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# CARRIE'S CHOICE: CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM AND SOCIOPOLITICAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD IN FILM ADAPTATIONS OF STEPHEN KING'S CARRIE

Molly Brianna Collins  
*Clemson University*

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*CARRIE'S CHOICE: CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM AND SOCIOPOLITICAL  
CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD IN FILM ADAPTATIONS  
OF STEPHEN KING'S CARRIE*

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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

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by  
Molly Brianna Collins  
May 2015

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Accepted by:  
Dr. Erin Goss, Committee Chair  
Dr. Sean Morey  
Dr. Travers Scott

## ABSTRACT

When Stephen King published his debut novel *Carrie* in a post Roe v. Wade America in 1974, a narrative about a young girl with telekinesis captured the fear of what was to come from women with power. In response to the burgeoning women's movement of the 1970s, King's novel culminates as a heightened expression of the cultural damage a sexually liberated woman with choice could cause. Brian De Palma's 1976 film adaptation of the novel follows suit, extending a fear of women with choice by employing the cinematic male gaze to reclaim the right to objectify women. By emphasizing cosmetic application and an invasive display of private spaces occupied by women, De Palma's film argues that women are to incite male pleasure through material performances of femininity, not to take ownership of their bodies and in turn their identities.

Kimberly Peirce's *Carrie*, a remake released in 2013, subverts those trends by constructing King's characters as emblems of women with choice and displaces the fear of women with choice expressed in De Palma's film by re-characterizing it as fear experienced *by* women rather than *of* women. In doing so, she captures the point of view of women struggling to assume roles of womanhood amidst attacks on their rights. In this paper, I analyze these film adaptations of *Carrie* in the context of Roe v. Wade and cultural, political, and social constructions of choice and the female body to argue for their significance in producing critical points of view on reproductive rights in America. I situate Kimberly Peirce's adaptation as a rebuttal to De Palma's that places women at the forefront of their own experience and thus reflects contemporary constructions of choice.

In turn, I position *Carrie* (2013) as an embodiment of feminist points of view that honor a woman's right and responsibility to choose the role (s) of womanhood she can and will assume.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the feminist scholars, activists, writers, politicians, and organizations that work tirelessly to defend and uphold the rights of women.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

When Stephen King published his debut novel *Carrie* in a post Roe v. Wade America in 1974, a narrative about a young girl with telekinesis captured the fear of what was to come from women with power. Horror scholar Carol J. Clover calls the work “an uneasy masculine shrinking from a future of female equality,” and King agrees, characterizing his prose as “largely about how women find their own channels of power and what men fear about women and women’s sexuality” (Clover 3-4). King’s motive may be to use genre therapy to confront his insecurities, but his method is propagandic; he pits two women in principle roles of their sex—motherhood and menstruation—against each other in a household with no male influence and presents them with tragic death in exchange for attempting to exert control over their fates.

King pairs choice with failure, in this regard, as he presents sexual activity and menstrual women functioning in the public as primary examples of how women with power are a threat to a social order that thrives when women submit to a male directive. In turn, *Carrie* deconstructs individualism in a manner that perpetuates conservative, anti-choice ideals that place the burden of maintaining social, cultural, and political harmony on women and argue that they must do so in submission to men. King’s realm dichotomizes women as either submissive wives and mothers or promiscuous, sexually liberated fiends, prioritizing gender relations in direct opposition to the foundation for the women’s movement, which was, as argued by Dorothy Sue Cobble, Linda Gordon, and Astrid Henry in *Feminism Unfinished*, a young generational drive toward a “holistic



transformation of the society, one that would do away with male dominance in every sphere—in private as well as public—and would challenge all the older gender patterns” (Cobble 70). While King is working within the supernatural horror genre, his narrative grounds itself in social, political, and cultural reality, which gives it more potential for influence when Brian De Palma adapts it into a feature film in 1976.

De Palma’s *Carrie* assumes a more nuanced point of view on sexual liberation by constructing women as objects of male pleasure through emphasis on material—namely cosmetic—ideals of femininity throughout his film. This too, however, culminates as directed fear toward the women’s movement, as De Palma’s obsession with cosmetic application produces a construction of femininity that works in opposition to the ideals of the “No More Miss America Movement,” a 1968 protest during which an assemblage of “New York Radical Women” stormed Atlantic City Boardwalks to protest the oppressive representation of women in mainstream media, specifically the “racist, sexist, and commercial nature” of the Miss America Pageant (Zeisler 49). In this light, the invasive camera angles in this film that capture makeup application along with showering, dressing, and other activity performed in private spaces occupied by women works in retaliation to the rejection of beauty standards helmed by the women’s movement and presents itself as a claim to a male right to objectify women and an expectation for a woman to comply.

De Palma’s film also argues for a woman’s place in the home and that a woman in power is destructive in nature, perpetuating King’s construction of women’s lives without a male directive. Carrie’s telekinetic powers culminate as a symptom of menstruation that

compromises a woman's ability to control her emotions and actions. Additionally, the characterization of Margaret contributes to an indictment of the single mother, as the film places particular emphasis on the absence of her husband and her inability to instill in Carrie the ideal of the submissive woman. And so, both King and De Palma's iterations of the *Carrie* narrative denounce choice, both as a right and responsibility that a woman is capable of assuming and as the idea that a woman would desire choice to begin with. I focus specifically on characterizations of Carrie and Margaret here, as while the presence of other female characters in the narrative, particularly Sue Snell in her decision to ally with Carrie, welcome conversation about choice, Margaret and Carrie critically set the standard for contextualizing *Carrie* in the realm of reproductive rights. Additionally, while reproductive control has produced progress that stems beyond the barriers set forth by conservative ideals, the context originally set forth by King and De Palma stands firm even in a contemporary re-imagining of the narrative as feature film by Kimberly Peirce in 2013, as prolific political efforts to regress from the Roe v. Wade ruling continue to propel women to navigate choice while facing restrictions.

Peirce's *Carrie*, billed as the remake of Brian De Palma's 1976 film, is released roughly three months shy of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Roe v. Wade. According to the Guttmacher Institute, in 2013, "39 states enacted 141 provisions related to reproductive health and rights," and "half of these provisions, 70 in 22 states, sought to restrict access to abortion services" ("Laws"). However, advances were made as well, as "five states adopted measures to expand access to comprehensive education, facilitate access to emergency contraception for women who have been sexually assaulted and enable

patients and partners to obtain STI treatment” (“Laws”). Peirce’s film lends itself to this recent context of reproductive rights given its present-day setting. And while the backdrop for her film, much like De Palma’s, is a profuse attack on choice, the differentiating factor between the two films is located in the characterization of Margaret and Carrie. I argue that whereas De Palma’s film presents both characters in light of how they function and ought to function as tokens of the male experience in order to subvert women with choice, Peirce’s film constructs the characters as emblems of women with choice. Peirce’s film thus displaces the fear of women with choice expressed in De Palma’s film by re-characterizing it as fear experienced *by* women rather than *of* women. By doing so, she captures the point of view of women struggling to assume roles of womanhood amidst attacks on their rights.

Peirce’s *Carrie* is a film that pits two female experiences against a background of anti-choice sentiment. Beginning with constructions of motherhood as a duty rather than a choice, I read Margaret White as a woman who assumes maternal identity outside of religious, patriarchal constructions of motherhood and suggest that Peirce’s iteration of King’s narrative makes extreme yet fathomable conjectures about the future of motherhood as an identity subject to and restricted by reproductive regulation. Additionally, I read Peirce’s representation of Margaret as a self-mutilator alongside theoretical constructions of the practice in order to position self-mutilation as choice that cannot be regulated. By self-mutilating, Margaret can assume a desired role of womanhood, in this case the role of mother, by transcending her material body. I take up these ideas through a series of close readings of the film’s key scenes.

Finally, I position Carrie's telekinesis in Peirce's film as a means of control rather than assuming its previous characterization in De Palma's film as a mere menstrual symptom. Considering *Carrie's* (2013) construction of these supernatural abilities as an element of the body that Carrie is capable of controlling, telekinesis comes to represent choice—a means through which Carrie not only assumes individuality within the restrictions of Margaret's patriarchal household, but also through which she carries out revenge against her conniving classmates by becoming one of them. I draw these conclusions through a close reading of Peirce's installment of the iconic prom massacre. In this regard, *Carrie* (2013) is not a tale in which good triumphs over evil in terms of a submissive role of womanhood trumping an individualistic role of womanhood; rather, it is an instance in which a woman is able to function in two roles of womanhood that exist in relation to rather than in opposition to one another. These conclusions lend themselves to a feminist characterization of the film by positioning it as an artifact that perpetuates the right and responsibility of women to construct their own sense of womanhood.

Contextualizing Peirce's film in relation to De Palma's situates each within the realm of reproductive rights, specifically sociopolitical constructions of the regulation of women's bodies in relation to *Roe v. Wade*. De Palma's film is conceptual—a story about how women should function within patriarchal constructions of gender—and derives only basic narrative structure from King so as to prioritize the objectification of women and reiterate their role in producing male pleasure. Peirce produces a character-driven piece and revives the chronological structure of King's novel by adapting key scenes omitted by De Palma that more closely explore the mother-daughter relationship

between Carrie and Margaret. While De Palma presents a film in which women exist as a means to an end, Peirce's film places women at the forefront of their own experience and thus reflects contemporary constructions of choice. Additionally, I approach both films as cultural artifacts for public consumption rather than signifiers of directorial identity and therefore focus on the *effect* of the content of each when situated within the context of sociopolitical constructions of womanhood. So as to not impose feminist, sexist, or other social, political, and cultural identities associated with gender upon Kimberly Peirce or Brian De Palma—and as an acknowledgement of the complexities of assigning feminist or anti-feminist intent to creative work that is not autobiographical in content—my discussion focuses on each director's particular approach to King's narrative in relation to the culture it enters, rather than in relation to the filmmaker's larger body of work.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CONSTRUCTIONS OF WOMANHOOD IN *CARRIE*

Kimberly Peirce's *Carrie*, which premiered in theatres on October 13, 2013, closely mirrors the narrative structure of King's novel, and this complicates characterizing her film as a remake of De Palma's. Peirce revives King's original characters and settings. Whereas De Palma's film takes place at Bates High in the fictional town of Bates, Peirce's film returns to Ewen High School in Chamberlain, Maine. Additionally, in Peirce's film, Carrie's gym teacher is named Miss Desjardin, the original title for the character in the novel and one that De Palma changed to Miss Collins. Peirce's return to the novel makes for a characterization of her approach as rebuttal to De Palma's film rather than revision, as to have re-made De Palma's film without re-grounding the production in King's narrative would suggest that De Palma got it wrong in his construction of women as objects for male pleasure. Instead, Peirce takes a hypothetical approach by accepting the idea that De Palma's film is a culmination of mainstream attitudes, both critically and creatively, toward women at the time of its production in 1976 but suggesting that those attitudes are unacceptable for consumption in a contemporary context. Peirce finds resonance in the effect of reading King's story in 2013 and what it renders when presented in a visual medium. This approach, then, is similar to De Palma's, yet to situate Peirce's film as a remake of its predecessor deems the primary critical lens of her work to be a refutation of the idea of viewing women as objects of male pleasure, which is not the most pressing critical perspective she takes up.

While *Carrie* (2013) prioritizes the experience of female characters, those characters in *Carrie* (1976) are secondary to the camera. De Palma's film experiments in conceptualizing the female body as both erotic and grotesque, and invasive camera techniques pioneer a voyeuristic male gaze that offers a sneak peek into intimate female spaces. Tony Magistrale, in a chapter of his book *Hollywood's Stephen King*, analyzes *Carrie's* (1976) approach to the female body, arguing that film maintains a dichotomy of the body as a source of "potential" and a source of horror (Magistrale 25). Additionally, he identifies camera movements and symbolism that frame Carrie's body as an "object of disgust" due to limitations of "external movement," enclosure in tight, dimly lit spaces, and Carrie's first period as the signal of a transition from the body as erotic to the body as repulsive in the opening shower scene (Magistrale 25). This is where De Palma's film begins. His opening sequence begins in gym class and proceeds by following the girls into the shower. Steamy, slow motion shots feature naked girls laughing as they dress and apply cosmetics, and when the camera pans to a freckled, bare-faced Carrie sensually washing herself in the shower, the scene turns horrific when blood begins to trickle down her leg. Here, the film materializes femininity, positing that female performances are to be fantasized while female bodily functions are to be feared. Therefore, De Palma's characters function on two accounts—they are projections of that fear—physical renderings of body functions that are met with humiliation, and they are constructions of beauty that is projected onto the surface of the female body rather than beauty that originates from the body.

Materialized femininity in *Carrie* (1976) lends itself to a critical construction of control as cosmetic. In *Horror Films of the 1970s*, John Kenneth Muir argues that the film assigns a monetary value to femininity and claims that Carrie's period is a "physical price" she pays for becoming a woman, a parallel to the manner in which she purchases makeup and fabric for a dress in order to transform her appearance (Muir 387). In "Horror, Femininity, and Carrie's Monstrous Puberty," Shelley Stamp Lindsey argues that the excessive application of makeup throughout the film signals that femininity is a characteristic to be applied rather than one to be embodied (Lindsey 37-38). Further, she argues that both De Palma's film and King's novel perpetuate this idea when Carrie abandons fulfillment of her sexual identity for something she can control by using her telekinesis to "destroy objects outside of the body" (Lindsey 37-38). These observations hold that the point of view argued by De Palma's film is that women already have control in relation to their appearance, which contributes to the sentiment that a desire for control is unwarranted.

This sentiment carries over into how *Carrie* (1976) situates telekinesis. Rather than characterize it as a struggle for control, De Palma constructs it as a menstrual symptom that produces a series of emotional outbursts. In turn, he purposes this construction for paying homage to classic cinematic horror tropes, thereby presenting Carrie's transition into womanhood as negligible.

The sound effects and camera tricks De Palma employs to capture Carrie's rage mirror those of Hitchcock in the 1960 film *Psycho*. In the shower scene, when Miss Collins confronts a bleeding, maniacal Carrie, Carrie experiences her first telekinetic



reaction. This pattern continues throughout the film. The same music cue used in Hitchcock's film to signal Norman's attack of Marion in the shower makes an appearance here, this time to signal the arrival of Carrie's powers via the bursting of the shower light bulb. This music cue makes an appearance again when Carrie, upset after a heated confrontation with Margaret, shatters a mirror in her bedroom. It plays while Carrie slams windows and doors to corner her mother during her plea for permission to go to the prom, and again when she refuses to stay home from the prom by knocking Margaret onto her bed. And when Carrie is doused with blood after being named prom queen, the violins sound again as she begins to orchestrate a series of fatal attacks on her classmates.

De Palma also uses split screen camera shots during the prom scene in a way that, while not identical to the victim POV shots in Hitchcock's film, pays tribute to such a technique. During the scene, the camera captures the prom goers' reaction to the blood dump and Carrie's reaction to the laughter of the prom goers simultaneously. And as the scene progresses, the simultaneity shifts to featuring Carrie's gaze alongside the gory deaths of her classmates and teachers, and at times the deaths of her classmates and teachers with Chris Hargensen and Billy Nolan's reactions to the mania. Additionally, De Palma directs telekinesis with limitations. Carrie projects her powers merely through eye sight—an "exquisite exchange of glances" as termed by Brody—in a manner that suggests that she is in limited control of her rage (Brody, n.p.). However, Peirce presents telekinesis as a power that can be controlled. Her film establishes that Carrie is in control of her powers in the prom scene by having her orchestrate each attack with her hands.

This change is significant, as it posits that telekinetic abilities in the narrative can assume meaning beyond an outward projection of uncontrollable female sexuality.

Further, this change is one of the many ways in which Peirce creates a more multi-dimensional *Carrie*. Rather than take up De Palma's cinematic mapping of the female body, her film explores the psycho and socio-sexual parameters of gendered fear, paying particular attention to the maternal. To this end, Peirce relays a chronological narrative—much more in the style of King's novel—that begins with Carrie's birth. Epistolary elements notwithstanding, Peirce's film begins where the novel begins. *Carrie* (2013) opens by panning up the stairs of the White household. A blood-stained bible and trail of bloody foot and handprints lead to Margaret White's bedroom, where she screams and writhes in pain, unaware that she is experiencing labor. Margaret's dialogue, like that of the character in King's novel, mistakes the pregnancy for “cancer of the womb,” as she cries, “Help me lord, I'm dying. What is this? Cancer?” She proceeds to pray for guidance in her “hour of death” (*Carrie*). When Margaret delivers the baby, she determines that she is being tested by God and must kill the baby as a confirmation of her faith. Margaret quickly reaches for a pair of scissors and lowers them toward the baby's face in a stabbing motion, but she halts her action when she makes eye contact with the baby. The scene ends with Margaret nurturing the crying child, and the next scene picks up with 16 year-old Carrie being bullied in gym class, where De Palma's film begins. By beginning with the crude establishment of a mother-daughter relationship rather than an erotic gaze into material femininity, Peirce's film sets a different tone for how the female

body will function in the narrative, as she finds horror in how women treat their bodies based on its construction in social, cultural, and political contexts.

While Peirce's film honors *Carrie's* iconic place in the horror genre by employing captivating special effects that heighten Carrie's use of telekinetic powers, it is very much character-driven as opposed to functioning in service to the camera. Through constructing the cultural context of the movie to reflect the role of technology in the construction of the female body, Peirce visualizes for a desensitized generation a fear that stems beyond period panic turned to unmanageable teen sexual angst by subjecting Carrie to a loss of ownership of her body via a social media attack. The orchestration of instances of both crime and punishment in Peirce's film culminate through circulation of a cell phone video of a bleeding Carrie writhing and crying in the locker room shower stall while chuckling classmates shower her with tampons and maxi pads. Chris Hargensen films the video on her cell phone. After the incident, in a scene during which Margaret escorts Carrie out of the school, Chris is featured sharing the video with her friends and boyfriend. "Look at this video," she says, while narrating the incident for her boyfriend. The audio of the girls yelling "plug it up!" sounds while he laughs (*Carrie*). In a later scene, Chris uploads the video. Tina, Chris's friend and another participant in shaming Carrie, begins to feel remorse, saying, "Do you think we're going to get detention because of that" (*Carrie*)? Chris insists that she and the rest of the girls were not in the wrong, and then proceeds to suggest that they post the video. Tina is not initially supportive of the action, because she fears that she is visible in the video. Chris assures her that she will not be seen, and proceeds to upload the video to YouTube. And while

the video does capture the attention of the school's gym teacher and principle, no punishment for the act is delivered (*Carrie*).

The role of technology in Carrie's humiliation sets a different precedent for the prom massacre, as the video, not Carrie's classmates' verbal assaults, remains the deed that goes unpunished. While Chris is suspended and banned from attending prom as a result of refusing to participate in running exercises as punishment for bullying Carrie, she is not punished for publishing the video of Carrie online. In a scene in which Chris's father accompanies her to the principal's office to discuss the incident, Miss Desjardin calls attention to the video when both Chris and her father both insist that she didn't participate in the locker room incident. Chris's father says, "I'm not going to sit here and listen to half-truths. I know my daughter—she said she didn't do it. I want her prom privileges restored" (*Carrie*). And in response to his disbelief and insistence that the principal has no proof of Chris's offense, Miss Desjardin mentions the video. She says, "Well I believe that there is a video of the incident, and I think your daughter's the one who took it" (*Carrie*). Miss Desjardin then proceeds to suggest the adverse effects that posting the video could have on Chris's future. She says, "I think a video like that would be pretty damning to anyone in it and to the person who made it...it seems like a video like that would probably affect college admissions, possibly a lawsuit, tons of bad publicity...I wonder what *The Today Show* would do with a video like that" (*Carrie*). However, the conversation ends when Chris refuses to hand over her phone, and while the subsequent scene reveals that she will not be allowed to attend prom, it is understood

that she is still subject to the initial punishment for bullying Carrie in the locker room and is not facing any penalties for the video (*Carrie*).

Here, had Peirce's Chris been subjected to additional punishment for publishing the video, King's narrative would not be compromised, as Chris could very well continue to sneak into the prom and deliver the iconic blood dump under additional punishment. As it is, however, the lack of enforcement by school officials despite easily accessible and traceable video evidence warrants critical commentary. Peirce's incorporation of video recording as a tool for objectification of the female body reflects the sentiment fueling a contemporary online culture of revenge porn. More specifically, she demonstrates that even in moments where women body shame other women as retaliation as opposed to men shaming women, the male gaze is re-appropriated. And by exploring how young women participate in the perpetuation of attacks on choice, Peirce complicates the idea of gendered technology by presenting the concept outside of heterosexual normativity. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey characterizes the male gaze as dichotomous and attuned to traditional gender roles. She writes, "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on the female form...women are simultaneously looked at and displayed with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact"(Mulvey 10). Yet in Peirce's film, that dichotomy is dissolved, as through the use of a cell phone to capture video of Carrie's period panic for the purpose of bullying online and in person, female characters

function in both active and passive roles to create the act of women objectifying other women.

However, while Peirce's film complicates misogyny by exploring the role of women in the practice, the gaze remains male, as the result is still objectification of the female body. And in turn, the film reflects contemporary feminist conversations that pose that while technology is progressive in function, it is becoming pivotal in the perpetuation of patriarchy. These conversations draw on recent celebrity nude photo hacks online to suggest that technology has become just another way to put women in their place, particularly to immaterialize them. Feminists Jessica Valenti and Roxane Gay offer this criticism in response to the 2014 nude photo hack of actress Jennifer Lawrence. In "The Jennifer Lawrence Nude Photo Hack Response is the End of the 'Shamed Starlet'," Valenti writes of online attacks that "The message to other young women is clear: your bodies are ours, and, if you resist or get angry at what we do, we'll remind you of your place" (Valenti, n.p.). Gay follows up on this characterization, citing a cultural hatred of women that thrives on vulnerability. In "The Great 2014 Celebrity Nude Photos Leak is Only the Beginning," Gay writes, "We are a culture that thrives on the hatred of women, of anyone who is the other in some way, of anyone who desires to threaten the status quo... what these people are doing is reminding women that, no matter who they are, they are still women. They are forever vulnerable" (Gay, n.p.). As such, while Miss Desjardin delivers a quaint moral lesson to invite Chris to fear for her future, what haunts the events in this scene is a lack of concern for treating the incident as a violation of Carrie's body.

While Carrie's superiors seek to deliver justice as a consolation for her embarrassment, there is no haste to protect her from current and further exposure, and therefore, Carrie's body not only remains public property, but she is violated again when the video re-surfaces at the prom to accompany the blood spill. In this scene, when Chris dumps the bucket of blood on Carrie, a classmate presses play on a laptop and projects the video onto two screens, one on each side of the stage. Carrie's response is significant here, as Peirce's direction produces the effect that Carrie is mutilating and murdering the bodies of her fellow classmates in direct response to the public display of her naked, bleeding body, rather than the humiliation induced by the blood drop. Because Carrie has learned to control her telekinesis, as demonstrated in previous scenes in the film in which she practices levitating and exuding force over objects, her reaction to the prom stunt is segmented rather than initiated in its entirety. When the bucket drops, covering both Carrie and Tommy Ross in pig's blood, the auditorium erupts in laughter. Miss Desjardin sees Carrie's distress and offers to comfort her, a move that causes Carrie to lash out by flexing her hand and delivering a force that sends Miss Desjardin flying across the room. It is seeing Tommy unconscious that breaks Carrie's focus, as she frantically cries over his body. However, when she registers the video, hearing it and then making eye contact with the screen, she returns to a state of rage and proceeds to enact terror (*Carrie*).

Both films associate the body with a lack of control, yet the difference lies in the execution of that loss as a means for taking a stance on women's liberation. De Palma's film immaterializes the female body by constructing it as a vessel for horror that a woman is unfit to control, perpetuating the fear that a liberated body threatens male

dominance. And as a result, his construction of the female body as an object of pleasure through invasive camera techniques and an infatuation with material female beauty functions as a patriarchal effort to reclaim the female body from women's liberation. Peirce's film counters this construction, reflecting contemporary female experiences of being violated. She documents the immaterialized female body, drawing horror from a heightened, violent rendering of an existential crisis that ensues when a woman is deprived of her materiality.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *CARRIE* IN THE CONTEXT OF ROE V. WADE

In *Carrie* (2013), both Carrie and Margaret embody characterizations of the immaterial woman. Carrie is deemed to be sexual and is condemned by outdated, manipulative, religious, patriarchal constructions of sexuality. Margaret is the conservative housewife, responsible for maintaining a repressed household and instilling conservative values in her daughter. While this character construction is the same in De Palma's film, the difference is De Palma's film's effort to offer an elaborate conjecture as to how women's liberation, particularly as it pertains to the body, aims to destroy the traditional household and family by driving the husband away and killing the children. However, Peirce's film revises this notion so as to reflect contemporary approaches to women's liberation, notably the immense amount of legislation being imposed to restrict a woman's ability to make decisions about her own body. In doing so, *Carrie* (2013) takes on an additional immaterial woman: the sexually liberated mother. Margaret is re-characterized as a contradictory maternal figure—one struggling with mothering a child that she conceived through a pleasurable sexual experience—and thereby confronts social, cultural, and political constructions of reproduction and motherhood that construct women's bodies as immaterial through legislation that is determined on the basis of moral perceptions of the body rather than aligned with their physical realities.

Given that the female characters in both films are constructed in the context of reproduction, motherhood, and sexual liberation, each film respectively can be positioned as a critical response to Roe v. Wade. De Palma's film relays anti-choice sentiment that

surrounded the Roe v Wade ruling that granted women reproductive control, as his construction of the mother-daughter relationship between Margaret and Carrie draws horror from women functioning as individuals outside of the traditional family structure. In *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*, James Davidson Hunter grounds anti-choice sentiment in a fear that a woman's failure to function submissively in her God-given role of mother not only undermines divine order but also poses a threat to the social order. Relying on both his own critical context as well as secondary Evangelical accounts, Hunter identifies this point of view as one held by those who strive to uphold the ideal of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois family. He writes, "Conservative Catholics, Mormons, and Evangelical Protestants generally view the survival of the bourgeois family as essential, not just because it was believed to be established in nature and ordained by God, but because it is believed to foster social harmony" (Hunter 181). Hunter goes on to cite an Evangelical who argues that deviant women undermine God's will when they choose to function outside of this family structure. He writes, "Much of the conflict in the modern family is caused either by misunderstanding of or by the refusal to accept the role each family member was designed by God to fulfill. For this reason, it is essential to family harmony that the wife submit to her husband's leadership" (Hunter 181). These principles can be located in De Palma's characterization of Margaret, as Margaret not only upholds these conservative ideals through a fear-based approach to mothering, but she also fails to adequately nurture a child without the presence of a male to submit to. In turn, *Carrie* (1976) depicts a household that crumbles as the result of functioning outside the traditional family structure, evident in the tragic

deaths of Carrie and Margaret and the literal destruction of the White household at the closing of the film.

*Carrie* (1976) also delves into the sacrifice of the female body for the sake of upholding the traditional family structure by perpetuating the idea that choice interferes with divine authority. This idea culminates in a single scene in which Carrie reveals her decision to attend the prom. The scene begins with Margaret arguing that God has governance over the body. While she and Carrie are eating dinner, Carrie refuses to eat her dessert, saying that doing so gives her acne. Margaret responds by saying “Pimples are the Lord’s way of chastising you” (*Carrie*). In saying so, she implies that assuming control over the body undermines the will of God. This short conversation sets the standard for the principles that a mother functioning within the traditional family structure is to instill in her daughter. And later in the scene, when Carrie tells Margaret that she has been invited to prom, Margaret is shocked that Carrie wants to fraternize with her classmates after “all she’s been taught,” and this indicates that Margaret has failed to raise her daughter appropriately. In turn, the scene relays the inadequacy of a single mother to uphold traditional family values.

When Carrie states that she is not willing to accept the construction of a woman’s existence outside of the home as a sin, stating that “Everyone isn’t bad, Momma! Everything isn’t a sin!” and “I want to be normal. I want to try and be a whole person before it’s too late,” she rejects her God-given role of wife and mother and reveals a desire for individuality (*Carrie*). A panicked Margaret then attempts to reform her daughter. First, she claims that women who venture outside of the home are promiscuous.

When Carrie claims that a “nice boy” will be taking her to prom, Margaret responds, saying “After the blood come the boys, like sniffing dogs...trying to find out where that smell comes from” (*Carrie*). Margaret’s point of view is that as soon as a woman has sex once, she’s obligated to every other boy that comes along. Additionally, she claims that promiscuous women are those the devil works through and that the devil is responsible for driving her husband away.

When Margaret insists that Carrie is unaware that her powers are a sign of the devil working through her, she cites Carrie’s father leaving as an example, saying, “He entered your father and carried him off” (*Carrie*). Carrie responds, saying, “He ran away, Momma,” yet Margaret is quick to reply, saying, “The devil tempted him.” Carrie is persistent, stating, “He ran away with a woman, Momma. Everybody knows that” (*Carrie*). Here, Margaret continues to blame women for a man fleeing from the household, as she does not object to her husband’s behavior, but rather greets Carrie’s mention of her husband’s mistress with silence and segues into demanding that Carrie renounce her powers. And when Carrie refuses, Margaret is left maniacal and hysterical and spends the rest of the film failing to reform her daughter until she dies at the hands of that daughter—the individual, promiscuous woman. As such, De Palma’s film not only holds that a woman refusing her role within the traditional family structure incites horror, but a woman mothering outside of the traditional family structure proves horrific. *Carrie* (2013) piggybacks off of this political context, as the film exists against a political backdrop of restricted reproductive rights and incites a critical approach to the notion of assuming and imposing maternal identity among such regulations.

In *Carrie* (2013), Kimberly Peirce scrutinizes traditional constructions of the mother in the horror genre by re-approaching and re-characterizing the mother-daughter relationship between Margaret and Carrie. Rather than positing Carrie as a mere product of a monstrous womb or *effect* of religious, patriarchal mothering, she constructs her as an extension of Margaret—a vessel through which Margaret confronts her identity as a mother. Existing critical assessments of Margaret are concerned mostly with De Palma’s film, though a few devote brief attention to King’s novel. They are simplistic and characterized in the context of traditional constructions of the mother in horror cinema and fairytale literature. In King’s novel, Margaret is the “evil stepmother” archetype perpetuated by classic fairytales, notably when she locks Carrie inside of a closet on multiple accounts as punishment. (Reino 15). In De Palma’s film, Margaret is the “monstrous mother,” a “demander of sexual repression,” the patriarchal force that terrorizes the family in order to cleanse the home of sexual desire (Lindsey 33). She is the “patriarchal stereotype of the sexually unfulfilled woman...a religious bigot who believes that female sexuality is inherently evil and responsible for man’s fall from grace” (Creed 78-79). And she is a “psychotic, dominating mother” responsible for “the creation of a monstrous child” (Creed 79). It is this monstrous mother-daughter relationship that draws Barbara Creed to confront the sexual connection between mothers and daughters in horror.

In *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Creed characterizes this experience as an exchange of “sexual desires,” exemplified through her analysis of *The Exorcist*. She writes that there, “Regan’s transformation from angel into

devil is clearly a sexual one; it suggests that the family home, bastion of all the right virtues and laudable moral values, is built on a foundation of repressed sexual desires including those which flow between mother and daughter” (Creed 35).

The parallel between the mother-daughter narratives in *The Exorcist* and in *Carrie* is evident—they each thrive on anxieties of sexual awakening. Regan’s possession disrupts the sexually repressed home through explicit acts and language. Carrie disrupts the White household by not only menstruating, but also by characterizing her menstruation as normalcy rather than a venture into sin. Regan’s foul language and gestures include masturbating with a crucifix, shoving her mother’s face into her bloody vagina and yelling “Lick Me!” and saying “Fuck me!” repeatedly to both her mother and doctor (Creed 35). Carrie exposes her body to other girls and vice versa by showering in an open locker room and justifies the act. Some scholarly literature suggests that *The Exorcist* is a heightened expression of fear of women’s liberation and sexual revolution that transpired in the 1970s. For example, Adrian Allan, in “What the Ever Popular *Exorcist* Tells us About Sex and Women,” argues that “the implicit fear of women and their sexuality in this film can perhaps be understood as the subliminal backlash from some of the profound cultural changes occurring throughout the decade of the 70s,” and cites women’s liberation, sexual revolution, and “paranoia of a Western male-dominated society resisting changes that increasingly include the voices of those previously unheard,” including women, as sources of anxiety (Allan 3). This fear can be located in King’s narrative and De Palma’s adaptation, as both function as artifacts that seek to reinforce antiquated ideals of repressed sexuality and femininity by constructing the

female body as grotesque and producing elaborate displays of cultural damage caused by women with power. Further, King and De Palma position female sexuality as uncontrollable through phallic symbolism that permeates interactions between Margaret and Carrie.

Creed constructs sexual desire in relation to a mother-daughter bond, suggesting that sexual desire “flows” between mother and daughter through phallic, penetrative acts, and cites that both films execute an act—or attempted act—of penetration. In De Palma’s *Carrie*, when Margaret stabs Carrie, the action mirrors “sexual assault,” and Carrie’s “knife attack” that kills Margaret represents “phallic penetration,” as Margaret “utters orgasmic moans” as she dies (Creed 82). However, Peirce’s film welcomes a different characterization of this altercation. While *Carrie* (2013) does feature these two knife attacks, Margaret’s death does not produce the effect of an orgasmic release.

Additionally, Margaret accepts fault for the exchange, as while she approaches Carrie with the knife after the initial stabbing, she says, “This isn’t your fault. It’s mine” (*Carrie*). Therefore, I read this scene not as exemplary of a shared sexual desire between mother and daughter, but rather exemplary of a single sexual desire that belongs to Margaret, and another in which Margaret confronts this desire by projecting sexual deviance onto her daughter.

In Peirce’s scene, Margaret uses Carrie’s prom humiliation to confront her first sexual experience. The scene begins when Carrie returns from the prom, unable to locate Margaret within the house. When Carrie does locate her, Margaret is dressed in a white gown and wielding a butcher knife behind her back. Carrie cries to Margaret for comfort,

exclaiming, “You were right! They laughed at me!” Margaret responds, saying, “I knew they’d hurt my little girl” (*Carrie*). She pauses briefly after delivering this line and then proceeds to turn the conversation toward her sexual deviance. Margaret says, “I should have killed myself when he put it in me. We slept in the same bed—lived together sinlessly. Then one night, I saw him look at me in that way. And we got down on our knees to pray for strength. And that’s when he took me” (*Carrie*).

Carrie tries to stop Margaret’s confession, crying “No mama! I don’t want to hear it!” Yet Margaret persists, and admits that she enjoyed this sexual experience. She says, “And I liked it” (*Carrie*). Margaret then goes on to express guilt over keeping a baby that was the result of “having sex and liking it.” She says to Carrie, “I should have given you to God when you were born, but I was weak” (*Carrie*). Carrie and Margaret then begin to recite the Lord’s Prayer together, and mid-prayer, Margaret stabs Carrie in the back, sending her rolling down the stairs. As Margaret continues to approach Carrie, she says, “This isn’t your fault, Carrie. It’s mine. You know the devil never dies. He keeps coming back. You’ve got to keep killin’ him” (*Carrie*). Carrie and Margaret continue to struggle as Margaret continues to stab her. When Margaret’s knife approaches Carrie’s face, Carrie’s uses her telekinetic powers to repel the knife while gathering several others along with scissors and additional sharp objects and pinning Margaret to the wall and killing her (*Carrie*).

Here, Margaret professes that she ought not to have become a mother to begin with, and seeks not only to kill the product of her sexual experience, but also her sexually liberated self, a woman who “fell from grace” and liked it. Carrie is the extension of the



sexually liberated Margaret, and the sexually liberated Margaret is “the devil,” the force that keeps coming back, and Margaret must kill her. Margaret is a sexually liberated mother, defiant of patriarchal constructions of motherhood, and it is this accidental defiance with which she takes issue. As such, Margaret should not be mothering because she experienced pleasure in conception and performed as a mother despite the fact that she should have “given Carrie to God.” She chose to mother based on desire rather than principle. Margaret says to Carrie, “I loved you so much. And I said, ‘God, let me keep my little girl’” (*Carrie*). So the effect of Peirce’s film, then, in 2013, is a re-contextualization and re-conceptualization of the monstrous mother. Margaret is not merely the extremist that sexually represses her child and home, nor is she just setting out to save her child from the sin of the free world by murdering her. Rather, her monstrosity stems from conflict over motherhood as a choice.

In turn, the narrative provokes inquiries into mothering as a choice versus mothering as a patriarchal, religious duty, as well as the woman’s role in her reproductive choices. In the context of Peirce’s film, reproduction is punishment for finding pleasure in sex, and motherhood is a privilege only granted to women who participate in sex as a ceremonial acceptance of a child from God. Therefore, this religious, patriarchal construction poses sex, reproduction, and motherhood as necessarily united, but when a woman approaches sex for pleasure and as a result conceives a child, that unity is itemized; a woman is to be punished by experiencing childbirth but relinquishing her role as mother by returning the child to God. As such, the itemization of these actions

suggests that giving birth to a child does not mean that a woman is the designated mother to that child.

Elissa Marder characterizes this itemization of sex, reproduction, and motherhood as indicative of the abnormality of “maternal function” in her book *Mothering in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Marder explores the concept of birth and “maternal function” independently “of the role of the mother as a real person in the life of a child,” suggesting that “As the originary matrix for all other reproductive acts, the maternal body tends to become associated and confused with other forms of cultural labor that are defined (at least in part) by their reproductive capabilities” (Marder 3). Marder’s distinction between motherhood and reproductive function here relays the sentiment of the patriarchal, religious approach to childbirth. This sentiment takes the liberty of concluding that if a woman can conceive a child in vain by participating in sex as a pleasurable experience, then she is not the mother of that child, but rather a vessel through which God may deliver a child to someone else. And therefore, if a woman conceives a child through a pleasurable sexual experience, then she has no governance over that child. I argue that this conceptualization of the connection—or disconnect—between maternal identity and reproductive function is what contributes to a reading of Margaret’s actions as mothering under false pretenses and defines the central conflict of her character throughout Peirce’s film.

These accounts of diminishing reproductive choice in relation to Margaret’s struggle with maternal identity contribute to extreme conjectures about the future of motherhood as a choice. If one can venture that *Carrie* (2013) constructs motherhood as

an exclusionary practice being regulated and orchestrated by a non-visible force—feasible as a representation of politicians regulating reproductive control behind closed doors—in a context in which women have choice, then Peirce’s film also lends itself to a visualization of a world in which maternity and choice are mutually exclusive and where a reversion back to the traditional family structure undermines *Roe v. Wade*. As such, if in viewing Peirce’s film we are to imagine a context in which a woman cannot choose motherhood for herself, then we are also to image one in which women no longer maintain a choice in how they choose to assume womanhood. In turn, I argue that Peirce responds to her own conjecture by locating choice within self-mutilation, a practice that Margaret utilizes in *Carrie* (2013) but not in any of the previous iterations of the narrative.

In two scenes in the film, Margaret gashes her arms with her fingernails and carves into her thigh with a seam ripper. In close reading these two scenes alongside theoretical constructions of self-mutilation as a means for role assumption through disembodiment, Margaret can be read as a woman with choice. Given that Margaret lacks choice in relation to her own womb, turning to body modification allows her to reconsider maternity as an external form of identity capable of being mapped onto the skin.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### MOTHERING BY CHOICE

In “*Mutilating the Body: Identity in Blood and Ink*,” Kim Hewitt frames the practice of self-mutilation as an act of transformation throughout which an individual both “reaffirms and transcends” their “physical existence and aliveness” (Hewitt 31). In turn, Hewitt’s characterization of this experience as consensually sadomasochistic lends itself to identifying self-mutilation in Peirce’s film as a means through which Margaret can mother by choice. In Hewitt’s text, “sadomasochistic” is defined to be indicative of “activities that revolve around physically expressing a role-play status of disparity,” and while Hewitt concerns this section of her book mostly with submissive acts, sexual or not, that occur between two consenting individuals, she goes further to suggest that self-mutilation is a ritual through which an individual gains autonomy by assuming multiple roles in a given type of partnership (Hewitt 31).

Hewitt argues that when one self-mutilates, they “parent him or herself,” as they must “strive to fulfill both roles...in developmental terms, the individual is both parent and child, authority and rebel, in the effort to become whole, mature, and autonomous” (Hewitt 3). Additionally, she writes that pain can function as a means through which one “loses awareness of his or her normal every day self,” and “pain may be experienced as a loss of boundaries between self and environment that evokes a feeling of union with something beyond mortal earthly existence” (Hewitt 31). These two facets of Hewitt’s characterization of self-mutilation lead to a reading of a scene in *Carrie* (2013) in which Margaret engages in an abusive confrontation with her menstruating daughter as one that

employs self-mutilation as a tool that Margaret chooses to alternatively mother Carrie. Through self-mutilating in this scene, Margaret not only assumes the role of both mother and child in the relationship, but also by achieving an existence beyond her physical body by assuming a maternal role that functions independently of her reproductive body.

Through assuming this disembodied maternal role, Margaret achieves “disembodied subjectivity,” a concept characterized by Victoria Pitts. In “Feminism, Technology, and Body Projects,” Pitts introduces, via Anne Balsamo, the ideal of disembodied subjectivity, a concept of total body transcendence that contextualizes body modification in the age of technology. She writes that, “technology is often represented as a resource to free us from what are seen as the natural constraints of the body, transforming the body into what Anne Balsamo terms “a purely discursive entity” (Pitts 232). Thus, when the body is able to exceed its “biological and physical inevitabilities,” it also garners the potential to liberate the sense of self from “embodied categories of identity,” likened to race, gender, sex, and other cultural identifiers (Pitts 232). As such, to transcend the body, “at its most extreme, is to reduce it to its surface” and have it “disappear altogether, such that we are left with self-created identities that are ‘floating sign-systems’ with no fixed meaning” (Pitts 233).

By self-mutilating, Margaret is able to assume maternal identity by mothering herself. In a scene in which Margaret positions Carrie as sexually deviant after learning that she has started menstruating, Margaret engages in role reversal, projecting her own sexual deviance onto her daughter through a manipulation of scripture so to characterize menstruation as a God-given punishment for intercourse. She pressures Carrie to repeat a

verse that states that “the first sin was the sin of intercourse,” and that Carrie’s period is a “curse of blood” she has been dealt as a result of engaging in intercourse. When Carrie refuses to repeat the scripture, arguing that the bible doesn’t contain the scripture, Margaret beats Carrie and delivers further punishment for denying her sin by locking her in a closet. Margaret self-mutilates here, responding to Carrie’s cries for being freed by carving into her arm (*Carrie*). The presence of self-mutilation in this scene, when characterized as a tool for embodying multiple roles in a dichotomized relationship as well as achieving identity through transcendence of the material body in conjunction with Margaret’s persistence to frame her daughter for a sin that she did not commit, allows for a characterization of this interaction between Margaret and Carrie as a moment throughout which Margaret mothers herself in an attempt to repent for engaging in sex before marriage and producing a child through pleasure, an act which Margaret details during a conversation with Carrie in the last scene of the film. Projecting her own identity onto her daughter also affords Margaret the opportunity to mother Carrie, as by self-mutilating, she is able to construct this teaching moment with her child as a performance of motherhood as a ‘floating sign-system’ of identity that does not exist in relation to her maternal body.

Peirce’s film presents a second scene in which self-mutilation functions as a means through which Margaret can mother by choice. In this scene, Mrs. Snell, the mother of Carrie’s classmate Sue, enters the Laundromat where Margaret works as a seamstress to pick up Sue’s prom dress. Mrs. Snell compliments Margaret on her stitching work on the dress, stating that, “So few people can sew like this anymore. I

could never do anything like this myself” (*Carrie*). Margaret self-mutilates in response to this compliment by removing a seam ripper from her own pocket and carving into her thigh. Given that Margaret is also constructed throughout the film as a homemaker that provides for herself and her child through making clothing, her interaction with Mrs. Snell can be characterized as another instance of role reversal. When Mrs. Snell relays that Margaret, a mother, can nurture Sue in a way that she cannot, Margaret self-mutilates so as to re-position herself as a maternal figure to Sue. Thus, Margaret again assumes maternal identity outside of her reproductive body, and self-mutilation functions as the choice to do so.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Margaret's role in Peirce's film is prominent as an exploration of social, cultural, and political constructions of motherhood within the contemporary context of *Roe v. Wade*, yet Carrie is still the film's title character and warrants attention in the same context. Though Carrie functions in this film as an extension of Margaret, a vessel onto which she projects her maternal role and through which she transcends her maternal body, she also functions as a decision-making individual. In the scene in which Carrie leaves for the prom, Carrie rejects her prescribed role in the home, silencing and locking Margaret away in the closet and thereby restructuring the home to function as a matriarchy. She achieves the social power she desires by using her powers to orchestrate the torturous deaths of her bullying classmates at the prom, yet she returns to the home with plans to re-assume her submissive role before reverting back to individuality in defense against Margaret's attempt to murder her. In turn, Carrie is a woman with choice who functions as and in relation to, rather than submissive to, her role in the home, a characterization achieved by Peirce's transformation of Carrie's powers from a menstrual symptom into a device for control.

Peirce positions telekinesis as control unrestricted. Whereas *Carrie* (1976) relies on the supernatural to ground Carrie's experience in an existing reality of discriminatory characterizations of women with power, in Peirce's film Carrie functions as a signifier of atypical constructions of womanhood, namely those that exist outside of sociocultural constructions of gender. More specifically, in De Palma's film, telekinesis is a



supernatural construction of menstrual symptoms that condemns a woman's assumption of a right to control by contradicting verbal pronunciation of power with an untamable body. In *Carrie* (1976), Carrie claims in the film that she is capable of controlling her powers, saying to Margaret, "If I concentrate hard enough I can move things," and grounds her ability in literature about telekinesis (*Carrie*). However, her telekinetic reactions throughout the film are never performed with intent, but rather are hasty emotional reactions. Carrie breaks her bedroom mirror while crying hysterically after enduring Margaret's abusive lecture about the sins of woman. She pins Margaret to her bed out of anger when Margaret insists that Carrie stay home from the prom. And because De Palma's film doesn't explore the role of the body in telekinetic activity, his pairing of the onset of Carrie's power with anger and hysteria lend to a reading of Carrie's actions as an outward projection of menstruation. This sentiment lingers in De Palma's orchestration of the iconic prom scene, as through the critical lens of an outward projection of menstruation the scene it plays out not as a teenager purposing her powers for revenge against sadistic bullies, but rather as a demonstration of why a woman's place is in the home. I characterize this as the moral lesson of De Palma's iteration of the narrative as it culminates in a large anti-choice statement: If a woman outside of the home can cause destruction by means of the mind and body, then giving her control over the mind and body could only mean worse.

In *Carrie* (2013), telekinesis is not a reaction; however, it is a means through which, by learning to control it, Carrie assumes the power to choose a role of womanhood in which she exists and succeeds outside of the home. Carrie's introduction

to her powers plays out much like the events in De Palma's film. In the shower scene, Carrie's hysterical reaction to her period and her classmates' taunting triggers an intense emotional reaction that causes the light bulb above the shower to burst. When Margaret forces her into the downstairs closet after their heated conversation about 'the curse of blood,' Carrie's screaming fit produces a large crack in the wooden closet door. The next day while she is at school, Carrie destroys a bathroom mirror through intense concentration, and this is the turning point—the moment of an assumption of control. Following this moment, Carrie both studies and practices her talent, reading books, watching videos online, and levitating objects in her bedroom. And, unlike Carrie's interactions with Margaret in De Palma's film during which Carrie exerts force over Margaret through emotional responses to her attempt to keep her sheltered in the house, Peirce's Carrie uses her powers as a defense mechanism, levitating Margaret when she calls Carrie a witch, locking her in the closet when she leaves for the prom, and eventually murdering her, conjuring a series of sharp objects and warning Margaret of her impending death with an apology (*Carrie*).

Given that Carrie performs with intent, Peirce's prom scene assumes a different characterization—an alternative framework for contextualizing Carrie's revenge. In this scene, Carrie does not serve as a pawn in an experiment in political correctness nor does she carry out a good triumphs over evil plot as a sheltered high school girl pushed too far. Rather, because Peirce constructs telekinesis as control that presents Carrie with choice, Carrie can assume the social status of her classmates. In the scene in which Carrie tells Margaret that she will be going to prom, Carrie expresses her desire to be like her

classmates because she considers them to be whole people. She says, “I want to be like them! I want to be just like them! I need to try and become a whole person before it’s too late” (*Carrie*). In this regard, during the prom massacre, Carrie achieves this desire by performing as a bully and not the bullied. Further, she tortures her classmates to death in a mirroring exercise that plays out much like their torture of her during the shower scene. This is initiated when, after the blood dump, a classmate begins playing the video of Carrie writhing and screaming in the shower that Chris took. Carrie’s massacre begins in response to the video and not the blood dump itself, which re-characterizes her response as role-play in which performs as a bully alongside her classmates. Therefore, the death count is not as quick, widespread, and randomized as De Palma’s installment of the scene, but is almost entirely focused on Carrie’s prolonged torture of her gym classmates.

Peirce’s prom scene, then, is a social experiment, enacted by Carrie to afford herself a test of character so as to make a decision about her transition into womanhood. And when positioned as such, Carrie’s return to the home is an informed decision, not a statement of belonging. In this sense, the final scene of the film, in which Margaret attempts to kill Carrie but is unsuccessful and dies at her hand, exemplifies Carrie’s unwillingness to give up choice, even if it implies death by the wrath of God. It is why she still employs her telekinesis as a defense mechanism against Margaret, and it is warrant that she is aware that she could leave the home rather than stay by her mother’s side and die, even though she chooses not to.

This subtle re-conceptualization of telekinesis allows Peirce to produce the effect of a pro-choice construction of womanhood without compromising King’s narrative

structure. Peirce transforms King and De Palma's fear of women with power into an exploration of fears held by women with power, thus making *Carrie* a story about women who struggle to live with choice within existing social, cultural, and political situations that question the assumption of that power. Margaret and Carrie play agential roles, and their fateful struggles to achieve a sense of self in the physical world ground the narrative in contemporary feminist commentary that seeks to label a woman's choice to assume either a traditional or non-traditional role of womanhood as a progressive statement and not a reversion to patriarchal constructions of womanhood or a means for being ostracized from feminism. As such, while it may be too large of a venture to suggest that Peirce has achieved a feminist rendering of King's narrative based on effect, the statement of the film is poignant in the name of women, as Peirce returns the narrative to Carrie and Margaret, its rightful owners, thereby calling for a genre shift in which we begin to think about opportunities for utilizing the horror genre to chronicle the fear that surmises women when women relate to one another.

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