

An Analysis of Sensationalism in the Portrayal of Serial Killers in Films

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Abstract

Sensationalism is a form of editorial approach used in journalism and media. When media content is sensationalized, events and themes in news articles are chosen and phrased in such a way that the biggest number of readers and viewers are enthralled. Stories of serial killers get an enormous level of attention and exposure around the world. The present study therefore takes into account the hype created around the persona of serial killers in popular media and is an attempt to check for sensationalism in the portrayal of serial killers in films. A qualitative research design was used, and the research method adopted for this study is the content analysis method to analyze the film text. The overall result of the analysis shows that films are significantly responsible for sensationalism surrounding serial killers. In the course of the content analysis, it was established that films choose to highlight personal traits of killers, such as living a family oriented ordinary life, past military service or also relationship with their family rather than their psychological motivations for killing. The serial killers' lives and their atrocities are glamorized and glorified in the films as celebrities. As we understand it, the media shapes how we see the world, and since the media sensationalizes serial killers in films, society often finds it hard to understand their stories.

Keywords

Sensationalism, serial killers, glorification, films, crime

I. Introduction :

Impact of Films on Society :

A film, also known as moving picture, motion picture, or photoplay, is a work of visual art that uses moving images to imitate experiences and express ideas, tales, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or ambiance. (Andrew, 2005).

Cinema is a fantastic way to get away from reality. It also aids in the rejuvenation of a person's psyche. Good films nearly always have an influence on the audience; how much depends on the film and the individual. Many leaders have exploited the power of cinema to achieve their objectives throughout history. Films have

a variety of social consequences, both positive and negative. (Elezaj, 2019)

They have the potential to boost the economy, inspire individuals, and broaden our understanding of the world around us. Major studios must be extremely cautious about what they include in their films, as even the tiniest details may have a significant influence on the audience. (PoutyBoy, 2017)

Crime Genre :

In a criminal story, the primary need for safety occurs after the instigating crime is found. The secondary impulse to restore order to a chaotic world often mirrors the protagonist's own inner disarray. (Sauer, n.d.)

The protagonist acts on behalf of society to seek justice for victims who lack agency. The audience is intrigued and eager to see the mystery solved before the protagonist reveals the perpetrator. (Storygrid, 2022).

Crime story sub-genres are frequently determined by traits such as the protagonist (hard-boiled detective, police investigator), the setting (newsroom, courtroom) or the sort of crime (heist, caper, or espionage). (Sauer, n.d.)

Representation of Serial Killers in Media :

Serial killers are well-known to the public, and their names are well known to the viewer's recollection. The value of psychology can also be shown in detective shows and films that attempt to explain and apprehend serial killers. (Nasr, n.d.)

Even if there are occasions in these depictions of close relatives giving memories of their grief, the names of the victims eventually fade from the viewer's

recollection. Charles Manson, Ted Bundy, Richard Ramirez, Edmund Kemp, and others are still known to the public. (NihalHasan, 2021).

These shows include Mindhunter, Memories of Murder, and The Alienist. Serial killers' aesthetics are also depicted in narratives, such as putting symbols at murder scenes or even sending letters or inscriptions to the press by a serial killer. *Memoirs of a Murderer* and *The House that Jack Built* are two films that use psychological elements to introduce imaginary serial killers. (Nasr, n.d.)

Sensationalism :

In the early days of print journalism, sensationalism was employed to inform the public about corruption, bribery, and other issues. (Uniassignment, 2019)

"The use of thrilling or alarming stories or language at the expense of accuracy, especially in journalism, in order to create public attention or excitement," according to the Oxford Dictionary.

Stories are frequently sensationalized for the simple reason that if people think the subject is fascinating, ratings and reading will rise. The impact of sensational news can linger in society for a long time. (Uniassignment, 2019)

Serial murderer narratives have less of an impact, and society is not urged to evaluate those with mental illness who exhibit such inclinations of indiscriminate violence in an objective manner.

The media has a profound impact on how we perceive the world, and because of the sensationalization of serial killers in the media and in popular culture, society will find it difficult to comprehend their stories. The study's significance largely focuses on how the lives of serial

killers and their crimes are glamorized and glorified in the films as celebrities.

The objectives of the study are :

1. To analyze serial killers' traits and personalities, to check for sensationalized representation.
2. To study the portrayal of capital punishment for serial killers in films to ascertain sensationalism
3. To analyze the film's visual grammar for sensationalism

II. Review of Literature :

Researcher April Nicole Pace in her paper titled 'Serial killers in popular media: A content analysis of sensationalism and support for capital punishment' analyzes sensationalism and support for capital punishment. Since the 1980s, serial murder has been a prominent media phenomenon in the United States, and media portrayals of serial killers have the potential to greatly affect public opinion as well as the death penalty policy. Her study looked at how a dozen distinct serial killers were portrayed in internet media publications from the 1970s to the current day. The findings revealed that serial killers were frequently sensationalized and depicted in biased ways by popular media. There was also a lot of support for the death penalty. (Pace, 2019).

The research conducted by Julie Bethany Wiest titled 'Creating cultural monsters: A critical analysis of the representation of serial murderers in America' is on the critical analysis of the representation of serial murders in America. The FBI created the word and profile for "serial killer" in the 1970s and henceforth serial murder and serial killers

have received a lot of attention in fictional crime programs (e.g., different versions of "Law and Order" and "CSI"), films (e.g., "The Silence of the Lambs"), and the print media. The study which used a qualitative content analysis of 15 serial killers' biographical narratives, media stories, and judicial papers established a model to assist explain the genesis of serial killers in the United States by illustrating the workings of culture. It was observed that the characteristics of serial killers tend to represent features most closely linked with white, male serial killers in the United States, while excluding other examples of repeated murder and serial offending. (Wiest, 2009).

Another study conducted by Lindsey Lowe, explores the evolution and use of spectacular media content in order to understand this expanding phenomenon and its effects on audiences in a paper titled 'Crying Wolf: An Analysis of the Use of Sensational Content within the Media and the Desensitizing Effects it has on Audiences'. Various cinematic approaches from the inception of the medium of films like *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*, *The Great Train Robbery*, the "War of the Worlds" Panic broadcast, the Hindenburg disaster, video from the Vietnam War, Apollo 11 and the first lunar landing, and *The Day After* are instances of sensational media content studied in this paper. These examples were chosen to chart the evolution and use of sensationalism, as well as to show how today's media audiences have become desensitized to sensationalism which has led audiences to believe that sensational content is the norm in the media. (Lowe, 2016)

III. Methodology

This study analyzes the sensationalism in the portrayal of serial killers in films. A Qualitative Approach is adopted with the aim to analyze sensationalism of serial killers in films and to understand to what extent sensationalism is engraved into the film text. Purposive sampling in non-probability sampling technique has been used for the selections of three films to analyze, i.e. The Zodiac (2007), The Silence of the Lamb (1991) and The Iceman (2012).

Content Analysis was the research method chosen to analyze the 3 films with the help of a content schedule mapping visual representation in terms of the following parameters of :

1. Archetypes of the serial killer.
2. Loaded terminology and sensationalism.
3. Negative and positive characteristics of killers.
4. Reference Capital Punishment.
5. Support for Capital Punishment.
6. Visual representation.
7. Camera Angles and Shot.

The research study also has devised certain operational definitions for the variables involved as they are parameters of analysis in the course of the study and are as follows:

Sensationalism :

Sensationalist approach in films is done by being purposefully opaque, appealing to emotions, being provocative, purposely missing facts and information, being loud and self-centered, and acting to gain attention are some of the strategies

used. Trivial information and events are frequently misrepresented and exaggerated as important or significant, and frequently include stories about the actions of individuals, the content of which is frequently insignificant and irrelevant to global macro-level day-to-day events.

Serial Killers represented in films :

A serial murderer is someone who murders three or more people, generally for abnormal psychological enjoyment, over a period of more than a month and with a large gap between them. While most authorities establish a three-murder threshold, others raise it to four or lower it to two. Serial killing is usually motivated by psychological enjoyment, and many serial homicides involve sexual interaction with the victim and motivation to kill include rage, thrill-seeking, money gain, and publicity-seeking, according to the FBI. The victims of serial killers often share characteristics such as demographic profile, look, gender, or ethnicity.

IV. Analysis and Findings

The following film synopsis of the three films describes the plot-lines in brief:

A) The Iceman (2012) : The film, directed by Ariel Vromen and starring Michael Shannon as Kuklinski, Winona Ryder, Chris Evans, and Ray Liotta, premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 2012. The film depicts Kuklinski's life from his beginnings as a porn distributor to his rise to become one of America's most heinous contract killers. He kept his family in the dark about his crimes, so they continued to live off his blood money until he was apprehended in

an undercover operation in 1986. The plot revolves around his years of living a double life as a devoted family man and a cold-blooded killer.

B) Zodiac (2007) : Zodiac is a 2007 American mystery thriller film directed by David Fincher and based on the non-fiction novels *Zodiac* and *Zodiac Unmasked* by Robert Graysmith, which were released in 1986 and 2002, respectively. The film which was nominated for the best thriller and film of the year in the Empire Awards, depicts the manhunt for the Zodiac Killer, a serial killer who terrorized the San Francisco Bay Area in the late 1960s and early 1970s, teasing cops with letters, bloodstained clothing, ciphers, cryptic letters, and threatening phone calls.

C) The Silence of the Lambs (1991) : The Silence of the Lambs is a 1991 psychological horror film directed by Jonathan Demme and written by Ted Tally, based on Thomas Harris' 1988 novel of the same name. It has won multiple awards such as best picture, best director, best actor & actress in the Academy Awards in 1991. The plot line depicts Clarice Starling, a top student at the FBI's training academy and played by Jodie Foster. Jack Crawford (Scott Glenn) requests that Clarice interview Dr. Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins), a brilliant psychiatrist who is also a violent psychopath serving life in prison for various murders and cannibalism in order to catch a copy cat serial killer who is inspired by Lecter and is following in his footsteps to engage in a killing spree.

The analysis of the 3 films on the basis of the parameters mentioned in the methodology are as follows :

1. Analysis of the archetypes of the serial killers in the 3 films :

The researcher Pace (2019) in her research talks about the archetypes proposed by Holmes and Holmes (2009) in their book "Serial Murder". The archetypes based on the core beliefs of serial murder are known as the visionary killer, the mission murderer, the hedonistic killer, and the power/control killer. Each of serial killer archetypes have distinct motives for killing, however one killer may fit into numerous categories.

- **The visionary killer :** Visionary killers are noted for having psychotic breaches with reality and being driven to kill by violent hallucinations like deadly talking heads.
- **The mission murderer :** Mission murderers, unlike visionary killers, feel they are on a mission to rid the world of a certain "undesirable" demographic, often prostitutes, but they are not driven by psychosis.
- **The hedonistic killers :** as the word implies, kill for the sheer pleasure of killing. The thrill and desire killers are subtypes of this category, with the latter being sexually motivated.
- **The power/control killers :** Power/control killers like to feel in complete control of their victims, so they torture and dehumanize them for long periods of time, frequently returning to the crime scene multiple times to further desecrate the bodies as they decay.

Furthermore, some categories may overlap, such as a power/control murderer who also gets a hedonistic rush from his deeds.

Films	Zodiac	The Iceman	The Silence of the Lamb
Visionary Killer	One of his many letters to the San Francisco Chronicle revealed his visionary side, in which he gloated that he wasn't afraid of the gas chamber because his murders has secured him enough slaves for heaven.		
Mission Murderer			
Hedonistic Killers	Zodiac said that killing was the most wonderful feeling and was "better than getting your rocks off with a female" in a letter to The Vallejo Times	R i c h a r d Kuklinski accepts to be enjoying killing his victims and killed just for the sheer pleasure of killing.	
Power/ Control Killers		He killed people for power and money. As a child, he always wanted power and he entered the mafia by selling illegal porn.	Buffalo Bill liked to feel in complete control of the victims and would torture and dehumanize them in his basement well. He would then skin them to make a woman suit for himself.

Interpretation: Analysis of these 3 films shows that the hedonistic and power/control killer is portrayed as the highest archetype. The hedonistic killer as the word implies, kill for the sheer pleasure of killing whereas the power/control killers like to feel in complete control of their victims, so they torture and dehumanize them for long periods of time, frequently returning to the crime scene multiple times to further desecrate the bodies as they decay. This illustrates that sensationalism is best portrayed in the hedonistic and power/control killer.

2. Analysis of loaded terminology and sensationalism in the 3 films :

This category includes any use of sensationalist vocabulary such as "horror," "terror," "monster," "devil," "slaying," "gruesome," "twisted," and "grotesque" to elicit an emotional response. (Pace, 2019)

The term "torture" was intentionally avoided because it appears in Dennis Rader's BTK moniker and is rarely included in stories about other serial killers.

Films	Loaded terminology used by media in the films	Loaded terminology used by law enforcement officers in the films	Loaded terminology used by civil society in the films
The Zodiac	Journalists and news papers referred to the Zodiac as “creepy”, “dangerous” “troubled”, “obsessed”, and also referred to Zodiac having “personality changes”	One of the law enforcement officers claimed the Zodiac couldn’t have a Christian upbringing.	Common people called the Zodiac killer a “Satanist”
The Iceman	The Iceman aka Richard Kuklinski is referred to as a “notorious” and “cold-blooded killer” in the film by journalists in the television who were reporting his arrest towards the end of the film.		
The Silence of the Lamb	The Buffalo Bill aka Jame Gumb is referred to as a “powerful”, “strong”, “the one in-charge”, “violent”, and “dark” by the media.	An officer referred to the killer as a “vampire” because he thought the killings were very gruesome	

Interpretation : The media has been portrayed in the films as one of the most prominent institutions engaged in sensationalism and glorification of the serial killers and the crimes committed by them. Loaded terminologies like “creepy”, “dark”, “cold-blooded” were seen used by the media representation in the films.

3. Analysis of negative and positive characteristics of killers in the 3 films :

- **Positive Characteristics :** Any mention of the killer as a “regular” person, upstanding citizen, loving husband or father, church member, company owner, or other respected

members of the community falls into this category.

This section also includes mentions of positive activities in school, work, and the military. (Pace, 2019)

- **Negative Characteristics:** This category includes personal allusions that portray the killer in a negative light. Rapists, shoplifters, loners, drifters, arsonists, mentally disturbed, cannibals, broken marriages, violent rage outbursts, and deviant youngsters are just a few examples.

Dishonorable discharge from the military and being dismissed from a job are also covered. (Pace, 2019)

Films	Positive	Negative
Zodiac	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He probably has served in the military for a while, most likely in the Air Force or the Navy, where he undoubtedly received coding training. 2. He had technological knowledge, showed aptitude with numbers and codes, and liked and was proficient with weaponry. 3. In his letters, he seemed to be very organized, bright, and well-educated. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. He is described as a narcissistic, paranoid, loner who was primarily motivated by the desire for attention, power, and, most importantly, credibility. 2. He felt the need to demonstrate his intellectual superiority throughout the film to make up for his personal emotions of weakness and inadequacy 3. He had a self-conscious obsessive disorder and was fixated on the idea that people were misjudging him and his abilities.
The Iceman	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Richard Kuklinski lived a regular life; in the film he was described as “normal” 2. In the film, he was portrayed to be a loving husband who had a healthy romantic relationship with his wife and was also protective of his family. 3. He wrote a poem for one of his daughters on her birthday. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Richard goes ahead to mocks God at one point and asks one of his victims to pray to God and ask him to save him. 2. Prone to aggressive and violent rage outbursts. He chased and hit a car though it was his fault in retaliation for cursing at him and his family. 3. He lacked empathy and fear.
The Silence of the Lamb	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Despite his terrible childhood, JameGumb adored his mother. 2. Precious, his beloved poodle, was always by his side since he loved her so much. He was upset and in tears when Precious was taken by Catherine Martin, which goes onto showing his love for his poodle. 3. He is shown to be intelligent; is an excellent tailor who also has knowledge in forensics. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. JameGumb did not consider individuals to be beings with feelings, which is one of his more unsettling personality qualities. 2. He hunted his victims in his basements with a sadistic relish, reveling in the anguish he was creating as they walked aimlessly in the dark. 3. To make them simpler to kill, he used the pronoun “it” to refer to his victims as things or animals.

Interpretation: The positive and negative characters demonstrate how all serial killers in films have nearly mundane lifestyles and no past history of breaking the law, which adds an element of surprise for viewers and fuels sensationalism. Negative personality traits like obsessive disorder, lack of empathy and fear, aggressiveness, violent rage, tendency to dehumanize his victims are glorified which leads to sensationalism. Positive traits of being a family-oriented person with a respectable job is shown as redeeming qualities of the serial killers juxtaposed against his unpardonable

negative traits and adds onto the aspects of sensationalism of the portrayal of the serial killers.

4. Reference Capital Punishment in the 3 films :

This category includes any explicit mention of the death penalty, regardless of whether it was applied to a specific murderer. Statements about a killer obtaining Life without parole (LWOP) because of a state's lack of capital punishment, as well as any mentions of actual execution sentences, are included here. (Pace, 2019)

Films	No Reference to Capital Punishment
Zodiac	No reference for capital punishment. It could also be because the killer was never found, and the prime suspect suffered a heart attack before the police could question him.
The Iceman	No reference for capital punishment. Though he was arrested by law enforcement officers, and he admits killing more than a 100 people he didn't seem to receive capital punishment instead he was sentenced to two life sentences in the same cell block as his brother Joey.
The Silence of the Lamb	No reference for capital punishment. It could also be because the killer JameGumb was killed by the FBI Agent.

Interpretation: The films show little sign of providing the victims with justice because there are few to no reference to the death penalty. Only in the film "The Iceman" did the killer end up in jail, and even then, he was only found guilty of five murders despite admitting to having killed at least 100 people. This shows these films give the impression that the perpetrators of heinous crime get away scot-free which augments glorification of criminals in the films.

5. Support for Capital Punishment :

Any words in favor of a killer's

execution, whether from victims' families, prosecutors and other court officials, the killer himself, or anybody else referenced, fall under this category.

Films	No Support for Capital Punishment
Zodiac, The Iceman & The Silence of the Lamb	No reference to support capital punishment from victims' families or law enforcement agencies in the films

Interpretation : There no support of capital punishment from victims’ families or law enforcement agencies in the films which goes to show that there is no justice served to the victims leading to sensationalism.

6. Visual representation :

It is unnecessary to describe the level of attention and exposure that serial killers receive around the world. Their names are well-known among the public.

Many of them portray the perpetrator from a psychological perspective, analyzing the crimes they did. It explains the procedure of these crimes, including

graphic details of how the murders were carried out.

In the narratives, the victims are also featured, although they are typically reduced to only names and images, subtly symbolizing the killer’s prizes in the game of murder. Even if there are occasions in these depictions of close relatives giving memories of their grief, the names of the victims eventually fade from the viewer’s recollection. On the other hand, names of serial killers like Ted Bundy, BTK, Edmund Kemp, Richard Ramirez, Charles Manson, etc., have become renowned with the passage of time gaining cult status in society.

Films	Gore Visualization	Glorification through monikers for the serial killer
Zodiac	A woman’s face, radio the car’s windows are shown covered in blood after the Zodiac shoots down a young couple who are parked at a lookout. Another pair is held hostage by The Zodiac, who then threatens them with a handgun while pretending to leave. He comes back to repeatedly attack them with a knife. The blade is shown piercing the woman’s back, stomach, and chest as she resists and yells. As he sits in his car, a cab driver is fatally shot. Later, as his body dangles from an open car door, we witness police officers inspecting the gunshot wound.	In the film, the killer is referred to as “ZodiacKiller” but the victims are predominantly reduced to as “girls,” “women,” and “babies.”
The Iceman	Earl - Throat slashed with a knife by Richard Kuklinski. Unnamed Man 1 - Shot three times in the stomach by Richard Kuklinski. Unnamed Man 2 - Stabbed in the back of the neck by Richard Kuklinski. Unnamed	Again in the film, the killer is described as “The Iceman” but the victims are predominantly reduced to “unnamed man” or “unknown man”

	<p>Man 3- Shot in the head by Richard Kuklinski.· Unnamed Man 4- Strangled to death with a wire over Richard Kuklinski's back.· Unnamed Man 5- Shot in the head by Richard Kuklinski.· Unknown Man 6-Poisoned with cyanide in his steak by Richard Kuklinski</p>	
The Silence of the Lamb	<p>When a woman approaches JameGumb asking for assistance while acting hurt, he sneaks up on her, knocks her out, and kidnaps her. He rips off their dress and tosses it out of his van as a calling card. He takes her to his house and abandons her in the basement's dry well, starving her until her skin can be easily peeled off.·He pushes the victims from the steps in the first two instances after leading them upstairs and putting nooses around their necks. Then, after skinning different body parts from each victim, he tosses each body into a river, erasing all traces of his crimes.</p>	<p>The killer in the film is described as a "Buffalo Bill", but the victims are predominantly reduced to "woman" "she" or "it." Buffalo Bill himself refers to his victims as "it" in order to make them easier to kill.</p>

Interpretation : Gore visualization is used as a sensationalist narrative technique, wherein the film's show body dangling from the car, or a woman's skin being stitched into a body suit for the killer and so on. The audience remember only the monikers of the serial killers like "Zodiac", "The Iceman" or "Buffalo Bill" but fail to remember any of the victims.

7. Camera Angles & Shot :

The camera angle indicates where the film camera or video camera will be placed to take a shot. A scene can be

photographed from multiple camera angles at the same time.

This will provide a unique experience and, on occasion, an emotional response. Distinct camera angles will have different effects on the viewer's perception of the scene being photographed. To accomplish this appearance, a camera operator could take several different approaches.

Many crime films have "bloody" scenes or situations where crimes are perpetrated in close-up shots from various angles.

a. Close Up Shots:

Zodiac :

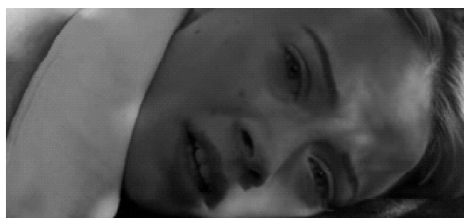


Figure 1: Women Moments before getting stabbed by the Zodiac killer

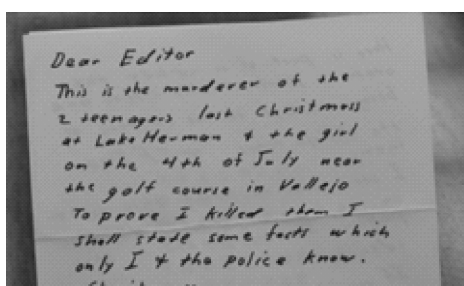


Figure 2: Insert Close Shot used to examine details of letter given to journalists

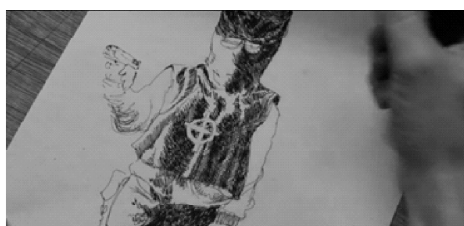


Figure 3: Close-up scene of a cartoonist drawing the zodiac killer (how the victim described the killer

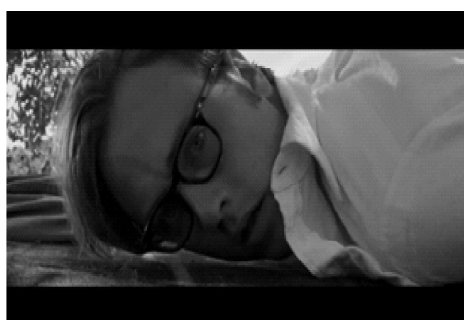


Figure 4: A man moments before getting stabbed by the zodiac killer



Figure 5: Close up shot of newspaper article talking about The Zodiac

The Iceman :



Figure 6: Murder of Marty Freeman by the Iceman



Figure 7: Iceman killing his partner with gun

The Silence of the Lamb :



Figure 8: Raspail's head is found in a garage



Figure 9: News of Buffalo Bill in newspapers

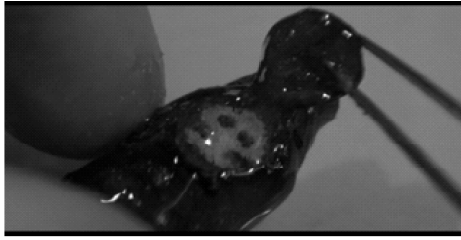


Figure 10: Moth found in a victim's mouth being cut for investigation

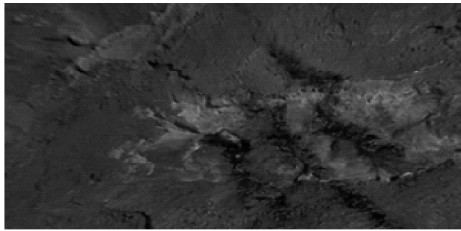


Figure 11: One of the victim's nail found in Buffalo Bill's well

Interpretation: The three films uses close up shots to gore visual scenes like shown in figure 1 to 11. The close-up shots in the film mainly displays blood, gruesome deaths and gore visualization which goes to show the use of sensationalism narratives in the film.

b. Long Shots :

Zodiac :



Figure 12: Zodiac captured his victims on a gunpoint



Figure 13: Victim after escaping The Zodiac by jumping out of his car

Interpretation : Long Shots in the film Zodiac display the killer's interaction with his victims and their escape as shown in figures 12 & 13. One scene also displays the killer returning to the crime scene and checking on his victims. The large representation of the shot displaying the victim's interaction, fear and eventual death shows the sensationalized narrative in the film.

The Iceman :



Figure 14: The Iceman chopping the bodies



Figure 15: Long shot angle of Iceman shooting his partner

Interpretation: Long Shots in the film The Iceman displays the killer after he has murdered his victims as represented in figure 14 & 15 and how the killer disposes of it as shown in figure 14. The gory representation of the shot displaying the victim's death and disposal of the victims shows sensationalism portrayed in the film.

The Silence of the Lamb :



Figure 16: Buffalo Bill's victim found



Figure 17: Buffalo Bill making a woman suit after skinning his victims



Figure 18: Hannibal Lecture being transferred by law enforcement officers

Interpretation : Long Shots in the film *The Silence of the Lamb* displays the killer after he has murdered his victims as represented in figure 16. The figure 17 depicts how the killer skins women to make a body suit for himself and figure 18 shows Hannibal Lecture being taken by law enforcement agencies and his attempt to escape while killing several officers. The several killings depict glorification and sensationalism in the film.

Conclusions :

The overall result of the analysis suggests that films are significantly responsible for sensationalism surrounding the serial killers. The films choose to highlight personal traits of killers, such as living an ordinary life, family oriented, past military service or also relationship with their family rather than their psychological motivations for killing.

The 3 films about serial murderers illustrates that sensationalism is best portrayed in the hedonistic (killing for sheer pleasure) and power/control killer as the highest archetype. Loaded terminologies like “creepy”, “dark”, “cold-blooded” were seen used by the media for the serial killers in the films.

Gore visualization is used as a sensationalist narrative technique. The audience tends to remember the monikers of the serial killers like “Zodiac”, “The Iceman” or “Buffalo Bill” but fail to remember any of the victims. In fact, one fails to remember the actual names of the serial killers. The films’ glorification and sensationalism were boosted by the long shots that showed the perpetrators toying with the victims before or after the murders had taken place, which in turn also increased gore imagery.

The serial killers’ lives and their atrocities are glamorized and glorified in the films as celebrities. The storytelling that should showcase the makings of a serial killer in a society is diluted, and the masses are not encouraged to view people with mental illness leading to such tendencies of indiscriminate violence in an objective way. As we currently understand it, the media shapes how we see the world,

and since the media sensationalizes serial killers in films, society will forever find it hard to understand their stories.

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