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“A PENNY FOR THE EAR, HOW MUCH FOR THE REST?”

a social constructionist and semiotic analysis of prostitution in the motion pictures “American Gigolo” and “Pretty Woman”

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Abstarkt

Denna uppsats undersöker hur prostitution porträtteras i filmerna *American Gigolo* (1980) och *Pretty Woman* (1990). Analysen tittar både på kvinnlig såväl som manlig prostitution. Genom social konstruktionsteori analyseras hur dessa filmer relaterar till verkligheten och populärkultur. Semiotik används för att 'läsa' tecken i filmerna och för att förstå deras innebörd. Uppsatsen tittar på hur prostitution relaterar till genus och sexualitet och argumenterar att medan dessa frågor är viktiga är de del av en bredare slutsats att prostitution innefattar vem som har makt över vem. Detta gäller för både manlig och kvinnlig prostitution. Uppsatsen argumenterar även att porträttering av prostitution i film kan utmana oönskade normer och omständigheter i samhället. Men samtidigt kan de ha negativa implikationer för hur prostitution ses och förstås som därmed kan påverka och forma beteende, attityder och policy gällande prostitution.

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Abstract

This investigation will analyze the portrayal of prostitution in the films *American Gigolo* (1980) and *Pretty Woman* (1990). The analysis looks at both female and male prostitution. It draws on the theory of social constructionism to look at how the films relate to reality and popular culture. Semiotics is used to 'read' the signs of the films and to understand their full meaning. The investigation looks at prostitution as it relates to gender and sexuality, and argues while these issues are important they are part of a broader conclusion that prostitution is about who has power over whom. This relates to both male and female prostitution. The investigation also argues that portrayals of prostitution in film can challenge unwanted norms and conditions in society, but simultaneously they can have negative implications on how prostitution is seen and understood that might shape individual behavior, attitudes, and policy towards prostitution.

Word count: 148

Key Words: American Gigolo, Pretty Woman, Prostitution, Male Prostitution, Female Prostitution, Film, Social Constructivism, Semiotics, Gender, Sexuality

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1 Introduction

Take a second to think about prostitution, what do you see? Do you see a woman? Do you see a man? Who is the client talking to them? A man or a woman? Is it on the streets, in a club, or in a fancy hotel? Whatever the answer to these questions may be, whatever you think prostitution is, may not be the only way prostitution exists.

Prostitution is a subject of taboo. Because of this the phenomenon is viewed and discussed too simplistic. Either arguments are strongly against or strongly for its existence. The ‘level’ of taboo is also dependent on the circumstances around the particular ‘version’ of prostitution that is discussed. Arguments legitimizing the phenomenon involve that prostitution is the oldest profession there is, and therefore a ‘natural’ part of society. But prostitution is a serious societal issue, and linked to other social challenges such as drug use, people-trafficking, criminality, and perhaps above all socio-economic problems. Part of what makes it a serious issue in society is that it is undefined and seriously understudied.

Prostitution is often reduced to being a primarily female issue ¹and while male prostitution is *mentioned* in association to ‘regular prostitution’ it is often marked as unimportant. ² Writings about male prostitution, by such as George R Scott claims that male prostitution and female prostitution have coexisted for hundreds of years. ³ In the US statistics show that arrests involving prostitution are 70 % female and 20% male prostitutes. ⁴ ‘Versions’ of prostitution are understood

¹ Minichiello Victor & Scott John. 2014. *Male Sex Work and Society*. Harrington Park Press. p. 65

² Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 53

³ Scott, George Ryley. 2005. *A History of Prostitution; From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Routledge Taylor & Frances Group, London and New York, p. 233

⁴ Statistic Brain, “Prostitution Statistics”, 1 March 2016, [13 August 2017]

<http://www.statisticbrain.com/prostitution-statistics/>

through different frameworks and male prostitutes have different experiences than female prostitutes.⁵ But it is crucial to consider that the social ideas regarding male and female prostitution, gender and sexuality are socially constructed.⁶ Due to sensitivities about gender, sex and sexuality and the (now changing) historic taboo of homosexuality have made studying male prostitution and finding evidence about it very difficult.⁷ Research on male prostitution related to clients of heterosexual women (as opposed to homosexual prostitution) have been particularly understudied.⁸ So, both statistics and ideas of prostitution are questionable for such a polarised subject like prostitution. Prostitution is neither often portrayed in popular culture. There are exceptions- *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Midnight Cowboys*, *Wedding Date*, *American Gigolo*, *Pretty Woman* - but often even in such stories prostitution is not the primary focus.

This investigation will compare prostitution as portrayed in *American Gigolo* and *Pretty Woman*. These were chosen because they are two of the most famous depictions of prostitution in popular culture and are therefore likely to have had the biggest impact on people's perceptions of prostitution. The two films strongly differ in its depiction of prostitution. *American Gigolo* is one of the few addressing heterosexual male prostitution and *Pretty Woman* depicts a seemingly traditional image of a prostitute; a heterosexual woman.

The reason for the chosen aspect of the subject is that movies have a large cultural impact: they shape people's perceptions of prostitution and can normalise collective understanding of prostitution that is different from reality. Not only movies, but music and pornography as well.⁹ The medium is a well-established forum of where women are objectified and sexualised, especially in depictions of prostitu-

⁵ Blasbell Raleigh. "Reel or Reality? The Portrayal of Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures", (2015). Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Scholar Commons, University of South Florida. p.77

⁶ Blasbell. 2015. p.77

⁷ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.38

⁸ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 19

⁹ Martin. P. "'Pretty Woman' Vs. The Real World Of Prostitution". WGBH News, 19 November 2013, [accessed 13 August 2017] <http://news.wgbh.org/post/pretty-woman-vs-real-world-prostitution>

tion.¹⁰ Elizabeth Hirschman and Barbara Stem argue that films such as *Pretty Woman* has influenced the view of prostitution in society and reinforced damaging perceptions of women's bodies as commodities.¹¹ By workings of technological and economic development, film is not only influencing popular culture but is progressively a part of everyday life. At the same time as film affects reality, reality influences film. Film is subjective as the maker leads its audience along a certain path, but it is equally subjective in how the audience will interpret what the maker is trying to state.¹² Different people will take different things away from the same film. But film makers do have power through story line and subtle signs (clothing, music, camera angles, dialogue)¹³ to shape what the audience is thinking.¹⁴ Therefore, a semiotic analysis of the films is important.

What happens with prostitution in film is that media production and consumption shapes cultural ideals both in question of policy and individual reality in the sex trade.¹⁵ The problem with this is that media can reproduce falsehoods playing on stereotypes within the trade, rather than real experiences, by real prostitutes.¹⁶ Therefore, the subject of prostitution in film is important as it shapes the way prostitutes might be treated by people within society and the policies and laws that affect prostitution.

¹⁰ Hirschman C. Elizabeth & Stem B. Barbara. 1994. "Women As Commodities: Prostitution As Depicted in the *Blue Angel*, *Pretty Baby*, and *Pretty Woman*", in NA- Advances in Consumer Research Volume 21, eds. Chris T. Allen and Deborah Roedder John, Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 576-581.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Klein-Hattori Megan and Phelps A. Katherine, *Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures: Pretty Woman and Subsequent Movies (1990-2015)*. University of Massachusetts-Boston, Conference Papers- American Sociological Association January 2016. p. 8

¹³ Ehrat Johannes. 2005. *Cinema and Semiotics: Pierce and Film Aesthetics, Narration, and Representation*. University of Toronto Press. p. 23

¹⁴ Monaco James. 2000. *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Multimedia*. 3rd edition. Oxford University Press, Inc. New York. p. 33

¹⁵ Klein-Hattori & Phelps. 2016. p. 9

¹⁶ Klein-Hattori & Phelps. 2016. p. 10

1.1 Purpose & Research question

This study will look at three questions about how these films address prostitution:

- How is prostitution portrayed in the films *American Gigolo* and *Pretty Woman*?
- What are the differences and similarities in how the films portray female and male prostitution?
- What can these films tell us about the reality of prostitution and what can they not tell?

Firstly, prostitution is a subject of various taboos and a victim of social stigma. Films have the potential to be helpful: they can challenge taboos, make people more sympathetic to the situations of prostitutes and increase the interest to challenge prostitution and surrounding issues. However, films can also be damaging. Portrayals of the issue in romantic and commercial films makes it necessary to question prostitution or norms around prostitution that may be wrongly constructed; potentially glorifying a serious societal issue by misrepresentation. Film does not merely pass time, but as all media affects the public, societal opinion, and policy making. It is between the social stigma around prostitution and the faulty portrayals of the issue affecting an audience that this study becomes relevant to Human Rights.

Secondly, prostitution is often portrayed as an issue related to gender and sexual hierarchies. Gender and sexuality are especially significant in these films as they portray both female and male prostitution. Female prostitution is often proclaimed as 'real prostitution' and research is extensive in this aspect of the issue compared to male prostitution. Male prostitution is viewed differently and often associated with homosexuality. In addition, the manifestation of male prostitution is often seen as different to female prostitution. However, this investigation will test the hypothesis that they are not as different as they may seem and that the key issue with prostitution relates to power. Gender is an important consideration, but there are also other factors that affect the power dynamics in both male and female prostitution that are equally important to understanding prostitution in society.

1.2 Assumptions & Limitations

This section will set out the boundaries of this investigation.

Firstly, this is a very specific investigation that limits its conclusions to prostitution as it relates to these films, and then also focused on my subjective interpretation of them. Secondly, prostitution for the purposes of this investigation is taken to mean a socio-economic issue that is discriminating to prostitutes' human rights. And though statistics may show little about male prostitution, there may be various aspects of the phenomenon that is unknown to public numbers because of the social stigmas revolving the subject. Thirdly, my analysis of prostitution and gender dynamics and culture are limited to a western cultural context. Fourthly, this essay does not set out to make judgments about the morality of prostitution or analyze its causes and effects in society. Rather it seeks to assess the possible varieties within the phenomenon and perceptions of these through the films and what that might mean.

1.3 Material

This section will briefly set out the materials used to support this investigation's analysis, taking in the films themselves and work that analyses these and the social constructionist and semiotic theories that the investigation draws on.

1.3.1 Empirical material

The primary material consists of the two motion pictures *American Gigolo* (1980) and *Pretty Woman* (1989). Both movies were made in Hollywood, treat similar themes, and have a few of the same stars in.

American Gigolo is a 117 min long thriller/drama/romance film. It was made in 1980 by director Paul Schrader, produced by Jerry Bruckheimer, and distributed by Paramount Pictures. In the U.S. it nearly hit 23 million dollars at the box of-

fice, and almost 4 million dollars the opening weekend.¹⁷ The protagonist of the film is played by Richard Gere, and actors such as actor and model Lauren Hutton, Bill Duke, and Hector Elizondo are part of the cast. It has arguably been called a slick film¹⁸, both elegant and cunning. The film was together with *Midnight Cowboy* (Schlesinger, 1969) the first commercial films to treat male prostitution in cinema in the U.S.¹⁹ Being a thriller the movie is very different from *Pretty Woman* (presented below) and portrays Richard Gere (a man) as a heterosexual prostitute. Being an inspiration from the French made production “*Pickpocket*” by director Robert Bresson²⁰ and arguably associated with *film noir*²¹ the film attracts more artistic vibes than *Pretty Woman*.

Pretty Woman is a 119 min long romantic comedy. The film was released in 1990 by Buena Vista (Disney), directed by Garry Marshall, and produced by Gary W. Goldstein, Arnon Milchan, and Laura Ziskin. All in all, the film has grossed worldwide a total of almost 464 million dollars, about 178 million in the U.S alone, and more than 11 million dollars the opening weekend.²² Julia Roberts, playing the leading role of Vivian, had her big breakthrough with this blockbuster film. Other well-known actors in the film were Richard Gere (Edward Lewis), Hector Elizondo (Barney Thompson) and Laura San Giacomo (Kit de Luca). Originally the film titled \$3000, was initially much darker depicting a bad experience for an undereducated hooker and an ill-tempered handsome and wealthy man. The ending was entirely different, ultimately changed to fit into a framework of Disney films.²³ The film came at a time when US culture was permeated by greed, wall

¹⁷ Box Office Mojo, IMDB, (website), [accessed 19 January 2017]

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=americangigolo.htm>

¹⁸ Parker. H. “Richard Gere’s slick 1980 thriller *American Gigolo* is set for small-screen remake at Showtime.” *The Daily Mail*, 2 November 2016, [accessed 19 January 2017] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3898916/Richard-Gere-s-slick-1980-thriller-American-Gigolo-set-small-screen-remake-Showtime.html>

¹⁹ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.53

²⁰ Ebert. R. ‘*American Gigolo*’. *Robert Ebert Reviews*, (website), 1 January 1980, [accessed 18 December 2016] <http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/american-gigolo-1980>

²¹ Nichols Bill. “*American Gigolo*: Transcendental Style and Narrative Form”. In *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 34, No. 4. Summer 1981. Pp.8-13. University of California Press p. 9

²² Box Office Mojo, IMDB, (website), [accessed 19 January 2017]

<http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=prettywoman.htm>

²³ Fallon. K. ‘How Garry Marshall Saved ‘*Pretty Woman*’ - and All of Us From Our Jadedness’. *The Daily Beast*, 20 June 2016, [accessed 17 December 2016] <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2016/07/20/how-garry-marshall-saved-pretty-woman-and-all-of-us-from-our-jadedness.html>

street, cynicism and anxiety.²⁴ As a result, its positive romance became a cultural touchstone.²⁵ A number of reviews at the time made the point that the storyline was essentially very simple and that without the sex and prostitution angle it could be just any Disney movie, and indeed it “whitewashes the realities of prostitution.”²⁶

1.3.2 Secondary material

There are five types of secondary material that I use: theory of social constructivism, theory of semiotics, materials reviewing the films, sources treating female and male prostitution.

Firstly, the theory of social constructionism is based on the work *Social Constructionism of Reality: A treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* by Peter L Berger and Thomas Luckmann.²⁷ They present how reality is socially constructed and how. The work enables a platform to understand and question society’s knowledge of reality.

Secondly, various works treating semiotics are used understand semiotics in film. Primarily the work *Semiotics: The Basics* by Daniel Chandler is used.²⁸ This work provides a framework of how to use denotative and connotative signs in studying film. James Monaco’s work *How to Read a Film* enables an understanding of what film studies are.²⁹ Johannes Erhat brings forth relevant aspects of the history

²⁴ Fallon. K. 2016.

²⁵ Griggs. B. & Grinberg. E. ‘‘Pretty Woman’ 25 years later: The good, the bad and the revenge shopping’. *CNN Entertainment*, 21 March 2015, [accessed 19 March 2017]
<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/21/entertainment/pretty-woman-movie-anniversary-feat/>

²⁶ Griggs & Grinberg. 2015. *CNN Entertainment*.

²⁷ Berger L. Peter & Luckmann Thomas. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books

²⁸ Chandler Daniel. 2007. *Semiotics: The Basics*. 2nd Edition. First published 2002 by Routledge.

²⁹ Monaco James. 2000. *How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, and Multimedia*. 3rd edition. Oxford University Press, Inc. New York

of semiotics.³⁰ And lastly, Christian Metz, who developed semiotics into film theory, expresses the significance of semiotics in film.³¹

Thirdly, articles, reviews, dissertations, and chapters in works that treat the actual films is included to deepen the interpretation of the two movies. For American Gigolo this includes: *Male Sex Work and Society*,³² *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*,³³ *The Daily Mail* article by H. Parker³⁴, and “American Gigolo: Transcendental style and Narrative Form”³⁵. And for *Pretty Woman*: “It’s All About Money: *Pretty Woman* and Mythic Capitalism,”³⁶ “*Pretty Woman*: The romance of the Fair Unknown, Feminism, and Contemporary Romance Comedy”³⁷, “‘*Pretty Woman*’ 25 years later: The good, the bad and the revenge shopping”,³⁸ and “Reel or Reality? The Portrayal of Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures”.³⁹ These sources express subjective opinions and views of the films and are therefore limited to their interpretations of what the films express and mean. It is also relevant to note that the articles and reviews are written at different times, many from recent years.

Fourthly, works that treat prostitution is included as a separate ‘literary survey’. Works by Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon, and Kate Millett argue form a

³⁰ Ehrat Johannes. 2005. *Cinema and Semiotics: Pierce and Film Aesthetics, Narration, and Representation*. University of Toronto Press

³¹ Metz Christian. 1974. *Film language: a semiotics of the cinema*. Translated by Michael Taylor. Oxford University Press New York

³² Minichiello Victor & Scott John. 2014. *Male Sex Work and Society*. Harrington Park Press, LLC

³³ Burston Paul & Richardson Colin. 1995. *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*. Routledge New York

³⁴ Parker. H. ‘Richard Gere’s slick 1980 thriller American Gigolo is set for small-screen remake at Showtime’. *The Daily Mail*, 2 November 2016, [accessed 1 December 2016] <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3898916/Richard-Gere-s-slick-1980-thriller-American-Gigolo-set-small-screen-remake-Showtime.html>

³⁵ Nichols Bill. “American Gigolo: Transcendental Style and Narrative Form”. In *Film Quarterly*. Vol. 34, No. 4. Summer 1981. Pp.8-13. University of California Press.

³⁶ Anderson Majda K. 1990. “IT’S ALL ABOUT MONEY’: *Pretty Woman* and Mythic Capitalism.” *The Spectator* 11.1 (Fall 1990): 62-71,75

³⁷ Scala Elizabeth. 1999. “*Pretty Woman*: The Romance of the Fair Unknown, Feminism, and Contemporary Romance Comedy”. In: *Film & History: An interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 29, Issue 1. 1999, pp.34-45

³⁸ Griggs. B & Grinberg. E. ‘*Pretty Woman*’ 25 years later: The good, the bad and the revenge shopping’. *CNN Entertainment*, 21 March 2015, [accessed 17 March 2017]

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/21/entertainment/pretty-woman-movie-anniversary-feat/>

³⁹ Blasbell Raleigh. “Reel or Reality? The Portrayal of Prostitution in Major Motion Pictures,” (2015). Graduate Theses and Dissertations, Scholar Commons, University of South Florida.

radical feminist standpoint against prostitution. Further, *Male Sex Work and Society* is an informative work compiled of research from different specialized researchers as well as statements from sex workers.⁴⁰ The editors Viktor Minichiello and John Scott are both professors and internationally recognized academics for their research in sexual and public health. They have also published previous works on sex work.⁴¹ In addition, Donald J West's work *Male Prostitution* is included for the further understanding of male prostitution and its research field.⁴²

⁴⁰ Minichiello Victor & Scott John. 2014. *Male Sex Work and Society*. Harrington Park Press, LLC

⁴¹ Columbia University Press (website), [28 May 2017] <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/male-sex-work-and-society/9781939594013>

⁴² West Donald J. 1993. *Male Prostitution*. The Haworth Press, Inc. Transferred to Digital Printing 2010 by Routledge. New York

2 The Films

2.1 Synopsis of *American Gigolo*

American Gigolo depicts the story of protagonist Julian Kay (Richard Gere), a handsome gigolo⁴³ living a luxurious life in LA. During the course of the film he is accused of murder and falls in love. The two other key characters in Julian's life are Miss Anne (Nina van Palladt) and Leon (Bill Duke). Both characters are or have been Julian's pimps. They are critical in affecting the version of Julian's profession; as he is 'upgraded' and earned the ability to say no if a deal is not to his liking (he no longer needs to do the "fag stuff" or "kink"). Both Miss Anne and Leon express frustration with the fact that Julian is no longer working for them on their terms.

The two plot twists central to the motion picture are Julian's love affair with Michelle (Lauren Hutton) and the murder of Mrs Rheiman. The love affair with Michelle, who is a senator's wife, turns out to be difficult for Julian's business, identity, and to Michelle's social status and marriage.⁴⁴ Secondly, Julian accepts as a favour to Leon to take on the Rheiman's which spirals quickly into an uncomfortable situation as Mr. Rheiman is dominant and rough towards his wife. Mrs. Rheiman is later found dead and Julian having no alibi, is the main suspect. One of Julian's clients, with whom he spent the night of the murder, cannot confirm his alibi as that would ruin her and her husband's reputation. In one of the final scenes Leon meets with Julian and confesses that he, together with Mr Rheiman, framed Julian because he has "stepped on too many toes." Following these events, Julian accidentally pushes Leon over the edge of the balcony and cannot hold on to him so Leon falls to his death. Julian goes to prison for the murder of Mrs Ryman. In the final scene Michelle, having given Julian an alibi, saves him from conviction.

⁴³ Heterosexual male prostitute*

⁴⁴ ca 1:03:45 h

2.2 Synopsis of *Pretty Woman*

The motion picture portrays a prostitute's journey from working Hollywood Boulevard to shopping on Rodeo Drive as she and a rich, handsome, and successful businessman fall in love. The two main characters Vivian (Julian Roberts) and Edward (Richard Gere) meet as Edward is lost and in need for route directions and this interaction eventually leads to him employing her for a week. As the film moves on, their relationship starts to change them both, Vivian has not only new opportunities such as shopping in expensive shops but also appears to become more confident. Edward gains a deeper sense of what is important in business and life. The audience is introduced to the contrasts of two prostitutes, Vivian and Kit (Laura San Giacomo). Kit does drugs and uses rent money to buy it, Vivian is more clean cut, for example, to Edward's surprise, uses dental floss and wants to build a different life.

The plot twist, is whether Vivian and Edward are going to become a couple. He wants her to live in an apartment and lead a similar life to the days at the hotel. Edward sees this as getting her off the streets. Vivian on the other hand claims it is only a matter of "geography"⁴⁵ i.e. that she will remain his prostitute. She wants the fairy-tale and speaks of a childhood memory dreaming of a knight on a white horse would come and rescue her. Edward says this is all he can offer, and leaves Vivian for a meeting. Edward suddenly decides that, unlike in his previous business practices, he does not want to tear apart the next company, rather he wants to support the company to build ships. Philip Stuckey (Jason Alexander), Edward's lawyer is so upset and goes to his hotel suite to confront Edward where he finds Vivian on her own. Philip blames her for the lost deal. He makes a move on her which eventually turns into a struggle and Edward walks in and hits Philip. Edward and Phil 'break up' and Vivian and Edward discuss the "good decision" Edward has made with Mr. Morse. In the last scenes, Vivian packs to go off to San Francisco to get her grades up and Edward is going back to New York. Edward

⁴⁵ ca 1:33:00 h

eventually changes his mind, and drives up to Vivian's "tower" (top floor apartment) in a white limousine. They "rescue each other" and the credits start rolling.

3 Theory and Method

This chapter will introduce the analytical theories used in this investigation. The first theory is Berger and Luckmann's 'social constructionism'. It will be used to understand the relationship between fiction in the films and the socio-cultural realities of prostitution. The second theoretical framework is semiotics. In semiotic film theory 'signs' in films are looked at as communicating meaning. Semiotics will therefore be used to 'read' in a deeper way what American Gigolo and Pretty Woman express, communicate and mean.

3.1 Theory: Social constructionism

The purpose of this chapter is to build a bridge between 'reading' the films and understanding socio-culturally constructed perceptions of prostitution.

Firstly, social constructionism is a theory about the nature of reality. It is the understanding that human reality is socially constructed.⁴⁶ Socio-cultural factors determine what it means to exist as one and together.⁴⁷ Through these formations, we create, individually and collectively, our own 'nature' and societies.⁴⁸ So, reality is both established and exists subjectively and objectively.⁴⁹ The subjective perceptions construct conceptions of reality that by action and inclusion of everyday life maintains them as real and make them objective truths.⁵⁰

Secondly, Berger and Luckmann express the need for a 'sociology of knowledge' because of the evident differences between societies in their perceptions of

⁴⁶Berger L. Peter & Luckmann Thomas. 1966. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books. p. 210

⁴⁷ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 66

⁴⁸ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 67

⁴⁹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 33

⁵⁰ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p.33

knowledge and therefore reality.⁵¹ Everyday life is taken for granted as reality.⁵² Collectively a 'stock of knowledge' is formed.⁵³ This stock of knowledge is transferred from generation to generation and affects the common available stock of knowledge.⁵⁴ It is through this stock of knowledge that one knows the possibilities and limitations of society.⁵⁵ Basically: what one can and cannot do, what is right and what is wrong. It is really a set order of logic which applies to each society and the world.⁵⁶

Thirdly, how we define how to behave and interact is established through socio-cultural formations.⁵⁷ The socio-cultural formations become norms and social codes that create patterns of behaviour and anthropological assumptions. Since these vary so profoundly it proves that it is socio-cultural formations rather than any fixed 'nature' of humankind.⁵⁸ An order that is an ongoing product.⁵⁹ Now, when these patterns of behaviour become a matter of order and are habitualized, they become institutionalised. So, the society one lives in is a product of institutions with predefined patterns of conduct that have taken one direction instead of the many other possible directions.⁶⁰ This is especially true in terms of norms but equally therefore taboos.⁶¹ Norms and taboos regarding prostitution are socially constructed, institutionalised norms, that determine how prostitution is understood in our reality.

Fourthly, the stock of knowledge earlier mentioned is largely associated with language. Language provides one with a handbook of how to relate to reality, or even further to make sense of every day life and how it has meaning.⁶² Language is our

⁵¹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p.15

⁵² Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p.33

⁵³ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 56

⁵⁴ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 56

⁵⁵ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 57

⁵⁶ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 58

⁵⁷ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. P.67

⁵⁸ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 67

⁵⁹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 69

⁶⁰ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 72

⁶¹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 73

⁶² Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 35

way to relate to the world and each other since it is how we communicate.⁶³ What it really means is that language is signification and provides us with signs. That in turn becomes collective understanding of signs' signification.⁶⁴ Language through signs and sign systems make it possible to symbolise matters that represent and transcend everyday reality. Constantly changing, reproducing and creating meaning that eventually become a part of the 'stock of knowledge'.⁶⁵

Fifthly, Berger and Luckmann write about different realities, dreams or the theatre, stating it to be a transition in reality with 'the rise and fall of the curtain.'⁶⁶ One is "...transported to another world, with its own meanings and an order that may or may not have much to do with everyday life"⁶⁷. Even if one is aware of the differences in reality in art and reality in everyday life, the art and the experience of this carries its meanings.⁶⁸ The reality in art, including film, may not be the paramount reality but it is a part of the experience in one's everyday life and therefore creates meaning.⁶⁹

Finally, when something disrupts or questions the workings or order of everyday life, a problem for example, everyday life tries to adapt by integrating the problem in a way that is not problematic.⁷⁰ This happens as the problem would shift perceptions of reality and perhaps make it an entirely different reality.⁷¹

3.2 Semiotics: a general introduction

Semiotics is a way to understand how meaning is encoded in text. It applies both to the way a film is made to *communicate* meaning as well as a tool to understand how meaning is *created* in a film. The founders of semiotics were Ferdinand de

⁶³ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. pp. 35-36

⁶⁴ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 50

⁶⁵ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 54

⁶⁶ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 38

⁶⁷ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 38

⁶⁸ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 38

⁶⁹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966. p. 38

⁷⁰ Berger & Luckmann. 1966 p. 38

⁷¹ Berger & Luckmann. 1966 p. 38

Saussure and Christian Pierce. They were linguists. It was later through theorist Christian Metz that semiotics became established in cinema studies. He made the connection between film and language, and explained that film is *like* a language.⁷² He also stated that even if arranged or natural, film has its own expressiveness and is inevitably a part of the world, and therefore has meaning in the world.⁷³ According to Johannes Ehrat film theory is obligated to make assumptions between reality and cinema.⁷⁴ This is because film is a dynamic experience that has many modes which makes film more real-like than any other art form.⁷⁵

In semiotics, there are two branches of theory; semiotics and semiology. Semiology is more ‘grammar’ or ‘language’-focused. It looks at the operations of a system of codes that does not leave much room for subjectivity.⁷⁶ In contrast to semiology, semiotics studies signs more than codes and so observes signs and what kind of meaning they convert rather than an epistemological study.⁷⁷ Semiotics studies cognitive relations between the film, the film maker, and the audience.⁷⁸ It is the bridge between the mind and reality.⁷⁹

Moreover, the combination of the work of theorists de Saussure and Pierce established the theory of the *signifier* and *signified* which is the basic distinction within semiotics. It is equal to the expressions *denotative* and *connotative* signs which is in linguistics *what we see* and *what we think*.⁸⁰ Monaco, drawing on the work of Metz, positions cinema semiotics in comparison to poetry as going further since the signification is already made in expression of the signified (what the sign represents).⁸¹ Film conveys a continuum of meaning, in the small as well as the big signs.⁸² So signs are initially signifier and signified simultaneously and make up a

⁷² Metz. 1974. p. 109

⁷³ Metz. 1974.. p 76

⁷⁴ Ehrat. 2005. p.17

⁷⁵ Ehrat. 2005. pp.15-16

⁷⁶ Ehrat. 2005. pp.18-19

⁷⁷ Ehrat. 2005. p.19

⁷⁸ Ehrat. 2005. p.28

⁷⁹ Ehrat. 2005. p. 23

⁸⁰ Metz. 1974. p. 109.

⁸¹ Monaco. 2000. p. 158

⁸² Monaco. 2000. p. 160

system of signs through their unity.⁸³ The continuum is really based on arbitrarily chosen or defined meanings, as film may contain as much information as the audience wants to read into it.⁸⁴

The initial and most important aspect of semiotics is the study of signs' signification. De Saussure argues that signs are arbitrary, focuses on the *relation*⁸⁵ between signs, and sees signs not as referents but as concepts of the mind.⁸⁶ A sign's meaning may be evident but the sign's *value* becomes evident in its relationship with other signs.⁸⁷ Pierce on the other hand relies on signs as *referential*⁸⁸, as symbols, pinpointing them to never fully being arbitrary but always having somewhat a 'natural connection'.⁸⁹

3.3 Method: Denotative and Connotative Signs in Semiotics

This section will build on the introduction to semiotics above and explain the method that will be applied to the primary material. Denotative and connotative signs are basically different angles to read meaning of signs, therefore different ways of interpreting the material.

3.3.1 "Denotative" sign in film

Using denotative sign theory, the meaning of a film can be better understood. There are three models of denotative signs: the icon, the index, and the symbol. Denotative signs are referential⁹⁰ and have meaning connected to reality. Meaning that the denotative sign is always referring to a medium, be it something material, an object, in the least something with a material dimension.⁹¹ Further, each medi-

⁸³ Monaco. 2000. p.160

⁸⁴ Monaco. 2000. p. 160

⁸⁵ Chandler. 2007. p.16

⁸⁶ Chandler. 2007. p.16

⁸⁷ Chandler. 2007. p. 20

⁸⁸ Chandler. 2007. p.29

⁸⁹ Chandler. 2007. pp. 38-39

⁹⁰ Chandler. 2007. p.29

⁹¹ Chandler. 2007. p. 55

um is charged with different cultural signification (initially driven by codes), may it be through verbal, visual, auditory and locomotive signs.⁹²

The icon is associated with similarity between sign and object.⁹³ The icon is indeed culturally specific and is typically something or someone constantly recognized or associated to something specific.⁹⁴

The index is like the icon but instead of similarity it is a relationship between sign and object/idea.⁹⁵ Simply put, the sign is like an index finger, pointing in a certain direction.⁹⁶ Index sign means a direct relationship between sign and object and not merely dependent on the interpreting mind.⁹⁷ For example, a clock indicating time, in fact connected to the object/concept of the object.⁹⁸

The symbol is entirely arbitrary and a sign between which what we see and what we think is purely convention associated.⁹⁹ Symbolic signs are unmotivated, but built on agreed meaning, outside the film as well as within the film.¹⁰⁰

3.3.2 Connotative signs in film

The most distinct difference between denotative and connotative signs is that connotative signs are more associated to how film is made. Connotation is relational, representing a concept in the mind.¹⁰¹ It is more psychological than denotative signs.¹⁰² These signs are relational as they are important alone, but *equally* together with other signs, being dependent on other signs' relation to each other.¹⁰³ Moreover, all signs carry meaning, but the value of their meaning depends on the

⁹² Chandler. 2007. p. 55

⁹³ Monaco. 2000. p. 164

⁹⁴ Chandler. 2007. p. 40

⁹⁵ Monaco. 2000. p. 164

⁹⁶ Chandler. 2007. p. 42

⁹⁷ Chandler. 2007. p. 42

⁹⁸ Chandler. 2007. p. 42

⁹⁹ Chandler. 2007. p. 38

¹⁰⁰ Chandler. 2007. p. 38

¹⁰¹ Chandler. 2007. p. 16

¹⁰² Chandler. 2007. p. 14

¹⁰³ Chandler. 2007. p. 18

context. One sign has no absolute meaning.¹⁰⁴ Connotative signs are therefore arbitrary,¹⁰⁵ and relational in the sense of how the film is made. Montage and mise-en-scene¹⁰⁶ are chosen in films towards an idea of meaning, but build on the individuality of the film, not necessarily on reality. This is where the signs of the film are most evident. Connotative signs are more the workings of the film maker. This is where fiction can happen, where new convention may be made. It may simply be a mental concept *created* rather than *drawn* from external objects /reality.¹⁰⁷

An example is the specific motion or non-motion of the camera that is done carries different connotations. In connotative signs the shot carries *paradigmatic connotation*. This means that the type of shot determines the type of connotation associated. It may be angles conveying dominance, comparison and conveyed importance, and of the inclusion/exclusion of other objects conveyed, and vice versa.¹⁰⁸ Further, when different shots or scenes are compared or associated with each other, they express *syntagmatic connotation*.¹⁰⁹ It creates meaning by conscious and unconscious comparisons about what is and is not conveyed and what is either before or after it.¹¹⁰ The paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations of a film may, like all signs, be driven by convention and are a product of culture. Though one must consider and be aware of the difference between convention from outside the film as opposed to convention of the film itself.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁴ Chandler. 2007. p. 19

¹⁰⁵ Chandler. 2007. p. 22

¹⁰⁶ Basically, montage means how the scene is orchestrated and set up while mise-en-scene means what is put in the scene.

¹⁰⁷ Chandler. 2007. p. 63

¹⁰⁸ Monaco. 2000. p. 163

¹⁰⁹ Monaco. 2000. p. 163

¹¹⁰ Monaco. 2000. p. 163

¹¹¹ Monaco. 2000. p. 162

4 Research Survey

This chapter will be used to discuss the different themes associated with prostitution in the films and prostitution in society.

4.1 American Gigolo & Pretty Woman

American Gigolo was one of the first films to depict male prostitution. It was connected to the “Hollywood renaissance” through which there was a change in the accepted code of sexual behaviour in American cinema.¹¹²

The movie American Gigolo comes off as homophobic, positioning homosexual sex work as only an option when in financial trouble suggesting a hierarchy of sexuality within the phenomenon,¹¹³ and that homosexual sex work is the ‘bottom rung’ of the ‘ladder’, which Julian has climbed.¹¹⁴ Qualifications are needed to get Julian’s services; female, wealthy, and preferably married.¹¹⁵ In addition the portrayed homosexuals in the film are linked to violence, sexual violence, and murderers. Specifically, through dealings with the Rheimans and the murder of Mrs. Rheiman.¹¹⁶

Further, in the work *A queer romance: lesbians, gay men and popular culture* the authors argue that the motion picture depicts a grim view of homosexuality, portraying dangers of the male body being eroticised. The author argues this was a part of the existing homophobia in Hollywood at the time.¹¹⁷ The gigolo is contrasted to what “fags” are like and depicts them in contrasting good and bad

¹¹² Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 61

¹¹³ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 64

¹¹⁴ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 64

¹¹⁵ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 67

¹¹⁶ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 67

¹¹⁷ Burston Paul & Richardson Colin. 1995. *A Queer Romance: Lesbians, Gay Men and Popular Culture*. Routledge New York. p.123

roles.¹¹⁸ The article argues that Paul Schrader uses traditional techniques of homo-erotica and makes it “convincingly heterosexual” through dialogue.¹¹⁹ The filming of Julian Kay’s body uses techniques of homo-erotica but in the way women are often filmed.¹²⁰ Julian is a sex symbol.¹²¹ The man is an object in American Gigolo.¹²²

According to an article written on the film by Bill Nichols, the film arguably centres a quest of declining human intimacy in exchange for successful level of business transactions.¹²³ The protagonist is depicted as a merchant whose high-quality commodity is himself. Emotional needs are less important than commercial excess.¹²⁴

There have been different interpretations of *Pretty Woman* and how it depicts women. In the article, *Pretty Woman: The Romance of the Fair Unknown, Feminism, and Contemporary Romantic Comedy* *Pretty Woman* is compared to medieval romantic tales.¹²⁵ Elizabeth Scala argues the connection of the film to the tale of Cinderella, having “Neanderthal intensions”¹²⁶ and poses a debate whether the film is feminist or not.¹²⁷ The article argues the film challenges female chastity¹²⁸ and goes deeper into the concept of heroism. She argues that Vivian is the heroine as she rescues Edward as well the reverse.¹²⁹ It is also apparent that class is essential to understand the value of the story of *Pretty Woman*.¹³⁰ Recourse is constantly made in relation to socio economic aspect, in relation to Edward, Vivian, and

¹¹⁸ Burston & Richardson. 1995. p.124

¹¹⁹ Burston & Richardson. 1995. p.124

¹²⁰ Burston & Richardson. 1995. p.124

¹²¹ Parker. 2016. *The Daily Mail*

¹²² Burston & Richardson. 1995. p.125

¹²³ Nichols. 1981. p. 8

¹²⁴ Nichols. 1981. p. 8

¹²⁵ Scala Elizabeth. 1999. “*Pretty Woman: The Romance of the Fair Unknown, Feminism, and Contemporary Romance Comedy*”. In: *Film & History: An interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*. Vol. 29, Issue 1. 1999, pp.34-45. p.35

¹²⁶ Scala. 1999. p.35

¹²⁷ Scala. 1999. p.42

¹²⁸ Scala. 1999. p .35

¹²⁹ Scala. 1999. p.38

¹³⁰ Scala. 1999. p.36

Vivian's friend Kit.¹³¹ This article states the film to be pseudo-feminist as it reflects societal views of female autonomy and sexuality, and class, but resolving them through hegemonic traditional conceptions of marriage and consumer capitalism.¹³²

In another article treating the film, *It's all about money: Pretty Woman and Mythic Capitalism* the money ideology is more central. The article argues that consumerism is so omnipresent that the audience forgets just what is being sold.¹³³ It discusses the ethics of capitalism that the film portrays, and states that in terms of the plot there is a need to stay within certain frames of ethics to be within Hollywood lines.¹³⁴ The film equally presents contrasting view of prostitution as it demonstrates one morally good and one morally less good prostitute; Vivian and Kit.¹³⁵ Further, the momentarily presence of the concept of marriage prevails in the end and is portrayed as the only answer for true love.¹³⁶ Messages play along the lines of social acceptability for marriage through the transformation in the class hierarchy. Portraying the transformation as a necessity for the film's credibility.¹³⁷

In the review from CNN at the 25th anniversary of *Pretty Woman* states the film to be both misogynist as it plays on traditional gender and socio-economic inequalities such as she is financially dependent on the rich man. Nonetheless the film is also feministic as Vivian demands what *she* wants and is no pushover. Though all in all the film comes off as promoting prostitution while portraying Vivian as an exceptional sex worker.¹³⁸ It is misogynist at the same time as it has feministic traits.¹³⁹

¹³¹ Scala. 1999. p.37

¹³² Scala. 1999. p. 35

¹³³ Anderson. 1990. p. 25

¹³⁴ Anderson. 1990. p.33

¹³⁵ Anderson. 1990. p. 34-36

¹³⁶ Anderson. 1990. p. 38

¹³⁷ Anderson. 1990. p.39

¹³⁸ Griggs. B & Grinberg.E. "‘Pretty Woman’ 25 years later: The good, the bad and the revenge shopping." CNN Entertainment, 21 March 2015, [accessed 17 March 2017]

<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/03/21/entertainment/pretty-woman-movie-anniversary-feat/>

¹³⁹ Ibid.

Lastly, according to Raleigh Blasdell portrayals of prostitution in film often glorifies the profession. He argues that it not only provides misconceptions but also false stereotypes that inform the public's view of what prostitution is really like.¹⁴⁰ The current depictions and previous depictions of prostitution in film do not treat the realities of prostitution that are necessary to understand the realities.¹⁴¹ Films such as *Pretty Woman* or *Taxi Driver* contribute to the false conceptions of the phenomena and as a result the public thinks and acts as if prostitution is something beneficial for the prostitutes.¹⁴²

4.2 Female Prostitution & 'Radical' Feminism

This chapter treats male and female prostitution. It is necessary for the analysis of prostitution in the films in contrast to prostitution in reality.

According to Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin prostitution is a threat to civil rights. Prostitution is the ultimate proof of men's domination and the gender and sex hierarchy. "*(F)or men, liberty entails that women be prostituted, for women, prostitution entails loss of all that liberty means.*"¹⁴³ Prostitution is an institution that silences women.¹⁴⁴ It is the utter proof of the abuse of women's bodies, and the only difference between rape and prostitution is money exchange. Money and sex has its own 'political system' that legitimizes male dominance.¹⁴⁵ Thereby prostitution systematically denies women their bodies sovereignty and is at the very bottom of the hierarchy power 'ladder' in society.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Blassbell. 2015. p. 144

¹⁴¹ Blassbell. 2015. p. 175

¹⁴² Blassbell. 2015. pp. 144 & 171

¹⁴³ MacKinnon, C.A 1993. "Prostitution and Civil Rights". Michigan Journal of Law and Gender vol. 1:13. p. 14

¹⁴⁴ MacKinnon. 1993, p15

¹⁴⁵ Dworkin Andrea, Prostitution and Male Supremacy, Andrea Dworkin delivered this speech at a symposium entitled "Prostitution: From Academia to Activism," sponsored by the Michigan Journal of Gender and Law at the University of Michigan Law School, October 31, 1992. p.2

¹⁴⁶ Dworkin. 1992. p. 5

Kate Millett speaks of sexual politics and that gender is expressed through power relations and structures.¹⁴⁷ Political relations regarding gender and sex categorize them in terms of status.¹⁴⁸ Catherine MacKinnon adds that for feminism sexuality is what work is to Marxism.¹⁴⁹ Thereby sexuality is a social construction of value which causes social connotations to each gender and its ascribed sexuality. This becomes an issue in terms of equality.¹⁵⁰ The relation between prostitution and gender inequality is that it is degrading and provide victims of objectification.¹⁵¹ The gender inequalities of power are equally problematic in pornography, MacKinnon claims it to be problematic as it blurs the line between violence and sex.¹⁵² The norms of masculinity make women a vehicle for maintenance of male domination¹⁵³ and the lies of natural gender will remain intact as long as male domination is sustained in a hierarchy where prostitution is at the bottom.¹⁵⁴ The rising queries and arguments that women might despite socio-economic circumstances choose this occupation is to Dworkin absurd as these arguments portray women as prostitutes in nature and that restriction of prostitution should exist to punish their nature.¹⁵⁵

One among Andrea's many points on the subject is that the modern porn industry is driven by commerce.¹⁵⁶ Sex sells. Pornography furthers discrimination of women and proof of sex inequality¹⁵⁷ And pornography is an entire subsection in film entertainment. Pornography is highly connected to prostitution by its similar sex discrimination and maintenance of gender inequality. It has made prostitution

¹⁴⁷ Millett Kate. 1970. *Sexual Politics*, Pocky, Svensk tryck Holmbergs, Malmö (2012), p. 32

¹⁴⁸ Millett. 1970. p.32

¹⁴⁹ MacKinnon, C.A. 1982. Feminism, Marxism, Method and the State. *Signs* 7(3), 515–44, p.516

¹⁵⁰ MacKinnon. 1982. p. 515, 516

¹⁵¹ Dworkin. 1992. p. 4-5

¹⁵² MacKinnon, C.A. 2006. *Are Women Human? : and other international dialogues*, Cambridge, Mass. : Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, cop. 2006, p. 93

¹⁵³ Dworkin. 1992. p. 4

¹⁵⁴ Dworkin. 1992. p. 6

¹⁵⁵ Dworkin Andrea. 1989. *Pornography - Men Possessing Women*, Penguin Books USA. p. 206

¹⁵⁶ Dworkin. 1989. p. 208

¹⁵⁷ MacKinnon. 2006. p. 91-94

available in everyone's home.¹⁵⁸ Sex is power,¹⁵⁹ and pornography and prostitution is a part of the political practice.¹⁶⁰

In addition, pornography not only brings prostitution into everybody's home but it produces discriminating and violent attitudes and behaviours. Popular culture is affected by the porn industry as it has the same audience. Thus, driving popular culture to become more and more sexual to keep up with the increasing demand.¹⁶¹ This eventually forms the policies of social institutions.¹⁶²

4.3 Male Prostitution

Writers in *Male Sex Work and Society* claim that the economics of male prostitution is a matter of an exchange where "cultural values and market logistics intersect". The authors argue that as caused by the limited research on male sex work there is an inability or unwillingness to regard the possibility of men as objects, being possessed, and consumed.¹⁶³ It is indeed an issue as the discourse on prostitution and sex work is limited to heteronormative frameworks¹⁶⁴ but initially *all* sex work is caused by power and hierarchies¹⁶⁵ and all comes down to today's inevitability that sex and money are intertwined.¹⁶⁶ Proof has been found from testimonies that there is a growing demand for male prostitutes by women as they now have the economic power and liberty to afford it.¹⁶⁷

In *Male Prostitution*, Donald J West notes that male prostitution was depicted evilly before the acceptance of homosexuality in society. He also points out that male prostitution is a choice based on socio-economic circumstances that has re-

¹⁵⁸ MacKinnon, C. A. 1987. *Feminism unmodified: Discourses on life and law*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p.5

¹⁵⁹ Dworkin. 1992. p. 4

¹⁶⁰ MacKinnon. 1987. p.147-148

¹⁶¹ MacKinnon. C.A. 2005." X underrated". May 20th 2005 *Times Education Supplement*, London. pp. 3-4

¹⁶² MacKinnon. 2005. p. 6

¹⁶³ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.xvi

¹⁶⁴ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.xxii

¹⁶⁵ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.2

¹⁶⁶ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.xxii

¹⁶⁷ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p.165

sulted in prostitution as an only choice.¹⁶⁸ West highlights that research is limited in male prostitution and the aspect of male prostitutes selling sex to heterosexual women is not studied.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ West. 1993. p. 12-13

¹⁶⁹ West. 1993. p. 19

5 Semiotic Analysis of the Films

This section will analyse the signs of American Gigolo and Pretty Woman. As presented in chapter 3.2 on semiotics it will be an analysis of denotative and connotative signs and what they convey about the meaning of the film. To structure the analysis of the films, scenes are chosen and divided by theme. Signs permeate the entity of both films so the selected scenes are the focal points of the analysis, other parts of the films will also be referenced to where appropriate.

Scenes from American Gigolo

5.1 The gigolo, class and money

Scene with Miss Anne and the girls – the scene was chosen as it portrays the working relationship between Julian and a female pimp. Hence, the dynamics demonstrates what ‘kind’ of prostitute Julian is and has been. Ca 3:19 min



The paradigmatic connotations present the audience with a dialogue and a ‘struggle’ between the characters through speech, their body language, and the camera angles.

¹⁷⁰ <https://www.pinterest.se/pin/63402307227654912/> [accessed 17 March 2017]

Firstly, the camera focus demonstrates a power play between Miss Anne and Julian while discussing clients and business. Julian comes into the room with a confident walk and walks towards the minibar to provide himself with a drink. Miss Anne is already watching his every move. Julian looks out towards the terrace, and towards the ladies, while Miss Anne is concentrating on getting Julian's attention, nearly constantly faces him. As Julian and Miss Anne are having a dispute about services and money, the camera shifts from a dichotomy of Julian and Miss Anne to focus on both. This is similar how the camera work is used in other parts of the film when depicting disputes. In that way, the mere movement of the camera heightens the feeling and tension between the characters. Julian's arrogance is demonstrated by his walk and how he just waltzes into the house, not waiting for someone to get the door, and casually throws his jacket over his shoulder. His arrogance indicates an upper hand while Miss Anne's negotiating skills and how she and Julian are filmed still suggest she is the one with the authority. Julian seems occupied with other thoughts and does not look at Miss Anne while she stands cross armed above him, as if irritated. In the dialogue, Anne tries to press Julian and says: "I've been trying to reach you all day."¹⁷¹ Julian simply replies he "got the message".¹⁷² They discuss a client and percentages. Miss Anne wants 40/60 but Julian says 50/50. This turns into a heavier discussion and it becomes evident that their business used to be closer as Julian has "cut her out of the repeaters."¹⁷³ This demonstrates the non-conventional gender roles with a female pimp and a male prostitute.

In terms of his arrogance and his area of business it is evident that he is exclusive. The house of miss Anne is modern and expensive with art works and crystal carafes. The sunbathing women on the terrace make a comment by asking if he "didn't fly down to Rio for the weekend."¹⁷⁴ During the scene Julian's heterosexual prostitution is contrasted with homosexual prostitutes and comes off as homophobic as he states that Miss Anne has plenty of other choices than him," you got

¹⁷¹ ca 03:51 min

¹⁷² ca 03:54 min

¹⁷³ ca 04:36 min

¹⁷⁴ ca 03:42 min

those retarded faggots. “¹⁷⁵ Surely not encircling all homosexuals though it clearly draws a line that Julian is not and what he thinks ‘they’ are.

Secondly, Miss Anne calls him an endearing *Julie*. The name *Julie*, is a strong denotative sign here, specifically a symbol. It is a feminising indicator, a conventionally female name, and a connotation of their working relationship and Julian’s business submission to Miss Anne who provides Julian with clients. Miss Anne is putting herself in the more commonly male role and Julian in the female one which implies a lot about the power dynamics in their relationship. However, she is dependent on him for his services and she seems to prefer working with him rather than the ‘hires’ who Julian calls “Mike or those other high-school drop-outs.”¹⁷⁶ Again proving his mis-placed arrogance as his power will later be proven to be an illusion.

Finally, the audience is introduced to a shot of two topless sunbathing women on the terrace indicating various versions of prostitution conveyed in this film. Basically, the two women hold little relevance other than their presence. Though they do carry paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations. There are two points to be considered here, one: Miss Anne provides services to all kinds of clients and two: even though they are beautiful and half naked Julian pays them little attention. *This is about business, not pleasure.* He even dismisses them as Miss Anne suggests he should” take some sun”¹⁷⁷, which he responds to by laughing.

¹⁷⁵ ca 04:48 min

¹⁷⁶ ca 04:38 min

¹⁷⁷ ca 05:21 min

Scene at Leon's place- the scene defines the entire film. Initially also Julian's profession. Ca 1: 41:03 h



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The meeting between Julian and Leon in this scene is a defining moment in the plot and reveal more of the realities of Julian's prostitute life. The scene proves to have both paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotation. The syntagmatic connotations in this scene is the name Julie, and signs in relation to homosexuality. As mentioned before, both Miss Anne and Leon calls Julian Julie. The assigned meaning to the sign of Julie is denotative symbol sign as it refers to something in reality; in heteronormative terms one thinks of a woman. Together with the homophobic tone of the film the name receives further significance in the power dynamics between the characters and one may assume, a reminder that Julian did not always refrain from 'the fag stuff.'

There are other denotative signs in this scene. Throughout the scene the shot often captures either parts of or an entire image of an art work, *Torso*, by Andy Warhol. The work is a mix of art and pornography,¹⁷⁹ and is an index sign distancing the life style of Leon versus Julian's. Together with the syntagmatic connotation of Julian's sexuality the sign makes the audience very aware of the fact that Leon likes men. As stated in *Male Sex Work and Society* Julian resorts to men as he is willing to do anything not to lose his gigolo life.¹⁸⁰ Again distancing Julian from homosexuality, portraying it as the last resort triggered by desperation. Minichiel-

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.alamy.com/stock-photo-american-gigolo-1980-richard-gere-bill-duke-amg-016-29111746.html>
[accessed 17 March 2017]

¹⁷⁹ The Andy Warhol Museum, "Past Exhibition, Dirty Art: Andy Warhol's Torsos and Sex Parts," July 23-October 4, 2010, [accessed 13 August 2017] <https://www.warhol.org/exhibition/dirty-art-andy-warhols-torsos-and-sex-parts/>

¹⁸⁰ Minichiello & Scott. 2014. p. 64

lo and Scott also point out that this film in many ways portrays homosexuals as violent.¹⁸¹ This links to the reality of prostitution: the gigolo must in the end resort to practices he *does not want to* for the sake of keeping his profession, *for the sake of money*. His want is not central, it is the demand that matters, and those who drive the demand.

Furthermore, in terms of paradigmatic signs, in the scene highlights that this is the resolution of the film and the truth about Leon's character becomes clear, how little power Julian has, and what an illusion his arrogant success was. In the first shot of Julian and Leon, Julian stands while Leon sits. Julian demands to know why Leon is framing him. Julian's appearance is revealing. He is normally neatly and elegantly dressed, but now he has not shaved and is wearing a non-speaking grey overall-like outfit. Similar outfit to when he was doing a line up for the murder investigation.¹⁸² Leon on the other hand wears a silk orange robe and a big red ring on his finger. Leon denies the accusation. Julian furthers the accusation and the minute Julian starts speaking about money to have Leon get off his back, Leon stands up and the camera focuses on both. This is the first time they are both standing up on flat floor in the entire film. Leon is taller than Julian and the contrast of their height is almost menacing, a clear indication of the power relation immediately shifting.

In their dialogue regarding money to solve the situation, Leon finally states: "it don't make no difference how much Julie, the other side will always pay more."¹⁸³ *The other side* being Rheiman, one of their rich clientele. The 'other side' is a denotative sign, an index, as it implies differences in class and wealth, power is ultimately sourced. Julian has turned to desperation and states he will basically do anything (less money, kink, the fag stuff)¹⁸⁴, his face is mediating the same, he is not the same Julian the audience has seen in the other scenes. His cocky demeanor is gone, with the lack of shave and expensive clothes. As Julian asks why him,

¹⁸¹ Please view chapter 4. 1

¹⁸² ca 1:05:09 h

¹⁸³ ca 1:42:49 h

¹⁸⁴ ca 1:44:35 h

Leon states: “you were frame-able, ...you stepped on too many toes.”¹⁸⁵ The gigolo has no power.

5.2 Male objectification & Gender Roles

Workout scene- this scene demonstrates the objectification of Julian as a male prostitute. Ca 6:14 min



The strongest sign indicators in this scene are paradigmatic. The camera angles show off Julian’s body while he simultaneously is trying to learn Swedish via a tape-recording. The paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations of this scene mount up to portraying the objectification of Julian. He is nearly naked while exercising. His body the focus of the camera, including full body shots. According to Burston and Richardson this scene is based on homo-erotica which is ‘compensated’ towards more heterosexual tone by the dialogue.¹⁸⁷ The tape recording goes: “I am not interested in that”¹⁸⁸ while he starts his workout. This is what the article claims to be a play on his sexuality. And further suggested in the syntagmatic connotation of the portrayal of Julian’s position in regards to “fags” associated with “kink” and submission in scene with Miss Anne, the Rheiman scene, and other signs which will be discussed later on. The article also suggests the objectification of Julian is uncommon as it is the way women are often filmed.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the politics of the scene not only opens for a new view of the male

¹⁸⁵ ca 1:45:00 h

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.flickchart.com/blog/movies-to-see-before-you-die-american-gigolo/> [accessed 20 March 2017]

¹⁸⁷ Please view chapter 4.1

¹⁸⁸ ca 06.30 min

¹⁸⁹ Please view chapter 4.1

body, at the same time as distancing itself between sexualities, but a challenge of normative portrayals of it.

Moreover, Julian's surroundings are modern and his workout equipment has a futuristic look (the gravity boots). This may be referred to one of Michelle's comments, that he is "something real special."¹⁹⁰ It is perhaps mostly a paradigmatic connotation to objectification due to the camera angles though the additional denotative index signs¹⁹¹ of learning Swedish and wearing spacy gravity boots suggests his rarity. Both indicating a man can be objectified and that his rarity speaks to a rich international clientele.

Meeting with Leon at the café after Julian's meeting with the Rheimans- it demonstrates the matters of gender, sexuality and clientele. Ca 21:19 min



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This scene transcends connotations of sexuality. The camera work portrays a differentiation between Julian and Leon's interests. There are three women present in the scene. The camera turns from each character in focus, then follows Julian's gazes towards beautiful women in the café. The camera shot and the plot of the scene seems to angle it towards a depiction of Julian not being homosexual, the minute Leon speaks of one of his other boys having a boyfriend the camera shot turns to a young beautiful woman, Julian watches her walk away while Leon seems unaware of her existence. Equally while discussing the Rheiman job and that they want Julian back, the appearance of two beautiful women sitting at the

¹⁹⁰ ca 15:41 min

¹⁹¹ Please view chapter 3.2

¹⁹² <http://movie-tourist.blogspot.se/2013/05/american-gigolo-1980.html> (accessed 20/3-17)

table next to them is in full view. And while Leon pays them no attention Julian is silently flitting with them. The paradigmatic connotation here clearly reveals that Julian is interested in woman while Leon is not.

Secondly, the scene treats Julian's arrogant attitude. The dialogue continues on the note that Julian feels tricked by the job at the Rheimans and Leon states: "I forgot. You... You've got scruples now? (he looks at Julian) huh?" "(looks away again). Julian counters with "I don't like playing the same numbers too often." (looks away from Leon.) "They get possessive. I can't be possessed."¹⁹³ Further the discussions turn to Miss Anne and that he is somewhat possessed by her. Leon doesn't understand why he fools around with "that dumb bitch"¹⁹⁴. It comes down to that she has jobs that *pay more*. Again, he chooses who to work for. Though Leon now starts to warn Julian that he is "walk(ing) an awful thin line" and "I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. I mean you're getting awful cocky"¹⁹⁵ Julian just keeps on flirting with the woman next to their table. This continues as Leon keeps giving Julian warnings. He seems to dismiss the hint from Leon that he should take care not to push too many buttons. Julian has 'moved up the ladder' and will not climb back down.¹⁹⁶

Thirdly and similarly to the scene with Miss Anne, the camera play during the characters' discussion turns from shots of the two, later when they are on heavier subjects of trust and money the camera moves between single shots of the two, to later reside on both of them as the last word has been said. The paradigmatic connotation of this enhances the effort of depicting the tension between the characters which is crucial for the rest of the plot, particularly the final scene.

¹⁹³ ca 22:15 min

¹⁹⁴ ca 22:36 min

¹⁹⁵ ca 23:08 min

¹⁹⁶ Please view chapter 4.1

5.3 Julian

Lovers quarrel- the scene depicts the issues of prostitution and a relationship. The politics of work and private life if you will, and equally the darkness of the film.

Ca 1:01:36 h



Michelle and Julian are in his house and practicing on his Swedish for a client of Miss Anne's. Though as they are both in bed, Michelle's mood changes in an instant and she gets up and goes to sit by a desk. She says: "I love it when you kiss me, when you touch me, but when we make love you go to work."¹⁹⁸ Camera shifts to Julian with his shirt open on the bed. He looks bothered by the direction of the conversation. The camera angle suggests a distinct angle of the conversation; she is questioning his profession sitting authoritatively by the desk as he lies with an open shirt on the bed which carries paradigmatic connotation that states him as an object to the audience, something to look at. Further Michelle is having a conversation about him not having to be a prostitute. He tries to make a comment about Michelle being on her period but she snaps back at him, again enforcing a sense of authority from the chosen camera angle as she sits behind a desk and he lies in bed. He is associated with a bed, she with a desk. The power dynamics are obvious and interesting. She continues with "I can't give you any pleasure"¹⁹⁹. He replies that she does not know what she is talking about while the camera stays with him only. Walks away from the bed in frustration, the flirty shot of Julian is gone and immediately turns more serious. Julian stands by the sink and slams the sink in frustration. Through the dialogue, Julian states that he *is* a

¹⁹⁷ <https://film-grab.com/2014/06/07/american-gigolo/> [accessed 17 March 2017]

¹⁹⁸ ca 1:02:29 h

¹⁹⁹ ca 1:02:49 min

prostitute, it is what he *does*, and initially ‘all that he is good at’ hinting at a lack of inner confidence in himself.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, as the scene starts to treat the drama of murder Julian walks further into the room speaking of the murder investigation. The lighting changes, becomes darker, with green lights and shadows from the curtains that make it look like Julian is behind bars. Surely one can assume it is a prophecy for what may come and in this context an icon sign. In addition, as Michelle starts to ask whether she might give him an alibi she sits down next to Julian and she is now also ‘behind shadow bars’. The paradigmatic connotations imply that she is now also involved in the drama. This is indeed a continuous icon throughout the film, in scenes with Michelle and detective Sunday. The signs denotation together with its syntagmatic connotation turns it into a symbolism of the entire film, therefore yet another type of sign. A constant reminder that this is murder mixed with a dangerous love indicating what the article by Bill Nichols states, that the film has similarities to *film noir*.²⁰¹

Rheiman scene - this scene is important in terms of prostitution in the film and gender roles. Ca 18:12 min



²⁰²

There is a mystery through this whole scene. The clip just as Julian arrives in his car to the house is filmed with mysterious and alarming music. Generally, the movie does not use music often thus the impression is fiercer. The first bit of the conversation between Julian and Mr Ryman even furthers that first feeling of mystic as Mr. Rheiman is not in the shot, one can merely hear his voice as they nego-

²⁰⁰ ca 1:03:45 min

²⁰¹ Film noir is initially murder and love. From: Nichols Bill. 1981. p. 9

²⁰² <https://avxhome.se/video/edi3218.html> [accessed 20 March 2017]

tiate the terms of their deal. This is a paradigmatic connotation. He is not in the shot though one hears him demanding his wishes. Julian also shifts in his behaviour in this scene. For example, one sees Julian turn full frontal with his hands in his pocket as he sets boundaries: he does not do “fags” nor couples.²⁰³ But the husband firmly states that he is going to watch.

Further into the scene, when Julian and Mr Rheiman moves into the bedroom, what is important is the camera shot, the music, the dialogue, and the facial expressions. As the audience is presented with the image of the bedroom and of Mrs Rheiman looking nearly unconscious. It is indicated that there will be some threatening events coming up as alarming music starts to play equally to what played before Julian arrived at the house. These are paradigmatic connotations and the music is in addition a syntagmatic connotation. In addition, camera shifts from the side of the bed with the two of them to a shot from the head of the bed where one can see a dim image of the husband still standing by the door. It is continuously montaged so that one can only see him sometimes in the rear-view of the shot. That is paradigmatic signifier of dominance. Mr. Rheiman is there though constantly out of focus while shouting out commands with a clear voice. It is even further strengthened as he starts to shout out commands “No. no. no. From behind...²⁰⁴ and later he commands “slap her//...//slap that c*nt”²⁰⁵ Julian looks at the husband disapprovingly, stares for a while and then the image is cut and next scene starts. One can assume it to be a paradigmatic sign for his disapproval of violence and ‘the kinky stuff.’

Lastly, the mode of sound producing alarming music, the visual of a commanding husband as well as offensive speech makes up for a significance of the dangers in the scene. This scene presents homosexuality as violent and sexually violent²⁰⁶ and again plays on the difference of sexuality. Even furthered here and in terms of the framing of the murder by homosexual pimp Leon, the message comes off as

²⁰³ ca 18:24 min

²⁰⁴ ca 20:36 min

²⁰⁵ ca 21:07 min

²⁰⁶ Please view chapter 4.1

homophobic. Which might be true in terms sexual hierarchy of prostitution, though the scene likewise exclaims that Julian's profession does involve acts and clients he does not approve of.

Scenes from Pretty Woman

5.4 Gender roles & Vivian's limit

Carpet scene- it is an important indicator of their business deal and Vivian's own limit (the kiss) as a prostitute; her power in their business relationship. Ca.26:04 min



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This is the first 'sex scene'. Vivian is lying on the floor while Edward sits down in the chair on the side of her. She is watching a movie. There most striking signs here are connotative. The paradigmatic connotations of the camera work and setting suggests different meanings of power relationships and introductory dynamics between the characters. Edward (Richard Gere) shifts his seat from further away while he talks business on the phone to the chair right in front of Vivian (Julia Roberts) just watching her. The very positioning of her on the floor and him in the chair suggests an imbalance of power. A choice has been made to not only position the characters on 'different levels' in relation to each other but also to film Vivian from an 'above angle'. In combination with the silent dialogue between them Edwards dominance is furthered.

In addition, and further analysis of paradigmatic connotation, the camera work and chosen angles never positions the viewer as if it was from Vivian's perspec-

²⁰⁷ <https://www.pinterest.se/salcamer/julia-roberts/> [accessed 17 March 2017]

tive. It is either from Edward's point of view or one sees a slight turn but an angle that has both in focus. Her perspective is not in focus here. Neither does he do anything other than sit there, looking at her intensely and with anticipation. Her experience is not relevant, here she is there *for* him.

Moreover, Vivian asks "What do you want?" Edward: "what do you do?" Vivian: "Everything, but I don't kiss on the mouth."²⁰⁸ The signification of the kiss, or the not kissing is a symbol *and* an index sign and will be the very essence of Vivian's own desires, the film's feminism if you will. She draws the line at kissing, a sign that through convention is associated with love and index for the fact that she chooses not to kiss him. Indicating that she has power. With that said it is indeed also a syntagmatic connotation sign, which will be further discussed in the next scene.

The Piano scene- this scene has been chosen as it shows prostitution as opposed to the general romantic theme of the film and the further symbolism of the kiss. Ca 58:13 min



The important signs in this scene are the monologue, the visuals, the silence of the scene (sound), and the acting. Vivian walks into the room in her robe while Edward plays the piano for some workers. They talk as soon as the workers have left the room, and Edward starts to undress her but is completely silent. Even as she speaks to him he says nothing. Vivian's monologue: "Do people always do what you tell them to do?"²¹⁰ He drags her towards him across the piano and starts un-

²⁰⁸ ca 38:35 min

²⁰⁹ <https://www.pinterest.se/amp/pin/76209418667437792/> [accessed 20 March 2017]

²¹⁰ ca 59:05 min

dressing her. She just says: “I guess so.”²¹¹ This scene reflects the very essence of prostitution and stereotypical gender roles. Visually, Vivian’s face is not in focus as they begin to have sex. It is her body. *She* is not there. She is leaning back on the piano and her hair is either covering her face or the camera angle only captures contours of her chin. And as Edward doesn’t say anything the paradigmatic connotation implies the only relevance Vivian has in this context is the fact that she is a paid prostitute and another someone doing as he says. Further, there is syntagmatic connotation here in connection to the first view the audience has of Vivian. There her body is the only focus as well, and portrays suggestively an importance in the focus of Vivian as an object.

Beyond and equally important is the discussion of Vivian’s desires and limits through the symbolism of the kiss (or not kissing) as mentioned in the previous scene, the sign of the kiss is convincingly a *syntagmatic connotation*. Edward tries to kiss her but she shies away, instead kisses his neck. Again, she does what he wants but the limit is the kiss, that is her expression of power. Furthering the signs syntagmatic connotation is that it is equally a symbol and an index sign. This is a sign (symbol and/or index) of the film’s own convention. Moreover, the silence of the scene also tells the audience something. The connotation here is a seriousness. It is not romantic, it is not menacing, it is just prostitution. This is evident in the previously discussed scene and the fact that both scenes are silent in contrast to the ‘love scene’ and romantic music is playing, when she does *choose* to kiss Edward. As a result, both the paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotations signal a shifting in the plot, in their relationship and the Vivian’s transformation. Shown through both the sign of the kiss and of the music. The not kissing plays on the film’s own connotation, a created convention of kiss and it’s the meaning expressed in the film. The connections of kiss and reality is something romantic which is also conveyed through cultural convention in the film. This part of the film could be argued demonstrates with the ‘feminism of the film’ or the traditionally romantic approach.

²¹¹ ca 59:39 min

5.5 Capitalism, Class, and Money

First shopping scene- this scene is correlated to the next scene. It demonstrates matters of capitalism, class, money, and prostitution in Pretty Woman. How the scene contrasts with the one below is of more importance than their individual significance. Ca 39:20 min



There are two scenes on Rodeo Drive. The *paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotation* of these two scenes make evidence of capitalism's omnipresence through objects (clothing, wigs, jewellery, cash-money & credit cards et), manners, location, speech, music, and the entire message of all the scenes and sequences.

Initially the paradigmatic connotations all comes down to the fact that she stands out. The sequence involves Vivian walking down Rodeo Drive and into the first shop. She is refused service and people give her dirty looks because she stands out. Simply by difference in clothing between Vivian and other people walking on the street the paradigmatic connotation is evident, especially conveyed through the syntagmatic connotation when this scene is compared to the next scene. It shows that she does not fit in and that she later does as expressed in the next scene.

The lyrics of the accompanying music sends a further message. The song 'wild women' implies a link to prostitution.²¹³ That is an index sign as it relates to the difference of a "wild woman" and a prostitute. To get a woman to do what you want, money exchange is a necessity, 'you have to pay her by the hour.' It refers to Edward and Vivian's involvement. And a syntagmatic relevance to what two

²¹² <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/experience-while-shopping-dior> [accessed 20 March 2017]

²¹³ *Wild women do and they don't regret it... Wild women show what they're going through. You tell me you want a woman who is simple as a flower. Well if you want me to act like that you have to pay me by the hour. What you think they'll never. What you only dream about... wild women do.*

previous girlfriends point out in the beginning of the movie, that they always feel like he wants them to be at his beck and call. Edward has specifically stated that he will pay Vivian to be at his beck and call as he wants no love hassle. One can assume that this implies a certainty to how capitalism works. Money can get you everywhere. It gets a hooker from the Boulevard to Rodeo drive and it gets a self-involved businessman a woman to do what he wants, to be what he needs. In terms of prostitution it certainly reinforces the view of women as commodities. Their relationship is in all aspects based on money.

“Pretty Woman scene”- as with previous scene, this example shows evidence of matters of capitalism, class, money, and prostitution. It is the most visible demonstration of her transformation from ‘hooker’ to ‘Pretty Woman’. Ca 1: 01:11 h



This scene demonstrates, through workings of the plot, through paradigmatic and syntagmatic connotation, a class transformation from prostitute to ‘pretty woman’. It brings home just how important money and class are in defining identity.

The difference in her experience from the first time on Rodeo Drive is unmistakable. This is due to the applied paradigmatic connotations, however, equally the syntagmatic connotations as it is a question of transformation. The story is emphasised through a number of signs. For example, how other people in the scene look at her in delight, establishing the significance of her transformation. The music and her change in wardrobe means she fits into her context more comfortably now. She has *become* a *Pretty Woman* from being a hooker. The presence of the concept of ‘pretty woman’ as opposed to a hooker invites for a differentiation of the concept of what beauty is, what is desirable, and what is appropriate on streets

²¹⁴ <https://www.pinterest.se/pin/122160208616707802/> [accessed 20 March 2017]

such as Rodeo Drive. The soundtrack playing *Pretty Woman* by Robby Cool, is one of the modes and is an index sign. It “speaks” *this is a pretty woman, not a hooker*. The scene screams: this is not the same woman, she *belongs* here. By moving away from being a prostitute to a ‘pretty woman’ she has moved to a different place in the hierarchy of society.

5.6 Cinderella

Final Scene -the following scene, depicts the soul of the film Pretty Woman. It’s contrast to the realities of prostitution & poses interesting aspects to the plot. Ca 1:54:30 h



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The final scene establishes the syntagmatic connotation of *Pretty Woman* as Cinderella; it also presents the film’s own connotative meaning. Previously the connotation of Cinderella reference is made in terms of what Vivian want from Edward, their relationship, as well as Vivian’s class journey. In this scene Edward is driven standing out the roof window of a white limousine as opera music bursts out of the car. The limousine is an *icon*²¹⁶ as it plays on its likeness to a white horse which refer to Vivian’s wishful thinking of a Cinderella ending. The reference of a Cinderella ending is in fact also a sign, though a *symbol*²¹⁷ as through convention the audience is directed to the knowledge of the meaning of a happy ending.

As Edward climbs the stairs up to the fifth floor to Vivian’s apartment there is another *icon*.²¹⁸ Vivian’s apartment resembles a tower which Edward climbs to res-

²¹⁵ <http://windowfashiontalk.com/25-amazing-facts-about-pretty-woman/25/> [accessed 17 March 2017]

²¹⁶ Please view chapter 3.2

²¹⁷ Please view chapter 3.2

²¹⁸ Please view chapter 3.2

cue her. The positions of the character as well as the dialogue convey connotative expression. Vivian stands just a little above Edward, as he stands one or two steps down the ladder. Edward says: “So what happened after he climbs up the tower and rescues her?” Vivian answers: “She rescues him right back.”²¹⁹ Their positions on the ladder as she stands above him as well as the dialogue are paradigmatic connotations conveying them on equal terms as they have now rescued each other, the message of all these indicators do not only imply the power relation between the two has changed but also that she has given him something. Conclusions would be different if it would be a monologue of Edward just stating he is rescuing Vivian. These paradigmatic connotations not only prove the change in the power relations between them in their relationship, but equally in the earlier constant signs of Vivian being a prostitute. The equality of them rescuing each other also suggest a connection to feminism, as Elizabeth Scola discusses in her article.²²⁰ Her heroine act could be viewed as feministic, besides she *demand*s for the fairy-tale, it didn’t merely happen. Likewise, the kiss’s significance. Though connections to Cinderella indicate exactly the opposite message, as Cinderella calls to traditional values the presence of a wealthy older man she now has been accepted by.

The syntagmatic connotation of Cinderella is not only a symbol truly defines the entire movie. It plays therefore on cultural connotations as well as conveys the film’s own connotation. The prostitute has not only made a class journey to becoming a “Pretty Woman”; she has *become* Cinderella. Nevertheless, Scala also notes that the fairy-tale ending erases the small possibility of the film being considered feministic as it conveys conservative ideas of marriage²²¹ and only whitewashes realities of prostitution.²²²

²¹⁹ ca 1:55:55 h

²²⁰ Please view chapter 4.1

²²¹ Please view chapter 4.1

²²² Please view chapter 4.1

Kit and Vivian scene- relevant as it shows the contrast between Kit and Vivian. Essentially their differences not only portray different prostitutes, but also connections to Cinderella. Ca 1:36:20 h



The mere existence of Kit de Luca and the difference displayed by the contrast of Vivian and Kit are interesting in the films portrayal of prostitution. There are several instances where their contrasts are visible though this scene is where it is most evident. Firstly, there are paradigmatic connotations, the contrasts of their clothing (Vivian wearing a silk peach suit and kit wearing similar outfit to when Vivian was working), their way of walking and the dialogue. As Kit says: “I was afraid to hug you up there, I might wrinkle you!”²²⁴ Furthermore Kit says: “you sure don’t fit at the boulevard looking like you do, not that you ever did.”²²⁵ That is the most interesting contrast portrayed between them as that would suggest Vivian to have been different from the beginning. Majda K Andersson argues that to be a demonstration of the morally ‘good’ and morally ‘bad’ prostitute.²²⁶ Kit so elegantly puts it as Vivian asks who (which prostitute) it works out for making connections to one girl that had been killed and thrown in a dumpster (skinny Marie): “Cindefu**ing-rella”.²²⁷ And they both laugh. Previously discussed scene together with this scene suggest the utter non-realistic depiction of prostitution. The review by CNN proclaims *Pretty Woman* as “white washing prostitution”²²⁸ and in light of

²²³ <https://www.bustle.com/articles/71214-ranking-julia-roberts-outfits-in-pretty-woman-because-there-was-more-than-just-the-vivan> [accessed 17 March 2017]

²²⁴ ca 1:36:37 h

²²⁵ ca 1:36:59 h

²²⁶ Please view chapter 4.1

²²⁷ ca 1:38:46 h

²²⁸ Please view chapter 4.1

what is analysed above, it is as if the film has a self-irony, almost joking along the lines of realism of prostitution and fairy tales such as Cinderella.

5.7 Summary

The two films 'speak' about prostitution in a number of ways, through the story-line but also through the signs they use. This includes matters relating to gender, feminism, sexuality, objectification, and power. The films often depict prostitution in a way that does not reflect real life.

5.7.1 American Gigolo

American Gigolo portrays a rather controversial portrayal of prostitution. The mere matter of having a male prostitute in the spotlight with a tragic fate was controversial and would have challenged many people's perceptions of prostitution.

Firstly, the film questions traditional gender roles. This in its turn questions gender hierarchies within society as well as the general portrayal of what prostitution is and who it involves. The women in this film have higher social and economic status than the gigolo. Dynamics of gender that entail an interesting challenge to power dynamics in prostitution as well as possibilities between gender dynamics in general. Julian works for almost exclusively the extremely rich, high classed and heterosexual clientele. He has had a female pimp and his lover Michelle ends up saving him from the murder accusations.

The issue of capitalism is also extremely intertwined in the story. Consumerism is something persistently present not only through the obvious luxuries but through the direction of the plot in terms of Julian himself. He is a commodity.

Building on this the film touches on the theme of objectification. To refer to one of the articles the film opens up for the possibility to objectify men.²²⁹ The male

²²⁹ Burston & Richardson. 1995. p.125

protagonist is very vulnerable. This questions the gender dynamics and the entire idea of traditional romance. The film is the total opposite to *Pretty Woman* with its more traditional gender roles and links to the objectification of women.

American Gigolo also depicts a tale in which the villain is homosexuality. While its approach to gender will have challenged traditional perceptions, its approach to homosexuality did the opposite- advancing negative stereotypes that might have been common at the time about homosexuality. Its homophobic tone poses questions of power dynamics within the politics of sexuality, both in society and within prostitution.

5.7.2 *Pretty Woman*

In the matter of gender roles, the film portrays a very traditional depiction of heteronormative romance. However, the combination of traditional romance and a grim insight into the life of a prostitute, spikes the gender roles even further. Edward is extremely rich and Vivian is extremely poor. It is in their meeting that the traditional power dynamics are demonstrated.

The film also brings out extreme economic and social differences; the very essence of the film relates to capitalism and consumerism. The film's very essence is a transformation of a 'street prostitute' to a 'Pretty Woman' making Vivian the merchandise. But the objectification of Vivian in these films is highly related to prostitution and as she 'transforms' into a 'Pretty Woman' she is no longer objectified. This therefore establishes that who can be objectified is dependent on class and wealth.

In addition, the film does as previously mentioned play on traditional gender roles though the symbolism of not kissing. Vivian drawing her own limits, to the workings of the final scene are arguably feminist. The articles discuss the matter of feminism in this film, one arguing the film to challenge female chastity while also

critiquing it for whitewashing a serious societal issue.²³⁰ This is the very essence of the film's ambivalence. The play on Cinderella somewhat mocks the film and the entire idea of non-realism of fairy tales though at the same time making it more appealing.

²³⁰ Please view chapter 4.1

6 Analysis of results

This chapter will look at the implications of the analysis in chapter 4 and 5, drawing on the theory of social constructionism set out in Chapter 3.

6.1 Prostitution

This chapter analyses portrayals of prostitution in the films found in the results.

6.1.1 A Sanitized Prostitution

A key common theme in both film is that they portray unrealistic and sanitized versions of prostitution. Some of the issues that affect prostitution are touched on in the films: they do show that prostitution entails objectification and that a person can be valued as a merchandise for example. They also do not glorify prostitution as in both films the protagonists are in the end ‘saved’ from prostitution by the workings of other characters (from more powerful positions and with higher social status). However, the plots do convey a very glamourized version of the phenomena. The reality of prostitution rarely involves perhaps not as Cinderella-like stories and often is linked to other serious challenges for example related to health, safety or personal finance. The result is thus that their depiction of prostitution is ironic and unrealistic.²³¹

6.1.2 The ‘Good’ and the ‘Bad’ Prostitute

The films contrast versions of prostitution. By doing so they depict what is ‘good’ and what is ‘bad’ prostitution. In *Pretty Woman* it is through Kit, a depiction of a prostitute who is involved with drugs, hangs out with pimps, and has no intention of ‘getting out of there.’ Kit is a bad prostitute. In contrast Vivian is portrayed as a

²³¹ Please view chapter 4.1

‘good’ prostitute with morals and aspirations for a better life.²³² American Gigolo contrasts heterosexual and homosexual prostitutes in a similar positive and negative light. Homosexual prostitutes are depicted as criminals. This is clearly a discriminatory depiction of homosexuality.

The protagonists both exit prostitution and the plot therefore plays on an idea that they are more deserving of having a different life. Prostitution is not criticized, but certain *versions* of the profession are. This is a perfect example of how culture tries to fit a challenging societal issue into accepted contexts. As Berger and Luckmann argue, when society and culture are posed with a problem, in this case prostitution, it tries to dissolve the issue into what is not seen as issues.²³³ By contrasting ‘good’ and ‘bad’ prostitution the portrayals lose their authenticity. Subsequently it furthers an idea that some versions of prostitution may be a good thing.²³⁴ It suggests that prostitution may be a positive thing, even for the prostitutes themselves.

6.1.3 Prostitution as a Choice

The films also raise questions about choice. Both films seem to imply the prostitute is able to ‘choose’ to leave the profession. However, both protagonists either have chosen the trade due to socio-economic circumstances or low self-esteem.²³⁵ Which in the least hints that if circumstances were different, this may not have been their choice. Authors such as Andrea Dworkin, Catherine Mackinnon, and Donald J West conclude that prostitution is connected to socio-economic issues and a choice **in lack** of choice.²³⁶ The fact that they are rescued by people in more powerful positions in society, and therefore still in effect reliant on them and therefore in a vulnerable position, is also not addressed in the films.

²³² Please view chapter 4.1

²³³ Please view chapter 3-.1

²³⁴ Please view chapter 4.1

²³⁵ Please view chapter 2.1 & 2.2

²³⁶ Please view chapter 4.2 & 4.3

6.1.4 Objectification

Objectification is evident in both films and understandably so as this is an integral part of the sex trade. Both films ‘show off’ their main characters in an objectifying way. Prostitution is according to Andrea Dworkin associated with objectification.²³⁷ This is a very interesting aspect in the films as in *Pretty Woman* the objectifying portrayal of Vivian is put to a halt when she ‘becomes’ a ‘pretty woman’. At the same time as the themes prostitution and romance are placed in these films and complied into the same story, the very plots of the films suggests that the two are highly infusible. On the other hand, *American Gigolo* opens up the possibility that men may be objectified, something that deviates from the norms of not only prostitution in film but also in reality.²³⁸

6.2 Male & Female Prostitution

This chapter discusses prostitution as well but does so with the focus on similarities and contrasts between male and female prostitution in and through the films.

6.2.1 Gender and sexuality

The contrasts of these films raise questions about the norms and dynamics of gender and sexuality in prostitution. Kate Millett explains in *Sexual Politics* that there is a “struggle between genders” that links to politics.²³⁹ Gender and sex are symbols of power and value. The traditional view of the gender hierarchy is that male gender/sex domination over female gender/sex is due to power struggles that result in unequal socio-economic status. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon proclaim prostitution as the extreme proof of the gender power relations and that prostitution is the bottom of this hierarchy.²⁴⁰ It is in prostitution that these dynamics are most evident. But this is dependent on a socially constructed idea of what prostitution is. What happens to these gender dynamics when men are prostitutes? Surely men may also be subjected to subordination. But this cannot explain power relations of heterosexual women buying sex from male

²³⁷ Please view chapter 4.2

²³⁸ Please view chapter 4.1

²³⁹ Please view chapter 4.2

²⁴⁰ Please view chapter 4.2

prostitutes. To discuss this in terms of social constructionism the idea of the patriarchy and the critique of it is incompatible with male prostitution as portrayed in *American Gigolo* through Julian.²⁴¹ The norms of the issues with gender dynamics, equally in prostitution, are constructed as well. Therefore, when male heterosexual prostitution is added to the equation the framework of male domination being an explanation for prostitution falls short.

Moreover, the contrasts of the films show that in the portrayal of male prostitution sexual politics derives from the hetero-norm of sexual politics but attacks homosexuality. As discussed in the articles treating the film, homosexuality was criticized in this film. This mirrors debate on homosexuality during this period in the US.²⁴² Sexuality, according to Catharine MacKinnon, has started to represent value. It is a problem in questions of equality.²⁴³ *American Gigolo* depicts certain sexual-orientations as more valuable than others. By doing so it presents and reproduces discriminating ideas of sexuality which already existed at the time of the film's release. This reproduction is partly what social constructionism argues is the essence of where culture and society is formed. It depicts controversial ideas of gender but discriminates sexualities that move outside a heteronormative framework.

6.2.2 Objectification

Objectification is as stated previously related to prostitution and sexual politics.²⁴⁴ Both Vivian and Julian are objectified and sexualized in the films. In research on female prostitution objectification is a clear and accepted associated issue. It links to gender norms in society regarding women and used as proof of women's subordination to men.²⁴⁵ *American Gigolo* presents the possibility of a man to be objectified in a similar way. Throughout the film Julian is essentially portrayed as a sex symbol.²⁴⁶ The film therefore challenges the gender norm. As noted in section 6.1, class determines who may be objectified. In these portrayals of prostitutes, it does not matter that one is a woman and

²⁴¹ Please note that Julian is not a representative for all male prostitutes, but relevant for the analysis of prostitution in these films and how they may be related to reality in this investigation.

²⁴² Please view chapter 4.1

²⁴³ Please view chapter 4.2

²⁴⁴ Please view chapter 6.1 & 4.2

²⁴⁵ Please view chapter 4.2

²⁴⁶ Please view chapter 4.1

the other a man, both are equally portrayed as objects. Who may be objectified is therefore not merely according to gender and sexuality norms. Instead it is a question of power. The power dynamic determining who may be objectified and by whom.

6.2.3 Power

As argued above, these films are flawed in many ways that they depict prostitution. However, in both films the power dynamics between the prostitutes and the other characters is a focus of the film- this is an important factor in prostitution in reality too. These films show that gender, sexuality, objectification, the matter of value and prostitution is correlated to power dynamics. Objectifying men shows that prostitution is not merely about gender and sexuality but more importantly about power dynamics alone. Andrea Dworkin states that prostitution is the extreme proof of power hierarchies, even though she speaks of it in terms of women. In *Male Sex Work and Society*, all forms of prostitution are rooted in power dynamics.²⁴⁷ In American Gigolo women with money and status out-power the gigolo despite him being a man. Like female prostitution he is an object and a commodity. Looking at objectification suggests that it is guarded and fueled by gender dynamics. However, that is to merely see to the norm. If the looking glass is expanded outside of the gender norm perspective it is rather a question of bigger power dynamics that encircle more than just gender and sexuality hierarchies. Class and wealth exceeds both gender and sexuality in terms of inequalities in both films. This may be understood by the portrayal of capitalism in the films. This suggests money and status can turn a hooker into a 'pretty woman'. Class and money mean power and act as the saviors in both plots which proves the ideology of capitalism in both films. *Male Sex Work and Society* argues that the growing socio-economic independence and liberty of women is expanding the demand for male prostitutes from female clients.²⁴⁸ If this is the case any ideas of power dynamics that define prostitution is at fault. It is then that prostitution is a societal issue that is determined by societal norms and its existence to cultural acceptance. A growing female clientele might then be due to changing gender dynamics but prostitution is not only 'reliable' on such dynamics. The phenomenon is dependent its social constructionism, that it is accepted at all and that money can buy sex. This will be furthered in the next chapter.

²⁴⁷ Please view chapter 4.3

²⁴⁸ Please view chapter 4.3

6.3 American Gigolo, Pretty Woman & Prostitution in Reality

This section treats the social construction of prostitution, reproduction of prostitution in film and the realism of film correlated to social constructionism.

6.3.1 The (possible) Reproduction of Reality

There are layers of reality intertwined within fiction in these films. As Berger and Luckmann and Christian Metz argues art and film is a part of reality, either a subversion of reality or a reproduction of reality partly or entirely.²⁴⁹ Film draws from reality through its connotations and denotations as well as create their own reality through their own connotation and denotations.²⁵⁰ These connotations and denotations are drawn from socio-cultural realities.²⁵¹ What the films may say or not about realities of prostitution is extensive. One important point is that both films glorify prostitution and present sanitized versions of prostitution. When the films are analyzed they cannot answer many questions about the reality of prostitution but they can be thought provoking and challenge the taboo nature of the phenomenon. The films analyzed together or in contrast, pressure some unanswered questions in prostitution and quite provokingly therefore also tests what a film can do. Films can provoke norms and ideas in society as well as reproduce damaging ideals and norms. The danger of this is that culture in society is not merely culture, it is equally a part of the political discourse and may then influence policy. Even if prostitution is criminalized in many societies, the demand for it is culturally accepted amongst many, not least because it has existed for so long in various forms. The demand for it exists. *American Gigolo* provokes generalizations of prostitution. But to make any universal truths based on one character is naïve. But as Metz states, however natural or fictional a film may be it is still a part of the reality we face.²⁵² If someone can imagine it, why not consider it to be a part of the ‘paramount reality.’

²⁴⁹ Please view chapter 3.1 and 3.2

²⁵⁰ Please view chapter 3.1 and 3.2

²⁵¹ Please view chapter 3.2

²⁵² Please view chapter 3.1

Film is also commercial and is to a large extent focused on what appeals to the audience. Again, this shows that gender and sexuality norms determine who can or may be objectified. A film's success is dependent on the reactions of its audience and therefore cannot be too provoking of the constructed norms of reality.

6.3.2 Pornography & Prostitution in Film

Prostitution and pornography are two phenomena that are tightly bound together. As Dworkin and MacKinnon argues, prostitution is an extreme form of objectification.²⁵³ Pornography is inevitably also an extreme form of objectification. And pornography having become so easily accessible has in a way made objectification entertainment. Dworkin and MacKinnon both relate pornography to prostitution, and how influential pornography is in popular culture.²⁵⁴ The connections suggest that prostitution in film, objectification in film and the growing presence of sex in film is a matter of sexual politics. This is highly relevant in films such as *Pretty Woman* and *American Gigolo*. It is therefore necessary to question as it could result in damaging and discriminating norms of sex and prostitution. Which eventually enforces social policy that may even be institutionalized.²⁵⁵ These films are not merely 'sexualized' but are depicting prostitution. Thereby normalizing and praising a societal issue that needs to be discussed, not glamorized.

6.3.3 Prostitution as a Socio-Economic Issue

The analysis of the films also touches on the causes to prostitution. As mentioned earlier the films portray sanitized versions of the phenomenon but aspects such as the characters' entry into the profession also addresses the matter of choice.

Through the films as well as through the literature it is evident that socio-economic circumstances are the core reason for entering prostitution. The greater prevalence of fe-

²⁵³ Please view chapter 4.2

²⁵⁴ Please view chapter 4.2

²⁵⁵ Please view chapter 4.2

male prostitution can be seen as resulting in part from the gender inequalities evident in society. However male prostitution also has the same causes. And as the growing economic independence and liberty is consolidated it may manifest in an increase in the number of male prostitutes with female clients.²⁵⁶ Rather, prostitution as it is, sex for money, is not *dependent* on specific gender or sexuality power structures. It is simply dependent on power.

The power in prostitution is expressed by the ability to treat people as commodities. Power dynamics set out by social cultural norms are enabling prostitution to exist. Policy is not in favor of prostitution, often punishing prostitutes, yet societies embrace the existence of prostitution as a profession that 'has always existed'. That the films portray issues of prostitution at the same time as glorifying the profession expresses equal ambivalence as in reality.

Socio-economic dynamics are important to discussing prostitution and gender inequalities. These may shift in time but the fact remains that our societies are built on commerce and that power is largely derived from wealth. These dynamics are problematic since they further the ability for people to be or be seen as commodities.

²⁵⁶ Please view chapter 6.3 & 4.4

7 Conclusion

For issues such as prostitution, which are in many ways taboo and not frequently discussed in society, films can have a profound effect on how they are seen in society. *Pretty Woman* became a cultural touchstone and grossed 464 million dollars. *American Gigolo* 23 million dollars.²⁵⁷ Those numbers prove a large audience. It is possible that for many in the audience their only ‘encounter’ with prostitution may have been through one of these films.

This investigation sought out to look at three questions and set out two hypotheses. The investigation has looked extensively at how the two films portray prostitution, particularly gender, sexuality and objectification. The previous chapter has looked at the differences and similarities in how the films portray female and male prostitution. Results and the analysis of the films have been used to argue that while some aspects of these films are useful in challenging prostitution, particularly male prostitution, they are also problematic in how they sanitize prostitution.

The two hypotheses set out in the introduction to question these films prove to be correct to some extent. Firstly, these films do prove to challenge aspects of prostitution and more importantly portray prostitution which is rarely seen in film or discussed in society. Unfortunately, the way prostitution is portrayed draws on norms and potentials rather than realities. They even glorify and therefore encourages a phenomenon that is extremely influenced by criminality, drugs, and trafficking. Leaving such realities in contrast to the protagonists and therefore further glorifying some prostitutes over others. Which suggests that some prostitutes deserve better than others. This is a problem since all prostitution is associated with power dynamics, power dynamics which are due to socio-economic inequalities in society. Which in its turn is an issue since such inequali-

²⁵⁷ Please view chapter 1.2.1

ties should not be enforced through objectification which is both the case in prostitution and more and more so in popular culture.

Secondly, this investigation argued that male prostitution could be equally as problematic as female prostitution and that it is not about gender but rather about power. The results and analysis show that gender or sexuality is relevant in aspects of prostitution and the issues around prostitution. But the initial factor that is making prostitution an issue is power; who has power over whom. This power may be affected by the gender and sexuality norms and hierarchies of society. But since the growing economic independence and social liberty of women is increasing a market for male prostitutes that cater female clients, the issue is less gender and more about power. This is economic and social power that exists outside of gender norms but which are correlating to changing gender norms. It is about how power takes different forms. The real problem is prostitution, and that it is not talked about enough. It is not sufficient to speak about gender inequalities in prostitution, the issue is that money, a social construction, validates a profession because it has 'always existed.'

The correlation between female prostitution and the patriarchy proves that gender hierarchies in society do matter in prostitution. But since the growing economic independence and social liberty of women is creating a market for male heterosexual prostitutes the issue is less gender and more about power. Economic and social power that exists outside of gender norms but correlating to changing gender norms. The real problem is prostitution, and that it is not talked about enough. It is not enough to speak about gender inequalities, the issue is that money, a social construction, validates a profession because it has 'always existed.'

The films also show that there should be more research on male prostitution. It is important that prostitution is spoken about without any shaming and blaming. The lack of research is a problem as it also shapes the view of what prostitution is. Therefore, the possibility of other forms of prostitution than the general idea is important to keep in mind.

To finally conclude, what proves most evident by analyzing these films is the complexities in questions about prostitution. Within a phenomenon such as prosti-

tution power structures based on certain norms does not encapsulate how prostitution functions, how and why it exists. By studying these motion pictures any new *truths* about prostitution, gender or sexuality is not found. However, this investigation has shown the important relationship, both positive and negative, between how films portray prostitution and the reality and how these need to be accounted for when trying to understand and question how society deals with a phenomenon as prostitution.

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