CROSS-CULTURAL STANDARDS OF FEMININITY IN THE POST-MODERN
HORROR FILM: A CASE STUDY OF CARRIE AND SHUTTER

Thesis
Submitted to
The College of Arts and Sciences of the
UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of
Master of Arts in English

By
Laura Marie Linneman
Dayton, Ohio
May, 2011
CROSS-CULTURAL STANDARDS OF FEMININITY IN THE POST-MODERN
HORROR FILM: A CASE STUDY OF CARRIE AND SHUTTER

Name: Linneman, Laura Marie

Approved By:

_________________________________
John P. McCombe, Ph.D.
Faculty Advisor
Associate Professor; Associate Director, University Honors Program

_________________________________
Bryan A. Bardine, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader
Associate Professor; Director of Teaching Assistant Training

_________________________________
Andrew Slade, Ph.D.
Faculty Reader
Associate Professor; Director of Graduate Program in English
ABSTRACT

CROSS-CULTURAL STANDARDS OF FEMININITY IN THE POST-MODERN HORROR FILM: A CASE STUDY OF CARRIE AND SHUTTER

Name: Linneman, Laura Marie
University of Dayton

Advisor: Dr. John P. McCombe

This thesis examines the ways the post-modern horror films Carrie and Shutter construct cultural conceptions of ideal femininity. Cross-culturally, the female body has been associated with being inherently monstrous. In order to repress the monstrosity, females are expected to adhere to social standards of femininity; however, horror films, like Carrie and Shutter illuminate the struggle that many women feel to adhere to these standards. The monsters in Carrie and Shutter, Carrie White and Natre, have failed in their attempts to repress their monstrosity that stems directly from the sexual potency of the female body. Despite failing to fulfill cultural expectations, Carrie and Natre release their monstrosity. By accepting their inner monstrosity, Carrie and Natre show the failures of a social system that requires women to observe specific guidelines. In addition to showing the flaws social understandings of gender, Carrie and Natre use their monstrousness to empower themselves against those who have wronged them. While the elements of these films are supernatural, they also shed light on inherent fears about
femininity and sexual taboos. The audiences are forced to come in close proximity to the female body and reconcile their bounded experiences of horror with their own cultural understandings.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to specially thank Dr. John McCombe, my thesis advisor, for dedicating so much of his time to helping me throughout the entire process of thesis writing. I would also like to thank Dr. Bryan Bardine and Dr. Andrew Slade for reading this thesis and providing invaluable feedback and advice. I sincerely appreciate all of the time and effort of everyone that has helped me through the entire thesis-writing process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................ iv  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .............................................................................. vi  
INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................... 1  
DEFINING MONSTROSITY ...........................................................................11  
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WOMAN? ..............................................13  
CARRIE: MONSTROUS FEMININITY .........................................................17  
  A. SUMMARY .......................................................................................... 17  
  B. ANALYSIS ....................................................................................... 21  
SHUTTER: RAPE BEYOND VICTIMIZATION .............................................29  
  A. SUMMARY .......................................................................................... 29  
  B. ANALYSIS ....................................................................................... 33  
CONCLUSION ...............................................................................................40  
WORKS CITED .............................................................................................42
INTRODUCTION

While contemporary audiences identify horror films and literature with modern culture and claim characters like Count Dracula and Frankenstein’s monster as their own, the genre of horror is anything but a new invention. In fact, horror has existed as long as any civilization, invoking threats of the “‘inauthentic’ others, such as an imperialist regime, mass culture, or immigrants who disregard an existing cultural order” (Evans 99). The struggle against an other does not distinguish the horror film from other film genres, though. Most genres, such as crime films or Westerns, deal with the dominant society overcoming a transgressive other. What distinguishes the horror film from other genres is that, as Isabel Pinedo asserts in her essay, “Recreational Terror” (1996), “the horror film is an exquisite exercise in coping with the terrors of everyday life” (25-26). While other film genres tend to transport to an alternative or supernatural universe, the horror film encroaches on the familiar, transforming the banal and safe into something monstrous and terrifying. Emphasizing the root of horror in the familiar, Timothy Evans identifies in “A Last Defense Against the Dark” (2005), that “much horror […] is predicated upon feelings of insecurity brought about by cultural change, by the idea that our families and communities, our familiar beliefs and cultural forms, are increasingly under assault by forces beyond our control” (100). Horror is also distinct because it draws on social taboos, making them “simultaneously attractive and repellent” (Pinedo 26). As an audience, viewers are able to watch and think about taboos like rape, death, and violence in a socially acceptable manner. Horror films also allow viewers to explore
supernatural elements, like hauntings, demons, and the afterlife, that are continually being contested.

Examining horror from the perspective that the genre provides an acceptable stage on which to deconstruct social taboos and entertain everyday horrors demonstrates certain consistencies that illuminate the psychological grounding of horror films: horror films might be defined as triggering latent social fears, particularly about domestic life and “perversions” of gender and sexuality. In his essay, “Genre and Enunciation: The Case of Horror” (1984), Edward Lowry argues that “the genre presents the spectacle of horror as a kind of forbidden scene, simultaneously desired and dreaded” (17). While this spectacle of horror can take many forms, such as the monster film or the slasher film, it is notable that fears of non-mainstream sexuality, sexual violence, and gender inversion permeate all horror genres, and sexual overtones have become a staple of the modern horror film. Film theorist James Twitchell identifies this trend as “a morality tale that demonstrates the dangers of sexuality outside the heteromonogamous nuclear family” (qtd. in Pinedo 18). The appeal of many horror films lies in their psychological reckoning of social fears pertaining to non-normative sexuality and gender, again an issue that is derived from everyday experiences and culturally instilled fears.

For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to study the manifestations of female sexuality and interpretations of femininity in the popular horror films Carrie (1976) and Shutter (2004). Carrie, an American film directed by Brian de Palma, is one of the most influential horror films and one of the first horror films to fit the criteria of postmodern horror. Written nearly 30 years later, Shutter, a Thai film by Banjong Pisanthanakun and Parkpoom Wongpoom, draws on a similar type of sympathetic female monster,
constricting attitudes of femininity, and postmodern elements. The term postmodern horror has been used excessively to describe films created after *Psycho* (1960); therefore, it is necessary to establish a clear definition of postmodern horror in the context of this thesis. In the postmodern horror film, there are is one specific element I will focus on: narrative shifts. Postmodern horror can refer to unconventional cinematography, but the most striking element in *Carrie* and *Shutter* is the way social anxieties are dismantled and recounted. The female monsters serve as a symbol for the breakdown of social conventions established for women to follow in order to achieve ideal femininity.

Taking the narrative shifts further, Pinedo describes six characteristics that both *Carrie* and *Shutter* fulfill: “(1) there is a violent disruption of the everyday world; (2) there is a transgression and violation of boundaries; (3) the validity of rationality is thrown into question; (4) there is no narrative closure; and (5) the film produces a bounded experience of fear” (20). In comparison to the pre-*Psycho* horror film, the postmodern film is bleaker in its conclusion and more focused on sexual violence. The postmodern horror film is a bounded experience of fear because it has a time limit and a distance from the audience. The fear lasts as long as the film and does not carry over into everyday life, though it invokes the possible presence of horror in the ordinary. Though postmodern horror films delve into the implicit horror of everyday life, the experience is recreational and has a boundary. The conclusions to *Carrie* and *Shutter* end with the immediate aftermath of the destruction caused by the female monsters and the traumatized victims suffering from devastating losses. The endings are inconclusive, offer little hope for the community, and imply that the monster has not been destroyed. Even if the form of the monster is no longer present, its threat is enduring.
Carrie and Shutter also demonstrate cross-cultural fears of a distortion in gender scripts for women by dealing with monstrous women affected by dysfunctional socialization or sexual trauma; however, the stigmas regarding their bodies and sexuality are not necessarily the cause for the monstrousness that becomes associated with their female bodies. Rather, Dennis White contends in “The Poetics of Horror” (1971), that there is a more relevant theme that is associated with the inability to conform to gender scripts: “Perhaps the least obvious fear to be found in horror films, but also the most encompassing, is that of being cut off from others, of being rejected by those around one” (11). In these films, the female monsters, Carrie White and Natre, act violently because of a rejection by those surrounding them. This loneliness and inability to connect morphs into hatred and yields the violence that ensues. Furthermore, in Shutter, Natre’s failure to adhere to gender cues causes her to become victim of sexual violence. Her status as an outsider causes the trauma that transforms her into a monster.

It is also important to note that both Carrie and Shutter are unique in their portrayal of social fears about femininity and female sexuality. Most horror films label women as sexually transgressive through sexual activity; however, Carrie and Shutter feature females who are not sexually active or promiscuous. The monstrosity stems not from anxieties involving sexual intercourse, but from the female body, particularly menstruation. The association with femininity and monstrosity is a cross-cultural, cinematic norm. Within most cultures there is a correlation between femininity and monstrousness in folklore. For example, the Thai legend of Mae Naak Phra Khanong exemplifies the stigma associated with femininity. Catherine Diamond describes the
legend in her essay “Mae Naak and Company: The Shifting Duality in Female Representation on the Contemporary Thai Stage” (2006):

Mae Naak, or Nang Naak, as she is also known, is an iconic figure of a woman possessed by a love so powerful that it staves off death and must be contained or it will wreak havoc on society. She embodies the duality of many female characters in traditional and folk stories, encapsulating the contradictions imposed upon women that become terrifying when carried to the extreme. (112)

Mae Naak was killed in childbirth, but continued to live as a spirit, but in a human form, with her husband until the townspeople told him about her death and made him renounce her. Enraged that the townspeople had turned her husband against her, she attacked those she held responsible until she was sealed in a clay pot by a Buddhist monk. Mae Naak possesses all the qualities of an ideal wife; yet, when pushed to extremes and unable to fulfill her womanly duties, due to her untimely death, Mae Naak becomes monstrous.

Mae Naak is both a sympathetic figure and a malicious killer, much like Carrie and Natre. Mae Naak’s motivations for her vengeance are not born out of evil, but out of her extreme love and rejection by her husband. Carrie and Natre act similarly in comparable situations. When Carrie believes that she has been duped by Tommy and Natre is betrayed by Tun, their love turns to an outpouring of violence to compensate for the rejection. This situation exhibits the inherent paradox and monstrosity of womanhood; women are expected to have an excess of love and invest themselves fully into a man, but when they are rejected this excess of love becomes monstrous.

In general, horror is produced by the violation of the familiar or “natural” order. Pinedo defines the encroachment of horror on the familiar as a “disruption of our
presuppositions about the integrity and predictable character of objects, places, animals, and people” (20). The violation of the familiar manifests itself as an unnatural, transgressive entity that is ostracized because of its deviance. Audience and the other characters must choose allegiance to socially accepted gender cues or relate to the monster. In horror films overtly dealing with gender and sexuality, this issue is acted out through those surrounding the transgressor. The transgressor acts outside of heteronormative standards of gender and sexuality; therefore, it is up to other characters to decide whether to empathize with the transgressor or act against them. For example, in Carrie, Sue is the only peer who tries to relate to Carrie and befriend her. For her compassion, she is not killed at the prom along with her less sympathetic classmates. On the other hand, in Shutter, Tun’s unwillingness to help Natre when she is being raped causes his emotional break, as he is haunted by his photographing her rape and later attacked by Natre’s vengeful ghost.

The monsters in both of these films, Carrie and Natre, are excluded for their otherness; in this context, their perversity excludes them from fitting in with social standards dictating what it means to be female. Not fulfilling their given gender roles render both of these women as dangerous outsiders:

For [Robin] Wood, Otherness is the product of a repressive society, a society in which powerful groups impose or project identities upon subordinate groups in a manner that underlines the ‘superiority’ and ‘normality’ of the powerful but which can sometimes render the subordinate groups not just as ‘inferior’ but also as menacing. (Hutchings 96)
The inability of Carrie and Natre to fulfill gender roles forces them outside of the protection of the norm, making them easy victims; however, the rejection of these sexual stereotypes also causes their extreme violence against those who victimize them. Though the indiscretion of acting outside of gender norms may be an effect of being forced outside of the dominant group, acting outside heteronormative standards solidifies social contempt for women unable to fulfill prescribed gender roles. In not following heteronormative standards, women outside of the social strata are associated with immorality as Nancy Fischer states in “Purity and Pollution: Sex as a Moral Discourse” (2007), “Therefore, sexual ‘immorality’ becomes rhetorically associated with danger, rot and disease. Because of this metaphorical logic, at some level, people believe that those whose behavior they find distasteful will contaminate and corrupt others” (54). It is not uncommon in societies to associate differences with an amalgam of curiosity, disdain, and fear. Non-normative gender roles and sexual transgressions are associated more commonly with disease and rot than most other transgressions because of the strong moral codes that exist in society. If the transgression is sexual, the transmission of bodily fluids and diseases equate sex with physical ailments and physical rotting. Gender and sex are subject to strong moral codes, and any transgressions are looked down upon, particularly in women. Whereas men are expected to be sexually aggressive, women are supposed to adhere to social cues regarding female sexuality. In essence, the experiences of men and women are measured against standards of acceptable behavior in how they interact with the opposite sex, respond to relationships, and engage in sex. For men, the roles they play are expected to be domineering and sexual whereas women are expected to be submissive and demure.
DOMESTIC HORROR: HORROR, THE FAMILY, AND THE FAMILIAR

The primary type of horror I will consider within postmodern horror is domestic horror because it is the most realistic and jarring to social beliefs about what it means to be a woman. Shelley Stamp Lindsey defines domestic horror in “Horror, Femininity, and Carrie’s Monstrous Puberty” (1991) as “films which engage the terms of domestic drama in order to depict horrors associated with […] the ‘familiar and familial’” (33). Other types of horror often take place in unrealistic situations, different time periods, or involve science fiction elements. For example, films like Sunshine (2007) and Alien (1979) feature dangers of living in outer space, including alien attacks, isolation, and dangers of harnessing solar energy. What makes domestic horror so frightening is that it takes everyday people, places, and ways of life, and shows the disturbances caused by outsiders or monsters.

The two films used in this study, though possessing supernatural elements, take place in realistic situations and challenge social beliefs about female sexuality, rape, and the stratification of gender roles. Lindsey expands on why domestic horror is both appealing and disturbs audiences: “What is striking about these films is not just the familial context in which the horror takes place, but the familial nature of the horror depicted: perverse social relations breed monstrosity” (33). This statement accurately describes the monstrosity present in Carrie and Shutter; neither Carrie nor Natre are
inherently monstrous. Both women attempt to adhere to mainstream norms, but their inability to meet these norms triggers their monstrosity.

Domestic horror is also noted for its “eruption of violence and sexuality [in] the domestic sphere” (Lindsey 33). The home is a safe haven without visible sexual connotation; however, domestic horror inverts the domestic drama by making family, friends, and neighbors the source of horror. The home exists as a repression of sexuality and domestic horror brings this horror forth. Robin Wood “contends that the sexual repression demanded by patriarchal culture in order to generate neutered, nuclear families returns in horror films ‘as in our nightmares, as an object horror, a matter for terror’ – the repressed familiar returns as unfamiliar and monstrous” (Lindsey 33). The force at work in the horror film is an exaggeration of everyday fears. This allows audiences to experience the delight and fear evoked by horror films by morphing these fears into something recognizable but exaggerated.

In order to understand what is terrifying in domestic horror films, it is important to understand how society constructs interpretations of what is safe and what is dangerous. Peoples’ inclinations about safety and danger are not innate; they are learned. Ruth Simpson calls these inclinations “intersubjective” in her essay “Neither Clear nor Present: The Social Construction of Safety and Danger” (1996), contending that perceptions of safety and danger are “products of social construction, collective agreement, and socialization” (549). Early in life, children are socialized to believe in dangers that their parents warn of; for example, young people should never get into a stranger’s car or accept candy from a stranger. Most of the time, these fears are rational; however, “we can even socialize children to believe in dangers that do not exist – dangers
that are, therefore, impossible to observe” (Simpson 553). These fears are typically prejudicial fears which attach danger to a specific group, generalizing everyone in this group as threatening. Also, members of the normative group can also be ostracized, stigmatized, and ousted from the group for an action, event, or quality. For example, rape victims are often stigmatized either as pitiable figures or as transgressive individuals who “deserved” the sexual assault.

According to Fischer, “the purity/pollution dualism is invoked by cultures in order to draw symbolic boundaries around groups” (54). By stigmatizing a group, it is easy for the normative group to avoid violations of their standards and “natural” orders. For example, there are reasonably stable views in any culture about masculinity and femininity. When an individual blurs the boundaries between the two genders, the normative group is at a loss on how to categorize the individual. Unable to categorize the individual as male or female immediately marks the individual as “not only something that is different from the normal but also something perceived as a threat to the normal” (Hutchings 96). The threats from these individuals may not be highly evident. As with Carrie, whose powers are latent and unknown to her classmates, the danger from these individuals can occur without warning.
DEFINING MONSTROSITY

Because of the genre conventions of the horror film, it is necessary that every film have a monster, whether it is a serial killer, vampire, or ghost. There have been many variations of monsters, but the monsters examined in this study fit a specific profile. Within the context of Carrie and Shutter, “the horror monster is a kind of pollutant; it embodies a crossing of borders and a transgressive mixing of categories” (Hutchings 35). This definition demonstrates what makes these monsters particular to postmodern horror; not only are the monsters dangerous, they are also unnatural and transgressive, meaning that they blur boundaries that are considered indissoluble. Their very essence is impure and a perversity of the so-called “natural” order. Carrie’s and Natre’s failures to adhere to social standards turns them into monsters.

Within this particular strand of horror, the monsters are very physically present. The source of the monstrosity stems from the dissolution of boundaries by their own bodies. As Pinedo suggests, these binary differences disrupt the social order by dissolving the basis of its signifying system, its network of differences: me/not me, human/nonhuman, life/death” (21). Both monsters differ in how their bodies signify this monstrosity. For Carrie, the opening scene begins with her nude body menstruating in the shower, “a narrative event that positions the audience in an uncomfortably close relationship to the female monster” (Briefel 16). As such, Carrie’s body becomes central to the film; in the end, it is her body that betrays her and gives away her monstrosity, causing her to lash out at her classmates and her mother. In Shutter, the audience als
becomes uncomfortably close with Natre’s body as they witness her being raped by three of Tun’s friends. This rape becomes the crux that the film is built on and the reason for Natre’s monstrosity. Until the rape, Natre’s presence is very distant. After the rape and suicide, Natre’s presence is physically powerful, a complete change from her quiet persona prior to the rape.
WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A WOMAN?

In order to understand the transgressions of Carrie and Natre, an understanding of social standards for women must be identified. Cross-culturally, the role of women is identified as being the opposite of what it means to be a man; therefore, the definition of femininity can only be defined through implications of what it means to be a man. According to Butler, “Within a language pervasively masculinist, a phallogocentric language, women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity” (9). The definition of what it means to be a woman can only be expressed through maleness. To be a woman is to lack maleness; it is the absence of the phallus and the characteristics constituting manhood. Catherine Waldby also supports this in “Destruction: Boundary Erotics and Refigurations of the Heterosexual Male Body,” stating: “The culture’s privileging of masculinity means that the hegemonic bodily imago of masculinity conforms with his status as sovereign ego, and that of women with the correlative status of the one who is made to conform to this ego, the destroyed” (268). The privileging of masculinity stems from the privileging of the phallus over the vagina. Genital differences, then, render the power relations and gender stratification predicated in society. The male body is understood to be penetrating, dominant, and strong whereas the female body is penetrable, fragile, and submissive. Though this understanding of the male and female bodies as binary opposites is a social construction, it is now presumed natural and inescapable in various cultures.
The idea that governs our ideas about gender is called *gender display*. Theodore Cohen defines gender display in “Just Because They’re Men” (2001) as “the variety of ways in which we reveal, through our verbal and nonverbal demeanor, that we fit in with masculine or feminine ideals” (5). At a base level, gender display highlights the performance aspect of genre. While there are obvious biological differences between the sexes, the criteria by which we define males and females are a social construction that requires performance to fulfill. In her groundbreaking work, *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler pioneered the theory of the relationship between gender and performance, asserting, “Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being” (33). Cohen elaborates on Butler’s theories, stating that “at a cultural level, we can speak of *gender ideals* to refer to the shared beliefs or models of gender that a majority of society accepts as appropriate masculinity or femininity” (5). These gender ideals can be found in every culture and is relevant to self-identity, roles in society, equal access and opportunity, and overall status in society. Though these ideals are clearly breachable, those individuals that create a dissonance in the ideals tend to be identified as outsiders or as an abject.

Carrie and Natre are what Julia Kristeva would identify as constituting the abject, or something which “disturbs identity, system, order” (qtd. in Hutchings 36). In the beginning they attempt to maintain their masquerades as “insiders”; however, it is quite obvious that they are unable to fulfill the ideal female roles. Though the films take place in separate decades, countries, and cultures, the same types of ideals are applied to both Carrie and Natre. That is not to say that there are not cultural nuances regarding
femininity; however, many broad expectations and overall understandings of what it means to be a woman endures in both cases.

In her 1993 work *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*, gender theorist Susan Bordo defines the cross-cultural ideal of what it means to be “feminine”:

Through the pursuit of an ever-changing, homogenizing, elusive ideal of femininity – a pursuit without a terminus, requiring that women constantly attend to minute and often whimsical changes in fashion – female bodies become docile bodies – bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, “improvement.” Through the exacting and normalizing disciplines of diet, makeup, and dress […] we are rendered less socially oriented and more centripetally focused on self-modification. Through these disciplines, we continue to memorize on our bodies the feel and conviction […] of never being good enough. At the farthest extremes, the practices of femininity may lead us to utter demoralization, debilitation, and death. (745-46)

Though there is a standardized, ideal version of femininity as a soft, beautiful, submissive, and sexy (but not sexual) woman, very few women are actually able to meet these standards. As Bordo notes, many women struggle to retain this ongoing masquerade as the ideal woman. It is not enough to biologically be female; in order to be a real woman, from an early age, girls are taught to improve themselves through self-modification rituals that can be psychologically damaging. For someone like Carrie it is particularly difficult because her mother reinforces the sin of adopting feminine standards, but she is also being told by Miss Collins that she will not be happy or
desirable unless she conforms to these standards that are expected of young women. As Bordo concludes, the practices of femininity can end with negative consequences. For women unable to live up to these standards or who have been subject to violation for not meeting these standards, the result can be violence, debilitation, and death.
CARRIE: MONSTROUS FEMININITY

A. Summary

Often regarded as the classic domestic horror film, Carrie (1976) navigates female adolescent culture and explores a wide spectrum of femininity. Opening with the juxtaposition of normal adolescent females and Carrie’s terror instigated by her first period, Carrie traces the progression of Carrie’s femininity while also exploring what it means to be ideally feminine and accepted within normative society. Lindsey asserts that “we must consider what most critics have glossed over – the role gender plays in the articulation of horror – since the film repeatedly insists on Carrie’s gender and the specific development of feminine subjectivity” (34). Although Lindsey’s article was written nearly 20 years ago, scholars continue to ignore discuss the relationship between the horror and gender. While most critics recognize that Carrie is a monster, they nevertheless fail to understand that her monstrosity stems from more than her telekinesis. Her inability to conform to gender norms is the root of her anger and the prompting of her destruction; her telekinesis is simply the medium she uses to exact her revenge on social norms that have labeled her freakish. Furthermore, using female archetypes like Chris and Sue to show other interpretations of femininity, the film draws attention to Carrie’s ostensibly fraudulent attempts at becoming feminine, which are unmasked at the prom as her monstrosity finally unveils itself, removing all traces of her acquired femininity. It is worth noting that although Chris unleashes Carrie’s monstrosity, the film unintentionally hints that only Sue’s model of femininity is good enough to reach the
standards required of women. The women on polar opposites of Sue, that is Chris and Carrie, are destroyed by their inherent monstrosity.

Carrie experiences her first period while showering after gym class and becomes hysterical when she sees the blood, believing that she is dying. Popular girls Sue Snell and Chris Hargensen notice Carrie’s distress, and Chris leads her classmates in throwing sanitary pads at Carrie before Miss Collins, the gym teacher, intervenes. As Carrie becomes more upset by the ordeal, a light bulb bursts due to the awakening Carrie’s telekinetic powers. Miss Collins brings Carrie to the principal's office, and while talking to her, the principal calls her Cassie multiple times, inadvertently showing how overlooked she is at school, even by her teachers and administrators. Consequentially, Carrie’s telekinesis flares up for the second time when she corrects the principal, flipping an ashtray onto the ground.

At home, Margaret White, Carrie’s fanatical and abusive mother, receives a call from Miss Collins about Carrie’s menstruation and tells Carrie that the “curse of blood” is punishment for sin, not puberty. Subsequently, she locks Carrie in a closet and forces her to pray for forgiveness. The next day, Carrie’s English teacher reads a poem to the class, plagiarized by Tommy Ross, Sue's athletic boyfriend. The English teacher invites the class to criticize Tommy's work but mocks Carrie when she says the poem is beautiful. Feeling guilty for how she treated Carrie, Sue convinces Tommy to ask Carrie to the prom.

As a result of the bizarre occurrences around her, Carrie suspects she may have telekinesis and researches supernatural gifts and miracles in the library. While there, Tommy asks Carrie to prom but she runs away. After being mentored by Miss Collins
and encouraged to accept her femininity, Carrie accepts Tommy's invitation. Carrie tells her mother that she is going to the prom, but Margaret insists the prom is sinful and does not give Carrie permission to go; however, Carrie reveals her telekinesis and tells her mother that she is going regardless of what she thinks. Her mother claims that Carrie has Satan’s power, but is forced to let her go.

Meanwhile, Miss Collins berates the girls who tormented Carrie in the locker room, subjecting them to a week-long detention, threatening them with suspension from school and the prom if they do not serve their detentions. All the girls report to the week-long detention except for Chris, who is subsequently banned from prom. Chris threatens Miss Collins and vows to have her revenge on Carrie. Chris tells her boyfriend, Billy Nolan, that she wants revenge on Carrie and goes with Billy and other students to gather pig’s blood. After draining the pig’s blood into a bucket, Chris has Billy place the bucket above the school’s stage where the prom king and queen will be sitting.

To get back at Carrie, Chris makes a deal with her friends Norma and Freddy to rig the election of prom king and queen so Tommy and Carrie win. As Carrie beautifies herself for the evening, her mother tells her that everyone will laugh at her. Regardless, Carrie leaves with Tommy. Though her classmates are surprised to see Carrie, they begin treating her as an equal. Sue, who was unable to attend due to lack of a date, sneaks into the prom to ensure everything is going well for Carrie.

After rigging the election, Carrie and Tommy are named prom king and queen. As the couple climbs the stage, Sue discovers Chris and Billy hiding under the stage holding a rope attached to the bucket of pig’s blood. Miss Collins forces Sue out, believing she is there to cause Carrie more trouble. As the crown is placed on Carrie’s head, Chris pulls
the rope and Carrie is drenched in pig’s blood. As the stunned crowd looks on, Tommy is knocked unconscious by the swinging bucket and Carrie imagines everyone laughing at her. Carrie’s telekinesis takes over and becomes destructive, closing the doors to the gym and turning on a fire hose. Norma is killed by the fire hose and Carrie kills Miss Collins with a falling rafter. The English teacher is electrocuted, which then causes a massive fire in the gym. Leaving her classmates to die inside the school, Carrie walks home, covered in blood. Chris and Billy intend to run her over with Billy’s car, but Carrie uses her telekinesis to flip the car and then cause it to explode, killing Billy and Chris.

At home, Carrie seeks consolation in her mother’s arms after cleaning the blood off. Believing Carrie has Satan’s power, Margaret stabs Carrie in the back with a kitchen knife. Carrie falls down the stairs into the kitchen, but as her mother is about to stab her again, she pins Margaret to the wall with knives, killing her. Overcome with guilt, Carrie uses her telekinesis to collapse the house where both she and her mother’s corpse are crushed by the cave-in. The film concludes with Sue, the only survivor of prom, dreaming of visiting the grounds where Carrie’s house used to stand. As she places flowers near the marker, a bloody hand reaches out, grabbing Sue’s wrist, who wakes up screaming.
B. Analysis

The film opens with the camera panning the girls’ locker room at Bates High School. The girls are virtually living out a heterosexual male fantasy, frolicking around naked and showering together. When the camera lands on Carrie, she seems like an extension of this ideal femininity, indulging in stroking herself as she showers. The nature of the scene is broken by Carrie’s terror as she experiences her first period. Not knowing what menstruation is, Carrie screams for the other girls to help, but is instead taunted by chants of “plug it up” while being pelted by tampons and pads. Carrie’s lack of knowledge about her period immediately separates her from the other females, demonstrating her ignorance as to her bodily role as a woman - i.e., as a reproductive body. The source of power in the female body stems from both reproductive capabilities and the vagina, and Carrie’s powers of telekinesis awaken immediately after her first period, demonstrating how “Carrie’s menstrual blood signals her own monstrosity” (Lindsey 35). Though other women use their female bodies to persuade or seduce men, Carrie’s inability to adapt and harness her femininity causes it to become something more grotesque and horrific.

This anxiety surrounding menstruation exists in many cultures. Lindsey found that “prohibitions surrounding first menstruation and menstruating women […] are grounded in fears that during menses a woman is polluted or possessed by dangerous spirits” (36). This blood is a signifier of both a woman’s fertility and a source of fear because a woman is being drained of her blood. By secreting blood out of the vagina, a
woman is considered to be unclean and impure. In Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949), she states, “The blood, indeed, does not make woman impure; it is rather a sign of her impurity” (307). This blood is not equating with blood spilling from other parts of the body. Rather, menstrual blood has always been associated with the mystical, due to its link with the vagina. In many cultures, menstruation is thought to disturb the natural energy, causing dairy products to sour, meat to decompose, and alcohol to not ferment (de Beauvoir 307). The menstrual blood is empowered with a negative energy and is often perceived to magnify the aura around a woman and make her particularly fearsome to those around her, simply because she is a woman. As Margaret White claims, biblically women are cursed with a curse of blood; it is not a blessing, but a sign of her sinfulness. The menstruation as a curse is present in many cultures and is a sign of wrongdoing by women.

Carrie’s power erupts during her first period, thus supporting the anxieties surrounding menstruation. Obviously Carrie’s femininity and sexuality has been repressed her entire life; however, her first period marks the awakening of her telekinesis. This relationship is not coincidental and demonstrates the impossibility, for most women, of achieving idealistic femininity. Though Sue comes closest to achieving ideal femininity, she is still implicated and forever affected by the terror imposed by the monstrous femininity of both Carrie and Chris. Therefore, “in charting Carrie’s path to mature womanhood, the film presents female sexuality as monstrous and constructs femininity as a subject position impossible to occupy” (Lindsey 34). Despite all of the girls’ attempts to become the ideal woman, it is not a possible venture. Sue is the female
who comes closest to achieving ideal femininity, but even she is implicated in the horror in her initial actions towards Carrie.

In the film, Carrie and Chris are foils who demonstrate opposite interpretations of femininity. Carrie, who develops supernatural powers from her awakened femininity, is the prudish and virginal stock character, while Chris is the over-sexualized archetype. These two types of characters often appear in film, literature, and other media; however, Carrie explores the danger of being too extreme in an interpretation of femininity. In order to survive in a world governed by gender stratification, a woman must find a middle ground; she must be sexy, but not sexual. Chris has achieved success by becoming a striking woman and attracting a man; however, her aggressiveness and willingness to be sexually active reveal her underlying faults. Though she does not have powers like Carrie, she uses her femininity to enlist the help of male friends, including her delinquent boyfriend, to prey on Carrie White. As the catalyst for Carrie’s final assault on her classmates and mother, Chris is implicated just as much in the horror.

While the destruction and monstrosity of hyper-sexualized characters like Chris have been studied in many other films, Carrie is unique because it focuses on the dangers of sexual repression, the state of virginity, and the inherent monstrousness of femininity outside of sexual activity. Typically, the perceived downfall of females stems from sexual activity, but Carrie shifts this view to demonstrate the inherent monstrosity of being a female with the horror stemming from the nature of the female body, either virginal or sexualized. As Lindsey reasons, “The fantasy Carrie offers is ultimately a paradoxical one: the film enforces sexual difference by equating the feminine with the monstrous, while simultaneously insisting that the feminine position is untenable
precisely because of its monstrousness” (42). Monstrousness is not necessarily inscribed in the actions of Carrie and Chris, but inscribed in the female body itself. The girls are socialized to attempt to achieve one ideal version of femininity, but it is impossible because female sexuality itself is regarded as monstrous. This attempt to sustain the rigid social standards associated with femininity is what eventually elicits the destructive response Carrie has towards those around her. Unable to keep up the charade, Carrie’s “inner monstrosity [is] finally exposed for all to see, and ultimately unable to “plug it up,” Carrie becomes an outright monster” (Lindsey 40). Initially, Carrie’s telekinesis is not inherently destructive, but when her monstrousness bursts forth, her powers also become destructive. Though Carrie is monstrous and her telekinesis is a source of destruction, the film suggests that Carrie’s uprising is a righteous rebellion against the standards imposed on women. Living in such an oppressive gender system, Carrie’s destruction of these boundaries is intended to break from the constricting ideals surrounding femininity. Carrie is taking her power in her own hands and, for once, doing what she wishes without conforming to any system. Unfortunately, Carrie’s rebellion, is a failure as she is eventually stifled and mortally wounded by her mother’s oppressive ideology.

Beginning with Carrie’s first menstruation and the awakening of her telekinesis, the audience witnesses Carrie’s struggle to maintain a balance, as she attempts to keep her telekinesis under wraps and masquerade as “one of the girls” by accepting a prom invitation from Sue’s boyfriend, Tommy. Following the shower scene, Miss Collins takes Carrie to the principal’s office. When Carrie enters the office, the principal persists in calling her “Cassie.” This slight enragés Carrie and her telekinesis erupts.
Subsequently, every time she is slighted, Carrie’s telekinesis flares up. It’s important to note that initially her powers do not harm anyone; therefore, her telekinesis is not inherently evil. Likewise, female sexuality is not inherently evil, though it has often been denounced or repressed in various cultures. Carrie’s telekinesis is often read as an onslaught against the repression of alternate views of female sexuality and gender roles: “Yet although the female body – its fluids, its sexuality, its reproductive power – is clearly the source of horror here, the metaphor of telekinesis represents an attempt to deny the body and its actions” (Lindsey 37). Regardless of which avenue of femininity Carrie opts to emulate - - either her mother’s or Miss Collins’s views - - both interpretations of femininity reject acting on sexual desire. To Mrs. White, sex is the crux for all other sins and, to Miss Collins, a female must be sexy, but sexually pure. In order to stave off her sexual desires that are brought out through puberty and her attraction to Tommy, Carrie’s desire is suppressed through violent surges of telekinesis.

Carrie’s extreme sexual repression obviously stems from her unstable, evangelical mother who associates menstruation with intercourse and sin. When Carrie comes home from school early, Miss Collins calls her mother to inform her about Carrie’s distress over her period. Instead of explaining menstruation to her daughter, Mrs. White proceeds to lecture Carrie about the sin of woman, stating that “the first sin was intercourse” and that Eve was afflicted with a curse of blood. Mrs. White does not see menstruation as naturally occurring unless prompted by intercourse, despite the fact that Carrie is obviously a virgin. Due to Carrie’s upbringing, Wood sees Carrie’s telekinesis as “a displaced eruption of the sexual repression enforced by her mother” (Lindsey 34). The view of femininity instilled in Carrie is completely divergent from the view of femininity
that she is faced with while at school. Her lack of “girlishness” thus makes Carrie an outcast.

Feeling sorry for her, Miss Collins attempts to train Carrie on how to be a “real” woman. At one point, Miss Collins makes Carrie look in the mirror and tells her that she is a beautiful girl. She also tells her that she could improve herself if she wore makeup and pulled up her hair. To Miss Collins and Chris, the definition of femininity is wrapped up in appearance. Joan Riviere and Michele Montrelay outline this appearance-based femininity as “a masquerade of femininity that consists of an exaggerated build-up of the body’s surface through make-up, shimmering fabrics, jewels, enhanced color, and elaborate coiffures which catch the eye but ultimately reflect the gaze away from the woman’s interior” (Lindsey 39). Carrie dons this masque by wearing makeup, curling her hair, and creating a dress of shimmering pink satin; however, her transformation is only on the surface. Inside, Carrie’s “monstrosity” still exists, and she finds that after being humiliated by Chris that she is unable to adapt to heteronormative views of femininity and allows her monstrosity to run rampant.

Carrie’s delicate balance of masquerading as a typical adolescent female and her inner monstrosity finally collapses when she is publicly humiliated by Chris at prom. In order to get back at Carrie, Chris and her boyfriend pour pig’s blood all over Carrie as she is named prom queen. On a small scale, Carrie’s first period was traumatic; however, by being covered with blood, the menstruation incident is magnified as if all the prom attendants are witnessing a very public menstruation. Once again, the audience is in uncomfortable proximity to Carrie’s body. The pig’s blood serves to awaken Carrie’s monstrosity and turn her telekinesis into an untamed destructive power. Therefore, “what
Carrie has attempted to repress is an intrinsic female sexuality associated with the supernatural and the monstrous; the culturally-sanctioned “femininity” she adopts is thus marked as a hopelessly failed masquerade” (Lindsey 40). This failure to adapt makes Carrie a sympathetic figure to many female viewers who also struggle with female norms. Female viewers are encouraged to relate to Carrie’s fears about her body, puberty, sexuality, and becoming a woman in a society inflexible regarding gender norms.

At the end of the film, Carrie has killed all the attendants of the senior prom as well as her mother; the only survivor is Sue. In the context of gender stratification in Carrie, it makes sense that Sue is the lone survivor, given that she is able to tread the line between being sexy, but not sexual. Sue is able to adapt to social cues about femininity and is the closest to achieving the “ideal” female sexuality; however, she is still haunted by the monstrous Carrie. Whereas the monstrosity within Carrie and Chris spews forth, Sue is able to contain her monstrous femininity and successfully repress her sexuality enough to be socially acceptable. While Carrie is seen as a monster, she is also a very sympathetic character. The film diverges from typical dialogues about female sexuality because it “is not about liberation from sexual repression, but about the failure of repression to contain the monstrous feminine” (Lindsey 40). Carrie is never able to be liberated from the views of femininity offered to her by her mother and Miss Collins. In fact, she eventually succumbs to her mother’s oppressive views about sexuality and femininity. What Carrie establishes is a dialogue about the inability of many young women to adapt to social insistence in following narrowly defined gender scripts.
Carrie’s self-destruction exhibits the faults of stringent gender cues and enables the audience to find the positives in constructing gender cues that allow for some fluidity.
A. Summary

Asian horror films are known for their stereotypical female ghosts; such characters are typically portrayed as contorted with long black hair, alabaster skin, and distorted features. Often these women have been murdered for adultery by jealous husbands, or commit suicide after a traumatic relationship. *Shutter* (2004), a Thai film, also includes these elements; however, the issue at stake is far more serious and realistic than many horror films: dealing with the social and psychological consequences of rape. While any form of rape is a very serious issue, one of the most overlooked types of rape is addressed in *Shutter*: acquaintance rape. Merely speaking about rape, particularly acquaintance rape, is stigmatized in many societies because victims are often blamed for not being cautious enough and men are often pardoned for rape because it is sometimes believed that they are biologically inclined commit this act. Citing Miller and Marshall, Boswell and Spade state that “because men’s sexuality is seen as more natural, acceptable, and uncontrollable than women’s sexuality, many men and women excuse acquaintance rape by affirming that men cannot control their natural urges” (369). In regards to behaviors outside of sex, men are expected to act appropriately; however, sexually, men are often seen as unable to control their libidos.

Most American audiences are familiar with *Carrie* and the American remake of *Shutter*, but the original Thai version is largely unfamiliar to American audiences. In
order to understand the dialogue about rape and female sexuality that is being presented, it is important to have a clear understanding of the plot and organization of the film.

Driving home from a friend’s wedding, Tun, a professional photographer, and his girlfriend, Jane, hit a young woman crossing the street. Afraid of the repercussions, Tun demands that Jane drive away, leaving the girl presumably dead in the road. Immediately after the accident, Tun begins to discover white streaks and what appear to be ghostly faces in his photographs. Jane thinks these images may be the ghost of the girl they hit on the road, but finds that no injuries were reported the night of the accident.

Tun, who has been experiencing severe neck pains since the accident, visits a doctor. While a nurse attempts to measure his weight, the scale registers him approximately 120 kilograms, an impossible weight for a man his size. Not finding anything physically wrong with Tun, the doctor prescribes muscle relaxers which never aid his neck problems. Despite several strange incidents, including hearing a woman’s voice accusing him of being a liar, Tun dismisses the idea of being haunted, although his three best friends are experiencing similar disturbances which cause all three of them to commit suicide.

Noticing the white streaks appearing over the college’s laboratory, Jane investigates and discovers the existence of Natre, a shy young woman who had attended college with Tun. After confronting Tun, he admits that he and Natre were in a relationship, which Tun had kept secret from his friends because he was embarrassed by her. However, Natre loved Tun and threatened to commit suicide when Tun abruptly broke off the relationship.
Believing that his friends have been coerced into committing suicide by Natre’s ghost, Tun becomes convinced that he will be next. The haunting by Natre’s ghost escalates, so Tun and Jane decide to visit Natre’s mother. At her house, they discover the decaying body of Natre. They learn from a neighbor that Natre had committed suicide by jumping off the roof of a hospital after previously attempting suicide upon returning from college in Bangkok. Natre’s mother was too distraught to have her corpse cremated and kept her daughter’s body in her home. Tun and Jane spend the night in a hotel, where Tun wakes up to Natre’s disfigured and bloody ghost climbing into bed with him. Tun runs but is chased by Natre; ultimately, he falls off a fire escape and is injured. Natre’s cremation is held the following day. The couple return to Bangkok believing everything has been resolved.

On returning to Bangkok, Jane picks up photographs for Tun. One of the films shows a series of images of Natre’s ghost in Tun’s apartment reaching for something in Tun’s bookshelf. Jane finds negatives and develops them to find images of Tun’s three friends raping Natre. After being confronted by Jane, Tun admits that he walked in during the rape but did nothing to stop his friends despite Natre pleading for him to help her. His friends asked him to take photos of Natre so that she would not report the rape. Although Tun claims to have never forgiven himself, Jane leaves him.

Knowing that he is still haunted by Natre, Tun takes a series of Polaroids in an attempt to find her. Earlier, Tun had visited a supernatural journalist who told him ghosts sometimes long to return to their loved ones. As Tun anticipated, Natre returned to him; when the camera snaps a photo by itself, Tun sees an image of the ghost of Natre sitting on his shoulders, the obvious source behind his neck pain. Tun jumps from the window,
trying to escape from Natre. The final scene shows a badly injured Tun slumped over in a hospital with Natre still clinging to his shoulders.
B. Analysis

In a 1996 study of the relationship between fraternities and rape, “Fraternities and Collegiate Rape Culture,” A. Ayres Boswell and Joan Spade attribute the idea of “rape culture” to “the assumptions that men are aggressive and dominant whereas women are passive and acquiescent” (369). These gender scripts about the dominance of men and the submission of women often excuse the rape of females and causes women to suffer the stigmatizing effects of being labeled a rape victim and “[facing] criticism for not being sufficiently cautious” (Simpson 554). If a support system is available, it is often possible for a woman to come to terms with the rape, but each rape victim experiences varying forms of trauma after the rape, including depression and suicide attempts. J. S. Bridges and C. A. McGrail have found that acquaintance rape is often more difficult to overcome than rape by a stranger and the “victims of acquaintance or date rapes are blamed more than stranger rape victims” (Viki, Abrams, & Masser 295). In Natre’s case, her only support system in Bangkok was Tun, who betrayed her by photographing the rape. Therefore, Natre follows the pattern of many acquaintance rape victims by dropping out of school: “If the rapist goes to the same school, workplace, or social function as the victim, the victim may feel uncomfortable and withdraw from these activities” (Muehlenhard and Highby 179). Her return from Bangkok and subsequent suicide attempts demonstrate a deep-seated shame and loneliness often associated with rape. With no support system and a cross-cultural understanding of rape as a “woman’s
problem,” Natre feels her only choice is to commit suicide to escape the wounds caused by the assault.

While rape is inexcusable, Boswell and Spade found that men, “when together in groups with other men, […] sensed a pressure to be disrespectful toward women” (374). Following inscribed gender scripts, Tun felt the pressure to be loyal to his friends over his ex-girlfriend, commonly known in American culture as the “bros before hoes” code. Even in the labeling of this “code,” men are unified as brothers and women degraded as sexual transgressors. In cases of acquaintance rape, “the friends may be reluctant to believe that a friend of theirs could be a rapist” (Muehlenhard and Highby 178-79). These mentalities are furthered by the “rape myths and stereotypes such as ‘She really wanted it; she just said no because she didn’t want me to think she was a bad girl’” (Boswell and Spade 369). By arguing that the victim “wanted it,” the rapist is devaluing the victim and undermining the sanctity of the body. This argument, particularly within a college setting as in Shutter, implies that sex among college women has become so customary, that it is impossible to think that a woman would not want to engage in intercourse.

Obviously these rape myths come into play during any rape scenario; however, it is important to note that college students tend to legitimize rape myths more than any other group because most rapes involve acquaintances and, often, alcohol consumption (Ward et al. 65). Though Natre had not been consuming alcohol, her rapists had been drinking beer and were obviously intoxicated. Tun indicates that his friends had assured him that they would “take care” of Natre after she threatened Tun with suicide; however, their actions most likely escalated to rape and assault as a result of their intoxication.
In reality, though Natre had not initiated sexual contact and was not intoxicated, her reaction to withdraw and not report the rape is very common. Though it is never specifically stated, it is implied that Natre never reported the incident because of the blackmail photos, and because she assumed that nothing would be done or she would be blamed for the rape. Unfortunately, statistics from college campuses support her inclination that acquaintance rape is underreported or excused because of the prior relationship between the rape victim and the rapist.

In the well-known Koss study (1988), statistics about acquaintance rape were collected from 32 college campuses. The study found that only 58% of victims reported the rape to a person close to them or a counselor, while a meager 5% reported the assault to the police (Ward et al. 65). When asked about why women did not report the assaults, the study found that “they fear nothing can or will be done and because they are unsure about how to define what they have experienced” (Ward et al. 65). In a stranger rape, the violation is obvious, but in an acquaintance rape, the term rape is much more ambiguous. Attitudes regarding acquaintance rape are very different than the overwhelming condemnation that pertains to stranger rapes. People are wary of labeling acquaintance rapes as a “real rape” because of the prior relationship between the victim and perpetrator. In relation to Shutter, Natre’s reluctance to report the rape to anyone, including her own mother, is understandable given the social reluctance to label what she experienced as a “real rape.”

Accompanying the ambiguities of acquaintance rape is the role of benevolent sexism in society. G. Tendayi Viki, Dominic Abrams, and Barbara Masser define benevolent sexism in “Evaluating Stranger and Acquaintance Rape” as “a set of attitudes
that are sexist in their prescription of stereotypical roles for women but are subjectively positive and affectionate towards women […] Thus, benevolence is targeted at those women that conform to traditional roles, whereas hostility is reserved for women in nontraditional roles” (296). In Shutter, Natre was treated with hostility because she was non-conformist. Tun describes Natre as a quiet girl without friends whom he and his friends thought was very weird. Natre does not subscribe to the version of femininity that is described by Miss Collins in Carrie. Like Carrie, Natre is plain looking, introverted, studious, and non-flirtatious. Natre’s reputation for being different apparently gave Tun’s friends free license to harass her. Where they act respectful towards girls like Jane and Tonn’s wife, they feel that Natre’s social awkwardness warrants their disrespectful treatment. Therefore, because her personality is non-normative, Tun’s friends are able to rationalize the rape. Furthermore, Tun’s friends were supposed ensure that Natre stayed away from Tun, so they used physical force and humiliation to guarantee that she would stay away. As Barber reports, “many sociologists have shown that men, as the dominant gender, use violence as a means to obtain and sustain power over women” (61). By taking pictures of Natre in a sexual position, Tun and his friends obtained power over Natre; however, after committing suicide, Natre used the inherent monstrosity that stems from being female to obtain and sustain power over her abusers. Likewise, in Carrie, Chris douses Carrie in pig’s blood to humiliate her in front of her peers. Imagining that they are laughing at her, Carrie takes ownership of her inherent monstrosity and uses it against her classmates.

As a ghost, Natre haunts her rapists, as well as Tun and Tun’s girlfriend, Jane. Each haunting is significant because Natre haunts each person differently and has reasons
for approaching each person in a specific way. It is also of note that her hauntings
disempower those who have harmed her, but empower Jane and shifts the power of the
relationship between Tun and herself. When talking to a magazine editor about spirit
pictures, he states, “Why would the dead return to the living without a message to
convey?” He goes on to discuss how some dead long for their loved ones or come back
for revenge on those who maligned them in life. In Natre’s case, she does all of the
above. Natre haunts all of her rapists, causing them to commit suicide in the same way
that she committed suicide. Her haunting of the rapists is most in line with traditional
horror films because it ends in death; however, her hauntings of Tun and Jane are quite
different.

Though Tun had betrayed her, Natre returns to him because of her deep love and
devotion to him. In their relationship, Tun had always used Natre and admits to Jane that
he never loved and would never be able to love her. He also admits that when he broke
off the relationship with Natre, he was cruel and entrusted his friends with making sure
she never came near him again. In death, Natre returns to Tun because she is now able to
have him as hers, even though she knows that he does not love her. With all of his
friends dead and Jane having left him, Natre and Tun have one another. As with the
legend of Mae Naak, Natre’s outpouring of love has become monstrous and twisted; she
will have him regardless of his desire to be with her. It is also a way to get revenge on
him for betraying her. The power in the relationship has shifted; Tun is unable to
separate himself from Natre, and Natre is now the dominant figure in the relationship.
Natre’s desires towards Tun are double-sided; on the one hand, Natre wants to reclaim
her relationship with Tun, but on the other hand, she wants to get revenge on him for
betraying her. Having been overcome by her monstrousness in death, Natre’s twisted feelings of revenge and love have become intertwined.

While Natre’s actions can be construed as destructive or evil, she is also empowering to Jane. Though Jane is haunted by Natre, she is never harmed by her as the others are. Natre seeks out Jane’s help in uncovering the story of her rape and, in return, Jane is empowered to leave Tun when she learns of his true character. Jane first encounters Natre’s spirit when she is driving herself and Tun home after a wedding. Jane’s car hits Natre and crashes into a sign. Though the crash is somewhat severe, Jane is completely unscathed while Tun receives a head injury. Throughout the film, Natre’s ghost appears in photos taken by Tun - - images that lead Jane to explore spirit photography and find Natre’s ghost in the lab where she was raped. At the end of the film, Natre puts a series of photos in Jane’s hands that illustrate Natre’s ghost attempting to find the photographs of her rape. Jane finds the photos and develops them, finally realizing Tun’s true character and leaving him. Tun tries to argue that he has changed and regrets his actions; however, his actions speak differently. When Tonn appears in his apartment asking for the photos, Tun searches for them and lies to Jane multiple times about Natre and his knowledge of the rape. As a result, Natre seeks Jane out to warn her about Tun’s allegiance to his friends over any girl he dates. Unlike the men that she haunts, Natre never hurts Jane and only serves to help her break off her relationship with Tun.

Instead of invoking traditional scripts about rape, Shutter demonstrates how women can move beyond victimization and empower themselves after a crisis. Though Natre committed suicide after the rape, she still acts as an empowered woman because
her spirit internalized the traumatic event and uses it to eliminate her abusers, reclaim her relationship with Tun, and empower another woman.
CONCLUSION

My argument about the domestic horror film’s illuminations of the constrictions of femininity differs greatly from a traditional understanding about the monstrosity of femininity. Typically women are condemned as monstrous when sexually active or gender transgressive; however, in horror films like *Carrie* and *Shutter*, femininity and the female body is understood to be inherently monstrous, regardless of sexual experiences. Horror films take the viewed uncomfortably close to the female body, associating female sex characteristics and fluids with monstrosity. Aviva Briefel responds to the horror film’s treatment of females in her essay, “Monster Pains: Masochism, Menstruation, and Identification in the Horror Film” (2005): “The menstruating monster exposes her biological identity with every drop of blood she sheds, both her own and her victims” (25). Therefore, the menstruation identifies the monster as a female and her “femaleness” identifies her as a monster. Simply because she is a woman, her body is inherently monstrous. Similarly, the images of Natre’s ghost mirror this discomfort with blood and the female body. Whenever Natre’s ghost appears, she is disfigured and bloody. As a ghost, Natre is unable to menstruate, but her body can still be associated with menstruation by being covered in her own blood.

Many critics such as Briefel argue that this association between femaleness and monstrosity serves to “reassure audiences that the terrors they are witnessing on screen are containable, that they will not uproot deep-seated beliefs about gender and violence” (Briefel 25). Although audiences are familiar with social ideas about masculinity and
femininity, and may see some of these monsters as containable because most of the monsters are defeated in the end, Carrie, Shutter, and other postmodern horror films are not nearly as reassuring. Instead, the films are inconclusive about the destruction of the threat and serve as a warning about the inability of gender norms to contain and repress the inherent monstrosity. Unable to masquerade as ideally feminine, female monsters like Natre and Carrie illustrate the ability of everyday women to become monstrous when their masquerades are disrupted.

Aside from the fear instilled by female monsters, female audience members are often sympathetic to the plight endured by the female “monsters.” Both Carrie and Natre are victims of abuse and are sympathetic characters who are easy to identify with. There are several popular horror films with female monsters that follow in the vein of Carrie and Shutter, such as Silent Hill’s (2006) Alessa and Jennifer Check in Jennifer’s Body (2009); however, Carrie and Shutter provide a cross-cultural understanding of the hardships of oppressive ideals regarding femininity. Furthermore, their characters are particularly powerful as both destroyers and sympathetic monsters. The female body is often associated with inherent monstrosity, but women are also associated with resilience and enduring love. Like the legendary Mae Naak, Carrie and Natre violently rebel against the norms of society when they are shunned by those around them. These female monsters implicate all of society in their misery and reveal the inability of social stratification to contain them. Their evocative power is present in all women who struggle to maintain the masquerade of femininity, but unlike the majority of females, female monsters rage against society, fulfill female fantasies of revenge, and serve as a reminder regarding the dangers of regimenting ideals about femininity.


