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Beyond Bloodshed

Investigating Justice in Rape-Revenge Films

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“If everyone helps to hold up the sky, then one person does not become tired.”

— Askhari Johnson Hodari, *Lifelines: The Black Book of Proverbs* (2009)

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Abstract

Victims of sexual violence face trauma and systemic hurdles in seeking rectification after the crime, leaving viable justice formations complex and scattered. Addressing the issue of sexual violence, the rape-revenge filmgenre provides a platform for justice and feminist discourse to flourish. Focusing on the the rape-revenge films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.*, and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* this essay explores their underlying justice frameworks through the prevalent theories carceral feminism and reparative justice. With the assistance of post-structural analysis and ideal types, results show that the films share certain reparative and carceral mechanisms while all demonstrating a lack of diverse offender voices. This absence risks simplifying narratives around sexual violence. This essay thereby prompts audiences and scholars to further look beyond the bloodshed of the rape-revenge genre to understand justice.

Keywords: Cinematic justice, Rape-revenge, Carceral Feminism, Reparative Justice

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1 Introduction *on Justice and Rape-Revenge*

In today's society, the legitimised administration of justice following a crime is generally delegated to the host-country and its legal institutions. It is even considered one of the legal system's purposes to systemize and unify the individual's desire to seek rectification after crime. However, with its current structures, the legal system fails to attend certain crimes and this insufficiency is especially notable in the sexual violence category. Research indicates that many survivors feel let down by the legal system and are at risk of being re-traumatized during the legal process (Walklate 2017, p. 113-114). This is purported to be a factor in why crimes in the sexual violence category have the most unreported cases globally (Stewart et al. 2023, p. 3-4). The difficulty to attend sexual violence within current structures, has led numerous feminist scholars to address the gendered aspect of sexual violence, such as the overrepresentation of women as survivors. In her book *Women, race and class*, Angela Davis describes the rise of sexual assault as one of the tell-tales of a dysfunctioning capitalist society, drawing on the cultural narratives surrounding sexual violence as well as the classist and racist effects of incarceration-based justice following gender-based violence (1981, p. 155). This critique has prompted alternative solutions to surface, attempting to engage society as a whole to combat and challenge normative perceptions of justice. The ways we conceive justice following sexual violence matters not only to the survivors but also to society at large, as cultural understandings shape opportunities for damage reparation, both socially and politically. As film is a dominant form of culture, it can be used to investigate cultural perceptions of justice following sexual violence (Beasley - Brooks 2019, p. 1-2). Specifically, the rape-revenge subgenre has a long history of engaging with feminism, horror and justice-elements. For this paper, a brief overview

of the purpose and research question is included. Next, a short description of the background and theories. The method section includes descriptions of the cases and choice of analytical methods, followed by the analytical process and results. The discussion will follow up, before concluding with a final summary. This essay will now look beyond the bloodshed of the rape-revenge genre, onto justice constructions in the contemporary rape-revenge films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.* and *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*.

1.1 Purpose & Research Question

Sexual violence remains a devastating reality for survivors who experience the horrors of sexual violence and then face the failures of the legal system's institutions. The history of legislation, the police and politics following sexual violence simultaneously reveals a risk of harming marginalised communities and increasing social disparities. To understand the ways which culture conceives justice are of great importance to the ways resources are politically allocated for offenders, community and victims. This thesis therefore aims to uncover justice constructions in contemporary rape-revenge films, with the purpose to highlight cultural understandings of justice as influencing political outcomes.

- How are justice constructions reflected in the rape-revenge films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*?

1.2 The political and film

As Stuart Hall describes in the book *Representation*, film reflects, represents and constructs versions of reality (2013, p. 1-6). Films are a dominant form of culture, particularly amongst the

youth, lending it a powerful place to influence and shape politics through popular culture (Beasley - Brooks 2019, p. 1-2). Ulrich Hamenstädt further emphasises the connection between politics and films in his article “Movies and social science: An Overview of the Debate in Political Science”, discussing the ways in which films can combine social, political and fictional dimensions to present social myths regarding the ideal society as well as the relationship between society and the individual (2018, p. 5-6).

The rape-revenge genre holds a particular place in regards to film and justice following the idea of representation as culturally and politically shaping. Alexandra Heller-Nicholas discusses in the book *Rape-revenge films: A critical study*, the complicated nature of the genres relationship with feminism and it's heavy subject-matter. Heller-Nicholas draws attention to the ways in which the genre has been criticized for exploiting the strife of sexual violence for views and adherence to the male gaze. The rape-revenge genre has simultaneously followed the trajectory of feminism, being popularized during the anti-rape movement of the 1970s and shedding light on gendered violence (Dethero 2023; Heller-Nicholas 2021, p. 10-12). Through these binary conceptions of the rape-revenge genre as feminist or not-feminist, Heller-Nicholas concludes that feminism itself is diverse, and to honor the diversity of opinions and reactions that this genre generates, it should be treated as such. In this sense, the rape-revenge genre handles the subject of sexual violence and reflects, represents and constructs a reality and informs viewers of the ways these dimensions should and do interact.

2 Background on Justice and Sexual Violence

This section delves into prior studies on justice in the aftermath of sexual and gendered violence, whilst also providing a theoretical foundation for understanding justice. This overview will enrich the understanding of the subject matter discussed in this essay.

2.1 Previous research

Pertaining to discussions of justice and gendered violence, a variety of research has been conducted discussing different facets of this problem. In the article ‘‘Military Humanitarianism Meets Carceral Feminism: The Politics of Sex, Rights, and Freedom in Contemporary Antitrafficking Campaigns’’, Elizabeth Bernstein highlights an unusual convergence in anti-trafficking efforts between liberal feminists and christian evangelicals in the United States (2010). Bernstein describes this confluence as new abolitionism and carceral feminism, identified by its turn toward a carceral state and law and order agenda. By this, carceral feminism is replacing old feminist abolitionists roots and prior ideals of strengthening the welfare state and reparative justice approaches (2007). Bernstein ties this turn to the neoliberal sexual agenda which relates social problems, such as crimes, to deviant individuals rather than fallible institutions. Borrowing from Bernstein, Janet Halley investigated the film *A Woman in Berlin* to analyse the framing of rape in relation to armed conflict, international humanitarian law and international criminal law. Halley points out that there is a certain feminist conduct which aims to influence domestic and international law to elevate the status of sexual crimes by implementing judicial reforms, applying harsher punishments as well as further criminalising, indicting and convicting offenders (2008).

On the topic of policies and sexual and gendered violence, Aparna Polavarapu discusses in an article that political trends following domestic violence, both in the US and globally, have been reliant on carceral feminist logic for decades. Polavarapu notes that reparative justice approaches are starting to be considered more viable, especially in non-western countries, challenging the traditionally Western view that legal proceedings are the most legitimate form of justice (2018). Tying into Polavarapus' argument, Abigail Barefoot and Sarah Deer discuss carceral feminism in a critique guided toward the US criminal justice system and carceral logic as it disproportionately affects marginalised communities negatively (2020). Specifically, Barefoot and Deer reference the alienation of marginalised people, as they risk being seen as the enemy first, receiving less sympathy from the legal system both as victims and offenders.

2.2 Understanding justice

According to Stumpf et. al., justice can be considered a prime example of a contested concept (2016), since both the concept and conception of justice have varied interpretations both practically and theoretically. While Stumpf et. al. propose that these conceptions still share key traits, they suggest that justice refers in some way to what we owe each other. A variety of domains of justice exist with their own points of focus. Distributive justice pertains to the distribution of goods, structural justice relates to background factors regarding judicial and political institutions, and corrective justice refers to rectification and punishment after a crime. Recent scholars also utilise justice conceptions which concern gender and climate that might overarch structural, distributive and corrective justice.

This essay specifically pertains to conceptions of justice relating to gendered and corrective

justice as its points of focus, but to consistently evaluate justice conceptions, a basis to measure must be established. Stumpf et. al. propose a set of criteria that are essential for a comprehensive study of justice. These criteria, which will be applied in this essay, include the judicandum, community of justice, claims, informational base, principle of justice, and instruments of justice (2016). Explanations of the criteria are further presented under section 4.2.1.

3 *Theory on Carceral and Reparative Justice*

This section introduces the theoretical approaches considered for this essay. The theoretical framework includes carceral feminism and reparative justice as theories with rising relevance and popularity internationally.

3.1 Carceral feminism

Carceral feminism refers to what Elizabeth Bernstein describes as new abolitionism, which in certain ways replace prior conceptions of justice proposed within feminist ideology. It seeks to elevate the status of gendered violence within the judicial system through punitive methods such as longer incarceration times, increased focus on criminalization, indictments and convictions on perpetrators of sexual violence (Bernstein 2007; Halley 2008; Sandbeck 2012). Critics of carceral feminism often point to how carceral solutions risk further harming marginalised communities by straying away from the anti-violence objectives that were present back in the 1970s, since carceral feminist approaches in conjunction with how neoliberalism individualises causes for crime, ignoring factors such as structural inequalities, economic vulnerability and sexism as legitimate components (Barefoot - Deer 2020). By applying a victim/perpetrator framework, Deer and Barefoot claim that the carceral framework re-victimizes survivors by

simplifying the complexities of sexual crimes. An example within the criminal justice system is the questioning of survivors' lack of risk-management and identity, undermining their 'genuine victimhood'. This includes individuals of marginalised communities who risk being seen as threats, further alienating them from sympathy within the system (Barefoot - Deer 2020).

3.2 Reparative Justice

Reparative Justice offers a new approach to justice by mobilising society as a whole to handle rectification after crime. Instead of resorting to punitive means, it seeks alternative approaches that draw from indigenous and international origins, as highlighted by Polavarapu (2018). To bring this approach into practice, one could look at conferences such as in the case of New Zealand's family group conferences in 1989, or citizen-lead courts like the Gacaca courts in Rwanda. Reparative justice can take a variety of forms, but generally they open a space for offender, victim and the public to, in a unified effort, rectify the crime (2018). Page and Arcy explored how the #MeToo movement served as a basis for collective healing, which is within the framework of reparative justice and potentially creating new innovative ways to reparation (2020). Critics of reparative justice highlight the risk of overrunning the victims' needs and the possibility of the offender's presence obstructing the victim's agency and voice. Polavarapu simultaneously highlights the risks related to the community's engagement, as they serve a major role in the cessation or perpetuation of gendered violence (2018). Unless the community is more feminist or victim-orientated, they run a risk of causing additional problems if they fail to act on the present issues. Polavarapu raises the notion that the reliance of reparative justice may risk putting domestic violence back into the private sector (2018).

4 Method *on Analysing Justice in Rape-Revenge Films*

In this section the study's method is introduced and discussed, starting with case selection and a brief presentation of empirical cases. As this paper aims to look at meaning within the films. The analytical method will follow and present post-structural analysis and more specific tools applied. Lastly criticism will be guided toward the choices made, and how these potential issues were mitigated.

4.1 Case selection

In accordance with the paper's aim, the process of case selection will be a targeted selection where the underlying strategy is determined by specific and individual criterias. These criteria are in part informed by Teorell and Svenssons' presentation of case selection principles which aim to improve explanatory method designs. The principles that are relevant to this essay specifically relate to significance, which is related to influence and reach, and variety (2016, p. 222). Therefore, the films must be Hollywood films from the US, as they reflect a form of cultural hegemony (Semati - Sotirin 2010). The films included for this essay have received awards, have a rating higher than 5.5 on IMDB, released within the last 10 years and all fall within the rape-revenge genre to ensure relevance.

To fulfil the criteria of variety, the film plots must guide the revenge in different directions and must be performed by different characters. Both *Promising Young Woman* and *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri* include the victim of sexual violence having passed away before the films timeline, which could impact the ways it conceives of justice and for whom. The inclusion of *M.F.A.* adds another dimension as one of the victims is enacting revenge. In *Promising Young*

Woman and *M.F.A.* the offenders are known, leading the avengers to guide the revenge toward them and others, whereas in *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*, the offender is never caught, leading the avenger to guide the revenge mainly toward institutions.

4.2 Overview of Empirical Cases

This section will briefly present some context to the empirical cases, as well as a brief summary of their plot to ensure the necessary background information is provided.

4.2.1 Promising Young Woman

Promising Young Woman was released in 2020, directed by Emerald Fennell and starring Carey Mulligan (IMDB). With a budget of 10 million USD, the film won five academy awards and also was described as the closest thing to the season's box office hit by Forbes (Mendelson 2021). At the center of *Promising Young Woman* is the haunting reminiscence of Nina, Cassie's (Carey Mulligan) college best friend who's implied to have committed suicide following a rape committed by med-school classmate Al Monroe. Nina, despite not being present in the film, is what leads Cassie to enact revenge directed toward the perpetrators, the institutions, former friends and potential rapists who are all perceived to hold some culpability. Both Cassie and Nina attended med-school together and the incident caused both of them to drop out. Cassie's revenge consists of two main categories, against rapists at large and against actors relating to Nina's case. Cassie lives with her parents, during the day she works in a coffee shop and spends the evenings pretending to be intoxicated, waiting for men to attempt to take advantage of her. As they isolate her she reveals her sobriety, promptly scaring them in hopes they will be too frightened to attempt something similar again. Cassie decides to concoct a plan to confront and torment Nina's

rapist and his defense attorney, and upon discovering that there is a recorded video of the rape, Nina's old friend who denies the rape and the college dean who failed to take action.

4.2.2 M.F.A.

Released in 2017 and directed by Natalia Leite and written by Leah McKendrick, *M.F.A.* stands for Master of Fine Arts as that is the degree our main character is receiving. *M.F.A.* handles the topic of college rape, sexism and rape-culture. With a budget of 250k USD and rewards from SXSW and Miskolc international film festival, *M.F.A.* stars Francesca Eastwood as Noelle (IMDB). At a college party, Noelle's classmate Luke rapes her, which swiftly deteriorates her life. After being disregarded by the school, Noelle confronts her rapist and accidentally pushes him over a balcony as he is attacking her. He dies and Noelle seems to be doing better. From here on, her project to kill the college-rapists on her campus begins.

4.2.3 Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri with a budget of 12-15 million USD, starring awarded best actress Francis McDormand as Mildred Hayes, follows a mother's attempt to avenge her daughter Angela, who's haunting absence, similarly to Nina in *Promising Young Woman*, drives the narrative forward (IMDB). *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* has won a wide variety of prestigious awards, Golden globes and Oscars for supporting and main performances as well as best screenplay awarded to the film's director and writer Martin McDonough. The film opens up with a shot of old decrepit commercial billboards, against a verdant background as our protagonist gazes at them, plotting the first step in her revenge. Mildred wants to replace the billboards with a message pertaining to her daughter's unresolved murder and rape- After convincing the owner of the billboards, their commercial past is replaced

by a poignant message. In order, the billboards read ‘‘Raped while dying’’, ‘‘and still no arrests?’’, ‘‘How come, chief Willoughby?’’ and they spark a feud between Mildred and the police force in the town of Ebbing, Missouri.

4.3 Analytical Method

To analyse the films presented above, this paper will utilise tools proposed by Ehn and Löfgrens version of a post-structural analysis (1982). Poststructuralism has its roots in social constructivism, meaning social phenomena are believed to be upheld through social interaction between individuals, according to Berger and Luckmann (1966). Berger and Luckmann’s theories on social constructivism focus on how shared symbolic value becomes internalised and objectivized in culture through external means, such as texts and films. Therefore their methodological aim was to uncover these shared symbolic values that become social structures. Foucault, generally considered to swing between post-structuralism and structuralism, furthered social constructivist sentiments by adding the component of power to consider who gets to set the agenda for what becomes socially legitimate (Alvesson - Sköldbörg 2009, p. 229; Hall 2013 p. 29-35; Tauhid - MacEachen 2021). As previously introduced, this paper will employ the poststructural tools proposed by Billy Ehn and Orvar Löfgren in *Kulturanalyser* (1982). This post-structural method differs from others as they emphasise the existence of cultural meanings that can be elicited interpretively. Some analytical methods proposed by Ehn and Löfgren are *perspectivisation*, *contrasting* and *dramatisation* which all aim to uncover underlying meaning within a communicative event. *Perspectivisation* aims to bring forth metaphors within different facets of the communication, which divert from only the primary impression. *Contrasting* aims to understand phenomena through what they do not mean, where one avoids binaries such as

chaos-order as a wide variety exists within culture. Lastly, *Dramatisation* looks at patterns and contexts, but also contradictions and discrepancies to not risk overemphasising the former (Alvesson - Sköldbörg 2009, p. 212-213; Ehn - Löfgren 1982, p. 110-113).

For this paper such a method is selected as political meanings, in this case justice constructions, are to be understood within the context of popular films. Popular films often have a concurrent intent to entertain, therefore certain decisions are made to create a compelling story. Looking at instances of communication as holding multiple concurrent meanings and purposes can therefore reveal underlying constructions of justice which this essay attempts to uncover. Its connection to culture simultaneously points to the social constructivist origin and the role that representation plays in generating social structures (Lynch - Klotz 2015, p. 88-89). One way representation can be showcased is through the film medium, where one can represent their version of reality to a large audience. Cynthia Weber discusses culture and this exchange of meanings in *International relations theory: a critical introduction*, where she discusses the ways that certain meanings become social myths and transcend into natural facts (2020, p. 33-37). Uncovering hidden understandings of justice can therefore uncover these meanings before they transform into natural fact. Therefore the aim of this paper is to raise awareness to justice-patterns within the film media, particularly the rape-revenge genre.

4.4 Analytical Tools

In this section the specific tools and processes of the method used will be presented, as well as the ways in which the method interacts with ideal types to inform the results and analysis.

4.4.1 Ideal types

The ideal types will be generated by applying Stumpf et. al. conceptual framework for studying justice. Ideal types are, according to Beckman, a thought-construction which attempts to capture the essence of a position or an ideology (2005, p. 28). For this essay, the ideal types are representing carceral feminism and reparative justice approaches. Ideal types can, in this context, provide clarity and simplify what is being identified in the films, since the justice-impressions concur with other ideas. Since ideal types try to capture the essence of a position, they do not necessarily exist as their ideal-form in reality. The following schema has been generated through the readings presented on carceral feminism and reparative justice and attempting to capture their essence. To make sense of the following table, the justice-framework presented by Stumpf et. al. will now be explained. Judicandum refers to the action that is to be deemed just or unjust, in these films this will particularly pertain to the act of rape, but it can also be concurrent with other crimes such as in *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*, where the victim was also murdered. The community of justice are the people who get to claim and those who are to address the crime that was committed. Claims and obligations refer to duties, responsibilities and actions that are to follow the crime. The informational base pertains to where information about the crime is acquired and the method of justice that is thus relevant. Principles of justice refers to what principles underlie the justice conceptions that are generated, such as core beliefs held within carceral feminism and reparative justice. Lastly, instruments of justice refer to what institutions are believed should be utilised in facilitating justice, such as the legal system.

Theory	Judicandum	Community of justice	Claims and obligations	Informational base	Principles of justice	Instruments of justice
Carceral feminism	Criminal offences	Victim & offender	Harsher, longer prison sentences & punitive measures.	Considers knowledge, context & evidence.	Victim protection & offender accountability	Legal system & police institution.
Reparative justice	Issues requiring the need for repair	Victims', communitys' & offenders'	Repairing harm.	Victim impact statement, context & victims needs.	Dialogue, empathy & understanding	Community based programs & policies.

4.4.2 Analytical process

In employing the analytical method concerning ideal types, the following analytical process is implemented. An initial film viewing and note taking, identifying important scenes and places, followed by analysing the scripts in the case of *Promising Young Woman* and *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri*. As *M.F.A.* has no published script, important scenes were instead transcribed and analysed. The scenes were analysed by guidance of Ehn and Löfgrens *perspectivization, contrasting* and *dramatisation*, centering the carceral- and reparative justice ideal types. Their tools were then employed to formulate four questions. This essay will mainly identify justice constructions in the narrative, as clear answers to the categories are not necessarily expected to be spoken out loud, but rather might exist within the greater context of the film. The following schema was produced to connect Ehn and Löfgrens' tools to the respective ideal types, to ensure a deeper understanding of justice against the backdrop of the entertainment factor of the film.

Ehn and Löfgrens tools	Questions guided by Ehn and Löfgrens tools
Perspectivization	What different impressions does the film give regarding ‘ <i>justice category</i> ’?
Contrasting	In which ways does the film contrast the impressions?
Dramatisation	What patterns are identified in the justice constructions? What discrepancies are identified in the justice constructions?

4.5 Method Criticism

To finalise the method section, a critical discussion will now be raised toward the chosen method of this essay. The poststructural methods are sometimes referred to as anti-methodological, in the sense that it utilises a wide range of interpretative, anti-objectivist and deconstructivist methods. This simultaneously leads to one of the criticisms guided to its usage. Alvesson and Sköldberg point to a lack of constructivity, in it being too dogmatic and too sceptical simultaneously (2009, p. 204-214). As it generally is sealed off against referent and subject, it too produces a closed system, which it criticises other approaches for. To combat this discrepancy as well as the risk of becoming overly reductionist, this essay utilises Ehn and Löfgrens method, which allows the elicitation of cultural meanings from communicative events. This is further emphasised by drawing the choice of theories from cultural junctures, such as the noticeable increase of carceral feminism as well as reparative justice approaches. The division of ideal types, as carceral and reparative justice, simultaneously risks undermining the sceptical nature of post-structuralism by pinning the two theories against each other like binaries. This is not the intent, but rather the theories allow for points to identify both contrasts and patterns within the justice-constructions, aiming to systematise the analysis in culture. Albeit, even carceral and reparative justice

approaches most likely have a variety of discrepancies within themselves, meaning generating ideal types from them can be reductive. Honouring the diversity of opinions existing within these theories is important and the ideal types generated for this essay are simplified for the purpose of systemization. To avoid overrunning other interpretations by this analysis, encouragement is guided toward further interpretative research adding onto a more holistic view of the relationship between film, justice and culture.

5 Results *on Justice in Rape-Revenge Films*

This section addresses the justice frameworks identified in the films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, touching on each justice category in order starting with a brief introduction and then the judiciandum, community of justice, claims and obligations, informational base, principles of justice and ending with instruments of justice followed by a short summary.

5.1 Justice frameworks in *Promising Young Woman*

Promising Young Woman handles justice in a variety of ways against a variety of people and thus Cassie's many revenges similarly vary toward different societal actors, such as the offender, bystanders or institutions. Because of Cassie's decision to take on this responsibility, Cassie can be seen as the story's judge. She delivers punishment or vindication, depending on the perpetrators reaction to her confrontation. Four revenge-plots initiated by Cassie are of particular interest to the justice-framework categories.

As mentioned above, the deeds that are deemed just and unjust in *Promising Young Woman* vary from the role as an offender to the role as a bystander or failure to act as an institution, which leads Cassie to avenge Nina against a variety of people with different types of involvement. One such example is Cassie's decision to confront Nina's and her old friend Madison about her scepticism regarding what happened to Nina. She questions Nina's reputation of promiscuity but also her alcohol-consumption, engaging in victim blaming. As the film criticizes and refers to the act of victim-blaming as problematic and a cause for revenge, it extends the judiciandum beyond the crime to individual responsibilities tied to the occurrence of sexual violence. This extension can similarly be seen once Cassie confronts College dean Elizabeth Walker, who discarded Nina's accusations to preserve Al Monroe's reputation. This revenge extends the judiciandum by proposing whether failing to act on an accusation as an institution is an issue which requires reparation. This point is reiterated by film critic Kimberly Ford in the article "Promising Young Woman: A feminist exploration of empowerment and justice", where she discusses the ways in which *Promising Young Woman* successfully criticises the responsibility of institutions to be held culpable for their part in contributing to sexual violence (2024). Cassie's third revenge similarly extends culpability. Al Monroe's defense attorney, John Greene, admits to purposefully causing Nina to drop her case by attempting to tarnish her reputation online. Greene putting pressure on Nina to drop the case might not be an illegal practice and thus the film's inclusion of it extends the judiciandum beyond criminal actions by pointing to societal and systemic practices, which harm victims of sexual violence. In this way, the film proposes whether defense attorneys, colleges and friends hold some culpability in the harm caused around sexual violence, and perhaps this culpability needs to be addressed. Aside from the stand out extension of judiciandum, the film also includes Cassie's revenge on Al Monroe and the bystanders witnessing Nina's rape,

which specifically adheres to both carceral and reparative frameworks. Albeit, the extension of culpability ties more into a reparative framework, as carceral feminism tends to look at the crime itself, between offender and victim.

As the judiciandum is extended, so is the community of justice since more actors are asked to respond to the crime which occurred. The community of justice is extended toward the college's and the attorney's in addition to the friends and bystanders responsibility to address various facets of the crime. In the case of Madison, it is partly the harm done to Nina's reputation as Madison engaged in victim-blaming. Elizabeth Walker, as the college dean, is similarly responsible for victim blaming and for protecting Al from punitive measures, such as potentially losing his place at the college. John Greene also acted to tarnish Nina's reputation online, encouraging her to drop the case which Cassie considers one of the reasons for Nina's unfortunate fate. The film thereby proposes that society at large acts to perpetuate sexual violence and protecting offenders over victims. As the film extends the community of actors asked to address the crime, it also extends the actors who can claim reparation from the crime as Nina has passed away. Cassie is the one seeking to avenge Nina but in a sense maybe also herself. This extension adheres more to a reparative framework, looking beyond claimholders and addresses in the crime itself and looking at a variety of actors impacting victims.

In terms of claims and obligations, Cassie deals her revenge in two parts. Initially, Cassie asks the perpetrators to take accountability for Nina's fate by confronting them about their role in what happened. If they are remorseful, Cassie spares them, if they are not remorseful, she enacts punishment. Cassie's idea of punishment when it comes to justice depends. Mainly she expects

the perpetrators to feel the same way Nina felt. This includes Madison and the college dean in particular, where Cassie stages a kidnapping of Elizabeth Walker's daughter to a college dorm. For Madison, Cassie stages a hook-up after getting Madison severely inebriated. Albeit, if the actors express remorse, Cassie forgives them, like she forgives John Greene as he is extremely distraught for his actions. In this category, it is difficult to say whether the type of revenge adheres to carceral or reparative justice-constructions, since it operates somewhere in between for all but in the case of Al Monroe, Cassie's fourth revenge. In addition to his college friends, the revenge is initially brought on by Cassie confronting Al, dressed as a stripper attending his bachelor party. As Al refuses to admit he did anything wrong, he kills Cassie. On Al's wedding day, it is revealed that Cassie had considered that she might not survive and had planned text messages and mail delivered, revealing her location, leading the police to arrest Al. This conception of revenge is directed more so toward punitive measures and for Al prison, adhering moreso to carceral justice conceptions.

The informational base present in *Promising Young Woman* is particularly informed by the absence of victim testimony. As Nina has passed away, one can only presume what Nina's reaction would be to Cassie's revenge plots. The lack of Nina's voice leads one to question whether this is something that she would've wanted at all considering that Cassie, her best friend, is destroying her own life. Without victims testimony present in the film, the informational base is mainly Cassie. As Cassie is in part a witness to the harm caused to Nina, this category adheres to reparative frameworks, but Cassie does not testify, but rather acts as Nina's avenger. Thus in part silencing Nina's perspective rather than bringing light toward her testimony. As the film criticises actors for ignoring and neglecting Nina's voice, perhaps the film

also fails to centre Nina by allowing Cassie to take centre-stage. Cassie could be viewed as an actor in that sense, who is sharing Nina's testimony, thereby undermining the capacity to employ a fully reparative justice framework.

Principles of justice regard underlying ideals pertaining to the ways justice is expressed. As mentioned before, Cassie favours accountability and is willing to forgive those who do accept this accountability. As Cassie confronts the perpetrators before enacting revenge on them, she to a certain extent engages in dialogue pertaining to reparative justice. Offender accountability is an important facet of carceral feminism, albeit reparative justice tends to offer accountability centred around the victims testimony. Cassie also extends understanding to perpetrators who take accountability, for example John Greene adhering more to reparative justice constructions. That dialogue and understanding is granted once an offender takes accountability, otherwise punitive measures are applied, moreso aligning with carceral justice frameworks.

The instruments of justice recognized in *Promising Young Woman* will now be discussed. As noted above, Cassie utilises the legal system to enact her final vengeance, otherwise employing vigilante punitive measures. As no community based programs or policies are discussed in *Promising Young Woman*, concurrent with the inclusion of AI getting arrested, the instruments of justice utilised in the film more so aligns with carceral ideas of justice.

In summary there are a variety of perspectives on justice concurrent in *Promising Young Woman*, certain facets reflecting reparative justice and certain factors relating to carceral feminism. However, the absence of Nina and Cassie's personal testimonies in the story, causes the film's

reparative justice elements to falter. Rather than allowing Cassie to be seen as a victim, the movie treats her death as a “gotcha moment” where she outsmarts Al. Cassie’s death is thus not treated with the same seriousness as gendered violence otherwise is in the film’s runtime. Al receiving jail-time without seeming affected by his actions feels lacklustre as the film prior to Cassie’s death prioritises accountability. Film critic Kimberely Ford also criticises the film’s ending, pointing out that ‘arresting a few perpetrators doesn’t address the larger structural and systemic issues that enable and perpetuate violence against women’, adding onto the hollowness of the film’s ending. On another note, there is an idea about accountability as a reparative mechanism reached through confrontation and dialogue, albeit if that accountability is not reached from confrontation, Cassie utilises another form of revenge more akin to an eye-for-an-eye approach. In this sense there is an idea in the film to spark empathy through punitive measures, unless the perpetrators’ immediate reaction is that of regret, which more so aligns with carceral ideals. At the same time, the film critically engages with certain elements of criticism often guided toward carceral feminism, such as the risk of engaging in victim-blaming by over-focusing on the dichotomy between offender and victim. Instead, the film criticizes a wide array of actors for engaging in victim-blaming and perpetuating sexual violence on a societal level.

5.2 Justice frameworks in *M.F.A.*

Justice within the world of *M.F.A.* is complicated. Despite being the main protagonist, there are different victims alongside Noelle who desire different things, much reflecting the diverse reality of victims’ needs in the real world. As a result, carceral and reparative frameworks are

concurrent and sometimes clash in the story. In *M.F.A.* Noelle acts as the story's judge but is not always considered to make the right decision.

The main judiciandum centred in the film is the crime of rape against three girls, Noelle, Skye and Lindsey. The story opens up with the protagonist, Noelle, getting raped by her classmate Luke in a brutal and torturously long scene which understandably leaves Noelle in shambles. *M.F.A.* is the only film out of the three cases chosen, which includes such a scene. Following the assault, Noelle attempts to testify to the college about her experience upon which she is victim blamed. Noelle is asked by the counsellor if she had too much to drink or really said 'no'. By showcasing the counsellors victim blaming, the film criticizes the college's ability to handle cases of sexual violence and as *Promising Young Woman*, points out the institutional failures of colleges in protecting victims and reprimanding offenders. Thus extending the judiciandum by questioning institutional liability in the perpetuation of sexual violence. As a lack of action is being done, Noelle decides to confront her rapist in which she accidentally pushes him over a balcony. As no further accountability is extended toward the counsellor aside from Noelle's confrontation, *M.F.A.* almost exclusively focuses on the crime itself, lending little criticism toward institutions. Therefore, *M.F.A.* in terms of the judiciandum, aligns more closely with carceral ideals.

Victims and offenders are in the centre of the community of justice present in *M.F.A.*, with the slight exception of the brief discussion about college responsibility. Some criticism is also guided toward the police, but not in the sense that they're to address the crime. Instead the criticism guided toward the police, is moreso shaped by the desire to elevate the status of rape to the status

of murder. As Noelle's murder streak progresses, the police is hot on her tail in regards to the murder, pointing out the mistreatment of rape as a crime within the police institution. Aside from this, the film generally has a carceral justice framework in regards to the community of justice, one where the victim claims rectification after the crime, and the offender addresses that claim.

The justice claims and obligations present in *M.F.A.* centre punitive measures as Noelle attempts to execute the offenders. As this might not pertain to the carceral framework in regards to jail time, one can view *M.F.A.* against the backdrop of the criticism against lacking legal engagement in a sense forcing Noelle to resort to vigilantism. Thereby punitive measures, more so align with carceral ideals focusing on punishment rather than reparation. At the same time the film sometimes addresses reparation, in particular the ways that Noelle's action does not repair the harm for the victims, rather furthers their pain. This is particularly expressed in Noelle's relationship with her roommate Skye, who's rapist Noelle attempts to kill. Skye is distraught by her past coming to light again, wanting to leave it all behind her. This demonstrates the diversity of victim's opinions and guides criticism toward carceral justice conceptions. Albeit, the film still uses the viability of punitive measures as means to perform justice.

The informational base in *M.F.A.* is the victim's testimonies, adhering to reparative justice sentiments. Despite the criticism that can be guided toward depicting rape on screen, perhaps *M.F.A.*'s depiction of rape can also be understood as showcasing the experience, acting as a type of victims-testimony. Since the audience follows Noelle throughout the film, it might strengthen her story as it demonstrates the impact the experience has had on her. The audience is put directly in Noelle's shoes, rather than as an audience member just witnessing her telling her

story. In the film and particularly in regards to Noelle, this might strengthen reparative justice sentiments by centering a victim's experience in the story. It connects to the informational base in particular by integrating victims testimony as central. In a similar sense, Noelle follows and speaks to Lindsey and Skye as they open up about their experiences, engaging with numerous individual testimonies. As these testimonies are not unanimous and their ideas of reparation differ, it also creates a diversity in victimhood which underlines the importance of considering different victim's opinions. The informational base in *M.F.A.* thereby strongly engages with reparative justice ideals.

The principles of justice employed in *M.F.A.* is influenced mainly by carceral justice frameworks. Noelle does not engage in dialogue with the perpetrators, but rather delivers punishment based on what the victim's have told her, as well as the coverage of the stories in the news or online. The primary purpose Noelle expresses is that the offenders face accountability in the ways she conceives it, which is punitive measures, particularly death. Noelle also believes what she is doing protects victims. This is showcased as Noelle says "They're not protecting us Skye, but I will" as Skye quickly retorts back "you're not protecting me!". In the case of principles of justice *M.F.A.* utilises carceral methods through Noelle, but also criticises these actions as unhelpful to victims. One way to understand the film is therefore to combine carceral and reparative points to identify a more helpful way to conceive of justice. The film shows these concurrent desires also in the principles of justice, lending dialogue, empathy and understanding toward victims. Although, the film fails to unite this principle with offender and community.

Unique to *M.F.A.*, in terms of instruments of justice is the inclusion of a community group which handles the topic of sexual violence on campus. The film holds critical toward this group, exaggerating its participants as detached from reality compared to Noelle. The film critic Chuck Bowen describes in his film review of *M.F.A.* the inclusion of the community group as a parody of activist group, which is likened to book clubs that “Trade platitudes without getting their hands dirty”; “while they quietly enable a culture of female subjugation” (2017). This is reflected in the film as Noelle is caught off guard as the girls are focused on international cases, rather than the ones happening on their own campuses. She then decides to confront the girls about this detachment and they engage in victim blaming, attempting to defile the victims reputation through slut-shaming and calling it a classic ‘he-said she-said’ situation. Similarly the group members centre their group efforts around preemptive measures for women to take to not get raped, such as praising the invention of rape-drug detecting nail polish. Noelle staunchly opposes this misplaced responsibility, calling for the school board to teach men not to rape, not for women to learn how to stay safe. As the recent murders against rapists reach the college group, a discussion is sparked amongst them regarding its efficiency upon where the president of the group opposes the murders, claiming it doesn’t help victims. Noelle similarly opposes this opinion and points out the lack of action from the group, compared to the serial killer's ability to get rapists off the street, reflecting the conflict between reparative and carceral justice frameworks.

In summary, *M.F.A.* has numerous contrasting impressions in regards to adherence to reparative and carceral justice conceptions. The victims centeredness in the story provides a sense of reparative justice sentiments, especially the diversified needs of victims represented. Despite

there being criticism toward carceral feminist ideas, such as punitive measures not necessarily protecting victims, the film does not fully commit to act on this criticism. Instead Skye, who was seemingly doing well before, commits suicide following Noelle avenging her. Leaving no room for reconciliation, empathy or dialogue. In a similar sense the film criticizes the police's lack of interest in rape cases, pointing toward the idea of more judicial and police engagement with justice where the elevation of the crime of rape matches that of murder. This paired with the lack of offender and community voices, leaves the story adhering more to carceral feminist ideals in general.

5.3 Justice frameworks in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*

Justice constructions in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, starts with neither victim nor offender present in the story, instead the film focuses on the way the community operates around such a tragedy. The movie's main focal point is on the police institution and the family of the victim. The mother of the victim as well as the film's protagonist, Mildred Hayes, seeks revenge on the police institution for failing to catch her daughter's killer and rapist. It's also worth noting that Mildred Hayes' character is the one seeking revenge.

In *Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri* Angela Hayes, is both murdered and raped, therefore the judiciandum adheres to two concurrent criminal acts. The movie also raises questions regarding police carelessness as a potential judiciandum, perhaps reaching beyond carceral feminist justice conceptions, which just focus on the crime. *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* looks at larger systemic issues in need of repair, such as police procedures. The lack of effective police investigation is what prompts Mildred to put up the billboards, and

despite the absence of an offender, catching him is her goal. The general community in Ebbing are negative toward the billboards, in part because of chief Willoughby's good reputation and him suffering from cancer. To protect chief Willoughby, different individuals try to get Mildred to remove the billboards, such as the town priest and town dentist, but Mildred refuses. Mildred instead points out the ways that they're culpable by supporting the institution, which has failed to capture her daughter's perpetrator. This extension Mildred expresses further implies that the judiciandum transcends beyond the crime itself, adhering more to reparative justice frameworks.

The community of justice is extended with the judiciandum in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* to the police institution as a potential claim addressee which should address the crime at hand. Similarly, Mildred can be considered a sort of claim holder, as she is the one who attempts to get answers. The police are responsible because of their mishandling of the case, and Mildred is asking for vengeance for her daughter and herself. Mildred pushes the police to catch her daughter's perpetrator, meaning the offender is also a claim addressee. Despite this inclusion, as the perpetrator is never caught, the focus falls on chief Willoughby's violent police officer Dixon as a character facing redemption. The initial impression the audience garners of officer Dixon is as a violent, prejudiced and angry manchild who gets no repercussions for his violent behaviour. Instead he is protected by the police-force brotherhood, until Chief Willoughby commits suicide, upon which the new police chief immediately fires Officer Dixon. The community blames Mildred's Billboards for Willoughby's suicide, but the reasons for his suicide is the fact that he is dying from cancer. Willoughby also admits in a final letter to Mildred that he paid for the Billboards to be kept up. In terms of community of justice, *Three Billboards Outside*

Ebbing, Missouri includes further claim addresses and claim holders than carceral feminist justice, therefore adhering more to a reparative framework.

In terms of claims and obligations, Joy McEntee describes *Three Billboard Outside Ebbing, Missouri* in her essay “Vigilantism and the law in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*” as the quietest rape-revenge film (2021). McEntee means that neither the rape nor the revenge against the rape is depicted on screen, rather the film reflects on the viability of vengeance as a means to find peace. Despite not showing the rape nor the revenge against it, the film still depicts violence, but holds critical toward it. For example, as Mildred’s billboards are set on fire, she decides to set fire to the police station in an act of irate revenge. As the police station is burning, it is revealed that officer Dixon is inside reading a final letter delivered to him from chief Willoughby. The letter recognises Dixon as a decent man, but describes his current state as consumed by anger. To reach his goals of becoming a detective, Chief Willoughby asks him to shed his anger. Dixon jumps through the flames to get to safety, which severely burns him and shocks Mildred as it reveals the damage done by her erratic revenge. In *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, unmet claims and obligations are faced with revenge, as Mildred’s expectation that the police officers should handle her daughter's case with care left her feeling unjust. This revenge is more akin to “eye-for-an-eye” as fire to Mildred’s billboards means fire to the police station, reflecting a sense of punitive measure. Similarly these punitive measures are reflected as a means to personal growth as officer Dixon loses his job, is burnt, then receives some hope from Willoughby’s letter, he becomes a better man and attempts to reconcile some of his wrong-doings. With *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*’s criticism toward vigilante

revenge as a type of punitive measure, paired with certain punitive measures ability to transform, it holds both carceral and reparative elements.

In terms of informational base, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* reflects on the viability of vengeance as a means to repair harm. Thereby the film shows violent revenges, in the feud between Mildred and the police but whether these actions are just or unjust in regards to the judiciandum is left up to the audience interpretation. The film rather depicts the harm done, by showcasing officer Dixon as he is set on fire, as well as showing the damage done to the people Dixon has assaulted. This demonstration can be seen as a type of victim's testimony, but the judgement falls on the audience's perception of the harm enacted. In this sense, the informational base adheres more so to reparative justice sentiments.

Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri includes lots of reparative justice facets in its principles of justice, such as empathy, dialogue and understanding. As the film progresses, the film's main characters, officer Dixon and Mildred Hayes both make mistakes as they're consumed by anger. Albeit, they manage to reconcile their anger as Dixon attempts to find Angelas killer and rapist. Dixon fails to do so, but instead finds another rapist and offers to Mildred that they should go kill him. They take a car ride, as the sun is shining and Mildred and Dixon are laughing together as they contemplate whether it will be helpful to kill the perpetrator. This scene reflects reparation without carceral means, such as catching the perpetrator. His jail-time is irrelevant to Mildred and Dixon's ability to reconcile. In a similar sense, Dixon and Mildred manage to overcome their anger toward one another through friendship, which requires empathy, dialogue and understanding. Another depiction of principles of justice is reflected in

Willoughby's absence and lack of protection toward Dixon. This absence leads to Dixon's revelation as he becomes a new and empathetic man. In this sense in accordance with reparative justice concepts, the film ties the occurrence of justice to greater normative change. Once the system that protects offenders is dismantled, offenders are able to become accountable which can lead to change. Offender accountability is an important facet of carceral feminism, but in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri*, it is partly reached through dialogue and tied to normative change, therefore adhering mainly to reparative frameworks.

Instruments of justice depicted in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* is in part society at large, as the community is criticised for their contribution in supporting an irresponsible police force. This idea ties more so into reparative justice constructions as it extends beyond the legal system and institutional responsibility. The film criticises the police for their mishandling of the case, reflecting the police institution's ability as important to catching an offender. Despite this, the film doesn't necessarily hold that catching the offender is integral to the process of reparation, which can be seen as a means to justice. Thereby *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri's* instruments of justice pertain to both carceral and reparative ideas, but leaning more toward reparation through the inclusion of the community.

In summary, *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* handles anger that follows tragedy. Mildred's anger following what happened to her daughter, and Dixon's and Willoughby's anger following the billboards holding them responsible for the mishandling of Angela Hayes case. This anger acts as the catalyst for lacking justice, as Mildred in particular believes that the justice in catching her daughter's perpetrator will set her free. The film denotes this idea by never

capturing the perpetrator, but allowing the characters a sense of reparation regardless. Through dialogue, empathy and understanding, Dixon and Mildred manage to heal by repairing their relationship. In this sense, the film's principles of justice seem to be very dedicated to reparative sentiments, perceiving punitive measures as non-integral to the process of healing a tragedy. Perhaps this reparative sentiment would be stronger if it included offender and victim voices. Since then film could respond to victim needs and offender accountability, as Angela's lack of presence leads the community to yearn for a conclusion. As the movie discusses police carelessness, the instrument of justice includes inadequate police management while catching the perpetrator as Mildred's cause for revenge. Despite this, the film primarily focuses on the reparation of healed damage. Similarly to the other films, it lacks the ability to fully engage with victim-centred storytelling, as the subject of rape has passed away, rendering the reparative justice framework incomplete.

6 Discussion on Rape-Revenge Justice and Beyond

Whilst glancing over the results, one can extrapolate that justice constructions in the films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* reflect certain reparative and carceral justice ideals. Perhaps the films demonstrate a discomfort with certain reparative ideals, while extending the justice framework to be comfortably reparative on other points. For example, the judiciary and community of justice are all in part extended beyond crime, offender and victim. In this extension, there is also a consistent absence of diverse offender-voices. Engaging empathetically with offenders is a facet of reparative justice, especially in regards to marginalised communities being more affected by justice constructions regarding sexual violence. Whilst demonstrating a lack of representation of diverse offender

voices, the film engages with reparative claims and obligations inconsistently. It is seemingly more comfortable engaging with reparative claims and obligations when it comes to non-rape offenders, such as *Promising Young Woman* depicting reconciliation through accountability with defence attorney John Greene and in *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* between officer Dixon and Mildred. *M.F.A.* on the other hand does not include reconciliation between the school counsellor and Noelle, but there is also no revenge aside from confrontation directed towards her. In terms of informational base, there is an absence of victim voices in *Promising Young Woman* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. When victim voices are represented in *M.F.A.* they're not fully engaged with. Yet the film seemingly comfortably engages with guiding criticism toward punitive measures as reparative and *M.F.A.* in particular stands out as showcasing the diversity of victim's needs. In terms of principles of justice, the films differ. *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* emphasise dialogue, empathy and understanding but only allow between the police and Mildred. Similarly *Promising Young Woman* includes empathy, dialogue and understanding between Cassie and John Greene whereas *M.F.A.* stands out strictly guiding punitive measures toward the offenders in the film. Instruments of justice also differ in the film where *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri* prioritises community healing as it moves beyond the police institution's responsibility. *Promising Young Woman* is the only film which includes the offender being arrested and thereby uses the legal system. As these points are somewhat unevenly discussed, some points provide greater insight into the justice framework by being simpler to identify in the film-narratives. Since much of the rape-revenge genre is set against the backdrop of insufficient legal institutions and police, it prefaces vigilante justice for this precise reason. Thereby not making use of the legal system, and through this absence guiding criticism toward the ways the legal system fails to respond to sexual violence in

the real world. Therefore the instruments of justice category were found not to be as useful to the analysis.

What particularly stands out in these films are that they neglect offender voices as well as reparation with offenders. The films therefore risk dichotomizing the role of victim and offender into categories such as good and evil, and not reiterating the nuance potentially present in cases of sexual violence. In the cases where offender voices are reflected, they're unempathetic and take no accountability for their actions such as Al Monroe's decision to kill Cassie upon confrontation, and Luke's gaslighting of Noelle as she confronts him. In *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing Missouri* officer Dixon accidentally overhears another rapist's testimony, in which he relentlessly brags about the violence he enacted onto the girl. This character depiction of a rapist might reflect rape-culture personified, rather than the actual diversity reflected in real cases of sexual violence. This risks oversimplifying the reasons for sexual violence by depicting the offenders as reprehensible deviant offenders rather than as influenced by a culture which struggles to address sexual violence in general. If one views all offenders as unitary and unpardonable, then reconciling the crime through reparative means can be more challenging. This impression is contrasted by the film's inclusion of a wide array of institutional actors such as colleges in the case of *Promising Young Woman* and *M.F.A.*, and the police in the case of *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. The ability to reconcile the relationship between the rape-avengers and these actors seem more viable. Their responses are heard in *Promising Young Woman* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbings, Missouri* in particular, even granting the ability to change. Thereby the films seem dedicated to showcasing the ways institutional actors further harm victims, but not necessarily how these institutions shape the potential rapists into offenders.

In summary, the films fail to fully encompass a reparative framework and perhaps risk simplifying the systemic and structural causes for sexual violence.

As this discussion may provide some insight into patterns identified in *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, these results are not comprehensive enough to draw a complete picture of the ways in which culture conceives of justice following sexual violence. Albeit, the pattern identified of lacking offender voices should be further analysed in a larger sample of films, tv-shows and other forms of media. At the same time, the films chosen for this essay, as they fall within the same genre, might represent a perspective more so identified within the audience of rape-revenge films and perhaps not extend culturally beyond that. These films also have an entertainment facet, which might impact the ways the narratives play out, such as providing a satisfying story arc for audiences. Therefore, relating the narratives or constructions identified, to real life examples of policy and activism, such as #MeToo would be interesting. This essay in particular would have also benefited from a more pointed analysis, guided toward one or two justice aspects as not all justice categories are equally relevant to answering the research question. Particularly of interest following the discussion would be looking at the role of offenders and to a greater extent tying that to discourse. If this were the goal, this essay would've also benefited from utilising critical discourse analysis rather than post structural analysis. Looking at narratives and meaning still uncovers certain areas which might be interesting for further research. But to strengthen the tie to policy, social media responses and activism might provide stronger connections outside the cinematic medium.

7 Conclusion *Beyond the Bloodshed*

Uncovering justice constructions in the rape-revenge films *Promising Young Woman*, *M.F.A.* and *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*, has shed light on the formations of justice which adhere to both carceral and reparative justice ideals. Reparative justice ideas are presented in certain categories, especially the inclusion of institutional actors as carrying some responsibility for the prevalence and continuation of sexual violence. The films also engage with principles of justice such as dialogue, however, this dialogue does not always include the victim's voices as the rape-victims remain absent in two of the films. The results also reveal a lack of offender voices and reparation including the offender. As depictions of offenders are comparatively one-dimensional and irredeemable, the depictions risk simplifying cultural narratives surrounding sexual violence, thereby making punitive measures seem increasingly warranted. From the results, one can identify areas of further research pertaining to the role of offenders in film tied to discourse, policy and activism strengthening its connection to culture. Beyond the bloodshed of the rape revenge genre, the exploration of justice constructions not only sheds light on the cinematic portrayal of rectification, but also prompts deeper cultural evaluations on the complexities of justice and the ways it interacts with all members of a society.

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