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Female Director Takes Hollywood by Storm: Is She a Beauty or a Visionary?

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**Female Director Takes Hollywood by Storm:
Is She a Beauty or a Visionary?**

By

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An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation from the
Western Oregon University Honors Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to understand how gender affects perceptions of film director Kathryn Bigelow and her work. It is no secret that there are not many female directors in Hollywood and more often than not female directors are associated with romantic comedies and other “women’s” films. What makes Kathryn Bigelow unique among her demographic is that she makes action movies and war films which are typically considered to be men’s genres. As a female lover of film it is interesting to me to look at how Ms. Bigelow and her work are received and how that may differ from how male directors who operate within the same genre are viewed.

Award-winning film-director Kathryn Bigelow is unique as a focus for a study on gender affected perceptions because she is a very prominent figurehead in the directorial industry, an industry that is almost entirely male. I have chosen Kathryn Bigelow as the focus for this among the few other successful female directors because she is arguably the most successful female director (being the only woman to win both best director and best picture) and because she makes action films unlike the majority of her counterparts. By looking at a few of her films in addition to articles, interviews, reviews, and other media, I hope to find the various ways in which how she is viewed by society is gendered. In my research I will be looking for things such as: industries not accepting her ideas because she is a woman and questions and comments about her appearance rather than her films or ideas.

Introduction

Director Kathryn Bigelow is probably the most well-known female director in the movie industry and she is easily the most awarded. But, is she out of place? Bigelow is most known for making action films which are stereotypically men's films, as in films by men for men. There are other female directors out there, but none making the types of films that Bigelow is known for. In 2011, Barry Keith Grant described her as "The only woman director to date who has succeeded in establishing herself as an auteur working within the various action genres traditionally regarded as addressing primarily male spectators" (Grant 10). Since her foray into the world of film, she has been criticized for "lacking new insight into gender politics" and that her films are not any different from the action films a male director would make (Lane 99). Yet at the same time, she has also been praised for exploring the nuances and possibilities within the genre that she has chosen to work in. And then on the next breath she is being asked questions like "What's a nice woman like Bigelow doing making erotic, violent vampire movies?" (Keough 7). These questions are then followed both by comments about her gender and appearance and comments about why people are talking about her gender and not her films. So what is the real truth? Is she a creative genius using feminist ideals to turn traditionally masculine genres on their head? Or, is she just another pretty face who is out of her depth in these dark violent worlds she has created? Throughout this paper I will be looking at four of her films (*Blue Steel*, *Point Break*, *The Hurt Locker*, and *Zero Dark Thirty*) as well as the body of literature surrounding those films to see how authors of both genders talk about Kathryn Bigelow both before and after *The Hurt Locker* as this film is arguably the film that elevated her to the level of fame she is at now. But first, why is this necessary?

Large Scale Problem

In a recent study by Women in Film and the Sundance Institute, they found that male directors vastly outnumber female directors with the gap increasing from independent to blockbuster films. Cathy Schulman, President of Women In Film Los Angeles, offers a theory on this gap. After the research was complete, she said “We now know that female filmmakers face deep-rooted presumptions from the film industry about their creative qualifications, sensibilities, tendencies and ambitions” (Robb 1). And the problem with the deep-rooted presumptions is not localized, it is a condition that plagues everyone involved in the hiring process.

As part of the study, Women In Film conducted interviews of 59 buyers and sellers of movies and 41 female directors to assess where the problem lies. What they discovered was, “The marketplace has a built-in gender bias — that female directors are perceived to make films for a less significant portion of the marketplace, while films directed by males are perceived to reach a wider and more lucrative segment of the marketplace” (Robb 2). This is unfortunately a fairly common thought, that women will only direct romantic comedies and musicals and that they cannot direct action or horror films. This was also shown in the conducted interviews when “12% [of the buyers and sellers] mentioned or speculated about beliefs that women ‘can’t handle’ certain types of films” (Robb 3). This belief is central to some of the issues that Bigelow faces as she is a woman making action films and her qualifications are routinely questioned. Interviewers do not seem to wonder if she can handle making this type of film, but rather they wonder why she is making this type of film.

Spanish director Isabel Coixet describes the film industry with an interesting metaphor: “the industry is like a rocky mountain. Boys climb the mountain equipped with boots and picks

and axes, and girls must climb the mountain naked except for a pair of stilettos and a suitcase filled with stones” (Malinsky 4). In less graphic language, women come into the industry greatly disadvantaged. Men are given all the tools they need to survive this rocky terrain, but women are stuck with tools that make the climb to the top even harder than it should normally be. This is for one simple reason that Coixet phrases nicely, “You don’t leave your tits and your vagina in your room before going to set” (Malinsky 3). Women are treated differently simply because they are women, not because of anything relating to their work or beliefs.

Author Manohla Dargis of The New York Times has written about the statistics of women both behind and in front of the camera and she notes that women are underrepresented everywhere in the film industry. After addressing the numbers, she writes about what some notable women are doing to change them. Among these women is Maria Giese, a member of the Directors Guild of America, and Giese recognizes that her organization itself is a problem. Giese’s main criticism is with the Guild’s classification system. She says that “the Guild classifies women and male minorities under the general rubric of diversity” (Dargis, “Lights, Camera, Taking Action” 3). This leads to the problem that members of the guild can meet their diversity requirements by hiring ethnic minority males and not hiring females at all. Another issue with the wording is that minority women like *Selma* director Ava DuVernay are excluded and get even less time behind the camera than white women and minority men.

And now even more women are raising their voices against poor treatment that they have received, many going through avenues like Dargis to get their stories told to a wider audience. Dargis recently published an article entitled “Voices From the Front Lines” which narrated issues that women face in the movie industry. Easily the biggest complaint from these women is the issue of money. Linda Woolverton, the writer of *Maleficent*, said this “The movies that reach

the world, the moneymakers for the studios, those movies are not being directed by women, because there's so much money at stake. What does that say about the trust in women with money?" (Dargis, "Voices From the Front Lines" 1). This is a constant theme throughout narratives given by women in similar positions, that they are not trusted with the kind of money that goes into big films and that they are not trusted to bring in the kind of money that is expected from big films.

Another common issue was personality. Traits that are admired in men are demonized in women. Barbra Streisand expressed this succinctly to Dargis when she said "What's wrong with bossy? It's O.K. for a man" (Dargis, "Voices From the Front Lines" 2). This is a problem that women in positions of power deal with on set. These women give orders as is expected of the position and are accused of being bossy or overstepping their bounds. For women to be accepted as directors and other executives, they need to be held to the same standards as men and that means being allowed to act the same way without being scolded for it.

Executives in movie studios, top agents, and other decision makers are still male and they still do not acknowledge that the problem is with them and not women. Jessica Ogilvie of the LA Weekly notes that "Since at least the 1970s, studio execs have deflected discussion of themselves and pointed to the women. They contend that the pool of female talent is too small and that women are not interested in directing action movies" (Ogilvie 5). This idea, that women are not interested in directing action movies, combined with the idea that romantic comedies and musicals are more appropriate movies for women to direct leads to the lack of women making action movies. This is part of what makes Bigelow so unique among female directors which is that she makes action movies. Director Sofia Coppola was nominated for best director and best picture for her film *Lost in Translation* which is considered a romantic comedy. Actress

Elizabeth Banks made her directing debut with *Pitch Perfect 2* which is a musical and thus a supposedly appropriate movie to direct. That's not to say that these women cannot branch out, Elizabeth Banks has been announced as the director of a new *Charlie's Angels* film, but what makes them separate from Bigelow is that Bigelow has not ever directed a stereotypical woman's film.

Another thing that makes Bigelow so unique is in her filmography. She had several films that did not do well at the box office which is notable because, as one anonymous female director told Ogilvie, "People hate risking anything, and they think it's doing something wild and crazy to hire a woman" (Ogilvie 4) and this can be seen in both the hiring of new talent and the rehiring of those behind a movie that flopped. Studios will almost never hire an inexperienced woman or one with a box office failure, but they hire inexperienced men and men with box office failures all the time. As Dr. Martha Lauzen told Ogilvie, "[Studio Executives] feel more comfortable taking risks on those who reflect the demographic profile of the majority of their own executives" (Ogilvie 8). This problem makes Bigelow notable because she had three films that were considered box office failures and they were the three films between her first big popular film, *Point Break*, and her award-winning film *The Hurt Locker*.

Another common problem encountered is the business wide stereotypes against women. Not only are women considered to be unmarketable, but they also cannot handle big films, a big film crew, or a big budget. Diablo Cody, the screenwriter of *Juno*, had this to say "You have to be protective and arrogant to direct...those are great qualities but people hate it in women" (Ogilvie 2). There is a disturbing double standard that not only makes it difficult for women to get work, but also to keep work. Cody even noted that "You'll hear about a male director throwing stuff; we just laugh, because a woman would never work again, no matter who it was"

(Ogilvie 2). The standards and acceptable behavior that men are accountable for are considered to be either unachievable or undesirable in women.

Now, social media is being used to bring this issue to the forefront of conversation. The tumblr blog “Shit people say to women directors” has been hailed as a force for good in the entertainment business. The blog gives women (with the occasionally apologetic man) the chance to share their stories anonymously. Not only does that get the stories out there, but it also highlights the issues that women face while keeping their identities secret. The secrecy is a big bonus for the submitters because they do not get labeled as “whistle-blowers” or “difficult” for speaking out. The founders of the blog stated that they started the blog because “Sexism is one of the most socially accepted forms of discrimination and a pervasive disease in the film and television business” (Carlson 3). And after reading some of the posts from their blog, it is fairly obvious that the founders were right in starting this project.

This blog has taken a stand to call out bad behavior in a well-known and idealized industry, and there is a fair amount of bad behavior to be pointed out. With everything from, “You are going to have to let me know when you have your period, so I know when to expect your work quality to be an issue” (Carlson 2) to “The worst thing we did in the 70’s was give women the idea they can have careers and babies at the same time” (Carlson 2) there is obviously some attitudes and ideas that need to change. As stated earlier, Bigelow has faced comments similar to these that question both why she makes the films she does and that place more value on her looks than her ideas.

This problem of women being snubbed is not exclusive to the movie industry. After publications about how publishing companies show a gender bias, Novelist Nicola Griffith went on a mission to find out if the bias remains after the books are out in the world. What she found,

was this “It’s not simply books by women that are ignored by prize committees, but also books about women” (Seltzer 2). This trend held true through all of the awards that she looked at: the Pulitzer Prize, the Man Booker Prize, the National Book Award, the National Book Critics’ Circle Award, the Hugo Award, and the Newbery Medal. Over the last decade and a half, all of these awards have been dominated by books by men about men/boys, with every other book making up less than half the pie chart. The theory that feminist critics pose about why this happens is pretty simple. They contend that literary culture has decided that “stories about women, no matter how they’re written or packaged, are too often seen as a special interest...while male-penned books about men are treated as universal” (Seltzer 4). This idea does not just apply to women. Books and other art forms by white men are treated as something that everyone can relate to, whereas books by women or people of color are seen as appealing to only those in the same demographic as the creator. These creators are overlooked because their ideas are not considered to be interesting to a wide portion of the population and those who put out this media — publishers and movie executives for instance — are hesitant to put the media out there because they fear it will not sell.

Despite how it may seem, there is progress being made. In November of 2014, Warner Brothers hired Michelle MacLaren to direct their *Wonder Woman* movie (Dargis, “In Hollywood, It’s a Men’s, Men’s, Men’s World” 1). This was a big deal because not only was she the first woman picked for a superhero project, but it was also a woman being picked from relative obscurity for a blockbuster film. While that happens for men all the time, it just does not happen for women for several reasons, including money. MacLaren has since been replaced with Patty Jenkins, but it is still a good start.

Movies require a lot of money and that money is given to a director to make a film. While the studio can impose creative restrictions, ultimately the movie that is produced is the director's vision. To compensate for this risk, studios would give the money to those "someone who appeared less risky" says director Jodie Foster (Dargis, "In Hollywood, It's a Men's, Men's, Men's World" 2). Foster goes on to say that the directors who appeared less risky are usually those that look like the studio executives.

Another big reason why women are not being hired by major companies to direct films is the big dilemma that people trying to enter a work force experience. Studios are more willing to hire women with experience to direct films, women that have successfully made money on films before; however, women cannot get experience if they are never hired. This leads to the cycle of needing experience to get a job...and needing a job to get experience. In addition, women tend to spend far more time in "movie jail" as director Mimi Leder calls it when a movie flops (Dargis, "In Hollywood, It's a Men's, Men's, Men's World" 5). When male directors have an unsuccessful movie they get hired again far sooner than women who have had an unsuccessful film. This concept of "movie jail" is something that Bigelow experienced as there was a five year gap between her first box office flop and the movie right after it which is longer than the two or three years she was averaging previously.

Methods

The rest of this paper will look at four of Kathryn Bigelow's films divided into two distinct groups. The first group is pre-*Hurt Locker* and contains the two films *Blue Steel* and *Point Break*. The second group is post-*Hurt Locker* and contains Bigelow's two most recent films, *The Hurt Locker* and *Zero Dark Thirty*. Each of these four movies will have its own

analysis that is broken into four parts: a summary of the major points of the movie plus observations recorded while watching the film, critic reviews from both male and female authors, articles from both a male and female author, and books from a male and female author. These analysis can then be compared to the previous analysis.

When analyzing the writings about the movies, there will be two specific areas of language that will be looked at. These would be content and diction. Looking at the content of the writings will provide information about what the author is talking about the most, be it Bigelow's ideas or her appearance. This can then be compared to the content of the other gendered author to see if there is a gendered connection to the types of content in writings about Bigelow and her films. Diction analysis will help enhance the content analysis by pulling out specific keywords that highlight which identity of Bigelow the author is choosing to portray in their writing. For the purpose of this paper, diction refers to the language and word choice of the author. Both content and diction analysis are part of a discourse analysis of the works. For this paper, the discourse analysis will follow what was written by Chris Barker. Barker writes that "Discourse analysis is interested in naturally occurring text (written) and talk (verbal). That is, 'real-world data' which has not be edited or sanitized and which can be studied in ways that come as close as is possible to their actually occurring forms in their 'customary' contexts" (Barker 63). Using this idea of discourse analysis, I will be looking at the writings of these authors as their mostly unedited ideas about Bigelow. This will give me an idea about their opinions on Bigelow and what image of her they intend to portray to readers.

In addition to the content and diction analysis of the body of literature surrounding four of Bigelow's films, there will also be a section on the 2010 Oscars as that is the year that

Bigelow won for *The Hurt Locker*. This category of articles will follow the same type of analysis as the movies with a look at both content and diction.

The analysis will start with a brief introduction to Kathryn Bigelow followed by a filmography, a brief section about her marriage to James Cameron and how that affects perceptions of Bigelow, and finally the analysis of the films. The films and events surrounding Bigelow will be organized chronologically. Within the film sections the analysis will be presented with the film impressions first, followed by the critic reviews, then the articles, and lastly the books if present.

Introduction to Kathryn Bigelow

Kathryn Bigelow was born in San Carlos, California in 1951 and has stated that as a child she always dreamed of being a painter. This dream prompted her to start her schooling at the San Francisco Art Institute. When she won a scholarship to the Whitney Museum in New York City, she packed her bags and headed to Manhattan to fulfill her dream. After studying there for a while, her tastes prompted her to move from painting to film and she enrolled in Columbia University's Graduate School of Film. While there, she made her first short film, *Set-Up* which garnered enough interest for her to push forward with her first full length feature, *The Loveless*. Since then she's made a total of nine full length feature films, the most recent of which was *Zero Dark Thirty*. During her filmmaking career, she met and married fellow director James Cameron in 1989, but the two got divorced in 1991 during the filming of his film Terminator 2. Since then, the two were out of the media together until the 82nd annual Academy Awards where they were competing for the two most coveted directorial awards, Best Director and Best Picture, both of which Kathryn ended up winning for her film *The Hurt Locker*.

Kathryn Bigelow Filmography

Since 1978, Kathryn Bigelow has made: nine full length films, four short films, and has directed five TV episodes and one TV movie. Of her short films, only the first one, *Set-Up* gets mentioned in works about her, possibly because it was her first product as a director. *Set-Up* is a short film depicting two men fighting in an alley while two theorists talk over the fight and interpret the violence. This film led to her first feature film, *The Loveless*, which focused on a biker gang that turns a quintessential 1950s American town upside down when they ride in for repairs.

It was Kathryn Bigelow's next film however that really pushed her into the limelight. *Near Dark*, a cross between the stereotypical Western and vampire movies, in which a farm boy gets seduced and turned by a group of vampires, quickly became a cult classic. Following *Near Dark* was her first cop film. *Blue Steel* starred Jamie Lee Curtis as a rookie cop who shoots an armed robber and quickly becomes the fixation of a serial killer that than haunts her and the story throughout the rest of the film.

Point Break followed *Blue Steel* and was not only a cop film, but a buddy film as well. *Point Break* follows the story of an FBI agent who goes undercover with a bunch of surfers while hunting a group of bank robbers. When the surfer group he has infiltrated turns out to be the group of robbers, the FBI agent faces the most difficult challenge of his career. *Point Break* was probably the first A-list film that Kathryn Bigelow made, but her subsequent film *Strange Days* seemed to put her back down a level in the hierarchy. In *Strange Days*, a former cop in a future universe becomes a street dealer of virtual reality experiences until he accidentally uncovers police corruption. It was supposed to be a box office success, but didn't quite hit off as

well as anticipated and it would be five years between this film and her next, *The Weight of Water*.

The Weight of Water was a step away from the action genre that Kathryn Bigelow seemed comfortable in. In this film, which was an adaptation of Anita Shreve's novel by the same name. A newspaper photojournalist investigates a nineteenth century murder mystery which oddly parallels her life. After this movie seemed to flop as well, Bigelow went back to the action genre with *K-19: The Widowmaker*. *K-19: The Widowmaker* also started Kathryn Bigelow on her recent trend of making war films that are based on true stories. In this film, the crew of the first Russian nuclear ballistic submarine effectively prevents World War III after a disastrous reactor meltdown in the bottom of the North Sea. Because of the A-list cast (including Harrison Ford and Liam Neeson), this movie was expected to rocket Bigelow back to the top of the charts, but unfortunately that didn't quite go as planned. However, it is easy to say that this film was the last of her box office flops.

While *K-19: The Widowmaker* was supposed to be the film that put Kathryn Bigelow back on top of the charts, it was not until her next film, *The Hurt Locker*, that she finally hit the major stardom and recognition that she deserved. *The Hurt Locker* is the Academy Award winning story of an adrenaline junky army bomb diffuser. The sergeant has no problem in combat, but he struggles to deal with the monotony of real life when he returns home. This film was easily Kathryn Bigelow's first big break and is not only what made her a name for film lovers everywhere, but is also the first film of hers to be nominated for an Oscar. *The Hurt Locker* was followed by yet another big hit in *Zero Dark Thirty*. While *The Hurt Locker* may or may not be a true story, *Zero Dark Thirty* definitely is. Kathryn Bigelow's latest film follows the ten year CIA manhunt for Osama Bin Laden and eventually ends with the Navy SEAL raid that

killed him. This film also earned Oscar nominations but was not nearly as successful as its predecessor.

Summary of Major Awards

Kathryn Bigelow made history in 2010 as the first woman to win the Academy Award for Best Director for her film *The Hurt Locker* after being one of only four women to have ever been nominated. This was followed by her historic Best Picture win over her ex-husband James Cameron. As one of only 11 women to be nominated and the first to win, 2010 was definitely a historic win for Kathryn Bigelow and all other aspiring female directors. *Zero Dark Thirty*, while also critically acclaimed, did not do as well with the Academy as *The Hurt Locker* did. Kathryn Bigelow was only nominated for one Academy Award for this film in the category of Best Picture which she lost to Ben Affleck for his film *Argo*. She was also nominated for the Golden Globe for Best Director of a Motion Picture for both of these films, and in both cases she lost with *The Hurt Locker* losing to James Cameron and *Avatar* and *Zero Dark Thirty* losing again to Ben Affleck and *Argo*. Ms. Bigelow has also won a fair amount of other awards, mostly for the two big winners, but there have been some for her other films as well.

Backstage Pass

One piece of information that has come up frequently when talking about Kathryn Bigelow as an auteur is her former marriage to director James Cameron. Despite the fact that the couple was only married for two years (1989 – 1991), her status as an auteur is called into question because Cameron helped produce *Point Break* and wrote and produced *Strange Days*. The problem does not lie in their collaboration, but in how their collaboration was perceived as

showcased by Christine Lane in *Feminist Hollywood*, “That Bigelow was married to him raises the uneasy issue for feminists about how to approach the work of women who seek production opportunities and financial success by making use of their male connections” (Lane 102). For these people, it does not matter if Bigelow was taking advantage of the connection or if she worked with Cameron because she liked his ideas, the knowledge of their collaboration will still be viewed as she needed his help to become successful.

Christina Lane also mentions that she talked to Bigelow about this after sending the director an early manuscript of *Feminist Hollywood*. In the original manuscript, Lane had written, “Married to Cameron at one time, Bigelow’s ability to push her projects through certainly relied somewhat on him” (Lane 102). Lane admits to thinking that Cameron would have more professional power than Bigelow when they worked together, but she was quickly corrected by Bigelow. Bigelow told Lane that it was her idea to bring Cameron into the project, not Cameron’s idea to bring her in. Bigelow also wrote back saying,

For some reasons, it would appear that whenever analysts (whether they be journalists or academics) study the career of men and women in the entertainment business, they assume that any collaborative effort between a man and a woman, somehow is more beneficial to the woman rather than the man. (Lane 102)

And what Bigelow said is true of most of the commentary surrounding her marriage, the general assumption is that she was using Cameron to get ahead in the industry or to make the project go through because it is not assumed that the woman could be helpful to the man.

Another point that Christina Lane brings up about Bigelow’s relationship with Cameron is the concept of authorship. Critics are hesitant to give Bigelow the credit for *Point Break* and

Strange Days due to the fact that she worked with Cameron on both. But the problem with authorship is greater than that. Lane points out that “they share similar visual and narrative styles, with an emphasis on special effects and physical violence” (Lane 103). Because the style of filmmaking is so similar between the two, it is difficult to narrow down which threads of story and storytelling belong to Bigelow and which belong to Cameron. But, in an interview with Cameron about working with Bigelow he said, “People gossip; there was a nasty perception that I was sneaking onto her sets and telling her where to put the camera, when anybody who knows anything about filmmaking can see we have totally different styles. The shortest lens she uses is the longest lens I use” (Keough 150). Cameron makes a strong argument for proving that he was not backseat directing *Point Break* or *Strange Days*, but the problem of authorship still remains. The directorial style could easily be confirmed as Bigelow’s, but the storytelling style could be either Bigelow or Cameron which makes it difficult to truly tell which points and ideas can from him and which came from her. However, this issue only applies to *Point Break* and *Strange Days* as those are the only two films that Bigelow and Cameron worked on together. Even the skeptics cannot argue that the other films in her resume contain that special Bigelow style.

Blue Steel

Synopsis and observations

This film starts with the sounds of domestic violence and a very androgynous looking cop walking towards the scene. The cop is revealed to be female when she enters this scene. After “shooting” the man in the scene and being “shot” by the woman the scene is revealed to be a police training scenario. Just this first scene sets up the idea that the viewer cannot count out women, that they are capable of violence, and showcases the

main character as a woman in a man's world. This leads into the opening credits where the background image is a gun. As the credits roll, the camera starts sensually gliding across the smooth panes of metal of the gun and it causes a very interesting dichotomy, especially when the gun is loaded. The gun is typically considered to be gendered male with a certain sense of phallic imagery that is especially obvious if the scene in question has a slow motion shot of the gun firing. Bigelow's direction with the opening credits takes this imagery and flips it around. The gun is given the kind of slow once-over that is typically reserved for something feminine and then Bigelow shows the gun being loaded. Instead of the typical shot that shows a person's thumb pushing the bullet into the chamber, Bigelow chooses to angle the camera so it is at the end of the chamber with the bullet coming at the viewer. When combined with the phallic imagery of the gun it flips the viewer and the gun from the "male" bullet entering the "female" chamber to the "female" chamber accepting the "male" bullet. When the credit scene is over, the gun is holstered and Bigelow again subverts the viewer's expectations. After the gun is holstered, the camera pans up the body of the individual who is dressing in a cop uniform. The gender of the officer is purposefully a secret until the camera pans up far enough to reveal a pink bra and then our heroine. With her intentionally short boyish haircut and slightly flat chest, this scene of Megan hiding the pink bra under the masculine cop uniform really showcases how hard she is trying to be a successful woman in a man's world.

What the viewer learns next is that Megan is getting dressed up for her graduation from the police academy and Bigelow uses this opportunity to showcase that Megan is really one of the guys. This starts with group shots that showcase Megan blending in with

her male colleagues and continues as the camera gets closer to and follows the heroine. Like all her male colleagues, Megan gets a celebratory photo taken with a female loved one who the audience learns is her best friend Tracy. After the graduation, Megan returns to her apartment and gets double takes from female passing strangers. This can be taken one of two ways, both which make sense with the story so far. Either she looks enough like a man that the women are interested and are taking a second look, or the women notice that Megan is in fact a woman and are confused by the disconnect between gender and gender role. This idea is reinforced later in the story at a party at Tracy's house when Tracy tries to set Megan up with a guy who comments "You're beautiful, why would you want to be a cop?" as if implying that because Megan is pretty that she should not want to have such a masculine profession.

The story then picks up and introduces the main conflict. Megan's partner stops them at a convenience store so that he can use the restroom. Megan decides to pay for some coffees when she looks out the window to see an armed robbery taking place at the grocery store across the street. Megan goes into the situation without backup and faces the armed robber resulting in the death of the robber. The man's gun flies through the air and lands on the ground next to a man that the audience does not know, but who is later revealed to be named Eugene. Eugene, after some hesitation, reaches out for the robber's weapon and takes it. This becomes a problem for Megan because suddenly there is no evidence of the robber being armed and in the eyes of her superiors she has shot an unarmed man. Now Megan has been suspended, Eugene has the robber's weapon, and Eugene has a fascination with Megan.

The next time the viewer sees Eugene, he is at work at the stock exchange. He retreats to the bathroom and takes the gun out of the front of his pants (which furthers the phallic imagery of the weapon) and fantasizes about using it. After Eugene leaves work, he is walking through the rain and he trips. When he falls, the weapon falls out of his jacket pocket from where he was fondling it and lands between him and a man walking past. As Eugene picks up the gun, the man pleads with Eugene not to use it, which only prompts Eugene to shoot this man. When Eugene shows up again, he is outside the precinct where Megan works and shares a taxi with her. Traffic is horrible because of the rain and after getting stuck in a massive gridlock, Eugene suggests that they go out for dinner. At this point it is obvious to Megan and the viewer that Eugene is interested in her. They have their date and Eugene escorts her home where Megan goes to bed alone.

A few hours later, Megan is woken up by her fellow officers because she is wanted in connection to a murder. After being interrogated by Detective Nick Mann, Mann reveals that there was a shell casing found that had her name carved into it, a casing that was found at the murder scene of the man that Eugene killed. At this point, Mann decides to make Megan a detective in name only to try and use her as bait to catch this killer. Megan is not too keen on being followed at all hours, especially when Mann tells her “I own you” which further perpetuates this idea that she is not a true cop.

As the story progresses, Megan and Eugene go on several more dates and Eugene kills several more people. Eventually, Megan goes home with Eugene and as they are kissing Megan remarks that she needs to take off her gun to which Eugene tells her to keep it because he likes it. He continually caresses her weapon and finally asks her to hold her gun. After some initial hesitation, Megan reluctantly agrees and gets out her

weapon and Eugene steps forward, gently putting the muzzle of the gun to his forehead. Eugene then goes on this rant about how they are soul mates and Megan clues in that this man is the one who has been killing people with bullets that have her name carved in them. She calls for back-up and Eugene is arrested, but his lawyer claims that the cops have no reason to hold Eugene and gets him released.

Megan is disappointed and confused and goes home where she is visited by Tracy who tries to cheer Megan up. As they go to leave, Eugene shows up and puts Megan in a choke hold before pointing his gun at Tracy. Megan tries to warn her best friend, but Eugene ends up shooting and killing Tracy. This is very similar to a common trope in action movies where the hero's female loved one gets killed to further the emotional suffering of the hero and to make the end battle between good and evil even more emotionally charged. After the death of Tracy, Megan tries to confront Eugene but he sets her up by destroying his own office and calling his lawyer. When the lawyer shows up, Megan is the one that looks bad and Detective Mann decides that maybe Megan needs a little time off. Megan goes to her parents' house to grieve with her family and it is revealed to the audience that her father is abusive to her mother, thus giving a reason for Megan's hesitation with the domestic violence scenario in the beginning of the film. Megan places her father under arrest and starts to drive him to the station before they pull off to the side and talk it out. After an emotional conversation, Megan returns her father back home and finds Eugene at her parents' house. The power dynamics in this scene was odd because, just in terms of body language, Megan held the position of power as she was standing and Eugene was sitting. However, Eugene's position, next to Megan's

mother and with a gun in his pocket, gave him more power to hurt Megan. After a terse conversation, both Megan and Eugene end up leaving.

Megan calls Detective Mann and they stake out Eugene's apartment building. When they see him leave, Megan chases after Eugene and taunts him by offering him her gun. In this scene she is trying to use his need to regain the phallic power from her as an excuse to shoot him, but Mann interferes. The next time Mann and Megan attempt to corner Eugene, Megan handcuffs Mann to the car and leaves to hunt what she thinks is Eugene, but Eugene shows up at the car window and puts his gun to Mann's head. Megan shoots Eugene in the arm and they enter a chase scene through traffic where Megan loses Eugene. The camera switches to Eugene in a bathroom dealing with his wound when Megan and Mann enter the room outside of where Eugene is, thus revealing that Eugene is in Megan's bathroom. Megan and Mann end up having sex and contrary to most other scenes of this nature, Mann is more attentive to the wants and needs of Megan than Megan is to Mann. After the sex scene, Mann retreats to the bathroom where Eugene was hiding and gets shot by Eugene. This is yet another instance of the protagonists love interest being killed by the antagonist. After Eugene shoots Mann, Eugene exits the bathroom and attempts to rape Megan. This, especially in contrast with the previous sex scene, reinforces the idea that Eugene is trying to take power away from Megan. After a brief struggle, Megan kicks Eugene off and he escapes.

The final act of the movie starts in the hospital where Megan learns that Mann is alive and will survive being shot. Megan tricks the cop guarding her room, knocks him unconscious, and steals his uniform. This costume change brings the viewer back to the Megan that we encountered at the beginning of the film which is a very androgynous

Megan in a standard cop uniform. She leaves the hospital and goes out looking for Eugene. She ends up finding him and they enter a shoot-out. Eventually Eugene runs out of bullets, so Megan shoots him in the chest, similar to how she shot the armed robber at the beginning of the film. With this final act, the story comes full circle for Megan and her fellow cops find her and help her as the end credits start to roll.

Critic Reviews

There are not many critic reviews about *Blue Steel* due to its lack of publicity. This film is not one of Bigelow's more famous films and as such not many people know about it. Of the critic reviews that were available, most of them were written by men. One such author was Roger Ebert who has a website dedicated to all his movie reviews.

Ebert appears to have been dedicated to his craft and the review he wrote for *Blue Steel* focuses on the film with only one paragraph towards the end about Bigelow herself. In his review he notes how this film is different from others, particularly others that the star, Jamie Lee Curtis, has been in because "She plays the competent, strong woman who finally has to defend herself, because nobody else can" (Ebert, "Blue Steel" 1). This is something that Ebert seems to enjoy about the film and something that he contributes to Bigelow's ideas and vision. He asks a rhetorical question of his readers about if this film would have been fundamentally different if the director had been a man to which he answers that it kind of is.

When Ebert touches on the other films Curtis has starred in, it is in reference to the fact that she played the helpless female victim before, but in this film he says "The female 'victim' is never helpless here, although she is set up in all the usual ways

ordained by male-oriented thrillers” (Ebert, “Blue Steel” 2). In most male-oriented thrillers, the woman is the helpless victim who is either saved by the hero or killed by the villain, but the most common theme is that she cannot save herself. In this film, she does. Not only does she have the tools to fight back like strength, intelligence, and training, but she also has the will to fight back.

The other major subversion of the genre that Ebert notes and contributes to Bigelow is how the male officers are depicted in relation to the heroine. Ebert notes that “There is an anger in the way the movie presents the male authorities in the film, who are blinded to the facts by their preconceptions about women in general and female cops in particular” (Ebert, “Blue Steel” 2). In the film, Curtis’ character is continually dismissed because of her gender to the point where the viewer comes to regard the male characters with a certain sense of apathy because they are not the main character that the viewer is supposed to sympathize with. These nods to Bigelow for subverting the genre are the only comments that Ebert makes about her in his entire review.

One of the few reviews available by a female author is by Kathleen Murphy and this review details several of Bigelow’s films including *Blue Steel*. Murphy focuses a lot on the sexual undertones of the film both between Eugene and Megan, but also of Megan herself and her gender identity. While the portion of the review does not have a specific section focused on Bigelow herself, the whole review attributes the sexuality of the movie to Bigelow and her vision.

The main way that Murphy discusses Bigelow is in specific camera choices that Bigelow made either in shooting the film or cutting the film. The first such instance that Murphy brings up is the scene towards the start of the plot of the film in which Megan

infiltrates the grocery store that is being robbed. Murphy says that “Bigelow extends Megan’s righteous shoot during a supermarket holdup in jazzed rhythms of in-you-face and long-shots, stop-and-go, freeze and fire” (Murphy 2). According to Murphy this leads to tension in the scene and in the audience as everyone not so patiently waits for something to happen. Murphy says that when Megan finally fires her gun, it is a release of tension for Megan and the audience, both on screen and off.

Murphy also chooses to discuss one other camera choice and she relates it back to the sexual tones of the film. When Eugene shows up at Megan’s parents’ house, there is a standoff as the two discretely tell the other that they are armed. When this exchange finishes, the camera jumps to outside the house, looking in through the window at Megan. Murphy describes this as “It’s a Rear Window moment: a nextdoor neighbor might read something or nothing into that partial view. For us, it’s like being bounced from a murderous encounter group at crisis-point, cinematic coitus interruptus” (Murphy 2). This is a very deliberate choice by Bigelow as it builds up the audience only to leave them hanging. The tension in the scene before is almost palpable and then when viewers expect something to happen the camera cuts outside and diffuses the tension in a very unsatisfactory way. This keeps the viewer interested and invested in what happens next because they need the tension relief that has not yet come. These two mentions of Bigelow are the only parts of this review that acknowledge Bigelow explicitly; however, the rest of the review seems to praise Bigelow’s vision without mentioning her name.

Overall, Ebert does not mention Bigelow by name at all, nor does he mention her appearance. Murphy does mention Bigelow by name, but she does not

mention her appearance. Therefore, it seems that authors of critic reviews are more focused on the film than the director which makes sense.

Articles

In articles about *Blue Steel*, some authors seem to have an issue figuring out if they are writing about Bigelow or her films. One such article, by Clarke Taylor, has this description in the first few paragraphs, “Kathryn Bigelow, sinewy and dark-haired, stood in long shadows that streaked the floodlighted clearing, directing her third film” (Keough 46). While this description does mention that she is the director and that this is her third film, it also draws attention to her appearance and it makes her appearance almost more important. By putting the physical description of Bigelow before who she is in relation to the movie it makes it seem more about the pretty director making an action movie...an idea that is only amplified by the title of the article “Black-Leather Director in a Business World”.

Taylor again distances Bigelow from her film just a few paragraphs later. He mentions how every other member of the crew, including: the camera operators, grips, technical personnel, the producer, the executives, and the distributor all looked and sounded like they belonged to Hollywood. He then goes on to say how Bigelow “in black pants and sweater and a black leather jacket, seemed more like one of the rockers or punkers who nest in downtown Manhattan” (Keough 46). This statement not only draws attention back to Bigelow’s appearance, this time her clothes rather than her physical features, but it also seems to say that she does not belong there. However, after these initial comments about Bigelow’s appearance, the article turns into a discussion about the

film and about Bigelow, with more nods towards her talent than her looks. There is a possibility that the descriptions of Bigelow, being on the first page of the article, were to draw in readers, but that cannot be known for sure without talking to the author.

In comparison, Phoebe Hoban starts her article about *Blue Steel* talking about the violent final scene while focusing on lead actress Jamie Lee Curtis. Mention of Bigelow herself doesn't take place until paragraph three where Hoban writes "Stalking the actors with her camera is a tall, dark woman with the deadly concentration of a killer" (Keough 51). While this sentence is a description of Bigelow, it is a far different description. Taylor's description address her physical attributes while Hoban address her presence with words that imply a stronger more powerful woman. Taylor refers to her as "dark-haired" while Hoban refers to her as "tall". This word choice makes a big difference in how the reader perceives Bigelow. The first description tells us about what she looks like and the second description tells us what people notice when they look at her and height can be very imposing and intimidating whereas hair color does not include those same feelings.

It is not until later in the article that Hoban addresses Bigelow's appearance in the same way that Taylor does. Hoban discusses the film plot, then the studios behind the film, and finally Bigelow's future projects before she decides to write about how Bigelow looks. This is in direct contrast with Taylor who started with Bigelow's appearance before moving into the film plot and Bigelow's future projects. The other contrast between Hoban and Taylor is that Hoban starts off with a quote from someone else, in this case Jamie Lee Curtis. Curtis is quoted as saying "Being near Kathryn, I feel like a fat dwarf" (Keough 53). This use of a quote from someone else before Hoban's own

personal description of Bigelow lets the reader know that this is not an opinion purely of the writer. In addition, this description of Bigelow from Curtis ties back into Hoban's earlier description of Bigelow because Curtis is referencing herself in relation to Bigelow's height.

Hoban then goes on to write a description of Bigelow as "A striking five foot eleven, Bigelow is long and lean and usually dressed in black leather and jeans" (Keough 54). This description still paints the picture of Bigelow as tall, by giving an actual number value to compare her height to, and as imposing. While Taylor uses physical descriptors that are associated with her facial features, Hoban writes about her height with words that just enhance this idea that she is an imposing figure.

It seems that, at this point in her career, both male and female article authors addressed Bigelow's appearance. But, the two differ in what parts of her appearance they address. The male author wrote about her physical facial features and the female author wrote about her height. The two also differ in the priority level they place on her appearance. For the male author, Bigelow's appearance was addressed first before the film. For the female author, Bigelow's appearance was addressed towards the end of the article after the film.

Books

In the book *Shadows of Doubt: Negotiations of Masculinity in American Genre Films*, author Barry Keith Grant writes about Bigelow and some of her films (namely the ones released at the time the book was written), including *Blue Steel*. His section on *Blue*

Steel is more about how Bigelow subverts the action film genre than it is about Bigelow herself.

Grant's main point about *Blue Steel* is the phallic imagery around the gun. He says that the film is "exploring the representation of the gun as a totem of masculine power" (Grant 182). This is something that he attributes to Bigelow and her vision. Grant goes on to describe the opening sequence where the camera penetrates and fetishizes the pistol before the gun is revealed to belong to a woman. Grant also argues that because of this, the movie is very empowering towards women, especially since it is the heroine and not Detective Mann who defeats the villain.

The only time Bigelow is explicitly mentioned in this section is in a paragraph about how some common tropes from werewolf films have been carefully placed in *Blue Steel*. Grant cites evidence from the movie that associate the antagonist Eugene with werewolves such as: his dark beard, his last name (Hunt), and the scene where Eugene frantically digs in the dirt for his gun by the light of a full moon. He then goes on to say "Violence is associated with male animality in Bigelow's films because violence is seen as an inherently masculine quality" (Grant 184). With this film, that violent male animality is in direct contrast with a violent female. Both characters kill, but only Eugene is animalistic in his violence and that is portrayed as bad particularly because Megan is also violent. As Grant said, violence is seen as inherently masculine and so the idea of a violent female character is striking. But, Megan only exhibits violence towards those men who would do violence to others whereas Eugene is violent for the sake of being violent.

While Grant does not mention Bigelow often, possibly because the whole chapter is on Bigelow and her work, he mentions her just enough to attribute what he considers to

be brilliant ideas to her. Grant does not appear to mention Bigelow's appearance at all in favor of discussing her ideas and what makes her films different from typical action films.

Christina Lane, author of *Feminist Hollywood*, also writes about Bigelow and her work and interestingly enough she focuses more on Bigelow herself than Grant does. But, like Grant, Lane focuses on Bigelow's ideas not her looks. Lane's main point about *Blue Steel* is the subversion and reversal of what she calls the film noir and cop-psychotriller genres of film starting with the "decision to place a woman in the typically male role of police officer" (Lane 113). According to Lane, this choice allows Bigelow to manipulate the gender roles of the cop genre in many ways, including: the opening credits framing the gun as female instead of the traditional male association, the use of the best friend Tracy as a core female homosocial bond instead of a traditional family unit, and associating the gun again with female by putting Megan in a shoulder holster thus putting her gun near her chest.

Lane also suggests that the film can be read in such a way that it connects Megan's situation with Bigelow's situation. She points out that both Megan and Bigelow are women striving for a foothold in a typically male dominated career industry, and she cites several shots that could be Bigelow making the connection herself. One such instance is in the very beginning of the film. Lane says that

"Another notable attribute in the film's opening sequence involves the initial camerawork, where we at first see Megan's point of view through a hand-held camera. Megan then steps into the frame, from the left angle, and we are left with the filmmaker's, presumably Bigelow's point of view. The original conflation of

Megan and ‘Bigelow’s’ vision functions as obvious encouragement to consider the ‘woman behind the camera’ in *Blue Steel*. (Lane 114)

In this quote and others, Lane mentions Bigelow specifically to credit Bigelow with making a statement about her own personal situation without being blatantly obvious about it and while she claims that the connection does not have to be true to Bigelow’s intentions, she does insist that it be considered.

Overall, between the two books, the female author (Lane) mentions Bigelow more explicitly, but does not mention her appearance. Rather, Lane talks about Bigelow subtly promoting feminist ideals in the film. Grant discusses Bigelow briefly in favor of writing about how she tweaks the action film genre. Both authors seem to have focused on that idea (Bigelow subverting movie genres), but they focus on different aspects of this. Grant focuses on how Bigelow’s films are different than male directed films and Lane focuses on how Bigelow’s films promote feminist ideas.

Point Break

Synopsis and observations

Point Break starts with a juxtaposition between a dramatic slow motion shot of a man surfing and an FBI agent training at a shooting range while the opening credits roll. After the credits, the FBI agent gets assigned to L.A. to be a part of the bank robbery team. The FBI agent, Johnny Utah, heads to the pool where agents are training offering the viewer a brief scene with multiple shirtless men. Meanwhile, a bank robbery is occurring by a group called the ex-presidents because they were masks of former presidents (Reagan, Carter, Clinton, and LBJ). Utah gets assigned to be partners with an

older agent who gets made fun of because he has been chasing the ex-presidents for years and has not caught them yet despite his theory.

Utah presses his partner Angelo for the other agent's theory on the case. Angelo reveals that he believes that the ex-presidents are surfers because of evidence that he has uncovered over the years including tan lines and oil that is commonly used on surfboards. Angelo also cites the evidence that the ex-presidents only strike during the summer before moving on and coming back the next year. The two agents think that this could be so that the ex-presidents can get travel money to chase the good waves around the world. But, it is nearing the end of summer meaning that the ex-presidents will be moving on soon. This leads Utah and Angelo to the idea that Utah should go undercover as a surfer to get close to them and try and catch the ex-presidents.

Utah tries to surf and ends up almost drowning when he is saved by a girl named Tyler. Utah later convinces her to teach him how to surf and the two get rather close when she introduces him to Bodhi and the gang. It is revealed that Tyler and Bodhi used to be a couple when Bodhi walks up and kisses Tyler. Tyler is an interesting character because she is the only main female character in this film. She also happens to play the love interest (past and present) to the two main male characters. In addition, Tyler is very boyish in appearance with short hair and a lack of cleavage. She also happens to be the only girl in the surfing crew, with most of the gang treating her like one of the guys.

After this first introduction with Bodhi and his gang of shirtless surfers, Utah and Angelo find a hair sample at a crime scene. Because surfers are territorial, they get the idea to take hair samples from surfers at each of the beaches to determine which beach the ex-presidents surf at. In the process, Utah gets jumped by a surfer and his friends only

to be rescued by a shirtless Bodhi. Bodhi invites Utah over to a party at his house and tells Utah to bring Tyler with him. Meanwhile, Utah tells Angelo that he thinks that the guys who jumped him are the ex-presidents and their house is put under surveillance.

At the party at Bodhi's house, Utah and Tyler find Bodhi with another woman, causing slight jealousy on Tyler's part. Tyler and Utah head to another part of the house where Bodhi and the gang greet them. The surfers talk about the biggest waves on the planet and Bodhi mentions Australia where the 50 year storm is supposed to hit soon. The others laugh it off as a hoax and Bodhi suggests that they all go surfing in the dark. After a few waves, Utah and Tyler share a kiss and fall asleep on the beach.

When Utah wakes up he shares a quick kiss with Tyler before going to join the raid on the house that belonged to the surfers who jumped him. Utah sees that the surfers have guns and the simple raid quickly turns into a shootout that ends with some dead and some injured. One of the surfers is revealed to be a federal agent working an undercover sting. He confirms that there is no possible way that these surfers could be the ex-presidents because they have a rock solid alibi which means that Utah and Angelo are back at square one.

The next time the viewer sees Utah, he is in bed with Tyler when a shirtless Bodhi shows up at his door asking the two to go surfing with him. Gradually, Utah starts to suspect that Bodhi's gang is actually the ex-presidents. This leads Utah to follow Bodhi around and he sees him potentially casing a bank to rob and clearing out his house. Utah persuades Angelo to stake out the bank and catch the ex-presidents in the act. After a little while, Utah goes out to get lunch and comes back right as the ex-presidents are exiting the bank with the money they stole. Utah hops back in the car and a car chase

occurs. The ex-presidents drive to a gas station and switch cars. The leader of the ex-presidents (Reagan) gets out to light the getaway car on fire, making things more difficult for the FBI. While he is doing this, Utah and Angelo show up. The rest of the ex-presidents drive off without their leader and Angelo takes the car to chase after them. Utah ends up chasing after Reagan on foot. The two run through alleys and houses before finally taking a jump down what appears to be an overpass. Utah lands badly and messes up his knee that he injured before being an FBI agent. Reagan turns to look at him and gets away because Utah cannot shoot him if he really is Bodhi.

Later, Tyler is seen helping Utah with his injuries while the ex-presidents, now without masks, are discussing what to do about Utah. Most of the gang is upset that an undercover federal agent was in their group of friends and they plan to get rid of him. One of the ex-presidents even complains that he should have shot Utah when he had the chance when Bodhi promises that he will deal with Utah.

The next time the viewer sees Tyler, she is violently waking up Utah because she found his badge and his gun and she knows now that he was just a federal agent. She accuses him of just being with her to get close to Bodhi and the gang and eventually she storms off. There is a minor passage of time showcased by Utah leaving Tyler desperate voice mails which cuts off when he hears a knock at the door. Thinking that Tyler is back, Utah goes to answer only to find Bodhi and the gang. They talk Utah into coming with them to go skydiving into the ocean. After the gang gets back on shore, Bodhi tells Utah that he needs to show him something.

Bodhi takes Utah to the back of the van to show him a video of Tyler tied up and held captive. Bodhi claims that he had to have a friend do this because he could never

hurt Tyler because she was his woman, but his friend will kill Tyler if Bodhi does not meet up with him when he is supposed to. Using Tyler as blackmail, Bodhi convinces Utah to go with them to rob a bank. Utah agrees and is given a gun with no bullets and no mask so his face will show up on camera. Bodhi decides to change the routine and get money from the vault, which the ex-presidents had never done before. This had them in the bank longer, long enough for an undercover cop in the building to act. The cop shoots at Bodhi, Utah, and one of the gang members causing Bodhi to rip his own mask off and shoot the cop. The cop and the one gang member end up dying as well as a couple bystanders. Bodhi pistol whips Utah and leaves him for the cops.

Utah wakes up being arrested by some of the guys that he works with. Angelo shows up and tries to convince their boss to let Utah go, but their boss refuses. Angelo punches their boss in the face and takes Utah in his car. Utah tells Angelo where they need to go but claims that the ex-presidents cannot be arrested or shot.

Utah and Angelo show up at a small airport where Bodhi and the two surviving gang members are loading up the loot into a plane. Utah steps out and tells Bodhi that he will let them go, if Bodhi lets Tyler go. Meanwhile, Angelo circles around to cover Utah and gets surprised by the one member of the crew who was not at the plane. Angelo turns and shoots the two members who are not Bodhi before being shot himself. Angelo dies in Utah's arms while Bodhi loads the one partially surviving member onto the plane before forcing Utah to get on the plane with them.

Utah pleads with Bodhi to let Tyler go and after some thought, Bodhi refuses. He puts a parachute and a bag of cash on the one surviving member of the group who is rapidly bleeding out while sitting on the plane before giving him a gentle shove out. The

one surviving member dies by the time he hits the ground. Bodhi then jumps out of the plane with the other parachute and the rest of the cash. In a fit of rage, Utah jumps out after Bodhi with only a gun, no parachute.

Utah angles himself as he falls so that he can grab onto Bodhi. He tells Bodhi to pull the chute so that the two can survive. Bodhi instead tells Utah that if he wants to survive, that he should drop the gun and pull the chute. The two have a midair stand off as each tries to convince the other to pull the chute. Finally, Utah does as Bodhi demanded and drops his gun to pull the chute. After they land, Bodhi releases Tyler who runs straight to Utah who lets Bodhi escape.

After some time, the viewer finds Utah in Australia during a massive storm. Utah walks down to a beach and tosses a Ronald Reagan mask at the foot of a man who is revealed to be Bodhi and it is implied that this is the 50 year storm that Bodhi was talking about earlier in the film. Utah tells Bodhi that he needs to return to the states to answer for his crimes. Bodhi tackles Utah and the two get into a fight on the beach that ends with Utah handcuffs himself to Bodhi. Local cops head down onto the beach to apprehend Bodhi when he asks a favor of his old friend, to surf one wave. After a moment, Utah uncuffs Bodhi. The cops accuse Utah of letting Bodhi go and Utah replies that he did not. The film ends with Bodhi disappearing under a massive wave and Utah throwing his badge into the surf.

[Critic Reviews](#)

Ebert also wrote a review of *Point Break* and unlike his *Blue Steel* review, Bigelow is mentioned far more. The first time Bigelow is mentioned in this review is

paragraph four where Ebert writes “The movie was directed by Kathryn Bigelow, a stylist who specializes in professionals who do violence” (Ebert, “Point Break 2). This language is very gender neutral, both about Bigelow and her characters. The use of the word professionals to discuss her characters is very deliberate as Ebert uses this word to compare Utah to Megan from *Blue Steel*, both of whom fit the description of professionals who do violence. The use of the word stylist to describe Bigelow is interesting because it is very gender neutral. Typically the word stylist calls to mind someone who designs like a hair stylist who designs hair which calls up a profession not a gender. It also is a unique way to describe a director because it implies creativity in design and control over that design.

Most of Ebert’s discussion of the film, and of his discussion of Bigelow, revolves around the plot of the film. Ebert writes about how preposterous the film is and how the plot “invites parody” (Ebert, “Point Break 2) and yet Bigelow does it in a way that works. He mentions how “Bigelow is an interesting director for this material (Ebert, “Point Break 2) because of the way she treats her characters. Ebert writes that Bigelow is interested in her characters’ motivations thus having their actions and final confrontation being more meaningful. While Ebert does not explicitly state that another director would not have treated the characters this way, it is implied that the story would be a parody and would not be nearly as meaningful if any other director had helmed the story.

The other time that Ebert mentions Bigelow by name is in the last paragraph where he gives her and her team credit for the movie by saying “Bigelow and her crew are also gifted filmmakers” (Ebert, “Point Break 2). The following paragraph proceeds to discuss the aspects of the filmmaking that Ebert found particularly good. While this

paragraph is not about Bigelow's ideas or appearance, it still is about Bigelow in the sense that it is attributing these good parts of the movie to Bigelow and her team.

Like with *Blue Steel*, there are not many female critic reviews. However, the review by Kathleen Murphy that was used for *Blue Steel* also included several other Bigelow films like *Point Break*. In an attempt to keep authors close to the same, I looked at the same review as *Blue Steel*, but the portion about *Point Break*.

Bigelow is not mentioned much in the two paragraphs Murphy wrote about *Point Break*, but when she is mentioned Murphy is comparing *Point Break* to previous Murphy films. Murphy writes "All of Bigelow's films end up on the road, stalled or cannonballing" (Murphy 3) and uses this as an excuse behind why the film ends the way it does. Murphy seems to claim that because supposedly all of Bigelow's films end this way that *Point Break* had to end similarly.

The only other time that Bigelow is mentioned specifically by name is earlier in the same paragraph. Murphy writes how the Ex-Presidents lead the viewer to believe that absolute anarchy is impending and yet Murphy claims that that never actually succeeds the way it should have. She writes that "Its berserker campaign iconography promising good times, a tiger in ever tank. Which is what *Point Break* is lacking, so that as Bigelovian narrative it drifts about like a vehicle without Baedeker" (Murphy 3). The term Murphy uses, Bigelovian, implies that in typical Bigelow films that the action does have a purpose and a guide on how to get where it needs to go, but that *Point Break* lacks this somehow.

Overall, Ebert and Murphy mentioned Bigelow about as much for *Point Break* as they did for *Blue Steel*; however, the comments appear to be more negative about her

ideas for *Point Break*. Her appearance still is not discussed at all, but the comments from Murphy imply that this film is almost substandard. Ebert hints that the plot of *Point Break* is not as good as some of the other plots, but he still commends Bigelow for her gifted filmmaking.

Articles

Mark Salisbury is one of the few authors to write an article about Bigelow and *Point Break*. His article is titled “Hollywood’s Macho Woman” and it focuses more on Bigelow and her existence in the genre of action films than it does her appearance. In the first paragraph Salisbury addresses the question that Bigelow gets asked many times which is, why does she make the movies she does? But, unlike other instances where this question would come up, Salisbury uses it as a jumping off point to discuss the issues Bigelow has faced as showcased in the sentences following the question, “As the sole woman director regularly working in the traditionally male-dominated action movie arena, Bigelow has had to contend with her critics ill-at-ease with her proficiency with the medium. Moreover, she does it better than most of her male counterparts” (Keough 97). This quote really showcases Salisbury’s almost unconventional approach to an interview with Bigelow. First he addresses the issues she faces which is followed quickly by him paying her a compliment and making it seem like the issues should not be issues at all.

In response to this, Salisbury gives quotes from Bigelow herself where she asks the question of why action is perceived as masculine and why it needs to be assigned that way because, as she says, “Action is action” (Keough 98). This idea of Bigelow having

an issue with concepts being assigned a gender comes up again when Salisbury mentions a remark that *Blue Steel* producer Oliver Stone said about Bigelow's relentlessness being masculine and Salisbury describes Bigelow's response as "Bigelow laughs at the suggestion, again questioning the need to assign gender. Though she does her best to disguise it, there's a twinge of irritation in her voice" (Keough 98). While Salisbury is not saying that Bigelow was blatantly irritated with the remark, she offers the impression that this is something that Bigelow deals with a lot thus making her slight irritation understandable to the reader. There is an impression that she feels sympathy that she has to deal with and it almost seems like Salisbury is distancing himself from the comment to compare himself to Stone and make himself seem more favorable.

The only other time that Bigelow's gender makes a big appearance in Salisbury's article is towards the end when Salisbury poses the question "Given her position as queen of the action picture, does Bigelow believe her work will encourage women to follow her lead and make tougher, grittier films?" (Keough 100). What is really interesting about this quote and the way Salisbury words this question is that she starts off by calling her the queen of action. He does not call her the only female action director, but rather implies that there could be more directors, but that Bigelow is the best of them all. He also does not ask if Bigelow's example will lead more female directors to directing masculine films, but rather he uses gender neutral adjectives that still accurately describe the type of film that Bigelow chooses to direct.

Ana Maria Bahiana is one of the only other authors that I discovered who wrote an article about Bigelow just after *Point Break*. This article, titled simply "Kathryn Bigelow", was less of an opinion piece and more of a transcription of an interview with

Bigelow. Bahiana starts off with a basic biography of Bigelow and then gets right into the question and answer section which comprises the majority of the article. The only real mention of Bigelow's gender in the biography section comes during a statement about *Point Break* where Bahiana states "*Blue Steel*...and this year's surfers-on-a-crime-rampage, *Point Break*, further expanded her clout as an action director who, of course, also happens to be a woman" (Keough 102). This sentence makes it seem like her gender is no big deal, which one can imagine is a goal of Bigelow's. Following this sentence, and a wry comment from Bigelow, Bahiana delves into her question and answer session with Bigelow.

In the question and answer section there are some questions from Bahiana that bring Bigelow's gender into the discussion but they are more curiosity than commentary. The first question about Bigelow's gender, which is the fifth question into the article, states "Did you get a lot of feedback that you, a female director, were shooting a macho-action film?" (Keough 103). This question is then followed by another question where Bahiana asks "Would you say then that there is a stereotype that women can only direct 'soft' material?" (Keough 103). Both of these questions are answered succinctly by Bigelow in a way that implies that she is not offended by them. This is probably due to the fact that the questions are worded in such a way that they do not demean Bigelow and her experiences. Rather, the questions seem as if spoken to an expert on the material which is not surprising considering the supposed novelty of a women directing action movies. After this point, most of the questions are about Bigelow's previous films and the ideas behind them.

For articles written after *Point Break* it appears that neither male nor female authors were very interested in Bigelow's appearance and were rather interested in her experiences and ideas. However, compared to the articles about *Blue Steel*, her experiences as a woman directing an action film were brought up more. This could be for two reasons. The first being that there seems to be a general consensus that *Point Break* is not as good of a film as *Blue Steel* as observed in: the critic reviews, the occasional comment about *Point Break* being a bit of a letdown, and the lack of material written after the film. The other reason could be that *Blue Steel* had a female main character and *Point Break* has male main characters. It is unknown if Bigelow's experiences are mentioned more in *Point Break* because her main characters are male and she is a female directing about male characters or if her appearance is mentioned more in *Blue Steel* because of the lack of femininity in her female main character. However, it is apparent that both male and female authors of articles about *Blue Steel* mention Bigelow's appearance more than both male and female authors of articles about *Point Break*.

Books

Like the section on *Blue Steel*, Barry Keith Grant's section on *Point Break* in his book *Shadows of Doubt: Negotiations of Masculinity in American Genre Films* focuses more on Bigelow's interpretation of the genre she operates in. Although, his opinion on *Point Break* is harsher than his opinion on *Blue Steel*. Grant's main argument is that Bigelow subverts the action genre by questioning the realism of the characters and by overdoing the homosocial bonds and the masculinity to a point of almost satire.

Grant brings this up early in the section with the only mention of Bigelow by name. He writes, “Bigelow treats the action excessively in *Point Break*, pushing the macho mysticism into overblown spectacle” (Grant 185). He follows this up quickly with a quote from the movie’s sole female character Tyler who said “There’s too much testosterone here for me”. Both quotes, the one in Grant’s own words and the other that he took from the film, easily make Grant’s point about the film which is that the masculinity is so overdone that it is almost comic. This is an idea that he continues to reinforce, albeit without the mention of Bigelow again.

Grant’s idea that the stereotypical masculinity is very overdone comes up again in his last paragraph about the film. His paragraph starts with the sentence “If action movies exhibit a masculine homosocial hysteria mapped onto the excessive display of the male body, then *Point Break* is a paradigmatic action movie” (Grant 187). He goes on to site the evidence of Bodhi’s general appearance and the way the camera lingers on his body and his luscious locks as well as the part of the movie where at least one of the gang members is identified by the tan lines on his buttocks after he moons the security cameras in one of the banks that they rob. This, in addition to the borderline homoerotic subtext between Bodhi and Utah leads the movie to an almost parody of the action genre in Grant’s opinion. But, his argument is not that this parody feel is bad or unintentional, but rather that this was Bigelow’s intention and a way for her to redefine the genre and in that regard it is successful.

Christina Lane, in her chapter about Bigelow, writes about all the films released by that point including *Point Break*. The purpose of Lane’s book appears to be to discuss female directors that manipulate gender norms and roles in their films of which Bigelow

is one of the ones she writes on. In her section about *Point Break*, Lane discusses the homoerotic subtext, the issues with the male buddy system, and the way the movie makes a commentary on the Reagan era.

Lane argues that most action and male buddy films have some degree of homoerotic subtext between the main characters, but that *Point Break* treats this very overtly in contrast to other films which implicitly discuss this. She writes that “Indeed, *Point Break* feeds on the sexualized pleasure of the male bonding between Johnny and Bodhi” (Lane 118). The two bond over football, then surfing, then skydiving. With each action, the level of danger increases until the two are flirting with death. Each time they survive their adventure, the tension and adrenaline get released and they both appear to be very relaxed, almost as if they were flirting with each other while they are flirting with death. This continues to build and build until the climax of the film. The other way that this is shown according to Lane is in instances like the mooning scene where the surfers are identified as the bank robbers because Johnny recognizes the buttocks of one of the surfers as he moons Johnny while surfing.

Lane’s second argument about *Point Break* is that it highlights issues with the male buddy system. She starts this section with the statement “At the intersection of gender and genre, the alternative logic I see in this film highlights the way in which the male buddy system relies on a problematic power structure that defines masculinity along a terrain of superficial symbols and facades” (Lane 120). She reasons that both Johnny and Bodhi are fighting against this system but at the same time have to operate within it and take up the facades that are present in the genre. The biggest one she mentions, which was seen earlier with *Blue Steel*, is the notion of the gun being a phallic object and thus

closely tied with masculinity. Both Johnny and Bodhi have to pick up the phallus when they rob the bank to discourage people from responding violently but then they have to drop it again. The most notable instance of this is at the climax of the film when Johnny and Bodhi are falling after having jumped out of the airplane. Johnny has a gun that he refuses to drop and no parachute, Bodhi does not have a gun but he refuses to pull the chute until Johnny drops the gun. The two plummet towards the earth until finally Johnny's need for survival wins out and he drops the phallic facade to save both of their lives. This happens again at the very end of the film when Johnny gives up the facade for both of them by throwing Bodhi's Reagan mask (the facade Bodhi took on to rob the banks) and then throwing his FBI badge into the ocean.

The first time Lane mentions Bigelow herself is towards the end of the section when she brings up the idea of *Point Break* as a satirical response to the Reagan era. Lane writes "Bigelow addresses discourses of power, specifically gender politics, by exploiting generic tensions. She re-writes the ideological tensions of sameness and difference, and law and nature, by implicitly critiquing the very values of the Reagan era that fostered the success of the action genre" (Lane 122). These values that Lane refers to she says are rooted in an ideology of hypermasculinity that was big in the Reagan era. She argues that the reason that this satire is so poignant is because Bodhi wears a Reagan mask when he robs the banks.

Like with *Blue Steel*, both Grant and Lane seldom mention Bigelow by name, possibly because in both cases the entire chapter is on Bigelow. Both authors in both instances focus on her ideas with negligible mention of her appearance. This is likely due

to the fact that both books are a discourse about films and Bigelow's films and filmmaking style is more relevant to their topic of choice than what she looks like.

The Hurt Locker

Synopsis and observations

The film *The Hurt Locker* starts off with a quote, "The rush of battle is often a potent and lethal addiction, for war is a drug". A majority of the quote fades out into the black screen leaving behind the last four words, war is a drug. Those few words sum up the experiences that the audience sees through the eyes and actions of the main character.

After the quote leaves the screen, it is revealed to the audience that the story, at least this portion, is set in Baghdad in 2004. The camera follows a bomb squad robot as it travels through the streets past screaming people trying to evacuate. The bot gets to the apparent bomb and allows the bomb squad of Sanborn, Eldridge, and Thompson to see exactly what they are dealing with. The team decides that the best course of action will be to just blow up the bomb. They fit the bot with charges and a wagon and send it back towards the bomb when the wagon breaks down. Thompson dons the bomb suit and lays the charges while Eldridge and Sanborn cover for him. Eldridge spots a man with a phone at a nearby stall. He yells at the man to put the phone down while Thompson tries to leave the blast zone. Unfortunately, the man presses a button on the phone and the bomb explodes, killing Thompson. And so, Sergeant James is brought in to replace Thompson.

During the rest of the film, the passage of time is showcased by a countdown of the number of days left in the squad's rotation. At the end of the countdown, the three men will get to go home and their tour will be done. In the meantime, they get routinely

called out to examine bombs and deal with them appropriately. The next time we see the team is on their first call. Sanborn suggests that they send the bot in, but James says that he would rather go out in the suit and check it out. While he is walking towards the bomb, he drops a smoke grenade as a diversion and starts to butt heads with Sanborn over protocol. Sanborn insists upon following protocol while James does not share the same thoughts.

As James is walking out to the bomb, a taxi speeds past the blockade and stops a couple of feet from James when he pulls a gun on the driver. After some verbal threats and a few gunshots, the man backs away and James resumes his hunt for the explosive device. He finds it and disarms it, only to find another wire. He follows the wire while a man watches him from a nearby building. James pulls up on the wire to find it connected to not one bomb, but eight. As James is disarming the bombs, the man starts to quickly exit the building and head towards what appears to be the trigger for the bomb. By the time he passes it though, James has disarmed the bomb and the threat has passed.

A couple days later the team is called out again, this time to the UN building where guards suspect a bomb in the trunk of a car. James dons the suit again and goes out to the car when it is shot by an insurgent, causing the car to go up in flames. After taking a fire extinguisher from Eldridge, James puts out the fire so he can get at the suspected bomb. The insurgent is caught and killed about the same time as James uncovers the bomb. He sees the amount of explosives in the trunk and decides to take off the suit because if he is going to die he wants to be comfortable. James disconnects the bombs, but continues to search for the initiator that he cannot find. The longer it takes him to find the initiator, the more people start to watch them. Sanborn urges James that they

should just leave because the evacuation has finished and there are too many people watching them. James takes off the radio and ignores Sanborn until he manages to find the initiator. When the team gets back to the car, Sanborn punches James for taking off his headset when they are interrupted by another man in uniform who asks how many bombs James has disarmed. He answers that he has disarmed 873 bombs and he gets congratulated before the team heads back to base.

While on the base, James makes friends with a local boy named Beckham who helps sell DVDs. The two play soccer briefly and James starts to look after the kid a bit. During this time it is also revealed that Eldridge has been meeting with a base doctor named Cambridge. Eldridge expresses some guilt over not shooting the man with the phone that detonated the bomb that killed Thompson. The next time the whole team is seen together is at a remote location detonating explosives that appear to have been left there. They detonate the first set when James exclaims that he left his gloves at the blast site and drives down. While he is gone, Sanborn appears to seriously consider detonating the other charges while James is still down there, but in the end he decides to let James live. As the team is driving back to base, they come upon an SUV with four armed locals. After demanding that the locals drop their weapons, the men reveal that they are friendlies with a flat tire. The team tries to help change the flat tire when a sniper shoots one of the friendlies. In the chaos that ensues, the prisoners of the stranded men escape, and another friendly gets shot. The lead friendly shoots his prisoners before being shot himself.

James and Sanborn isolate where the sniper is and take the rifle that the lead guy was using when he was shot. The sniper and Sanborn exchange fire. Meanwhile Eldridge

notices a herd of goats on the other side of the canyon and what appears to be movement. He assumes, correctly so, that the herd is hiding another insurgent. After a brief discussion with James, Eldridge fires at the herd and scares off the animals and the man with the gun. Sanborn shoots the last sniper and the team gets to go back to base.

Back on base, the team is wrestling to release some adrenaline from the day. Sanborn and Eldridge find out that James has an ex-wife that he still lives with and son back home, and that he keeps a box of things that almost killed him under his bed. The box is mostly filled with bomb triggers, but he keeps his wedding ring in there too. Sanborn and James resume wrestling until James takes it a bit too far and Sanborn threatens to slit his throat. James apologizes and takes Sanborn back to his room.

The team goes out on another call and this time the doctor, Cambridge, asks if he can join. When they arrive at the scene, they learn that the building was not secured so the team goes in to secure the building. While the team is checking the building, Cambridge is talking to some locals trying to convince them to leave the area because of the danger. As the team finishes securing the building, James finds a body bomb put into the local boy Beckham that he had befriended. James initially decides to detonate the building, but then changes his mind and disarms the bomb so he can carry the boy out and likely give him a proper burial. Cambridge is seen still talking to the locals when Sanborn tells him that it is time to go. As Cambridge is walking back towards the humvee, he steps on an IED and is killed instantly.

When the team gets back on base, James goes and confronts the old man who Beckham was working with on base and threatens him at gunpoint. He makes the old man drive him to Beckham's house and he ends up at the house of a professor who does

not seem to know Beckham. James gets chased out of the building by the lady of the house and walks back to base down the streets of Baghdad. When he gets back to the base, he is threatened by the officers guarding the gate. To get admitted back to the base, James tells them that he was at a whorehouse. The gate officers let him back in only for the team to be sent out on a call.

The call in question is a tank explosion that the team is sent to determine if it was caused by a suicide bomber or not. After looking through the wreckage and finding an oil tanker in the blast zone, James thinks that the bomb was a remote detonation and not a suicide bomb. James wants to go and hunt for the insurgents that did this and persuades Eldridge and Sanborn to go with him. They find oil tankers identical to the tanker that was in the blast zone and three alleyways. The team splits up and starts searching when Sanborn and James hear gunshots. They run down into the alley that Eldridge was searching and find a body, but not Eldridge's. They find two guys taking away Eldridge and Sanborn and James quickly shoot the two men and rescue Eldridge, who has been shot in the leg. The team makes it back to base and Eldridge gets sent home in a helicopter with a shattered femur. Sanborn and James go to say goodbye to their teammate and Eldridge cusses out James for making them go hunting for the insurgents.

The next call James and Sanborn go out on, they go without a replacement for Eldridge. They get called to a report of a man with a bomb strapped to his chest. There is a translator nearby who is trying to convince the soldiers that the man is a good guy who does not want to hurt anybody. James puts on the suit and goes to try and help the guy, but discovers that not only is the man locked into the bomb, but it is on a timer as well. James tries to help the man, but he cannot get the man unlocked in time and abandons the

man to save himself. The bomb goes off and James is still within the blast zone, but he survives.

The next time the audience sees James, he is at the grocery store with his wife and son. He seems very out of place in this civilian world. Back at home, he is talking to his wife about how the army needs more bomb technicians, but she ignores him. James talks to his son for a while about how he does not really love anything anymore. After this conversation, James is seen shipping out with a new team for another year long rotation as a bomb tech.

Critic Reviews

In an attempt to keep the analysis as constant as possible, Roger Ebert's review of *The Hurt Locker* was chosen for the male critic review. Unlike the previous two reviews discussed, this review mentions Bigelow several times throughout the piece.

As before, Ebert started his review with a discussion of the plot and the main character James. He writes about how "[James] isn't an action hero, he's a specialist" (Ebert, "The Hurt Locker" 1). He uses this to explain the character of Sgt. James as a character to whom the quote "war is a drug" applies. By placing that quote at the beginning of the review, Ebert makes it well known that James is not the kind of character who is in this line of work purely for patriotic reasons and this helps the reader and the viewer understand the character.

Bigelow is mentioned for the first time after the analysis of James' character. Ebert writes "'The Hurt Locker' is a spellbinding war film by Kathryn Bigelow, a master of stories about men and women who choose to be in physical danger. She cares first

about the people, then about the danger. She doesn't leave a lot of room for much else" (Ebert, "The Hurt Locker" 2). This quote is interesting because it does not mention her appearance, but it does craft an image of Bigelow as a star in the action genre. It is a very flattering description of Bigelow and her filming style and the way it is worded implies that this methodology of putting characters above danger is a rarity in this genre.

Bigelow is mentioned again in the following paragraph with the sentence "Bigelow and Boal know what they are doing" (Ebert, "The Hurt Locker" 2). Boal in this case is reference to the screenwriter of the film Mark Boal. Ebert then goes on to compliment Bigelow and Boal on the film and how thought provoking it is with the minimal dialogue that is present in certain scenes. This section of the review about the writing of the film actually comes before a section devoted to the other main character Sanborn which actually places more importance on Bigelow than on the character Sanborn.

After a brief couple of paragraphs about Sanborn and his relationship with James, Ebert transitions back into a discussion of Bigelow. In this case, her masterful use of suspense in the film. He says "Bigelow uses no phony suspense-generating mechanisms in this film. It is about personalities in terrible danger. The suspense is real, and it is earned" (Ebert, "The Hurt Locker" 2). He follows this with a quote from Hitchcock about suspense and the idea that a bomb randomly exploding is action, and a bomb sitting there while people move around it and it does not explode is suspense. Ebert is using this quote from Hitchcock to demonstrate exactly why he is specifically complimenting Bigelow on her use of suspense in this film.

Ebert mentions Bigelow one final time in the last paragraph of the piece. He starts off his concluding paragraph by calling *The Hurt Locker* a great film and complimenting the camera work. Ebert writes “The camera work is at the service of the story. Bigelow knows that you can’t build suspense with shots lasting one or two seconds. And you can’t tell a story that way either” (Ebert, “The Hurt Locker” 2). In this statement, he is commenting on Bigelow’s expertise behind the camera and complimenting her work on this film. He is also making a point, possibly at the expense of other directors in the genre, about the length of shots and the amount of cutting that goes into some action scenes.

Like previous reviews, Ebert does not mention her appearance or her gender at all, instead choosing to focus on her ideas and her creative choices as a director. Unlike the previous reviews, he compliments Bigelow and her choices more frequently. There is the possibility that this is because *The Hurt Locker* is a better film than *Blue Steel* or *Point Break*, but no judgments of that sort will be made.

For the female critic review, the author MaryAnn Johanson was chosen. There was no similar female author between the previous two films and this one, but Johanson wrote reviews of the later films making her a fair choice for cross movie comparison.

Johanson mentions Bigelow for the first time very early in the piece. She writes, “The magnificently ironic thing about Kathryn Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker* is that it doesn’t give *us* a rush” (Johanson, “The Hurt Locker” 1). While initially this word choice seems harsh, Johanson appears to mean it as a compliment. She goes on to write about how Bigelow managed to find something new to say through the quiet moments of the film and not the loud moments in a way typical of other films of the genre. In a way, this

almost feels like a backhanded compliment, as if Johanson is saying that the film fails on some level as an action film which is only heightened by the sentence immediately following this observation which is “Not that this is *not* an action film” (Johanson, “The Hurt Locker” 2) as if she must clarify that it really is an action film even though she made it seem like it was not.

After this brief mention of Bigelow, Johanson transitions into a discussion of the story and the main character Sgt. James. Bigelow is not mentioned again until the last sentence of this section when Johanson writes “And how Bigelow turns ‘the shootout’ on its head is extraordinary, rendering it long and excruciatingly patient, finding new suspense in, incongruously, inaction” (Johanson, “The Hurt Locker” 2). This statement again seems to suggest that Bigelow is not following the typical action movie formula. In the scene in question, what in other action movies would be a brief and intense shootout, turns into a long wait as the two snipers patiently try to find the perfect shot. Unlike the previous statement though, this statement does not have the same almost negative connotation. One of the things that Johanson seems to admire about this film is Bigelow’s use of suspense which is complimented in this sentence.

Johanson then transitions into a section about how *The Hurt Locker* could be read as a social commentary of what was happening in Iraq at the time the movie was released. But, she quickly notes that the film is not supposed to be a documentary and this is where Bigelow is mentioned for the last time. Johanson is quick to mention that *The Hurt Locker* is not a documentary, but then goes on to talk about how the screenwriter was embedded with a bomb disposal squad and how Bigelow shot quick and dirty so close to the Iraqi battlefields. She almost seems to be questioning Bigelow’s choice to not

make a documentary by citing this evidence that the people in charge of how the film looks (namely the screenwriter, cinematographer, and director) were dealing with this film the way that Johanson would expect the creative team behind a war documentary would deal with a film.

Overall, Johanson mentions Bigelow about as often as Ebert does and slightly more often than Murphy did for the previous two films. However, with the exception of *Point Break*, Johanson appears to be more critical of Bigelow and her choices than Murphy and certainly more critical of her than Ebert who praised her every time he mentioned her by name. Like previous reviews, all the mentions of Bigelow are about her ideas and style of filmmaking rather than her physical appearance.

Articles

For the analysis of *The Hurt Locker*, author Steve Rose of *The Guardian* was chosen as the male author. His article on *The Hurt Locker*, entitled “Kathryn Bigelow: back in the danger zone” seems to be more about Bigelow and the production of the film than the film itself.

Rose starts the article by discussing how Bigelow wanted to actually go to Iraq (from the filming location of Jordan), but the security guards said that it was too dangerous. He follows this up with the line “Characteristically, Bigelow wanted to get that bit closer to the danger zone. She was in her element” (Rose, “Kathryn Bigelow” 1). This quote starts to give an idea of the kind of person that Rose thinks that Bigelow is. It is a very complementary quote and makes it seem like Rose has respect for Bigelow in this aspect.

Rose's next step in his discussion of Bigelow is to debunk some of the stereotypes and characterizations that surround her. He notes how she is seen as very tough and how she works in the most macho of genres. He even goes so far as to say "On paper, she sounds like the sort of woman who drinks men under the table having first beaten them at arm-wrestling and a Hummer rally" (Rose, "Kathryn Bigelow" 1). Rose seems to be saying that this is her reputation, but that it is not the truth at all. He goes into further into this idea with the next two sentences in the paragraph "In person, though, she's tall and waif-like, gently spoken and regally handsome. She is 57, but looks a decade younger, and her hands make graceful movements in the air as she talks" (Rose, "Kathryn Bigelow" 1). Like most other authors who discuss Bigelow's appearance, Rose mentions her height first and describes her in such a way that makes her seem delicate. Waif-like tends to imply thin and delicate and the use of the word graceful just adds to this image. The most interesting thing about this quote is that he calls her handsome. Typically, handsome is a word that is applied to men more frequently than women, but it makes sense in the context that Bigelow is typically considered a woman in a man's world.

This notion of her as a woman in a masculine environment is exactly where Rose takes the article next. He writes "The only time the hands stop and the arms fold is when I ask her about being a woman in such a masculine environment" (Rose, "Kathryn Bigelow" 1). Easily the most interesting thing in Rose's word choice is the use of the word "the". By writing "the hands" and "the arms", it makes it seem like her hands and arms are separate from her or have a mind of their own. This could have been intentional, or merely a connector as the sentence previous to this one is the one last quoted. However, Rose's intentions cannot be interpreted.

Rose's intentions are also a little questionable later in that same paragraph. He writes "One suspects she has got by in the company of so many swaggering males less by arm-wrestling them than by simply charming them into submission" (Rose, "Kathryn Bigelow" 1). On one hand, this quote paints Bigelow's male counterparts in a relatively negative light because the word "swaggering" has negative connotations and it makes her seem their equal. On the other hand, the phrasing that she had to either arm-wrestle or charm her way to success undermines her talent by implying that she did not get to where she was by skill alone.

Author Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* was chosen as the female author. Dargis starts off her article titled "Action!" by calling out the notion that Bigelow needs to be identified by her gender. Dargis writes, "Sometimes, more simply, she's called a great female director. But here's a radical thought: She is, simply, a great filmmaker" (Dargis, "Action!" 1). She goes on to write, in a rather condescending tone, about how it is only marginally interesting that Bigelow is doing director things with two X chromosomes, before dismissing it as not as important as her filmmaking style.

Having gotten that business out of the way, Dargis goes on to write about the film in question, *The Hurt Locker* and how some critics reacted to it. She discusses how some critics felt that it was not anti-war enough and was too close to propaganda. Dargis then transitions into a portion of the article that is an interview with Bigelow both about the film and about her style. Bigelow talked about how she has never made a studio film and how she missed the freedom of getting to make her own film her own way. Dargis describes Bigelow as gracious and how it is hard to imagine people pushing her around. She then goes on to write, "She works to put you at ease, but even her looks inspire shock

and awe. Because she was early for our interview and already tucked into a booth, I didn't realize how tall she was until we both stood up, and I watch, from a rather lower vantage, her unfurl her slender six-foot frame" (Dargis, "Action!" 2). While several other authors have touched on Bigelow's height, Dargis is unique in that she actually gives a number value to that height instead of just the descriptor of tall. This description from Dargis implies grace and beauty in a stunning way, without overtly saying it.

Dargis then transitions into a brief history of Bigelow and her films. She gives a brief plot description and, for the more recent films at the time this was written, how they fared at the box office. After a few flops, Bigelow went a different direction with *The Hurt Locker* opting for more control of her own. Dargis asked Bigelow if she might become addicted to the freedom like Sgt. James was addicted to war and earned a laugh. That lead to this observation from Dargis, "But moviemaking is littered with broken spirits, and there's something improbable about the longevity of her career in the mainstream. Partly because, yes, she's working in an sexist field where even female studio chiefs are loath to hire female directors, but also because of the stubborn persistence of her artistic vision and intellectualism" (Dargis, "Action!" 3). This quote not only calls out the industry for being sexist, but allowed Dargis to segue into a discussion she had with Bigelow about how Bigelow kept receiving scripts for high school comedies and other movies that are supposedly suitable for her gender.

Overall, both authors did write about her appearance. Rose focused more on making her seem more feminine than her reputation allows. Dargis focused more on why her appearance does not matter, while at the same time making it known that she is a stunning woman. Compared to authors before this film, both Rose and Dargis are making

her seem like more than just a novelty. Before *The Hurt Locker*, when authors mentioned Bigelow's gender it had more of a novel quality to it, whereas Rose and Dargis are dismantling these ideals to make her more of a person and less of an idea.

Book

Unfortunately, *Born in Flames* was published before *The Hurt Locker* so there is no analysis from Lane regarding the film. *Shadows of Doubt* was published after *The Hurt Locker* so Grant's writings on the film can be looked at. Like Grant's previous analysis, he focuses on how Bigelow manipulates the action genre to her whim rather than how she looks. He starts with the line "Bigelow's most recent film, *The Hurt Locker* (2008), continues to show her strategy of critiquing the masculine ideology of action genres by working within them, in this case the war film, again providing the genre's pleasures even as it subverts or questions them" (Grant 190). This quote serves several purposes. The first is to introduce readers to the next topic in question, in this case *The Hurt Locker*. Second, it reminds readers of the purpose of Grant's chapter on Bigelow, which is about how she messes with genre. And the third is to introduce how she works with genre in this film.

Grant goes on to discuss the opening shot of the film, how the audience is dropped into the action with the focus on Sgt. Thompson. He argues that because Sgt. Thompson is played by Guy Pearce who had been in other action films, and the two other members of the squad were not as well known, that Thompson becomes the focus of the scene and is set up as the main character. Grant then goes on to offer that there is a lesson to be learned from Thompson's death, "Immediately, then, the film offers us a lesson

about the pitfalls of spectator identification in the context of violence, as well as placing us in a situation similar to that of the soldiers, who cannot afford to form bonds with Iraqi civilians since anyone is a potential insurgent or the victim of them for colluding with the enemy” (Grant 191). This is the first instance that Grant notes of Bigelow questioning the ideals of the genre that viewers are familiar with. He seems to argue that Bigelow is telling the audience that star power should not equate to main character, nor should it be seen as an automatic ticket to survival.

Bigelow is not mentioned again until the last paragraph in this section. Grant brings her up again in a paragraph devoted to how Bigelow specifically is not making any kind of commentary on the Iraqi war, either for or against it. He writes, “And because of war’s devastating effects, Bigelow presents the guts without the glory; there are no clear antagonists, little meaningfully ‘heroic’ action in the traditional sense, and no rousing climax” (Grant 192). This is, to Grant, another way that Bigelow refuses to conform to the mold of action movies. Not only is she not making a commentary on the war, but she also is not following the same pattern that other action movies follow.

Like before and with the whole chapter, Grant focuses on her ideas and not her appearance. Most likely because Bigelow’s ideas are the focus of his book while her appearance is not. There is not any change in how he writes about her pre-*Hurt Locker* versus post-*Hurt Locker*.

The Oscars

When looking at how the media discusses Kathryn Bigelow, it is important to look at the 2010 Oscars because of her two historic wins. Bigelow is one of four women

to be nominated for the Best Directing category and one of eleven women to have their film nominated for Best Picture and she holds the only win for women in both categories. In an attempt to keep consistency in the analysis, Manohla Dargis was chosen as the female author for this section. Because Steven Rose did not write an article about Bigelow's win, fellow *Guardian* author Matthew Weaver was chosen for the male author.

Weaver starts his article by acknowledging Bigelow's achievement. He writes, "Kathryn Bigelow today became the first woman in history to win the best director award at the Oscars" (Weaver 1). By starting his article with this statement of fact, Weaver sets the tone for the rest of the piece which reflects on how truly historic this win was. Weaver does mention that Bigelow was only the fourth woman to be nominated and he briefly mentions the other three nominees, but that does not occur until several paragraphs later in the piece. Rather, Weaver focuses more on how Bigelow won and how her ex-husband James Cameron did not.

After writing the sentence acknowledging Bigelow's achievement, Weaver writes a sentence summary of the film and another sentence summary of the awards that *The Hurt Locker* won at the Oscars. Then, Weaver immediately delves into what comprises the majority of his piece, which is the apparent rivalry between Bigelow and Cameron. He starts by writing that "The Hurt Locker triumphed over the 3D blockbuster Avatar" (Weaver 1) in which the word triumphed makes it seem like the two films were in a neck and neck all-or-nothing competition. Weaver even acknowledges Cameron's gracious loss by noting that Cameron was one of the first to offer congratulations. But then, according to Weaver, other reporters tried to make Bigelow seem as if she was not a gracious winner.

Weaver himself is not suggesting this view of Bigelow and instead makes her seem like a very humble winner. He writes that, “In interviews after the ceremony, Bigelow resisted reporters’ attempts to encourage her to gloat about her victory over Cameron. ‘I think he is an extraordinary film-maker,’ she said” (Weaver 1). This sentence serves two purposes. One, is to highlight that Bigelow is a good person who would not lord this victory over her ex-husband. The second is to set-up the end of his article which discusses how this apparent rivalry was the media go-to for stories about the Oscars. Weaver also notes that “Much of the build-up to the Oscars had focused on the rivalry between the former couple” (Weaver 1) and that the hosts made jokes about the two being nominated in the same category several times.

Weaver finishes off his article by going back to the subject: Bigelow. He writes that “Bigelow has for decades been a female pioneer in the male-dominated world of action genres” (Weaver 2). In that one simple sentence, he manages to acknowledge Bigelow’s place in the movie industry in a way that suggests that she is paving the way for future female action movie directors and not that she is a novelty or that she is out of place.

Dargis writes about Bigelow’s win in her article “How Oscar Found Ms. Right”. She starts off with a summary of what happened and how historic it was. Dargis writes, “Kathryn Bigelow’s two-fisted win at the Academy Awards for best director and best film for ‘The Hurt Locker’ didn’t just punch through the American movie industry’s seemingly shatterproof glass ceiling; it has also helped dismantle stereotypes about what types of films women can and should direct”. (Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right 1)

This statement not only tells readers what Bigelow accomplished in terms of the awards she won, but also the implications that this win has for the movie industry. Especially since she goes on to write about how women who make movies and women who watch movies have been routinely ignored by an industry that is by men for men.

Dargis then goes on to write about how the Oscars can be very influential when it comes to social change because of the amount of people that watch the Oscars. She writes about how Bigelow took many awards for this film while also sparking feminist discussions, discussions she says that she has not seen since *Thelma & Louise* came out. Dargis argues that the characters of Thelma and Louise were so controversial because they did not conform to what people thought women should be and that Bigelow is the same way. She writes “The same goes for Ms. Bigelow who doesn’t like to talk about being a feminist touchstone much less her role as a female director. Her refusal, along with the types of movies she makes, have not always sat well with some” (Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right 1). This comment seems based in the idea that some people think that if women are going to direct that they need to direct romantic comedies, not action films like Bigelow chooses. It also allows Dargis to lead into a brief discussion about how Bigelow is possibly recognized because she does action films and not romantic comedies. She states that movies about women are dismissed because they are about women and critics and awards committees are typically men.

Dargis branches off from this idea, after an expansion on it, to what we can learn from Bigelow’s achievement and to her ex-husband James Cameron. She writes “One of the lessons of Ms. Bigelow’s success is that it was primarily achieved outside of the reach of the studios. She had help along the way, including from male mentors like James

Cameron, her former husband, who helped produce ‘Strange Days’” (Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right 2). She goes on to add that *Strange Days* did poorly at the box office as did the other studio features she directed *The Weight of Water* and *K-19: The Widowmaker*. But, for *The Hurt Locker*, Bigelow went to the desert and shot the movie the way she wanted to, as she did for *Near Dark*, and both movies were a success. This commentary suggests that even though she had male mentors, that she was just as successful without them if not more successful.

Dargis then goes on to discuss an interview that Bigelow did on “60 minutes” with Lesley Stahl. She writes on how Bigelow insisted that there is no difference between her filmmaking and the filmmaking of a male director, just that the path for women is more difficult no matter the field. But, according to Dargis, Bigelow worded the statement well. Dargis writes “It’s instructive that she didn’t say it had also been a hard journey, because that might have pegged Ms. Bigelow as a whiner, as in whiny woman” (Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right 3). This statement not only showcases Dargis’ respect for Bigelow, but also how intelligent Bigelow is and how negative society is towards women. What Dargis is implying is that if Bigelow had said that it was a hard journey, even if she was not complaining, she would be labeled as the stereotypical whiny woman and it would have been a detrimental image, an image that would not have been applied to a man who discusses how difficult his journey was. Stahl also brings up Cameron and that if Bigelow won, which she did, it would have vetted Bigelow. Dargis also comments on how well Bigelow handled the remarks forcing her to share her interview with her ex-husband, even if just in spirit, and that Bigelow seemed very well behaved.

Dargis argues that this calm, cool, and collected image that Bigelow projects to the public is upsetting to some members of the media. She writes “Her cool has disturbed some, who have scrutinized Ms. Bigelow up and down, sometimes taking suspicious measure of her height and willowy frame, partly because these are the only personal parts of her that are accessible to nosy interviewers” (Dargis, “How Oscar Found Ms. Right 3). Like a majority of the comments about Bigelow’s appearance, Dargis mentions her height and her body shape, but she mentions them in a way that suggests that the people who write on that topic have not actually tried to get to know Bigelow for her ideas. She argues that women in movies are expected to be more open about everything from their body to their personal life and that Bigelow defies that by only offering her work and ideas.

Overall, both Weaver and Dargis are complementary of Bigelow and acknowledge her historic win. Weaver focuses on her supposed rivalry with Cameron whereas Dargis appears to be disapproving of those who would focus on Cameron when they are talking to or about Bigelow. Dargis also is the only one of the two to mention Bigelow’s appearance, but again it shows up in the form of a chastisement towards those who mention her appearance as an interesting fact.

Zero Dark Thirty

Synopsis and observations

Zero Dark Thirty starts in a very uncomfortable manner, complete silence. The silence lasts for all of the opening credits which is about 45 seconds. This then transitions into darkness. The words September 11, 2001 appear briefly on the screen before sound

clips start playing that sound like 911 calls and news stories from that day all while the screen stays black. This lasts for approximately 1 minute and 25 seconds before an image appears along with the words “two years later, Saudi group”. The image turns into a cell containing a prisoner and a man threatening him. The man is accompanied by a group in ski masks and when the team exits the cell, one of the people in ski masks takes the mask off to reveal that it is a woman. After a brief discussion in which the audience learns that the woman is straight from Washington DC, the woman (Maya) convinces the man (Dan) to go back in and interrogate the prisoner (Ammar) some more. Maya asks Dan if Ammar is ever going to be released and when Dan tells her no, Maya decides to go into the interrogation without a mask.

The interrogation of Ammar rapidly turns into torture as Dan demands to know more about the Saudi Group. He asks after email accounts of the Saudi Group and after Bin Laden himself. The interrogation continues for a few minutes before the scene shifts to the U.S. Embassy in Pakistan with Maya driving up. Dan is then seen talking to his boss Joe. Dan tells Joe that he needs to turn up the heat on Ammar to get an answers. The two happen upon Maya sitting in a waiting room and Dan lets her in. Dan, Joe, and Maya are part of a group trying to find Bin Laden and his crew. The team discusses new leads and ideas before the scene shifts again.

The first thing the audience notices is loud screamo music followed by the location which is Ammar’s cell. Dan brings Ammar food and drink in exchange for the answers he wants. When Ammar does not provide them, Dan pulls down Ammar’s pants and leaves him alone with Maya while he goes to get something. Ammar begs Maya for help, but she only offers the advice that help will come when answers come. Dan returns

with a dog collar and he chains Ammar up before forcing him in a box for not providing answers.

When the scene changes, a new date is provided to the audience, May 29, 2004. The date leaves and the audience sees men gunning down foreigners and Americans in what is obviously a strike by the men Ammar works with. Back in CIA headquarters, Maya mentions that Ammar has been locked up and has no idea that the attack actually happened. She suggests that they tell Ammar that he helped them stop the attack to see what information he gives up. Dan and Maya let Ammar out of his cell and provide him with food before starting their line of questioning. Ammar admits that his friends wanted to kill Americans and he provides three names of people who tried to get into Tora Bora with him in the one space of time that Dan did not have accounted for. Two of the names Maya knew, but the third Abu Ahmed, she did not. She asks for Ahmed's full name and Ammar provides a war title not a birth name. Ammar admits that he does not know Ahmed's real name and that Ahmed is a courier to and from Bin Laden and a man named Faraj.

Maya is then seen watching interrogation after interrogation where Dan and other CIA members are asking after Abu Ahmed. She even participates in an interrogation at one point. In a briefing with Joe, Maya gives the scope of the findings. Twenty different prisoners recognized a picture of Abu Ahmed and Maya believes that he is the key to finding Bin Laden. Joe disagrees and dismisses Maya.

At this point in the film there is another time jump, this time to July 7, 2005 in London. The camera follows a double decker bus that then blows up. The audience learns that there has been multiple explosions in London and that the CIA team after Bin Laden

had heard rumors about these attacks but had been unable to stop them. Maya is next seen interrogating a man and that interrogation leads to the capture and interrogation of Faraj. Maya takes point in the interrogation and she asks Dan if he wants to help her. Dan admits that he intends to go back to Washington and lead a normal life for a while. He tells Maya to be careful because the political tide is changing and torturing prisoners may not be allowed much longer.

The next time jump takes the audience to September 20, 2008 in the Marriott Hotel in Pakistan. Maya and her coworker Jess are enjoying an evening out when the hotel blows up after a suicide bomber drives a truck bomb into the side of the building. Back at CIA headquarters, Jess shows Maya a video taken by a mole that the team in Jordan managed to get. Jess sets up a meeting with the mole in Afghanistan so she can determine if he can give them any viable information. A car arrives supposedly containing the mole and Jess tells the base officers to let the car through without being searched. It rapidly becomes apparent that something is off when a second man is visible in the car. Before anyone in the car can be properly identified, the car explodes killing both men, Jess, and the rest of the team.

After a period of grieving, Maya resumes her hunt for Abu Ahmed only to have Joe yell at her for it. He shows her a video of a man identifying the picture of Abu Ahmed and telling the interrogator that he buried Ahmed. Joe tells her to focus on London and to bring him people to kill. Maya returns to her desk only to have a new girl come by who identifies Ahmed as one of eight brothers. The older three brothers all look very similar leading Maya to a conclusion. She calls Dan in Langley and tells him that Abu Ahmed is still alive and that the picture they have been using is one of Ahmed's

brothers. Maya asks Dan for the family's phone number and he promises to get it before the two sign off. Dan gets the number for her and Maya and her team keep an eye on the incoming calls.

The next time jump brings the characters and the audience to May 1, 2010 and the failed bombing of Times Square in New York City. Joe tells Maya that he needs her to protect the USA and she argues that finding Bin Laden will protect the US better than anything else she could do. She storms off to a nearby bar when one of her team members comes to find her to tell her that Ahmed got a cell phone and they cloned it.

Now that the team has Ahmed's cell phone, they are able to trace his phone anytime he is making or receiving a call. This leads to the strike team driving around in a van looking for Ahmed. At one point the team gets stopped by a group of locals who say that white faces do not belong in town. The team continues looking, but fails to find Bin Laden. Meanwhile, back at the U.S. embassy, a large group of protesters is blocking the entrance demanding justice against Joe who apparently killed some civilians thus earning Joe a ticket home.

The strike team is seen again driving around the streets of Pakistan trying to find Ahmed when they manage to find him. They get decent pictures of him and his car and report back to Maya. Not long after, Maya is leaving her dwellings when two men with machine guns start firing at her as soon as she drives out of the gate. She quickly puts her car in reverse and backs behind the gate. At work, her new boss tries to convince her to go home because she has become a target. Maya refuses and orders that they set watchers on the main highway to follow Ahmed's car which they trace to a compound in a nearby city.

After some infrared surveillance on the compound, there is revealed to be a third woman, meaning that there is a third man in the compound. Maya is convinced that the third man is Bin Laden and manages to get a strike team assembled to raid the house. Finally, on May 1, 2011 the strike is authorized. While landing in the compound, one of the helicopters loses power and crashes. The team raids the compound, killing every man and any woman that reaches for a gun. Finally, they find a man that they suspect to be Bin Laden and he is shot and killed. The team grabs the body and all of the files in the other room to return to base. After blowing up the downed helicopter, the team heads out. Maya confirms the identity of Bin Laden and that he is deceased before getting to go home after 12 years working on this case.

Critic Reviews

For the critic analysis of *Zero Dark Thirty*, Roger Ebert was chosen as the male author and MaryAnn Johanson was chosen as the female author in an attempt to keep the analysis as consistent as possible. Unlike the previous review, Ebert hardly mentions Bigelow at all and the review seems far harsher than the review for *The Hurt Locker*. He starts off by questioning the labeling of this film as a thriller because, according to Ebert, everyone knows that Osama bin Laden is dead and everyone knows the facts of the case that lead to that result. He discusses the plot and how the story revolves around Maya having the guts to follow her instincts against what her bosses are saying.

Bigelow is not mentioned until late in the review when Ebert switches from the plot to the writing. He writes that “I gather that much of [Boal’s] and Bigelow’s early preparation for this film took place before it began to be known (in those shadowy places

where such things reside) that the end of this film could not turn out quite as everyone expected” (Ebert, “Zero Dark Thirty” 2). This quote seems to serve as an excuse, as if Ebert was trying to find a way to justify the issues that he had with the film. It is very obvious that he had issues with this film especially since he starts the paragraph following this quote by saying that the opening scenes are not great filmmaking. But, it seems like Ebert has a great respect for Bigelow and Boal and is trying to find a way to explain why they were not as good on this film as they were on *The Hurt Locker*.

Bigelow is mentioned one final time in this review. Ebert writes about how he thinks the fascination with the film is due to the facts being unveiled and how there is not very much of a plot in this film, and yet it was doing very well and winning a lot of awards leading Ebert to a revelation. He writes that “The back story is that Bigelow has become a modern-day directorial heroine, which may be why this film is winning even more praise than her masterful Oscar-winner ‘The Hurt Locker’”(Ebert, “Zero Dark Thirty” 3). There are several things that are particularly interesting about this quote. The first is that he is attributing *Zero Dark Thirty*’s success to Bigelow’s fame. This implies that she is far more well-known after *The Hurt Locker* and that people know who she is and would be willing to go see a film just because she directed it. The second is that he calls her a directorial heroine. This status of heroine is probably largely to do with her Oscar’s victories as she was the first woman to win a best directing Oscar which leads to the third interesting point, that *Zero Dark Thirty* is/was doing better than *The Hurt Locker*. This is particularly interesting when taken in context with the previous points because it seems like Ebert is implying that *Zero Dark Thirty* only did well because of the previous success of *The Hurt Locker*. *The Hurt Locker* was arguably the film that

propelled Bigelow to mainstream stardom and Ebert seems to be suggesting that *Zero Dark Thirty* is just cashing in on that success.

Overall, Bigelow is not mentioned as much in this review as she was in *The Hurt Locker* and it appears to be in a more negative light especially when compared to *Point Break*. In the *Point Break* review, Ebert had negative things to say about the movie but he still stated that Bigelow and her team were excellent filmmakers. In this review he wrote that the opening scenes were not great filmmaking. It could be that he disliked this movie more than the others, or it could be that he is being harsher on her because of her previous success. Either way, the tone is more negative and he speaks of her less than he has previously.

Maryann Johanson was chosen for the female author to keep the analysis between *Zero Dark Thirty* and *The Hurt Locker* as consistent as possible. Interestingly, Johanson only mentions Bigelow once throughout her review of the film. Johanson writes

“If only this were a wholly fictional story, with none of the baggage of real life weighing it down, I could probably get behind it 100 percent, instead of the ‘mere’ 95 percent I can give. Because director Kathryn Bigelow, reuniting with her *Hurt Locker* screenwriter Mark Boal, has created an awesome engaging investigative procedural featuring perhaps the most fearsome female protagonist ever”. (Johanson, “Zero Dark Thirty” 2)

This quote ties into the two main themes that Johanson has in her paper: how interesting and engaging Jessica Chastain’s character Maya is, and how this movie suffers because it is based on true story. In this quote, it seems like Johanson wants to like the movie and that she commends Bigelow and Boal on the story.

Johanson main issue with the film appears to be that it is too pro-America considering the subject matter and the actions that some of the main characters take. She argues that the film would have been better if someone had taken issue to the actions that the U.S. took of infiltrating an ally country like Pakistan. Obviously, that is something that the U.S. did and not something that Bigelow could have changed if she was staying true to the facts. But, Johanson says that something in the writing, a piece of dialog perhaps, should have been added to address this issue.

Of all the critic reviews, this review of Johanson's mentions Bigelow the least. Compared to Johanson's review of *The Hurt Locker*, this review is about the same in terms of how positive it is. Johanson does have negative things to say about both films but not in relation to Bigelow by name.

Articles

Because Steve Rose did not write an article on *Zero Dark Thirty*, author Philip French of *The Guardian* was chosen as the male author for this section. Author Deborah Orr was chosen as the female author because Manohla Dargis wrote one article that covers both *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo* and will be used later for analysis. Orr's article also discusses *Argo* but for the purposes of this section of analysis those will be mostly ignored.

French starts his article on *Zero Dark Thirty* by mentioning *The Hurt Locker*. He introduces both Bigelow and screenwriter Mark Boal by mentioning the film that the two previously worked on together before transitioning into the current film. He also uses this to discuss the time differences in the story of the film, from *The Hurt Locker*'s 38 days to

Zero Dark Thirty's decade. This seems to be a theme of his article, differences between Bigelow and Boal's previous story to the current one.

The trend of comparing *The Hurt Locker* to *Zero Dark Thirty* continues with a brief sentence on the inspiration behind Boal's writing and a dissection on what the names of the film mean in military usage. After comparing Sgt James' obsession with bombs to Maya's obsession with Osama bin Laden, French dives into his review of the film. After this point, the review consists of a synopsis of the film focusing on the main character (and her actress). Bigelow is only mentioned once more in this article and it occurs during a paragraph about the torture scenes.

French starts the paragraph about the torture scenes by discussing how Maya is thrown into this world and how she develops a friendship with Dan. He discusses how Maya reluctantly accepts the torture as how things are done, and that Bigelow "shows it in graphic detail, though not with anything resembling sadistic glee" (French 2). This single comment is very telling in how French views Bigelow as a filmmaker. By saying that she shows torture in graphic detail and by drawing attention to this fact, French sets her up as strong and shows her as not being too bothered by the images. But, the second part of the quote is equally important. French set Bigelow up as someone who is not bothered by torture and the second part of the quote is necessary to reassure the audience that Bigelow does not take pleasure from the torture scenes, just that she feels that they are necessary for the story she wants to tell.

Deborah Orr's article about *Zero Dark Thirty* is actually an article about *Zero Dark Thirty* and *Argo*. In this article she compares the two films to discuss why *Argo* won the Oscar despite *Zero Dark Thirty* being a more serious work of art. However,

because this section is focused strictly on *Zero Dark Thirty*, no quote about *Argo* will be used from this article unless it is in relation to a quote about Bigelow.

Orr starts off by discussing why *Argo* won the Oscar. She argues that not only is it a good movie, but it also makes the American people feel good about themselves and the lengths that they are willing to go to for fellow countrymen. But, the reason why this film won according to Orr is that Affleck told only as much truth as the U.S. was willing to bear. In her analogy, he pills a sugar. *Zero Dark Thirty* on the other hand is uncompromising and tells the truth...even if the American public does not want to hear it. As Orr puts it “There’s a lot more pill than sugar in Bigelow’s movie, that’s for sure” (Orr 1). This quote serves as both a comparison between Bigelow and Affleck (the pill to sugar ratio in their films), but it also leads into why *Zero Dark Thirty* lost the Oscar race and yet, to Orr’s point of view, is a better film. She goes on to write that the pill in this case is the torture scenes and that both the left and right wing critics argued against the torture. Some argue that it glorifies torture and others argue that torture should not be depicted in film even though those people believe that it is useful in real life.

Orr’s argument about why *Argo* won starts by discussing the historical inaccuracies of both films. She says that the two films are both wrong and yet one is condemned and the other is heralded. Her argument is simple and comes down to the following two sentences, “Affleck sacrificed accuracy in favour of easy-to-swallow heroics. Bigelow sacrificed accuracy in favour of hard-to-swallow anti-heroics” (Orr 2). This quote again compares and contrasts the filmmaking style of the two directors which is useful as the rest of the article is a comparison between the two films. In this quote we learn why Orr thinks that *Argo* won, and it is because the accuracy was abandoned for a

feel good story that the audience could get behind as opposed to one that made them think and question. But, Orr is not condemning Bigelow for this, in fact she seems to be praising Bigelow for this style of filmmaking because it is, to her, more unique and interesting. She says later that *Zero Dark Thirty* deliberately messes with the mythos that is present in many American films and that is what makes the film more troubling and thought provoking...in a good way.

Overall, French talked about Bigelow far less than other article authors, male or female. He focused strictly on the film and the article was more akin to a critic review than an article. Orr wrote about Bigelow herself about the same amount as other female authors. However, Orr and French are unique in that they did not mention her appearance at all or her role as the minority female director. This could be because the articles were about films and not the director, but that cannot be proved as other articles were theoretically about the film and not the director.

Conclusions

Overall, the critic reviews were fairly consistent. The authors only mentioned Bigelow as much as need be to get the point across and they focused on the ideas not her appearance or gender. The reasoning behind this consistency is likely because the medium is a review of the movie and the sources chosen stayed true to that medium. The books were very consistent across movies. This is likely due to the fact that there is not actually a time difference between the writings about the movies as they are part of the same publication and the authors are trying to make a point about the ideas of Bigelow.

The articles is where the biggest deviation occurs between gender and movies. For *Blue Steel*, both authors mentioned Bigelow's appearance. The male author mentioned her appearance before the film and the female author reversed that. In addition, the male author focused on her facial features and the female author focused on her height. For *Point Break*, her appearance was not mentioned at all, just her experience and ideas. In this instance, both authors wrote in a similar style. With *The Hurt Locker*, her appearance came back as a topic, with the male author trying to make her seem more feminine and the female author mentioning her appearance in a way that makes it seem unimportant. However, both authors tried to make Bigelow seem more human than the mythical identity of "female director" that she seemed to be embodying previously. In the section devoted to the Oscars, both authors focused on James Cameron. The male author focused on the rivalry with Cameron. The female author only brought up Cameron in a way that seemed very condescending of anyone who mentions Cameron when talking to or about Bigelow. In the articles about *Zero Dark Thirty*, the tone was more similar to the reviews. There were less mentions of Bigelow by name and no mentions of her appearance. Over time, it appears that Bigelow's appearance became less important as her ideas and experiences became more important.

Based on this change for Bigelow, it seems safe to assume that as other female directors gain more recognition that they can also be free from these kinds of comments at least in the media. As seen earlier with the "Shit people say to women directors" blog, there are still very negative and derogatory comments being made in person to women in film. This is likely due to the fact that these people would rather not have their comments

publicized for the world to see. However, getting authors to focus on ideas and not appearances is still a step in the right direction.

But, is Bigelow truly unique or do other directors get the same respect? A quick google search of director Sofia Coppola, who is one of the three other women to have been nominated for best director, showcased an article devoted to her fashion sense. Granted, the article was being written because she just debuted a new purse for Louis Vuitton, but a cursory read did reveal only a brief discussion of her film career that had equal page length with a discussion of her famous father Francis Ford Coppola. After a search of articles about Ava DuVernay, the biggest thing that stood out was that authors did not explicitly call her the director of her film *Selma* the way that authors did for Bigelow. This choice of omission seems to give DuVernay less respect than her fellow directors and it is likely because she is African-American. While the focus of this thesis is strictly sex and gender, DuVernay likely experiences more discrimination due to her race. According to World's Best News, "Additionally a mere 10 of the top 300 highest grossing directors of all time are black" ("Racial Bias in Hollywood" 2). This shows that there is an issue where non-white individuals are not being hired that should be addressed even though it is not the focus on this paper.

I believe the reason that Bigelow's ideas are more important than her appearance and personal life is because she refused to talk about her appearance and personal life. Instead, she would direct the questions back to the film whereas other female directors were polite enough to answer the question and hope the conversation went back towards their film. Despite Bigelow being a special case currently for female directors, I think that Bigelow's example is one that more female directors can follow to earn the respect that

Bigelow has. The key is not in making every female director do only action movies, but rather in encouraging them to do what they want without shaming them for it. Women who want to direct musicals should be treated with the same respect as women who want to direct action films and these women should be treated with the same respect as male directors. While most of the change required to meet this goal has nothing to do with female directors, they can still start this change for themselves by directing the conversation to their film over their appearance and by making the films that they want.

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