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"He Didn't Mean It": What Kubrick's

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“He Didn’t Mean It”:
What Kubrick’s *The Shining* Can Teach Us About Domestic Violence

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis project to my mother, Terri O'Brien. Thank you for always supporting my dreams and for your years of advocacy in the fight to end violence against women. I could not have done this without you.

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First I'd like to express my gratitude to my thesis advisor Dr. Daniel Belgrad, for his support, dedication, and guidance throughout this process. Thank you for believing in my project and for sharing your knowledge with me. I'd also like to thank the other members of my thesis committee, Dr. Amy Rust and Dr. Maria Cizmic. This thesis could not have come to fruition without your pointed and honest feedback. Each of these fine scholars pushed my abilities as a writer and an academic. I am immensely grateful for the input and expertise that each of you brought to the table.

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Abstract

With Second Wave Feminism and the Women's Rights Movement, 1970's Americans began to see a shift in gender norms affecting how we relate to one another, particularly within a family structure. Scholars have noted an anxiety permeating the decade over the potential negative ramifications of such a drastic cultural shift. We see these issues of gender politics played out in numerous popular films from the 1970s and into the 1980s. Kubrick's *The Shining*, like many horror films of the time, preys upon the societal fear for the family, due to these shifting gender norms, by featuring a crumbling patriarch (Jack), a troubled child (Danny), and mother struggling to hold her family together (Wendy).

Upon closer examination *The Shining* stands out for its progressive narrative which supports leaving behind outdated ideas of masculinity and femininity, in favor of embracing a more open and ambiguous definition. Kubrick uses his characters as figures, representative of broader social and cultural conflicts. His film operates at two levels, the individual (or micro level of the character's story) and the systemic (or macro, how their story reflects large social issues). In this way he exposes the toxicity of traditional masculinity and its detrimental effects on a family. By killing Jack and allowing Wendy and Danny to escape, *The Shining* emphasizes the need to progress and reshape our perceptions of gender identity. In my examination of the film I combine film theory with historicism, leaning on the works of cultural history scholars as well as film scholars. My analysis of *The Shining* expands both our understanding of the film and of its cultural moment, unearthing issues we continue to grapple with as a society today.

Introduction

In 1977 Francine Hughes made headlines after setting fire to the bed in which her ex-husband was sleeping. She was found not guilty for reasons of temporary insanity after it was proven that she had suffered a severe psychotic break due to thirteen years of abuse from her former husband. Her story became a bestselling novel and was adapted into a television movie starring Farrah Fawcett. Hughes' was one of the first high profile cases around domestic violence, but it would not be the last. Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*, released in 1980, can only be read properly when viewed as another prominent intervention in the popular discourse surrounding domestic violence in those years.

Domestic violence was a “discovery” of the Seventies. Before the 1970s domestic violence had been a historically invisible problem because of its association with the home, a private space and therefore personal problem. The Women's Rights Movement, beginning in the 1960s fought the patriarchal system and gave women a voice and safe space to divulge these long kept secrets. By the 1970s the Battered Women's Movement was officially in motion, setting up hotlines, connecting survivors with resources, and creating safe havens for women escaping abusive partners.¹

While there are a number of biological and environmental factors, domestic abuse essentially comes down to gender politics. Patriarchal society relies on an unequal distribution of

¹ History based on: Judith Herman's “Chapter 1: Forgotten History” and “Chapter 2: Terror” from *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, (NY: Basic Books, 1997).

power such as the strict gender roles that associate men with work in the public sphere and women with domesticity in the private realm. What the Women's Rights Movement exposed is how often these binaries are maintained through physical aggression. While most men are not abusers, statistics show that they are the primary perpetrators of all types of violence within our society. The connection between aggression and masculinity has been carefully cultivated over time. However, Americans began to alter their perceptions of gender identity in the 1970s embracing a more fluid and open ended concept of non-essentialism (the belief that gender is not physically tied to the body).²

In *The Shining*, we see these shifts playing out through the film's primary characters: Jack, Wendy, and Danny. As Jack clings to the false promise of patriarchy, we see an increasingly predatory representation of masculinity being performed. In Danny audiences are offered a non-essentialist, more progressive male identity. A sensitive and quiet boy, he has a "shining" ability that acts as a metaphorical "opening up." Despite our first impressions of Wendy, she is also seen to be taking on many traditionally masculine roles, often pictured addressing the needs of the hotel in her corduroy overalls. I argue that these subtle details are signs of the film's attempts to challenge traditional gender roles and identity, and to offer audiences a story of fear in order to emphasize the violent results of a patriarchal system.

A clear anxiety over the potential negative ramifications of a drastic cultural shift in gender roles permeated popular culture of the era. Horror films in particular dominated the box office from the 1970s and into the 1980s. A "family in crisis" trend plagues these narratives,

² Cultural trends of 1970s come from: Thomas Hine, *The Great Funk*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007). Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006). And Bruce Shulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics*, (Cambridge, England: De Capo Press, 2002).

Horror film trends specifically based off Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989).

often featuring weak fathers and troubled children whose problems initially go unnoticed or ignored by their parents. The threat to the family takes on a metaphorical and supernatural form in these films. Generally the threat is subdued by banding together, essentially forgiving dad in order to preserve the family unit. Kubrick's *The Shining*, like many horror films of the time, plays on this fear for the family due to shifting gender norms by featuring a crumbling patriarch and a troubled child. And yet, contrary to the usual generic conventions, in this film Jack is left to die by his wife and son as they flee for safety free of dad. This suggests that the real problem in *The Shining* is not the demented spirits of the Overlook hotel, but rather Jack and the type of masculinity he represents.

The Shining stands apart from other similar films by exposing the damage done by patriarchal violence and its detrimental effects on a family. Kubrick both plays with and subverts the tropes of similar horror films by first painting Jack as a sympathetic figure, down on his luck and striving to better his situation. Yet viewers begin to grow uncomfortable in their association with Jack as his behavior becomes increasingly dangerous. We reluctantly shift our identification to the film's true heroes, Wendy and Danny. I argue that there is a reason viewers are hesitant to relate to Wendy. As the stereotypical meek, battered woman, she embodies a person from whom most people have tried to distance themselves. We are easily annoyed by her demeanor, criticize her appearance, and are frustrated by her lack of action which is a common reaction to victims. Danny is unique as well, coping with his father's abuse through his telepathic capabilities, or "shining." His extraordinary ability, a literal and metaphorical sort of sensitivity, offers Danny as the possibility for a new type of masculinity, one that challenges his father's conceptions. This is a reading that I feel has been overlooked or underdeveloped by previous academic work which tends to focus solely on Jack.

In my examination of the film as a significant cultural work I combine first-hand personal experiences in advocacy with film theory and a cultural history of the period (specifically focusing on the later 1970s into the early 1980s). The Battered Women's Movement of the 1970s left a permanent mark on the American public, creating visibility and intervention. Unfortunately, despite several decades of research, advocacy, and increased awareness, statistics still show that domestic violence has not decreased. According to the recent National Survey on Intimate Partner Violence published by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, one in four women will be abused by an intimate partner in her lifetime.³ The fight is not yet over since clearly as a society we have not managed to leave domestic abuse in the past. I hope that by exposing *The Shining's* distinctive treatment of gender and domestic violence, I can illuminate not only something new from our past, but affect our future as well. A constructive conversation around domestic violence must involve an honest address of gender politics. For too long we have focused on the victims and not the perpetrators, blaming women for not leaving sooner rather than calling out the pervasive violence attached to concepts of masculinity. Along the same lines, scholarly work on *The Shining* has almost exclusively focused on understanding Jack as a victim of circumstance, driven mad by societal pressure and haunted by ghosts of the past. There has been some discussion of Danny as a manifestation of the child abuse anxiety stoked during the era. Conversations around Wendy rarely extend beyond pointing out her flaws. Therefore, to understand the film's narrative as a metaphor for domestic violence and the dangers of patriarchy, I explore each member of the family: Jack, Danny, and Wendy.

Andrew Tudor's *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie* catalogues horror films as a way of understanding what such trends as familial horror may reveal

³ "NISVS Summary Reports," Center for Disease Control, <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/NISVS-infographic-2016.pdf>.

about American culture. In his various listings of *The Shining* (none of which involve an in-depth discussion), Tudor categorizes the film as an example of “families invaded by monstrosity,” although with the caveat “assuming that it really does involve supernatural.”⁴ This suggests that Tudor, like myself, is aware of the possibility that the haunting of the Torrance family comes not from ghosts but human nature. Two other scholars who have written more specifically about this idea in *The Shining* include Walter Metz and Tony Williams. Metz’s “Toward a Post-structural Influence in Film Genre Study: Intertextuality and *The Shining*,” describes it as a film about the collapse of the traditional American family. Williams’ more recent work *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film* comes even closer to my analysis in his discussion of Jack’s “patriarchal violence.” Yet none of these scholars has addressed the issue of domestic abuse nor has there been much consideration of Wendy’s character and what she brings to the film. A recent article from feminist scholar Elizabeth Hornbeck makes these connections in her 2016 article “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?: Domestic Violence in *The Shining*.” Hornbeck’s reading of the film aligns with my own observations, noting Jack’s violent tendencies even before the family reaches the hotel. She also examines Wendy’s character as a prime example of a battered woman and therefore not surprisingly one with whom most viewers are hesitant to identify. Hornbeck also takes the time to root this reading in the time period, pointing out the popularity of the book-to-film story *The Burning Bed*, a narrative explicitly about domestic violence. While I whole heartedly agree with Hornbeck’s analysis, I differ with her suggestion that Wendy is the sole hero of the film. Danny plays just as important a role in

⁴ Andrew Tudor, *Monster and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Film*, (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 128 and 75.

their escaping Jack and therefore overcoming the abusive gender paradigm, presenting a male character who challenges traditional masculinity.⁵

My reading goes beyond Hornbeck's argument not only in my examination of Danny but also in my understanding of domestic violence. Due to my years of work with a local domestic violence program, I have firsthand experience and knowledge of both victims and their abusers, of the systemic barriers survivors face and of the deep-rooted social norms that continue to condone violence against women. Statistics show that "a woman is battered every 15 seconds" and that "domestic violence is a major cause of injuries to women, including one third of their murders."⁶ In fact, "the Federal Bureau of Investigation notes that four women die every day in the United States from domestic assaults."⁷ Such data proves that domestic violence is unfortunately a serious problem that can affect families regardless of their economic status, religion or ethnic background.

While every situation is different, through the collection of data from victims in domestic violence programs around the country, advocates have learned to identify the warning signs and common behaviors/actions of victims and abusers. Awareness is key for advocates based on the misperceptions regarding who victims and perpetrators are, what they look like and how they behave. The National Coalition against Domestic Violence provides this definition which I work from:

Domestic violence is the willful intimidation, physical assault, battery, sexual assault, and/or other abusive behavior as part of a systematic pattern of power and control

⁵ Hornbeck cites James Hala's "Kubrick's *The Shining*: The Specters and The Critics." in *The Shining Reader*. ed. Tony Magistrale, (WA: Starmont House , 1990), as inspiring her reading of the film.

⁶ Estelle B. Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, (New York: RandomHouse Publishing Group, 2002), 293.

⁷ Freedman, *No Turning Back*, 293.

perpetrated by one intimate partner against another. It includes physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence, and emotional abuse. The frequency and severity of domestic violence can vary dramatically; however, the one constant component of domestic violence is one partner's consistent efforts to maintain power and control over the other.⁸

Numerous power and control tactics are employed from verbal abuse to physical assault and rape. Women often emphasize how charming and affectionate their partners were initially. The abuse often begins with a minor incident, a momentary loss of control as the abuser will frame it. After lashing out in anger the abuser may be apologetic ("I'm sorry but...") and shower his partner with gifts and affection convincing her that it was an isolated incident and will never happen again resulting in a repetitive cycle of abusive behavior. Abusers are therefore often described as narcissistic, emotionally immature and temperamental, the slightest spark can set them off. They are accustomed to getting their way, feel entitled to do so and have developed masterful manipulation abilities. Abusers often look for women who appear to be vulnerable and naïve, perhaps with low self-esteem and then take advantage of their trusting nature. Red flags for an abusive relationship include monitoring your partner (never trusting them), critical language and constant put downs, gas lighting (using the victim's doubts or suspicions against them, convincing them that they are crazy and either imagining or exaggerating the situation), blaming them for *everything* that goes wrong, and isolation. I argue that once we begin to look for these signs in *The Shining*, the evidence is everywhere. Jack is a typical abuser and Wendy plays into the role of a typical victim.⁹

⁸ "Learn More," What is Abuse?, National Coalition Against Domestic Violence , <https://ncadv.org/learn-more>.

⁹ See "What is Abuse?" and "Signs of Abuse" from the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence at ncadv.org.

The Shining continues to be a horror icon in popular culture, often referenced due to its standout performances by Duval and Nicholson as well as director Stanley Kubrick's hauntingly beautiful aesthetic. But Kubrick's work must also be recognized for its progressive and controversial narrative which reveals how traditional masculinity can be harmful and toxic and must therefore be removed. The Torrances are representative of many families living in an abusive home: Jack as crumbling patriarch, Wendy as submissive wife, and Danny as the troubled child. In support of this reading of the film, it is important to note that Kubrick's works often tend towards social critique. Known for a detailed, meticulous, and deliberate style, Kubrick's films were "conceived with the possibility of multiple meanings," as Mario Falsetto states in his comprehensive analysis of the director's works.¹⁰ What I offer in this project is not necessarily the only way to read *The Shining*, but I do argue that it is a significance that has been largely overlooked. Kubrick scholars often link his works together through their connections to social issues. One Kubrick anthology discusses the link of "family strain" in films such as *Barry London*, *The Shining*, and *Full Metal Jacket* stating:

The theme of the father, or father figure, as fate's fearsome agent shapes each of these film. . . . The father figure loses out; in two of them, he dies. None of the three men feels he "belongs" to the family acquired through marriage, birth, or command. . . . One would have to know more, much more, about Kubrick in order to assign reasons for this thematic recurrence. But it's likely that Kubrick's filmmaking enables him to confront it, without actually involving himself. The film becomes a buffer between the director and his emotional involvement.¹¹

¹⁰ Mario Falsetto, *Stanley Kubrick: A Narrative and Stylistic Analysis*, (Westport, Conn: Praeger, 2001), 160.

¹¹ Alexander Walker, Sybil Taylor, and Ulrich Ruchti, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, (New York: Norton, 1999), 264-265.

Here the authors offer just one of many connections between Kubrick's works. Note too how these three films fall together at roughly the same moments in history (1975, 1980, 1987) aligning closely with Philip Jenkins' definition of the 1970s cultural phenomenon falling between 1975-1986.¹² Kubrick was clearly tapping into a sense of estrangement and loss present in men of the era. We also see strong connections to social themes in Kubrick's use of violence in his films. The authors of *Stanley Kubrick, Director* put it best stating, "Violence in Kubrick's films is seldom present for its own sake. Here [in *The Shining*] it reverberates with social and cultural references."¹³ They go on to compare this to his use of violence in films such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and *Lolita* (1962), citing similar comedic mash-ups between characters mocking or telling jokes containing cultural references, while either committing acts of violence or being attacked themselves (in the case of Humbert Humbert). Again, this association suggests that social critique lies in the backdrop of many of Kubrick's films which supports my argument that it is present in this one.

Further support for a reading of *The Shining* as a film concerned with domestic violence comes from the involvement of co-writer Diane Johnson. She has contributed to several film scripts but is most recognized for her fiction novels. Some Kubrick scholars simply describe her input as "the benefit of a woman whose novels showed a concern for humanity, depth of character and intellectual sharpness, all of which Kubrick felt could be applied with profit in adapting a book like *The Shining*."¹⁴ However in Hornbeck's article on "Domestic Violence in *The Shining*," she cites an even more relevant

¹² Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The Ending of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.), 5.

¹³ Walker, Taylor, Ruchti, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 310.

¹⁴ Walker, Taylor, Ruchti, *Stanley Kubrick, Director*, 280-281.

connection between Johnson and the film's subtext. She explains that Johnson had previously "taken up violence against women in her 1974 novel *The Shadow Knows*."¹⁵ Both the novel's subject matter and its gothic style would have worked well with Kubrick's aim in making *The Shining* into a horror film about domestic violence since, as Hornbeck argues, gothic literature has long been a site for familial and personal conflict to be worked out. As she states, "gothic conventions in *The Shining* are key to its effective portrayal of domestic violence. The genre creates a qualitatively different viewer experience from dramatic films about domestic abuse."¹⁶

My argument for a domestic violence subtext is strongly tied to the historical moment in which *The Shining* was made. For this context, I lean on Bruce Schulman's *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* and Philip Jenkins' *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*. I believe that Kubrick's film embodies both the spirit of progress and anxiety that permeated the decade, which Schulman and Jenkins cover in their works.¹⁷ For a more specific discussion of masculinity in the 1970s, I turn to Barbara Ehrenreich's *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*. Her work defines and analyzes various masculine performances of the late twentieth century while tying them to larger social and political structures. Having worked and volunteered at a local center for survivors of domestic and sexual violence for many years, my reading of *The Shining* also comes from applying the lens of an advocate. Judith Herman, in her seminal text *Trauma and Recovery*, lends another vital tool by defining trauma. Herman was part

¹⁵ Hornbeck, "Whose Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?: Domestic Violence in *The Shining*," *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016), 691.

¹⁶ Hornbeck, "Whose Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?," 691.

¹⁷ Other texts that shape my definition of 1970's American culture include Thomas Hines' *The Great Funk*, (NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

of a group of advocates working to increase awareness and knowledge of domestic violence in the 1970s and her work continues to be integral in domestic violence work today. By defining those who have been abused as trauma victims, on par with other types of survivors such as victims of war, Herman helped to create a public space for addressing the problem on a larger social level.

I use Herman's work to develop an understanding of Wendy's and Danny's characters as victims of trauma. In my second chapter I analyze in detail how, via key scenes in the film, Kubrick shifts the viewer from identifying with Jack (the abuser) to instead sympathizing with Wendy and Danny (the victims). This is accomplished essentially by making the viewer into one who is traumatized through Kubrick's careful manipulation of cinematic elements such as pacing, *mis-en-scene* and sound. In looking specifically at these scenes from the film, my analysis is also fostered by the work of Carol Clover and Vivian Sobchack who have both written extensively on gender politics in the horror genre. Clover's "Final Girl" theory, from her work *Men Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, analyzes how viewers are brought to identify with a victim, making the female lead become the object around which gender issues are worked out. This is central to Clover's main thesis which argues that horror films encourage audiences to relate to and engage with the victim/hero, rather than the sadistic point of view of the killer. After 1970 this figure is predominately female, adding another layer of significance to her argument. While she does not write about *The Shining* specifically, I apply her theory to my analysis of Wendy. Similarly, Sobchack's theory on the "special" children of 70's horror and sci-fi from her article "Bringing it all Back Home: Family Work and Generic Exchange" does not focus on *The Shining*. Her article focuses on the intersection of horror, sci-fi, and melodrama through their child figures. Sobchack recognizes that in these films the home and

the family are no longer a site of security but of chaos and horror, which she then links to the breakdown of patriarchal authority. I use her argument about the power of these children and their strained relationship with their parent (usually a father figure) in my analysis of Danny. How we understand and relate to these characters is a crucial component of my project.

In Chapter 1, titled *Performing Masculinity: Jack and Danny*, I begin by analyzing the role of Jack, the character most discussed by other scholars. I argue the “ghosts” of the hotel manifest the core of Jack’s masculine identity: alcohol, the male gaze, and physical aggression. These idols, which Jack clings to, represent a more traditional idea of masculinity, one that was being actively challenged by social movements of the time. Already lost to him in social reality, this identity becomes a nostalgic performance for Jack, as is revealed to us in the moments Jack interacts with the ghosts of the hotel. Through two close readings of scenes that expose the cracks in Jack’s fragile performance, I emphasize how he sinks from sympathetic to problematic and eventually insane. Essential to our understanding of Jack’s performance of masculinity is Danny. Danny’s masculinity (though he is only a child) is in direct opposition to Jack’s. He is sensitive and perceptive; his “shining” ability seems to be a metaphorical manifestation of that idea. Through Danny, Kubrick presents a more modern male identity and therefore offers audiences hope for future generations.

Wendy Torrance is the textbook example of what a battered woman/trauma victim looks like. In Chapter 2, *From Victim to Survivor: Wendy and Danny*, I analyze her character’s development over time emphasizing how in the viewer’s eyes she shifts from victim to survivor. Looking at an early scene of Wendy, I argue that our initial dislike for her is directly tied to her status as “victim.” Again in this chapter I explore the crucial role of Danny as seen through his strong bond with his mother. Danny is the empowering force that pushes Wendy to make a

change and stand up to her abusive husband. Our willingness to care for Danny opens up the possibility for identifying with Wendy. In a later scene we see Wendy “man’s up,” confronting Jack, thus our identification switches as we leave behind his madness for Wendy’s inner strength that is fostered by her love for her son.

In the Epilogue, wrapping up my argument about *The Shining*’s significance as a domestic violence narrative, I reflect on Kubrick’s ability to capture both the realism and the horror of abuse. Looking at Kubrick’s directing style, I address the treatment of actress Shelley Duvall during filming. Turning from the work itself to the film’s enduring cultural significance, I compare other films that address abuse. I end with an exploration of current events and cultural trends as well as the state of domestic violence advocacy today.

Chapter 1

The Problem of Performance: Masculinity in Jack and Danny

Jack Nicholson's manic face popping through the fragmented bathroom door and shouting, "here's Johnny!," has become one of the most recognizable horror movie moments in American cinematic history. The sheer terror audiences felt in 1980 as they watched his character, Jack Torrance, chase his own wife and child with an axe still resonates with viewers today. What is it about *The Shining* that lingers with us; what fears does it manifest? In this project I argue that the true horror of Kubrick's film lies not in the ghosts of the Overlook Hotel, but in Jack Torrance. By exposing Jack as an abusive husband and father, I analyze *The Shining* as a film concerned with the social issue of domestic violence and its ties to greater patriarchal violence within American culture.

Jack and Wendy's story functions on two levels. Within the domestic violence narrative (micro level), we experience and hopefully come to understand the incredibly complicated and difficult struggle within an abusive family. On a macro level Jack and Wendy act as figures, representations of the broader problem of a patriarchal society. In this way the story pushes viewers to connect patriarchy to victimization, and white male rage to oppression. By the death of Jack, the toxic parent is removed from the family unit and there is hope for Wendy and Danny. Therefore, on the macro level Kubrick's ending warns audiences of the dangers posed by the patriarchy Jack represents and suggests that as a society we are stronger without it. It is a complicated critique which functions at both a systemic (oppression of patriarchy) and individual

(Jack's abuse of his family) level, linking the individual to the system and vice versa. Central to both levels of this analysis lies Danny. His strained relationship with his father mirrors the struggle over masculine identity taking place on the cultural stage during the 1970s. Kubrick offers audiences an alternative to Jack's masculinity, hinted at through Danny.

Kubrick emphasizes how Jack's masculinity is a performance designed around personal and imagined social expectations.¹⁸ Jack is a crumbling patriarch lashing out at his family both emotionally and physically due to guilt over his own shortcomings. Kubrick reveals this side of Jack through scenes of his interactions with the ghosts of the Overlook Hotel. In these scenes, Jack's mask slips and he readjusts it, exposing the troubled man beneath. The hotel spirits also act as archetypes, manifestations of the type of masculinity Jack clings to out of his desperation to receive the reward patriarchy has promised him. Lloyd the bartender represents alcoholism, a significant threat to men's health.¹⁹ The woman in the bathtub from room 237 symbolizes man's objectification of women and the cultural obsession with youth and beauty. Finally, Grady, the old caretaker, becomes a materialization of man's obsession with violence. Each ghost, manifestations of Jack's own struggling psyche, pushes Jack down an increasingly dangerous path.

Jack's representation of a masculine identity in crisis is supported by many scholars who have studied *The Shining*. Tony Williams devotes Chapter 11 of his work *Hearths of Darkness* to film adaptations of Stephen King's novels. Williams looks beyond the supernatural and cuts to the heart of the social critique in *The Shining* stating, "What strongly emerges in *The Shining* is

¹⁸ I use this term referring to gender performance as it was first coined by Judith Butler in her work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (NY: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁹ Ehrenreich discusses in chapter 6 "Reasons of the Heart: Cardiology Rewrites the Masculine Script" of *The Hearts of Men*, (NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1983) the blow to masculinity from the medical community, which concluded that men we're in fact the weaker sex. Stress and alcohol consumption we're key contributors to men's health problems.

not the Overlook Hotel's supernatural traps but Jack Torrance's failure in the American Dream, his past history as an abused child, and his alcoholic descent into a psychosis that is preferable to admitting personal failure and ideologic entrapment."²⁰ Williams' particularly sharp, culturally grounded analysis of Jack aligns closely with my own. Describing his character, Williams states, "Failing as writer and father Jack overcompensates for masculine inadequacy by patriarchal violence toward his wife and child."²¹ Despite Williams' observations he leaves out a further discussion of familial violence in his chapter.

In examining Jack's character as representative of the broader masculine identity struggle of the period I lean on the work of Barbara Ehrenreich. Her text *The Hearts of Men* offers a historical and sociological perspective on the different male cultural moments of the 1950s-1980s. Particularly important for the purpose of my discussion is her work on the "New Male" of the 1970s, an identity which emphasized the connection between success and self-growth, a connection that she explains inevitably excluded many working-class men. While Jack may try and play the part of a successful writer, his financial shortcomings are integral to his character's development.

Yet it is essential to point out that Jack had the capability of harming his family before entering the Overlook Hotel; he was a man pushed to a breaking point but not "possessed." In "How Narcissistic Injury May Contribute to Reactive Violence: A Case Example Using Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining*," Matthew Merced presents a clinical approach to Jack as an example of a man with extreme narcissism who has suffered numerous blows to his self-worth. These failures mount over time pushing Jack towards his eventual mental break and attempted murder of his

²⁰ Tony Williams, *Hearths of Darkness: The Family in the American Horror Film*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 240.

²¹ Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, 249-250.

family. Merced's analysis is rooted purely in psychology demonstrating how any discussion of Jack must recognize his mental instability prior to entering the hotel. Jack is more than problematic, he is abusive. A solid understanding of the warning signs in abusive men is essential to my discussion of the film. According to psychologist Lundy Bancroft, abusive men are often quite charming, masking their ability to manipulate, as we can see in Jack's interactions.

In this connection, I emphasize Jack's relationship (or lack thereof) with Danny. We see in these characters two different presentations of masculinity, Jack performing the traditional view of a breadwinner, a man in control; while Danny offers instead the beginning of something new, something more flexible or inclusive. Danny's shining ability stands for being open, sensitive, and perceptive which separates him from the sort of identity Jack clings to. While Jack also technically "shines" (he sees spirits), he does not appear to understand or take to the gift the way Danny does. Therefore Jack and Danny offer two performative possibilities for masculinity, one aggressively defensive and the other more vulnerably open. Danny is able to escape his father and trap him in the hedge maze, symbolically leaving behind the oppressive patriarchy (represented by Jack's performance) to forge a more hopeful path for the future.

Vivian Sobchack's "Bringing it all Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange" examines the tension in masculinity between father/son characters like Jack and Danny. She describes male characters like Jack as those whose masculinity is "threatened." She then reveals how children such as Danny act as counters to their fathers, a manifestation of their own self-loathing.²² Yet Sobchack does not spend significant time on *The Shining*, focusing

²² Vivian Sobchack, "Bringing It All Back Home: Family Economy and Generic Exchange," in *The Dread of Difference: Gender and the Horror Film*, ed. by Grant, Barry K. (TX: University of Texas Press, 1996), 151-152.

instead on another Kubrick classic, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. By contrast, Stephen Davenport's article "From Big Sticks to Talking Sticks: Family, Work, and Masculinity in Stephen King's *The Shining*" offers a lengthier discussion of the strained relationship between Jack and Danny. Davenport's argument centers around the traditional concepts of "men" versus "boys," associating men with action and boys with words/thought.²³ Working off these binaries, Davenport also reinforces Sobchack's idea of the father's feeling "threatened" by the son, explaining Jack's assault on Danny as a power display. Yet the significance of Danny's survival and actual defeat of his father is left to be explored. I argue that Danny's opposition to his father is cultivated throughout the film to demonstrate not just the weakness in men such as Jack, but also to propose a possibility for the future of men and boys in the form of the sensitive Danny.

Historical Background

The period between the early 1960s and the late 1980s in the U.S. was a time of transition in which traditional gender structures were being torn down. Bruce Schulman describes the decade as a period of malaise, referencing the general climate of uneasiness amongst the American people.²⁴ A weak economy, the Vietnam War's stretching on, Presidential scandals all resulted in a general distrust of the American government. Meanwhile a number of civil rights issues were shaping and changing American politics and culture, due to pressure from the Women's Movement as well as a number of other minority rights groups such as Black Power, Chicano, Native Americans, Gay Liberation, and persons with disabilities.²⁵ Not surprisingly, working-class white men of the late 1970s were feeling anxious, even threatened. The rise of the

²³ Steven Davenport, "From Big Sticks to Talking Sticks Family, Work, and Masculinity in Stephen King's *The Shining*," *Men and Masculinities* 2 no. 3 (2000), 308-310.

²⁴ Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift In American Culture, Society, And Politics*, (Cambridge, England: De Capo Press, 2002), 121-122.

²⁵ Schulman, "Introduction," from *The Seventies: The Great Shift In American Culture, Society, And Politics*.

New Right and the Reagan White House of the 1980s is cited by many 70's scholars as a clear sign of the cultural backlash to the progressivism of the 60's and 70's.²⁶ Phillip Jenkins in particular writes about the atmosphere of anxiety that permeated the decade which he defines as roughly 1975-1986.²⁷ By segmenting the period between these years, Jenkins picks up on a later theme from Schulman's work. The distrust and unease only deepened as the decade progressed and gave way to a climate of fear which Jenkins captures in his title *Decade of Nightmares*. Television plays a prominent role in Jenkins' analysis, from endless war footage to nightly stories of predators and abuse – this was a world which had seemingly lost all sense of security.²⁸ As Jenkins states, “The willingness to accept nightmarish media images in the post-1975 decade suggests the existence of widespread fear and anxieties which could be readily mobilized.”²⁹

One of the foremost “structures” eroded in the 1970s was patriarchy. Male privilege and traditional gender roles were being challenged on all sides from the women's movement, the youth counter-culture, and even the black power movement. The superior status of the white male was crumbling. The move by women from the home into the workplace meant not only changes in the business realm, but also changes in the family. Traditional ideas of gender roles were being challenged and reshaped, calling for more flexibility, allowing room for women to be strong-willed and men to be sensitive. Barbara Ehrenreich writes about this phenomenon in her work *The Hearts of Men* in which she dissects American cultural trends relating to masculinity and male expression. She describes the “New Male” of the 70's (coming out of the 1960s counter-culture), which reflected a positive attitude towards shifting and bending gender

²⁶ Schulman address this in chapters 8 and 9 of *The Seventies: The Great Shift In American Culture, Society, And Politics*

²⁷ Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*, (NY: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5.

²⁸ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 5.

²⁹ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 16.

identities. Ehrenreich explains how the feminist movement (excluding some more extremist factions) sought changes that would improve the lives of men along with women. She sums up this argument stating:

The promise of feminism – that there might be a future in which no adult person was either a ‘dependent creature’ or an overburdened breadwinner – came at a time when the ideological support for male conformity were already crumbling. Physicians had found men the weaker sex; psychologists were finding them perilously ‘rigid.’ The war reinforced the medical dictum that male aggressiveness was a lethal force; and the counterculture reinforced the promise, from the new psychology, of a richer life for those who could overcome their masculine hang-ups.³⁰

Unfortunately not all men (or women) were willing to go the full distance, as Ehrenreich discusses in her last few chapters which address antifeminist backlash. She emphasizes the class divide around this issue, citing that the qualities of personal growth pushed a narrative equating success and happiness to financial stability.³¹ Working-class men were therefore particularly turned off by the shift in gender politics. There was also a strong undercurrent of antifeminist activism which harnessed the fears and insecurities still lingering in many American conservatives. This is demonstrated by the rise of the New Right leading into 1980 whose emphasis on traditional family values offered a clear opposition to early 70’s progressivism.

Films coming to theaters in the period of the late 70’s reflect the struggle over gender equality. Horror films in particular saw a massive resurgence in the 1970s, often filled with bad dads, paranoia, and a loss of control. The men of these films are representative of the patriarchy

³⁰ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 116.

³¹ Ehrenreich discusses this in great detail in chapter 9 “The Male Revolt Redeemed: Class Uplift and Health Reform in the Seventies” of *The Hearts of Men*, 117-143.

under attack in the 70's: men such as the priests in *The Exorcist* and *The Omen* and the fathers in *Amityville Horror*, *The Shining*, and *Poltergeist*. Each of these films features a man in crisis - a manifestation of these "attacks" on patriarchy and traditional American values and gender roles. The families under attack depict destabilized gender identities both in their weak fathers but also the strong mothers who ultimately save their child(ren). This is particularly true when comparing *Amityville Horror*, *The Shining*, and *Poltergeist*, which were all released only one year apart. George, Jack, and Steve are struggling financially and relocate their families to a new (or temporary) home. Each film also features a sensitive child (or children) who interacts with the paranormal. While the family's "home" becomes the site of horror, one could easily argue that the problems came from within the families themselves. Specifically, the family is hurt by the father, due to his own weakness or shortcomings. In *Hearths of Darkness* Williams draws a direct comparison between the fathers of *Poltergeist* and *The Shining*. He states that "presenting himself as representing a family crisis organization, Kane recognizes the same insecure fears in Steve that Grady discerns in Jack Torrance of *The Shining*. 'You feel that you're not man enough to hold this family together'."³²

The paranoia that is present in these films reflects the anxiety of adults living through the decade who were faced with an uncertain future. Andrew Tudor discusses this paranoia in his book *Monsters and Mad Scientists*. "This is a view of the world which is not simply paranoid of other people. It fears the unreliability of the self, and doubts the security of our identities as functioning and responsible human beings."³³ Tudor is explaining here that the chaotic, paranoid worlds within these films are representative of the identity struggles happening within the United States during the 1970s. As Tudor suggests, in these films the attacks are literally coming from

³² Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, 228

³³ Andrew Tudor, *Monsters and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*, (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1989), 221.

within, attacks on one's identity resulting in a loss of self. What stands out about Kubrick's film in comparison to many of its more generic cousins, is how it purposefully critiques systems and ideas in which it takes part. That is to say, Jack's performance on the surface appears to be the "backlash" I describe, and one in which the audience seems to take pleasure; when actually the performance is, in fact, a system critique that takes pleasure in patriarchy's (and Jack's) breakdown.

The film seems to fully encapsulate the end of the 1970s for it brings to life the nightmarish images Jenkins evokes, as well as embodying the feminist challenge to patriarchy (shifting gender politics) and its backlash (anxiety and anger) that Ehrenreich describes. In *The Shining*, the Torrance family is torn apart by Jack's repressed aggression. The anxiety and insecurities festering within Jack take on physical form once the family arrives at The Overlook Hotel. Desperate to regain control over his family, Jack finds himself seduced by the hotel's resident spirits and the violence they suggest. His son Danny has a strange ability, one that represents a new era of men who are open and reject traditional masculinity. Kubrick's Danny plays an essential role in the death of Jack by trapping him in the maze – lost, Jack freezes to death. Jack dies just as the patriarchy he represents should, while Danny and the possibilities he embodies as this "New Male" escapes. Kubrick's characters and their problems not only reflect the struggles of men in the 1970s but also offer American audiences a hope for future generations.

Performing Traditional Masculinity

Barbara Ehrenreich's attention to differences in the performance of masculinity by social class reveals the socio-economic dimension of the personal frustrations that Jack's character embodies. She points out that while many middle to upper middle class men of the 70's

embraced the bending and blurring of strict gender roles, blue-collar men were marginalized. She notices a chance at progress with the “New Male” coming out of the 70’s which emphasized growth, maturity, and consumption.³⁴ This left little room for working-class men to redefine themselves. As she explains; the middle-class male could be categorized as “ ‘modern’, while the working class male role was marked by ‘obsolescence’ and ‘dysfunctionality’.”³⁵ Jack, struggling as a writer and unable to provide the expected level of comfort to his family, encapsulates the attitudes of such men. Ehrenreich points out the rise of violent, male-driven films in the late 1970s, which she sees as Hollywood’s clear attempts to pander to a rising audience group.³⁶ She states that such films “returned obsessively to the interlocking themes of masculinity and class, and ... Hollywood located ‘traditional’ masculinity in the working class.”³⁷ The same could be said for *The Shining* where Jack, who as a teacher/writer should be considered middle class, instead finds himself relating to the working-class (bartender and caretaker) ghosts haunting the Overlook. Jack’s class identity in the film is precarious and tightly bound to his masculinity. Unsure of what his role should be, Jack appears to be faking it, masking his insecurities. Yet I argue that, in the case of *The Shining*, Kubrick uses violence not merely for entertainment but to expose the truth of violence in our everyday lives. The domestic violence subtext points out that the personal is political and therefore the familial violence of the Torrances stands in for the patriarchal violence in our society.

Jack’s insecurities are reflective of many men grappling with their roles as men, husbands, and fathers within the historical moment in which the film was made, the late 1970s. While Ehrenreich paints a picture of the socioeconomic context in which *The Shining* is

³⁴ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 127-132.

³⁵ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 134.

³⁶ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 136-139.

³⁷ Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men*, 136.

unfolding, Stephen Davenport in his article “From Big Sticks to Talking Sticks: Family, Work, and Masculinity in Stephen King’s *The Shining*,” relates Jack’s inability to be a good father to the way Jack was raised by his own father.³⁸ This idea comes from the book *The Shining* by Stephen King, on which the film is based. I am not alone in my belief that what Kubrick’s adaptation cuts to is the masculine insecurity at the core of King’s story. Given Jack’s likeness to King himself (a writer struggling for success and battling alcoholism), it is not surprising that the author was not a fan of Kubrick’s version of his story.³⁹ The inclusion of Jack’s backstory, a childhood of abuse, helps King’s readers sympathize with Jack’s condition throughout the novel. His character, unlike Kubrick’s version, is meant to be forgiven. King’s ending, in which Jack sacrifices himself to the hotel to save his family, further highlights this redeemable image of Jack which King creates but Kubrick breaks. King’s story emphasizes the supernatural elements (ghosts, possession, ESP), as if those become an excuse for Jack’s behavior, while Kubrick instead uses them metaphorically to point out the systemic problem at the heart of Jack’s actions. Film Scholar Tony Williams has commented on this as well in *Hearths of Darkness*. He states that Kubrick “significantly locates the supernatural within relevant social and political boundaries. His version successfully conveys important features within King’s fiction.”⁴⁰ What Williams suggests here, as do I, is that Kubrick has tapped into something deep within the story that was perhaps too personal for King to see himself.

However, if we merely see Jack as frustrated father, insecure about both his masculinity and his class identity, it is too easy to overlook the threat he presents to his family. Many previous film scholars who have written about *The Shining* have fallen into this trap - they

³⁸ Davenport, “From Big Sticks to Talking Sticks,” 309-310.

³⁹ King’s dislike for the film adaptation by Kubrick has been discussed by numerous pop culture magazines such as *The Guardian* and *Av Club*. One notable interview from BBC News with King discusses in detail his disappointment with Kubrick’s film.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Hearths of Darkness*, 249

believe Kubrick wants us to pity Jack because they see his frustrations as understandable given the world he occupies.⁴¹ This is a point again, where we must remember the two levels Kubrick's film is operating at: man as a victim to the pressures of patriarchy *and* Jack's violence as a reaffirmation and expression of that patriarchy. A close reading of the film confirms that Jack is problematic, displaying many classic abusive behaviors as he becomes increasingly unstable and as a result the audience shifts their initial identification away from his character. We are confronted with the truth that Jack was always capable of violence against his family and while we may take pity on him for his shortcomings, we believe that his character meets his unavoidable end.

The Mask Slips

Jack is aware of his failures; he is both unhappy in his life and with himself. This internal conflict is revealed to the audience throughout the film, primarily through scenes in which Jack interacts with the spirits of the hotel. The two scenes at the bar of the Gold Room that I explore in this section emphasize the performative nature of Jack's masculinity. We see his swagger and confidence exaggerated, this is the mask Jack wears to convince himself and the world that he is in control. What we also see in these two scenes is how Jack loses that control and how he lets his mask slip to reveal a conflicted man within. The effect of these scenes is not to increase our empathy with him, but to progressively alienate us from Jack as we become uncomfortably aware of his abusive nature. In this realization, we then transfer our sympathies from Jack to Wendy and Danny (as explored in Chapter 2).

⁴¹ For other analysis of Jack's character see Tony Williams's *Hearths of Darkness*.

The Torrance's world is becoming increasingly unstable causing the family to further splinter apart from one another. After being accused of hurting his son we see a troubled Jack mumbling angrily, punching the air, kicking at the ground as he wanders down the hall. Jack is clearly upset that Wendy believes him guilty of harming Danny again. The camera slowly follows him down the hall and into the Gold Room where we see an ornate and empty ball room. The slow pan following Jack's walk across the empty room further emphasizes the isolation of the Torrances. The camera cuts to a tight close-up of Jack's face as he slumps into the barstool and proclaims in exasperation "I'd give my goddamn soul for just a glass of beer." Then we see Lloyd standing behind the bar. The audience first sees Jack's reaction before they are aware of Lloyd's presence, filtering our response to his appearance. Strangely, the two seem to know one another and they speak in a typical manner between a troubled man and his usual barkeep. The camera uses shot-reverse-shot repeatedly in this scene, framing the two in mid-range close-ups. This encourages the audience to closely examine the expressions and reactions of Jack, whose words are hollow clichés. From lines such as "white man's burden," "problem with the ol' sperm bank; nothing I can't handle," and "I love the little son of a bitch," we feel the coarse, misogynistic quality to Jack that he ordinarily keeps hidden. Here Kubrick presents Jack as backlash – he embodies the qualities of anti-feminist backlash Ehrenreich describes.

As Sobchack explains in her work "Bringing It All Back Home," the anxiety and resulting repression in many 70's horror films is related to "patriarchal hatred, fear, and self-loathing."⁴² In this scene Jack is affirmed as one of these men. His lost sense of control over the family has been triggered by Danny's getting hurt in the hotel and particularly by Wendy's suggestion that Jack was the cause. Such harsh language is not only part of Jack's performance

⁴² Sobchack, "Bringing it All Back Home," 152.

but further evidence of his abusive nature: his macho attitude, the objectification of his wife, and his ability to always frame the narrative in his favor. The cliché quality of his words, coupled with Nicholson's exaggerated expressions (the raised brows, the snicker and smirk, the grand waving gestures of his hands and arms) feels forced because in this moment Jack *is* forcing himself to remain composed. This becomes most evident when he talks about his relationships with his son and then his wife. Here we see the mask slip, the control is briefly lost. It is clear from the way Jack describes the incident in which he hurt Danny, that he feels regret. Yet his words continue to betray him as he tries to minimize the true brutality of his own actions, "could have happened to anyone." Jack, like most abusers, cannot take full responsibility for his actions because in his mind he is always right. We see in this moment the classic abuser behavior pattern of deny, minimize, and rationalize. Jack denies any intention of harming his son, he minimizes the incident, and then rationalizes the entire situation. He also blames Wendy for interfering with his role as a father, "that bitch" as he calls her, is a flimsy attempt to displace his anger over his own failures on to her. Displacement is another common tool used by abusers to assuage their guilt and attempt to earn sympathy.⁴³ Lloyd acts as a passive object around which Jack attempts to recompose himself, working through his temporary loss of control over both himself and his family. Lloyd seems almost robotic in comparison to Jack's animation, barely speaking or moving and always the same fake smile plastered across his face. The camera work here with tight shot-reverse-shots of each character face-on helps to focus the audience's attention on these details. The exposure of the man behind the mask does not help viewers empathize with Jack but instead repulses us. Defensive due to his past transgressions (dislocating Danny's shoulder), Jack becomes increasingly angry and dangerous. We leave the scene feeling even less comfortable

⁴³ For more on common abuser behaviors see Lundy Bancroft, *Why Does He Do That?: Inside the Minds of Angry and Controlling Men*, (NY: The Berkley Publishing Group, 2002), particularly relevant is chapter 3 "The Abusive Mentality," 49-75.

with Jack's character than we did before, our concern for Danny growing.

The camera angles used also serve to highlight how strange this scene is for the audience, yet not for Jack. For example, the two men are dressed in styles from two very different time periods. Jack's attire includes jeans, plaid shirt and a casual jacket, a very "working-class man" aesthetic. This look clashes with Lloyd who is wearing formal servant attire reminiscent of the 1920s. It is interesting that in Jack's fantasy Lloyd is simultaneously of a lower social standing yet more formally dressed. There is also curious lighting coming from behind Lloyd which casts shadows upon his face while brightening Jack's. Again, Jack appears unfazed by any of these differences or the strange lighting. The camera, which backs off at certain moments for a wide angle shot, reminds the audience that Jack is sitting in a large, ornate ballroom, completely empty except for he and Lloyd. This only further accentuates how odd the scene is between Jack and Lloyd. Jack's inability to recognize these strange features hints that his sanity is gradually slipping away, alienating us from his point of view.

The second scene at the bar of the Gold Room mirrors the first in many ways, while simultaneously presenting an even more bizarre and problematic situation. Bitter and angry with his wife for suggesting leaving the hotel, Jack wanders down the hall into the ballroom to find a roaring party. The camera work here is almost identical, a slow pan following Jack through the hall and into the ballroom, except this time the room is not empty. There is again a peculiarity to this scene that Jack is completely oblivious to: the entire room has been sent back in time, the clothing, decor, and music are all from the 1920s. Yet Jack is relaxed and comfortable chatting with Lloyd the bartender. At first taken aback when Lloyd tells Jack that the person buying his drinks is "not a matter that concerns you, not at this point," Jack quickly shrugs off these disconcerting words and continues to smile and enjoy himself.

It is the encounter with Grady, who brings Jack in the bathroom to wipe a spilled drink off his jacket, that I focus our attention on. Dressed formally as a servant, Grady is initially quite polite, responding “yes sir” and “no sir” to Jack whom he treats as his superior. The audience of course knows that Grady was once the caretaker of the Overlook. We learned in the beginning of the film that in 1970 Grady, while watching over the hotel, went crazy and killed his wife, two daughters, and then himself. At first Jack seems unaware with whom he is speaking, but as the room changes from the grandiose golden ballroom to the stark and sterile red and white bathroom, so does the tone of their interaction. The camera cuts from one room to next, emphasizing the sharp contrast. Jack’s mask slips again as slowly the realization dawns on him that this man with whom he speaks could not possibly be real. First we see a look of concern and confusion as Grady denies ever being the caretaker. As Grady throws pretext to wind and confronts Jack about the truth of Danny, Jack’s mask now stays off. They refer to Danny as “willful” and “naughty,” the two abusers feeding off each other’s loathing. Jack, with a glazed expression, stares wide-mouthed at Grady’s explanation of Danny’s “very great talent.” Grady emphasizes that the boy is using this “against your will” or Jack’s will, the will of the patriarch, the head of the family and the home. An eerie smirk creeps across Jack’s face at Grady’s suggestion to “correct” his wife and child in order to maintain control of the situation. Again the words here are the most telling as Grady states “when my wife tried to prevent me from doing my duty, I corrected her too.”

The scene is wrought with signs of white male privilege and superiority. The two use racial slurs and Jack insults his wife even further, blaming her for all his problems. The moment marks Jack’s complete mental break with reality and introduces the final piece of Jack’s repressed aggression – Grady as the symbol for familial violence. Notice how openly the two

men talk about hurting their loved ones. The conversation is essentially one abuser giving advice to another on how to best control his family. If we were to play into the supernatural narrative, it becomes clear from this scene that Jack has now been “taken” by the hotel. However, if we think of Lloyd and Grady as representing traditional ideas of masculinity (because they are presented to Jack as figures from the 1920s), then we see that Jack has been seduced by these forces. He feels he must take action to reassert his dominance over his family. From this moment on audiences are completely alienated from Jack, searching for the hope we soon find in Wendy.

In these bar scenes Jack is an unrelenting misogynist while also recognizing his own failure. This results in a cliché to the viewer, one that betrays Jack’s own performance as precisely not something stable and long-lasting, like the patriarchal system of power he seeks to emulate. Indeed, one could argue for audience’s pleasure in both backlash *and* breakdown in these moments. Jack, by opening himself up to repressed patriarchal desires, has led to his own demise. The film ends with Jack having failed as a writer, a husband, and a father. He could not carry out his plans to care for the Overlook or to murder his family. He dies alone, left out in the cold. If we continue to read Jack’s character as a symbol for men of the 1970s, men whose identities are in crisis, then Jack’s failures and ultimate death are significant. Jack serves as a warning to men: Do not let your anxiety defeat you, accept these changes and better yourself. Carol Clover loosely discusses this in the second chapter of her book *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*. She argues that possession films, which generally center around a female who is possessed, are just as much about the men in the film.⁴⁴ Clover states that the film’s “psychological interest, its problem, typically resides at least as much in the significant bystander,” the bystander generally being male. She goes on to explain that the films feature a

⁴⁴ Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*, (NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 85.

transformation within these bystanders who must open themselves up to new possibilities (super nature). While this does not exactly fit what is happening in *The Shining*, there is a relevance. Clover references these bystanders as being men in crisis and suffering from identity issues. Clearly Jack is suffering from these as well. Unlike the men to whom Clover is referring, Jack does not transform for the better - he sticks to traditional masculinity which leads to his undoing. While Kubrick at first seems to be presenting Jack as this “bystander” to transformation, it is actually Danny who takes on the “bystander” position. The title focuses on Danny and his ability to “shine,” yet the film is largely focused on Jack’s gradual decay and violent rampage. It could be read that Danny is simply the vessel, as Clover claims, around which the male crisis is worked out.⁴⁵ I argue however, that Danny plays a more significant role than merely an object around which Jack’s decay is centered. Danny is the true bystander and the “transformation” that Clover cites is actually happening within Wendy. This transformation of Wendy is what I will explore in my second chapter.

Jack and Danny

Kubrick works to present a strained relationship between father and son, pointing to Danny as a “solution” for the “problem” posed by Jack (clinging to the failed promises of patriarchy). In one of the few scenes in which Jack and Danny interact alone without Wendy, we see their strained father-son relationship. Danny has gone to retrieve his toy and finds his father, who is supposedly napping, actually lying wide awake. Jack calls his son over and holds him as the two discuss the hotel that Jack seems to love and of which Danny is obviously terrified. Despite their physical closeness, there is no warmth in this moment. You do not feel love between Jack and Danny. The two do not look in each other’s eyes but instead stare coldly in opposite directions. As he repeats, “I love ya Danny,” Jack smiles but viewers do not feel

⁴⁵ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 85-97.

affection, rather Jack's words ring hollow and empty of any true emotion. Meanwhile, Danny is seemingly eager to get away from his father's clutches, almost unresponsive to Jack's touch he sits perfectly still. The moment cultivates an image of Jack as a distant father, while the scene also serves to exemplify the increasing instability of Jack. The scene with Grady, which comes later, then furthers this idea by presenting Danny as a clear threat to Jack. The ghost of Grady voices Jack's hidden desires by labeling the boy as "naughty" and referring to his call for help as "bringing in outside forces." One could easily argue that these words, while from Grady's lips, are rooted deep within Jack's conflicted psyche.

I argue that Danny and his mother offer the audiences of *The Shining* a glimmer of hope at the end of an otherwise horrifying story. Instead of the usual female child, Danny is a male child who possesses supernatural abilities, an ability that is generally coded feminine.⁴⁶ Danny is also very close to his mother. We see them together in many scenes watching television, playing, and talking, unlike the few scenes of Danny and Jack together. These elements lead to a blending of masculine and feminine in Danny. Danny's ability to "shine," combined with his closeness to his mother, form the possibility of a new type of masculinity. As for Wendy, despite her meek and confused appearance throughout most of the film, she is able to escape and plays a much stronger role as Danny's protector than his father does. Danny, with some help from his mother, is able to escape the hotel. He ultimately saves himself and Wendy by outwitting his father and trapping him in the maze, allowing he and his mother to escape. If we follow the same analogy we have been using for Jack as a figure for patriarchy in 70's culture, then Danny represents the hope for the future. Danny's masculine and feminine blending and his escape symbolize the possibility that the youth of the 1970s will be able to overcome the anxiety over gender role changes and progress. If these young men are able to become these new open,

⁴⁶ Clover explores this idea in depth in "Chapter 2: Opening Up," of *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 65-113.

masculine/feminine blends as Danny is, then there is hope that America will continue to grow and thrive if we believe in the youth.

Scenes that show Danny at play at first seem to work with Clover's reading of the film as being solely focused on Jack. There are several short clips that show Danny riding his big wheel or playing with toy cars. These clips seem to set up larger more important scenes, such as Danny's entering room 237. In this sense, they foster an image of Danny as being an innocent child to whom horrible things keep happening. It is precisely that creative side of Danny that actually saves his life, making his character equally integral to the film's themes. In this way, these short clips take on their own significance in terms of Danny's role and importance in the larger meaning of the film. The scenes of Danny on his big wheel display his ability to navigate. Danny knows his way around the hotel much better than Jack, who spends all his time in the bar, the bedroom, or the great hall. These skills come in handy later when Danny is able to outwit Jack in the maze. When Danny plays with his trucks on the carpet he is showing the type of creativity that Jack is lacking, unable to write his book. The carpet itself recalls a sort of maze, hinting at Danny's escape in the end and his ability to outwit his father.

Danny is able to work within the limits he is given, such as the boundaries of the hotel or the patterns on the carpet. He creates a game from these limits, melding a sort of work and play. Play, according to Davenport's argument, acts as a figure for openness to transformation. Jack is unable to do this and instead gets stuck in the same loop. This loop of Jack's is represented by his thousands of pages with the same phrase repeated, over and over: "all work and no play." In comparing Jack and Danny, the scenes of Danny at play promote the idea that Danny is better able to navigate his world than Jack. Danny is able to use his imagination and escape while Jack remains stuck - doomed to fail. These scenes, which at first do not appear to have any great

importance and only serve to accentuate Danny's innocence as a child, are actually setting up the notion that Danny is more adaptable to his surroundings. He can navigate and create within this world better than Jack. Therefore Danny is the one who survives, offering the hope that younger generations will thrive, while Jack dies because he is unable to let go of being a "man" of work or, as Davenport would say, action.

Chapter 2

Domestic Violence and Trauma: Exploring Wendy and Danny

When *The Shining* hit America's theaters in 1980, critical responses to the film were a mixed bag. Most heavily criticized was the performance of Wendy played by up-and-coming actress Shelley Duval. Some blamed the actress while others cited directorial issues. What is interesting about these reactions is how culturally telling they are – if Wendy is meant to embody a typical abuse victim, then it is not surprising that viewers would dislike her. This is due to a desire, on a social level, to distance ourselves from the issue of domestic violence.⁴⁷ No one wants to see themselves in a victim. We want to deny the possibility that abuse could happen to anyone, therefore we push the blame onto the victim as if she is in some way responsible and in doing so, our sense of safety is maintained. It is interesting then to note how responses to Wendy's character mirror this line of thought.⁴⁸

I explained in my previous chapter how the type of masculinity Jack represents is problematic. Entrenched in an unequal distribution of power maintained through aggression, patriarchy is not just a problem for the Torrances; men's violence against women is a problem for society. This was made visible through the exposure of domestic violence during the 1970s. I argue in this chapter that Kubrick's portrayal of Wendy, as someone with whom the viewer can

⁴⁷ Ann Jones discusses this in her work *Next Time She'll Be Dead: Battering and How To Stop It*, (Boston, Mass: Beacon Press, 1994) see pgs.82-86 and 174.

⁴⁸ Hornbeck makes a similar argument, from a more sociological perspective, in her article "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?"

increasing identify, complements his portrayal of Jack as progressively less so, as described in Chapter 1. At first, Wendy Torrance is the textbook example of what a battered woman/trauma victim looks like, meek and full of excuses for her partner's behavior. Due to this negative association, Wendy is not a character with whom viewers are completely comfortable identifying; her behaviors seem odd, she is often confused and easily manipulated. As Kubrick does with Jack, he challenges our assumptions slowly through multiple scenes. Wendy's true strength is finally revealed, she is not a victim but a survivor, a "Final Girl."

Again central to this conversion of the viewer is Wendy's son Danny. Viewers may be more willing to identify with him because it is easier to sympathize with a helpless bystander of abuse, as children often are. Danny acts as a window to our understanding and relating to Wendy. It is our compassion for Danny that eventually pushes audiences towards Wendy, as well as away from Jack. In making this argument, I focus on early scenes that cultivate Wendy's "victimhood" status, then follow her character arc to the turning point of standing up to Jack and therefore transforming our perception of her.

Feminist scholar Elizabeth Jean Hornbeck calls out previous scholars' misunderstanding of the complex character of Wendy, and she is also the only writer I have found to use the term "domestic violence" when describing the film. In "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?: Domestic Violence in *The Shining*," Hornbeck examines Wendy's character as a prime example of a battered woman and therefore, not surprisingly, one with whom most viewers are hesitant to identify. The issue of identification is central to Hornbeck's argument, as she explains, "viewers' and critic's contemptuous attitude toward Duvall-as-Wendy mirror the experiences of many women in abusive relationships... [who] have been subject to all manner of negative

stereotypes...[and] are often treated not with sympathy but with shaming.”⁴⁹ Through the practice of close readings I will add to the work Hornbeck started on Wendy’s character, further cementing her as representative of a battered woman. While I agree with Hornbeck’s analysis, I differ with her suggestion that Wendy is the sole hero of the film. Danny plays just as important a role in escaping Jack and therefore overcoming abuse. In this chapter I highlight how Danny acts as the empowering force that pushes Wendy to stand up to Jack and leave, and the significance of that moment.

The Discovery of Domestic Abuse

Encapsulating the slogan of the Women’s Movement, “the personal is political and the political is personal,” feminists of the 60’s and 70’s fought for legal as well as social change.⁵⁰ A number of legislative actions took place in these decades marking changes for women’s rights spanning from birth control, abortion and family planning to reducing work place sexual harassment and discrimination.⁵¹ Challenging the patriarchal system, activists during this time sought to tear down traditional gender roles and the oppressive stereotypes long prescribed to American women.⁵² Central to women’s fight for equality in the late 60’s and 70’s was combatting the violent oppression of women by men within the private sphere. When women came together and shared their stories, the pervasiveness of sexual assault, rape, and domestic violence was inevitably exposed. As Dicker explains, “Women’s liberation allowed women to talk about the way sexual violence altered their lives.”⁵³

⁴⁹ Hornbeck, “Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?,” 712.

⁵⁰ Rory Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, (Berkeley, CA: Seal Press, 2008), 81-82.

⁵¹ Historical background on Second Wave Feminism comes from chapter 3 “Second Wave Feminism: Seeking Liberation and Equality” of Dicker’s book *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 57-102.

⁵² Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 57 and 64-74.

⁵³ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 87.

While the Battered Women's Movement grew out of Second Wave of feminism, their work continued even after the movement had died down.⁵⁴ Their goal was to shed light on the violence that had long been happening in many American homes, to call it out as both morally and legally wrong, and to provide aid to any women in such relationships needing assistance. The first Battered Women's shelters were set up in 1973, providing a safe haven for victims of domestic violence.⁵⁵ Workers in the centers came to be known as advocates; their job was explicitly empowerment focused. Advocates to this day are there to provide emotional support and connect women with the resources necessary to take back control of their lives. Over the years these advocates have fought for better protection for women under the law and they have worked to educate community partners such as police, healthcare professionals, and anyone who may have contact with a victim and be in a position to provide assistance. The truth is that "by the end of the twentieth century, each year between 10 and 20 percent of North American women were beaten by a man with whom they had an intimate relationship."⁵⁶ With these numbers it becomes clear that domestic violence was and continues to be a widespread problem that can affect any woman regardless of race, ethnicity, class, or education – Wendy Torrance was not alone in her struggle. To better understand how abuse applies to Kubrick's portrayal of Wendy, I turn to the work of Judith Herman, which continues to be used today in domestic violence centers when training advocates.

In her seminal text *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Judith Herman illustrates how a battered woman embodies the

⁵⁴ Estelle B Freedman, *No Turning Back: The History of Feminism and the Future of Women*, (NY: Random House Publishing Group, 2002), 292-297.

⁵⁵ Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, (NY: Penguin Books, 2001), xxv.

⁵⁶ Freedman, *No Turning Back*, 293.

effects of trauma. Herman herself was amongst this group of women fighting for equal rights, and with her education in mental health she was essential to the exposure of domestic violence as well as to the treatment and support for survivors.⁵⁷ In *Trauma and Recovery*, she walks us through the mindset, thoughts, behaviors, and reactions of a trauma victim. Most importantly she highlights how abuse can be as damaging as any other form of trauma (such as war). Previously, mental health professionals recognized trauma as a symptom of extreme and dangerous circumstances, but it had only been discussed in relation to treating veterans and other victims of war. The inclusion of abuse victims under the umbrella of trauma was essential to helping survivors. Herman's work on this subject continues to play an important role in domestic violence advocacy to this day.⁵⁸ I lean heavily upon the foundational work done by Herman in my analysis of the character Wendy.

In *Trauma and Recovery* Herman explains how social movements centered around women's rights that were happening in the 60's and 70's, exposed the truth about domestic violence. She states:

Not until the women's liberation movement of the 1970s was it recognized that the most common post traumatic stress disorders are those not of men in war but of women in civilian life. The real conditions of women's lives were hidden in the sphere of the personal, in private life. The cherished power of privacy created a powerful barrier to consciousness and rendered women's reality practically invisible. To speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and

⁵⁷ Roger Luckhurst discusses the significance of Herman's work on pg. 62 of *The Trauma Question*, (NY: Routledge, 2008). Ann Jones also leans heavily on Herman's work in her book *Next Time She'll Be Dead: Battering and How to Stop It* and on pg. 88 mentions Herman's role in understanding, diagnosing, and treating abuse as a form of trauma.

⁵⁸ Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, 59-62.

disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation.⁵⁹

Herman goes on to emphasize the importance of consciousness raising, an activity common in the women's liberation movement that involved sharing stories and experiences.⁶⁰ As she points out, there is a direct correlation between the abuse and exploitation of women and their silence. These consciousness raising events therefore created a safe space where for the first time women could openly discuss their shared female experiences. It was here that the widespread and long tradition of abuse in the home was exposed. This often began as incest or child abuse which would lead many women into a lifetime of abusive relationships. In the 1970s, awareness movements swept the United States rallying women to come together to intervene and potentially bring an end to violence in the home. The Battered Women's Movement formed networks of support for survivors creating emergency hotlines, coordinating resources, and opening safe havens for those needing to escape potentially fatal situations.⁶¹ Kubrick's film can be counted among the texts raising awareness of domestic violence. While critics and scholars at the time did not discuss the topic of domestic violence in the film, it is safe to assume that many audience members would be at least familiar with the concept.

Establishing Wendy as "Victim"

Kubrick illustrates Wendy as a typical victim early in the film. Wendy is first pictured in the home, just she and her son Danny. She is presented as a kind woman who clearly loves her

⁵⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 28.

⁶⁰ Luckhurst also emphasizes consciousness raising on pg.62 of *The Trauma Question*.

⁶¹ For up-to-date information on domestic violence advocacy programs and the work they do see the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence's website NCADV.org

son and we see it in her eyes as she smiles down at him. She attempts to console Danny and alleviate what she interprets as his anxiety at the prospect of caretaking for the Overlook all winter. “We’re all gonna have a real good time,” she reassures him, but the irony is not lost on viewers familiar with the story. Our first significant moment establishing Wendy as a victim of domestic violence comes at roughly twelve minutes into the film, immediately following Danny’s “episode.” We gather from the dialogue between Wendy and the doctor that she found him collapsed on the bathroom floor appearing to have had a sort of fit. After asking Danny a few questions, the doctor and Wendy leave the child in his room to talk privately. The camera first presents the women at a medium range, where both are visible and seated in the living room. As Wendy and the doctor discuss Danny the camera moves in closer, cutting between the two. Through their shot-reverse-shot conversation the audience is exposed to three key warning signs: the family has moved several times, Danny has not adjusted well and is doing poorly in school, and most significant here is the revelation of Danny’s injury. These are red flags to any advocate, checking off boxes on an abuse evaluation or lethality assessment.⁶² Wendy reluctantly recounts the events of that night: Jack came home late, he had been drinking, Danny had messed up some of Jack’s papers and in a fit of rage Jack jerked Danny up by his arm causing it to dislocate from the shoulder socket. The camera work here seems to mimic our own view, focusing on the women, particularly Wendy, as they talk. The camera draws us in; we are enrapt in the moment, curious about the truth Wendy is so careful to conceal.

Within this small section a considerable amount is revealed about the Torrances, particularly Wendy. She is reluctant to tell the doctor about Jack being the cause of Danny’s

⁶² Ann Jones details what constitutes “domestic violence” in “Chapter 3: What is Domestic Violence?” of her book *Next Time She’ll Be Dead*, 81-105. Jones along with co-author Susan Schechter also provides lists of warning signs to help guide family and friends of victims in “Chapter 9: Reclaiming Your Life” of their book *When Love Goes Wrong: What To Do When You Can’t Do Anything Right, Strategies for Women With Controlling Partners*, (NY: Harper Perennial, 1993), 198-220.

injury. It is likely she is embarrassed by her husband's behavior and probably fears that the doctor may become concerned for Danny's safety. This could trigger a chain of events which would involve outside forces intruding on their family life, potentially exposing Jack's abusive behavior and further shaming Wendy as a victim and mother.⁶³ We see the uneasiness in her eyes; they shift about, trying to avoid the doctor's direct stare. We hear hesitancy in her voice which slightly shakes; she speaks low and quiet, slowly at first and then rushing through the rest of the story. Her words are the most telling as she repeats, "It was just one of those things, you know?" Any person who has first-hand experience with domestic violence knows those phrases all too well, the denial and the smoothing over that happens in order to reconcile her husband's actions with her own fears. "Looking for Explanations" as Jones and Schechter label it, is a common behavior seen from abuse victims trying to manage their situation.⁶⁴ They describe this desire stating, "It is a particularly attractive strategy because it seems to offer a chance to find what's wrong, fix it, and live happily ever after...."⁶⁵ Wendy's emphasis on Jack's drinking as the source of his violence is an example of one type of "excuse" on which victim's often lean.⁶⁶ Her visible discomfort in discussing the subject further highlights Wendy's entrapment. The audience most likely mirrors the look of concern and discomfort seen on the doctor's face as she hears about Jack's rage. Throughout the conversation the camera shifts from Wendy to the doctor, back and forth as if the lens itself is equally uncomfortable in the moment.

I want to focus our attention briefly on Wendy's appearance for she is not the attractive Hollywood stereotype of motherhood. Her hair is a little greasy and stringy and her clean face looks more hollowed than fresh without make-up. Her clothing, here and throughout the film, is

⁶³ Jones and Schechter repeatedly mentioned the fear, embarrassment, and shame that victim's feel, which keep them from reaching out for help in their works *Next Time She'll Be Dead* and *When Love Goes Wrong*.

⁶⁴ Jones and Schechter, *When Love Goes Wrong*, 52-65.

⁶⁵ Jones and Schechter, *When Love Goes Wrong*, 52.

⁶⁶ Jones and Schechter, *When Love Goes Wrong*, 55-57.

oversized and conservative. Very little skin is exposed and despite Wendy's slender stature, her figure is hidden beneath layers of frumpy overalls, thick corduroy, and stiff cotton dresses. I think these were interesting and deliberate choices made by Kubrick to purposefully downplay Shelley Duval's natural good looks. Hornbeck addresses this in her article on Wendy, drawing a similar conclusion. She claims that Wendy fits the image of a battered woman that the majority of the American public would envision at that time (and I would add arguably still do today).⁶⁷ She appears timid, modest, soft-spoken, and one could say a little homely. In Hornbeck's article she quotes one critic who described Wendy as "abuseable," which she notes as an "appalling but not uncommon attitude towards abused women... [which] reproduce(s) the misogyny that the film sought to portray."⁶⁸ What Hornbeck is helping to point out is how Duvall's performance conveys the vulnerability audiences would subconsciously expect to see in a real-life abuse victim. Whether Kubrick was deliberately using these stereotypes in order to expose them or if he, too, imagined that a victim would probably fit this description, I cannot say and ultimately it does not matter to the narrative. In these early moments, Wendy is established as an easy target for Jack's white male rage.

This scene is one of many in which Kubrick places Wendy and Danny together, apart from Jack. I stress the connection between Danny and Wendy for two reasons: it acts as a counter to Danny's relationship with Jack (as discussed in Chapter 1), and it correspondingly affects the viewer's perception of Wendy. By emphasizing their relationship, I also add to the conversation on Wendy by feminist scholar Hornbeck, who downplays the importance of Danny in Wendy's transformation. Her son's safety appears to be the driving force that pushes Wendy to finally take a stand against Jack. Their relationship sits in the background of the film's plot;

⁶⁷ Hornbeck, "Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Wolf?," 706-712.

⁶⁸ Hornbeck, "Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Wolf?," 709.

Kubrick is careful to demonstrate throughout the film that there is a strong bond between the two. As pointed out in the close reading of the doctor scene, Wendy is not (at first) a likeable or relatable character. Our minds jump to questions of Danny's safety and there follows that familiar sensation of wanting to blame the mother, who we forget is also a victim.

The trope Kubrick plays into here (in which the child motivates the mother to leave), is a tool in his effort to cement our identification with Wendy. It would be what audiences expected because we instinctively want to protect Danny and even while tending to ridicule Wendy for not doing enough, we crave for Danny to be that motivating force. I understand Hornbeck's desire to promote Wendy as a hero in her own right, however in doing so we lose the significance of Danny. Audiences of the time, and perhaps still today, needed Danny in order to relate to Wendy. Perhaps Kubrick himself believed in the stereotype of child as motivator, or perhaps Danny was his way for audiences to forgive and root for Wendy (rather than for Jack, who seems to terrify the boy).

The viewer's concern for Danny is understandable because as a society we innately want to protect children. The process of forsaking Wendy in the name of Danny, which at first seems to mirror the cultural phenomenon that Jenkins refers to in his chapter on child abuse, actually inverts it. The discovery of child abuse and the subsequent "epidemic," as it gets labeled, aligns almost too neatly with antifeminist backlash. As Jenkins points out, the focus on child abuse came at the same moment that women and gays were fighting for equality as though the conservative answer to their call was, "But what of the children?"⁶⁹ By pushing the country's focus onto possible dangers posed to our youth, it was implied that women were the true source of the problem: How dare they leave the home and abandon their families? This agenda would be

⁶⁹ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 113.

further coopted and cultivated into a climate of continuous fear throughout the 1980s by the New Right.⁷⁰ It seems that statistical evidence that the abuse was coming from a parent within the home far more than a stranger in the outside world was ignored in favor of a narrative that better suited the antifeminist agenda.⁷¹ It would be easy for Kubrick to lean into the public's greater concerns for children's safety, blaming and shaming Wendy in the process. Instead Kubrick challenges his audience to see the true source of the problem, Jack and the patriarchal oppression he has come to represent. Hence the slow shift in identification away from Jack and in to Wendy.

Progress is often met with resistance. Jenkins helps us understand that in the case of gender politics and 1970s America, the type of progress that feminist scholars such as Dickers and Herman discuss triggered an intense fear. Many of the significant strides towards equality that were made during this time were already being chipped away by 1980. Jenkins cites the widespread attack on abortion rights and clinics as one such example of these anti-women campaigns.⁷² Both Dicker and Jenkins consider the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 as the final nail in the coffin of Second Wave Feminism.⁷³ Dickers emphasizes the role played by "the rise of the New Right, a conservative movement that would put the family and morality at the center of its arguments."⁷⁴ She explains that "the backlash to feminism launched by right-wing political groups in the 1980s succeeded in both overturning some of the gains made by Second Wave feminists and creating an atmosphere hostile to further feminist activism."⁷⁵ Key to the new right-wing platform was a return to "traditional" family values emphasizing the rigid gender roles that Second Wave

⁷⁰ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 261.

⁷¹ See David Adams's "Chapter 6: Child Abuse" from his book *Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners*, (Vanderbilt University Press, 2007), 148-162.

⁷² Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 109-110.

⁷³ Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares*, 109-110.

⁷⁴ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 101.

⁷⁵ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 101.

Feminism had fought so hard to break.⁷⁶ There appeared to be a growing struggle between progress and fear as the 70's came to a close, a fear which Kubrick taps into, reproducing it in his work. Danny is perhaps Kubrick's most obvious challenge to anti-feminist rage, with his beautiful long blond hair, his closeness to his mother, his distrust for his father, and his metaphorical sensitivity as represented through his "shining" ability.

Wendy also rides the line of gender ambiguity. In Kubrick's presentation of Wendy we see her play the role of submissive wife at first, yet there are hints of her resistance to a more traditional feminine gender role. Wendy's stiff and oversized clothing, as discussed earlier, gives her an androgynous or "tomboy" appearance, particularly once the family has settled at the hotel, where she often wears pants and overalls. Kubrick also slips in shots of Wendy doing maintenance work around the hotel. In one scene she uses the CB radio to check in with local rangers before a bad storm. Kubrick never shows Jack engaging in this type of masculine-coded work; instead he is engaging in leisurely, personal activities. When Wendy confronts Jack about wanting to leave the hotel, he actually brings up his "responsibility to his employer," which is laughable at this point due to Jack's utter lack of accountability. Wendy's non-feminine qualities and the devotion she shows in her work as mother and caretaker add to her character's significance. In her article, Hornbeck describes Wendy's "differentness" as a "mixture of abused wife and 'singular womanhood'," bringing to mind Carol Clover's "Final Girl" theory (which I will cover in the following section).⁷⁷ Kubrick builds layers into her character. Wendy is not mere victim, she is a survivor and she will become the hero audiences crave, making her more complex than most previous scholars have recognized.

⁷⁶ Dicker, *A History of U.S. Feminisms*, 104.

⁷⁷ Hornbeck, "Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Wolf?," 710.

Wendy's Shift

As we saw in the early scene between Wendy and the doctor, Kubrick works to first present Wendy as a typical victim that is meek, timid, and submissive. In the shots leading up to that particular scene, the audience sees Jack at the Overlook interviewing for the caretaker position (work/public) juxtaposing Wendy at home caring for Danny (domestic/private). A clear separation is therefore established: Jack in the public world interacting with other men; Wendy in the private sphere, taking care of their son. These traditional binaries of men and public versus women and private were already being viewed as outdated by the time the film was released in 1980. Kubrick forces his viewers to jump back and forth between the two locations, accentuating the division between Jack and Wendy and hinting at the unequal distribution of power in their home. Along those same lines, Kubrick takes the time to shoot their car ride up to the Overlook, weaving through miles and miles of mountains and forests. The hotel is not just isolated; it is enormous, as the tour of the Overlook demonstrates. Viewers glimpse an intricate maze of decorative and decadent ballrooms, suites, and long narrow hallways. This is a brilliant metaphor on Kubrick's behalf, comparing the increasing isolation of an abuse victim to the desolation of an empty mountainside resort.

Eventually Kubrick challenges our initial impression of Wendy as "victim," and instead presents her as "survivor." Danny is key to this shift. It is Danny who ultimately forces Wendy to stand up against Jack. As the film approaches its climax, Wendy reaches a sort of crossroads in her character development when she picks up the bat and faces Jack. As a result of the scenes described in Chapter 1, audiences have cut ties with Jack, yet they are still hesitant to put their faith in Wendy. In the minutes leading up to this seminal scene, we see Wendy frantically smoking and pacing the room, struggling to decide what to do. The camera follows her back and

forth and we feel her anxiety as she carefully walks through all her possible options, knowing that she must be strategic. Wendy is approaching empowerment; Danny's safety is now her top priority. Regardless of what Jack has stated, Wendy is determined to get her son away from danger. Again, if we take the supernatural elements of the film as metaphorical, this is the moment when Wendy has shed her skin of "victim" and becomes a survivor. She takes up a bat and wanders downstairs to confront Jack. It is in this scene that Wendy conclusively realizes that her husband is the problem (something viewers have already become aware of) and viewers finally align themselves with Wendy. There is a look of sheer terror on her face as she sees the typewriter and Jack's pages upon pages of insane ramblings "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." We watch her at first from behind with a long following shot, but then after glimpsing the papers Kubrick cuts to a close up of her face. We see the increasing fear in Wendy's eyes as she desperately rifles through Jack's papers. The camera then switches again, zooming out to reveal Jack creeping up from behind. He startles Wendy, smiling at her discovery of his madness. Perhaps the camera's switch from behind to face-on is meant to mirror the shift that happens at this moment. As we soften to Wendy, we also become fearful of Jack. We transition from hesitantly following Wendy (in the lens) to facing the realization that Jack is dangerous (view flips to reveal him behind her). The camera then follows the couple, switching between shots of Jack pursuing Wendy and shots of her backing away – mimicking our own frantic glances between the two. Despite her feeble swats at Jack with the bat and the tears pouring down her face, Wendy is now the hero we root for.

In these final scenes the music in particular serves to amplify our own terror, mirroring that of Wendy and Danny. Christine Gengaro cites the use of Penderecki's *Polymorphia* and

Kanon Paschy in the bat scene.⁷⁸ The works from Penderecki that Kubrick chose are interesting in themselves given his “discovery of new sounds through the use of extended techniques.”⁷⁹ The music of Penderecki and similar modernist composers was beginning to be used for the cultivation of emotions such as fear, dread, anxiety, and paranoia in popular films like *The Exorcist* and *Rosemary’s Baby*. Kubrick himself was building a reputation for his distinctive and impeccable choices in film sound particularly in previous works *2001: A Space Odyssey* and *A Clockwork Orange*. Scholars emphasize Kubrick’s flexibility in cutting and mixing together different parts of Penderecki’s works, layered and fading into one another, as being key to the music’s effectiveness.⁸⁰ The section of *Polymorphia* used in the background of the bat scene is entirely comprised of strings being played at extreme lows and highs. The way the strings are slowly drawn across with the bow causes the sliding sensation. Sometimes we hear a single instrument, while at other moments Penderecki layers multiple string instruments, being played at slightly different intervals, each sliding in and out. The unpredictability of this sliding technique creates an unsettling sensation in listeners. The higher pitched rain-drop-like sounds come from a higher string instrument, made by gently tapping the strings. By using the instruments in unconventional ways Penderecki produces unexpected sounds which add to the music’s unpredictability and therefore the discomfort felt in listeners. The music slowly intensifies, with sudden short breaks that further enhance the rising fear reflected in the scene. The increasing intensity signals to audiences that Kubrick is building towards something, yet he takes his time further amplifying both Wendy’s and the viewers’ fear.

⁷⁸ Christine Lee Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick: The Music in His Films*, (MD: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2013), 203-204

⁷⁹ Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick*, 202.

⁸⁰ Code, “Rehearing *The Shining*,” 144. And Gengaro, *Listening to Stanley Kubrick*, 202.

Notice the difference in this scene between Kubrick's depiction of a survivor versus characters such as Farah Fawcett's in *The Burning Bed*. Fawcett's Francine is fed up; she is angry, strong, and at last in control as she exacts her revenge. While Francine's story is real, it depicts an extreme, whereas the image Kubrick offers in Wendy is much closer to what would be typically seen. Wendy does not stand firm and fearless as Jack taunts her, instead she is crying, exclaiming, "I'm very confused!" She is still vulnerable in this moment and "confused" would barely begin to describe the emotions any reasonable wife would be feeling in that situation. Her bat makes contact, cracking Jack's skull and knocking him down the stairs. It is a triumphant act, but it is done while she is still sobbing. She may be brave but she is still scared. The fear feels real for audiences here; we are concerned for her safety even as Wendy seems to be metaphorically "manning up," standing her ground and swinging her bat in defiance. It is this scene that verifies Wendy as the character audiences are meant to root for. We finally feel confident in our identification with the supposed "victim" because we now understand her inner strength.⁸¹

As previously mentioned, film scholar Carol Clover theorizes that from roughly 1974 onward "the survivor figure," (or "Final Girl") as she names it, in the horror genre is female.⁸² She emphasizes that both male and female viewers share an identification with the female survivor/hero figure of horror films, an important and previously under-discussed relationship. Clover argues that "the image of the distressed female most likely to linger in memory is the image of the one who did not die: the survivor, or Final Girl."⁸³ This Final Girl "looks death in the face... [and] finds the strength either to stay the killer long enough to be rescued or to kill

⁸¹ Hornbeck also emphasizes this scene as a turning point for both Wendy's character and for viewer identification on pg. 713 of "Who's Afraid of The Big Bad Wolf?".

⁸² Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 35.

⁸³ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 35.

him herself.”⁸⁴ Like Clover’s Final Girl, Wendy survives and therefore she, like Clover’s heroines, is more than just a victim. Wendy undergoes the same “manning up” process throughout *The Shining* that Clover describes in the characters she examines. Clover’s Final Girls, like Wendy, are not overtly feminine; they take on many masculine coded qualities. The bat scene crystalizes Wendy’s shift to survivor, her full realization of a Final Girl. This shift is integral to our identification with Wendy.

Kubrick’s Ending for Wendy and Danny

In the final scenes of the film, Kubrick continues the work of bringing the viewer to identify with the victims of domestic violence. As Wendy and Danny are traumatized by Jack, so in turn, are the audiences traumatized by the film itself because Kubrick places us inside the headspace of victims Wendy and Danny. Jack has transformed from abusive to psychotic, taking up an axe and chasing his family around the hotel. Audiences watch frantically as Wendy and Danny attempt to escape and run for safety. Leaving an abusive relationship is a messy, chaotic, and truly terrifying time for a survivor. Statistics show that leaving can be the time when a victim is in the most danger of being killed by their partner.⁸⁵ Due to the possessive quality of an abusive relationship, partners like Jack become increasingly volatile and dangerous as they sense they are losing control of the situation.⁸⁶ Any hint of their behaviors being exposed to others outside the family is cause for alarm in abusers, as we clearly see demonstrated in Jack’s drastic actions.⁸⁷ Kubrick brilliantly reflects the chaos and danger of such an escape in these final scenes. In a nightmarish whirlwind we see some of the most rapid cutting Kubrick has used,

⁸⁴ Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws*, 35.

⁸⁵ Adams discusses the lethality of leaving on pgs. 5-6 of *Why Do They Kill? Men Who Murder Their Intimate Partners*.

⁸⁶ Adams, *Why Do They Kill?*, 91 and 163-166.

⁸⁷ Adams, *Why Do They Kill?*, 91.

giving the end a rushing climactic feel. The camera moves in quick following shots, repeatedly tracking the movements of each character. Jack chases Danny through the enormous sterile kitchen, while Wendy runs aimlessly through the halls of the hotel which feel especially mazelike in these final scenes. She cries and screams for her husband and son, running into an odd assemblage of alarming sights: a furry oral sex act, an elevator of blood, and a ballroom filled with corpses. The clacking, screeching, swirling, dissonant and atonal music of Penderecki is cleverly cut together and used here to further enhance the rising terror of the film's finale. The chaotic sights and sounds in these final scenes mimic the chaos victims experience while trying to escape abusive partners.

This shared perspective continues until the end of the film. While the film's ending technically qualifies as "closed" since Jack is dead, viewers are not reassured that all is well for the remaining Torrances.⁸⁸ This lingering terror is the post-traumatic stress for the audience, like the trauma of the abuse that Wendy and Danny will carry with them for the rest of their lives. We, like these survivors, are frozen in fear as we sit watching the camera pan to that haunting photograph of Jack at the New Year's ball some fifty years prior to the events of the film. We understand in this moment that the true threat is not dead, because the patriarchy that Jack represents is alive and thriving still in our society. He smiles out at us amongst figures of a not-so-distant past, a past whose inequalities are still felt by many in the audience.

Wendy empowers herself to take a stand for her son and leave behind Jack's abuse, moving beyond a mere victim and into a survivor. I previously discussed the contribution to my conversation on Wendy by feminist scholar Hornbeck who also argues for a domestic violence

⁸⁸ For more information on closed versus open narratives in horror films see Andrew Tudor's *Monster and Mad Scientists: A Cultural History of the Horror Movie*.

subtext within the film's narrative. While I agree with many of the points Hornbeck makes, she downplays the importance of Danny in Wendy's transformation. Her son's safety appears to be the driving force that pushes Wendy to finally take a stand against Jack. Their relationship sits in the background of the film's plot. Kubrick is careful to demonstrate throughout the film that there is a strong bond between the two. In the scenes of Wendy, Danny is almost always present. The two are often playing together or eating together; these are comfortable and intimate moments meant to highlight the strength of their relationship. While Wendy is the hero, Danny is key to her success. Danny contacts Dick Halloran, the hotel cook who reveals early on in the film that he too shares Danny's special telepathic ability. It is also Danny who outwits his father in the enormous hedge maze outside The Overlook. These final scenes present a very different ending than the one King offers in the original novel. Aside from the heavy implication in the book that Jack was possessed by the hotel and not in control of his actions, in the book Halloran does not die and he helps Wendy and Danny escape. However Kubrick gives his audiences a different take, one which affirms that Jack/patriarchy is the threat to women and children. Jack is not redeemable in Kubrick's story because of the patriarchy which he reflects in his exaggerated performance of masculinity. Therefore Kubrick's vision is one in which Wendy and Danny escape alone and where viewers are relieved but only temporarily, as that final shot of Jack reminds audiences that the true threat is not defeated.

Epilogue

Where Do We Go From Here?

It may be easy to see the horror of *The Shining* as a story about haunted hotels and violent spirits, but I argue that the true terror is that of domestic violence. Domestic violence, unlike ghosts, is scary because it is real and it is a problem faced by millions of women in their lifetime. By presenting viewers with a horror film, Kubrick is able to imply the terror of abuse through a metaphorical haunting. As I have explained, I believe that it is not the spirits of the Overlook Hotel which threaten the Torrance family, but the abusive hold of Jack Torrance. Wendy begins the film as a victim, but ends it as a survivor; having left her husband and his violence behind, she brings her son to safety and a chance at a happy, healthy life. Yet Kubrick's audience is left with a lingering apprehension, as we see Jack's smiling face in that final shot. Now one with the violent ghosts of the past, unable to overcome his insecurities, the abusive Jack is frozen in time (quite literally), leering out at audiences as the symbol of a problematic patriarchy.

Jack is an angry man prone to violent outbursts. Bitter and aware of his weakness as a father, he lashes out at those closest to him – his wife and child. By engaging in close readings of Jack's scenes, it becomes increasingly clear that he fits the profile of a typical abuser. Jack is filled with hate, anger, and self-loathing. Kubrick first persuades audiences to identify with Jack, but by degrees we see his dangerous side emerge as he interacts with the hotel spirits, as if those ghosts are manifestations of the issues struggling inside Jack's mind. In this way Kubrick

alienates the viewer from Jack's viewpoint, freeing us to seek another character with whom to identify. It is through Danny that Kubrick begins to offer audiences a contrasting image of masculine identity, one that is open and receptive to the world and people around him, as we see in Danny through his shining ability.

Danny also plays an integral role in Kubrick's work of channeling the viewer's identification away from Jack to Wendy. As our concern for Danny grows, Wendy's strength is revealed, and audiences shift their identification towards her. Wendy's character perfectly encapsulates that of a typical victim of domestic abuse. At first, viewers want to distance themselves from Wendy's perceived passivity. Judith Herman tells us that "in each instance, the salient characteristic of the traumatic event is its power to inspire helplessness and terror."⁸⁹ This is what we see in Wendy at first: she spends a majority of the film trapped and scared. Our desire to distance ourselves from the problem of abuse produces a hesitancy to take Wendy's side. As it becomes increasingly obvious that Jack is dangerous, Wendy shifts her own perception of self from victim to survivor and we shift with her. When she takes up her bat, Wendy confronts her abuser. It is an incredibly powerful moment and yet also a terrifying one, a terror which Kubrick communicates through his pacing and building of anxiety.

I have demonstrated in both chapters how this particular reading of the film is tied to the historical moment in which the film was produced. If we think of Jack's performance of hyper masculinity as part of the anti-feminist backlash that Phillip Jenkins describes happening during the late 70's, then naturally Wendy is the embodiment of the type of woman one would assume falls prey to such a patriarch. Yet Kubrick wants to challenge both subject positions, pushing for the removal of Jack and his toxicity by placing Wendy and Danny as the film's survivors. He

⁸⁹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 34.

presents his audience with a very different ending from similar films, such as *Amityville Horror* or *Poltergeist*. These dads were flawed but redeemable; however, Kubrick's Jack is beyond saving because of the patriarchy which he represents.

I find the suggestion that Kubrick is making to be incredibly powerful and controversial for the time. Divorce, while becoming normalized in the 1970s, was still a divisive issue for most Americans, so the suggestion that Wendy must abandon her husband and her marriage is bold. The assertion that Jack, and the patriarchy he represents, is incurable due to their connection to violence is an even brasher place to end the film. In order to bring us along with him, Kubrick pretends to ride the line for much of the film. He first positions the audience to sympathize with Jack, only to reveal more powerfully that Jack *is* the problem. We are reluctantly led by Kubrick's craft to shift our focus to Wendy, a figure we are uncomfortable relating to due to her victim-like demeanor. As the film climaxes, we cheer for Wendy's and Danny's escape and on some level we understand, as Kubrick intended, that we are all victims of the patriarchy. We long for their survival just as we crave and fight for our own survival in a world where the patriarchy continues to maintain its aggressive hold.

When working on this project, I repeatedly wondered what other films deal with the issue of domestic violence. I found that while it is often a subplot it has rarely been the sole subject of a film (see *Friend Green Tomatoes* or *Thelma and Louise*). The more general theme of abuse, often focused on child abuse, is more commonly seen, such as *Sybil*, *The Color Purple*, *Bastard out of Carolina*, and *Precious*. In most cases, domestic violence stories take the form of revenge narratives or overcoming narratives, where the abused character's survival is successful or even triumphant, such as *The Burning Bed*, *Sleeping with the Enemy*, and *Enough*. This suggests that viewers are not ready to confront the full hard truth of domestic violence because many women

do not leave, they return over and over again out of loyalty and a false belief that their partner will change.⁹⁰ What we regularly find in these films are different versions of an extreme situation. They lack more relatable and realistic images that tell the day to day story of abuse the cycle of affection and love that turns to anger and pain which repeats itself over and over again for months or years.⁹¹ Even Kubrick's film omits this aspect, although it gives more attention to it than most. What I do find compelling about his treatment of the issue is how he uses the horror genre to emphasize the true terror and trauma of domestic violence in a way that dramatic films have not.

In presenting this argument, I have met many critics who cite Kubrick's aggressive directing style as proof of his misogyny, particularly his treatment of Shelley Duvall in making *The Shining*. It is widely known that Duvall nearly suffered a nervous breakdown during filming, which many attributed to Kubrick's pushing the actress over the edge. However Duvall herself has stated that she is thankful for the pressure Kubrick put on her which lifted her acting ability to new heights.⁹² Kubrick had high expectations for all of his actors, pushing them to an extreme (aside from the child actor who played Danny) as his daughter's documentary points out. I am by no means saying in this argument that Kubrick is a feminist hero. Rather, I suggest that it is possible for a man to recognize a social problem, like violence against women and problematic masculinity, while maybe being a little guilty himself.

⁹⁰ On why she stays see *When Love Goes Wrong*, by Anne Jones and Susan Schechter.

⁹¹ For more on the cycle of abuse see *Next Time She'll Be Dead* by Ann Jones.

⁹² Duvall's experience is discussed in more detail in Hornbeck's article "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?: Domestic Violence in *The Shining*." She ultimately draws no conclusion from this but acknowledges both Kubrick's aggressive style in general, and the lack of regret felt by Duvall looking back at the making of the film. Both Hornbeck and I draw upon the documentary *Making 'The Shining'*, by Vivian Kubrick which offers viewers a glimpse into the long grueling process of completing the film.

Looking at current events and the “Me Too” movement, what has been most apparent is how saturated and complicated gender inequality continues to be in our society. This has created extremes such as producer Harvey Weinstein and the mass rape and sexual assaults he has committed from a position of power for decades. It has also exposed the more common offenses such as what was seen in the Aziz Ansari situation, which involved unclear communication in a romantic setting and demonstrated how two parties can leave with drastically different pictures of what took place. With the proliferation of mass and social media coverage of these events, many men are owning up to minor offenses in order to shed the skin of abuser and instead show their support for bettering the treatment of women by men in American society. Perhaps this is the first time since the birth of domestic violence advocacy that we may begin to see a true cultural revolution which will hopefully forever change the way we view both the abused and the abusers. Such a drastic shift would finally bring real closure to Kubrick’s *The Shining*.

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