

Set in the “urban criminal underworld,” films within the gangster genre include a tight-knit group creating their own rules to maintain success, wealth, and power (Belton 128). Male gangsters are transformed into this culture, as they grow up learning the values of brutal violence and undying loyalty. *Some Like It Hot* (1959), *The Godfather* (1972), *The Godfather Part II* (1974), *Goodfellas* (1990), and *The Departed* (2006). Billy Wilder’s, *Some Like It Hot* (1959), is an introduction to the American gangster genre. This film, which begins in Chicago during 1929, stars two musicians Joe (Tony Curtis) and Jerry (Jack Lemmon). In search of work, the two learn about a potential gig in Miami for female musicians. A plan is devised to escape to Miami, but they witness a mafia shooting before their exit. Jerry and Joe catch a train to Miami with an all-female band where they create new identities as Daphne (Jerry) and Josephine (Joe). This train scene displays the stereotyping of women, as these beautiful women are used for entertainment. Sexual objectification occurs when the conductor of the group recalls that men “just want one thing from a girl” (*Some Like It Hot*). Later, vocalist Sugar (Marilyn Monroe) shallowly recounts that she “hasn’t got any brains anyways,” especially when it comes to a man since she “doesn’t trust herself” (*Some Like It Hot*). Sugar shows naïve recklessness as she explains how often she gives men money. After arriving in Miami, Jerry and Joe begin to see the world through a woman’s perspective (IMDb “Some Like”). Daphne catches the attention of a real Miami millionaire, Osgood (Joe Brown), who pinches “her” behind in the elevator, treating her as just an “accessory” (Dutt 5). Upon recounting the story, Jerry is told that “it doesn’t matter, as long as you’re wearing a skirt” (*Some Like It Hot*). Meanwhile, Joe pretends to become a millionaire from Shell Oil to win over Sugar. Eventually, Daphne and Josephine run into the gangsters in the hotel lobby, who are attending a convention, and attempt to flee. A comedic chase ensues as they assume different identities and witness another brutal massacre. The film concludes with Daphne and Josephine revealing their true identities, Sugar following in search of love, and the group escaping on Osgood’s yacht.

Hailed as one of the greatest movies of all time, Francis Ford Coppola's film *The Godfather* (1972) is the story of the all-powerful Corleone gangster family living in New York during the 1940s. The film begins on the wedding day of the daughter of Don Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando), also known as the Godfather. The audience is introduced to more characters, such as Michael Corleone (Al Pacino), the youngest son, Kay Adams (Diane Keaton), girlfriend to Michael, Fredo Corleone (John Cazale) the middle son, and Sonny Corleone (James Caan), the oldest son, at the wedding of Don's daughter, Connie Corleone (Talia Shire) and her husband, Carlo Rizzi (Gianni Russo). As the family continues business of dealing drugs and persuading Hollywood directors, Don Corleone gets shot. Seeking vengeance for his father, Michael enters the mob business and agrees to kill. Michael escapes to Italy as Sonny takes over the family business while their father recovers. Eventually, it becomes obvious that Connie and Carlo's marriage displays examples of female disrespect: domestic violence with the multiple bruises Conrad gives Connie, sexual objectification with the phone call from Conrad's mistress, and Connie's recklessness as she destroys the house. Later, Sonny receives a call that Carlo beat Connie and rushes to the house, only to end up getting killed by a rivalry family. Don Corleone calls for peace among the five families. In this meeting, the Godfather recounts that the drug business "isn't like gambling, or liquor, or even women" (*The Godfather*). This shallow characterization of women displays their fleeting nature. Before Don passes, he teaches Michael that "women and children can be careless, but not men" (*The Godfather*). The film ends with Michael taking over the family business.

The Godfather Part II (1974) continues as two parallel stories that showcase Don Vito Corleone's journey establishing the business throughout 1900s to 1925, and the actions of new boss Michael Corleone during the late 1950s. The film begins in a flashback in Sicily during the funeral of Don's father, which is quickly followed by the killing of all remaining family members. The first scene of Mikey's ruling begins during his son's First Communion party in Nevada. While having dinner, the

family is introduced to Fredo's wife, Deanna Dunn (Marianna Hill), who exemplifies the stereotypical dumb gangster wife. Her drunken dancing makes Fredo pull her away, where she yells out to "never marry a wop," since they "treat their wives like shit" (*The Godfather II*). Mikey expands the family business into Nevada and Florida despite multiple attempts on his life, betrayal from his most beloved associates, and a collapsing marriage. Business within the family gets tense as Frank Pentangeli (Michael Gazzo) becomes upset with Mikey for not defending territory against the Rosato brothers due to a business partnership. Flashbacks explain how Don began killing, earning respect and receiving favors. Through similar tactics, Mikey reverses Frank's testimonial hearings against him, forgives Fredo's disloyalty, sends hitmen to assassinate enemies, and maintains control of the mob. Despite learning his wife intentionally had an abortion and not a miscarriage, Mikey manages to win the children and exceed his father's expectations.

Martin Scorsese's film, *Goodfellas* (1990), is another classic gangster movie that takes place in New York throughout the late 1900s. This movie tells the story of Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) a young, half-Irish, half-Sicilian boy, who gets inducted into the world of crime by mob boss Paulie Cicero (Paul Sorvino). *Goodfellas* tells the account of Hill's ascent up the gang rankings and showcases the lifestyle of cash, luxury, and women. After he is recognized as a "stand-up guy" by opting for jail time over ratting out his partners, Hill becomes even more loved by the mobsters (*Goodfellas*). A tracking shot take is used to display Hill's prominence, as he brings Karen through the back door of the Cabana all the way to a front row table. Hill both kills and helps kills different guys, hookups with different women, and gets arrested for crimes. Hill says that "Saturday night was for the wives, but Friday at the Copa was always for the girlfriends" (*Goodfellas*). After multiple jail sentences, Hill is forced to re-evaluate his lifestyle and instead gets involved in drugs. Issues in Karen and Henry's marriage develop as the emotional and physical abuse become more prominent. Karen realizes he is cheating, but shallowly

recounts that even though she “hated” him, she was still “very attracted to him and couldn’t leave him” (*Goodfellas*). The film ends with Hill ratting out his mentors and living in witness protection like an “average nobody” (*Goodfellas*).

Martin Scorsese’s film, *The Departed* (2006), is a modern gangster set in Boston during the 2000s. The film begins in a small convenience store where mobster Frank Costello (Jack Nicholson) objectifies the shop owner’s young daughter by asking if she’s “gotten her period yet” (*The Departed*). Costello gives her money to “buy some makeup” and redirects his attention to the young boy, Collin Sullivan (Matt Damon). Costello’s interaction towards Sullivan is much different, asking him about school, buying him groceries, and offering the boy the chance to earn money when he gets older (IMDb “The Departed”). Over time, Sullivan becomes a mastermind working for Costello that manages to infiltrate the Massachusetts Police Department. Meanwhile, Billy Costigan (Leonardo DiCaprio), a South Boston undercover cop, looks to “make a name for himself” by infiltrating Costello’s gang under the supervision of Captain Queenan (Martin Sheen) and Staff Sergeant Dignam (Mark Wahlberg) (Rotten Tomatoes). Both Costigan and Sullivan meet Madolyn (Vera Farmiga), a mental health professional: Sullivan by hitting on her in the elevator and Costigan by attending counseling sessions. She displays the shallow characterization of women, as both men disrespect her professional and personal boundaries and engage in sexual relationships. The film progresses with Costigan and Sullivan gaining “credibility within their respective organizations” (IMDb “The Departed”). Both men discover that there is a snitch in their groups and work in fear of having their identities revealed. Costello forces gang members to provide social security numbers so that Sullivan can run background checks on the members. In attempt to catch the traitor, Sullivan sets up an operation that results in Queenan getting killed. Sullivan steals Queenan’s cell phone and acts as Costigan’s informant, urging him to come in and

end his undercover mission. But, Costigan discovers Sullivan's identity. Eventually, Madolyn learns the truth, Costigan gets shot by another police mole, and Sullivan gets killed by Dignam.

These films begin in the historical great depression and prohibition era where mobsters illegally bootlegged. Gangs acquired "huge financial profits" and became heroes to society (McCarty 5). Following 1929, employment rates rose significantly as women entered the working force with a "renewed sense of urgency" and independence (Pearce Rotondi). During the 1930s, a 22% decline in marriage rates showed that women could financially support themselves (Pearce Rotondi). As the United States entered World War II, both the role of the female and the strength of the mobs grew. By the 1940s, the number of employed women reached an all-time maximum of 13 million (Pearce Rotondi). *The Godfather* shows employed females as singers and nurses, while *Some Like It Hot* shows women as entertainers. Even though women managed both the work force and the domestic life, they always had dinner waiting for their husbands. Meanwhile, the ruling of the mob was "stronger than ever" thanks to the "patriotism" of mobster bosses who helped to oversee vital Allied ports and industries during WWII (McCarty 5). Despite the American dream of equal opportunity, the 1950s brought about a longing for traditional "American ideals and values" (Larke-Walsh). Films such as *The Godfather*, *The Godfather Part II*, and *Goodfellas* displayed cinematic themes of patriarchal business, continued wealth, pure capitalism, and conservative mindsets. "Marriage bar" legislation prevented women from entering high-paying occupations and maintaining employment after marriage (Women & Work). Women were forced into roles of submissive wives, child-bearing mothers, and sultry mistresses. These traditions carried into the cinematic 1960s to retract the "equal footing to men" that had caused drastic change (Dutt 3). Male dominance continued within the Italian heritage, where many men were facing "prejudice and negative stereotypes" (National Endowment). Italian Americans began climbing the "socioeconomic ladder"

because of ties to organized crime (Cannato). As a result, women were forced to adhere to “patriarchal structures” despite the “façade of female empowerment and independence” (Dutt 3).

Even though the 1960s was characterized by the “women’s liberation movement,” this cultural progression was not evident in the production world (Dutt 3). Men were still the main protagonists and directors of films, despite women making many advancements in employment, pay gap, and reproductive rights. This time of social change caused men to feel that women were “bombarded with contradictory expectations and images about work and family” (Walsh). Perhaps men felt threatened by developing feminist groups, such as the National Organization for Women. As a result of this “time of great turmoil,” a feeling of nostalgia came about in entertainment as many would “look back to the way things were” (McCarty 9). The passing of Frank Costello and the shift of Roger Corman, “master of the exploitation film,” resulted in the production of gangster pictures (Belton 369). The most successful films “reassured rather than disturbed the public” through a sentimental lens (Belton 379). The late twentieth century brought about so many firsts for women, including female attorney generals, Ivy League institution presidents, and CEOs, which resulted in 1992 being named the “Year of the Woman” (Yarrow). But, this sense of gender equality held little importance in cinematography. Instead, themes of promiscuous women, submissiveness, and sexual objectification were the result of “mainstream 90s narratives in media and society” that “promoted sexism and exploited girlhood” (Yarrow). Even though 2000s gangster films showed women with growing professions – evolving from musicians to counselors and cops, as seen in *The Departed*– topics within “national conversations” such as pay equity and domestic violence were still exempt from scripts (Ryan). This poor representation carried into the twenty-first century, where a University of Southern California study found that, of the top 100 grossing films of 2009, less than one-third of speaking characters were female, enforcing the concept that women are “stereotyped and sexualized” in the misogynistic cinematic culture (Dutt 5).

Although women have background roles in most gangster films, the genre would be incomplete without female figures. Despite their “simplistic ways,” women are used to exemplify the power dynamic that exists between themselves and patriarchal society (Larke-Walsh). In *Some Like It Hot*, female musicians are gawked at upon arrival to the hotel as entertainment for the old rich millionaire men. *The Godfather* shows how women should never meddle in personal and professional business, as Sonny’s wife tells him to not interfere with someone else’s marriage. In *Godfather II*, Connie asks Mikey for money so she can runaway to get married in Europe, despite never seeing her own children. *Goodfellas* displays the effect of being a gangster’s wife, as Karen is shocked at the cheap makeup and cheap talk during her first ladies’ night. *The Departed* reinforces the idea that women will bring men down for being stupid. Whether women are excluded over fear of not understanding or fear of understanding too much, they are frequently “overlooked in the genre” and deemed as lacking “loyalty, brains, or real ambition” (Shadoian). Men acknowledge their lack of self-control when dealing with women, and instead use defensive tactics of objectification, violence, wealth, and oversight. Gangsters swap their wives and children for supplemental families of gangsters and business associates. Because Italian gangsters prefer to financially “sponsor” a woman than to emotionally support her, they can assert authority and avoid vulnerability (Shadoian).

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