

# Feminism, Sexuality and Gender Roles in the Scream Movies

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**Magdalena Zmajić**

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Feminism, Sexuality and Gender Roles in the Scream Movies

Završni rad

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Zadar, 2023.



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Zadar, 20. srpnja 2023.

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## 1. Introduction

The goal of this work will be to demonstrate the shift of conventional gender roles in *Scream* movies, to emphasize the importance of sexuality, motherhood and its influence on child development, the problem of men and power, and Sidney's transformation as part of the third wave of feminism.

First, this paper will examine the depiction of male and female characters and gender roles within the movies. In her work *Werewolves, Mothers and Femmes Fatales* Nielsen argues that: “Randy, Dewey and Mr. Prescott are helpless victims and need to be rescued,” and that “Sidney and Gale are resourceful and survive in all three films” (38).

The second section will elaborate on the problem of sexuality, more precisely female sexuality and homosexuality of some of the male characters. Nielsen states that Billy has “homicidal tendencies that are derived from his relationship with his mother” (44).

The third segment will explore the role of motherhood, its importance for the child’s development and it will touch upon the unhealthy relationship between the child and the parent.

The fourth part will focus on men in power and misogyny. Victims of the system are considered to be women who struggle to get to the top. This section will mostly be focused on Sidney's mother who, according to Gooden in her work *Unpacking Maureen Prescott's devastating story in Scream 3* “refused to play by the ‘rules,’ which are obviously set by men in positions of influence who suggest women must trade sex for career advancement.”

Finally, the fifth section will cover Sidney's renovation and the third wave of feminism. In her work *Scream, Popular Culture, and Feminism's Third Wave: “I’m Not My Mother”* Karlyn suggests how Sidney “also develops into a more mature and complex hero for the Third Wave” (par. 59).

The methodology applied in the development of the work will be an in-depth analysis of the first five movies, the characters, the principles on which the plot is based, and also previous scientific works on the topic of the third wave of feminism and *Scream* movies.

## 2. Male and female characters and gender roles

*Scream* movies, perhaps one of the most popular slasher movies that have gained massive popularity over the years, are full of interesting characters who play certain roles and establish certain relationships throughout the development of the plot. One of the most important categories for distinguishing characters and their roles within the action itself is their gender.

First, it is important to understand the term gender roles. In her master's thesis and doctoral dissertation, *Reel women: gender stereotypes in film*, Krahn states that gender-role stereotypes are features of gender in traditional portrayals that establish distinctions between conventional "feminine" and typical "masculine" behaviors. The author also says that these preconceptions are based on an individual's position in society, such as men being hunters and women being babysitters (6). These behaviors and displays can often be found in movies, and the media has a significant influence in the formation of the idea of gender among young people. Throughout history, women have been thought to be the weaker sex, and in horror movies, they are frequently portrayed as victims, with specific focus given on their fear. Krahn also believes that the portrayal of women in horror is particularly intriguing because, in addition to being victims and sexual symbols, they may also be heroes. The phrase "scream Queen," which arose from the representation of women as victims who scream for help, is also mentioned in her research (7). The idea of women as autonomous heroines and carriers of action is clearly prevalent in the *Scream* franchise, but it is also possible to argue that Sidney keeps the traditional female status of a victim. Despite the fact that she triumphs in every circumstance, she cannot seem to catch a break. Practically until the end of the franchise, her character is repeatedly victimized. Not only that, after the withdrawal of Sidney from the franchise, Samantha and Tara enter the scene, and they both continue this principle. Even though they act as heroines in the movie, and even though the whole plot is based on the character of Sidney or Samantha, it seems that the two of them cannot escape from their problems.

## 2.1. Female characters

The *Scream* franchise is filled with movies that mock traditional and established gender roles, which is important in perceiving the role of women in the fight against violence, and stresses the importance of understanding the unification of women in the struggle to achieve the common goal. Nielsen states that:

“The fact that a collective identity in these films is accomplished through female companionship also asserts a feminist premise. Many girl power movies imply that women must respect each other's differences in order to restore a form of justice that is in opposition to the patriarchy” (17-18).

This is easy to conclude through the development of the action. There are numerous situations in which the characters of Sidney and Gale joined forces to solve the problem together, putting aside their differences and conflict. More specifically, Sidney is initially suspicious of Gale's intentions. Gale is known to capitalize on tragic stories throughout her reports and broadcasts, which can be seen on the example of her mother. In the first movie, Gale was attacked by the protagonist for writing a book about her mother's death, while also trying to shine a light on the face of the man who was then believed to be the murderer. Samantha Carpenter, daughter of Billy Loomis, later had a similar problem with Gale Weathers. Not only that, but we can also find that example in the movie from 2022, where Tara's friends desperately blame their female friends for the murder. Only when this principle is annulled, it is possible to talk about progress. Without the union of Sidney and Gale, and later Gale and Sam, the murders cannot be solved. Nielsen also suggested that the unification of women in bringing justice puts in the background the patriarchal view of the dominance of the heterosexual relationship, in which men played the main role (11).

The established, sexualized view of women is also harshly criticized. Already in the first part, in response to the question why she doesn't fancy horror movies, she says: “What's the point? They're all the same. Some stupid killer stalking some big-breasted girl who can't act and who is always running up the stairs when she should be running out the front door. It's insulting” (*Scream* 00:26:15-00:26:25). Criticism of the sexualization of women, the emphasis on physical appearance, and the degradation of female intelligence are also visible in the



character of Olivia Morris in *Scream 4*. The sarcastic line that best sums it up is: “Olivia don't-look-at-my-tits-I-have-a-mind’ Morris” (*Scream 4* 00:17:24-00:17:26). In the movie *Scream 2*, the characters gather en masse to watch the new movie *Stab*, which opens with a scene of a naked woman taking a shower, who, of course, falls victim. This type of representation of the female body is very often encountered in movies, and the emphasis on appearance and the portrayal of less intelligent and very hot girls are often criticized by the female protagonists.

## 2.2. Male characters

The dominance of female characters in the movies entails certain consequences in the portrayal of male characters and their actions, as well as their importance for the plot. Randy and Dewey are the best examples of that. Dewey, a character who from the very beginning strove for independence, strove for respect from those around him, and tried to gain admiration from Gale in every way possible, although a very likable character whose death may have shaken the viewer, is a man whose actions remained in the shadow of Gale and Sidney. An example of a man's subordination, a desire to establish power, but also an example of a mother's influence on her son, which will be discussed in the next section, can best be seen in Dewey's sentence: “What did mom tell ya? When I wear this badge, you treat me as the man of the law” (*Scream* 00:35:34-00:35:38). Furthermore, when his sister informed him, that Sidney will be staying with them due to the attack, his immediate response is: “Does mom know” (*Scream* 00:31:33). Dewey's subordination can also be seen in the movie *Scream 4*, more specifically in his relationship with Gale. Relying on his position as sheriff in *Scream 4*, during the discussion with Gale about the way to solve the murder, he says: “I'm the sheriff now” (*Scream 4* 00:23:24). His inferiority regarding his job is once again confirmed by Gale in the same movie when she said: “I'm not wearing a uniform, but I can get a lead and you don't” (*Scream 4* 00:48:19-00:48:24).

Another striking example is the character of Randy. Although his influence, his predictions, and his rules are important for the development of the film, unfortunately, Randy never gets the girl. Throughout his life, we follow his immense love for Sidney. However, unfortunately, he is killed by Billy's mother. Although the real target was Gale, he was killed

because he happened to be in that particular place. The fact that even in his death he was not the chosen one, but only a passer-by, puts him in a subordinate position.

A third example of male portrayal in horror movies is Neil Prescott, Sidney's father. His promiscuous wife had sexual relations with other men, which was known to the whole town, and later wrecked the stability of their family. Nielsen points out that: "These characters demonstrate that Hollywood products represent male victims as feminine and female killers as masculine" (37). She also describes all three male characters previously touched on, claiming: "Dewey, Randy and Mr. Prescott are characters that are also incapable of 'getting the girl'" (38). Randy never gets the girl, Dewey's marriage fails, and Mr. Prescott is the victim of his wife's cheating. All three are subservient to women, victimized, and incapable of maintaining a solid romantic relationship. Nielsen also argued that: "Randy, Dewey and Mr. Prescott are helpless victims and need to be rescued" (38). Those characteristics that were traditionally associated with women can now be found in male characters, such as Dewey. For example: lack of respect in one's profession and being looked down upon by the opposite sex. On the other hand, qualities that were once associated with men, such as independence and success in business, were added to female characters.

With that being said, it is possible to say that the male characters in the films are shown as weaker compared to the females, from Dewey, Randy, and even Billy who ends up being killed, none of them work independently, suffer a tragic fate and are usually eliminated by female killers. Women are traditionally, however, portrayed in a very sexualized way, which puts their intelligence and capabilities in the background, or, moreover, portrays them as empty-headed individuals who make foolish decisions. The criticism of that view, however, is woven through numerous lines that may have escaped the viewer's attention. The idea of a female hero as well as the necessary unification of women in the fight against violence and solving problems represent the background of the plot, without which it would not be possible to talk about a positive outcome related to the murders. Nielsen points out that:

"Definition of girl power can be applied to a series of films produced during the mid to late nineties and first few years of the new millennium. Many films produced during this timeframe depict strong female protagonists who fight the forces of patriarchal culture 'unapologetically and often violently'" (2).

### 3. Sexuality

Sexuality dominates the franchise. From the representation of the female body both in the movie and the film within the film called *Stab*, the perception of female sexuality as something natural that has its own power, and not something dirty that needs to be suppressed, to the problem of homosexuality are all present in the movies. It is even possible to say that the franchise was created on the sexuality of a mother. The movies are full of hidden problems such as the portrayal of gay characters from Billy to Mindy, but also the understanding of how unhealthy relationships with parents can manifest. Although it is not possible to precisely examine the characters on a psychological level, repressed emotions can explain in more detail the reasons behind certain actions and the relationships between the characters.

#### 3.1. Billy and Stu

New interpretations and queer theories suggest a potential homosexual relationship between Billy and Stu Macher. There is a possibility that viewers are overanalyzing this relationship, but it is claimed that Billy and Stu's relationship is based on the real characters of Leopold and Loeb, a homosexual couple responsible for the murder of a young teenage boy named Bobby Franks. There is a possibility that the feelings were mutual, but there is also a theory that Stu was so in love with Billy that Billy could use him as a pawn. Billy, although quirky, had a motive for the murders, while the same cannot be said for Stu. Why Stu would go to such lengths for Billy and was their relationship possibly romantic remains unclear. In her article *It's Canon That Billy and Stu Are Queer-Coded in 'Scream'*, Stockton emphasized Williamson's statement:

“One of the reasons that one could get the other one [to follow] is because I think the other one was secretly in love with him. And it was sort of a fascinating case study on double murderers. If you Google ‘Leopold and Loeb,’ you will see. And you’ll read about it and you’ll get, OK, that’s Billy and Stu.”

Furthermore, Stockton also points out how Neve Campbell emphasized the issue related to Billy and Stu, implying that some of their rage potentially stems from not being able to be whatever they desire to be.

Although there has been controversy regarding whether or not Gale is homosexual, we know for certain that Mindy from *Scream 5* happens to be gay. The explanation for this could be based on Neve Campbell's assertion, which is the heteronormativity of society during the dominance of Billy and Stu. In the work titled *Queer Representation in the Scream Franchise*, Harvey points out that Billy Loomis and Stu Macher, characters whose homosexuality is not directly portrayed, end up killed, while Mindy is portrayed as the leader of the group, who does not suffer a tragic fate, suggesting that this is also a leap towards a better representation of queer people both in society and in the movie (8).

### 3.2. Phallic fixation

Discussions on Billy's sexuality and aggressive behavior, which are linked to his connection to his dad and mom and his sexual interest in Sidney, might be analyzed within the context of Freud's psychosexual development research. In his paper titled *Psychosexual Development: Freudian Concept*, Philip relied on Freud's studies and explained fixation as the continuous connection of the sexual impulse to a certain stage of pregenital maturation, and also stated that fixation is believed to have a detrimental effect on the growth of a personality (187). In his book titled *Basic Freud: Psychoanalytic Thought for the 21st Century*, Kahn devoted a full paragraph to the phallus fixation and elucidated Freud's concepts. Nielsen claims that the manner in which Billy and Stu stabbed each other while placing the knife near the groin is homoerotic itself, and corresponds to the concept of the phallus. The phallus is closely related to the image of the knife piercing the wound (45). The problem of Billy's sexuality narrowly related to the Oedipus complex in the theoretical framework of Kahn's work will be elaborated in more detail later, as part of the discussion about the role of the mother in the movies. Although it is impossible to say that they were definitely gay, many moments and interpretations of situations suggest homosexual tendencies, which many critics agree with.

### 3.3. Female sexuality

One of the rules of survival in a horror movie is that you must not have sex. In the first movie, while watching TV, Randy states rule number one. Later in the movie, Sidney breaks

that rule, making herself a sitting duck with no protection against murder. Randy tells her: “You gave it up, now you're no longer a virgin. Now you gotta die, those are the rules” (*Scream* 01:33:18-01:33:26). Randy and his friends watch the horror movie *Halloween*. The women that Michael kills are all women who have just before or were planning to have sexual intercourse. The woman he does not kill, Laurie, is a girl who is not interested in boys or relationships, and says that boys find her to be too intelligent. In her work titled *Evolution of the Final Girl: Exploring Feminism and Femininity in Halloween (1978-2018)*, Zhou describes Laurie and states: “She possesses ‘masculine’ gender traits like intelligence and strength, providing a sharp contrast to her friends Annie and Lynda, who hold little interest for academia and seem quite underdeveloped next to Laurie” (9). Before *Halloween*, there was *Psycho*, with whom Billy Loomis equates. “Did Norman Bates have a motive?” (*Scream* 01:32:20). Norman Bates, whose murders were narrowly related to sexuality, brutally murders a woman who was very attractive. She had extramarital affairs, and her partner refused to offer her marriage because of the lack of financial stability. The moment Sidney loses her virginity, she becomes a victim of Billy, who even quotes a movie: “We all go a little mad sometimes. Anthony Perkins, *Psycho*” (*Scream* 01:30:27-01:30:41).

In their interesting work *Gender and survival vs. death in slasher films: A content analysis*, Cowan and O'Brien made an interesting remark by saying: “In slasher films, the message appears to be that sexual women get killed and only the pure women survive. This message that the good woman is asexual and the bad (and therefore dead) woman is sexual...” (194). They also suggest that:

“The female survivors were not only the ‘good’ girls, but also more androgynous, less inane, and less physically attractive than the nonsurviving females [...] the message about women has been in existence as far back as the story of Adam and Eve—that there is something inherently evil about female sexuality. Thus, the effects of reduced sympathy toward rape victims by viewers of slasher films (Linz et al., 1988) is not surprising, given the sexual objectification of women and denigration of female sexuality in slasher films” (195).

Just when her fate seems doomed, the movie breaks the circle and discontinues the condemnation and demonization of female sexuality, when Sidney kills Billy, she emerges as

a new heroine who has destigmatized female sexuality. The idea that sexual women die in slasher films and androgynous and non-sexual women survive, supported by Cowan and O'Brien's research, is now being debunked. Sidney, losing her virginity to a murderer and a sociopath/psychopath, rejects Randy's rules and writes her own new slasher movie rules. Sidney also disrupts the binary opposition between men and women, which is seen in the example of Laurie, dictating that intelligence and strength are masculine qualities, in contrast to the other girls who are only interested in men and physical appearance.

In short, the *Scream* franchise, while at the same time mocking the established values and the strict opposition of male and female virtues, has made considerable progress in the portrayal of queer characters, this can be seen on the examples of Billy and Stu, and now Mindy. The idea that female sexuality is inherently malevolent goes back to movies like *Halloween* and *Psycho*, both of which are relevant to *Scream*. Sidney, because of breaking this circle, is considered to be a hero and stands out from the expectation of what a woman should be. This is also stated by Karlyn in the section *Scream*, as she argued that the killer is always a man resembling Billy, and his targets are always young, beautiful, and attractive women. He is finally assassinated by a "Final Girl" who, similar to Sidney, has a "masculine" name, looks masculine or behaves like a man, and employs an aggressive, male gaze to see any potential danger and locate the killer. Unlike Sidney, the Final Girl continues to be a virgin, able to slay the murderer due to the fact that she has not yet discovered the dangerous power of her mature sexuality (par. 40).

## 4. The problem of motherhood

Not only is the fact that mothers have a huge influence on the development of a child indisputable, but also that an unhealthy relationship with the mother can have detrimental consequences on the development of the individual. In this part, the examples of Billy, Sidney, and Roman, and the influence of the mother on their development will be discussed.

### 4.1. Billy Loomis is momma's boy

As a part of Freud's interpretation, it is possible to correlate fixation with focus on the phallus and obsession in the sense of an unhealthy attachment that involves a parent. The phallus problem was already previously discussed, but Billy's problem relating to his mother can be linked to the Oedipus complex. The problem of the phallus was previously explained, and his problem with the mother can be connected to the Oedipus complex. Kahn explains the term by saying: "...we would long for intimate connection with the parent of the opposite sex [...] subsequent mental health, he thought, depends in large part on us becoming able to relinquish those feelings, but few of us rid ourselves of them entirely" (57).

When asked why he committed the murders, Billy pointed out the fact that Sidney's mother had become intimate with his father, which resulted in his mother leaving his life. This scene is shown with a lot of violence and name-calling towards her mother, all of which adds to the conclusion that Billy did not have a healthy relationship with his mom. To make a firm diagnosis of Billy without a detailed investigation of his subconscious is indeed tricky, but it's safe to say that his unhealthy relationship with his mother led to horrific consequences at the expense of innocent people, including Sid. Be that as it may, Nielsen also writes about the problems between Billy and his mother, claiming at the same time that the problem of his sexuality originates from his view of his mother's sexuality, and at the same time, his hatred and contempt for women who engage in casual sexual relations is emphasized (44).

"BILLY. Is that motive enough for you? Or how about this? Did you know your slut mother was sleeping with my dad and she's the reason my mom moved out and deserted me?"

SIDNEY. What?

BILLY. Think about it. On the off chance I get caught, a motive like that could divide a jury for years, don't you think? You took my mother, so I took yours. Big sympathy factor. Maternal abandonment causes serious deviant behavior. It certainly fucked you up. It made you have sex with a psychopath" (*Scream* 01:32:50-01:33:15).

However, some critics believe that the idea of a lack of motherhood is insufficient in Billy's case, and that his aggression is an expression of his repressed homosexuality. This could be linked to Campbell's statement about heteronormativity as part of the reason for Billy and Stu Macher's aggression. In *Scream 2*, Randy describes Billy Loomis as: "What a rat looking homo repressed momma's boy! Why not set your goals higher huh" (*Scream 2* 01:04:40-01:40:42). This agrees with both the idea of repressed homosexuality and the idea related to the so-called mommy issues.

#### 4.2. Roman Bridger, director, psychopath

Roman Bridger's example once again relies on the role of the mother, more precisely, on the lack of a mother figure in the boy's life. As it is already known, he is the character behind the murder of his and Sidney's mother. He sent Billy a video of his father and Sidney's mother, thus passively influencing the murder from the background, as he himself says "I'm a director. I direct" (*Scream 3* 01:38:22). He pointed out the fact that his mother, then a well-known actress, had left him for a life in Woodsboro as the reason behind everything he did. He specified how she slammed the door in his face, by saying: "She slammed the door in my face, Sid. She said I was 'Reena's' child and Reena was dead... and then it struck me. What a good idea, so I watched her" (*Scream 3* 01.37.34-01:37:45).

Speaking of mothers, it was said above that they have a crucial influence on our development. Growing up without a mother can have negative consequences on a child's development, but going so far as to slam a door in a child's face can certainly be a traumatic experience at any age.

In his work *Understanding the Violent Personality: Antisocial Personality Disorder, Psychopathy, & Sociopathy Explored*, psychologist Johnson defines and draws the boundaries



between the terms psychopathy and sociopathy. “Childhood traumatization, including physical and emotional abuse, may lead to the development of psychopathic traits in boys, not girls” (Johnson 81). Johnson also points out that: “Children who experienced childhood neglect and/or abuse appear to have higher scores of psychopathy as well as higher rates of violent offending” (81). He goes a step further by stating:

“Sociopaths tend to be more impulsive and erratic than psychopaths and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system as a result. They are also more likely to act on impulse and may become easily agitated and angered, displaying violent outbursts” (81).

It is possible to argue that not only the lack of a mother figure, but the open rejection of a child from his mother by saying that his mother is dead can lead to severe trauma, which can ultimately result in a disorder that leads to aggressive behavior. The paper additionally points out that sociopaths express a certain amount of sorrow for their misdeeds, but this is limited only to a certain group (such as a family). While they have a sense of morality, they frequently behave rashly. Although psychopaths also exhibit tremendous impulsivity, the distinction between the terms is that they exhibit no regret at all. Furthermore, Johnson emphasizes that psychopaths are characterized by a: “Complete lack of remorse or guilt, conning and manipulateness, and a parasitic lifestyle. The psychopath has a need to hurt others [...] Also, an abnormal lack of conscience and compassion and they take what they want in a cold-blooded manner” (82). Finally, when it comes to murders, Johnson states that psychopaths are said to have:

“Ability to act well and fooling [sic] others with ease. They come off as charming and caring and can con and manipulate others with ease. When they commit crimes, they tend to carefully plan every detail and calmly engage in the crime (cool, calm, and meticulous). [...] The psychopath's ability to demonstrate good impression management, to con and manipulate, often led to corporate success...” (80).

The mentioned factors: lack of remorse for his misdeeds, manipulation, careful planning, success, expressed aggression due to emotional abuse and rejection by a parent, negative emotional outbursts, and problems with the law are all part of Roman’s personality. It would

be unprofessional to say with certainty that he suffers from psychopathy, although almost everything alludes to it, all of the above points to deep psychological problems due to the lack of a mother in his life.

#### 4.3. Sidney Prescott's trauma

The third person who will be analyzed in relation to her mother is Sidney, as her relation to her mother, the murder and the knowledge of her mother's double life left significant consequences on her development. Nielsen suggests that: "Theorizing the significance of maternal protagonists in the girl power genre is of importance because the mother-daughter relationship is central to many women's films" (19). After the death of her mother, but also because of her death, Sidney suffered horrific consequences. Not only did her mother's death trigger a series of murders that continued throughout the movies, but Sidney became the object of ridicule for her mother's promiscuity. Nevertheless, what is particularly highlighted in the first movie is her frigidity after finding out about the "rape" and murder of her mother. Karlyn states that: "because of unresolved grief for her mother, she resists her boyfriend's ongoing pressure for sex" (par. 27).

Karlyn also goes a step further and points out that the fourth of the film's key problems is the personality created by the family relationships - more precisely, a daughter's relationship with her mother (par. 28). The central theme of the movies is "maternal abandonment," and it is precipitated by maternal sex. Because of the fact that the traditional culture sees female sexuality as taboo, Maureen is the one to blame for her demise, but it is pointed out that this principle is not applied to men. When Billy accuses Sidney of being just like her mother, of questionable morals, the fear awakens in her that she might not become like her.

The ghost of Sidney's mother is particularly interesting in the movie *Scream 3*. Sidney dreams a very realistic dream about her mother and tries to solve her problems by isolating herself, both socially and physically. The ghost of her mother can be understood as a realization of the trauma that she repressed after everything that had happened relating to the murders, and it is also possible to talk about post-traumatic stress disorder. The UK guide defines life-threatening situations, witnessing an extremely aggressive situation towards someone else,

being a victim of violence, rape, as well as some types of accidents as some of the causes of trauma or secondary-trauma<sup>1</sup> (7). Some of the symptoms pointed out are: “Vivid flashbacks (feeling like the trauma is happening right now), intrusive thoughts or images, nightmares, intense distress at real or symbolic reminders of the trauma” (3). It is safe to say that Sidney is suffering because of everything that happened with her mother, which led to the death of many people. Her physical withdrawal and isolation from people, conducting business over the phone under a false name, and distancing herself from family and friends can all be perceived as manifestations of her disorder and deeply disturbed state of mind.

One constant idea that is present throughout the franchise is mother blaming. Mothers are shown as the main causes of the accident. Sidney’s mother, whose behavior has caused a series of accidents, is a punching bag for anyone who has an underlying problem with Sid. In the movie *Scream 3*, Billy's mother says: “You know what makes me sick? I am sick to death of people saying that it’s all the parents’ fault that all starts with the family. [...] You don’t know what it is to be a mother ...” (*Scream 2* 01:43:10-01:43:42). Although perhaps Billy’s mother is not the best example of parenting, just as Mrs. Prescott was not for her son, society automatically shifts the blame to mothers without considering the background and causes of situations, while fathers go unpunished. The causes of the proceedings and Maureen Prescott’s background are detailed below in the next chapter.

With that being said, the role of the mother in the franchise has an immense role. It could be said that mothers represent the backbone or the background of the plot. The character of the mother serves as an object for blaming, but also as a factor that makes every further development of the film possible (Billy kills because of his mother leaving, Nancy Loomis is a mother who avenges her son, Roman dictates all the murders because of the lack of a mother in his life), while only with the appearance of Samantha the backbone of the plot shifts on the character of the father. Sidney's mother is responsible for her PTSD, Billy's relationship with his mother is unhealthy and hints at an Oedipus complex, while Roman developed psychopathic tendencies due to his mother’s abandonment and abuse.

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<sup>1</sup> “If you experience some PTSD symptoms while supporting someone close to you who's experienced trauma, this is sometimes known as secondary trauma” (*Mind 3*).

## 5. Men in power and misogyny

The position of the white man in the film is of crucial importance. Although characters like Sidney, Gale, Samantha, and Tara are considered heroines, the film abounds with examples of misogyny and abuse of power by men in high positions to exploit, humiliate, and sexually harass women. Many consider these prejudices of men against women and the terror that men in Hollywood put the opposite sex through as a reflection of reality and a criticism of such a situation. Throughout the film, some of the rules related to the killer are highlighted, which are problematic in themselves, such as the fact that the killer must be a white male. In *Scream 2*, Dewey clearly stated that: “Serial killers are typically white male” (00:52:25). It can be said that this is partially true. Krahn also pointed out that it is: “Also interesting to note that very rarely is a women [sic] depicted as the killer in a horror film [...] Horror films are all about shock-value and cheap thrills” (9). It appears that women can only play the role of co-killers. In *Scream 2* the killers are Billy’s mother and Mickey Altieri, in *Scream 4* Jill Roberts and her boyfriend, in the fifth part Richie Kirsch and Amber Freeman, and in *Scream 4* Quinn Bailey, her father, and brother. Krahn also states that: “The portrayal of female characters in horror films will most likely never change” (9).

### 5.1. Stu Macher

In her article *The Lifelike Misogyny of Scream’s Stu Macher*, Phillips singles out Stu Macher as the best example of misogyny in the franchise. She points out that: “Stu seems inspired to kill by his misogynistic ideology and a destructive obsession with masculinity and male approval.” The fact that Stu considered men to be the stronger and superior sex is best conveyed by his statement: “Yeah, Casey and Steve were completely hollowed out and the fact is it takes a man to do something like that” (*Scream* 00:20:10-00:20:15). In this position, the most logical thing to do would be to try to divert attention away from yourself, however Stu gets pleasure from putting the male sex on a pedestal. With the purpose of proving his masculinity, Phillips also points out Stu’s extreme sexual behavior that he publicly exposes so as to prove his masculinity and thus his worth. When Randy mentions sexual intercourse, that is, the prohibition of sexual intercourse for the purpose of survival in the horror film, Stu responds with the phrase: “I’d be a dead man” (*Scream* 01:13:24). Another observation is that Stu addresses Sidney by calling her baby. He tells her: “Sidney baby, please give me the gun”

(*Scream* 01:23:12). The reasons for this can be numerous, but addressing a woman with whom one is not romantically involved can be considered degrading and even closely related to objectifying a person. Phillips states:

“Stu hates the women he can have, hates the women he can’t have, hates the women he’s attracted to, and hates the women he’s not attracted to. Stu is, in this sense, an embodiment of the impossible standards of patriarchal, misogynistic systems. The only pleasure or joy he actually seems to derive from women is either through bolstering his masculinity via interactions with them or by enacting violence upon them. Most disturbingly, it seems for Stu that these events are often one and the same.”

This is evidenced by the murders of Sidney’s mother, for which Stu had no direct motive. He exhibits terror and aggression towards almost everyone, and that he does it to prove his ability and masculinity to Billy (because of his homosexual tendencies) is also argued by Phillips.

## 5.2. Tragedy of Maureen Prescott

The tragedy of Maureen Prescott is another factor that indicates how much hatred there can be in people who have power, but also the sexual aggression of powerful men towards women who strive for success. Maureen Prescott wanted to become a famous actress, and she was promised great fame. In the movie *Scream 3*, her son Roman Bridger describes her fate saying:

“Here he is. The man who gave away your mother’s innocence! Huh? What he did to her, made her a slut, didn’t it? Huh? She never recovered from that night right here in this room! They f-cked her three ways from Sunday! Ruined her life! Ruined yours too didn't it Sid? Ya hate him Sid? Come on, I know you do. I'm sure you too” (*Scream 3* 01:39:19-10:39:42).

The movie punishes this kind of misogynistic ideology that the woman herself is to blame for the rape because the perpetrator is brutally slaughtered. The problem with Mrs. Prescott can be seen through the attitude of most of the characters towards her. The public treats her as the main culprit, calling her derogatory names for her promiscuity. Roman, knowing full well what happened to her, fails to see her victim profile, and considers himself the only victim of the whole situation. That she is not the only one to blame for her behavior and that the main reason for her sexual promiscuity is the suffering of rape can be proven by the research of Schwartz and Galperin titled *Hyposexuality and hypersexuality secondary to childhood trauma and dissociation*. In their paper they state that: “Traumatized individuals may develop a sexual desire disorder with hypo-, hyper- or asexuality [...] hypersexuality employs frequent sexual initiation as a means of dealing with most negative affective states, including loneliness, fear and sadness” (1-2). When discussing power, Gooden states that:

“Hollywood producer John Milton reveals to Gale and Dewey that, during her stint in show business, Maureen/Rina was gang-raped at a party in his mansion. Milton quickly places the blame on Maureen, saying that nothing happened that she didn’t invite. He claims she refused to play by the ‘rules,’ which are obviously set by men in positions of influence who suggest women must trade sex for career advancement.”

Both Stu Macher and John Milton’s characters end tragically, and the idea of seeing women as weaker individuals who can be exploited, as well as the principle of exploiting power and misogyny, are harshly criticized.

In section 9, Schwartz and Galperin focused on the medical treatment of hypersexuality, they state that the victim of trauma has unmetabolized wrath that affects them both within and outwardly. At the same time, the traumatized people are proactively striving to flee the emotions and desolation of their restricted, damaged state. Their libido arises early and it is tremendously motivating them to seek potential partners. Sexual compulsive behavior is defined by this exceedingly ambiguous state. Their trauma-bonded love maps (described before) encourage individuals to look for out damaging relationships and sexual engagements (51). An example that once again shows the amount of power a man holds over a woman and the struggles women are experiencing to succeed in Hollywood can be seen in the example of Angelina Tyler, the

lead actress who was supposed to play Sid in the upcoming movie. Although the film alludes to the way she got the role, she confidently justifies her talent. However, her final words were: “I did not fuck that pig Milton to get a leading role just to die here with second-rate celebrities like you two” (*Scream 3* 01.21.55). Of course, she suffers a tragic fate.

Although the *Scream* franchise advanced the role of women in terms of heroines and protagonists, the success and ability of women to perform are still questionable. Although some disagree with that, pointing out that Sidney and Gale could serve as an example against that statement, others argue that until now there have been no independent female Ghostfaces in the franchise, such as Billy Loomis and Stu Macher. In the franchise, we have not had a woman who is an independent murderer, but shares that role with a man. The rise of a woman and her success in Hollywood is depicted as a thorny path, and the best example of this is Maureen Prescott. She also serves as an example of how people are quick to judge sexual women without knowing the whole story.

## 6. Sidney's renovation and the third wave of feminism

Many consider, taking into account the typical positions of third-wave feminists and the principles for which they stand, that Sidney is an excellent example and an embodiment of the characteristics of third-wave feminism. While the first wave advocated for women's voting rights and education rights, the second wave stood for equal rights for men and women, the third wave emerged in the early 1990s as a response to the second wave. The issue of gender arose. Individuality, inclusivity, and the destruction of the strict definition and boundaries of what a woman actually is became the main themes of the period.

### 6.1. Sidney as a model of third-wave heroine

In order to explain the correlation between the *Scream* franchise and the third wave of feminism, it is necessary to define the third wave of feminism and its characteristics and beliefs.

In a journal article titled *What Is Third-Wave Feminism? A New Directions Essay*, Snyder points out that third-wavers believe they have the freedom to socialize with males as equals, to claim sexual fulfillment as they choose it (heterosexual or other), and to deliberately experiment with the idea of femininity (179). Girl power is a central point of the third wave. The conflict and difference between mothers and daughters is very emphasized. Furthermore, Karlyn, in the section on the third wave and the popular culture, compares the difference between second-wavers and third-wavers to the difference between mothers and daughters and the tradition of blaming mothers. In terms of popular culture, Karlyn says that third-wavers:

“Reject the label of ‘feminist,’ that stance may have less to do with the meaning of the term itself than with their skepticism about the capacity of language to represent the ‘truth’ of who they are’ and that ‘*Scream* trilogy enables girls to reject codes of femininity familiar to them from the highly conventionalized genre of the teen slasher film in order to rewrite them in more empowering ways” (par. 21).

Snyder also argues that: “Third-wave feminist ideas about identity embrace notions of contradiction, multiplicity, and ambiguity, building on postmodern theory's critique of ideas about the unified self and engaging with the fluid nature of gender...” (187). In other words, the idea of individualization, rebellion, complexity of gender perception, and inclusivity are



becoming more and more prevalent. It was already mentioned above that the characters like Dewey and Randy were given feminized characteristics and the women like Sidney, Gale, and Samantha were given masculine ones.

This fits perfectly with the idea of rejecting conventional boundaries in the understanding of what is feminine and what is masculine. Moreover, this explains the shift in the portrayal of female characters from the movies *Psycho* and *Halloween* until *Scream*. Traditionally, women with pronounced sexual nature were killed and only innocent women used to survive. Sidney rewrote the rules in this case, which is proved by Karlyn's statement that: "Unlike Sidney, however, the Final Girl remains a virgin, allowed to kill the killer because she has not yet discovered the more threatening power of her adult sexuality" (par. 40). However, the author points out at the same time that some believe that the movies are full of examples of female appropriation.

Snyder notices that through the character of Sidney, the trilogy offers a new idea of femininity for third-wavers: an active girl, a woman who is able to take care of herself, push through all physical exertions, who is able to take her sexuality into her own hands, and show anger instead of repressing it. The root of this lies in the understanding of female sexuality within the framework of third-wave feminism. More precisely, the third wave disregards any taboo regarding female sexuality (179). Due to understanding sexuality as something personal and free, refusing to play by the rules, and finally trying to come to terms with her mother's fate, while simultaneously trying to build herself and discover her own identity as a writer, we can say that Sidney is going through a renovation. Her transitions can be traced through the development of the movies. In the beginning, she is crippled with fear and anxiety, through the middle of the franchise she isolates herself mentally and physically, and towards the end, she accepts her life, starts a family, and steps back from all the tragedies related to Woodsboro, while also providing help to those that found themselves in tragic situations. Although male characters are portrayed as weaker, subordinate, and those to be saved, considering the gender fluidity idea of third-wave feminism, the feminized characteristics attached to men, as well as vice versa, may not necessarily have to be seen as something to be eradicated.

## 7. Conclusion

The aim of this final paper was to firstly point out the problems of established and traditional gender roles and the way in which they are questioned. Gender roles in the franchise no longer have rigid binary oppositions between men and women, as women are portrayed as strong individuals who carry the plot, and a large group of men, except for those in power, are subjugated to women.

The second topic that was detailly elaborated was sexuality. Sexuality is addressed within the framework of the study of homosexuality between Billy and Stu Macher, drawing a parallel with the portrayal of Mindy and the progress in the portrayal of homosexual characters after a period of heteronormativity.

The third topic covered was the topic of motherhood. The complex topic was elaborated in detail in relation to Billy, Roman, and Sidney, emphasizing at the same time that mothers have a long-term contribution and play a key role in the development of the child. It is also emphasized that an unhealthy relationship in the family can lead to serious psychological disorders (the Oedipus complex) and traumatic events to post-traumatic stress disorder.

The fourth topic was the problematization of men in high positions, their attitude towards women who are climbing the social ladder, and misogyny. The *Scream* films abound with elements that indicate aggression and hatred towards women. Stu Macher and John Milton, whose relationship and treatment of women are illustrated in the portrayal of Maureen Prescott/Reena Reynolds and Sidney, stand out significantly.

The last part of the elaboration is focused on the renewal and self-actualization of Sidney as a young individual, her way of dealing with the past without running away from it and accepting her sexuality as something that is not dirty and essentially bad, but part of a strong and developed person. Her role in popular culture was explained within the framework of the theory of third-wave feminists.

This area is an extremely fertile ground for many further research and analysis, with an emphasize on studies related to in-depth psychological analysis of the characters and their mental states that influence their actions and views of the world.

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## **9. Feminism, Sexuality and Gender Roles in the *Scream* Movies: Summary and Key Words**

The aim of this paper is to present an analysis of sexuality, gender roles, and feminism in the context of the *Scream* movies. Through numerous examples, it was highlighted how male characters are often portrayed as subordinate to female characters. The topic of sexuality encompasses various categories, including homosexuality and the Oedipus complex, while also challenging the prevailing prejudices about female sexuality as deserving punishment. Furthermore, it was explained how the theme of the mother is not only essential for understanding the actions of characters like Billy, Roman, and Sidney but also crucial in analyzing the power dynamics that white men hold over women in general. Sidney's character not only serves as an exemplary representation of the third-wave feminism, but also carries the core ideas associated with this wave, such as gender issues, inclusivity, and individuality.

Key words: Feminism, sexuality, gender, *Scream*, mothers, Sidney, third-wave feminism

## **10. Feminizam, seksualnost i rodne uloge u filmovima *Vrisak*: Sažetak i ključne riječi**

Cilj ovog rada je prikazati analizu seksualnosti, rodnih uloga i feminizma u kontekstu filmova *Vrisak*. Kroz brojne primjere istaknuto je kako se muški likovi često prikazuju kao podređeni ženskim likovima. Tema seksualnosti obuhvaća različite kategorije, uključujući homoseksualnost i Edipov kompleks, a ujedno dovodi u pitanje prevladavajuće predrasude o ženskoj seksualnosti kao onoj koja zaslužuje kaznu. Nadalje, objašnjeno je kako tema majke nije samo bitna za razumijevanje postupaka likova poput Billyja, Romana i Sidney, već je ključna u analizi dinamike moći koju bijeli muškarci općenito imaju nad ženama. Sidneyin lik ne samo da služi kao primjeren prikaz feminizma trećeg vala, već nosi i temeljne ideje povezane s tim valom, kao što su rodna pitanja, inkluzivnost i individualnost.

Ključne riječi: feminizam, seksualnost, rod, *Vrisak*, majke, Sidney, feminizam trećeg vala