand-television movie (it has a largely American cast) has a running time of approximately 100 minutes in its syndicated form: thus, it fits within the two-hour time slot used by most American television/cable movies.

Over the years, many television movies have had their running times altered. Some are shortened for ideological reasons before they premiere at the insistence of the network

that runs them. Roger Gimbrel Productions, EMI Television, and Abby Mann Productions worked together on a television movie originally titled Lawman Without a Gun. When it aired on May 30, 1979, the movie had been retitled This Man Stands Alone and had been "emasculated by severe last-minute editing by [NBC]." The plot of the movie deals with a follower of Martin Luther King who defeats the segregationist sheriff of his small hometown in an election; the movie was "inspired" by the life and career of Thomas E. Gilmore. The movie is once again known in syndication by its original title, Lawman Without a Gun, although the excised material has apparently not been edited back in (Marill 1987, pp. 417-418).

Occasionally a television movie is lengthened after its initial on-the-network showing. Such was the case with Human Feelings, a movie produced by Crestview Productions and Worldvision. The movie, a comedy pilot, ran ninety minutes and, like a sitcom episode, had a laugh track in its NBC network premiere on October 16, 1978. When it was repeated, the movie had grown to two hours and the laugh track had been eliminated.

Commercial Breaks. The 100-minute running time of the commercial over-the-air television network movie is most often punctuated by six commercial breaks, which force the movie to be constructed in seven distinct "acts." Made-for-cable movies tend to include additional breaks for commercials, so that The USA Network's movies, for example, have nine breaks and ten acts. It appears that the extra commercials are simply inserted into the movie, for the usual climaxes before breaks seem to be missing. This can disrupt the narrative, provoking the same feeling produced when a theatrical film is edited for

television, as the breaks sometime occur within scenes.

Breaks for commercials control the structure of the made-for-television/cable movie:

> These sequences, therefore, affect the cause-effect relations in the narrative whereby climaxes of increasing intensity are usually accomplished as the drama proceeds along toward its denouement. As a result, scriptwriters and directors working in the telefilm are confronted with an exact formal imperative, just as if they were writing a sonnet, or composing a rondo (Edgerton 1985, pp. 164-165).

This "exact formal imperative" requires a dramatic climax to occur without fail immediately before each break. Individual acts in television movies tend to run between ten and twenty-five minutes in length, usually with a longer act at the beginning and end of the movie. With cable movies, later acts tend to be shorter than earlier ones.

Constraints. Gomery (pp. 204-205) writes that the constraints imposed by "restrictions on budgets, language and sex" caused the made-for-television movie during the 1970s to "become what the B film was to Hollywood in the earlier eras." To Gomery, made-for-television movies are the equivalent of the low-budget, quickly-produced Hollywood films that dealt with topical themes during the studio era (roughly 1930 to 1960). We will return to this comparison later in the dissertation, with a discussion of social problem Hollywood films and their relationship to social problem made-for-television/cable movies.

Edgerton (1991, p. 114) disputes the B-film categorization, though; instead he conceptualizes made-for-television movies as being closer in theme and structure to a "product of network TV." Brode (p. 57) sides with Edgerton in the argument, writing that

> the TV movie has to play to everybody, to entertain the vast middle American audience which had never frequented the theatrical B movies. Thus [made-for-television movies are] far more restrained and considerably less impressive.

The key difference here -- Brode's value judgments aside -- is that Gomery views made-for-television movies primarily as films, while Edgerton and Brode view them as forms of television programs. This dissertation is argued from the point that the television/cable movie fuses elements of television and film into a new form with its own set of conventions.

Relation To Hollywood Cinema

Style. Made-for-television/cable movies are produced specifically with the small home television screen in mind. This means that television/cable movies are filmed mostly within the conventions of television and not within Hollywood cinematic conventions, although the conventions are related. That is,

> the typical telefilm emphasizes few and intimate shot types, usually favoring the medium shot, the close-up, and the extreme close-up; a shallow depth-of-field and higher key lighting strategies because of the low definition of the TV picture; very simple and confined settings; uncomplicated editing, characteristically in the continuity style; and a straightforward and functional use of sound (Edgerton 1985, p. 165)

Stylistically, made-for-television/cable movies are similar to television programs, although they are shot with the one-camera technique Hollywood uses for films and not the

three-camera technique used for television programs. In other words, made-for-television/cable movies look at home on television because they are produced specifically to be seen on the typical twenty- to twenty-five-inch diagonal television screen.

Nevertheless, "it is not too much to say that our conception of any film (or television show), fictional or not, rests chiefly upon assumptions derived from the classical Hollywood cinema" (Bordwell et.al., p. 379). That is, the way television looks owes a debt to Hollywood: viewers expect, for example, continuity editing -- an editing style that doesn't draw attention to itself as it allows dramatic action to flow from shot to shot and scene to scene -- and an objective camera that sees more than any one character in a program or movie can see. "Contemporary television has continued this [cinematic] influence: shot/reverse shot, eyeline matching, and edge lighting are obvious borrowings" (Bordwell et.al., p. 379, quoting David Antin).

The techniques Hollywood employed for decades in theatrical releases have carried over into the production of television/cable movies. What is important in Hollywood movies, in terms of their cinematic style, is often what viewers don't consciously see on the screen. As Ray puts it (p. 32):

> the American cinema's formal paradigm ... developed as a means of concealing ... dozens of choices about such elements as camera placement, lighting, focus, casting, and framing .... Thus, lighting remained unobtrusive, camera angles predominantly at eye-level, framing centered on the principal business of a scene. Similarly, cuts occurred at logical points in the action and dialogue.
>
> The film style is invisible; it doesn't call attention to itself and rarely (if ever) forces

the film viewer to contemplate that they are watching a film and not peering in on the characters' "real" lives.

The style of classical Hollywood films, then, does not draw attention to itself. This Hollywood convention is reflected in the structure of most made-for-television/cable movies because television, like the Hollywood film, "strives to conceal its artifice through techniques of continuity and 'invisible' storytelling" and demands that "the film should be comprehensive and unambiguous" while possessing "a fundamental emotional appeal that transcends class and nation" (Bordwell et.al., p. 3).

Realism. The reason for not calling attention to the stylistic elements and structure of a film or television program is that producers strive for the effect of realism, i.e., they want the viewers to believe they're watching "real life" (although of course they aren't). As such, a film or television program

> is "realistic" not because it reproduces reality, which it clearly does not, but because it reproduces a dominant sense of reality, a reality that is itself carefully, although perhaps not entirely consciously, constructed. We can call television an essentially realistic medium because of its ability to carry a socially convincing sense of the real (Fiske, p. 21).

What we see on television and in film is less reality than a compellingly "real" looking version of a fictional world. Critics argue that what we see is what the makers of the movies and the networks want us to see, that what the movie makers see is what the dominant social class (i.e., white, upper-middle class, male) sees. Plus, in social problem television/cable movies, there is often a particular viewpoint of right and wrong taken by the

movie.

In short, it could be said that made-for-television movies are

> old-fashioned stylistically and quite blatant in their moralistic, social messages. They use -- and assume that their viewers buy into -- the hokey realist conventions that have by now been thoroughly unmasked, deconstructed, and discredited by cultural theorists as bearers of falsely "naturalized," mythologized versions of social reality (Rapping 1992, p. x).

Nonetheless, if ratings are any guide, the intended audience of made-for-television/cable movies appear to be comfortable with "hokey realist conventions." They are probably unaware -- and perhaps don't care -- that what they watch has been "unmasked, deconstructed, and discredited by cultural theorists," as well.

Ideology. The "socially convincing sense of the real" conveys both the ideology of the culture in which the film, television/cable movie, or television program is produced, and the ideology of its producers.

> "Ideology" to Americans usually smacks of a foreign disease: something that afflicts other people. But ideology means nothing more or less than a set of assumptions that becomes second nature ... Television can no more speak without ideology than we can speak without prose. We swim in its world even if we don't believe in it (Gitlin 1983, p. 333).

It is too simplistic to say that a culture's ideology is directly reflected in the mirror of mass media, for the "commercial culture" does more than just produce ideological messages:

> it relays and reproduces and processes and packages and focuses ideology that is constantly arising from social elites and from active social groups and movements throughout the society (as well as within media organizations and practices) (Gitlin, p. 251).

The manner in which "social reality" is portrayed on television and in films is through

> characteristically represent[ing] particular events happening to individualized people in specified places and time spans. The senses and experiences of the individual are seen as the prime way of making sense of the universe of phenomena, and if social, moral, religious or political ideas intrude, then they must always be experienced within the focus of individual experience (Fiske, p. 22).

This occurs as part of the melodramatic tradition, and it is to that subject that this chapter must now turn.

Melodrama

Definition. Because of the manner in which television/cable movies are produced and because they are viewed at home on television (via broadcast, cablecast, or on videocassette), plot and story development are melodramatic. Edgerton (1985, p. 165) notes that melodrama has five basic ingredients:

> a predictable fictional world, the display of exaggerated emotions, stereotyped characters, distinct poles of good and evil with justice usually prevailing, and resolution through action.

This definition points to a linkage between melodrama and realism. Fiske (p. 22) quotes Raymond Williams, who wrote that realism itself has three characteristics: a contemporary setting, dramatic action described in human terms, and a story that deals with the lives and experiences of ordinary people. All of these characteristics are present in the majority of made-for-television/cable movies.

Melodrama has a unique structure that is rooted in the nineteenth century theater and in novels. Melodrama is characterized by its

> persistent and much-condemned habit of moral simplification and its lust for topicality, its hunger to engage or represent behavior and moral attitudes that belong to its particular day and time, especially behavior shocking and threatening to prevailing moral codes (Thorburn, pp. 531-532).

The topicality of made-for-television/cable movies is a factor that connects them to the silent social problem movies, to the Hollywood B pictures of the 1930s and 1940s, and to Warner Brothers' "social films of the Great Depression" (Gomery, p. 199). Hollywood social problem films from the silent era onwards dealt with subjects which were then part of the public discourse and raised other issues for public debate, just as the social problem television/cable movie does today. One example is Warner Brothers' 1932 release, I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang, a film that dealt with the punishment of criminals; another is Columbia Pictures' On the Waterfront (1954), which dealt with union corruption, among other things.

Made-for-television/cable movies have historically treated a wide variety of social problems and themes in melodramatic fashion.

> You name the subject and there's probably been a TV movie about it: missing children, wife beating, the off-the-field antics of the Dallas Cowboy cheerleaders, the war in Vietnam, a mock invasion of killer bees, hookers, rape, nuclear holocaust, homosexuality, serial murder, AIDS, incest and homelessness (Weinstein, p. 24).

Many movies that deal with these issues play to high ratings. In fact, the "nuclear holocaust" movie The Day After, which dealt with the issue of survival after a nuclear strike, is the highest-rated television movie in the thirty-year history of the form.

Individual Action. Another important aspect of melodrama is that

> action should result from individual characters acting as causal agents .... The story invariably centers on the difficulties of a small group of persons, their decisions, choices, and given character traits (Gomery, p. 207).

The small group of persons in made-for-television/cable movies are often the members of a family. The movies personalize, discuss, and try to offer possible solutions to social problems by acting them out with a few main characters who are what Ray (p. 73) calls the "interest centers" of the movie. Where the issues themselves are often the subject of documentaries, how those issues affect the members of a family is the subject of countless made-for-television/cable movies (and of hundreds of melodramatic Hollywood films).

Within the context of the made-for-television/cable movie, the definition of family is broad enough to include "traditional" mom-dad-and-kids families and families with a missing parent. That is, a family is

> a group of people tied by blood or marriage; living under the same roof; organized by the hierarchy of authority, mutual obligation, and privilege; assuming the defined roles and statuses associated with "traditional" extended and "modern" nuclear families; and providing its members with primary supports and constraints cemented by emotional as well as economic interdependence (Taylor, p.2).

The notion that social problems can be solved by individuals who act within families is descended from the classical Hollywood cinema. Christensen (p. 212) notes that Hollywood has a long "cinematic tradition of the common man rising to meet a challenge" in situations where "ordinary people who stumble onto evil and corruption overcome their fear and fight the system single-handedly and successfully." In the world of the television/cable movie, however, fighting the system is something done by a family instead of an individual. Ray calls this tradition of the brave-but-ordinary hero part of the "Hollywood thematic paradigm" (p. 57), which

> rested on an industrywide consensus defining commercially acceptable filmmaking. This consensus's underlying premise dictated the conversion of all political, sociological, and economic dilemmas into personal melodramas.

The thematic paradigm -- which has been adopted whole-scale by the television industry for both dramatic series and movies-- holds that a successful person can simultaneously be a rugged individualist and a member of a family, and that personal action can solve social woes. Speaking of the Hollywood cinema, Ray writes (p. 57) that the thematic paradigm extends across all genres, even into musicals:

> Meet Me in St. Louis, for example, overcomes the opposition inherent in the myth of family (encouraging contentment and permanence) and the myth of success (encouraging ambition and mobility).

The social problem television/cable movies this dissertation examines have adopted the thematic paradigm. The interest centers of these movies are simultaneously members of families and (usually) successes at whatever it is they're doing; they take some form of action which resolves the problems they face.

The Hollywood Social Problem Film

Characteristics of the Genre. From the silent era through the 1960s and 1970s, Hollywood produced large numbers of social problem films. The percentage of Hollywood films within the genre varied between 28 percent in 1947 to about 9 percent in 1954 (Byars, p. 113, quoting Garth Jowett).

From the first, the social problem film was characterized by "the attempt to capture a possible economic reality ... and then represent it with a single individual" (Sloan, p. 24). That is, the films attempted to show a problem that faced all of society, but framed the problem within the context of a single individual or a family. This tradition continues in contemporary television and cable movies, in which problems facing hundreds or thousands of people are examined in light of how they affect one person or one family.

But while the social problem genre is often associated with the 1930s, 1940s, and early 1950s, the social problem film "interpreted the nation's headlines in dramatic visual

images that at once persuaded and entertained" (Sloan, p. 3) almost from the beginning of the movies themselves:

> With titles such as Capital Versus Labor, The Suffragettes' Revenge, A Corner in Wheat, The Usurer's Grip, The Girl Strike Leader, or The Reform Candidate, all released in the first fifteen years of the twentieth century, the cinema championed the cause of labor, lobbied against political "bosses," and often gave dignity to the struggles of the urban poor. Conversely, other films satirized suffragists, ridiculed labor organizers, and celebrated America's corporate leaders in antilabor melodramas that the American Federation of Labor denounced and boycotted (Sloan, p. 2).

Roffman and Purdy's definition of the studio era social problem genre is consistent with the definition of the television/cable social problem movie of today. They write that it

> combines social analysis and dramatic conflict within a coherent narrative structure. Social content is transformed into dramatic events and movie narrative adapted to accommodate social issues as story material through a particular set of movie conventions. These conventions distinguish the social problem film as a genre (p.viii).

Byars would agree with this. She writes (p. 112) that social problem movies, especially those produced just after the end of World War II, represented "the frustrations as well as the aspirations of their American audiences" as they "explored the seamier side of life." As examples, she lists The Lost Weekend, "Hollywood's first realistic depiction of alcoholism" and The Best Years of Our Lives, "which focused attention on the concerns of returning soldiers and their families" (p. 113). Byars emphasizes that the films, like the social problem television/cable movies of today, were a "celebration of the family" that

"offered no real challenge to the status quo" (p. 113). That is, they resolved social problems within the context of the family and showed that the institutions of American life were basically sound.

One of the conventions of the Hollywood social problem film was its didacticism: "it deals with social themes very much on the surface of the dramatic action" (Roffman & Purdy, p. viii). The social problem films were, for the most part, more content to deal with the reactions of a few characters to a social situation than with examining the underlying problems that caused the situation. Or, as Byars has it, the problems are resolved by bringing the person with the problem back into the "domestic and social order" of the family (p. 129).

The downplaying of the sociopolitical causes of problems facing society in favor of resolutions found through personal action, personal redemption, and heterosexual romance continued to be employed by both Hollywood films and made-for-television/cable movies in the 1990s.

The Decline of the Social Problem Film. The Hollywood social problem film, so popular during the '30s and early '40s, went into decline after the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) began its investigations in 1947 into the alleged infiltration of Communists in the film industry and the subsequent use of the blacklist (Byars, p. 113; Roffman & Purdy, pp. 285-286). In addition, the social climate of the nation seemed to be changing as the 1940s gave way to the more-prosperous 1950s. "Eisenhower and affluence relegated social concerns to a position that was secondary to matters of personal identity." The socially-concerned hero of the '30s and '40s became the "rebel without a cause" hero of

the 1950s (Roffman & Purdy, p. 297).

The social problem film, however, did not die out completely. Films in the genre continued to be made during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. And by the mid-1960s, the made-for-television movie began to take up social issues as a concern.

The Television/Cable Social Problem Movie

Incompatible Values. Most Hollywood films, including social problem films, and made-for-television/cable movies deal at some level with incompatible values. Ray (p.63) calls the incompatibility of American values the

> ... contradictory [tradition] evinced by the general pattern of American mythology: the denial of the necessity for choice ... By discouraging commitment to any single set of values, this mythology fostered an ideology of improvisation, individualism, and ad hoc solutions for problems depicted as crises.

Westerns often showed how the hero had to choose between the value of individualism versus the value of being a member of a community. But in television/cable movies, the choices are often more specific to the problem at hand.

An example of the concept of refusing to choose between conflicting values can be found in the social problem movie In the Best Interest of the Children, which premiered on NBC on February 16, 1992 to a respectable 16.0 rating/24 share. (It was repeated on September 7, 1992 and pulled an 11.1 rating/18 share). The movie dealt with a three-sided argument: the right of a parent to raise her children the way she sees fit, the right of the state

to see that children are "properly" cared for, and the rights of the children themselves -- each of which is in conflict with the others. The movie examined the complex interrelationships among a mentally ill, unwed, welfare mother of five; foster parents appointed by a state agency; and five minor children who wanted a voice in the decision about whom they would live with.

In the Best Interest of the Children made the viewer's choice of deciding who is correct more difficult by breaking some of the stereotypes surrounding welfare mothers, thereby constructing a reality in which welfare mothers are similar to the movie's implied audience of middle-class viewers. The mother (Sarah Jessica Parker) was young, white, blonde, and pretty, and lived in a small town in Iowa, not in an inner city area. Viewers were shown that the foster parents were good and decent people, who "broke the rules" by becoming too emotionally attached to their foster kids. The bureaucrats at the welfare agency, on the other hand, were portrayed as part of a system that failed to provide the best care for the children.

But by the end of the movie, the existing system was shown as flawed but still functioning. The mother was recovering in a state hospital and the kids, who were placed with different foster parents, were eventually reunited. The child-care system ultimately worked, despite bungling bureaucrats who cared more about rules and paperwork than the children in their care. In other words, the current system of child welfare, though flawed, came through in the end. No one in the movie proclaimed that the system was rotten and ought to be dismantled; this was not one of the choices facing viewers.

Telling the viewers that making a decision really isn't necessary (because the system

as it exists works) is also a part of the Hollywood thematic paradigm that has been transplanted to television movies. Ray notes (p. 67) that

> ... when faced with a difficult choice, American stories resolved it either simplistically (by refusing to acknowledge that a choice is necessary), sentimentally (by blurring the differences between the two sides), or by laughing the whole thing off.

Construction of Social Reality. There are many ways in which social problems can be reflected in television/cable movies. Jarvik (p. 80) contends that made-for-television movies are essentially democratic, calling them

> the locus for debate over values in contemporary American society, serving as morality play and town meeting ... The television movie-of-the-week presents common citizens with the opportunity to participate in the formation of national opinion on social and historical issues.

Rapping (p. 36) concurs in this viewpoint, referring to the made-for-television movie as a form of "low art" that is significant because of its "very accessibility, its way of allowing an entire nation ... to participate in a common cultural and political experience." As mentioned earlier, the social and historical issues in these movies range from incest to nuclear war.

Gomery (p. 206) reflects this theme, writing that both current made-for-television movies and the social problem Hollywood films of the 1930s - 1950s attempt to fulfill "a particular cultural need: topical entertainment reaffirming basic values and beliefs." Rapping

(1992, p. xi) agrees, noting that television movies

> crossed the line between fiction and fact, between drama and information, and entered the realm of important social discourse not indirectly, through movie reviews, but quite directly through channels normally reserved for "real-life" events.

Of course, crossing the line between fiction and fact is not unique to made-for-television/cable movies. I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang, for example, was "based on a shocking true story," just as many of today's television/cable movies are.

Jarvik, Gomery, and Rapping are approaching the arguments that television/cable movies not only allow opinions of right and wrong to be formed, but also help shape the values and beliefs that the opinions are based on.

Gomery writes that made-for-television movies treat controversial issues in a noncontroversial manner, so that the movies can "titillate viewers without scandalizing them" (p. 207). This is a way of raising a currently hot issue and discussing or at least exploring some aspects of the issue, without calling into question the existing beliefs of audience members. Thus, social problems that can be considered unsavory but nonetheless interesting in a voyeuristic fashion, such as incest or wife beating, "can be presented in a way which is accessible to people of all ages, classes and education levels" (Rapping 1987, p. 30) with a minimal risk of offending anyone.

Controversy by definition requires a dispute with opposing sides. But few (if any) social problem movies deal with issues that have two sides. More often, the issue is presented so that one side is right and the other wrong. In this light, movies that could be

considered to have a controversial subject -- e.g., Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story, a 1993 television movie about incest, and Shameful Secrets, a 1993 movie about an abusive male-female relationship -- can be seen as not controversial at all. The incest aggressor and the wife-batterer are wrong. Period. The movie offers no other interpretation; the victims are never shown to be "deserving" of their abuse in any way, the abusers are never justified in any way for what they do.

Made-for-television/cable movies often appear to "put a challenge to dominant ideology while deploying codes that work to pull this challenge back into a socio-central space" (Schulze, p. 35). That is, while made-for-television/cable movies on their surface seem to challenge the way things are, they often take a safe route and endorse the status quo: "Issues are raised but never resolved ... the problems are exploited rather than explored" (Brode, p. 63). The problems in television and cable social problem movies are resolved within the system, which (most of the time) works in the best interests of the people who most need to be helped. The system itself is rarely challenged; it is usually shown to be flexible and accomodating to changing demands.

Portrayal of Issues. The exploitation of issues in made-for-television/cable movies is a characteristic inherited from the Hollywood cinema. Hollywood has a long tradition of oversimplifying and personalizing social problems without deeply exploring them or challenging the beliefs of audience members. Christensen (p. 218) writes that

> in Guess Who's Coming to Dinner, for example, the solution is so readily apparent that our own racist attitudes aren't really challenged: of course our daughters could

> marry nice black doctors like Sidney Poitier. Red Dawn and Rambo leave us no options either. The villains of such movies -- whether they're racists, communists, bureaucrats, or businessmen -- are so broadly caricatured that we have no choice but to reject them, and we certainly can't identify with them.

This characteristic is carried over into the television/cable social problem movie. The villains -- the self-serving attorneys, the wife beaters, the men who rape their daughters -- are all portrayed so as to be rejected by the audience. The bad characters in these movies are not like you and me; they are different, they are "others".

The dilemma facing the made-for-television/cable movie is that it

> has to be "hot" or sensational, yet, it must be "familiar" at the same time. It must mark itself off as "different," but not too different. It must provoke curiosity by the promise of the unusual or scandalous, but reassure by its reference to the instantly recognizable (Schulze, p. 37).

This is exactly what the social problem movie juggles. The narrative must put the viewers into a foreign situation, such as being part of a family in which a woman in a coma needs an abortion, that is "'different,' but not too different."

This sense of familiarity within the television/cable movie may be part of an agenda-setting effect. Agenda-setting theory "focuses our attention on the process by which the media play a significant part in generating a common culture" (Lowery & DeFluer, p. 339). Certainly television/cable movies are part of our common culture, as large numbers of people watch and presumably talk about them. Perhaps agenda-setting is a perspective from which they can be studied. It seems plausible that the movies might play a role in

highlighting a particular problem that viewers may not be aware of, and showing how that problem is "correctly" viewed and resolved.

Family Melodramas in Hollywood and on Television

Hollywood social problem films existed side-by-side with family melodramas, and the pattern is repeated today in made-for-television/cable movies. Byars writes (p. 147) that "the various film melodramas of the 1950s ... lay bare the family's internal contradictions more explicitly than any other film genre." This notion -- which applies to television/cable movies as well as Hollywood films -- points to an overlap in what I call the social problem television/cable movie and other television/cable movie genres. The issues the movies discuss may be similar. But while the social problem movie explains and generalizes a problem that faces society, the family melodrama television/cable movie, like its Hollywood compliment, examines a problem within the context of a family. It often looks only at the family at the center of the movie, and frequently fails to generalize the issue beyond that family.

The genres are distinct in other ways, as well. The Hollywood family melodrama often

> begins as the community of women and children is invaded by a young and virile male "intruder-redeemer" who identifies the problem -- the female protagonist's lack of connectedness to a male -- and enables its solution: their coupling and integration into the larger community as the core of a family unit (Byars, p. 149).

This "problem" seems to not exist in social problem television/cable movies. In them,

in fact, women often detach themselves from abusive men and carry on more happily than before. Likewise, the central male character who is "crucial for the film's conclusion and the female's entry into the larger social order" (Byars, p. 149) is also missing from social problem television/cable movies with female central characters. Further, the social problem movie genre also appears to lack a male "intruder-redeemer" whose role is to mate with the female interest center and to complete the mother-father-child triad (Byars, p. 153) of the traditional Hollywood family. Instead, the social problem television/cable movie often shows viewers families with one missing member, usually the father, who is not replaced during the movie.

Byars writes that Hollywood's family melodramas of the 1950s have plots that serve to integrate heterosexual romantic couples into the existing social order. This integration is also lacking in the social problem television/cable movie genre, most of which have strong central characters who don't feel the need for social integration. Although they're often not members of traditional triadic or dyadic relationships, the central female characters of the social problem movie are usually already fully integrated into society: they don't need a man to help them.

The "'happy ending' that provided the female protagonist with a male companion, a husband, a strong and capable patriarch to whom she could submit" (Byars, p. 156) is also not found in the television/cable social problem movie. The movies have happy endings of a sort -- the female characters become stronger and more self-sufficient -- but being provided with a husband is no longer a necessity or even something that seems particularly desirable.

Summary

We have seen thus far that the classical Hollywood film, produced during the long reign of the studio system (roughly 1930-1960), and the made-for-television/cable movie (produced from 1964 through today) have many stylistic similarities. Both use the same editing conventions, for example. Both are melodramatic and at the same time create an illusion of realism. Both, at various times, have dealt with social issues and social problems, in which individual action is the key to solving or resolving the problem. And many seem to come down in the middle of the political road.

But the made-for-television/cable movie differs in structure from the Hollywood film in its production constraints. Chief among the constraints are the necessity of building the narrative to incorporate commercial breaks and of appeasing the networks in both subject matter and what we could call the "ideological message" of the movie. Like the Hollywood film, the made-for-television/cable movie presents its ideological stance as the "natural" one.

The chapter also compares and contrasts social problem and family melodramas, genres that occur in both Hollywood films and made-for-television/cable movies.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGIES TO STUDY MADE-FOR-TELEVISION/CABLE MOVIES

Two Approaches

Of the many viewpoints that have been used to study Hollywood films, two in particular can be applied to the study of made-for-television/cable movies. One is genre analysis, the methodology used for the largest part of this dissertation. But the other method, feminist criticism, complements genre analysis and leads to a fuller and richer description of movies made for television and cable. A description of the techniques of genre analysis, which relies heavily on the work of Schatz, is followed by a look at feminist criticism, notably the work of Rapping and Schulze. In the chapters to come, both methods are combined for a well-rounded view of the social problem made-for-television/cable movie.

Genre Analysis. The methodology of genre analysis can be applied to theatrical films, made-for-television/cable movies, and television entertainment programs. Genres have some overlap across the media -- viewers can watch Western films, Western television/cable movies, and Western television series -- but not all genres are shared by the three media. In fact, film genres are not always equivalent to made-for-television/cable movie genres. And when the genres are similar, there are sometimes substantial differences between, for example, a theatrical film that deals with social problems and a television/cable movie that

deals with social problems.

Defining Genre. The first step in genre analysis is to answer the questions, "What is a genre? Which films are genre films? How do we know to which genre they belong?" (Altman, p. 6). Altman answers them by suggesting a theoretical model to serve a guideline for genre researchers.

Altman writes that films often fall onto one of two genre lists. The first is an inclusive list of films which correspond to a "simple, tautological definition of the genre (e.g., western = film that takes place in the American west, or musical = film with diegetic music)." The second list is composed of a "familiar canon" of films.

> Here, the films are mentioned again and again, not only because they are well known or particularly well made, but because they somehow seem to represent the genre more fully and faithfully than other films (Altman, p. 7).

The problem with these lists, writes Altman, is that they make it difficult to classify an Elvis Presley film, for example, as a musical, in part because "real musicals" such as Singin' in the Rain are on the musicals list. Further, these self-evident genres -- e.g., 'monster movies' are movies with monsters in them -- are not analytically-based, are too simplistic, and too prone to error. Tautological genres do not tell us enough to make them useful.

Altman calls for a system by which genre can be defined through the combination of what he calls the semantic and syntactic approaches. The semantic approach categorizes films through "generic definitions which depend on a list of common traits, attitudes,

characters, shots, locations, sets, and the like." The syntactic approach to genre examines "certain constitutive relationships between undesignated and variable placeholders" (p. 10). The key to understanding this is that the semantic approach looks at things, while the syntactic approach looks at the relationships between things.

Altman (pp. 10-11) compares the work of two critics to differentiate between the approaches. He quotes Jean Mitry's semantic definition of the Western as a

> film whose action, situated in the American West, is consistent with the atmosphere, the values, and the conditions of existence in the Far West between 1840 and 1900.

This contrasts with John Cawelti's syntactic definition of the Western as a film

> always set on or near a frontier, where man encounters his uncivilized double. The western thus takes place on the border between two lands, between two eras, and with a hero who remains divided between two value systems (for he combines the town's morals with the outlaws' skills).

Put very simply, a syntactical approach emphasizes the relationships between characters, locations, etc., while the semantic approach notes the presence or absence of characters, locations, etc. and how those characters and locations act and interact in more-or-less standard ways.

Again, it should be noted that Altman is calling for a combination of the semantic and syntactic approaches when performing genre analysis. While Ray points out that "many of Classic Hollywood's genre movies, like many of the most important American novels,

were thinly camouflaged westerns" (p. 75), we would err in classifying too many (or all) genre films as Westerns. Using both the semantic and syntactic approach helps us avoid problems in classifying the "Pennsylvania western" films such as Drums Along the Mohawk:

> Employing familiar characters set in relationships similar to their counterparts west of the Mississippi, these films construct plots and develop a frontier structure clearly derived from decades of western novels and films. But they do it in Pennsylvania, and in the wrong century. Are these films westerns because they share the syntax of hundreds of films we call westerns? Or are they not westerns, because they don't fit Mitry's definition? (Altman, p. 11).

Altman's semantic/syntactic approach to film genre takes into account the role of historical and social developments in the evolution of a genre. As an example, he notes that many films made during World War II used characterizations of evil Nazis and Japanese which were developed in the 1930s for use as representations of villains in gangster films. These war movies "simply transfer[red] to a new set of semantic elements the syntax of the righteous cops-punish-criminals genre which the gangster genre of the early thirties had turned into" (p. 13).

The relationship between the semantics of a film and its syntax determines the longevity of the genre:

> The Hollywood genres that have proven the most durable are precisely those that have established the most coherent syntax (the western, the musical); those that disappear the quickest depend entirely on recurring semantic elements, never developing a stable syntax (reporter, catastrophe, and big caper films, to name but a few) (Altman, p. 16).

The genre analysis of a set of made-for-television/cable movies will be informed by the viewpoint that the social problem television/cable movie has a coherent and stable syntax.

What Genre Does. Feuer begins with the basics, noting that "genre is simply the French word for type or kind." She then points out the problematic of genre analysis, i.e., that

> genre theory deals with the ways in which a work may be considered to belong to a class of related works ... Genre theory has the task both of making those divisions [between related and non-related works] and of justifying the classifications once they have been made (p. 138).

This is not always an easy task. Star Wars, for example, contains elements of both the science-fiction and the Western genres; made-for-television movies are often characterized by "intricate overlaps and combinations of various structural and thematic features" (Rapping 1992, p. 94). Therefore, if "docudrama" is a genre unto itself, for example, then the genre is so broad that it encompasses everything from The Missiles of October to the most pedestrian "torn from the headlines" topical movie.

Film, television/cable movie, and television program genres operate as a sort of "short-hand" for the viewer. Genre helps the viewer classify what they're watching, in part by using existing knowledge, gained from previous exposure to the genre, to understand it:

> For the audience -- as members of various interpretive communities for American mass culture -- genre ensures the interpretibility of the text. Through repetition, the cultural "deep structure" of a film genre "seeps to the surface." The audience -- without conscious awareness -- continually rehearses basic cultural contradictions that cannot be resolved within the existing socioeconomic system outside of the text: law and order versus the idea of individual success (the gangster genre); nature versus culture (the Western); the work ethic versus the pleasure principle (the musical) (Feuer, pp. 144-145).

These cultural contradictions seem to be apparently unresolvable conflicts and themes that we, as viewers, want to explore time and time again. This repetition appears to be what draws an audience to genre films, in which "the structure of melodrama enacts a fantasy of reassurance" (Thorburn, p. 629). The reassurance is achieved through the resolution of the problem at hand, which, as Schatz (p. 31) puts it,

> involves a point of dramatic closure in which a compromise or temporary solution to the conflict is projected into a sort of cultural and historical timelessness.

But genres should not be thought of as static. As Feuer points out (p. 151) "one of the dangers of a generic approach is a built-in tendency to structuralize the model in such a way that it is impossible to explain changes or to see a genre as a dynamic model." Feuer notes that genres evolve, and stresses the notion that generic evolution simply refers to changes over time without the implication that a genre gets "better" as it evolves. She notes that literary genres have evolved over a period of centuries, that film genres have evolved over five decades, and that even television sitcoms evolved between the 1960s and the 1980s (p. 151). The process of generic evolution, of course, continues; one can look to the "new

Westerns" of 1992-1993, such as The Unforgiven and Posse, as examples of the continuing evolution of the Western film.

As an example of generic evolution, Feuer explicates the changes in the television sitcom since the 1960s, noting that the sitcom genre develops internally "by reacting to and against previous sitcoms" (p. 151) through the process of intertextuality. But industrial changes in the sitcom genre are also important, and they stem from a reconfiguration by the networks of what they perceived of as their most-desirable audience. In the 1960s, networks targeted older rural dwellers with programs such as The Beverly Hillbillies; in the 1970s, "the audience for sitcoms was defined as mindless teenagers" who would watch Three's Company; and in the 1980s the networks began to cater to demographically desirable, affluent, eighteen-to-forty-nine-year-old urban dwellers with programs such as Cheers (Feuer, p. 152). Changes in American social and cultural history were also reflected in sitcoms like All in the Family, which dealt with social and political issues, and The Mary Tyler Moore Show, which in part grappled with what it was like to be a single career woman in the 1970s (Feuer, p. 153).

Schatz also deals with what genre does. He writes (p. 6):

> Simply stated, a genre film -- whether a Western or a musical, a screwball comedy or a gangster film -- involves familiar, essentially one-dimensional characters acting out a predictable story pattern within a familiar setting.

This is a definition that comfortably fits made-for-television/cable movies, as well. A genre can be identified in two ways, "either by its rules, components, and function

(by its deep static structure) or conversely by the individual members which comprise the species (by its dynamic surface structure)" (Schatz, p. 18). This statement points to Altman's approach to film genre: Schatz's deep static structure is the equivalent of Altman's syntactical structure, and the dynamic surface structure is the equivalent of semantical structure.

Schatz further details the relationship between film genres and genre films by noting that "whereas the genre exists as a sort of tacit 'contract' between filmmakers and audience, the genre film is an actual event that honors the contract" (p. 16). Or, to invoke an analogy with language, "we might think of the film genre as a specific grammar or system of rules of expression and construction, and the individual genre film as a manifestation of these rules" (Schatz, p. 19). That is, the audience expects a specific Western film, for example, to comply with certain structural rules (which can be semantic or syntactic) that define the Western as a genre.

Schatz writes (p. 21) that a film's "generic context" is more than just the physical locale of the film. It is the site where the plot, setting, and characterizations come together into a coherent whole that the audience, in a successful genre, understands.

> The American frontier or the urban underworld is more than a physical locale which identifies the Western or the gangster film; it is a cultural milieu where inherent thematic conflicts are animated, intensified, and resolved by familiar characters and patterns of action. Although all drama establishes a community that is disturbed by conflict, in the genre film both the community and the conflict have been conventionalized.

Schatz constructs two broad categories of genre in which Hollywood

conventionalized both conflict and community. The first he calls "genres of determinate space," and he includes in this Western, gangster, and detective films. Films in the determinate space genre have "a symbolic arena of action" which "represents a cultural realm in which fundamental values are in a state of sustained conflict" (p. 27). The second of the broad genres is the "genres of indeterminate space," into which Schatz classifies musicals, screwball comedies, and social melodramas -- and into which we can place large numbers of made-for-television/cable movies. He writes that indeterminate space incorporates "a civilized, ideologically stable milieu, which depends ... on a highly conventionalized value system" (pp. 27, 29). While in genres of determinate space conflicts arise "from a struggle over control of the environment," in genres of indeterminate space the struggle is that of "the principal characters to bring their own views in line either with one another's or, more often, in line with that of the larger community" (p. 29). Films of indeterminate space "celebrate the values of social integration" while films of determinate space "uphold the values of social order" (p. 29).

The social problem television/cable movie usually falls into the indeterminate space genre, but with at least one important difference from theatrical films in this broad genre. Social problem television/cable movies often "uphold the values of social order" by showing heroes who try to bring society's values in line with their own values, instead of trying to bring their values in line with society's. A character like Shari Karney in Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story, for example, works to make laws against incest tougher. She doesn't try to adjust her values to go along with the values of a society that, the movie tells us, often doesn't think of incest as a crime.

But while some genre films value social integration and others social order, few genre films actually solve the problem or problems that the film has explored. Instead, the problems are resolved, which involves

> a point of dramatic closure in which a compromise or temporary solution to the conflict is projected into a sort of cultural and historical timelessness ... the resolution does not solve the basic cultural conflict. The conflict is simply recast into an emotional context where it can be expeditiously, if not always logically, resolved (Schatz, pp. 31-32).

This emotional context, of course, is directly related to the melodramatic structure of most Hollywood genre films and most made-for-television/cable movies, as well to as television programs geared toward entertainment.

The goal, then, of genre analysis is to classify a group of films, television/cable movies, or television programs by noting similarities (and by implication differences) in plot, location, characters, problems, and resolutions. It does this by examining the movies themselves, for "genre study tends to give only marginal attention to the role of the audience and the production system in formulating conventions and participating in their evolutionary development" (Schatz, p. 15).

Feminist Criticism and Analysis. The feminist perspective is valuable in examining both Hollywood films and made-for-television/cable movies. The film genre of the "family melodrama," designed to appeal to "suburban housewives" (Schatz, p. 224) developed in Hollywood during the 1950s, and since the 1980s has been an area of interest for feminist-

oriented film and television scholars. The television networks themselves believe that more women than men watch made-for-television movies (Browne 1987, Gitlin 1984, Rapping 1992). As such, many television/cable movies feature female protagonists and deal with issues of importance and interest to women.

Definition. By definition, feminist criticism holds questions involving gender issues at heart and is therefore not "objective":

> feminism is a "political" position, and feminist research (no matter what type) must look for issues having to do specifically with women and the place they are assigned in society (Kaplan, p. 249).

Television/cable movies often deal with women's place in society; for this reason alone the feminist perspective is a useful tool for their analysis.

But feminist criticism is itself a problematical term because feminism, like film genre, changes as time passes. Kaplan (p. 251) describes different schools of feminist thought as they evolved during the 1970s and 1980s. She writes that four major categories developed:

> a bourgeois feminism (women's concern to obtain equal rights and freedoms within a capitalist system); a Marxist feminism (the linking of specific female oppressions to the larger structure of capitalism and to oppressions of other groups -- gays, minorities, the working classes, and so on); a radical feminism (the designation of women as different from men and the desire to establish separate female communities to forward women's specific needs and desires); and ... a post-structuralist feminism (the idea that we need to analyze the language order through

> which we learn to be what our culture calls "women" -- distinct from a group called "men" -- as we attempt to bring about change beneficial to women).

The bulk of Kaplan's chapter explicates post-structuralist feminism, which she defines as a political concept that arose from the conjunction of literary critical postmodernism and 1980s feminism (p. 252). She applies concepts from post-structuralist feminism to an analysis of MTV and musician/celebrity Madonna as an example of this critical stance.

Kaplan also details philosophical definitions of feminism. She writes that during the 1980s, there were two major philosophical positions within feminism. The "essentialist" position incorporated the bourgeois, Marxist, and radical feminist political viewpoints. Essentialist feminism argued that

> there is a particular group -- "women" -- that can be separated from another group -- "men" -- in terms of an identity that precedes or is outside of culture and that ultimately has to have biological origins. The essential aspects of woman, repressed in patriarchy, are assumed to embody a more humane, moral mode of being that, once brought to light, could help change society in beneficial directions (p. 252).

But since the 1980s, feminism has come to be more "antiessentialist" in scope, with the bourgeois, Marxist, and radical feminist positions largely abandoning the biological basis of essentialist feminism.

In the antiessentialist view

> the "feminine" is not something outside of, or untouched by, patriarchy, but integral to it. Antiessentialist theorists are concerned with the links between a given sexual

> identity and the patriarchal order, analyzing the processes through which sexuality and subjectivity are constructed at the same time (Kaplan, p. 253).

That is, the antiessentialist viewpoint holds that differences between men and women are cultural in origin (and thus learned), while the essentialist viewpoint says in effect that men and women are different because we were born that way. Kaplan also notes that the essentialist and antiessentialist viewpoints are "not necessarily as incompatible as they might at first seem" (p. 253) and that "in the 1990s we can find examples of most types of feminist criticism still being produced concurrently" (p. 254).

The Construction of Problems and Solutions. Byars covers some of the same ground as Kaplan, but focuses a feminist interpretation on the social problem film of the 1950s. She begins by writing that the classical Hollywood film is "remarkably realist" and its plot operates in a step-by-step fashion to an inevitable ending:

> It presents a coherent reality in which individual identity is unified and clear and in which characters' actions are goal-oriented, motivating a formulaic plot pattern. The exposition lays out the situation and the primary conflict, showing psychologically defined individuals striving to solve problems or attain goals; the middle drives inexorably toward an absolute truth as the protagonist struggles with other individuals or with a hostile (often social) environment; and that absolute truth (the 'truth' of dominant ideologies) is revealed in the plot's logical conclusion, a happy ending achieved through individual action (pp. 107-108).

Two of the best-known post-World War II social problem films were The Lost Weekend (1945) and Best Years of Our Lives (1946). Byars notes that these films were

topical in that they "focused attention on the concerns of returning soldiers and their families: unemployment, physical handicaps, and the psychological problems of readjustment to family life" after the war (p. 113) and on civilian alcoholism. But as a genre, social problem films "were a site for the struggle over gender and also for the related struggle over ways of knowing -- realistic and melodramatic" (Byars, p. 112). Byars's re-reading of the films focuses on the manners in which women were portrayed and how the films came to celebrate the traditional family in which the husband worked outside the home and the wife inside the home (p. 113).

Byars quotes Michael Wood, who writes that all social problems in Hollywood (and also in television movies) were interchangeable and constructed in the same way: "the problem can be named, and social institutions are created to cope with it." All problems are cast in terms of deviancy from normalcy, with the deviant person -- the alcoholic (in Come Back, Little Sheba), the juvenile delinquent (in Rebel Without a Cause), the drug addict (in The Man With the Golden Arm) -- portrayed as an abnormal "other."

Byars points out that the implication in the social problem film is that the inverse of the abnormal other is normalcy, in this case the "normalcy" of the white male. Byars says that in the social problem films, white men are both the deviants and the resolvers of the problems -- something that is true of many social problem television/cable movies, as well -- and that women's role is to "provide the possibility of a solution" by eventually reintegrating the deviant male into a reunified family. In this manner, the films deal with an issue of societal concern by melodramatically resolving the conflicts through individual action and reintegration (pp. 115-116).

A theme in feminist critical analyses of classical Hollywood melodramas concerns the "narrative rupture" that allows "the gods [to] intervene to provide a happy ending" (Byars, pp. 203-204). For example, a hunting accident allows the older Cary (Jane Wyman) to unite with Ron (Rock Hudson), the younger man she loves, at the end of All That Heaven Allows: Cary must nurse Ron, who has fallen off a cliff, back to health; they form a family unit. "Family is the ultimate issue in these films. Other issues ... are subsumed in the narrative drive toward the happy ending that overcomes all odds, all conflicts" (Byars, p. 98). Made-for-television/cable social problem movies also employ narrative ruptures. As we'll see in the chapters to come, the immediate problem the movie deals with is almost always resolved before the movie's end.

Rapping (1992) extends feminist criticism directly into the study of made-for-television/cable movies, and explicitly notes that the made-for-television movie in the 1960s and '70s took over the "social issue drama" from Hollywood (pp. 2-4) when the audience shifted and the studio system broke down after World War II. Rapping writes that during the 1930s the Hollywood studios developed two complementary genres to deal with social issues: the crime or gangster film and the woman's film. The crime/gangster films were set in the predominantly male, social, external world, while the woman's films were more domestically oriented (Rapping 1992, p. 7). And while Rapping maintains that most made-for-television movies fall within the women's genre, it is also true that the women in them often resolve the problems in the "social, external" world that can no longer be considered exclusively male.

During Rapping's brief history of made-for-television movies, she refers to Variety's

list of the most popular televised movies, which includes both theatrical films and television/cable movies. It's significant that many of the most popular movies made for television and cable are issues-oriented and can be considered social problem movies. Rapping points out (p. 14) that The Day After (1983), about the issue of nuclear war, ranks third on the Variety list; The Burning Bed (1984), about spouse abuse, ranks 20th; and A Case of Rape (1974), which examines the aftermath of the crime, ranks 32nd. Other made-for-television movies that deal with social issues and which have landed in the top 100 most-popular televised films include Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway (1976), Sarah T.: Portrait of an Alcoholic (1975), and Something About Amelia (1984), one of the first television movies about incest (Rapping 1992, p. 15). She writes, "it is safe to say that in the realm of TV genres, the telefeature is at any given time the most suitable form for dealing thoroughly not only with complex social issues but also ... with the most resonant of tensions, contradictions, and ambiguities" (p. 19). The subject matter, as well, often deals with issues that Hollywood deems unsuitable for drawing a big box office.

Rapping's delineation of the narrative structure of a made-for-television movie agrees with Byars's explication of the "standardized" Hollywood genre movie. Rapping writes that

> They all begin -- and end -- with the family; all other matters are subsumed into that never-questioned ideal institution. They begin with a problem or crisis that threatens, or at least has an impact on, the functioning of a nuclear family or the values that generally accrue to that idealized structure. Midpoint, the crisis escalates, but by the end of the movie it is, one way or another, resolved and family values are reinstated as inalienable and transcendent (1992, pp. 33-34).

Rapping, like Schatz, contends that problems in the movies are resolved without

being solved. She goes on to point out a key way in which television movies differ from genre films: the upholding of traditional family values at end of the movie takes place "even in movies that end tragically, or in which the family does not survive intact" (1992, p. 34). This points toward the fact that the social problem television/cable movie relies to a lesser extent on a happy ending than did its Hollywood forebears. For example, in the Lifetime Network's made-for-cable movie The Good Fight (1992), a teenage athlete dies from the oral cancer he contracts from chewing tobacco and the attorney who litigates his case loses when a mistrial is declared. But in the final scene, the attorney says she'll take the case back to court. The ending is optimistic, although not exactly happy.

Rapping's feminist critique of a set of made-for-television movies -- those "dealing with serious feminist issues" (1992, p. 64) -- leads her to write that although most television movies, even "serious feminist" ones, are family-centered, not all families survive: "when families do break up, it is because they were 'bad' families. The heroine is implicitly or explicitly moving toward a new, 'good' family -- the only really happy ending for women" (1992, p. 66). The Good Fight is again an example. Approximately half the running time of the movie shows viewers the slow reconciliation of attorney Grace and her ex-husband, Henry, who is also an attorney. Even though Grace loses the legal battle, at the end of the movie she is back with her ex-husband, re-forming their previous family.

Five Categories of the Women's Genre. Rapping points out one of the major difficulties in applying the tenets of genre analysis to television and to television movies. Looking solely at what she calls "the women's genre that dominates TV movies," Rapping

says

> On the one hand, we have a mind-boggling list of telefeatures about women that are sometimes indistinguishable one from another. On the other hand, however, we can separate out specific thematic emphases rather neatly. Even here, though, when we look very closely at these different "types" of movies, they tend to blur, to become far less distinct than their TV Guide blurbs or a casual viewing might indicate (1992, p. 94).

But genres have no hard-and-fast boundaries, and contemporary made-for-television/cable movies are no more easily categorized than classical Hollywood movies were.

In trying to deal with the blurred boundaries between types of television movies, Rapping establishes the broadly-defined "women's feature" as the genre and then classifies these movies according to a set of "thematic categories." Unfortunately, Rapping's classification is no less blurry than other classifications. She doesn't explain the methodology she used to arrive at the women's feature genre, other than to write that the genre was developed out of Marill's 1987 listing of all made-for-television/cable movies and miniseries to date (p. 95).

The women's feature genre is too broad; it seems to categorize all movies that have women in prominent roles as being part of the genre. Therefore, it implies that movies with men in the leading roles must be in the "men's feature" genre. The position of this dissertation is that the social problem movie is a distinct genre by itself, one that allows the protagonist to be either male or female. It appears that under Rapping's classification, a social problem movie with a female hero would be a woman's movie while a social problem

movie with a male hero would be a man's movie. If this were so, then all television/cable movies and all theatrical films could be reduced to just two genres. This would make genre analysis simple, but would provide little useful information about the characteristics of the genres.

Rapping goes on to develop the thematic categories that she treats as sub-genres of the women's feature. Like the genre itself, the categories are based on the assumption that women viewers prefer movies with women in leading roles or movies with certain "feminine" subjects. Nevertheless, Rapping's thematic categories are:

> Domestic family issues, women overcoming illness, 'star' biographies, sexual issues, issues involving children (not necessarily in families), women confronting social or political issues, and women in danger ... from sexual or domestic violence or psychopathic stalkers (Rapping 1992, p. 95).

It appears that the thematic categories are also overbroad; e.g., "issues involving children" could also include the roles that fathers play, not just mothers, for even in television/cable movies, two-parent families still exist. Men could also be interested in the category of "sexual issues."

Rapping points out one of the pitfalls of assigning films to genres. Many television movies can be classified into two or more of the thematic categories; i.e., "a movie about a social worker treating an abused child ... had many characteristics of family drama" (p. 96) although Rapping categorizes it within the "supergenre" of women's movie. This broadness of category is problematical when dealing with television/cable movies, as too many could potentially fall into one or more categories. For example, Shattered Trust, a movie about

incest, could fall into the categories of domestic family issues, sexual issues, issues involving children, or women confronting social and political issues.

Rapping analyzes five made-for-television movies and places each into genres in which "the problematic of 'womanhood' is central" (p. 98). They are

1) movies which represent "the heroine as first and foremost a wife and mother confronting family crises" (p. 102);

2) movies which "address sexually unconventional women" (p. 106);

3) movies which show women to be "in danger" (p. 110);

4) movies "about women whose work involves treating the problems of troubled children" (p. 98);

5) movies "about women who actually take on social or political causes" (p. 114).

When looking at social problem television/cable movies, Rapping's "genres" are more akin to the ways in which the interest centers/main characters are portrayed, than genres in and of themselves. The first category, heroic wives and mothers, is especially important in the social problem movie, where almost all the heroic characters (male and female) work within the context of the family. And, because the movies themselves deal with social problems and resolve these problems through action that affects many people, the interest centers often find themselves taking on the "social and political causes" of Rapping's fifth category.

Schulze's Feminist Approach. A strictly feminist reading of a television/cable movie can lead to interpretations that can't be uncovered through "strict" genre analysis. Getting Physical (1984) took as its subject the incompatibility (or so it seemed at the time) of femininity and physical fitness. (The movie is mentioned here because of the approach Schulze used, not because it is a social problem movie. It fails the generalization test included in the social problem definition).

Schulze wrote that during the 1980s the American ideal of feminine beauty began to shift to include a more well-toned or visibly-muscled standard (p. 37) as increasing numbers of women (and men) made physical exercise an important part of their daily routines. Typical of made-for-television movies, Getting Physical cast this changing social ideal of beauty in the form of a personal melodrama. The movie followed interest center Kendall Gibley's personal and physical development as she metamorphosed from a harassed secretary with no personal ambition into a competitive bodybuilder.

Schulze attributes much to male hegemony in her analysis of Getting Physical. She writes that the reason viewers never see Kendall's "articulated muscle mass, definition, and separation -- the marks of a body builder" is because of a "visual strategy [that] allows the protagonist to be anchored by patriarchal discourse while posing no threat to visual pleasure" (pp. 46-47).

In Schulze's view, our male-dominated society does not approve of heavily muscled women and so television dares not show them for fear of alienating viewers. Even in a movie about female weight lifters, their muscles cannot be shown: the dominant phallocentric belief that women should be soft and shapely must be upheld and reinforced. The movie cloaks

Kendall in leotards or "layers of sweat clothes" and the camera stays progressively farther away from her, until in the movie's climax "33 out of the 36 shots that construct Kendall's posing routine are extreme long shots" (Schulze, p. 47).

Traditional genre analysis would not reveal the patriarchal discourse that underlies Getting Physical.

Integration of the Two Approaches

So, what is it that the perspectives of genre analysis and feminist analysis can tell us about the contemporary made-for-television/cable movie? Put very simply, genre analysis teaches viewers and scholars alike to classify movies by such common traits as location, characterization, and issues, and by the relationships among these generic elements. It seeks a more detailed classificatory scheme than the tautological genre definitions often applied to films.

Feminist analysis demands that we look at the roles of women (and men) in the movies to see how gender roles are portrayed and how those portrayals reflect the ideology of the culture in which the movies are produced. A fundamental concern is how the movies show preferred "feminine" and "masculine" behavior. Schulze in particular teaches that patriarchy in some cases forms the base upon which a movie is constructed.

Together, the methods should lead to a rich description of the social problem made-for-television/cable movie.

Method for the Current Study

To accomplish the project of doing an analysis of the social problem genre of made-for-television/cable movies, the following three steps were taken: (1) defining the genre, (2) selecting the movies, and (3) analyzing the movies.

Defining the Social Problem Genre in Television/Cable Movies. As discussed above, the "standard" Hollywood genres don't precisely map onto made-for-television/cable movies. Schatz devotes individual chapters of Hollywood Genres: Formula, Filmmaking, and the Studio System to the "major" genres, dealing with Westerns, musicals, comedies, gangster and hard-boiled detective films, and family melodramas. He omits horror films, perhaps because they were less popular with audiences and usually produced by smaller studios, and science-fiction films, which had their greatest popularity at the tail end of the studio era.

TV Guide lists all movies in each issue by genre, but the classification system its editors use is unknown. An examination of every issue of TV Guide between January 1 and December 8, 1992 found the following genres applied to 226 made-for-television/cable movies that were dated 1991 and 1992: Drama, Mystery, Crime Drama, Western, Adventure, Comedy, Comedy-Drama, Thriller, and Sci-Fi. Unfortunately, the editors of TV Guide applied the genre of Drama to 143 of the 226 television/cable movies, thus placing 63 percent into the same category. The genre is thus too broad to be of much use.

The author wants to avoid at all costs a tautological definition of the social problem

made-for-television/cable movie. At this point, before the analysis of the sample has been done, the following tentative definition is offered:

> The social problem made-for-television/cable movie genre is characterized by the discussion of an issue that affects society as a whole, as well as the characters in the narrative. The discussion is moved from the family or individual level to the societal level through the use of dialogue and/or titles that reveal the extent of the problem in society.

This definition, of course, will be further refined as the analysis progresses. One aspect of the dissertation is to establish the characteristics of a social problem television/cable movie. The goal is to refine the definition, not to set up a pre-existing category and see which movies fit into it.

Selecting the Movies. Twelve made-for-television/cable movies were analyzed for the dissertation. The movies were collected by using a form of multi-step convenience sampling (although "sample" is not the correct term, as this project is non-scientific and does not claim to be a legitimate sample of all possible television movies). The selection process is described below.

Recent television/cable movies were analyzed, with "recent" defined as those first shown between 1988 and 1993. These years include the current television/cable season; further, large numbers of movies from this period are repeated on the over-the-air and cable networks. In addition, the seven major programmers of made-for-television/cable movies (ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox, Lifetime, TNT, and USA) were all producing movies they had commissioned by this time. Hence, movies from this period are relatively easily obtained.

No attempt at a random sample of all broadcast and telecast made-for-television/cable movies was made. The analysis concentrated only on movies that could be assigned to the social problem genre; the movies were not selected to ensure that each network received equal representation. The goal of the dissertation is to define the genre, not to look at the way the genre is distributed across the networks that program social problem television and cable movies.

An initial cut of potential movies was made through the use of TV Guide's vague genre descriptions (the only source for genre listings of all television/cable movies being aired in a given week). Between December 1992 and October 1993, each week's edition of TV Guide was examined, and each made-for-television/cable movie produced between 1988 and the current date was marked for possible inclusion. For example, the edition of July 10-16, 1993 contained synopses of twenty-seven television/cable movies made between 1988 and 1993. (Of these, one -- Absolute Strangers -- was eventually categorized as a social problem movie and included in the study.) The number of movies from these years varied from week to week, but averaged around an estimate of twenty; as such, something on the lines of 800 synopses (twenty per week for forty weeks) were read. Fortunately, a large number of these movies were repeated several times during the time period -- the cable networks often run a movie several times during the month in which it premieres -- making the count of synopses highly redundant.

After reading the synopses, I determined whether to tape the movie on a home VCR. The criterion for deciding whether a movie qualified as a social problem movie at this step was simply whether it seemed to fit the definition noted above. The synopses of many

movies disqualified them immediately.

For example, the USA Network made-for-cable movie Voyage (1993) is classified by TV Guide as a drama. Its synopsis reads, "A couple's idyllic Mediterranean sail is disrupted by a pair of psychopaths" (June 5-11, 1993; p. 80). On the face of it, the movie did not fit the definition of a social problem movie and it was therefore excluded on the grounds that having one's Mediterranean vacation ruined by psychopaths is not a social problem. (It is a common theme in television/cable movies, however).

On the other hand, the Lifetime Network made-for Shame (1992) is classified as a social problem movie. Shame's synopsis in TV Guide (May 29-June 4, 1993; p. 128) reads, "A lawyer (Amanda Donohoe) stranded in a remote Northwestern logging town urges the young victim (Fairuza Balk) of a gang rape to press charges." This synopsis led the researcher to tape the movie for its possible inclusion in the analysis. The synopsis at least opened the possibility that the **issue** of gang rape would be dealt with, and that the movie's narrative wouldn't concentrate solely on one instance of a gang rape. Viewing the movie confirmed this. Overtly, Shame ends with superimposed titles that give facts about rape and what a victim should do. Also, the narrative develops so that viewers can extrapolate from the characters in the story to a situation that potentially faces all women.

After the movie was taped, it was closely viewed to see if it fit the guidelines of the tentative definition of the social problem television movie. This process required that approximately forty movies were taped and scrutinized. The first viewing was sufficient to determine whether the movie should be included in the genre or excluded from it -- it was readily apparent whether the problem facing the characters was being generalized or not.

Watching the movie was the only reliable way to see if it could be considered for inclusion in the social problem genre (or into any other genre). Some made-for-television/cable movies on their surface appeared to be possible candidates, but a viewing revealed they were not.

For example, the NBC movie Final Appeal, broadcast on September 26, 1993, had the potential to be a social problem movie. The TV Guide synopsis for the movie (Sept. 25 - Oct. 1, 1993; p. 96) reads: "Brian Dennehy plays a boozing, down-on-his-luck lawyer whose career rests on his defense of his sister (JoBeth Williams), an accused killer with a shaky defense." This synopsis is open enough to include a social problem movie. Although the movie wasn't constructed in this way, Dennehy's character could have faced alcoholism in a way that shows viewers how alcoholics can be helped. (The movie came close to this, in a scene where Dennehy's character goes to an AA meeting. But the narrative never developed his alcoholism as anything more than a character trait or personal flaw; no one ever said to him that thousands of alcoholics had been helped in AA.) Nor did the movie say that a woman who was afraid of her husband -- a socially-prominent, drug-using, physically abusive M.D. -- could be railroaded into jail because no one would believe that a saintly pediatrician could be a bad person. If either of those had happened, then the movie might be considered part of the social problem genre.

If the characterizations and dialogue fit the definition of the social problem movie, then the movie was included in the analysis. The process repeated itself until all the movies in the set were selected. At the end of the analysis of the movies, a better definition of the social problem made-for-television/cable movie genre will be offered.

The number of movies analyzed was developed from a grounding in qualitative research, which often holds that redundant information begins to be produced after between eight and twenty interviews are conducted. This concept was adapted from qualitative interviewing to the analysis of television/cable movies; at some point in the process, the researcher expected redundancy in the movies. In fact, a pattern began to emerge after the first five movies were coded, when the conventions of didactic dialogue, movie style, and generalizability were first seen. Little that was new was found after the tenth movie had been coded, but two additional movies were viewed and coded to better ensure that the patterns were real and could themselves be generalized from the set of movies to the genre as a whole. The project ended with twelve movies, which provided sufficient similarities (and differences) so that a sense of the genre could be developed. Examining more than twelve movies would produce copious amounts of redundant data. Also, the number twelve is, speaking aesthetically, a "nice, round number."

Because only about seventeen percent of television/cable movies produced between 1988 and 1993 and shown during the data-gathering phase of this dissertation can be considered social problem movies, something about the characteristics of the other eighty-three percent of movies needs to be said. The major distinguishing characteristic of all other movies -- excluding the obvious differences in Westerns, comedies, and science-fiction -- is that many of the other movies do not generalize their plots. That is, the subject of the movie applies only to the characters in that movie; the characters live in situations that most other people don't find themselves in.

An example is the 1990 USA Network movie, Blind Vengeance. The plot of this

movie follows a Vietnam veteran who avenges the death of his son (and his son's black friend) at the hands of a white supremacist. I would classify this movie as an action-oriented drama and not a social problem movie because Blind Vengeance never deals with white supremacy, racially-motivated murder, or the role of the Vietnam vet in contemporary society as **issues**. Instead, the movie shows us that what one man does following a murder of a family member is to fool the bad guys into killing each other. It ends with the hero aiding the police in a climactic shootout with the remaining bad guys. During the shootout, the hero is able to legally kill the last of the evil-doers; after it, he climbs into his Jeep and, in the best cowboy tradition, drives off into the sunset.

Analyzing the Movies. The set of television/cable movies were analyzed to note the similarities and differences that occur within the social problem genre. That is, all twelve movies were coded for the presence or absence of various characteristics. For example, movies were coded for the presence of "traditional" gender roles (men work outside the home, women inside the home) or for the presence of "non-traditional" gender roles -- which is the same thing as coding for the absence of traditional roles -- in which both men and women are shown to be employed in careers outside the home. Both portrayals are part of the way the movies show us the social realities of modern life; neither portrayal is more "significant" than the other. The overall goal of the coding was to show the characteristics of the social problem television/cable movie by letting us see what's in them and, once we know what's there, what is not in them. As Schatz phrases it, "We can appreciate difference only when we begin to examine films systematically, when we consider the systems whereby

an individual film 'makes meaning'" (p. 21).

Coding Process. The actual process of coding involved watching each movie three times. During the first viewing, the suitability of the movie for inclusion into the genre of social problems was determined. The primary consideration at this point was the presence of elements of generalizability: did the movie generalize the problem or situation from the characters to other people through dialogue, multiple examples of the problem, or identification with the characters? That is, did the movies use dialogue to tell viewers that others besides the characters face the problem, did they show us that the problem affects many characters, or did they employ characters with whom viewers can feel sympathy, empathy, or some form of kinship?

The movie was coded during the second viewing. This step involved taking detailed notes on a coding sheet, while starting and stopping the tape. Scenes were watched repeatedly, so that movie style could be noted and transcripts of dialogue made. It took approximately three hours to code each movie (all had a running time of about 100 minutes).

A third viewing was made to verify that the coding sheet was accurate. Additional information was added; other information that turned out to not be germane was dropped.

The next step involved transcribing the coding sheet on a personal computer. This was done for the purpose of legibility and also helped familiarize the researcher with each of the movies.

After each movie was fully coded, the information was re-typed into a summarized coding sheet document. The summarization was in the same format as the individual coding

sheets themselves. Information from each coding element was entered and grouped, e.g. the first section under Cultural Conventions, gendered behaviors/roles, (see the sample coding sheet in the appendix) contained paragraphs about each of the twelve movies. The summarized coding document eventually grew to fifty-nine single-spaced pages. It served as a control on the coding, in that it helped ensure that the same elements were being coded in the same way from movie to movie.

An additional validity check was undertaken, as well. An outside auditor viewed the movies Doing Time on Maple Drive and Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story and examined the coding sheets for the movies. The auditor concurred that the coding system and the descriptions of the content of the movies was valid. At an earlier stage in the project, before it assumed its final form, another auditor read and approved of an essay on a made-for-television movie (Overkill: The Aileen Wuornos Story, about a female Florida serial-killer) that was not included in this set.

Coding Categories. The coding categories the analysis uses are not arbitrary. The researcher entered the project in a frame of mind that is as objective as possible (while realizing that, on a philosophical basis, objectivity is impossible, and that his observations are inherently biased because of his socioeconomic status, gender, and racial background). The researcher wants to know the ways in which movies in the social problem genre are similar and different.

The coding scheme used by Cheatwood (1982) to examine "abstract classifications" in Tarzan theatrical films was modified to better fit contemporary made-for-television/cable

movies. Cheatwood's four major categories (pp. 130-132) -- cultural conventions, ethnic/racial conventions, geographical conventions, and contextual conventions -- were retained, although "contextual conventions" was renamed "stylistic conventions" to better fit Cheatwood's own definition of them as relating to "the standard ways of establishing tone or framing plot" (p. 132). The modifications were necessary because of the time period of the films Cheatwood studied, their subjects, and because he analyzed Hollywood films, not television/cable movies.

Several changes were made. Cheatwood found that minorities were often portrayed as villains; this did not match the portrayal of minorities in social problem television/cable movies produced since 1988. The minority villains in Tarzan films usually spoke with distinct accents which implied they were from "somewhere else" and therefore "others"; the minorities in the television/cable movies, for the most part, have no discernable accents. Hence, Cheatwood's category of "verbal clues" had little to do with the set of movies. Other modifications were necessary to locate the television/cable movie in modern American society and to account for the stylistic demands of television.

The coding categories as modified for television/cable movies are:

> Cultural Conventions: gendered behaviors and roles of characters; heroism and villainy; occupations; display of cultural products, such as clothing, home, and automobile style; activities of extras; relationships between men, women, and children; leisure activities; wealth and socioeconomic status of characters; the moral of the story; direct social statements.
>
> Ethnic/Racial Conventions: visual and verbal clues to appearance; apparent socioeconomic status of individuals; occupations.

Geographical Conventions: direct statement of location; rural, suburban, or urban locale; use of identifiable landmarks; plant or animals used to indicate terrain; statement of location in credits.

Stylistic Conventions: establishing shots; climaxes before commercial breaks; music; framing of shots; television/film conventions.

A completed coding sheet is attached in the appendix.

Once again, we should note that the movies were coded for the presence and absence of the coding categories. Some movies emphasize cultural products more than others, some movies make no overt statements about their geographical location (others do), and each portrays gender roles differently from the others.

Research Questions

The analysis of the social problem television/cable movies will be guided by the following set of research questions:

(1) What conventions characterize the made-for-television/cable social problem movie? What makes a social problem movie different from other genres? What is the role of generalizability?

(2) What social problems are shown in the contemporary television/cable movie? Are these problems shown to affect everyone in society, or just certain groups or certain individuals? Do the problems affect men, women, children, or families?

(3) How are the problems in social problem movies resolved? Who are the heroes and villains? Who are the oppressors and victims? What roles do the legal and judicial systems play in the resolution of social problems? What is the role of the family?

(4) How are gender roles portrayed?

(5) Do the television/cable social problem movies have a subjective viewpoint of right or wrong? How didactic are the social problem movies in showing the relationship between the characters' problems and the extent of the problem in society?

(6) What is the definition of the social problem television/cable movie?

Summary

The chapter outlines two methods of examining made-for-television/cable movies: genre analysis and feminist criticism. These methods have been used to study Hollywood films, television programs, and made-for-television/cable movies, among other subjects. The chapter also shows how the methods will be integrated for use in the study.

The methodology of the study is also explained in this chapter: the social problem movie is defined, the selection of the movies to be analyzed is explained, and a framework for analyzation is laid out. Research questions are provided.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF SOCIAL PROBLEM MADE-FOR-TELEVISION/CABLE MOVIES

Introduction

Made-for-television/cable movies all seem somehow vaguely familiar. Rarely does one come along that causes viewers to think that the subject of the movie is something they've never seen before. Instead of breaking new ground through subject matter or movie style, made-for-television/cable movies are, for the most part, genre films, "designed for the variations-on-a-theme approach" (Schatz, p. 9). The television/cable movie almost always employs "a system of conventions -- familiar characters performing familiar actions which celebrate familiar values -- that represents the genre's narrative context, its meaningful cultural community" (Schatz, p. 22). It is this sense of familiarity that has allowed television/cable movies to be popular with audiences for the past 30 years.

This chapter contains descriptive material covering the major similarities and the key differences in this set of twelve made-for-television/cable social problem movies. The goal of the chapter is to elaborate on the familiar characters, actions, and values that are the basic components of the genre. But beyond that, the chapter also applies the feminist perspective in order to pay particular attention to gender roles and the way the question of who has (political and legal) power is answered.

The chapter looks at common themes in the movies, showing how dialogue controls the examination of "feminine" and other issues, and also the educational uses of dialogue; looks at the construction of families and romantic relationships, and how they change during the movie; the ethnic and racial conventions the movies use; the role cultural products play in the narrative; and the stylistic and geographical conventions that help define the social problem genre as a genre that deals with problems that affect large numbers of people.

Synopses of the Set of Social Problem Movies

Twelve television/cable movies were examined for this genre analysis. The following section provides synopses of each movie, introduces the main characters, and describes the issues the movies discuss.

Absolute Strangers. Marty and Nancy Klein are a happily married, suburban Long Island couple with a four-year-old daughter, Ariel, and a second baby on the way. One rainy day, Nancy drives into New York for a showing of her clothing pattern designs. She has a car crash in which she suffers a severe head injury, and she goes into a coma.

The doctors tell Marty they don't know how long Nancy will be comatose. With the agreement of Nancy's parents and his mother, Marty decides that the baby Nancy is carrying should be aborted in an effort to help her recover from her coma. Marty asks the hospital to perform the abortion, but is refused. He takes his request to court and petitions for legal guardianship of Nancy.

A legal battle ensues in which members of the Right-to-Life movement also petition for guardianship of Nancy and the unborn baby. The Right-to-Lifers take their battle all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court, which refuses to intervene in the case. In the end, Marty is granted guardianship of Nancy and the abortion is performed. Nancy begins to slowly recover from the coma.

Main issue: abortion rights. Secondary issue: rights of families of incompetent medical patients.

Better Off Dead. Catherine "Kit" Kellner is a career criminal and prostitute who kills an undercover police officer after the officer kills her boyfriend. Her case is prosecuted by Daisy "Cutter" Dubuque, an ambitious young prosecutor. Cutter has been ordered to handle the case by District Attorney John Byron, who believes it would be politically expedient to have a black female prosecute a white woman charged with killing a black male police officer. Kit confesses and is sentenced to death. Afterwards, Cutter is elected District Attorney and Byron wins election as Governor.

Seven years later, after resigning as D.A., Cutter helps Kit, who wants to die, speed up the process that will lead to her execution. But Cutter begins to believe that Kit doesn't deserve the death penalty, and Kit becomes pregnant by a prison guard. Kit decides she wants an abortion, but Governor Byron, a Pro-Life conservative, won't allow state funds to be used for it. He offers to stay the execution until after Kit delivers her baby.

Kit has a change of heart after her baby is born, and she no longer wants to die. Cutter repeatedly appeals directly to the Governor for clemency, but is refused each time.

Shortly after giving birth, Kit is executed in the gas chamber.

Main issue: capital punishment. Secondary issue: abortion rights.

Doing Time on Maple Drive. The Carters are a seemingly-typical suburban family. Phil is an ex-military officer who runs a restaurant. Lisa, his wife, is a full-time homemaker. They have three children: Tim, an accountant at the restaurant; Karen, a married schoolteacher; and Matt, a freshman at Yale. Matt is engaged to Allison, the daughter of a rich family on Martha's Vineyard.

But beneath the surface calm, the Carters have many problems. Phil dominates his family, issuing orders and lecturing them. Lisa is resentful. Tim is an alcoholic. Karen is pregnant and frightened, and plans to have an abortion without telling even her husband. And Matt, despite his engagement, is gay.

The issues come to a head over the space of a few days. Allison discovers Matt is gay, and leaves him. Matt attempts suicide, then reveals his sexual orientation to his startled family. Karen's husband tells Phil that Tim's alcoholism and Karen's fear are rooted in their poor upbringing. Lisa is shattered by the revelation. But Phil slowly begins to accept Matt's homosexuality.

Main issue: sexual orientation. Secondary issue: parent-child relationships.

The Good Fight. Tony Taber is a high-school baseball star who's just been called up to play for the New York Yankees. But before he can leave for training camp, he discovers he has oral cancer, brought on by years of using chewing tobacco. He approaches Grace

Cragin, an attorney and mother of his best friends. Tony convinces Grace to sue Federated Tobacco, even though Grace tells him that their chances of winning a tobacco liability suit are negligible.

Tony dies before the case can go to trial. Grace carries on anyway, with the legal and financial help of her wealthy ex-husband, Henry, who is also an attorney. Grace and Henry together build a strong case against Federated Tobacco, proving that the company markets tobacco to children -- and they also fall back in love.

They litigate the case, but to no avail. Their evidence is strong and convincing, but the attorneys for the tobacco company apparently slip excluded documents to the jury, and a mistrial is declared. Grace tells Henry she'll take the case to court a second time.

Main issue: tobacco liability. Secondary issue: none.

Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted. Ginny Moore is a volunteer at a home for developmentally disabled children. On her first day of work, she discovers that little Jonathan, who has Down syndrome, is not the hopeless vegetable everyone thinks he is. Ginny soon discovers that Jonathan's parents, Max and Carol Willis, only visit their son three times a year and have denied him education, dental care, and the heart operation that will prolong his life.

Ginny makes Jonathan a part of her family over the course of a decade. Jonathan wins the love of Ginny's husband, Franklin, and their two children, Laurie and Brad.

When Jonathan becomes a teenager, Ginny declares that the Willises have abrogated their rights as parents, and the Moores go to court to petition for guardianship of Jonathan.

The Willises, however, battle them in two court cases. The Moores lose the first case but win the second, and are allowed to adopt Jonathan.

Main issue: parental rights. Secondary issue: treatment of the developmentally disabled.

Liar, Liar. The Farrows are, on the surface, a typical middle-class family, although with some problems. Gil, the father, is an unemployed white-collar worker in the ship-building industry. Gil's unemployment forces Mary, his wife, to work temporarily in the Post Office. The Farrows have four children. Christina is married and estranged from Gil. The other three children -- Kelly, Ninni, and Patrick -- spend most of their time squabbling amongst themselves. Kelly is the oldest of the three, an eleven-year-old chronic liar who is always in a bad mood.

One day, after a sex abuse prevention class, Kelly goes to the school counsellor and reports that her father has repeatedly anally raped her. Gil is promptly arrested and hustled off to jail. Everyone, including her siblings, her mother, and her attorney, thinks Kelly is a liar.

But it turns out Kelly has been telling the truth. Gil is sexually abusing her. Worse, he also sexually abused Christina when she lived at home, and has also begun buggering Patrick. Gil is convicted of pederasty and sent to prison. Mary is devastated, but Kelly begins to get along better with her siblings.

Main issue: sexual abuse of children. Secondary issue: none.

Miss America: Behind the Crown. Carolyn Suzanne Sapp was Miss America in 1992. The movie traces her career through the beauty pageant ranks, beginning with her first title in Hawaii, Miss Kona Coffee 1987.

But life is not all glamour for poor Carolyn. Shortly after her first pageant victory, she falls in love with Nuu Faaola, a Samoan-Hawaiian professional football player. Their relationship is hurt by Nuu's violent tendencies. On several occasions Nuu beats Carolyn, and at one point, while in a rage fueled by pina coladas, threatens to kill her.

After years of abuse, Carolyn finally takes the advice of her pageant trainer and confidant, Eric, and takes out a restraining order against Nuu. He is jailed when he violates the order. The shock of his arrest sends Nuu to seek psychiatric help, where he learns to control his temper. But it's too late for the relationship. Carolyn refuses to take Nuu back, and she wins the Miss America crown without him.

Main issue: physical abuse of women. Secondary issue: none.

Shame. While taking a vacation on her motorcycle, an accident strands attorney Diana Cadell in a small town in the Pacific Northwest. While she's there, Lizzie, the 16-year-old daughter of the town mechanic, is raped by one of the local ruffians.

Diana soon finds that there will be no justice for Lizzie. Sexist men dominate the town, harassing and assaulting women without fear of legal reprisal. When Diana herself is harassed and threatened, the town police chief accuses Diana of "stirring up the hormones of the boys" and asks what she was doing "traipsing around" town at 8 p.m.

Lizzie decides to prosecute the rapist, and Diana agrees to be her attorney. But Dan,

the rapist, kidnaps Lizzie and tries to beat her into submission. Lizzie jumps from his speeding car and is killed. This finally motivates the police into taking action, and the rapists are arrested.

Main issue: rape. Secondary issues: stigma of rape, sexism.

Shameful Secrets. Maryann Walker Tate is stuck in an abusive marriage to Daniel, a self-employed architect who frequently beats her. When Maryann is released from her most recent hospitalization, Daniel refuses to allow her back into their house. He yells through the closed door that he's going to court to get custody of their two children on the grounds that Maryann abandoned them. Maryann is forced to move into a battered women's shelter.

At the shelter, Maryann resolves to do everything in her power to get custody of the kids herself. She learns in court, however, that the fact Daniel has physically abused her is not admissible in child custody cases. The court awards custody to Daniel and visitation to Maryann.

Daniel then begins to verbally, emotionally, and physical abuse the children. Maryann decides to take the children and to go underground with them. She does, but resurfaces to testify at a hearing to change custody laws so that evidence of spousal abuse is admissible. The law is changed and Maryann goes to court again.

Main issue: physical abuse of women. Secondary issue: child custody.

Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story. Shari Karney is a thirty-year-old aviation

attorney who moonlights in divorce cases. Rose, a social worker, comes to Shari and asks her to take an incest case, involving a three-year-old girl who's being sexually abused by her father. The little girl's parents are divorced. Shari reluctantly agrees to take the case.

During the trial, Shari has a breakdown and attempts to strangle the little girl's father while she's questioning him. The judge orders Shari into therapy, and she begins to see psychologist Joan Delveccio. Shari soon learns that she herself is an incest survivor who has repressed memories that her father had sex with her when she was a toddler.

Shari becomes a crusader for incest victims. She represents them in court and teams up with Stephanie Chadford, another attorney interested in the rights of incest survivors. Together, they influence the California legislature to pass tough legislation that makes it easier for incest victims to sue their abusive fathers.

Main issue: incest. Secondary issue: legal rights of incest survivors.

Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story. Nancy and Steven Ziegenmeyer are divorcing. Nancy, a bartender, has had too many affairs with men for Steven, a tractor mechanic, to endure. But they continue living in the same house until the divorce becomes final and they figure out what to do.

Nancy decides to better herself by becoming a real estate salesperson. She goes to Des Moines to take a real estate exam, but is kidnapped in broad daylight by a black man wearing a suit and tie. The man, Bobby Lee Smith, rapes and sodomizes her.

Nancy presses charges and endures the blinkered attitude of the locals, who think she got what she deserved. Steven encourages Nancy to respond to an editorial in the Des

Moines Register. Nancy makes her case public and allows her name to be used in an effort to help all women overcome the stigma of being a rape victim. She then makes the rounds of talk shows, but returns home to try to patch up her relationship with Steven. Bobby Lee goes to prison for life.

Main issue: stigma of rape. Secondary issue: rape.

A Town Torn Apart. Dennis "Doc" Littky publishes a weekly newspaper in Winchester, New Hampshire, a town where the high school is a graffiti-scrawled warehouse that utterly fails to educate its students. While covering the selection of a new principal, Doc realizes that none of the candidates can successfully reform the school. He reveals he has a Ph.D. and that he's a former award-winning principal and college professor.

Doc uses unorthodox means to bring the high school students around. He has new and innovative ideas that make learning fun, such as daily "advisory" sessions where students meet with a faculty advisor and talk about whatever's on their minds. The drop-out rate goes down and grades go up. Doc is pretty unorthodox himself, as he wears a full beard and comes to school in polo shirts, jeans, and baseball caps.

Doc's reforms offend the town's conservatives. They take control of the school board and refuse to renew Doc's contract. He takes them to court and eventually wins his job back. Doc's students graduate and become successful adults.

Main issue: education reform. Secondary issue: none

Table 3 summarizes the synopses of the twelve movies. It also provides readers with the date the movies were tele- or cablecast, the network, rating and share numbers for the movies that ran on over-the-air networks, and the main issue each movie dealt with.

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF THE TWELVE MOVIES

TITLE	DATE	NETWORK	RATING/ SHARE	ISSUE
Absolute Strangers	7/11/93	CBS	12.9/24	abortion rights
Better Off Dead	1/12/93	Lifetime	n/a	capital punishment
Doing Time ...	3/16/92	Fox	9.4/15	sexual orientation
The Good Fight	12/15/92	Lifetime	n/a	tobacco liability
Jonathan ...	8/24/93	NBC	6.8/12	parental rights
Liar, Liar	6/22/93	CBS	14.5/26	incest
Miss America ...	9/11/93	NBC	7.6/14	physical abuse
Shame	8/18/92	Lifetime	n/a	rape
Shameful Secrets	10/10/93	ABC	13.2/21	physical abuse
Shattered Trust ...	9/27/93	NBC	16.2/25	incest
Taking Back ...	3/15/92	CBS	15.8/25	rape
A Town Torn Apart	11/30/92	NBC	12.8/20	education

This set of made-for-television/cable movies can be characterized by features common to their genre. This section points out the major common features of the twelve movies.

The Dialogue of Social Statements

Social problem made-for-television/cable movies utilize dialogue to make social statements which criticize and comment upon the situation the movie deals with. Much of the dialogue is explicit and didactic, and contains a point of view that tells viewers how right and wrong are constructed within the movie. Dialogue is the primary method used to convey the ideological message or messages of the movie.

The didactic, to-the-point, unequivocal dialogue of these movies groups as follows: six of the movies are about "feminine" issues in that they deal with crimes in which women and children are victims and men are perpetrators. This subset of movies has rape, incest, and physical abuse as its subjects. The other six movies explore issues that face all members of contemporary society without regard to gender: abortion, capital punishment, education reform, parental rights, sexual orientation, and tobacco liability cases.

"Feminine" Issues. This subset can be further subdivided into groups of two movies each. Liar, Liar and Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story deal with incest. Shame and Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story are about rape. And Miss America: Behind the Crown and Shameful Secrets are about physical abuse. None of these movies make explicit statements that the particular crimes they deal with are wrong; the evil of the crime is taken for granted by the narrative.

A. Incest. Both Liar, Liar and Shattered Trust argue from the incontrovertible

viewpoint that incest has a damaging effect on its victims and on families. Both movies show viewers that the abuse has caused personality and behavior problems in the incest survivors: eleven-year-old Kelly Farrow is grouchy and argumentative, thirty-year-old Shari Karney is sexually dysfunctional and, as she says, hates her body. But beyond this, the movies employ dialogue that spells out what can be done about it.

Liar, Liar tells us that incest is a crime involving power relationships. One of Kelly's friends tells her that the correct thing to do is to tell an adult. So, when Kelly tells her school counsellor about the sexual abuse, Mrs. Hildebrandt says, "What you've done by coming forth and telling is a very brave thing. People think that sexual assault is about sex. But it isn't. When your father molested you, it wasn't for sex. It was for power." This statement defines the crime, perhaps giving viewers something more to think about. It certainly puts Gil Farrow's dominant behavior into a particular perspective, one that links his personality to the crime he commits.

Shattered Trust reinforces messages about what it's like to be an incest victim and what steps can be taken to rectify the problem. Shari Karney is an attorney who specializes in incest cases. One of her clients, Rachel Fowler, testifies on the witness stand about the effects incest had on her. She says she started drinking at age thirteen and turned at fourteen to sex and drugs: "I hated myself. I wanted to die. I tried to kill myself four times."

Shari herself knows how to resolve the problem of incest. She works to change the laws so that adult incest survivors can sue the men -- usually a father or a brother -- who abused them when they were children. In a scene set in a law library, Shari outlines her legal strategy:

> These cases are being lost all over the country. Now, as far as I know, not one child's testimony has held up in court against an adult's. So, I was thinking, what if the child were a teenager? Wouldn't she be more likely to be believed? ... I'm thinking of a civil suit -- suing the perpetrator for damages. She may not put him in jail, but just maybe she could win a settlement for her pain and suffering.

This statement is interesting because it generalizes the problem of incest to something that's going on "all over the country." It also points out the problem of taking legal action against incest aggressors. As the movie develops, Shari is able to convince the state legislature to change the statute of limitations in incest cases.

B. Rape. Taking Back My Life and Shame deal in a similar manner with rape and the stigma borne by rape victims. Both thirty-ish Nancy Ziegenmeyer and sixteen-year-old Lizzie Curtis live in small towns, and they both are subjected to gossip about themselves. Both movies contain a scene in which the protagonist is in a store and confronts gossiping women. Lizzie flat-out says "I was raped" to counter a woman who calls her a "little slut" who got what she deserved, while the previously promiscuous Nancy tells a supermarket cashier, "There's a difference between sex and rape ... and I hope you never have to find out what it is!" Thus, both movies make the point that rape is a crime, and that no woman, regardless of her past behavior, ever "deserves" to be raped.

Both movies also make nearly identical statements that show the extent of rape in modern American society. Nancy's husband Steve says to her, "I'll betcha there's a lot of gals out there goin' through just what you are"; attorney Diana Cadell tells Lizzie, "A lot of girls have been through what you've been through." Both movies also show the legal process in action, as Lizzie makes a statement to the police and Nancy takes her case to trial.

C. Physical Abuse. Shameful Secrets and Miss America: Behind the Crown are movies about the abuse of women by their husbands and boyfriends. In both, the batterers apologize for the physical abuse and the women temporarily forgive them. But later, when the abuse continues, both women leave the relationships and go on with their lives without the abusive men.

Shameful Secrets makes an explicit statement about how widespread the problem of abused women is. Testifying before a state legislative hearing, Maryann Tate -- who has been in hiding with her children after her abusive husband was granted custody -- says, "In this country right now eight women a minute are being physically abused by their mates. Most of them have no money and no place to go. So for the sake of the children they stay." This statement also answers the question the movie **doesn't** ask; i.e., Why do women stay in abusive relationships?

Miss America, on the other hand, does specifically ask why a woman would stay in a relationship in which she's being battered. The movie answers the question in two ways. First, it has the newly-crowned Miss America, Carolyn Sapp, confront a reporter who asks her exactly that question. She sidesteps the answer, however, by replying, "Asking that implies that I was somehow at fault. Why do we always blame the victim?"

However, earlier in the movie, Carolyn does answer the question. Her pageant coach, Eric Chandler, tells her she should leave Nuu because he's beating her. But Carolyn says she can't, and quotes her grandmother: "It may not always be fair, but women are the peace-makers." Eric calls this line of thinking "sexist crap."

Taken together, then, both movies say that women are trapped in abusive situations.

Married with children battered women stay in the relationship because they have nowhere to go; single abused women stand by their men because of a warped sense of duty. The movies quite clearly shows that these viewpoints are incorrect.

The Other Issues. The remaining six movies in the set deal with a host of other issues facing contemporary American society: abortion, capital punishment, education reform, homosexuality, parental rights, and tobacco liability.

A. Abortion. One of the few truly controversial subjects in the social problem made-for-television/cable movie, abortion plays a role in three movies in this set, albeit only a minor part in two. In all three, abortion is presented as a constitutionally protected right or as a choice almost any woman would consider. Further, the issue is presented as affecting husbands as well as wives, which informs abortion as a "family" issue and not one that concerns only women. As such, abortion is categorized outside of the "feminine" issues grouping.

The constitutional basis of abortion is at the heart of Absolute Strangers. Marty has to go to court to be declared Nancy's guardian. He also has to do battle with members of the Right-to-Life movement -- who petition to be the guardians of both Nancy and her unborn baby -- and with anti-abortion attorneys, judges, and doctors, and with a feminist who wants to make Nancy into a cause. Considerable dialogue in the movie makes the repeated point that abortion is constitutionally protected.

For example, in one scene Marty is having dinner with friends and discussing the

situation. Barbara, a friend of Marty and Nancy, says he'll probably lose his petition for an abortion for Nancy because they live in a county with "vocally anti-abortion" judges and district attorneys. Marty's reply is, "I'd be petitioning for her constitutional right. It's a federal law. What does it matter what county I live in?"

The legality of abortion plays a role in Better Off Dead, as well. When death row inmate Kit Kellner discovers she's pregnant, she quickly decides she wants an abortion. Cutter Dubuque, Kit's attorney, advises against it, on the grounds that the pro-life governor might commute her death sentence if she has the baby. Kit refuses, saying "Is abortion legal in this state?" Cutter answers, "For now ...."

Cutter next goes to governor John Byron to ask for state funds to pay for Kit's abortion. But Byron refuses, offering instead to stay the execution until after the baby is born. Cutter angrily exclaims, "You're playing politics with her right to choose!?" To which Byron responds, "What about the rights of the child?" Cutter's reply is, "This is not a child," a statement that leaves unsaid "it's a fetus."

However, the entire issue of abortion is sidestepped in Better Off Dead when Kit decides to have the baby after all. Kit is reunited with her mother, and decides that if her mother could love her, then she can love a baby.

Abortion is mentioned in passing in Doing Time on Maple Drive, also. Karen Carter, who is married and pregnant, considers an abortion because she's afraid to tell her domineering father that she's going to have a baby. Her father, Phil, has lectured her and her husband about how carefully a couple has to plan a baby; the plot implies that this baby is somewhat unplanned.

B. Capital Punishment. The main plot of Better Off Dead concerns capital punishment, which the movie considers to be an evil. Dialogue spells out the ideological viewpoint of this controversial subject in explicit terms. Early in the movie, Cutter is assigned to the prosecution of Kit, who has killed a black police officer. Cutter is at first incredulous that her boss, then-District Attorney John Byron, wants her to push for capital punishment. She says, "You know damn well no one in this country gets the death penalty for killing a black man."

Later, Cutter is reduced to begging now-governor Byron for mercy in Kit's efforts to avoid the gas chamber. Her final statement to him is, "We're the only country in the free world that still practices capital punishment. Do you want to be remembered as the governor of the first state to execute a woman?" Byron replies that he's not the first governor of his state to execute a woman, and he won't be the last.

Taken together, Cutter's statements present a clear point of view of capital punishment. The movie says that the death penalty is unjustly applied, uncivilized, and that it is particularly barbaric to execute women.

C. Education Reform. The subject of A Town Torn Apart is education reform in a small town in New Hampshire. The movie says clearly that it is a good thing to change the school system so that students are motivated to learn and to stay in high school until graduation -- a non-controversial viewpoint that few people would disagree with.

In fact, the movie has it that education reform is money well spent. In one scene, Doc Littky, the new principal, and his girlfriend Allie discuss the importance of education. Allie

says, "This town's too poor to have a good school." Doc replies, "You think education's expensive, try ignorance." Again, this is a statement that generalizes beyond the particulars of the movie to American society as a whole. A poor education is an issue outside of the confines of the movie's setting.

D. Homosexuality. The main subject of Doing Time on Maple Drive is how Phil and Lisa Carter cope, or don't cope, with their gay son Matt when he comes out of the closet. (The movie is mentioned above in relation to the abortion issue). Like the other movies in the study, Doing Time has a clear viewpoint.

In this case, sexual orientation is presented as something a person has no control over. This is played out in two scenes. In the first, Allison Hall has discovered that Matt, to whom she's engaged, is gay. As she tells him that she's (naturally) calling off their engagement, Matt begs her not to leave him. He says that even though he's "had the feelings," he can change if Allison marries him. Allison replies, "Matt, I don't think this is the sort of thing you can talk yourself out of." Matt, of course, has had more than just feelings: dialogue is straightforward about the three-year affair Matt had with his college roommate Kyle.

Later, Matt tries to talk about his sexual orientation with his mother. When she says that she doesn't understand why anybody would choose to be gay, Matt tells her, "I didn't choose this. I **am** this" -- thus laying out a clear ideological point of view.

E. Parental Rights. The "correct" way for parents to raise their children is the major

issue in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted. The movie takes great pains to show us what parents ought not to do: Jonathan's parents, Max and Carol Willis, are frequently shown to be completely wrong in their treatment of the boy. For example, they confined Jonathan to a children's home shortly after his birth, they visit him just three times a year, and they refuse to allow him dental care or the heart operation he needs.

Ginny Moore spends ten years taking care of Jonathan, eventually making him a part of her family. When the Willises refuse to have the hole in Jonathan's heart corrected, Ginny's husband Franklin says the decision is the Willises to make, and that they're within their rights to make it. Ginny explodes:

> I don't think it's the right of any parent to take a child, never bring it home, never give it daily love, and then do everything in their power, after that child has already lived, to say "no, we don't want him to live anymore." It is a parent's responsibility, when you bring a human life and a soul into this world, to do everything you can to help that person ... Don't you dare talk to me about parental rights. They have lost theirs!

F. Tobacco Liability. The Good Fight tells viewers that tobacco in all forms is dangerous and that the tobacco industry is fully aware of the risks. The plot follows the legal case that is built around the death of a high school athlete -- he'd just been called up to the baseball major leagues -- who had contracted oral cancer from smokeless tobacco. The dialogue in the movie is constructed so that any statements that oppose the anti-tobacco point of view are lies told by the tobacco companies themselves.

The Good Fight indicts tobacco company advertising as being part of the problem. Specifically, the movie opposes advertising of tobacco products directed at children; it cites

two examples. In the first, Grace tells Tony Taber (the athlete who later dies) that Federated Tobacco will argue that he began using smokeless tobacco of his own free will. In reply, Tony says his eight-year-old brother was given chewing tobacco at a circus by a man in a cowboy suit, and that the brother cried when he realized it wasn't candy. This anecdote, juxtaposed with Tony saying he didn't know snuff was dangerous when he started using it, strongly implies that Tony was a child when he started dipping.

This theme is repeated later in the movie. Grace sends Elijah to Tony's boyhood treehouse, and Elijah returns with a sack full of smokeless tobacco containers and sports magazines. The characters note that the snuff comes in spearmint and wild cherry. Grace picks up a tin and says, "This one has lower nicotine so they can get you hooked before you move on to the more serious stuff." Elijah opens a magazine and produces an ad for 'Cherry Little Dipper.' He looks at a coupon in the ad and asks, "How many forty-year-old men you know want a free bat and glove?"

Educational Dialogue

Much of the dialogue in the social problem television/cable movie is educational, in that it provides specific knowledge, often about the law, that viewers need to fully comprehend the movie's action.

For example, in Absolute Strangers, direct, to-the-point dialogue repeatedly informs viewers that abortion is a constitutionally protected right in the United States. The issue of whether the comatose Nancy Klein should have an abortion goes before a hospital bio-ethics

committee (a minor character tells Marty Klein, and us, what a bio-ethics committee is and what it does). One committee member, a doctor, says the decision is purely a legal one: "It seems to me this is not a medical matter at all. The woman has a constitutional right to terminate her pregnancy for any reason at all prior to twenty-four weeks." The movie thus reinforces its point that abortion is protected within certain legally-established guidelines.

The scene in The Good Fight that introduces Elijah, the black law student who's the legal team's German translator, is used to explicitly teach audience members that tobacco companies know their products cause cancer by combining facts and an ideological viewpoint. Elijah picks up a document and reads aloud in German. He then looks at Grace and says in English that this 1941 document shows a direct connection between smoking and lung cancer. Grace agrees, and says that under oath, representatives of the tobacco companies always say that the industry knew of no connection until the U.S. Surgeon General's report of 1964. Thus, the scene makes educational and ideological points: viewers are told explicitly about the Surgeon General's report and are also told that the tobacco industry lies when it claims there is no firm evidence that smoking leads to premature death.

Educational dialogue appears in many of the movies. Miss America: Behind the Crown explains what a restraining order is and how one is obtained. Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story explains what a tort is and how the legal concept applies to incest, and also goes into detail on how the legal concept of "delayed discovery" can be applied in incest cases. Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story provides details of the legal process through a discussion of the admissability in court of DNA tests. By doing this, the movies portray not only a social problem, but provide details on the manner in which the

problems are resolved in the real world.

Families

The families of the main characters -- those who Ray calls the "interest center" of a movie (p. 73) -- in this set of made-for-television/cable movies can be categorized into three different groups. The largest group is of families (found in six movies) that are intact or seem to be intact. The second-largest group (five movies) encompasses families that have been broken through divorce or abandonment. One movie features a main character whose family does not play a role in the movie.

Perhaps more interesting than the way the families are constructed is that almost of all of these families change for the better during the movie. This change can come either through the family drawing more closely together to become stronger or, surprisingly, the family can better itself by breaking apart.

Intact Families. Just two of the twelve movies in this set have traditional families -- composed of a mother, father, and children living under one roof (cf. Taylor, p. 2) -- that remain intact throughout the dramatic action, even though each family is sorely tested by events in the narrative.

The Kleins in Absolute Strangers begin and end the movie as an intact family. Nancy spends most of the movie in a coma, but she remains an integral part of the family unit, along with her husband and daughter. The Moores of Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted

are also a traditional and intact family. But they have all drifted into their own interests and don't seem to interact as well as a family ought to. Franklin, for example, is preoccupied with building furniture and doesn't keep up with what activities his wife and children are involved in. But the family draws closer as Jonathan, a boy with Down syndrome, becomes part of the lives of each family member. Jonathan is the catalyst for the change that makes the Moores more emotionally close.

The other four movies have families that only appear to be intact. On the surface things are fine, but underneath each family's surface are problems that draw family members apart.

The Farrows of Liar, Liar only appear to be a "normal" and traditional family. Although parents and children live together, Gil has a history of anally raping two of his daughters and his son. This is a similar situation to that of the Karneys in Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story. The relationship between Shari and her parents is strained; she gets along all right with her father, but doesn't communicate well with her abrasive and aggressive mother. Although Shari is an adult and no longer lives with her parents, she learns in therapy that she is an incest survivor.

Shameful Secrets presents the Tates as a family that is "normal" only on its surface. The traditional family structure in this movie -- mom, dad, and two children living in the suburbs -- is underlain and undermined by the daily physical abuse that Maryann suffers at the hands of her husband, Daniel. And while physical abuse isn't a problem with the Carters of Doing Time on Maple Drive, emotional abuse is. Phil dominates his family to the extent that his wife Lisa seems emotionally withdraw, son Matt can't accept his sexual orientation,

son Tim is an alcoholic, and daughter Karen is about to have an abortion without telling her husband she's pregnant.

Broken Families. The interest centers of another five movies in this set are members of broken families, families that have been separated by divorce or abandonment.

Divorced parents dominate the broken families sub-set. Grace and Henry Cragin of The Good Fight have been divorced for six years at the start of the movie, but they can still be considered a family because they appear to share joint custody of their two college-age children. Nancy and Steven Ziegenmeyer are divorcing in the early acts of Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story. They have three small children, and they continue to live in the same house while their divorce arrangements are being made final.

Even in the movies in which the interest center is not the divorced parents themselves, families are still seen in terms of the divorce of the parents. Thus, while Carolyn Sapp and Nuu Faaola, who are a couple, are the interest centers of Miss America: Behind the Crown, they both mention in dialogue their parents, both sets of which divorced years before the movie takes place. Carolyn is able to cope with the divorce and still considers herself to be part of a family that includes her mother and father, but Nuu views his family as having been destroyed by his parents' divorce. Lizzie Curtis, the teenaged rape victim in Shame, is a member of a family that is now composed of a father, a grandmother, and two children. Lizzie's mother left the family before the movie began; the absent mother is no longer a part of the family.

Kit Kellner, in Better Off Dead, is in a related situation. Her parents divorced when

she was still a baby, and she was raised by her father and her step-mother. Kit is reunited with her mother, whom she thought dead, and becomes part of a family composed of only a mother and a daughter.

No Families. The main character of A Town Torn Apart is Doc Littky, the crusading high school principal. This movie is anomalous in this set, in that the interest center's family is barely mentioned and plays no role in the dramatic action. Doc is a bachelor, and he spends most of the movie living alone. He mentions his mother in only one scene. As such, the movie is outside the conventions of families in made-for-television/cable movies.

Shame also omits a family for one of its two leading characters. While Lizzie Curtis's family plays a role in the movie, the family of attorney-hero Diana Cadell does not. Like Doc, Diana only mentions her family once, and they play no role in the movie.

Changes Facing Families

Most of the families (and all of the interest centers) in the twelve movies face changes that make them a better family. These families are able to face adversity and to come away from it stronger than before. Sometimes their strength comes from drawing closer together; other times the family becomes stronger by breaking apart.

Closer Together. Broken families in this set of movies sometimes reunite and become stronger than they were before they broke up. The Ziegenmeyers in Taking Back

My Life, for all practical purposes, call off their divorce after it becomes final. Nancy's rape has made them work together to bring justice to all rape victims, and they come to realize they still deeply care about each other. Similar circumstances envelope Grace and Henry Cragin in The Good Fight. Although they've been divorced for six years, they work together on tobacco liability litigation and learn that they still love one another.

In movies in which one of the divorced parents is missing, the change in status of the family can be reflected in the relationship between the parent and a child. Kit Kellner in Better Off Dead is reunited with her mother; they bond before and especially after the birth of Kit's baby. Lizzie Curtis and her father become close in Shame, shortly before Lizzie dies a melodramatic death as she tries to escape from a kidnapping.

Miss America: Behind the Crown is the exception in this sub-set of movies. Carolyn Sapp's divorced parents play no role in the movie. Nuu Faaola tries but fails to reconcile with his father, and the old man dies before Nuu can make amends with him.

Families that are more-or-less intact can also improve by becoming closer. The happy Kleins of Absolute Strangers are not damaged by Nancy's long coma, and the movie strongly implies that the family is strong enough to withstand a blow that takes one member of the family out of the picture for several months. In Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted, the Moores become closer as Jonathan becomes a part of their lives. The family becomes stronger and more cohesive, united in their love for Jonathan. Franklin emerges from his workshop and begins to interact more with Ginny and the kids. And even in Doing Time on Maple Drive, the revelations of homosexuality and alcoholism and pregnancy are seen to have a positive effect on the Carters. By the end of the movie, Phil is taking the first tentative

steps to resolving in his own mind Matt's sexual orientation. By implication, can his acceptance of his other children be far behind?

Farther Apart. In three of the movies, however, the family becomes stronger by breaking up the traditional two parents and children construction. In Shameful Secrets, Maryann Tate takes her two children and goes underground with them after the court awards custody to the abusive Daniel. In a sequence that shows their underground life, Maryann and the children look much happier than they did when they lived with Daniel. The two movies that deal with incest modify the new happy family scenario by showing siblings becoming closer after the family is all but destroyed. The Farrows in Liar, Liar and the Karneys in Shattered Trust cease functioning like families after the allegations of sexual abuse surface. But in both cases the children -- Kelly, Patrick, and Christina in Liar, Liar and the adult Shari and Linda in Shattered Trust -- become closer than they were when they were on different sides. At first, no one sides with Kelly, and Linda flatly tells Shari that she doesn't believe their father "incested" Shari.

Romantic Relationships

The romantic relationships the main characters have in these twelve movies can be categorized into three groups: apparently good relationships, poor or bad relationships, and neutral or no relationships. Most of the romantic relations are viewed within the context of the family.

As in family relationships, most of the romantic relationships change for the better during the course of the movie. However, unlike family relationships, many of the romantic relationships change for the better by ending, so that the interest center becomes a better person by having the relationship end.

Apparently Good Relationships. Among this set of movies, only Absolute Strangers has what can be considered a "good" romantic relationship. Marty and Nancy Klein are devoted parents who are affectionate toward one another and who express their love for each other.

Four of the twelve movies have romantic relationships that appear to be good, but that have problems. The Ginny and Franklin Moore relationship in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted seems all right on the surface, but really isn't. Ginny moves from activity to activity (e.g. college classes, volunteer work) without much commitment to any of them until she finds Jonathan in a children's home. Franklin doesn't at first support Ginny's interest in Jonathan, and even says at one point that Jonathan's absentee parents have the right to deny medical care to him.

The relationships of the other main characters are more complex. Carolyn Sapp and Nuu Faaola in Miss America: Behind the Crown have what appears to be a loving relationship. But Nuu physically abuses Carolyn, and Carolyn eventually leaves him. Gil and Mary Farrow in Liar, Liar seem to have a happy and sexually active marriage, but Gil is a pederast who abuses his own children. The relationship between Matt Carter and Allison Hall in Doing Time on Maple Drive is more problematical: on the surface, the relationship

is wonderful -- they are happily engaged and are planning their wedding -- but Matt is gay and therefore can't be married to Allison.

Poor Relationships. The major characters/interest centers of five of the movies can be placed into the category of poor relationships. A poor relationship is one that looks bad on the surface of it, although it might be good underneath. This contrasts with the previous category of apparently good relationships, in which a bad relationship looked good on its surface. Relationships in this category range from the misunderstood to the dangerous.

The relationship between Nancy and Steven Ziegenmeyer in Taking Back My Life is not very good. Nancy has had affairs with many of the men in the small town where she and Steven live, which is Steven's reason for their divorce. For her part, Nancy can't live with a man who won't stand up to his domineering and meddlesome mother. Extramarital affairs were also part of the reason for Grace and Henry Cragin's divorce in The Good Fight. Their relationship continues to be somewhat acrimonious, even six years after the divorce.

Another relationship is bad because of misunderstandings between partners. In Shattered Trust, Shari Karney's husband Mark leaves her because she spends all her time working on incest cases and because her repressed past as an incest victim causes her to have anxiety reactions during foreplay.

Maryann Tate leaves her relationship with her husband Daniel in Shameful Secrets because Daniel physically, verbally, and emotionally abuses her.

The poor relationships of the two female interest centers in Shame are problematical in that the relationships themselves are not central to the plot. Diana Cadell mentions her

Saturday night only relationship with her boyfriend in just one scene, and little is made of Lizzie's teenaged relationship with Andrew. Even though Lizzie was raped while on a date with Andrew, he is not the rapist, although he did nothing to stop it. The date is used as a dramatic contrivance, to set up a situation in which Lizzie and the rapist could logically meet.

Neutral or No Relationships. Better Off Dead, the second movie to have two main character/interest centers -- attorney Cutter Dubuque and death row inmate Kit Kellner -- presents problematical romantic relationships. Cutter has no romantic life during the movie; her romantic status is not an issue, except for in one line of dialogue where she comments that while she can't get a date, Kit manages to have an affair and become pregnant on death row.

On the other hand, Kit has a romantic life. She is first part of a couple with Del, her partner in crime. After Del is killed, Kit becomes involved with and eventually marries prison guard Andy. Both relationships are essentially neutral. Kit says that her relationship with Del spanned ten years, but that Del "liked boys," which implies they were not sexually involved. And when Andy proposes, Kit at first refuses, saying "I don't love you that way" to him. The movie portrays Kit as being emotionally attached to her baby, but not to Andy.

The relationship between Doc Littky and his live-in girlfriend Allie in A Town Torn Apart is ruined by Doc's workaholic routine at the high school: he spends all his time there, working until eleven at night, so Allie leaves him to go back to New York City, to the life she misses. The Doc-Allie relationship is fairly good on its surface during the first act of the

movie, but after the breakup Doc remains alone for the other six acts.

Changing Romantic Relationships

Like the family relationships detailed above, the romantic relationships in this set of movies all undergo changes as the plots develop. The changes usually involve either the unification of the romantic couple or the end of the romantic relationship, although a few relationships are static. In most cases, the change is for the better, making the interest center a stronger person once the relationship has come to its end.

Unification. Four of the twelve movies show viewers the unification of a romantic couple. In all of these cases, the change in the relationship is a positive change. Jonathan draws the entire Moore family closer together in The Boy Nobody Wanted. By implication, dialogue, and action, we see that Ginny and Franklin are more closely working together for the good of their family than ever before.

Two of the movies reunite divorced couples. The tobacco liability case at the heart of The Good Fight is the vehicle that draws Grace and Henry Cragin back together again. They are still divorced at the end of the movie, but are again sexually and romantically involved. The narrative implies that they will permanently reunite as a couple, now that they've proven they can work together. Steven and Nancy Ziegenmeyer in Taking Back My Life also get back together. They, too, are working together again -- and ignoring their divorce decree -- as Steven encourages Nancy to take her rape case to court and to go public

as a rape victim.

Better Off Dead unifies half of its interest centers through the Kit-Andy marriage. The unification, however, is largely symbolic. Kit has married Andy not out of affection, but out of the necessity of ensuring that Andy will gain legal custody of their child. Cutter, the other interest center, has no romantic relationship and thus cannot be unified.

End of the Relationships. In six of the twelve movies in this set, the main characters/interest centers end the relationships they're in. Moreover, of these six endings, four take place in relationships that are categorized above as being "apparently good" relationships. The remaining two relationships that end come in the "poor" relationship group. For the most part, the end of the relationship is seen as a positive event in the life of the interest center.

Carolyn Sapp ends her relationship with Nuu Faaola in Miss America: Behind the Crown because of Nuu's continued physical abuse. The movie clearly presents this as being for the best, as it is what Carolyn has to do to save her life; the movie uses dialogue from Carolyn, who says that all women in abusive situations should be brave enough to take the step she has.

The other movies that fall into the "apparently good" relationship category are more equivocal in their portrayal of the benefits of ending the relationship. The end of the Matt Carter-Allison Hall relationship in Doing Time on Maple Drive is beneficial to Matt, for the ideological stance of the movie is that it's better to come to grips with one's sexual orientation than to deny it. However, Allison is dropped from the narrative after she

discovers that Matt is gay, and we don't get to see how she deals with the situation beyond breaking off the engagement. Liar, Liar also has an equivocal ending. The movie is constructed so that no one could sympathize with the pederast Gil Farrow; thus, by implication, Mary Farrow is better off without him -- although the movie does not make an overt statement to this effect. This stance is reflected in a family relationships scene in which Kelly and her younger brother Patrick emotionally connect for the first time, after Gil is convicted.

The remaining movie with an apparently good relationship that ends is A Town Torn Apart. Doc Littky's live-in girlfriend Allie leaves him to go back home to New York. But their relationship plays an incidental role in the movie, and it's difficult to surmise that Doc's life is better or worse without her. Doc's character shows no change after she leaves; it's as if the relationship had no influence at all on him.

Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story shows the end of a poor relationship in much the same way that A Town Torn Apart shows the end of an apparently good relationship. Shari and her husband Mark split up because of Shari's long hours at work on incest cases and because her own incestuous childhood makes her sexually dysfunctional. But, again, the Shari-Mark relationship plays only a small role in the movie. The break-up of the marriage has no visible effect on Shari; Mark simply disappears from the narrative and never returns.

On the other hand, Shameful Secrets shows the end of the marriage to be a definite positive for Maryann Tate. When Daniel throws Maryann out of their home, Maryann goes to live in a battered women's shelter, and the abuse stops. From the shelter, Maryann goes

on to a place in the workforce and eventually becomes so self-assertive that she defies a court order that gives custody to Daniel and goes underground with the children.

Static Relationships. Absolute Strangers and Shame both show viewers relationships that are essentially unchanging during the course of the movie. Marty and Nancy Klein, in Absolute Strangers, are a close and loving couple whose relationship is not damaged by the long months Nancy spends in a coma. Their relationship begins good and stays good throughout the movie.

Shame is a bit more problematical about the romantic relationships of its two interest centers, however. Diana Cadell has an off-screen romance; she speaks of a poor relationship with a boyfriend she sees only once a week. But this romance has little to do with the movie's plot, and Diana never resolves the issue of what to do. The romance between teenagers Lizzie and Andrew is not a major part of the plot, either. We know that Lizzie and Andrew are dating, but we're never told what the depth of the relationship was before the rape or what the relationship has become after the rape. As such, both the relationships of Diana and Lizzie are essentially static during the movie.

Ethnic and Racial Conventions

Main Characters. The characters in the social problem movies in this set are predominantly white. None of the white characters have ethnicity; they all appear to be of Anglo-Saxon stock. No white character is described as being Italian, Polish, German, etc.

Their surnames -- Moore, Byron, Farrow, Karney -- sound as if they originate in Western Europe or the British Isles, although Klein and Littky are on the fringes of this convention. Many of them have high-status, middle- to upper-middle class careers as attorneys, high school principals, certified public accountants, and beauty pageant queens.

Three of the movies are entirely Caucasian. Doing Time on Maple Drive, Shame, and A Town Torn Apart have no minority characters. The movies are set in New England and the Pacific Northwest, areas of the country thought of as predominantly white.

Only two of the movies, Better Off Dead and Miss America: Behind the Crown, have non-white leading characters. The minority-member leading characters are Cutter Dubuque, who's black, in Better Off Dead and the Samoan Nuu Faaola in Miss America: Behind the Crown. Both have high-status careers: Cutter is an attorney and former District Attorney, Nuu is a professional football player. Nuu's race plays no role in the narrative. That he's Samoan and Carolyn is Caucasian is not an issue in the movie, because, as a beauty pageant announcer says, "Hawaii reflects and embraces many cultures." Cutter's race has more to do with the story, because she achieved her career position by exploiting the prosecution of a white woman who killed a black police officer.

Supporting Characters. While the leading characters tend to be Caucasian, many of the supporting characters are members of minorities. They play smaller roles in the narratives and tend to have occupations lower in status than those of the main characters. But not always, as these movies also have supporting minority characters who are doctors and attorneys.

The four characters described below are the major African-American supporting characters in this set of movies. Three of the four dress differently than the white characters in the same movie; their style of clothing sets them apart from the white characters.

Sam "Sherlock" Jones is a private investigator who works closely with Cutter Dubuque in Better Off Dead. As a p.i., Sherlock is a more marginal member of the society than the mainstream Cutter. Sherlock dresses more hip than the other characters. He wears short dreadlocks and funky clothing, usually brightly-colored shirts, vests, and baggy black trousers tucked into army boots.

Elijah is the only minority character in The Good Fight. He's a black law student who's part of the legal team litigating the tobacco liability suit. Elijah's position as a law student gives him lesser status than the attorneys he works with, but his appearance and demeanor sets him off as well. When Elijah first shows up at Grace's house to volunteer to work on the case, Grace is put off by the sight of a young black man with dreadlocks who speaks with a Jamaican accent. With a cautious look on her face, she asks him what he wants and appears skeptical when he says he's a German translator. But Elijah explains that his father is German and he proves his usefulness to the legal team by translating on the spot a document that proves tobacco use causes cancer.

Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted focuses on the activities of Ginny, the white volunteer child-care worker who eventually adopts Jonathan. But the person who runs "Hope & Care", the facility Jonathan lives in, is Faye Lincoln. Faye is African-American. Her clothing style varies, depending on the situation she's in. When Faye goes to court to support the Moores' proposed adoption, she wears a solid-color business suit. But when she's at

work, she wears bright print dresses and colorful turbans or head scarfs. Thus, Faye dresses "white" for the courtroom and "ethnic" for her day-to-day activities.

The major minority character of Taking Back My Life is Bobby Lee Smith, the man who raped Nancy Ziegenmeyer. Viewers aren't told much about Bobby Lee. We see that he wears a suit to his trial (he wore the same suit when he raped Nancy) and he testifies that he's had two years of college. But as his occupation isn't mentioned, it's difficult to judge his status. Dialogue explicitly notes that even though Bobby Lee is black and Nancy is white, race was not an issue in the trial and that just four percent of the rapes in the United States involve black men and white women. These statements, of course, defuse a possibly racially-motivated reading of the movie.

Cultural Products

The clothing, homes, and automobiles of the characters are all kept in the background of the movies. They provide verisimilitude and don't often draw attention to themselves.

Clothing. By and large, the characters' clothing is appropriate to their occupation or job. The attorneys wear tailored suits; the tractor mechanic wears jeans, t-shirts, and hooded sweatshirts; the Hawaiian football player wears tank-tops and shorts.

Clothing and personal appearance is a major issue only in A Town Torn Apart. Several characters, including teachers and the town police chief (who makes a special trip to the high school), tell Doc Littky that he ought to get a haircut, shave off his beard, and

start wearing a shirt and tie to work instead of polo shirts and bib overalls. Doc later comments that the attitudes of the people in town are "backward" for the early 1980s, but Ellen, his chief supporter, corrects him by saying that their values are more traditional.

Personal appearance and clothing play a minor role in Shattered Trust. While at the mall, Linda criticizes Shari for wearing clothes that are "too big" and for skipping makeup. Shari defends herself, saying that her clothes are comfortable. But after she stops repressing memories of incest, she's able to admit that she's ashamed of her body. Shari buys a new wardrobe of more stylish clothing -- including suits with short skirts, which indicate she's now more comfortable with her body -- and starts wearing lipstick and makeup. In this way, viewers see that Shari's clothing is an unconscious reflection of her emotions.

Homes. The characters' houses are also appropriate to their occupational roles. The more affluent live in houses that range from sprawling suburban homes (Absolute Strangers) to old-money mansions (The Good Fight). The members of the working classes (Taking Back My Life and Shame) live in smaller homes.

In overall terms, the furniture in the homes tends to be Colonial or Traditional in style, so that the homes "look American." Many of the houses, even those of the working classes, have polished hardwood floors. Most of the homes are immaculately neat and clean.

The exception to the neatness rule comes in Shame. The houses of the workers are cluttered, with knickknacks and food boxes on every surface. Lizzie's house is jammed with inexpensive Colonial furniture; the yard is littered with rabbit hutches, car wheels, and a worn-out glider couch. Lorna's house is a mess inside and a trash heap outside, its yard filled

with rusting metal and logging trucks.

Automobiles. Once again, the more affluent characters drive the most expensive cars. The automotive spectrum ranges from the battered early-1970s Ford that Kit and her criminal boyfriend drive in Better Off Dead to the rich girl's BMW convertible Allison drives in Doing Time on Maple Drive.

But the automobiles sometimes tell us something about the characters' personalities. Doc Littky in A Town Torn Apart is a bearded post-hippie type who lives in a cabin without electricity or running water, so he drives an "antiestablishment" Jeep Wrangler. Henry Cragin, in The Good Fight, is a semi-retired attorney in his 40s with so much money that he can afford to run an antique E-type Jaguar as a plaything.

Motorcycles figure prominently in two of the movies. Henry also has what the dialogue explicitly tells us is a 1938 Brough-Superior in The Good Fight. It is just another toy for him, and Grace asks if he's having his second childhood -- a statement that suggests riding a motorcycle is not something an emotionally-stable adult does. Diana Cadell in Shame rides a Honda CFR sport-touring bike. Her motorcycle makes her different from the oppressed women of the town she rides to (but not frivolous like Henry), suggesting that Diana is from outside that community and has more personal freedom than they do.

Stylistic Conventions

The twelve made-for-television/cable movies examined in this study use the same

stylistic conventions in establishing the movie's look. That is, certain standard types of shots are used, characters are framed in certain ways, there is a climax of action just before each commercial break, and each of the seven "acts" begin and end in the fixed convention of fading up from or down to a black screen. However, despite these conventions, the movies sometimes use shots or styles that vary substantially from those normally used: in the midst of television-style shots, a sudden film-like shot will call attention to itself, making some of the movies more visually interesting than the others.

This section provides an overview of the conventions as used in this set of social problem television/cable movies. Because the movies are so stylistically similar, one "typical" example from the set will be discussed in each of the sub-sections below. Another example that varies dramatically from the standard will also be mentioned, to show the range of styles that are being used.

Establishing Shots. The initial sequence of shots in a television/cable movie or a theatrical films serves several functions. The opening sequences play an important role in establishing the context of the following closer shots (Gianetti, p. 409). Context is established through the introduction of the characters and the introduction of the location of the action. Context is also set by "telegraphing" the issues the movie will deal with and by posing questions (e.g., Who are the characters, What roles will they play in the narrative, etc.) that the movie will later answer.

Characters are usually introduced at the same time the setting of the movie is established; doing this may require several shots edited together into an introductory

sequence. The initial establishing sequence, the one at the start of the first act, is longer in time than the establishing shots that open each of the acts because the characters and locations are being introduced for the first time.

A Town Torn Apart is typical. It begins with a slow tracking shot across a scenic small town in New England. The camera pauses on a sign that reads "Winchester, New Hampshire." The scene then cuts to a bearded man jogging down a street. The man (we later learn he's Doc Littky) greets some scruffy-looking teenagers in black leather jackets who are hanging out; they respond with rude comments and gestures. A cut takes the viewer inside a diner, where an overweight, middle-aged waitress sees the jogger and says, "There goes that maniac, runnin' down Main Street ... He's a damn flatlander." The scene cuts back the jogger again, who pauses by a trash-strewn, graffiti-covered high school, where the police have just arrived to break up a fight between two female high school students who have been brawling in the cafeteria. The school's principal is ineffective: he calls the police, then quits his job. The run-down condition of the school and the fight makes a strong contrast with the idyllic scenery. The sequence sets up at least three conflicts: that Doc is an outsider in a small town, that the major problem in the movie will be the school, and that Doc will be able to do something about it.

Miss America: Behind the Crown opens with a sequence that is stylistically different than the one discussed above, but still within the parameters of the television/cable movie. The Miss America sequence shows us what goes on backstage at the Miss America pageant. The first shots introduce the main characters by showing Carolyn Sapp being fitted into a white evening gown by Eric Chandler, her coach, and Takeo, her dress designer. This shot

cuts to news footage, shot on videotape, of the pre-pageant Miss America parade. (The entire movie is on videotape). Additional news footage is intercut with scenes of the actors -- e.g., an actor who plays a reporter narrates part of the parade in a stand-up -- so that shots of the "real" Carolyn winning the 1992 Miss America pageant are seamlessly blended with shots of Carolyn the "actor" interacting with the other characters who are watching her. A few minutes into the first act, after Carolyn has been crowned, the problem -- Carolyn's been beaten by her boyfriend -- is introduced by a late-night phone call from a reporter who wants details of the abusive episodes. As such, the main contrast is established: even a Miss America can be a victim of physical abuse.

Establishing Shots Within Acts. The twelve made-for-television/cable movies are constructed in the standard form of seven acts interspersed with six commercial breaks. This construction requires that each act begin with an establishing shot that sets the scene for the action that follows.

Frequently, the establishing shot is a long shot of the entire scene, followed by a series of breakdown shots which close in on the character or the site of the action. Or, a long shot of the exterior of a building cuts to an interior shot of a room in that building. For example, the courtroom sequences in Absolute Strangers begin with long shots of the courtroom and through a series of cuts move into medium close ups of the person who has been called to testify. Additional shots in the sequence show the judge, the defense and prosecuting attorneys, the audience, and, of course, the heroes and villains. This once again reinforces the who the characters are and the setting of the narrative.

But other establishing shots at the beginning of an act are more visually interesting. Liar, Liar uses a 360-degree rotating camera movement to begin Act IV. The sequence begins with a medium close up of Kelly Farrow, shot at her eye level (she's eleven, so eye level is about four feet above the floor). The camera pulls straight back to a medium shot and begins to circle around her. As it moves through 360 degrees, the camera continues to pull back and down, until the sequence ends in a low angle shot of the rather small Kelly dwarfed by the immense multi-story lobby of the courthouse she's standing in. The shot emphasizes how small and powerless Kelly is (she stands looking upwards, alone and somewhat lost-looking) in the world of the adult legal system.

Shots Within Acts. Television/cable movies are shot much like television series programming. Medium close ups of the characters using the shot-reverse shot editing style (a key convention of Hollywood continuity or "invisible" editing) are used during dialogue; exterior long shots of scenery, homes, or places of business help set the dramatic scene. These within-act shots are the "generic" shots used time and again in television; they tend not to stand out because they all look much the same. They can be found in all 12 of these movies, and indeed in all television/cable movies.

But most of the movies in this set contain at least one sequence that is stylistically different, and often more like shots used in theatrical films, than the "realistic" shots used for most of the narrative. These sequences are often shot from angles that no character in the movie, or viewer in real life, could see.

An example of the viewpoint no human is likely to see is found in Doing Time on

Maple Drive. One scene is momentarily visually confusing. The shot begins with what seems to be a black screen, but the blackness is suddenly pulled to both sides of the frame. This reveals a white rectangle with an object directly in the center of the frame. The heads of two women then enter the frame from each side. What we're seeing is a table being opened to insert a leaf, from a point of view as if we were flat on our back underneath the table, looking up at a chandelier.

"Climax" Shots. The construction of the television/cable movie into a form that requires six commercial breaks and seven acts also demands that a "mini-climax" of dramatic action take place before each break. This is done to help ensure that the viewer returns to the movie after the break. The climax itself is often presented through dialogue; e.g. Shari Karney in Shattered Trust vows to change the incest laws to give victims a better break. The visual conventions often have the camera focus on the movie's interest center, so that viewers can see how the dramatic climax affects that person. Most of the climactic shots are rather undistinguished and are usually in the form of a fade-to-back on a medium close up of a principal character.

Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted is typical in that it presents the mini-climax through dialogue and visuals. Acts III and V end in medium close ups that focus on Ginny, the interest center of the movie (the plot follows Ginny's activities to a greater extent than Jonathan's). In both act-ending shots, Ginny is in tears and is either being comforted by her husband Franklin or is comforting Jonathan. She is in an embrace in both shots, and in both she is facing the camera, while Franklin and Jonathan are seen in profile or from behind. The

visual presentation thus privileges Ginny's point of view in the movie and helps make the movie "about" her experiences.

Visual Representations of Rape. Four of the movies in this set deal with rape: date or acquaintance rape in Shame, incest committed against children in Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story and Liar, Liar, and the rape of an adult stranger in Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story.

The movies show viewers the rape itself or the events immediately leading up to the rape, but the film is processed so that it looks different from the other scenes. Three of the four movies (Shattered Trust is the exception) show the rape in grainy black-and-white images assembled into temporally short shots. The shots are inserted into the rape victim's dialogue -- filmed in color without a visible grain -- as she recounts the incident. As such, the black-and-white images are flashbacks.

The style is used in Shame when Lizzie Carter makes a statement to the police about the night she was raped; it is intercut with medium close-ups of Lizzie as she narrates the incident. The imagery is used twice in Liar, Liar. First, as Christina Farrow begins her testimony, the flashbacks appear to be hers, and the viewer sees a man's hands forcing a child hand's to grasp a toilet tank. But then the footage is repeated, and additional quick cuts (medium close ups) show that Kelly is the child who's being victimized. Using the same footage to represent Christina and Kelly links them as victims of the same abuser, their father, Gil. And the imagery is again used in Taking Back My Life, as Nancy Ziegenmeyer has flashbacks of the rape during her testimony and as she tries and fails to make love with

her husband.

The point of view of the shots in these three sequences is that of the objective camera/viewer of the movie. The viewers (or perhaps voyeurs) of the movies are onlookers to the rapes. We are asked to identify with the characters, but we are not put in their place; we do not see the rape from their perspective. Certainly, identification also prevents the sequence from being portrayed from the perspective of the attacker.

Shattered Trust varies from the convention by using other visual imagery besides grainy black-and-white video. Shari Karney's flashbacks are at first auditory: in court on an incest case, she thinks she hears the manual typewriter her father wrote on before he abused her. Later, a flashback is portrayed almost as a visual hallucination. Shari sees a grainy extreme closeup of the crying face of a toddler reflected in her bedroom mirror, and she hears the child's cries. Shari's flashbacks are represented through footage that has muted colors and sometimes appears sepia-toned; it is grainy and somewhat out of focus. The images are processed to look different from the "natural" color of the real-time events.

Geographical Conventions

The geographical location of a made-for-television/cable movie falls into three categories: the generic real place, which has only a state; the no place, which could be anywhere in the U.S. or Canada; and the specific real place, identified by a city and state. Geographical location is inferred from visual representations, e.g., of state seals in courtrooms, and through dialogic references.

Geography can be thought of as also involving whether the characters live in urban, suburban, or rural-small town areas. Because most Americans live in urban and suburban population centers, it comes as no surprise that nine of the twelve movies are set in urban-suburban areas. The three exceptions to the rule are Shame, Taking Back My Life, and A Town Torn Apart, all of which are set in small towns.

Geography is important in that it can affect how easily the social problem is generalized from the movie's characters to the population of the country as a whole. A movie that is too geographically-specific may lose its easy generalizability if viewers think the problem only affects those specific characters or only people in that part of the country.

The Generic Real Place. The largest group of social problem movies in this set (six of twelve) is set in real places, but in locales that are less-specific than named towns. The usual convention within this group is to specifically name the state or, less often, the geographic region in which the action takes place.

A sub-group of movies are placed in Northeastern states. Absolute Strangers takes place in the Long Island-New York City region; Doing Time on Maple Drive is set in suburban New England; and The Good Fight is set in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Another group of generic real place movies are set outside of the New England-New York area. Miss America: Behind the Crown is located in Hawaii; Shameful Secrets is set in Maryland; and Shattered Trust takes place in California. Each of these movies contains dialogue that refers to more-specific locations; e.g. Honolulu is mentioned in Miss America and one scene takes place in Sacramento in Shattered Trust, but the bulk of the action takes

places in non-specific areas.

The No Place. Four of the movies have no particular location; their action could take place anywhere in America or Canada. These movies contain only passing references to location or no mentions at all. No state flags are seen in courtroom sequences; dialogue refers only to "the state;" car license plates are either kept out of frame or plain black-on-white tags are used; and urban street scenes show only anonymous buildings.

Better Off Dead completely disguises its location, employing neither location-specific dialogue nor identifiable landmarks. Shame is set in a small town in the Pacific Northwest, but the state is never identified. The location is known through the scenery and dialogue. Tim, the town mechanic, says the parts for Diana's motorcycle will have to be ordered from Portland.

Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted is set in urban and suburban areas without distinguishing features. The only hint to location comes in exterior shots which show palm trees along city streets. A glimpse of a skyline is seen, but it doesn't provide enough information to identify the specific city. Liar, Liar uses the same conventions to downplay its Canadian origin. The exterior shots could show any urban area. It is not until Kelly's incest case goes to court that dialogue reveals the movie was made and set in Canada, and Kelly's attorney introduces herself as Crown Council Susan Midori.

The Specific Real Place. Two of the twelve movies in this set are located in easily-identified real places. Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story is specifically

set in Grinnell and Des Moines, Iowa. The dialogue refers to Des Moines and to Grand View College, and one scene shows a sign clearly marked "Grinnell, Iowa" hanging outside a post office building. Another scene evokes the image of the Midwest by showing a tractor being driven down the main street of the small town in a flat, agricultural area.

A Town Torn Apart has a specific setting in Winchester, New Hampshire. The opening sequence of the movie is a long tracking shot across a postcard-perfect New England village; the camera comes to rest on a sign that locates us in Winchester. Dialogue contains references to New England, and plays on the stereotype that you're a stranger in town for the first three generations your family lives there. One character says that Doc Littky's three-and-half years in Winchester makes him a "very recent" addition to the town.

The New Definition of the Genre

All of this information leads us to a new, somewhat expanded yet still concise definition of the social problem made-for-television/cable movie. It is this:

> The social problem made-for-television/cable movie genre is characterized by the discussion of an issue that affects large numbers of men and women, not just the characters in the narrative. The discussion is moved from the family or individual level by didactic and educational dialogue, and by stylistic and editing conventions that help viewers understand that the problem is being generalized. The movies operate from a point of view that defines right and wrong for the viewer. They explore and resolve problems within the context of the existing institutions of contemporary American life, particularly the family. Almost all the characters in the movies are portrayed as members of families. Families can be traditional, with two parents and children, or non-traditional, with one parent and children.

Summary

The twelve made-for-television/cable movies examined in this study are all quite similar in the way their narratives are presented. An issue -- such as incest, or tobacco liability, or capital punishment -- that currently concerns many people in contemporary society is discussed or examined. The discussion is carried through didactic dialogue, which is designed to provide exposition and to set out a particular viewpoint on the issue.

The problem is personified by showing how it affects one particular family. These families undergo changes as they deal with the problem or issue, sometimes becoming closer and stronger, sometimes breaking apart and reforming as a new family.

The characters often have romantic relationships. These, like the family relationships, also change during the passage of dramatic time in the movie. Relationships that appear to be good are revealed to be bad; poor relationships end and the people from them go on to find a new life.

On the whole, characters tend to be affluent and white, although there are exceptions. A few of the movies have minorities in leading roles, although it is more usual for minority characters to be secondary characters or extras.

The interest centers of most of the movies are women. Often these women in pitted are some way against a power structure that is dominated by men and whose wishes are imposed through the legal and justice systems. The interest centers are often strong-willed individuals, who affect change in the system with the help of a small group of people with the same interests in mind.

The occupations of the main characters, men and women, tend toward the professions, although again there are exceptions. The characters live in cities or in small towns across America. The geographical locations of the movies are important only in that they tell us that the problems and issues affect Americans of all levels of affluence, regardless of where they live.

The movies all look remarkably alike, having all been produced within a set of narrative and visual conventions common to television and to made-for-television/cable movies in particular. Conversations are most often photographed within the tradition of medium close ups and the use of the cinematic shot-reverse shot technique. But all of the movies use other camera techniques, as well, to help make the movies visually interesting.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

The question "What is the meaning of the social problem made-for-television/cable movie genre" is probably unanswerable, but is an important question that ought to be asked. The meaning of any genre is tied closely to what that genre does. And what the social problem television/cable movie genre does is to rehash familiar themes within familiar conventions (cf. Schatz), so that a coherent picture of contemporary American society is produced. This picture shows both the bad (the problems facing us) and the good (the resolution of those problems through legal and legislative means).

The social problem genre is, on the whole, optimistic. The problems that arise during the movies are resolved, or partially resolved, or the promise of a resolution is held out, by the end of the movie. The genre shows us that individuals who are members of families resolve the problems that face those families, even when the resolution involves breaking up the traditional mom-dad-and-kids family. The movies within the genre frequently deal with change, but the changes -- to individuals, to families -- are most often positive changes that make the individual and the family better and stronger.

But the genre is also "liberal reformist", like the Hollywood social problem film before it. It points out specific problems and shows that they can be resolved within the

framework of the existing system. Characters work to have new laws passed, not to tear down the legal system; rape victims meet their attackers in court, not in the street with a gun drawn.

This chapter outlines the picture of contemporary society by exploring some of the messages and meanings found with the social problem genre. It looks at the social problems themselves; explains some broad patterns within the genre; shows how the system rights itself when it is wrong; provides details about the complexes of heroes and villains; looks at the role of individual action; examines a number of gender issues; shows how the social problem is generalized from the family it concerns to society as a whole; looks at the ideology of the social problem movie; and notes how the genre deals with ambiguity.

The Social Problems

The twelve movies this study examines cover a range of problems and issues that confronted society during the time the movies were produced and shown. The general structure of the movies is to deal with a major issue and one or more lesser, secondary issues. The paragraph below recaps the social problems each movie deals with.

Absolute Strangers is about abortion and the rights of the families of medically incompetent patients. Better Off Dead examines capital punishment and abortion. Doing Time on Maple Drive examines sexual orientation and parent-child relationships. The Good Fight is about tobacco liability legal cases. Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted examines parental rights and the treatment of the developmentally disabled. Liar, Liar looks at the

sexual abuse of children. Miss America: Behind the Crown deals with the issue of the physical abuse of women. Shame and Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story examine rape and the stigma of rape. Shameful Secrets examines spousal abuse and the legal machinery that deals with such cases. Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story looks at incest and its aftermath. And A Town Torn Apart deals with education reform.

Broad Patterns Within the Genre

In the previous chapter, the set of twelve movies was divided into two subsets: movies that deal with "feminine" issues and movies that deal with other issues. Some details about these two broad subsets are necessary at this point.

"Feminine" Issues Movies. Six movies fall into this category: Liar, Liar, Miss America, Shame, Shameful Secrets, Shattered Trust, and Taking Back My Life. These movies are thematically and stylistically related. In terms of theme, all six have female protagonists/interest centers. Moreover, the female interest centers are largely (but not always) victims of the situations the movies portray -- they are the battered wives or girlfriends, the daughters who've been incested by their fathers, the adult victims of rapists. (In Shame, attorney Diana Cadell becomes involved in the rape case because of altruistic and personal reasons, something that characterized the "other issues" movies, as noted below.)

On the other hand, the interest centers tend to be slightly outside of or are marginal to the system. They are children or teenagers, housewives or mothers who work outside the

family home, and beauty pageant queens. But the heroes of two movies -- Diana in Shame and Shari Karney in Shattered Trust -- are attorneys and closer to the center of power.

Regardless of how powerful the heroes are, the six "feminine" movies all use the legal system to resolve the problems that face the interest centers. Shame and Miss America: Behind the Crown rely on the law enforcement system to (at least partially) take care of the problems of rape and physical abuse; the other four movies resolve problems through courtroom activity and the legal process. Once again, the movies are optimistic. They hold out the hope that problems can be resolved within the existing system of judges, courts, and legislation.

In terms of style, all six of the movies use explicit dialogue to generalize the situations they deal with, to tell other characters and viewers that the female victims are examples of a much more wide-spread problem. The six movies have scenes in which a phrase similar to "you are not alone" is used. In addition, two of the movies -- Shattered Trust and Taking Back My Life -- use multiple examples of people with the problem. Taking Back My Life also asks the audience to identify with the sometimes unlikable main character/interest center.

Other Issues Movies. The remaining six movies all group into the "other issues" subset. Absolute Strangers, Better Off Dead, Doing Time on Maple Drive, The Good Fight, Jonathan, and A Town Torn Apart fall into this category. These movies are less related by theme and style than the previous subset. The interest centers of three of the movies are male: Marty Klein in Absolute Strangers, Matt Carter in Doing Time, and Doc Littky in A

Town Torn Apart.

The interest centers of this subset, regardless of their sex, are not always victims of the situations they're in. Grace Cragin of The Good Fight is not herself a victim of tobacco-caused cancer, but her client, who was also a friend of her children, was. Likewise, Doc Littky of Town is not personally hurt by the poor education the high school students of his town are receiving. Instead, Grace and Doc are activists who take on the central problem of the movie for both altruistic reasons (it's the right thing to do) and personal reasons (I'm the right person to do it). This non-victim structure gives these movies a slightly different viewpoint than the "feminine" movies and, in Doc Littky's case, allows the movie to concentrate fully on the social problem and not on Doc's romantic life.

The interest centers of this subset of movies are as much in the mainstream as the heroes of the "feminine" movies. Matt in Doing Time is marginal to the power center of society, but that's because he's a university student and not quite a full-fledged adult. Ginny Moore in Jonathan is also marginal to society in that she's a volunteer worker and mother. The other interest center/heroes are attorneys, a certified public accountant, and a high school principal -- all about as mainstream as you can get.

These movies also differ in that the legal and law enforcement systems are not always central to the resolution of the problems the characters encounter. Doing Time doesn't invoke the law to partially resolve its problems, and Better Off Dead casts the legal system as a villain that unjustly executes women. Doc files a lawsuit to keep his job as principal in Town, but the movie focuses on resolving the problems of education reform through hard, hands-on work, rather than through the courts. On the other hand, Absolute

Strangers, The Good Fight, and Jonathan do take to the courtroom to successfully resolve their problems. The overall message still is, though, that problems can be resolved within the existing system.

This subset of movies also uses different stylistic techniques to generalize their problems. Where the "feminine" issues movies used dialogue of the "you are not alone" variety to generalize, the "other" issues movies rely more on identification with the interest centers (in Better Off Dead and Doing Time) and the use of multiple examples of people with the problem (Absolute Strangers, Jonathan, and Town). The Good Fight uses the same type of generalizable dialogue as the "feminine" issues subset to make its point about the evils of tobacco.

The following sections provide additional details about these issues and others.

The System Rights Itself

The social problem genre of made-for-television/cable movies resolves problems within the existing framework of society. None of the characters take the law into their own hands; rarely do the movies as much as imply that the system can't be changed to make it more just, more humane.

The institutions, specifically the legal and law enforcement systems, in these movies work. The problems that face the characters, and through generalization all of us in modern day America, are resolved within the institutions of our society. The problems of incest and rape, for example, are settled through legal action. Rapists go to jail; laws are changed to

make it easier for incest survivors to find justice.

But the resolutions don't come easy. Often the legal system is stuck in its bureaucratic rut. The legal system is controlled by men and the laws it enacts and enforces are unjust toward women and their concerns. But small groups of courageous individuals can stand up to the system. The system rights itself, fixing its own problems and bringing at least the promise of justice for all.

Many of the twelve social problem movies examined for this study take to the court system to resolve their problems. Eight movies -- Absolute Strangers, The Good Fight, Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted, Liar, Liar, Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story, Shameful Secrets, Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story, A Town Torn Apart -- resolve a large portion of their conflicts in the courtroom. In addition, Shame implies that the series of rapes and Lizzie Curtis's murder will be resolved in a trial, and Miss America: Behind the Crown shows that law enforcement works to protect battered women.

Only Better Off Dead paints a pessimistic portrait of the legal system, as convicted murderer and new mother Kit Kellner is executed by a system that refuses to acknowledge that a career criminal can be rehabilitated. (Doing Time on Maple Drive is the exception to the rule: it has no legal content).

Legal System as Hero. In the courtroom, the virtuous are rewarded, but not immediately, because the justice system works slowly. It takes fourteen months for Nancy Ziegenmeyer's rape in Taking Back My Life to come to trial; part of the delay is legal

wrangling about the admissability in Iowa courts of a DNA test that proves rapist Bobby Lee Smith's semen was found in Nancy's body ("I could've told them that," she says, acknowledging that common sense and the law are sometimes two different things). Nancy is upset at the delay, and she says the system is stacked against women: "First I was raped by this man, then by the legal system." But county prosecutor Nan Horvak, who's in charge of the case, counters Nancy's negative statement by spelling out the entire genre's viewpoint of the legal system. "It's not a perfect system, but if we work within it, we'll prevail," she says.

And they do prevail. Bobby Lee is sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole for kidnapping Nancy. (There is a narrative rupture at this point. Rape charges are not mentioned, although Nancy's courtroom testimony dealt more with the specifics of the rape than with the brief period of time Bobby Lee drove Nancy around in her car before the rape).

There is a similar atmosphere of prevailing through adversity in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted. Ginny Moore spends ten years nurturing Jonathan before she can legally adopt him. The Willeses, Jonathan's parents, have failed to provide him with education, dental care, and a heart operation that will prolong his life past his early twenties. Yet when the Moores petition the court for guardianship of the boy, they are turned down by a judge who says Jonathan's parents have fulfilled their legal and moral obligations. The judge also says it is not the role of the state to interfere in issues of parental rights.

Later, when Jonathan's heart condition worsens, Ginny takes the case to a second court. The second judge reverses the earlier decisions (he believes that Jonathan's rights

outweigh those of his parents), awards the Moores custody of Jonathan, and sets the stage for his eventual adoption. In the end, the Moores prevail by using the system. A final voice over by Jonathan says, "It's good. Life is good."

The other movies in this sub-set also show that the legal system works to punish the guilty and reward the innocent. In Absolute Strangers, Marty Klein is granted guardianship of his comatose wife Nancy, and is able to arrange for her legal abortion. Gil Farrow, the father who sexually abused two of his daughters and his son, is sentenced to jail in Liar, Liar. The California state assembly changes the state's incest laws under the influence of Shari Karney and associates in Shattered Trust; an end title tells us Shari is currently lobbying in Washington to change federal laws. In Shameful Secrets, Maryann Tate emerges from hiding with her two children and testifies about the raw deal battered women get from the courts. In return, the laws of Maryland are changed and Maryann gets a second day in court, where it's implied she will win legal custody of the kids. And in A Town Torn Apart, Doc Littky raises a legal challenge to the school board's decision to not renew his contract. He stays on the job until a teacher is elected to the board; her vote swings the board so that Doc's contract is renewed.

Law Enforcement as Hero. Miss America: Behind the Crown and Shame utilize the law enforcement branch of the criminal justice system to at least partially resolve the issues they've raised. In Miss America, Nuu Faaola's arrest for violating a restraining order designed to keep him away from Carolyn Sapp sends him into immediate psychiatric care, where he leans to control his violent impulses. The police are quick to respond to Carolyn's

call, and Nuu violates the restraining order only once. He does not become even more violent, nor does he begin to stalk Carolyn. When he meets Carolyn face-to-face, she calmly tells him that since she can never be sure he won't hit her again, their relationship is over. However, she still wants to remain friends, and she tells the press that Nuu is a brave man who's big enough to confront his shortcomings.

The ending of Shame implies that Dan, the rapist, and the other young men present at the rapes of Lizzie and Lorna, will be brought to justice. The men are arrested, but only after Lizzie has been killed. Dan and Andrew kidnapped Lizzie, and she jumped from their speeding car in order to avoid a beating and possibly being raped a second time. The trial is not shown in the movie, which ends with the men arrested and additional victims coming forward. Shame ends with a western-inspired scene (a parallel to the similarly-titled Shane?) in which Diana Cadell rides her motorcycle out of town, knowing that she doesn't have to hang around to ensure that justice is done.

Mixed View of the Legal System. The Good Fight, however, advances a mixed message about the beneficence of the system. The justice system works in that it allows the tobacco liability case to go to court, but the slowness of the judicial bureaucracy means that Tony Taber dies of oral cancer before his case goes to trial. The system is also stacked against the users (or victims) of tobacco products. Grace Cragin explicitly tells Tony in Act I that the chances of winning a tobacco liability case are slim:

> If one person wins one of these things and sets a precedent, the entire tobacco industry would be flooded with suits. I mean, they're willing to spend billions of

dollars to make sure nobody wins one.

Worse, the evil tobacco company attorneys are able to use the legal machinery to their own ends. They attempt to discredit professional anti-tobacco witness Dr. Lemon by suggesting that his psychiatric hospitalization means he is not a reliable, objective witness. Worse, when it seems they may lose the case and be held responsible for the oral cancer that killed Tony, the attorneys apparently arrange for excluded documents to reach the jury, forcing the judge to declare a mistrial. Viewers know the evil attorneys are behind this, because as the judge begins to announce the mistrial decision, they are already smiling at one another.

This rather pessimistic view is tempered, however, by Grace's resolve to take the case to court a second time and by a rousing speech from Henry, who says it doesn't matter if Grace loses the case. "The winner and still champion will always be the team with the most money. The point is that if you quit, the light goes out," he says. The implication is that eventually someone will win a tobacco liability lawsuit, and that we (presumably anti-smoking viewers) can't stop trying until that day arrives.

Legal System as Villain. Better Off Dead inverts the optimistic view of the justice system by casting it as a villain, the only movie in this set to do so. At the start of the movie, Kit believes that even though she's killed a police officer, she can outwit the system. Kit tells her court-appointed attorney that because "the man don't never give you what you want," her strategy is to avoid the gas chamber by saying in court that being executed doesn't faze her. She does exactly this, confesses, and is promptly sent to death row. Once there, her attitude

inexplicably changes and she tells attorney Cutter Dubuque that she now wants to be executed.

But after seven years, Kit has an affair with a prison guard, becomes pregnant, and gives birth to a baby girl. This rehabilitates her. Kit comes to realize the value of human life and the importance of a stable family, something she didn't have when she was young. She no longer wants to be executed. Despite Kit's change in temperament, Cutter's repeated pleas for clemency fail to move governor Byron. Kit dies in the gas chamber at the end of the movie. The message is clearly that once the system makes a decision, it will not right itself: the governor could spare Kit's life, but for political reasons -- he's a pro-life conservative -- he won't.

One Exception. The exception to the generalized rule that institutions are the setting where problems are resolved is Doing Time on Maple Drive. Doing Time is extralegal. It partially resolves the conflicts within the family by having Phil Carter, the patriarch of the clan, take some tentative steps toward accepting Matt's homosexuality. The other conflicts -- the ones between Phil and his wife, and between Phil and his other children -- are left dangling at the end of the movie. This lack of full resolution also distinguishes this movie from the others, which tend to wrap up most of their problems by the end. Because of this, Doing Time may perhaps be characterized as a movie that bridges the social problem and family melodrama genres.

Heroes and Villains

In the social problem television/cable movie, good and evil are arranged so that complexes of heroes -- a small group headed by a strong individual -- match wits with groups of villains who are often the representatives of institutions. Heroes in these movies tend to be concerned with the well-being of individual persons, while villains tend to be interested in causes and to see individuals as examples of causes.

Complexes of Heroes. The heroes of these twelve made-for-television/cable movies are single people or couples at the head of small groups of heroes -- a construction somewhat akin to theatrical Western films in which the hero complex is "a fighting group composed of equals" (Wright, p. 170). The problems that are resolved by these movies cannot be resolved by an individual who works alone, for in modern day America, every hero needs the help of others.

For example, Marty Klein in Absolute Strangers cannot achieve his goal -- an abortion for his comatose wife -- without the support of doctors, attorneys, friends, members of his family, and the judicial system. Likewise, Carolyn Sapp in Miss America: Behind the Crown can't protect herself (or become an advocate of a woman's right not to be physically battered) without the support and advice of Eric Chandler, her pageant coach and confidant, and a law enforcement agency that enforces the restraining order she takes out against her boyfriend.

The heroes are all slightly outside the system that they're battling against. None of

the heroes really speak for an institution, even if it is an institution (like education or the law) that they're defending. Instead, the heroes work within an institution so they can reform it, so that it works better and is more just.

Running through the hero characters in each of the movies, we find the following:

A. Mainstream Heroes. Doc Littky is a newspaper publisher who returns to his former career as a principal save the high school in A Town Torn Apart. His chief ally is Ellen, a teacher who, like the other teachers, has little say in who the principal is or how he runs the school. Ellen becomes committed to Doc's way of doing things, though, and she gives up her career as a teacher to win a seat on the school board which keeps Doc employed.

Nancy and Steven Ziegenmeyer are blue-collar workers (not attorneys) who use the courts and the newspapers in Taking Back My Life to seek justice not only for Nancy, but for all female victims of rape. They are aided by the institutions of the judicial system and the Des Moines Register, which crusades for the end of stigma attached to rape victims.

Cutter Dubuque in Better Off Dead, although an attorney, is an ex-District Attorney who's in private practice during the time she tries to save Kit's life. She is outside the official power system. Cutter works closely with Sherlock Jones, who as a private investigator is himself marginal to mainstream society. Cutter is herself a victim of the uncaring system: she was seduced by it and became a somewhat corrupt D.A., only to be forced to resign when a scandal erupted.

Grace Cragin, the attorney who litigates the tobacco case in The Good Fight, resigns

from her position in a three-partner law firm to take Tony Taber's case. Grace's ex-husband Henry, a semi-retired but extremely rich attorney offers advice and personally bankrolls the litigation. They are aided by Brown, another attorney, and Elijah, their translator and law student.

Diana Cadell, the attorney in Shame, is on vacation and away from her position as a public defender in Los Angles. Although she's part of the power structure, she is off-duty and out of her jurisdiction during the situations the movie describes. This enables her to work more freely and act as the head of a heroic group that includes Lizzie, Lizzie's father Tim, and Tina, Tim's girlfriend.

Ginny Moore is a volunteer in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted who helps a boy with Down syndrome. She is allied with her husband, Franklin, and their children, Laurie and Brad, in the adoption of Jonathan. Franklin is a white-collar worker who's career is not specified; however, the narrative makes it clear he is neither an attorney nor involved in a field that cares for child with mental disabilities. The Moores are aided by their attorney and the judge who gives them custody of Jonathan.

Marty Klein in a CPA in Absolute Strangers who works for his comatose wife's constitutional rights. His chief allies in building his case to allow the comatose Nancy to have an abortion is a large group composed of family and friends, doctors and attorneys, and the judge who hears his petition for guardianship of Nancy. The U.S. Supreme Court is also a part of the heroic complies as its justices refuse to hear last-minute appeals by the Right-to-Lifers who want guardianship of Nancy so that they can prevent the abortion.

The hero complex in Shattered Trust is composed of four women: Shari Karney, an

attorney and incest survivor; Stephanie Chadford, an attorney who specializes in incest cases; Rose Beckman, a social worker; and Joan Delveccio, a licensed psychologist. They work together and through the official channels to influence their state legislature to pass a law that makes it easier for incest victims to sue their abusers.

B. Marginal Heroes. On the other hand, some of the heroic characters are more marginal to power and society than the heroes already mentioned. Kelly in Liar, Liar is a child; she is almost a "pure" individual hero in that no one, including her attorney and her older sister, who has also been sexually abused by their father, believes Kelly's story. Kelly would be powerless if it weren't for her strong personality and indomitable spirit.

Lizzie Curtis, the rape victim in Shame, is a teenager, and, like Kelly in Liar, Liar, is not yet part of the adult power structure. Lizzie is a martyr in the story, for she dies while standing up against the rapists who have kidnapped her. Her resolve to prosecute gives her power, but it also leads to her death. Fortunately, Lizzie's death prompts Lorna to come forward to continue the legal case.

In Doing Time on Maple Drive, Matt (the character who's closest to being a hero) is a college student. As a teenager who's dependent on his parents for emotional support, Matt is also on the fringes of society's power structure.

Carolyn Sapp in Miss America is a beauty pageant queen. As such, she is considered to be powerful only in that what she says will be more readily reported by the media than would the words of an "ordinary" citizen. Thus, she has more power than most people, but less than individuals who can change society through law, for example. Her co-hero is Eric

Chandler, her beauty pageant coach, who supports her stand for independence and personal safety; he too is relatively powerless.

Shameful Secrets also has a marginal hero, in this case the physically-battered housewife Maryann Tate. Maryann is the head of a heroic complex of women connected to the power system: Louise and Josie, who run the battered women's shelter where Maryann takes refuge, and attorney Rachel Morales. As with the other heroes who work with the legal system, Maryann is aided by the system itself as the law is changed to help ensure that battered women can get custody of their children in divorce cases.

C. Institutional Heroes. Because no one person working alone can resolve the problems raised in a social problem television/cable movie, institutions have to be called on to take action toward a resolution. Psychiatry and psychology are noble institutions in the social problem movie; they are where characters turn to for help in resolving their problems.

Nuu Faaola in Miss America: Behind the Crown is cured of his abusive tendencies by a psychiatrist. Nuu was arrested when he violated Carolyn Sapp's restraining order. He took the "talking cure" and learned that he became abusive when his feelings were hurt. The psychiatrist told Nuu that when the violent feelings come on, he should simply walk away from the situation. Nuu reported his happy progress to Carolyn, but she rejected him, saying that she still didn't feel safe around him.

Shari Karney in Shattered Trust sought the help of "licensed psychologist" (as her sign reads) Joan Delveccio to deal with her unusual behavior in the courtroom. Shari was jailed overnight and threatened with disbarment after she leapt over the dock and tried to

strangle a man accused of incesting his three-year-old daughter. During the course of her therapy with Dr. Delveccio, Shari stopped repressing the memories of her father from raping her when she was a baby. Afterwards, Shari found a new meaning in her life, and became a full-time advocate of the legal rights of incest survivors.

Complexes of Villains. Villains in these twelve made-for-television/cable movies are representatives of institutions. They reside at the center of the power structures of medicine, the law, and the family. Villains in these roles can show that problems are caused by those at the hearts of institutions that are usually respected.

A. Institutional Villains. The chief villain of Better Off Dead is Governor John Byron. He begins the movie as a District Attorney and as such is a double villain, an attorney and a politician. Byron is the embodiment of, and the head of, an evil system that refuses to reverse itself and stay the execution of a rehabilitated female death row inmate.

Attorneys who use their powers for bad ends are also found in The Good Fight, where they work for Federated Tobacco. Their tactics include character assassination -- they grill Tony's father about the affair his late wife had and question a witness about his confinement to a mental hospital -- and, when faced with losing the case, jury-tampering.

In Absolute Strangers, the villains form a coalition of attorneys, doctors, and Right-to-Life partisans. The evil attorneys are the state prosecutors who attempt to block Nancy's abortion, and the attorneys who represent the Right-to-Lifers who petition for guardianship of Nancy and the unborn baby. They are backed up by anti-abortion doctors from the

hospital Nancy is in.

Feminist Rita Thompson is another villain in Absolute Strangers. She contacts Marty, who at first thinks she wants to help Nancy. But what Rita really wants is to make Nancy into a symbol of, she says, what can happen to all women if the Pro-Life movement succeeds (the logic of this line of reasoning is not explained). Rita wants to talk about Nancy during a feminist rally, which Marty refuses to grant her permission to do.

The institutional villains in Shattered Trust are representatives of the male-dominated power structure. They are the attorneys who represent child molesters, judges who dismiss the cases, and conservative legislators whose major concern is that innocent men are not accused of incest by vindictive women.

Police chief Cutty of Shame is a villain who represents the legal system and patriarchy. Cutty refuses to take legal action against the rapists, and his dialogue makes it clear he doesn't believe a crime has been committed. When Diana Cadell complains of being sexually harassed on the streets at 8 p.m., Cutty asks her what was she doing "traipsing around" the streets at that hour, "stirring up the hormones of the boys." Diana's response, of course, is that Cutty would never say such a thing to a man.

B. Personal Villains. Fathers are the villains in five of the movies, and as fathers they can be seen both as bad individuals and as representatives of the institution of the family. Some of the movies in this set have both institutional and personal villains.

Gil Farrow rapes his own children in Liar, Liar. Daniel Tate of Shameful Secrets beats his wife and emotionally abuses his children. Jack Karney incests his daughter (as the

language of the movie expresses it) in Shattered Trust; other father-incest aggressors are also seen. Phil Carter dominates his entire family in Doing Time on Maple Drive, driving his children to fear, alcoholism, and attempted suicide. Max Willis denies medical and dental care to his son, who has Down syndrome, in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted.

C. Marginal Villains. The villains in the remaining movies are somewhat more marginal to the power structure than those already mentioned. We are told very little about Bobby Lee Smith, the rapist of Taking Back My Life. Although he is the father of two small children, his villainy is not rooted in parenthood, as he commits his crime against a woman who is not a member of his family. We know he has a criminal record because we see police mug shots of him, but we don't know the nature of his earlier crimes.

The villain of Miss America: Behind the Crown is Nuu Faaola, a Samoan-Hawaiian who plays football for, and is cut by, the N.Y. Jets and the Miami Dolphins. Nuu's villainy -- he beats Carolyn -- is cured through psychiatry. The roots of Nuu's violence are largely unexplored by the narrative, however. The movie does not say that Nuu's tendency toward physical violence is related in any way to his training as a football player. It would seem logical that an athlete who is trained to use aggression might resort to it in inappropriate circumstances.

The chief villain of A Town Torn Apart is Sheila Bennett, a somewhat ambiguous character who appears to be a housewife who works (in one scene) in a shop in Winchester. Sheila is an example of small-town, backward thinking. As a graduate of Julia B. Thayer High School, she sees no reason why her son and his contemporaries should be educated any

differently than she was. Sheila opposes Doc's innovative educational ideas and makes unsubstantiated accusations that Doc is a Humanist who is "too free with his hands" around students. Doc's beard and clothes are also an issue with Sheila, who says that when she was in school, principals dressed like principals.

Individual Action

Across this set of movies, the narratives are constructed so that problems are resolved through the action of a complex of heroic characters. This action is always within the context of an institutional setting, such as a courtroom, a school, etc. Individual characters rarely if ever take action entirely on their own; i.e. the rape victim doesn't kill the rapist; instead she takes the rapist to court and wins a victory through the use of the institutional process of the law.

However, the interest centers of three of the twelve movies come close to taking individual action. Doc Littky almost singlehandedly resolves the problem of educational reform in A Town Torn Apart. His beliefs and his winning personality bring together teachers and students, and override the wishes of the conservative non-reform faction in town. Significantly, Doc lives and works in Winchester; he is not a bureaucrat from the Department of Education who comes in from outside the community to impose a resolution.

Diana Cadell in Shame is also the vehicle of individual action. There is no one, either a person or an institution in Sawaya, to help Lizzie and Lorna after they're raped. The men in town laugh about the rape, the women gossip about them, and their own fathers think the

girls asked for it. Police chief Cutty will do nothing about the assault. But Diana is able to galvanize Lizzie into pressing charges. After Lizzie is killed, Lorna vows to continue the case against the rapists.

Even eleven-year-old Kelly Farrow in Liar, Liar is able to take individual action which gears up an institution that resolves her problem. Kelly first tells the story of her sexual abuse to her school counselor. From there, she is sent to a social worker, to a psychiatrist, and then to an attorney who takes the case against her father to court. While the people who help Kelly are representatives of institutions, it is Kelly's initial action that propels everyone else into activity. There would have been no case against Gil if Kelly hadn't come forward. In fact, it's only Kelly's personal resolve that continues the case after her attorney loses faith in her and begins to think that maybe Kelly is a compulsive liar after all.

Gender Issues

The social problem made-for-television/cable movies examined in this study abound with gender-related issues, both overt and subtle. This is to be expected, as the movies are made with the notion that more women than men will watch them (Browne 1987, Gitlin 1984, Rapping 1992). In fact, Rapping (1992) examines made-for-television movies that have a strong feminist subtext.

This set of social problem television/cable movies, however, is less than forthright in portraying women in independently powerful positions where they can make needed

changes and right wrongs. While ten of the twelve movies have female interest centers, in several, men are the motivating force who goad the women into action. And in most of the twelve movies examined here, men are firmly in control of the legal and political systems -- a disadvantage that women must overcome to resolve the problems at hand.

The eight movies that deal with the legal system and the two that examine the law enforcement system all portray the system as being controlled by men. (The remaining two movies deal with the educational and family systems; both are dominated by men as well). Women in these legal- and law enforcement-related movies play a direct role in the system -- many of them are attorneys and some are judges -- but for the most part their gender makes them marginal to the power center: even though the women are part of the system, they are without the power to effect real change by themselves.

The Mostly Male Legal System. Seven of the eight movies that deal with the law have a female interest center or centers, who are usually attorneys, who go up against a male-dominated legal system. A pattern recurs in these movies: a woman who needs legal help engages the services of a female attorney, who then fights for justice in a system dominated by men. In the world of the social problem television/cable movie, it is women who understand women's problems.

Better Off Dead concerns the dual interest centers of attorney Cutter Dubuque and death row inmate Kit Kellner. Both women are used by the male-dominated system for its own ends. Kit's death sentence furthers the career of John Byron, who uses the case as his springboard from district attorney to the governorship. It also temporarily advances Cutter's

career, as she is elected district attorney on the basis of it. But the male-dominated system chews up Cutter just as it has Kit. A scandal (an innocent crime suspect has died in police custody) forces Cutter to resign as D.A. And, after she realizes Kit shouldn't be executed, the system in the person of governor Byron refuses to stay the sentence.

The interest center of Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted is Ginny Moore. When she goes to court to petition for guardianship of Jonathan, she faces a male judge who rules that Jonathan's parents were within their legal rights to deny the boy medical care. Later, a male attorney helps her take the case to a second male judge, who reverses the earlier judge's decision.

Shameful Secrets uses much the same structure. Maryann Tate, a battered housewife, is the interest center. A male judge who hears her divorce case awards custody of her two children to Daniel, her abusive husband. The reason for doing this, says the judge, is that under Maryland law evidence of spousal abuse cannot be heard in custody cases. He awards custody to Daniel because Daniel, an architect, is in better financial shape that Maryann, who has just taken a job as a restaurant hostess. Maryann's attorney, Rachel Morales, objects to this, of course. Eventually, a female member of Congress opens hearings into the issue, and the law is changed so that spousal abuse may be heard in custody disputes.

Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story modifies the pattern somewhat by showing us an interest center who is herself an attorney, and hence part of the system she works to reform. All of Shari's incest cases are heard before male judges; the judiciary committee of the California assembly, which holds hearings into making incest laws tougher, is also all male -- and opposed to tightening up the laws. But it is also men who help right these

wrongs. Shari, and her female associates, enlist the help of a sympathetic male legislator who helps push the new, tougher bill through the judiciary committee and into law.

The Non-gendered Legal System. Three of the movies that use the legal system to resolve the problem are more equivocal about who controls the center of power. In Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story, the legal system is presented as working, although slowly. The male attorney for Bobby Lee Smith, the rapist, uses the system for a series of delays that hold up the trial for fourteen months. But in the end, the female prosecutor wins justice for Nancy, as Bobby Lee is sentenced to life in prison. The portrayal here is that in the system, men and woman are equal partners.

Liar, Liar also skirts the issue of who controls the legal system by showing that the gender of the attorneys and judges is not an issue in incest cases. Interest center Kelly Farrow has a female attorney on her side, although the attorney, Susan Midori, worries that a middle aged white male judge may not be sympathetic to the case. But Kelly's father Gil also has a female attorney. The judge neither sympathizes nor sides with Gil. Instead, Gil is convicted, and the legal system is shown to work equally well for children and adults (a viewpoint Shattered Trust disagrees with).

The Good Fight also pits a female interest center, attorney Grace Cragin, against a predominantly male (yet still neutral) legal system. The tobacco company attorneys Grace faces are men, although one woman is on the team. The judge who hears the case is a woman, but she is powerless to prevent the jury tampering that causes her to declare a mistrial. Further, tobacco liability itself is not presented as a gender issue: dialogue makes

clear that tobacco-induced disease affects men and women.

The Law Enforcement System. The two movies that deal with law enforcement present a mixed message about how the law treats women. In Shame, the police system is dominated by men who fail to acknowledge that crimes committed against women are crimes. Police chief Cutty, like all the men and many of the women in the town, blames rape on the victims. In one scene, Diana Cadell complains to Cutty that she was sexually harassed by young men when she was walking down the street. Cutty pointedly asks her what she was doing "traipsing around at that hour" -- Diana interjects that it was 8 p.m. -- "stirring up the hormones of the boys." Cutty takes no action against the group of rapists until Lizzie Curtis is killed while trying to escape from them.

The law enforcement system, on the other hand, works in Miss America: Behind the Crown, despite a Cutty-like attitude by a male police officer. When Carolyn Sapp goes to the Honolulu police to swear out a restraining order against abusive boyfriend and pro football player Nuu Faaola, a male cop says to her, "A guy like that doesn't get violent unless he's pushed." He is immediately corrected by a female police officer, who tells him he's out of line. Nevertheless, as soon as Nuu violates the restraining order, Carolyn calls the police and two male cops arrest Nuu at his home. Even though the system is dominated by men, it still works to protect women.

Educational and Familial Systems. The educational system of A Town Torn Apart is gendered, but the narrative plays this aspect down. Doc Littky, as principal of the high

school, is clearly the interest center of the movie, but both his chief ally, teacher Ellen Krieger, and main opponent, Sheila Bennett, are women. Men and women are teachers and members of the school board. But the system is still dominated by Doc, who is the motivating force (and hence the power center) behind education reform.

The Carter family in Doing Time on Maple Drive is dominated by Phil, the father-husband around whom the family revolves. But Phil's dominance and narrow-mindedness is shown to be something that almost destroys his family. His rigidness has led to a poor relationship with his wife and children. But even this movie holds out an optimistic note at the end, when Phil begins to rethink his attitudes and takes the first steps toward accepting that his son Matt is gay.

Men Resolve the Problems. Even though many of the problems in these movies affect female characters, it is often male characters who resolve the problems or who motivate the female characters to take action to resolve the problem.

In Miss America: Behind the Crown, Carolyn Sapp is the victim of Nuu Faaola's violent temper. But Carolyn believes what her grandmother has told her -- "It may not always be fair, but women are the peace-makers" -- and says Nuu hits her when she provokes him. Finally, Eric Chandler, her pageant coach, convinces Carolyn to go to the police for a restraining order after Nuu tries to kill her. Thus, Carolyn, who is being menaced by a man, has her problem resolved by another man. Only after this is Carolyn able to speak out on the issue of physical abuse and tell other battered women that they are in no way responsible: "I think the hardest part was realizing that he had no right to hit me. It didn't

matter if I pushed or provoked him -- or that I cared about him. Nothing gave him the right to be violent."

Grace Cragin litigates the tobacco-liability case in The Good Fight, but she couldn't do the job with the help of her ex-husband, Henry. First, she needs his money to finance the case, and second, she needs his advice because, as dialogue reveals, Henry is a better attorney than Grace. She not only goes against his recommendation, but she later apologizes for showing a key piece of evidence (a map that correlates by state sales of chewing tobacco and the incidence of oral cancer) to the president of Federated Tobacco during a deposition. Henry wanted her to save it for the trial, when it would be a surprise to the defense attorneys. In fact, when Grace wants to drop the case, Henry encourages her to continue it and tells her it's the fight that counts, not the win or loss.

Absolute Strangers is less about whether a woman in a coma should have an abortion than it is about her husband's battle to see that the abortion takes place. Marty Klein is really the interest center of the movie, not Nancy, whose coma begins during the first act. It is Marty's actions that lead to the successful abortion.

The high school in A Town Torn Apart is in a shambles and remains that way until Doc Littky comes along to save the day. Doc and all the candidates for the principal's job are men. The women in the movie are teachers, who have less status and power than a principal. A female character who's asked if she'll run for the school board declines, saying "Charlie would kill me." We presume that Charlie is her husband; why he would object is not made clear.

In Taking Back My Life, Steven Ziegenmeyer pushes Nancy to go public with her

story of being raped. Steven suggests that Nancy could do good for other women in the same situation by going to the Des Moines newspaper and allowing her name and picture to be used. Once again, the man is showing the way for action to be taken, and the woman is actually taking action.

Doing Time on Maple Drive also fits in the category of men resolving the problem. Phil Carter, who is the cause of his family's problems, is also responsible for the partial resolution of the "problem" of Matt's sexual orientation. At the end of the movie, Phil is making a tentative step toward accepting his son.

Women Resolve the Problems. In other movies, however, women resolve the problems they are face with. Shattered Trust has the most complex resolution. It's dramatic action is initially motivated by a man. Shari takes her first incest case after the mother of the incest victim and the mother's boyfriend come to see her. The boyfriend is the one who has noticed the symptoms of incest; the mother later testifies in court that "it never crossed her mind" that her ex-husband was raping their three-year-old daughter. However, after this first call to action, the four primary female characters (Shari, Stephanie, Joan, and Rose) band together to work for the real changes in the system.

Other movies follow suit. Diana and Lizzie are the women who take action in Shame, Ginny stands up to both the legal system and Jonathan's parents in The Boy Nobody Wanted, and Maryann in Shameful Secrets takes the custody issue into her own hands and goes underground. Liar, Liar is motivated by the actions of Kelly and Christina Farrow, and Kelly's attorney, Susan Midori.

Leisure is Gendered. Leisure activities have little to do with social problem movies -- they are only seen in three movies -- because the emphasis in them is on the resolution of the problem at hand. Characters are usually seen at their jobs or at work on the social problem. But when leisure time is shown, it is often men who have it.

Franklin in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted is seen building furniture in his garage workshop. Ginny, on the other hand, is shown at work in the kitchen or working with Jonathan, although she has one brief scene in which she takes part in family jogging. Franklin's leisure is mostly directed toward himself, while Ginny's time is directed at the family. Also, the leisure activities of the Moores' children are gender-related: Laurie takes ballet ("feminine" behavior) while Brad takes trumpet lessons ("masculine" behavior). This children's gender split is also seen in Shameful Secrets, in which Maryann's son plays baseball and her daughter takes ballet.

In Doing Time on Maple Drive, Phil has time to play doubles tennis with his children; Lisa works in the home, cooking and cleaning, and is never pictured in any leisure activity other than eating a meal with the family.

Henry has so much free time in The Good Fight that he can ride around on antique motorcycles and tend his roses in his greenhouse, while Grace is more often seen working on the case. In one scene, she comes home from taking a deposition with a bag of groceries -- something that shows that what should be her leisure time is filled with "feminine" duties like shopping.

Generalizability of the Social Problem

All of the social problem movies examined for this study explicitly and/or implicitly generalize a problem that faces a family or an individual to society as a whole. This is in fact the key to the definition of the social problem television/cable movie. A movie that focuses on a problem only within the context of the manner in which it affects one person or one family fails to meet the definition.

Generalizability is achieved through one or more of the following techniques: explicit dialogue, multiple examples, identification with the interest center, and conventions of geography and time.

Explicit Dialogue. The most direct way to generalize a problem to the greater society is to employ explicit -- at times, heavy-handed -- dialogue that tells viewers the problem is not unique to the characters in the movie. This technique is used in the six movies that deal with abused women and children to ensure that viewers remember that sex crimes affect real women in numbers ranging up to the millions.

Taking Back My Life shows that Nancy Ziegenmeyer's post-rape trauma -- residents of her town think Nancy "got what she deserved" -- is almost universal. Nancy's husband Steven urges her to take her story to the newspapers, saying, "I'll betcha there's a lot of gals out there goin' through just what you are." The line is ambiguous enough so that we don't know if Steven is referring to the rape itself, to the stigma that follows rape, or to both.

The line is repeated almost verbatim in Shame. Attorney Diana Cadell tries to

convince Lizzie Curtis, the teenaged rape victim, that she should press charges. Diana tells Lizzie that "a lot of girls have been through what you've been through." Lizzie and Lorna, the other girl who was raped at the same time, then discuss the stigma of being a rape victim in a small town, where people call them sluts behind their backs.

The point that rape affects large numbers of women is made in almost the same words in Liar, Liar. When eleven-year-old Kelly Farrow tells Mrs. Hildebrandt, the school counsellor, that her father has raped her, Hildebrandt replies,

> You know you aren't alone here, Kelly. You'll have to trust me when I tell you that there are other girls in this school who are going through the exact same thing as you are.

For his part, Gil denies he's sexually abusing Kelly in a line that illustrates how the narrative constructs reality to imply that the sexual abuse of children is widespread. In court and under oath, Gil says, "I swear to God I didn't do anything to Kelly that a million other fathers aren't doing to their children right now." The line is spoken at a point in the narrative where viewers are still unsure whether Kelly or Gil is the liar. Its ambiguity can either mean that Gil has only spanked Kelly like a million other fathers, or that a million other fathers like Gil sexually abuse their own daughters.

Miss America: Behind the Crown also makes points about the number of women in abusive relationships. When Carolyn Sapp wins the pageant, she is mobbed by reporters who want to know the details of her relationship with boyfriend Nuu Faaola. When one of the (male) reporters asks why she stayed with Nuu for several years, Carolyn replies, "Asking

that implies I was somehow at fault. Why do we always blame the victim?" Carolyn goes on to give advice to all the other women currently in abusive relationships. She says, "You can be strong. You need to get out." This extends Carolyn's problem -- and, more importantly, her solution -- to all women in similar circumstances.

Women who are incest survivors are the subject of Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story, where dialogue about the extent of the problem is handled in a similar manner to the other movies in this set. Shari appears on a television talk show, which, in a melodramatic coincidence, her parents just happen to be watching. As the elder Karneys react with shock and anger at Shari's going public as an incest survivor (they seem more upset about people knowing than about the wrong that's been committed), Shari's voice is heard answering a question from the talk show host. As part of the answer, Shari says there are millions of incest survivors just like her in the country.

Relating the problem to millions of other victims is something that Shameful Secrets does, as well. Maryann Tate surfaces from her underground life with her two children to testify at a legislative hearing about custody laws in Maryland. Maryann's dialogue spells out the dimensions of the problem. She says "I am not alone" and refers to the extent of spousal abuse by pointing out that "in this country right now, eight women a minute are being physically abused by their mates." Moreover, Maryann's testimony helps to change the laws so that battered women can more easily gain legal custody of their children in divorce cases.

Even the tobacco-liability movie The Good Fight uses language to generalize its story away from just Tony Taber and his attorney, Grace Cragin. The most specific example

comes when Tony asks Grace, "What about the Ciccipolone case?", a reference to a tobacco liability case that was litigated during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Grace explains that the Ciccipolones spent millions "to win four or five cents, and they lost it all on appeal."

Multiple Examples. Besides explicit dialogue that explains the extent of the problem in society, a social problem movie can also point to multiple examples of people beset by the problem. This is done along with dialogue in several of the abused-women movies in this set, as well as in movies on other subjects.

Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story uses this technique to make the point that incest is a problem that affects more people than just those in the movie. Shari is the attorney for four incest victims: two toddlers, a teenager, and an adult woman. By showing viewers these cases, the movie strongly implies that incest is a problem that affects many women. Further, Shari herself is an incest survivor. Thus, the movie uses five examples and adds to them dialogue in which Shari says that there are millions of incest victims in the United States.

During the final scene of the movie, Shari comes home and plays her answering machine messages. The first message is from an incest victim who wants legal help (another case); the second message is from a woman in Montana who tells Shari that she's just won an incest lawsuit. The second call further implies that the incest problem occurs all across the country.

The multiple examples technique is also used in Taking Back My Life. After Nancy's story comes out on the front page of the Des Moines newspaper, she begins to get phone

calls of support, eventually logging more than a hundred in four days. An audio montage is later used to represent the people who have written Nancy letters, both in support of her and to tell Nancy their own experiences. The montage is done in the voices of men and women, and the sequence ends with the voices reading the names of the cities and states in which the writers live. The addresses inform viewers that rape is a problem that happens to women in every corner of America.

Absolute Strangers also uses the technique of multiple examples. Although there are few pregnant women in comas at any given time, public support for Nancy and Marty Klein is shown in a sequence in which Marty reads letters written by well-wishers to the unconscious Nancy.

Two of the movies are rather subtle in their use multiple examples. In Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted, viewers see other kids in the home Jonathan lives in. This tells us that Jonathan is not the only kid in his situation and, by implication, the Moores aren't the only family in their situation of wanting but not being able to adopt a child with a developmental disability. Further, the generalized poor treatment of the mentally disabled is also reflected in the behavior of a teenaged jock who hurls abuse at Jonathan, comparing him to an ape and enraging Brad Moore.

Multiple examples are also seem in subtle form in A Town Torn Apart. Education reform is certainly a subject of public debate, something anyone with cognizance of the state of American schools would be familiar with. As such, the movie is really about more than just one school in New Hampshire. The movie is constructed so that its broad concerns -- classroom discipline, relevant coursework, teacher-student relations, the drop-out rate -- are

seen to apply to all schools.

Identification. To some extent, all of the social problem movies (like most other movies) examined here ask the viewer to identify to some degree with the interest center/leading character. This helps to generalize the problem at hand by asking viewers to consider that the problem affects someone they like or someone similar to them.

Doing Time on Maple Drive uses identification instead of dialogue or multiple examples to generalize the point that homosexuals are not "others." Matt is a handsome, clean cut young man. He dresses well (button-down oxfords and khaki trousers) and is upwardly mobile, attending Yale on a full academic scholarship. His parents adore him; his father in particular is proud because he's destined to become a success. Of course, Matt is gay, and the way his family copes with his sexual orientation is at the heart of the movie.

By portraying both Matt and his lover Kyle as (almost literally) the boys next door, Doing Time invites viewers to perceive gay men as being ordinary and just like us, and thereby extends the treatment of homosexuality from this one case to that of homosexuality in general. Matt and Kyle are the kind of young people we all know; they just happen to be gay. They are not stereotypically gay, neither effeminate nor clad in black leather; you can't tell they're gay by looking at them. This reinforces the ideological points of the movie, i.e. that sexual orientation is not a choice, and gay people are really no different from straight people.

Other movies, however, muddy the issue of identification by asking viewers to empathize or sympathize with a character many audience members would have difficulty

identifying with. It is difficult to sympathize with Kit Kellner, the racially-prejudiced prostitute and confessed cop-killer of Better Off Dead. Yet the narrative asks that viewers put Kit's personality and background aside, and condemn the system that sends Kit to the gas chamber shortly after the birth of her daughter.

In a similar fashion, viewers are asked to grapple with Nancy Ziegenmeyer's behavior in Taking Back My Life. Nancy is not a particularly sympathetic character in the beginning of the movie. She is in the midst of a divorce because she's had many affairs with many men. Even though her divorce isn't yet final and her husband is still living in the same house, Nancy runs off to Arkansas with a current boyfriend, leaving her children behind. But, despite her personality flaws, the movie tells viewers that not even unlikable female characters "deserve" to be raped.

Geographical Setting. The geographical setting of a social problem movie can also help (or hinder) the generalizability of the problem. Movies that are too geographically specific induce viewers to perceive that the problem being discussed affects only the people in the physical setting of the movie.

Geographical specificity can be avoided through dialogue and visual references to physical setting. For example, Absolute Strangers is set in the Long Island and New York City area. A copy of Newsday is seen; Marty Klein makes a phone call while standing in front of a sign that reads "Long Island Carpet and Flooring"; a Nassau County (NY) school bus is seen as Nancy Klein says she's planning to drive into the city. But dialogue repeatedly stresses that abortion is a legal right in the United States, and that local authorities and Right-

to-Life zealots cannot legally prevent a constitutionally-protected medical procedure from taking place. Thus, Marty's problem --how to obtain a legal abortion for a woman who is in a coma -- is not localized to just the New York City area. We're told several times that abortion is a right guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution, not something that should be at the whim of local officials.

Other movies attempt to avoid geographical specificity by being vague about the location of the movie. Better Off Dead is the least location-specific movie in this set, and represents the other end of the spectrum from the specific references to place found in Absolute Strangers. For example, Dead contains no references to geography in either dialogue or exterior shots. The location is referred to only as "the state" and no state flags or state seals are seen in courtroom sequences. The only exterior shots in the movie are "generic" scenes of city streets and on-location shots of a prison with no specifically-identifiable characteristics. The point the movie is trying to make is that this unjust execution could happen anywhere in America.

In fact, one of the implicit themes in the social problem television/cable movie is that the problems they discuss could happen anywhere and to anyone. Miss America: Behind the Crown, for example, tells viewers that the physical abuse of women occurs even in idyllic Hawaii, and that glamorous beauty queens are not immune from abuse. This viewpoint is generalized when a pageant contestant tells Carolyn Sapp and the other contestants that her boyfriend, enraged that she'd entered the Miss Honolulu contest (we aren't told why), punched a wall and broke eight bones in his hand. Later in the movie, Carolyn goes to the police to take out a restraining order against her boyfriend, Nuu Faaola. When she tells the

police officer that Nuu has hit her on more than one occasion, the officer says, "Yeah, I understand. Nobody ever comes in the first time." The two examples indicate to viewers that the problem of physical abuse is not unique to just Carolyn and Nuu in Hawaii.

Small Towns. While problems affect people no matter where they live, the small town is a site for conventions of behavior in these movies. A Town Torn Apart and Taking Back My Life are both set specifically in small (and real) towns, and Shame is in a non-specific small town. What Schatz calls the "repressive small town milieu" (p. 224) is found in these movies. The natives of Grinnell, Winchester, and the fictional Sawaya are portrayed as backward-thinking: they don't see the need for education to be any different from when they were in school, and they think women who are raped are sluts who get what they deserved. Shame and Taking Back My Life, in fact, both counteract this point of view through scenes in which the victims explicitly state they didn't 'deserve' to be raped.

Temporal Setting. The twelve movies all use a contemporary setting, i.e. the 1980s or 1990s, depending on when the movie was produced. This aids generalizability and verisimilitude, by showing viewers characters and locations that correspond to the everyday experience, where the physical setting -- clothing style, automobiles, home furnishings -- looks familiar and doesn't distract the audience from the important parts of the narrative.

From an industrial viewpoint, it is no doubt less expensive to shoot a movie that's set in contemporary times. The physical props the movie uses would be easier to obtain; e.g. it's more than likely cheaper to use a recent automobile than an antique one. Current styles of

clothing, home furnishings, and architectural styles can also be used in a movie with a contemporary setting.

It also allows stories based on recent real life experiences, which may still be fresh in the minds of viewers, to be used as the basis of the movies. (Six of the twelve movies in this set are based on real-life events: Absolute Strangers, Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted, Miss America: Behind the Crown, Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story, A Town Torn Apart, and Shattered Trust: The Shari Karney Story all fall into this category.)

Movies based on real-life events are often geographically specific; e.g. Miss America is clearly set in Hawaii and A Town Torn Apart is situated by visual and verbal references in New Hampshire. But movies such as this provide generalizability through dialogue or titles that help ensure that viewers get the point that the movie is about more than just the characters. But these movies also have to be careful to not to be too temporally-specific, especially if they are based on real-life events. A movie that deals with an event that took place during a particular month, day, and year can lose its generalizability over the passage of a relatively short period of time. Because of this, few specific dates are mentioned in these movies.

It can be difficult for a movie specifically set in the past to "resonate" with viewers. The made-for-cable movie Wildflower (not otherwise treated in this study) is an example of a movie that could have been a social problem movie if among other considerations its setting had been contemporary. The movie is about a teenager with epilepsy, uneducated and usually confined to a chicken coop by her ignorant father. The opening sequence of

Wildflower places it in the rural South during the Depression. This setting may lead viewers to conclude that this story is about others -- people who lived in a different place and time. As such, the movie fails to qualify as a social problem movie. But it does highlight the importance of the contemporary setting to the genre.

Ideological Position

Each of the twelve social problem movies in this set advances an ideological position. This ideological position contains a distinct point of view, and is usually conveyed through dialogue. But in a few movies, the points being made through dialogue are reinforced by eye-catching visuals.

Visuals. Better Off Dead uses a visual sequence to reinforce an ideological point made in dialogue, a technique accepted as part of the "classical language of the cinema" (Glass, p. 10). The villain of the movie is Governor John Byron, an ambitious, middle-aged, white male politician who believes that capital punishment is right and abortion is wrong. Cutter Dubuque, an ambitious black female ex-D.A. in her thirtiess, believes that capital punishment is wrong and that abortion is a right. She approaches Byron to plead for two things: that state funds be used to pay for an abortion for confessed murderer Kit Kellner and that Kit's execution be stayed. Byron refuses both requests, but he offers to stay the execution if Kit agrees to have the baby.

The final lines of dialogue in the confrontation come when Cutter points out that

abortion is a legal right in their state. Byron's response -- "For the time being ..." -- begins a series of dissolves. The screen dissolves from a medium close up of Byron to an extreme close up of a barbed wire fence. The camera slowly pulls back, bringing more of the scene into focus; and a series of dissolves ends with a long shot of the prison in which Kit is held. In the foreground of the view of the prison, we briefly see a shotgun-toting guard. The visual sequence connects the pro-capital punishment/anti-abortion ideological view with barbed wire, prisons, and shotguns, implying that conservatism equates with imprisonment. Moreover, the gender of the characters strongly suggests that the conservative viewpoint is the male viewpoint, and that women are imprisoned and disempowered by a male-dominated system that is so cruel that it even executes the mothers of newborn infants. Further, the races of the characters in the scene suggest that the legal/governmental system privileges whites over minorities.

Liar, Liar uses a similar device of linking visuals to dialogue to reinforce a point the narrative makes. A scene in which Gil Farrow is found guilty of sexually abusing his children (the judge says "using your own children for your sexual gratification is both repugnant and depraved") ends with an "associative match cut" (Glass, p. 10) to an extreme close up of a pushbroom. The camera pulls back and we see the janitor pushing the broom through the dirt on the courthouse floor. This visual image of cleansing -- we sweep up men like Gil just as we sweep up the trash -- is further reinforced by prosecution team attorney Reimer, who says about Gil, "That son of a bitch was makin' his way through the whole family." This refers, of course, to Gil's abuse of three of his four children over a period of years.

Dialogue. Other movies are more dialogue-driven and rely less on visuals to make their points. The Good Fight has an overt anti-tobacco stance, devoting considerable amounts of dialogue to an indictment of the tobacco industry for willfully producing and marketing a product that kills people. For example, a courtroom scene is constructed so that death caused by cigarette smoking is simply a given, something not even contested by the tobacco industry attorneys. The evil attorneys badger a professional witness, Dr. Lemon, a cancer researcher from the West Coast. They accuse him of being on a vendetta because his mother died from lung cancer. Lemon denies he's biased, and the attorneys don't challenge him was he states as a fact that his mother's death was the result of smoking.

Absolute Strangers makes an explicit statement about meddlesome Right-to-Lifers. Marty Klein, who spends the movie battling in court to obtain an abortion for his comatose wife, says to a friend that he's heard that the attorney for the Right-to-Lifers is a "good man" who gave up a promising legal career for the anti-abortion cause. Marty's friend replies, "The Crusaders were all fine fellows, too, galloping around Europe, killing everyone who didn't see things their way." This statement makes an ideological connection between the modern pro-life movement and zealotry during the Middle Ages, in effect saying that the Right-to-Lifers have outmoded and outdated beliefs.

Ambiguity

Many of the social problem made-for-television/cable movies looked at here are ambiguous in the way the situations they deal with are resolved: while the movies take a

stand on an issue, they sometimes take back part of that stand. Ambiguity can also be found in characterization, in that a few characters in these movies are difficult to sympathize with -- although it should also be noted that the movies' texts are open enough so that viewers with different subject positions could identify with different characters.

Ambiguous Messages. Shattered Trust contains both anti-family and pro-family messages. The incest cases mentioned in the movie always take place within a family: the perpetrators are fathers or brothers, and the victims are female toddlers or adult women. Shari's mother apparently knew that her husband was abusing their baby, but did nothing to stop it. When Shari confronts them, Jack and Vivian continue to deny that the incest ever occurred. Even Shari's sister Linda sides with her parents.

But by the latter stages of the movie, a pro-family message is embedded. Linda and Shari reconcile when Linda asks Shari to be the maid of honor at her wedding. The approximately forty-year-old Linda says, "I'm not as strong as you, Shari. I need my family. I need a mother and a father and a sister in my life." Linda also admits during this conversation that she knows "something happened" to Shari, and says she can't pretend anymore that it didn't happen.

Ambiguous Characters. Ambiguity also shows up in characterization. The Kit Kellner character in Better Off Dead is an example of this. The narrative is constructed so that her adult characteristics -- she's a racially-prejudiced prostitute, thief, and cop-killer -- are partially explained by her bad childhood. Kit's father Frank is a white supremacist who

owns Klan robes and Nazi memorabilia. He gave Kit a rifle for her 12th birthday; a home movie of the party shows her shooting an effigy of a black man. Frank threw Kit out of their home shortly after her 12th birthday, and she lived on the street until she went to death row for murder.

Viewers are asked to be sympathetic to Kit, especially when she becomes pregnant and is rehabilitated. Cutter even goes to the governor at one point and pleads for a stay of execution. She asks Governor Byron, "Do you want to be remembered as the governor of the first state to execute a woman?" Byron denies that he's the first governor in that situation and ominously warns that he won't be the last. Here, the narrative implies that executing a woman (and a mother, at that) is even more heinous than executing a man. It also erroneously implies that women prison inmates are not executed, when in fact they are.

Nancy Ziegenmeyer, the lead character in Taking Back My Life, is also presented as a somewhat ambiguous character. Viewers are asked to put aside the portrayal of Nancy as a not very good wife and mother, and to sympathize with her plight as a rape victim.

Ambiguous Situations. Absolute Strangers, a movie that is pro-abortion in its point of view, handles the necessity of Nancy Klein's abortion in an ambiguous manner. Dialogue clearly points out that an abortion is not necessary to save Nancy's life and that the abortion will not hasten her recovery from the coma. Instead, the abortion is to be done to better ensure Nancy's eventual recovery: it's to be done as a precaution. The Right-to-Lifers make the argument that there's no evidence that Nancy wants the abortion, but this argument is dismissed without explanation as fallacious by a female assistant attorney general. The most

compelling medical evidence comes from Dr. Cannon (part of the hero complex), who says that medical history shows just two cases in which a comatose mother delivered a baby. Dr. Cannon says in both cases the mothers died, but the babies lived. Even this argument is not fully developed, as Cannon never reveals when the deliveries took place or provides any details of them. In the end, viewers are being asked to support the abortion simply because having one is Nancy's constitutional right.

Marty even denies he has a viewpoint about abortion. After spending much of the movie engaged in a legal battle to obtain the abortion, Marty is approached by a television reporter and asked to appear on a debate about abortion. Marty says to the reporter, "I don't have any views on abortion. We're just a family. I'm not advocating anything." The movie endorses a woman's constitutional right to an abortion while condemning feminist Rita Thompson's defense of the same issue by portraying her as a villain more interested in the cause of women's rights than in Nancy's personal situation.

Summary

The social problem genre of made-for-television/cable movies tells that the problems individuals face in contemporary society can be resolved within the system. The legal and law enforcement systems are basically self-righting; they can and are changed to take care of injustices in most cases. However, in some cases the system is shown to be inflexible and unable to change.

Change comes about when a small group of heroes band together to fight injustice

and make the existing system better. These heroes are often connected to the power structure -- they are attorneys and such -- and they know how to use the system to make the needed changes. They are opposed by institutional villains, who want the system to remain static, with injustices in place. While the heroes heroically fight injustice, the villains profit by injustice; they stay in power because of it. The movies offer a look at gender roles in modern society, as well. They show us that women can make the male-dominated work to better accommodate women's needs. In this way, the women are feminists. But they bourgeois feminists who seek equality, not radical change. They are often wives and mothers, as well as attorneys.

The social problem genre of television/cable movies generalize the problems they illustrate from the characters in the movies to the general public. This is done through didactic dialogue that lays out the ideological message of the movie. Viewers are usually told what is right and what is wrong. But, despite this, the movies also deal in sometimes ambiguous characters and situations.

Answering the Research Questions. The research questions posed in Chapter 3 deserve concise but formal answers. This is done below.

(1) What conventions characterize the made-for-television/cable social problem movie? What makes a social problem movie different from other genres?

Television/cable social problem movies are recognizable by their conventions. They set up a problem that faces one or more members of a family, and they generalize the

problem and the solution to other people in American society.

Generalization is accomplished through dialogue that informs characters that they are not the only ones to have the problem; through the use of multiple examples to show that others have the problem; and through identification with characters that viewers can relate to and feel sympathy or empathy with. Generalization also takes place through the use of geographical conventions, which tell us that the problems the characters have face people no matter where they live. Finally, generalizability is enhanced by the use of contemporary settings for the narratives, which tells viewers that the problems affect people today.

Social problem television/cable movies share stylistic conventions with other genres of movies made for television and cable. The movies in this set, like most other television/cable movies, have linear cause-and-effect plots in which problems are raised and resolved by the end of the movie. The movies also share the stylistic conventions of most television/cable movies.

The convention of generalizability makes the social problem movie different from movies in other genres.

(2) What social problems are shown in the contemporary television/cable movie? Are these problems shown to affect everyone in society, or just certain groups or certain individuals? Do the problems affect men, women, children, or families?

The social problems can be grouped into "feminine issues" and "other issues" categories. The "feminine" issues are incest, rape, and physical abuse; in these movies, the issues are crimes committed by men against women. The "other" issues are abortion rights,

capital punishment, education reform, parental rights, sexual orientation, and tobacco liability.

The problems affect everyone in society, not just the victims of the circumstances of the individual movies; e.g. physical abuse is examined as an issue that has an impact on the battered woman, on her children, on other battered women in general, on the court system, and on society as a whole.

The problems affect men, women, and children, but almost always within the context of the family. As such, we can safely say that the problems are shown in the manner in which they affect families. The connection between individuals and families in the social problem television/cable movie is so tight that it cannot be unravelled.

(3) How are the problems in social problem movies resolved? Who are the heroes and villains? Who are the oppressors and victims? What roles do the legal and judicial systems play in the resolution of problems? What is the role of the family?

In almost all the movies (eleven of twelve in this set), the social problem is resolved through the court system. Legal and legislative measures are used to combat the problem -- either the victims are compensated by the courts, or the laws are changed so that victims in the future will be better served.

The heroes tend to be the members of families, who act as the motivational heads of the small family group. Heroes are part of heroic complexes of family members, friends, and "good" doctors and attorneys. The villains are largely institutional representatives; e.g. attorneys who work for tobacco companies or who "interfere" in abortion rights cases. Other

villains are fathers who sexually abuse their daughters; they can be seen as the representatives of the institution of the family.

Often in these movies, women are oppressed by institutions, such as the law, that are controlled by men. But the institutions are almost always portrayed as being flexible: they are oppressive now, but they can be changed and made more fair and just.

(4) How are gender roles portrayed?

The social problem television/cable movie carries a mixed message on gender roles. While the movies feature many female characters who work outside the home in professions, they are still cast as wives and mothers who work outside the home. They work; they take care of children and husbands; they have little or no leisure time, while the men do. Other women, who have no husbands or children, are seen only at work. In many of the movies in this set, men start the ball rolling to resolve the problem: it is a man who notices, for example, child sexual abuse, and who calls it to the attention of the child's mother, who takes the case to a woman attorney for its resolution. The movies appear to be trying to accommodate points of view that see women as involved in careers in the outside world, and views of women as homemakers and the providers of care.

(5) Do the television/cable social problem movies have a subjective viewpoint of right or wrong? How didactic are the social problem movies in showing the relationship between the characters' problems and the extent of the problem in society?

Positions on right and wrong are spelled out by these movies, through dialogue and the ways characters are portrayed. That one side is right and the other wrong is not left open to debate; e.g. the connection between tobacco use and cancer is shown to be direct and without dispute, except by lying tobacco company attorneys.

The movies in this set are highly didactic. Their dramatic action frequently comes to a halt so that expository dialogue can give viewers important information they need to know within the movie's context. This exposition can be explanations of the intricacies of the law and court systems, or can spell out a distinct point of view on the issue being discussed.

Comparing Social Problem Films and Movies

How similar, or how different, are Hollywood social problem films and contemporary social problem made-for-television/cable movies? Although this is a subject for a book by itself, a brief overview of the major characteristics of each is in order, so that the social problem television/cable movie can be better understood.

However, as a first step, what we mean by Hollywood social problem film must be better defined. There were literally thousands of Hollywood films that dealt with social problems, beginning with the silent era and continuing through recent years. But the television/cable social problem movie is more similar to the problem films Hollywood produced after World War II than to earlier examples. This is due in part to the need for topical subjects: unemployment is less of a problem in the 1990s than it was during the Great

Depression, and the penal system of I Am a Fugitive From a Chain Gang has passed into history.

Similarities. Although social problem films and movies are similar in many ways, three major areas of similarity are prominent. Both are didactic, both tell us that the system is (usually) where problems can be resolved, and both share a similar stylistic and formulaic structure.

A. Didacticism. Roffman and Purdy call didacticism "the distinguishing feature" of the Hollywood social problem genre (p. viii). It is the key theme that unites social problem films and social problem television/cable movies.

As we've already noted (see above), didacticism is often employed through a combination of dialogue, editing, and story construction. An example of the didactic treatment of a social problem is found in the anti-Semitic film Gentlemen's Agreement, a 1947 Twentieth Century-Fox release. The narrative follows a magazine writer who masquerades as a Jew, and who "through a series of painfully manufactured but revealing confrontations ... telescopes 'a lifetime of hate into a couple of weeks'" (Roffman & Purdy, p. 240). The film is blunt in its portrayal of right and wrong and says that with "zealous liberal activism, 'the problem' will be overcome and the world will be a better place in which to live" (Roffman & Purdy, p. 241).

This is quite similar to what the television/cable social problem film does. Viewers of almost any of the twelve movies in this study are informed about right and wrong through

expository dialogue, and shown scenes of "painfully manufactured but revealing confrontations" between the opposing sides.

B. The System. Brownlow notes that even before the World War I era, fictional films dealing with social concerns were being made and shown in the United States. He writes (p. xvi) that even though subjects such as prostitution were being examined by filmmakers, for the most part "these realistic films stopped short of attacking the system that led to prostitution." This failure to attack the system, and the tendency to "reproduce and reinforce dominant ideologies" (Byars, p. 130), characterizes both social problem films and movies, and is a consistent theme that unites the two.

The Hollywood social problem films of the post-World War II era were also conservative in tone, despite their paying attention to subjects such as alcoholism, anti-Semitism, the reintegration of war veterans into civilian society, and drug addiction. "These were films Hollywood was proud to call its own, but ... they presented no real challenge to the status quo" (Byars, p. 113). Again, the films looked at individual examples and also generalized the problem to more people than just the characters in the film, but rarely (if ever) said that the existing system needed to be overhauled. "For the most part, the films attack such problems in order to inspire limited social change or reinforce the status quo" (Roffman & Purdy, p. viii). In short, they said the system has its problems, but is basically sound. It is significant that problems in both social problem films and movies are always resolved through social institutions; as mentioned elsewhere in the dissertation, individual action is taken through existing channels (we take the rapist to court) and not outside of the

law (we don't simply shoot the rapist).

The same can be said of the television/cable social problem movie. The movies say, in overall terms, that the system we have today -- law enforcement, courts, legislatures -- is competent to resolve the problems facing the characters. Education reform in A Town Torn Apart comes about within the existing system of public education, not through tearing down and replacing the structure with a radical new form of schooling; in Shameful Secrets, a mother forced to live underground with her children to avoid her abusive husbands surfaces so that the law can be changed and made more just.

C. Structure. The third common element of the social problem film and movie is their formulaic structure. Both are "remarkably realist" and present "a coherent reality in which individual identity is unified and clear and in which characters' actions are goal-oriented" (Byars, p. 107). The goal, of course, is the resolution of the problem the film or movie deals with. The movies and films begin with exposition that lays out the characters and the conflicts, middles that "drive inexorably toward an absolute truth," and endings which reveal the absolute truth to be "the 'truth' of dominant ideologies" (Byars, pp. 107-108).

The Hollywood formula has carried over into the television/cable movie. As Roffman and Purdy (pp. 4-5) explain it, the formula was this: A "linear narrative with the straightest line of action" was used as a setting for a dramatic conflict with a "readily identifiable hero and villain." There was "romance and true love," and a "gratifying plot resolution -- the Happy Ending, in which evil was destroyed and good rewarded." For the most part, the

twelve movies examined in this project fit the formula (although there is some variation, of course; e.g. romance is missing from A Town Torn Apart and there is no happy ending to Better Off Dead) and they could be described in terms of it. Almost all of them contain what Byars (p. 108) calls the two plot lines of the classical Hollywood movie -- the social problem plot and the plot whose goal is the formation of a heterosexual couple.

Differences. As with the similarities between social problem films and movies, there are also differences. The major differences are in the subjects the movies deal with, the changing portrayal of the family, and women's roles in society.

A. Subjects. The social problems the television/cable movies deal with are smaller or more intimate problems that those the Hollywood social problem films explored. One reason for this is that Hollywood was governed by the Production Code during the heyday of the social problem film. The Code made it often difficult or impossible to deal with sexual themes, so that Crossfire, a 1947 film in which an ex-serviceman is murdered because he's Jewish, was based on the novel The Brick Foxhole, in which the murder victim is gay. This change allows Roffman and Purdy to point out that social problem films dealt with their subjects on a superficial level -- one problem could be easily substituted for another -- and that producers "obviously feared that their audience would not have related too well to the murder of a homosexual" (p. 239).

Television was itself governed by the National Association of Broadcasters Code, which was similar in many ways to the Motion Picture Code. But the NAB Code also fell

by the wayside, and opened subjects such as incest, rape, and sexual orientation to the television/cable movie, beginning in the 1970s.

Nevertheless, the subjects of social problem made-for-television/cable movies are different from those of social problem Hollywood films. To over-generalize, Hollywood tended to go after the big issues of the day. Looking just at Roffman and Purdy's chapter headings, we find issues such as the breakdown of the economic system during the Depression, unemployment, unionism, ex-convicts in society, domestic and international fascism, anti-Semitism, race relations, alcoholism, and mental problems (among a host of others). The subjects of the twelve social problem television/cable movies in this study are abortion, rape, incest, physical abuse, parental rights, tobacco liability, capital punishment, and education reform. Aside from capital punishment and education reform, these are all "smaller" or more personal issues than the ones the Hollywood films examined.

Part of the difference is attributable to the perception that a different set of problems face contemporary American society. The Depression and the rise of fascism that were sources of anxiety during the 1930s and 1940s are no longer a concern; we worry now about incest and physical abuse. What appears to have happened is that we're now more concerned about problems that face us in the interior world of our personal lives, and less concerned about the problems of the exterior world that face us as members of a collective society. Somewhere along the line, our priorities shifted, and the shift is both reflected in and probably partially caused by the movies themselves. If the mass media doesn't portray a problem as a problem anymore (e.g. unionism or unemployment) will most of we television-movie viewers realize it's still a problem?

B. Family. The family in the contemporary social problem made-for-television/cable movie is less sanctified than it was in the Hollywood film. Byars (p. 129) writes that social problem films deal in large part with "rejection from and reintegration into the social and domestic order" of the family. Byars uses the film Come Back, Little Sheba as an example of this (pp. 118-119). The film is about the collapsing childless family of Doc Delany, an alcoholic chiropractor, and Lola, who resists the role of wife through "sloppy listlessness." (The social problem, says Byars, is absence of children.) The Delaneys take in a boarder who causes them to "struggle with their repressed desire for parenthood." But when Doc falls off the wagon, Lola is rejected by her own parents, and she is faced with the choice of "life with Doc or life alone." She chooses Doc and becomes the model of the 1950s housewife, wearing a "crisp, pastel shirtwaist dress," cleaning up their house, and cooking for Doc. The problem of children can't be resolved, but Doc gets his drinking back under control and is reintegrated into his family.

This contrasts with the portrayals of families in some of the made-for-television/cable movies examined here. As noted elsewhere, the family is often the site of the problems (incest, physical abuse), as in many social problem films, but the problem is sometimes resolved by breaking up the family: the incest aggressor is jailed, the abused woman leaves the relationship. But this is not to say that the families are destroyed. Instead, the families are often re-formed. The Farrow children in Liar, Liar are brought closer together by the common bond, as it were, of having been sexually abused by their father; Maryann Tate and her children in Shameful Secrets become a better family after Maryann wrests custody of them from their father.

C. Women's Roles. The roles of women are considerably different in the television/cable movie than they were in the social problem film. In the Hollywood films, "the function of the female characters ... is to maintain the integrity of the family; they provided the possibility for the solution" of the social problem (Byars, p. 116). The problem itself involves a man, is resolved through the individual action of a male character, and the resolution includes "reintegration into the domestic-civilized order" (p. 116) of wives, children, and homes. The problems all involve a deviancy from normalcy -- "alcoholism, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, labor union corruption" -- and a construction of reality in which normalcy is "male -- white male" (p. 115). This reinforces an ideology that "valorizes the individual and that places action as masculine" while telling women to reject independence and join in the solution that "lies in the re-creation of the familial institution" (Byars, p. 121). Roffman and Purdy reflect this (although they don't specifically mention it) when they note (p. 258) that in the film The Lost Weekend, the alcoholic main character's fiance "determinedly nurses her future husband back to health, ignoring his abuse and rejection."

This is a startling contrast to the women of the television/cable social problem movie. Often the women themselves take action; e.g., attorney Diana Cadell teaches rape victim Lizzie the rudiments of self-defense in Shame or when Shari Karney pushes for legislation to aid incest victims in Shattered Trust. Carolyn Sapp in Miss America: Behind the Crown neither ignores the physical abuse she suffers from boyfriend Nuu Faaola nor stands by him as he takes psychotherapy. Instead, she simply rejects him, thus valorizing personal safety over romance.

Even the traditionally feminine role of "maintaining the integrity of the family" is different in the television/cable social problem movie. As noted above, the way to maintain the family is sometimes to reformulate it without the presence of the abusive father. The balance of power within the family unit, which was lopsided in favor of the man in the 1950s film, is more even in the 1990s television/cable movie. When the mom-dad-and-kids family is maintained, it is because husbands and wives (such as Steven and Nancy Ziegemeyer in Taking Back My Life) work together to save it.

Once again, a change in the way we Americans view the roles of women has changed, and the change is reflected in and enhanced by the television and cable movies we watch. Feminism has certainly had an impact on the mass media since the 1960s. It would no longer be acceptable (or politically correct) to show women as the docile, long-suffering, homebodies of the 1950s. On the other hand, the dominant ideology continues to portray women as wives and mothers, and so the interest centers of many of the movies continue to be wives and mothers. (Does it somehow make it more heart-rending that Nancy Ziegenmeyer has a not-quite ex-husband and three little kids?) But then, the dominant ideology is not wholly dominant, and other movies show us the "realistic" portrayal of a society in which women are not only employed outside the home, but employed in the professions such as the law. Better yet, the movies tell us that women can have it all, can be mothers and attorneys, like Grace Cragin in The Good Fight, and can balance the demands of family and career. Or they can put a traditional family behind them and go on as strong individuals, as Shari Karney in Shattered Trust and Diana Cadell in Shame do.

What It All Means

At this point, we need to ask the question, What does the genre tell us about ourselves and our society? The following section answers this by noting again the resolution of problems, the portrayal of gender roles, and the structure of the family across the genre as exemplified by the twelve movies in this study. This section deals in generalities about the movies.

Resolving Problems. The problems the genre deals with are, by definition, problems that affect large numbers of persons. By resolving the problems through legal and legislative means, the resolutions benefit not only the individual characters in the movie, but all Americans by extension. An underlying theme is these movies is that we -- as individual citizens and as a nation -- become stronger when the wrongs are made right.

The movies are optimistic. They hold out the hope of a better world, where, for instance, developmentally disabled children get the love and care they need, where families accept their members for the people they are, and where rapists, incest aggressors, and batterers are punished. But not only do the movies hold out hope, they show viewers examples where the situation is worked out for the best.

Modern society doesn't condone individual action to resolve problems. We admire the lone hero of the Western film -- who operated outside of society and had little need for it -- and praise individual heroic action. But we seem to be more comfortable with changes that come from within the existing structures of society. Thus, we demand that problems be

resolved through the apparatus of courts and legislative bodies. It's in the best interests of the power structure itself to encourage change from within, of course, because it wouldn't long remain the force of dominance if people began to seek change outside of it. So the power structure (of which television and cable networks are certainly a part) portrays itself as flexible and capable of adapting to change.

Social problem movies stack the deck. They are not "objective" reports of real-life events, even the ones that purport to be "based on a true story," "based on a shocking true story," or "inspired by a true story." Instead, they present us with problems in which right and wrong are spelled out in terms of black and white, and they lead us to the "correct" interpretation. Most of the time there are not two sides to the argument. Of course people who get cancer from the use of tobacco products should be compensated by the industry. Of course children should receive a quality education. Of course women who are raped should see their attackers jailed. No one would dispute these stands on issues.

Still, the movies are frequently ambiguous in some way. They show us characters who are not always conventional in their behavior and ask us to look at our norms of behavior, to see if our norms apply to everyone. For example, we're asked to agree that the pregnant Nancy Klein in Absolute Strangers should have an abortion, not because her life depends on it, but because the law allows it. We're asked to agree that rape is wrong, even when a woman is promiscuous and unfaithful, as in Taking Back My Life: The Nancy Ziegenmeyer Story. And we're asked to agree that a convicted cop-killer in Better Off Dead, who is also a racist and appears to be unsorry for the murder, be spared from the electric chair because the death penalty is wrong.

Gender Roles. Social problem television/cable movies show their heroines to be bourgeois feminists; i.e. they work for equal rights and equal opportunities (Kaplan, p. 251) in a system that can and does provide equality, at least to those willing to stand up for themselves. The system is essentially neutral: there are injustices at the moment, but the injustices can be ironed out. The system can't or won't automatically do this, however. Instead, individuals and small groups with insight must come along to point out the problems and to recommend ways to fix them. Very often the individuals and groups are women. They come from just somewhat outside of the male-dominated power center where, as women, they have less power than men. But after the women point out the problems, the system is able to right itself. And although the political and legal systems are dominated by men, women force the issue so that the male power structure makes the accommodating changes without disturbing itself.

It is significant in these movies that the system itself doesn't change: the men in the power structure are not deposed and replaced by women. Shari Karney in Shattered Trust is able to get her stronger anti-incest legislation through the existing state judiciary committee. The resolution of the problem does not depend on changing the power base so that it includes more women, although it is a female member of Congress who is instrumental in getting custody laws changed in Shameful Secrets. In both movies, however, women look out for the interests of women -- and men don't. This presents a mixed message: the system takes care of all of us, but we need to be watchful to ensure the system is working in our best interests.

Families. The family in the social problem television/cable movie is where questions of individual identity are explored. Few of the movies examined in this study have "traditional" families composed of a mother, father, and children. Those that do have traditional families are often plagued with incest, physical and emotional battering, and generally poor parent-parent and parent-child relationships.

One resolution in these movies involves breaking up the family. The family fragments as the mother and children leave the family unit, as in Shameful Secrets. But even when this happens, the family is not destroyed. Instead, the remaining family members continue to function as a family. In fact, they become the "true" family -- the one that offers love and support and comfort to its members. This contrasts with the "false" family they had been when they were united only in their fear of abuse.

Other families face adversity head-on and become a stronger and closer family because of it. Ginny, Franklin, Brad, and Laurie Moore all become closer in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted during the long legal battle to gain custody of Jonathan. Ginny's devotion to Jonathan doesn't drive the family apart, even when she ignores her own kids; instead it strengthens the Moore family, which expands and takes in the boy.

The social problem movie tells us that we can be individuals, with our own interests and personalities, and members of families at the same time. Women in these movies have careers and fulfilling personal lives: they have husbands or boyfriends, they have children, they have friends.

Thus, the family itself is portrayed in much the same way the legal and judicial system is. Both the family and the legal/judicial systems are flexible and self-righting.

There's nothing seriously wrong with either institution; they can modify themselves to better adapt to the situations at hand. Even at their most pessimistic -- the rigid legal system in Better Off Dead and the "bad" Karney family of Shattered Trust -- the movies still imply that the situation could be made better. Kit's execution could be prevented; Shari's father could acknowledge the incest. The system didn't work this time, but the movies imply that it will some other time.

What the made-for-television/cable movie "means" is this: as Jarvik and others have written, the movies are a way for viewers to safely negotiate problems that face society. They allow us to look at an issue, and to ask ourselves how we would deal with the issue if we were personally involved. They provide both the democratic forum for discussion of issues such as the death penalty, and simultaneously offer us a voyeuristic peek at problems such as incest and spouse abuse. Perhaps most of all, they tell us that society is basically sound and that all the problems that face us can ultimately be resolved.

The Critical Perspective

But is the viewpoint that society is basically sound 'unbiased truth' or the ideology of a capitalistic society? It's instructive to keep in mind that the networks that program social problem movies are part of the power structure of American society, along with the various branches of the government that the movies portray. The networks have tremendous power in determining what viewers watch and in determining how the power structure itself will be portrayed. As such, it should come as no surprise that the ideological stance of the movies

is that in our society, institutions are a positive force. Institutions rarely attack themselves, and it seems highly unlikely that a movie that said the system was rotten and needs to be replaced would ever make it onto the air. Even Better Off Dead, in some ways the most subversive of these movies (it shows that the system doesn't always work), makes its points about capital punishment within the framework of the system of courts and prisons. We're told that it's wrong to execute a woman and that the judicial system is incapable of righting itself. But the movie doesn't go so far as to say that the jury-based court system, with its public defenders and public prosecutors, is inherently biased against women and minorities, and that it should be overhauled. Instead, the movie pins much of the blame on the white, male governor of the state. There is still a hopeful note in Better Off Dead, that even after Kit is gassed, and although the system failed this time, the next time it may not.

Across the movies, we see problems that can be resolved in some fashion. For example, the problem of incest is not exterminated in Liar, Liar and Shattered Trust, but the system punishes the incest aggressor in the former movie and reforms itself so that victims can sue more easily in the latter movie. The movies seem to say that even though incest continues to occur -- and the movies point out that this happens in large numbers -- there is a form of compensation for the victims. But the movies don't ask if sending someone to jail or winning a lawsuit really helps the victims. The psychological scars caused by incest are problems that can't easily be resolved in 100 minutes, and the movies simply gloss over this aspect of incest. Significantly, the incest victims resolve their problems the "correct" way, through legal action, and not through castration, or murder, or through the forming of a radical feminist society which is separate from the society of men.

Part of the dominant ideology of modern capitalistic society is that we can resolve our problems. None of these movies deal with "unsolvable" problems, and it's difficult to grow up in this society and conceive of a problem that can't be solved or resolved. We can, of course, think of problems that are difficult to resolve (race relations, unemployment, etc.), but how many of us really throw up our hands and say, "It can't be fixed?" To do so would seem, well, un-American.

A movie that deals with a problem that can't be resolved would be well outside the Hollywood tradition (something we've become conditioned to by our exposure to Hollywood films and Hollywood television programs) and would perhaps be a depressing if not grueling event to its audience, assuming that a television/cable movie audience would sit still for it. Which assumes that the movie would be made and shown, in the first place.

All of the twelve movies in this set of social problem movies ask viewers to believe in the soundness of institutions, whether those institutions are societal or familial. And sometimes, the optimism seems a bit stretched. Why should we assume that the rigid, authoritarian Phil Carter of Doing Time on Maple Drive will miraculously accept his son's homosexuality? Why don't the abusive men of Miss America: Behind the Crown and Shameful Secrets stalk their wife-girlfriend/victims like abusive men do in real life? Why does one judge reverse the decision of another and take a child with Down's Syndrome away from his natural parents and allow his adoption in Jonathan: The Boy Nobody Wanted? The only answer to these questions is that this is the way the institutions want to portray themselves. And we've become so accustomed to this sort of portrayal, that not only do we accept it, but we believe that it even looks natural -- that the way the system is, is the only

way it can be.

The nagging question when dealing with made-for-television/cable social problem movies is whether their portrayal of society as basically sound is a good or bad thing. The answer, of course, is yes and no.

In order for a society to exist, the members of that society must believe that its institutions are good and proper, that justice exists (either now or down the road), and that despite our problems, we are basically sound. This is a benefit for the institutions themselves. When institutions aren't questioned, those in the positions of power tend to stay there. Few if any of us would willingly remove ourselves from the center of power.

But do individuals necessarily benefit in a society that proclaims itself to be sound? The simple answer is "no." If the characters in the movies were real people, then Kit Kellner would have scant reassurance that even though she was being executed in Better Off Dead, maybe the next death row inmate's life would be spared. Kelly Farrow, the child incest victim of Liar, Liar, might feel relieved or even happy that her father/attacker is in jail, but she's going to have a lot of other problems to work out -- problems that can't be resolved through a Shattered Trust-style lawsuit. If our society is basically sound, then we don't really have to worry very much about those difficult, perhaps unresolvable problems.

Social problem movies hold out a tidbit of hope. They tell us that if we work within the system, we'll prevail. But what we prevail over are small troubles that don't rock the foundations of the establishment. Both Doc Littky, the hero of A Town Torn Apart, and Sheila Bennett, the villain, work within the education system. Neither of them walk away from the existing system to start an alternative school system.

And the movie, in the best Hollywood institutional fashion, tells us that they both win. Doc's victory is that he continues to be principal. But Sheila's loss -- she couldn't get Doc fired -- is actually a victory as her son graduates from high school during Doc's tenure. The institution is so good that there really are no losers.

Suggestions for Further Research

There is still much that can be learned about movies made for television and cable. One line of research would take us into audience response theory: Who are the viewers of made-for-television/cable movies? What meanings do the movies have for them? What does the viewing experience entail? Do they take in the dominant message of the movie or are they able to decode other oppositional or subversive meanings?

Another line of research would look into the most pedestrian of made-for-television/cable movies. This line of work would examine not the best television/cable movies, but the ones that seem to be cranked out on an assembly line. The women's melodramas produced by Hollywood during the 1950s were thought to be unworthy of critical or academic study until feminist researchers, and others, came along in the 1970s and 1980s to re-examine them. Only then was it discovered that these 1950s films had much to say about America at the time they were made, and about 'appropriate' gender and behavioral roles. The situation is probably similar for the run-of-the-mill television/cable movie. Certainly even a movie like Knight Rider 2000 can tell us something about the society in which it was produced.

The industrial background of made-for-television/cable movies bears further examination, as well. Much of the "look" of the television/cable movie is the result of constraints placed upon their production. But what are the constraints placed upon the subject of the movies? How is it decided what an "appropriate" subject for a made-for-television/cable movie is? Why are the subjects of some movies "torn from today's headlines," and others not? What is the appeal to producers and networks (not to mention viewers) of stories based on real life news events? Why do certain genres (e.g., disease of the week) fall out of favor with producers and networks? How do cable networks decide which made-for-television movies they'll program? What are the real differences between a made-for-cable and a made-for-television movie?

Finally, the movies made for premium cable channels such as HBO and Showtime are worthy of a closer look. Because these movies are produced without commercial breaks, are they more similar to theatrical films than to other made-for-television/cable movies? Or are the conventions much the same for all television/cable movies? What can we learn from the short history of the premium cable movie? Are the subjects the same or different from other cable/television movies?

In short, there are still many questions about the movie made for television/cable that can be asked and answered.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE CODING SHEET

TITLE Shameful Secrets ABC October 10, 1993

Synopsis. Maryann Walker Tate is stuck in an abusive marriage to Daniel, a self-employed architect who regularly beats her. When Maryann is released from her most recent stay in the hospital, Daniel throws her out of the house and tells her he wants custody of their two children on the grounds of abandonment. Maryann goes to live in a shelter for battered women. The court actually gives Daniel custody because the judge is not allowed to take spousal abuse into account. Fed up with the legal system, Maryann takes the kids and they go underground. After the law is changed, Maryann surfaces and gets her day in court.

CULTURAL CONVENTIONS

Gendered behaviors/roles. Daniel is violently dominant: he screams abuse and beats Maryann for things as trivial as a male neighbor who innocently touched Maryann's hand. Maryann is cowed by the years of abuse, and is submissive and passive. Their 2 children exhibit gendered activities: the son plays catch with Dad, while the daughter dreams of becoming a ballerina. Maryann's motivations after she moves into the shelter revolve around her gaining custody of the kids. She tells them that they are her whole life. Maryann often seems more concerned for the kids than for her own safety. The women at the shelter (a racially mixed group) do "female" things: laundry, meetings in which they talk about their feelings, and interacting with visiting children. Maryann sits in a play room and looks at kids' books, surrounded by children's drawings and toys. As the movie develops, Maryann becomes more assertive. Maryann's mother defines her life as being happy only before her husband left her: she even tells Maryann that she had a wonderful marriage until Maryann was born, which was the reason her husband left (unresolved is the issue of how good a marriage it could have been if hubby took off when the baby was born). Mom was physically abused by her father (so abuse runs through the generations). Maryann is a full-time housewife with no job skills; when she's down on her luck, the only job she can get is as a restaurant hostess. The hearings into the legal aspects of the cases are called by a Congresswoman -- significant because it frames the issue as one caused by men but one that must be solved by women.

Heroism/villainy. Women are the heroes. They not only endure abuse and run a battered women's shelter, but they successfully fight -- with the help of a Congresswoman -- for laws that are more just for women. There are no female villains, although Maryann's mom comes close. Men are the villains, from Daniel the abuser, to the male judge who refuses to hear evidence of spousal abuse (it's illegal in custody cases), to Daniel's male attorney. There are no male heroes, although a nice overweight man with a beard gives Maryann a job when she needs one.

Occupations. Predominantly upper-middleclass. Daniel is an architect, ergo Maryann doesn't have to work to support their lifestyle. But the lack of job skills reduces Maryann to working

in a restaurant. Louise is a social worker/paralegal/advocate who helps run the shelter. The women at the shelter apply for apparently menial or low-class jobs. Other occupations include attorneys (Maryann's is female; Daniel's male), a male judge, a Congresswoman who is referred to but never seen, a couple of male police officers, and the social worker job held by Nancy Silverstone.

Cultural products. **Cars** -- play a small role. Maryann drives what appears to be a new, full-size GM station wagon with fake wood sides; it may be an Oldsmobile Vista-Cruiser. The cop car in one scene is a Chevrolet. **Clothing** -- Maryann dresses in chaste long dresses, often with a flowered pattern, which implies she dresses the way Daniel wants her to. Daniel dresses much older than he is. He wears suits and ties in some scenes; at home he wears grey flannel trousers, plaid or striped shirts, and cardigan sweaters. The women at the shelter dress in around-the-house clothes like jeans and t-shirts; Rosalie goes on a job interview in a low-cost K-Mart's sort of outfit. The attorneys wear business suits regardless of gender. **Homes** -- The home of Maryann and Daniel is a suburban, Colonial two-story. It's white with green trim; the yard is landscaped and full of flowering plants. The furniture is colonial/early American. It has a hardwood floor. Maryann moves to an apartment which she paints in bright colors and furnishes with colonial/early American furniture. The shelter she lives in is seen in interior shots only; it looks to be a converted big old house.

Activities of extras/minor characters. They are police officers, neighbors, women at the shelter, women who testify to change the law, women and men in the audience at the hearing, people who walk along the street, and nurses at the hospital. Social worker Nancy Silverstone is introduced by name in Act II, but appears only in that act and has a small role for someone with a name.

Relationships. All relationships involving Daniel are bad: he beats Maryann; verbally and emotionally abuses both children by calling them stupid and telling them their mother doesn't love them anymore; and even beats up 10-year-old Jason. Daniel has no friends and forbids Maryann from having any. Relationships among women at the shelter are sometimes strained -- Maryann won't speak in the group therapy sessions -- but the woman all get along because of their common background as abuse victims. Women make friends immediately: Maryann, Josie, and Louise all get along instantly, and Maryann's attorney is by implication close to her.

Leisure activities. Virtually none. Maryann takes her daughter to a ballet lesson. Both kids play in the park while Maryann keeps watch over them from a park bench.

Wealth-economic/social status. Maryann and Daniel are upper-middle to upper-class, judging from their possessions. Maryann appears to be able to keep this lifestyle even when working as a restaurant hostess. She is able to furnish her apartment, has a car (unseen), and is able to get her daughter into ballet lessons. Many of the women in the shelter dress poorly and are black or Hispanic, which implies they are of a lower class than Maryann.

Moral of the story. The male-dominated system is stacked against women: it allows abusive men to get custody of children because of unjust laws. (Men are beasts.)

Direct social statements. The movie opens with a social statement. The first sequence deals with a hearing that's been called, for reasons as yet unknown. A witness arrives amidst a flurry of reporters and reveals she is not really the person she seems to be. Instead, she is Maryann. And she says, **"My children and I have been forced to live underground, under assumed names. At this moment I am in contempt of a court order. And if the judge sees this hearing, I will be placed under arrest. I might even be charged with kidnapping. And I am not alone."** Daniel beats Maryann and she is taken to the hospital. The system is so rotten that Daniel's story that Maryann fell down the stairs at 4 a.m. is questioned by no one, until social worker Nancy comes along. Nancy tells Maryann, "You don't have to stay there and be hurt day after day. There's places for you to go. Places that will take you in and help you." But Maryann won't admit that she's been abused -- she tells Nancy she's accident-prone -- and until she does, says Nancy, her hands are tied. Maryann says her life is with Daniel; Nancy says the abuse will continue "until he wears you down to nothing ... or he kills you!" Daniel obtains a court order giving him temporary custody on grounds of abandonment: the system is rotten -- Maryann was hospitalized, not abandoning her kids. Josie, the head of the women's shelter, explains exactly what goes on inside one. Josie notes that the shelter has no published address and that Maryann must keep it a secret: "Some of these guys, they come lookin' for their wives. That's why we don't advertise. No signs out front, right?" Louise explains to Maryann that the system is biased against women: **"[The beatings] may not be admissible. The law states that the judge must not hear the testimony of spousal abuse in child custody cases."** At the shelter, a woman in group therapy says she was sexually abused by her husband, who told her that he couldn't be charged with raping her. Jason asks Maryann how she could let Daniel beat her for all those years. In reply, Maryann spells out the viewpoint of abused women: "I thought I deserved it. Because I thought I was no good." Louise tells Maryann she must document with a trip to the doctor and photos the black eye Daniel gave Jason, saying that with full custody, Daniel has legal rights. Maryann replies, **"What about my rights? Don't I have rights? Where are the laws that protect me and my children? Don't I have the right to keep them safe?"** Maryann later says, **"The whole system is designed to protect the abuser, not the children."** (This is an interesting statement as the issue until now has been the abuse of wives.) Louise and Maryann have expository dialogue that explains what going underground entails: constant moving, changing names, emotional stress, possible jail terms. But then the system begins to right itself. Congresswoman Morella calls a hearing into spouse abuse. Louise tells her aide that the shelter gets as many as 50 calls a day from battered women who need help (thus implying the size of the problem). The narrative provides closure as the scene shifts to the opening hearing. Maryann testifies: **"In this country right now eight women a minute are being physically abused by their mates. Most of them have no money and no place to go. So for the sake of the children they stay. I know this because I've spent the last eleven years of my life as a battered woman. And I'm still being battered. Only this time, by the courts and by a government that does not honor or respect women, but instead strips us of our rights and our dignity."**

This is spoken over a silent montage of women of different races and ages testifying before the hearing (which implies this is a problem that faces All Women). **"Our courts are insensitive to our pain ... All I want is to give my children a home, to love them, and take care of them without the threat of violence."** After Maryann testifies, all the women in the courtroom rise in a standing ovation. After the last woman stands, the men begin to join in! The scene shifts, and the judge says that Maryland, like many other states, has now adopted the Morella Resolution and that Maryann's testimony about spousal abuse is now admissible in court. The movie ends with a PSA for The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence. Joanna Kerns appears in and reads the PSA, thus linking the actor and the character.

ETHNIC/RACIAL CONVENTIONS

Visual/verbal clues to appearance. Louise is black, as is Rosalie, a battered woman. Other women in the shelter in minor roles are black and Hispanic. Minority women are as heroic as Maryann. No minority character has an accent (interestingly, the only accent is Josie's Southern accent, and she's white).

Socioeconomic status. Difficult to judge. Rosalie's clothing suggests she is of lower status than Maryann; Louise's status is unknown. The other women in the shelter, judging solely by their clothing, suggests they are lower class than Maryann.

Occupations. Louise's is as noted elsewhere. Maryann's attorney is named Morales and looks Hispanic. The women in the shelter are unemployed, but apparently looking for work.

GEOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS

Direct statements of location. The judge specifically mentions Maryland. Maryland car tags are seen in MCU on cop car. Josie has a mild Southern accent.

Rural/urban/suburban. Exterior shots of Maryann's house indicate suburban location with large lawns and big trees. Maryann parks in urban parking lot at night to sleep in the station wagon. Only other exterior shots are at what looks like an outdoor shopping district and one scene set at a wharf, where Maryann meets her mom. No exterior shots of the shelter, the courthouse, or Maryann's apartment.

Use of identifiable landmarks. None.

Plant/animal life indicators of terrain. No.

Statement of location in credits. None.

OTHER INFORMATION OF NOTE

We never learn the motivations of the Daniel character: why is he so angry? Why does he beat Maryann? Why does he emotionally terrorize his own children? Why does he think it's bad for Maryann and their daughter to be around other people? Maryann stays with Daniel out of fear -- he says in at least one scene he'll kill her if he leaves -- and her dialogue that says she feels worthless. The underground life of Maryann and the kids is presented as a happy montage of shots. They laugh as Maryann dyes and cuts her hair. There's more laughter as the kids pick out new names and as the daughter has a joyful birthday party. This doesn't correspond with the life of hardship and fear Louise has predicted. Actually, it looks like fun! Interesting to note that they don't have to leave town because "daddy doesn't know where we live." No hint that Daniel even tries to find them is surprising. Abuse seems to be passed down. Jason becomes verbally and emotionally abusive toward her sister under Daniel's influence; he becomes violent at school and gets into fights. When he goes into a fury at Maryann, she asks him if he wants a life like his father has. Physical abuse is very widespread. Besides the women at the shelter, Maryann's mother was beaten by her father after her mother left him.

STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

Establishing shots. 1) Fade up (FU) on long shot (LS) tracking right as reporters rush down courthouse steps to mob Maryann. Shot as if from a hand-held newscam. 2) FU on extreme close up (ECU) medical equipment, pan/track right to medium close up (MCU) of Maryann's battered face as she lies in hospital bed. 3) FU on LS pan right as cop car drives into parking lot at night; camera looks through Maryann's car at this scene. 4) FU on ECU of lighted candle, pan right to MCU of Maryann lying on bed. 5) FU on LS tracking as Maryann walks through hospital to visit battered Rosalie. 6) FU on full shot (FS) of street, pan left to LS of Maryann sitting on park bench. 7) FU on medium shot (MS) of daughter at ballet practice.

Climaxes before breaks. 1) Fade to black (FTB) on close up (CU) of Daniel in right foreground; pull focus and zoom to Jason in upstairs lighted bedroom window in left background. 2) FTB on high-angle LS of Maryann's car in parking lot at night; ground is wet. 3) FTB on CU of Maryann, crying and being comforted by Louise. 4) FTB on MCU of Daniel, smirking in courtroom as Maryann is hustled out by bailiffs. 5) FTB on CU of Maryann, crying and comforting Jason. 6) FTB on pullback to LS high-angle of Daniel waiting outdoors.

Music. Melodramatic non-diegetic solo piano without orchestral accompaniment. Masquerades as unseen diegetic piano in single ballet scene.

Framing of shots. Standard made-for-TV movie; e.g. slow zoom in from MCU to CU as Maryann emotionally tells how Daniel beat her until she miscarried their 3rd child. Maryann is frequently framed to show her powerlessness: she sits while Daniel stands, she's in the background while Daniel dominates the foreground of the shot. Maryann silently watches

her kids through a playground chainlink fence that of course symbolizes her distance from them.

TV/film conventions. Story is told in flashback (although not narrated by main character) with testimony as framing device. Closure is provided by opening sequence and penultimate sequence taking place during testimony; some dialogue is repeated and end sequence is shot from different angles than opening. Abuse of Rosalie is telegraphed: she says she can't make it in the world on her own and that she's going back to her husband, which means she'll be horribly abused if not killed. Sure enough, Maryann visits Rosalie in the hospital, where Rosalie is apparently unconscious and has a huge gash on her cheek roughly stitched together.

PRODUCTION DATA

Writer	Stephanie Liss
Co-producers	Ken Raskoff, Judith Jacobs
Executive producer	Steve White
Producer	Barry Bernardi
Director	David Carson
Music	Laura Karpman
Cinematography	Christopher Taylor
Production design	Curtis Schnell
Editor	Lance Luckey

Production companies Steve White Productions and ACI

Actors/character names

Joanna Kerns	Maryann Walker Tate
Tim Matheson	Daniel Tate
La Tanya Richardson	Louise Levy
Justin Isfeld	Jason Tate
Theresa Saldana	Rachel Morales
Khandi Alexander	Rosalie
Ashley Peldon	Josie
Bruce McGill	Judge Ian Greenstein
Katherine Cortez	Ella Lange

VITA

James Van Dyke is a former Yankee who has spent the past 15 years living outside of the North. He was born in Cairo, a small town in the shadow of New York's Catskill Mountains, on May 26, 1956. He emigrated to west Tennessee in 1979. Since then, he has lived in Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, east Tennessee, and Missouri.

Van Dyke's higher education spans three decades, three states, and several subjects. He was awarded an Associate of Arts degree in Liberal Arts/Humanities from Columbia-Greene Community College in Hudson, New York in 1976. He has a Bachelor of Science in Geology and a Master of Science in Journalism from Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky; the degrees were conferred in 1984 and 1985. He received his Doctorate in Communications (with an emphasis in Broadcasting) from the University of Tennessee at Knoxville in May 1994.

In between episodes of higher education, Van Dyke worked in on-air positions in radio. He was employed by two commercial radio stations in Jackson, Mississippi and was later morning anchor and a science/higher education reporter for the Mississippi Radio Network. He contributed reports to the Associated Press, National Public Radio, and United Press International.

Van Dyke is a former Instructor of Journalism at Berry College in Rome, Georgia. He is currently an Associate Professor of Mass Communications at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri.