

The Representation of Post-Rape Trauma in *Jennifer's Body* and *Sorry, Baby*



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The Representation of Post-Rape Trauma in *Jennifer's Body* and *Sorry, Baby*

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

I hereby declare that this thesis is the student's own work and effort. All sources of information incorporated here have been duly acknowledged. This thesis has been submitted with my approval.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mushira Habib', written in a cursive style.

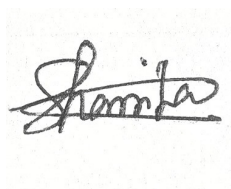
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DECLARATION

This thesis is a presentation of my original research work. Wherever contributions of others are involved, every effort is made to indicate this clearly, with due reference to the literature, and acknowledgement of collaborative research and discussions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sharika', is placed on a light-colored, textured rectangular background.

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Dedication

To all the angry women who are angry on behalf of EVERY woman out there

Acknowledgements

For once in my life, I would like to take a moment and give some credit to myself. Despite being the ultimate pessimist and procrastinator, I somehow managed to finish this thesis, and I'm proud of the perseverance and effort that carried me through.

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Table of Contents

Abstract	8
Chapter 1: Introduction	9
Chapter 2: Methodology.....	13
Chapter 3: Literature Review	15
Chapter 4: Analysis.....	23
4.1: The Symbolic Interpretation of The Sacrifice in <i>Jennifer's Body</i>	23
4.2: Externalization of Trauma and its Impact in <i>Jennifer's Body</i>	26
4.3: The Unspeakability and Speakability of Trauma in <i>Sorry, Baby</i>	34
4.4: The Compounding Effect of Institutional Betrayal on Sexual Trauma.....	40
Chapter 5: Conclusion	44
Works Cited.....	46

Abstract

Post-rape trauma is a multifaceted experience that encompasses psychological, physical, social, and identity-based consequences, yet its representation in film and media often remains underrepresented or oversimplified. The aim of this thesis is to examine how *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry, Baby* (2025) explore the complexities of women's post-rape trauma and the varied responses that follow. The study also emphasizes the interplay between suffering and large social and cultural contexts. The literature review demonstrates the broader understanding of trauma, rape trauma and its impacts, as well as how it is generally exhibited. Anchored in trauma theory, the methodology draws on Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* to investigate how rape trauma impacts survivors/victims, and psychological complexities that shape their responses across both movies. It further engages Michelle Balaev's concept of a pluralistic model of trauma to account for trauma's multiple representational forms, alongside Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal to analyze how systemic failures intensify survivors' experiences. The study further employs visual and textual analyses by examining the character construction, narrative structure, and cinematic techniques present in the movies to show the layered depictions of coping. The study intends to reveal how trauma of rape manifests through dissociation, displaced rage, subversive humor, and volatile affect, which may provide a significant addition to the ever-growing body of trauma studies.

Keywords: Post-rape trauma, Unspeakability, Pluralistic trauma, Institutional betrayal, Symbolic, Representation

Chapter One

Introduction

Rape is one of the most severe and violating forms of gender-based violence, leaving consequences that reach far beyond the immediate act. Its aftermath commonly known as rape trauma, affects every dimension of a survivor's life including their sense of self, bodily autonomy, and psychological stability (Herman, 2). For quite some time, the depiction of sexual violence in mainstream media has been a topic of debate. Historically, modern cinema has frequently depicted rape trauma not as a deeply psychological experience for the survivor, but rather as a sensationalized plot device, serving as a catalyst for male vengeance or providing shock value for the audience. This practice often places greater importance on the dramatic spectacle of the assault than on the intricate and enduring process of post-rape trauma and survival. As a result, films frequently maintain a cultural silence regarding the realities of survival, directing attention instead to clichés that downplay the subjectivity and agency of survivors. This tendency further reduces the suffering of women to a symbolic role, oversimplifying the complexity of survivors' lived experiences and neglecting the various ways trauma influences identity, behavior, and self-perception. This thesis examines two contemporary films, *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry, Baby* (2025) that foreground the aftermath of rape and engage with the complex emotional landscapes that follow such events. It is important to note that, throughout this thesis, the terms “*victim*” and “*survivor*” are used interchangeably to reflect the complexity of post-rape experiences, without privileging one term as more definitive than the other.

Jennifer's Body (2009) is a horror comedy directed by Karyn Kusana and written by Diablo Cody. The story revolves around Jennifer, a popular cheerleader in high school, who is

offered as a sacrifice by an indie band that goes wrong and transforms into a man-eating succubus. The indie band performs a ritual that requires sacrificing a virgin to gain fame. They target Jennifer, believing her to be the right candidate, but because she isn't actually a virgin, the ritual backfires and transforms her into a demon instead of killing her. As her metamorphosis converts her into a flesh-eating demon that hunts male classmates, her best friend Needy is compelled to put an end to her rampage. The ritual sacrifice depicted in the film is commonly interpreted as a symbolic representation for sexual assault, with Jennifer's monstrous transformation symbolizing either a reclamation of power or the destructive consequences of exploitation.

Sorry, Baby (2025) a black comedy, is the directorial debut of Eva Victor, which she wrote and starred in as well. In the movie *Sorry, Baby*, a young woman named Agnes is struggling with the aftermath of being raped. The story chronicles her three year battle to recover as she uses black humor as a coping mechanism to deal with mental states of isolation and feeling trapped. Non-linear flashbacks are used to show Agnes's fragmented experiences and memories as she is trying to move on.

This thesis uses Judith Herman's concept of dialectic of trauma theory as set out in *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) to investigate the representation of post-rape trauma in *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry, Baby* (2025). Herman's framework provides a lens that allows to view trauma-induced psychological patterns, such as hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction, and enables an examination of how these symptoms appear in the movies through symbolic representation, narrative decisions, and character traits. Her emphasis on trauma as a disruption of safety, identity, and interpersonal connection further allows an exploration of how the films portray the victim and/ or survivor's emotional landscape and how trauma affects interpersonal

relationships as well. The study also draws on Michelle Balaev's pluralistic model of trauma to explore its varied representations, while using Jennifer Freyd's theory of institutional betrayal to examine how systemic failures exacerbate survivors' experiences

The main objective of this research is to examine how the portrayals of *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry, Baby* (2025) depict women's post-rape suffering. The study will look at how every story creates and conveys the emotional, psychological, and behavioral aftermath of sexual abuse using trauma theory as a framework. While *Sorry, Baby* will be examined for its depiction of internalized, reserved and emotionally delicate reactions to trauma, *Jennifer's Body* will be focused on the character's external and harmful coping strategies. The intention of this research is to comprehend how each film provides a distinct yet legitimate manifestation of post-rape trauma rather than contrasting the texts.

This research seeks to answer the central question of "In what ways are women's post-rape trauma and their varied responses represented in *Jennifer's Body* and *Sorry, Baby*?"

The primary goal of this research is to address the lack of studies that closely examines the representation of women's post-rape trauma in *Jennifer's Body* and *Sorry Baby*, particularly in terms of their varied emotional and behavioral responses. While *Jennifer's Body* has often been discussed through lenses such as feminism, monstrosity, and female rage, limited attention has been given to reading Jennifer's transformation specifically as a post-rape trauma response or to understanding Needy's role as someone affected by another woman's trauma. Similarly, *Sorry Baby* is a recently released film with virtually no existing scholarship, leaving its portrayal of Agnes' coping mechanisms following her rape and her friend's shared emotional involvement largely unexplored. By analyzing how these films depict trauma's destructive, internalized, and relational dimensions, this study aims to fill this gap and also hopes to contribute to wider

conversations about how film can challenge, subvert, or reinforce cultural attitudes surrounding rape and women's trauma.

Chapter Two

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach to examine the representation of women's post-rape trauma in two films *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry Baby* (2025). The primary theoretical framework is Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* (1992), particularly her concept of the central dialectic of trauma, which refers to the fundamental struggle in psychological trauma between the urge to acknowledge horrible events and the urge to deny them. It further draws on Michelle Balaev's pluralistic model to account for trauma's multiple forms of expression, and on Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal to show how systemic failures heighten survivors' suffering. These films' depictions of the psychological, societal, and identity-based aftermath of rape, particularly the survivors' trauma response and emotional complexity have been widely examined through textual and cinematic analysis. Other scholarly articles that are related to the topics of rape and trauma are summarized and utilized in this analysis as well.

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* serves as the primary theoretical framework for this study to examine the representation of post-rape trauma in both films. Herman's notions of the central dialectic of trauma, hyperarousal, intrusion, and constriction will guide the study to understand how Jennifer's transformation and Agnes' withdrawal after being raped reflect the psychological patterns of trauma. Other secondary sources are also used to support and contextualize the analysis.

In addition, this study draws on Michelle Balaev's pluralistic approach to trauma theory, as elaborated in *The Nature of Trauma Theory in Contemporary Literature and Culture*, which challenges singular understandings of trauma by incorporating multiple theoretical perspectives

that recognize diverse responses to traumatic events. This approach helps to acknowledge Agnes' trauma's diverse manifestations while examining how it is communicated and represented in different forms.

Finally, this study incorporates Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal, an extension of her broader betrayal trauma theory. This framework examines how organizations or social institutions can exacerbate the harm of traumatic experiences by failing to prevent, respond to, or acknowledge them. This perspective will help to highlight the systemic dimensions of trauma and to analyze how institutional failures intensify the psychological and social consequences of sexual violence for victims and/ or survivors.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

Women's trauma has been a significant subject matter in contemporary storytelling for a long time, yet its representation often varies across cultural, institutional, and media contexts. Such representational strategies can be observed in the two films *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *Sorry Baby* (2025). The current research aims to analyze how narrative, visual, and symbolic strategies convey the internal, relational, and identity-related consequences of rape. The research will also aim to examine how different narrative choices shape the portrayal of women's emotional and psychological responses to sexual violence, as well as how these responses are complicated by social expectations, patriarchal norms, and relational dynamics. The secondary sources reviewed in this chapter, arranged thematically, will further support a critical understanding of these portrayals and help solidify the theoretical framework guiding this research.

To understand rape-trauma holistically, it is essential to recognize both its personal and social dimensions. In the article "Conceptualizing the Harm Done by Rape: Applications Of Trauma Theory To Experiences Of Sexual Assault, " Sharon Wasco questions conventional psychological frameworks that characterize rape only in terms of personal trauma symptoms. Wasco contends that institutional attitudes, cultural norms, and societal circumstances that dictate how survivors' feelings are accepted or disregarded have a significant impact on the harm caused by rape. The emphasis on the social production of trauma is also discussed, where the author says that victim-blaming, humiliation, disbelief, and silencing increase the injury much beyond the actual assault. This approach emphasizes how trauma is a relational and structural experience rather than just a personal psychological one. The combination of dread, rage, numbness, and

self-blame, in particular, highlights how survivors' reactions frequently transcend beyond traditional commercial labels, as Wasco's notion of emotional complexity highlights (309). This viewpoint is especially helpful when analyzing cultural texts like horror or stylized narrative forms that use symbolic or indirect techniques to depict pain. Wasco offers a paradigm for understanding how cultural narratives can either replicate or challenge the circumstances that intensify post-assault harm by highlighting the disparities between women's experienced emotional experiences and the social institutions that diminish or distort them.

Similarly, by concentrating on identity disruption rather than only neurobiological reactions to rape, Kaitlin M. Boyle's article "Sexual Assault and Identity Disruption: A Sociological Approach to Posttraumatic Stress" provides a sociological reframing of posttraumatic stress. Boyle contends that sexual assault causes "identity deflection" (70), a condition in which the assault itself violently contradicts the victim's culturally expected identification, such as friend, girlfriend, or acquaintance, based on affect control theory. This disruption causes emotional shock, cognitive perplexity, and a loss of coherence between the experience and one's self-perception. Higher degrees of identity deflection are closely linked to intrusive memories, hyperarousal, and avoidance, as indicated by Boyle's research, implying that trauma endures when the self is unable to reconcile who they were meant to be with what happened. The paper also emphasizes how self-labeling impacts distress: assuming the identity of "survivor" does not have the same negative impact as identifying as a "victim," a socially stigmatized and disregarded status that increases posttraumatic stress. By showing how cultural nuances, stigma, and identity revision impact the long-term emotional effects of attack beyond the immediate incident, this sociological method broadens our knowledge of rape trauma.

Building on the understanding that trauma is socially produced, several studies emphasize how institutional responses can intensify harm. Rebecca Campbell's article titled "The Psychological Impact of Rape Victims' Experiences With the Legal, Medical, and Mental Health Systems," synthesizes a wealth of empirical research showing that survivors frequently encounter "secondary victimization" when they seek assistance from institutions designed to protect them. She demonstrates that dealings with police, emergency-room personnels, and mental-health professionals often feature incredulity, questions that blame the victim, a lack of attention to procedure, or complete disregard. The distribution of these negative responses is unequal: Campbell points out that survivors of non-stranger rape, as well as low-income and ethnic minority women, face disproportionately more mistreatment. Such institutional dynamics heighten psychological distress, amplify PTSD symptoms, and undermine survivors' trust in social systems (705). Significantly, the review highlights that post-assault trauma is deeply influenced by the nature of support survivors receive from the systems they encounter, whether it be supportive, doubtful, or retraumatizing. This shifts the perception of trauma from an interpersonal occurrence to a systemic one.

In a similar vein, Martin and Powell's "Accounting for the 'Second Assault'", delves into how legal, medical, and community organizations systematically reproduce what they call a "second assault," the re-traumatization of rape victims through dismissive, accusatory, or insensitive treatment by authorities. These authors make the case based on data from 130 Florida organizations; that institutional norms, practices, and pressures contribute to secondary victimization in addition to personal prejudice. The emotional and psychological requirements of victims are sometimes subordinated to organizational aims, such as efficiency, public opinion, and conviction rates. Due to such factors, victims are frequently portrayed less as trauma

sufferers and more as dubious witnesses. While prosecutors typically pursue only "winnable" cases that meet specific assumptions of the perfect victim, hospitals that prioritize treating evident physical injuries also neglect or mishandle rape exams. Rape crisis centers, on the other hand, have little authority within the system while using advocacy-based frameworks. Overall, the study demonstrates how systems of power normalize victim-blaming and emphasizes the necessity of changes that put victim care first and diminish secondary trauma.

Just as institutions shape survivors' experiences, media representations also play a crucial role in constructing and communicating the experience of trauma. The article "All the Rage – and Other Feelings: Young Women, Sexual Harassment and Media" by Gill et al. reflects this nuanced comprehension of harm by exploring the ways in which young women interpret and internalize instances of sexual harassment and assault depicted in media. The research demonstrates that through media discourse, peer culture, and institutional messaging, harassment is frequently normalized. The author contends that young women often grapple with mixed emotional reactions, such as anger, dismissal, and resignation, due to the portrayal of harassment and assault as commonplace and even anticipated parts of public life. Instead of viewing trauma as a single psychological occurrence, the article places it within a wider cultural context that downplays young women's unease. The author emphasizes the influence of media portrayals in shaping emotional norms, instructing girls to downplay their own boundaries or to view aggression as a form of humor or flirting. This article adds to wider conversations about gendered trauma by highlighting the daily and cumulative aspects of harassment, along with the emotional regulation that patriarchal cultures impose on young women.

Similarly, Amanda Spallacci's "Representing Rape Trauma in Film: Moving Beyond the Event" examines how mainstream cinema's focus on depicting the rape scene restricts viewers'

comprehension of trauma. Spallacci draws attention to a significant change in modern visual culture: the transition from depicting rape as an incident to addressing it as trauma rooted in memory, affect, and cultural discourse. Her fundamental assertion is that the event-centered rape scenarios evoke momentary empathy or disgust but never question the structural circumstances that give rise to sexual violence, explaining why many mainstream representations are stuck in voyeuristic (6) shock rather than substantive critique. She illustrates how fragmented memories, stillness, and associative imagery can more successfully portray the lasting, nonlinear nature of trauma than graphic depiction by tracking the development of memory-focused narrative in pieces like *Sharp Objects*. Her readings of *Sharp Objects* demonstrate how trauma can be portrayed in visual media as being distributed, recursive, and culturally mediated rather than connected to a single violent incident.

Furthermore, Lisa Fitzpatrick's "Signifying Rape: Problems of Representing Sexual Violence on Stage" investigates the challenges, contradictions, and ethical stakes involved in staging rape within contemporary theatre. Fitzpatrick argues that sexual violence in women's drama is usually not presented merely as a plot device; instead, it becomes a fundamental site for interrogating how patriarchal cultural constructs, normalizes, and polices women's bodies and responses. Examining works such as *Ficky Stingers*, *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Blasted*, and *On Raftery's Hill*, she demonstrates that playwrights must navigate the danger of reproducing the very conventions they seek to critique. Realistic depictions risk slipping into voyeurism, erotic spectacle, or melodramatic sensationalism, whereas symbolic or fragmented techniques risk being dismissed as metaphorical (193). Fitzpatrick notes how many feminist playwrights therefore rely on strategies such as off-stage violence, metonymy, stylized abstraction, disrupted chronology, and fractured dialogue to represent trauma without reenacting it. Her analysis

highlights the inherent tension between showing and not showing, between exposing systemic misogyny and refusing to replicate it theatrically. A central insight of the article is that rape on stage is always mediated by cultural “rape scripts” (183) , the pre-existing narratives that determine whether women are believed, blamed, silenced, or granted complexity. Fitzpatrick contends that feminist theatre attempts to disrupt these scripts by foregrounding bodily knowledge, fragmented subjectivity, and the lingering aftermath rather than the event itself. Her work ultimately emphasizes how the ethics of representation are inseparable from the social conditions that shape audience interpretation, offering an essential framework for understanding how visual and narrative media grapple with the depiction of sexual trauma.

Several scholars have analyzed how *Jennifer's Body* can be interpreted in various ways. The article "I Eat Boys: Monstrous Femininity in Jennifer's Body" by Victoria Santamaría Ibor uses feminist film theory to examine the film, focusing on Julia Kristeva's abjection and Barbara Creed's monstrous-feminine. She looks at the satanic ritual sequence as an ironic, self-aware critique of masculine aggression, revealing how the film uses comedy to expose the trivialization of female misery in horror tropes. She adds that Jennifer's monstrous transformation also derives from neoliberal postfeminist forces that link empowerment with desirability and consumerism, rendering Jennifer both victim and active participant in her own objectification. The toxic, homoerotic, and competitive friendship between Jennifer and Needy is further examined in the article as a place where patriarchal standards set girls against one another, transforming them into monsters in different ways(158). Ultimately, Santamaría finds that the film both critiques and reproduces the clichés it intends to overturn, demonstrating the ideological limits of postfeminist empowerment.

Likewise, In "Female Monsters: Figuring Female Transgression in *Jennifer's Body* (2009) and *The Witch* (2013)," Chusna and Mahmudah examine how female characters become monstrous when they transgress patriarchal boundaries using Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection and Barbara Creed's framework of the monstrous-feminine. In *Jennifer's Body*, Jennifer's seductive yet predatory femininity, her consumption of male victims, and her abject bodily emissions, blood, vomit, and black ooze, mark her as a figure who destabilizes fixed gender identities and challenges patriarchal expectations of feminine passivity. The authors emphasize that such imagery positions Jennifer as an abject presence who threatens symbolic order through excessive sexuality and violence (13). Similarly, in *The Witch*, Thomasin's alleged witchcraft and her sexualized body transgress Puritan religious norms, embodying fears of the castrating woman and the collapse of moral boundaries (15). Ultimately, the article concludes that both films portray the monstrous feminine as a site of fluid identity that exposes and resists patriarchal constructions of gender and religiosity.

Furthermore, Alba Alonso Palombi's article "The New Femme Fatale in *Jennifer's Body*" reexamines Jennifer Check through the femme fatale's ancestry while pointing out a significant change in the creation and interpretation of the character. Jennifer turns out to be a girl molded by exploitation, brutality, and the cultural eroticization of injury rather than an enticing seductress acting out of natural risk. According to Palombi's framing, Jennifer is a modern-day femme fatale whose deformity is manufactured rather than innate. The emphasis on how *Jennifer's body* becomes a battlefield, desired, violated, feared, and ultimately demonized, becomes important in this reading. Palombi's talk highlights the long-standing tendency of hiding women's pain behind stories about risky femininity. The movie is a critique on how patriarchal culture turns women's suffering into a spectacle: Jennifer's monstrous characteristics are

symbolic representations of the violence she experiences rather than indications of an underlying threat (10). This knowledge supports the idea that Jennifer's transition is a reflection of broader societal fear of women whose pain defies accepted norms of silence and submission.

Finally, Katarzyna Paszkiewicz's chapter "Repeat To Remake: Diablo Cody And Karyn Kusama's *Jennifer's Body*" looks at Jennifer's Body as a movie torn between patriarchal commercial pressures and feminist authorship. She contends that although Diablo Cody and Karyn Kusama create a story about female friendship, manipulation, and the fallout from male violence, Megan Fox's visual appeal was highlighted in the promotional framing, which reinforced the male gaze and reduced the movie to a sexual spectacle. Paszkiewicz draws attention to the irony that Jennifer's transition, which was spurred by her brutal assault, is deceptively promoted as stimulation rather than testimony (67). Therefore, by emphasizing male pleasure, her work illustrates how commercial institutions distort narratives of female pain and suffering.

The literature review in this study has thus explored how rape, sexual assault traumatizes an individual. It further explored research on secondary victimization and the ways cultural and institutional responses can intensify rape survivors' experiences. Moreover, studies on media portrayals of rape helped understand how popular culture constructs, distorts, or erases women's trauma. It also reviews the limited existing discussion on *Jennifer's Body*; however, as *Sorry, Baby* has no available scholarship yet, this chapter establishes the necessary context for analyzing both films.

Chapter 4.1

The Symbolic Interpretation of The Sacrifice in *Jennifer's Body*

When *Jennifer's Body* premiered in 2009, it performed poorly at the box office and was met with openly hostile critical reception. This backlash had less to do with the film's narrative or thematic ambitions than with the way it was marketed. The studio aggressively positioned the film toward a heterosexual teenage male audience, promoting Megan Fox as its primary spectacle. The film's marketing campaign consistently foregrounded Megan Fox's sexualized image across multiple platforms, including posters, trailers, and press materials. Promotional imagery emphasized her body, desirability, and erotic charge, presenting Jennifer less as a character within a narrative, more as a visual commodity. As a result, much of the promotional material relied on the very male gaze the film sought to expose, revealing how patriarchal structures shaped not only the film's reception but also its circulation. This framing primed viewers to expect a conventional erotic horror film rather than a satirical critique of misogyny, rape culture, and the commodification of female bodies. Many audiences and critics dismissed the film as shallow, incoherent, or exploitative, failing to recognize that the hypersexualization of *Jennifer's body* functions 'within' the narrative as a deliberate commentary rather than an endorsement. Its failure in 2009 was therefore less about narrative weakness and more about an audience unwilling or unequipped to engage with horror as a feminist critique of gendered spectatorship and bodily politics.

In addition to that, *Jennifer's Body* has been repeatedly revisited by its central creative figures like Megan Fox, Diablo Cody, and director Karyn Kusama who have reflected on the gap between the film's intentions and its initial reception. In retrospective interviews, Fox has spoken

openly about the misogyny she encountered during this period, describing how her public image was aggressively sexualized and then weaponized against her, shaping both critical responses to the film and the dismissal of her performance. In a reunion interview with Megan Fox more than a decade after the film's release, Diablo Cody reflected on the original intentions behind *Jennifer's Body*. She explained that she had always wanted to write a horror film that was unapologetically female-centric, one centered on a girl who eats boys. Cody described the film as deliberately engaging with themes of sex, revenge, empowerment, and cannibalism, framing violence as a subversive inversion of how female bodies are typically consumed in horror (*Jennifer's Body* Reunion, 00:00:1:25).

However, the film underwent a significant cultural re-evaluation following the mainstream emergence of the #MeToo movement in 2017. As survivors began publicly exposing patterns of sexual harassment, abuse, and systemic misogyny, audiences became increasingly attuned to the power structures that enable such violence. In this shifting cultural climate, particularly among younger women, *Jennifer's Body* was revisited with renewed critical attention. As #MeToo reshaped conversations around power, consent, coercion, and the normalization of harm, the film's central ritual came to be recognized as an allegory for sexual and gendered violence rather than a sensational plot device.

This allegorical dimension of the film becomes most evident in its pivotal sequence at Melody Lane, where Jennifer and Needy go to watch the band Low Shoulder perform. What begins as a seemingly ordinary night quickly descends into chaos when a fire breaks out, leaving the crowd disoriented and panicked. In the aftermath, a visibly shaken Jennifer is approached by the band outside the bar. Despite Needy's desperate protests, the men pressure Jennifer into entering their van and drive her to a remote wooded area. There, they restrain her and announce

their intention to perform a satanic ritual to secure fame, convinced that sacrificing a virgin will guarantee success. Jennifer initially claims that she is a virgin, which leads the men to select her for the ritual. When she later protests that she is not a virgin and attempts to retract her claim, the men dismiss her refusal, assuming she is lying to save herself. Which emphasizes the men's brutal disregard for her voice and autonomy. As Nikolai reads from a ritual script, the other band members joke among themselves, their casual cruelty making Jennifer's fear and confusion all the more palpable. She is stabbed repeatedly, a moment that is as physically terrifying as it is emotionally devastating. A decade later, this specific scene began to be reinterpreted as "...a rape in all but name..." (Fradley 214), which can be understood to mean that, even though the film never explicitly calls this event "rape," the coercion, restraint, and sexualized undertones of the ritual function as a form of sexual violation. The ritual's emphasis on Jennifer's virginity, her repeated pleas, and the men's performative indifference mirror the dynamics of rape culture, in which consent is rendered irrelevant and female suffering is trivialized. The brutality of the stabbing, coupled with the band's joking demeanor, further intensifies the allegorical violence of the scene, reinforcing that Jennifer's monstrosity emerges not from supernatural corruption alone, but from an act of profound traumatic violation.

Taking into consideration this reinterpretation of the symbolic ritual as rape, it becomes possible to further examine Jennifer's actions as responses shaped by post-rape trauma. If the ritual is read as a form of sexual violation, then her later behaviors can be understood as the externalization of post-traumatic experience rather than as innate monstrosity.

Chapter 4.2

4.2 Externalization of Trauma and its Impact

Jennifer

Jennifer's Body, directed by Karyn Kusama and written by Diablo Cody can be examined as a film that represents the violence and exploitation against women and their bodies. Through Judith Herman's core dialectic of psychological trauma theory, this chapter examines how Jennifer's transformation into a monstrous figure externalizes her post-traumatic symptoms, how her violence against men embodies misdirected anger, and how her bond with Needy becomes a site of shared trauma, where Jennifer's unassimilated suffering is displaced, mirrored, and ultimately enacted through Needy.

At the start of the movie, Amanda Seyfried's character Needy is already confined to a mental health facility. Her voiceover narration establishes the viewpoint from a future point in time right away, indicating that the main story's events have already come to an end. The movie places Needy narrating the majority of the movie as a flashback, describing what happened two months earlier when Jennifer (Megan Fox) got possessed and began murdering their male classmates.

Within this flashback, the ritual is not shown right away. Instead of immediately revealing what happened after Jennifer was taken by the band Low Shoulder, the film first presents her return to Needy's home that night, allowing the audience to witness her physical and emotional state. In this way, the impact or the result of the ritual is shown before the event itself is explained. In (00:23:00) Jennifer shows up covered in blood in Needy's dimly lit kitchen right after the ceremony. Jennifer merely smiles slightly in response to Needy's question about what

happened before throwing up an odd, black material. But by the next day at school, she seems bright and unaffected, the unexpected shift makes Needy wonder if the incident from the night before actually happened. Ann Burgess observes that sexual assault survivors often experience nausea, avoidance, dissociation, and altered sexual behavior, including hypersexuality, as early trauma responses (Burgess, 5). Jennifer's abrupt transition from physical suffering to emotional detachment can also be seen as indicative of an initial shock response, in which physical symptoms appear but verbal expression and conscious interaction with the incident are avoided. It is important to note that this research does not suggest that such responses are necessary or universal markers of sexual trauma; rather, it underscores how cultural frameworks like "Rape Trauma Syndrome" have shaped which forms of suffering are rendered visible and intelligible, while others can remain unrecognized. Instead of relying on an unambiguous diegetic declaration of rape, this reading is approaching Jennifer's aftermath through its alignment with culturally recognizable narratives of sexual violation. Therefore, these responses are understood here as "possible" manifestations of sexual trauma rather than definitive or universal indicators, and their absence in other victims and/ or survivors does not negate the reality of violation. To further examine Jennifer's trauma, this analysis turns to Judith Herman's dialectic model, which conceptualizes post-traumatic experience as an oscillation between intrusive and constrictive states. As Herman explains, "victims of trauma alternate between intrusive and constrictive sensations following a traumatic incident;...the victim's attempt to find a balance amid these two states is apparent by this oscillation and yet traumatized individuals lack this very balance" (Herman, 60). Jennifer's vomiting, affective outbursts, and hypersexual behavior can be read as moments of intrusion, in which the traumatic violation resurfaces through the body and overwhelms psychic containment. At other times, her emotional detachment, calculated

composure, and instrumentalized sexuality mark a shift toward constriction, in which numbness and control function as survival strategies. Importantly, it is not any single behavior that defines Jennifer's trauma, but her persistent instability between these states. Herman's framework thus captures the fluidity of her post-traumatic experience, highlighting how trauma manifests not as a predictable pattern of symptoms but as a continual struggle to navigate opposing psychic forces. Jennifer's behaviour throughout the film reflects this oscillation, as her emotional numbness and withdrawal alternate with moments of excessive physicality and violent intrusion, mirroring the imbalance Herman describes in the dialectic of trauma. Jennifer's first violent act happens against Jonas, a classmate who is still suffering over the death of a friend. She uses emotional intimacy and seduction to approach him, presenting herself as a consoling figure before guiding him away and killing him. The movie first depicts her as strong and energized after her first slaughter, implying that eating men provides her with immediate psychological and physiological nourishment. However, it is demonstrated that this sensation of control is conditional. When time goes on without another death in later scenes, Jennifer's appearance clearly deteriorates, her skin seems sallow, and temperament is agitated. When Needy concerns herself about Jennifer's state, she reluctantly replies that she is "just wearing off" (00:44:00) and explains nothing further. Her obvious exhaustion and refusal to provide an explanation suggest that something continues to unfold through her body instead of being processed consciously. It gets quite evident that Jennifer frequently alternates between aggressive engagement and withdrawal. Her character is not defined by consistency, which Herman implied in her theory that trauma disrupts the ability to maintain a steady sense of self. She moves between vulnerability and assertion, between being acted upon and taking action, never fully settling into the roles of monster, victim, or empowered agent. At times, her responses reflect the deep weight of trauma, while at other

moments, she asserts control and manipulates situations. Even in acts of violence, such as when she tells Chip she “feels so empty” (00:86:44) before killing him, a small ounce of vulnerability surfaces, revealing the lingering presence of her humanity. Jennifer’s humanity emerges in this in-between space, in the ways she navigates the unstable terrain of power, trauma, and agency, showing that trauma does not produce a single, coherent identity but rather a complex interplay of survival and resistance as a victim.

Furthermore, Jennifer's actions after her transformation can be interpreted as a persistent pattern of acting out in an effort to regain agency and control over a body that was stripped from her forcefully. She seems to take intentional control of her sexuality once she enters her monstrous form, utilizing desire as leverage rather than vulnerability. This change highlights a dramatic reversal of power dynamic where Jennifer is now the aggressor after being seduced, cornered, and violated by men who took advantage of her vulnerability and trust. Her interactions with her victims are characterized by a recurring sequence of emotional manipulation, flirting, and abrupt violence; this structure closely resembles the premise behind her own violence. This dynamic is made explicit in the scene where Jennifer tells one of her victims, just before killing him, “I need you frightened”(00:54:52). This reclamation is damaging and unstable. Her anger is focused on boys who are also characterized by loss, loneliness, or social marginalization rather than Low Shoulder, the people who attacked her. Her victims are chosen specifically because they are easily available and vulnerable, much like Jennifer was when she was abducted. Jennifer's murderous tendencies can also be understood as her taking control by reenacting because “sometimes people reenact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter. In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm. Some reenactments are

consciously chosen” (Herman, 52). Jennifer's violence can be understood not solely as cruelty or monstrosity, but as a means of symbolically regaining agency over circumstances that previously left her powerless. She seems to be trying to restore control and influence over the risks she formerly faced by reenacting aspects of her trauma, whether through direct aggressiveness, manipulation, or confrontation. These reenactments are inherently ambivalent as they offer a sense of empowerment while simultaneously exposing her to further psychological and moral risk. At the same time Jennifer killing innocent men can also be interpreted as that, Jennifer's attempt at reclamation does not break the structure of violence but instead perpetuates it, allowing the cycle of abuse to continue through repetition rather than resolution. It shows how trauma affects everyone differently, shaping their thoughts, behaviors, and relationships in unique ways. For Jennifer, the overwhelming sense of powerlessness in the face of her own suffering made it almost inevitable that she would project her pain onto others. Since she was unable to process or release the trauma safely, she channels her anger and fear outward, repeating patterns of harm that mirror the abuse she endured. In this way, her actions become a reflection of both her unresolved trauma and the desperate, often unconscious, attempt to regain a sense of control over a life that has consistently denied her agency

Needy

Needy's characterization can be read through the lens of shared and secondary trauma rather than through a reductive moral framework. As it is stated before that, from the opening, Needy is framed through institutional confinement. In this setting, the audience witnesses that she seems violent and aggressive in nature, unstable, and socially uncontainable in the present timeline. However she does reveal that “she was not always like this” (00:03:00). This framing

immediately positions her violence not as inherent pathology but as the outcome of prior experiences. The institutional setting thus functions as a visual and narrative acknowledgment of trauma's afterlife, suggesting that Needy's present instability is the residue of events she has witnessed and absorbed rather than evidence of an innately disturbed subject. This becomes particularly significant when Needy is understood as a witness to Jennifer's trauma. Trauma theorists have long argued that witnessing and testimony can generate secondary or vicarious trauma, wherein the observer internalizes the pain of another. As Caruth noted through her interpretation of Freud's *Moses and Monotheism*, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own, but rather that history is precisely the way we become entangled in each other's traumas," (Caruth, 24), highlighting a universalist understanding of trauma that affects the psyche and stimulates a common reaction passed down through time. Needy's identity is deeply rooted in her emotional bond with Jennifer, a friendship that started in childhood. This study recognizes their depth of attachment which is shaped by childhood bonds and loyalty, eventually renders Needy both witness to and vessel for the trauma that Jennifer experiences and enacts. Needy's language and behavioral changes are among the most obvious signs of this shared tragedy. Her language in the current timeline starts to resemble Jennifer's previous form, which is characterized by blunt, aggressive tones, cutting sarcasm, and hostility. These traits, once distinctly associated with Jennifer, are now embodied by Needy, suggesting that trauma has entangled their identities. This mirroring is not imitation for social belonging but a symptom of absorption where Needy begins to speak and act through a register shaped by Jennifer's pain and rage. Even language here becomes a site of trauma transfer, revealing how Jennifer's suffering continues to reverberate through Needy even in Jennifer's absence.

Moreover, another notable aspect is that Needy's long-standing protectiveness toward Jennifer further reinforces this dynamic. In the bar, when Needy overhears Low Shoulders members' conversation, she immediately starts questioning their intention. It was always clear that Needy never appreciated their encounter with Jennifer. From early on, she never fully trusts Low Shoulder, consistently expressing discomfort with their presence and intuitively sensing the threat they pose. This persistent unease functions as narrative foreshadowing, anticipating Needy's eventual act of killing them. Importantly, Jennifer herself does not kill Low Shoulder; Needy does. Her violence thus operates as a form of vicarious vengeance, an externalization of Jennifer's unresolved trauma. Rather than signaling moral clarity, this act reflects how deeply Needy has internalized Jennifer's trauma, to the point where it demands physical expression. This act, however, is not impulsive or abstractly moral but also emerges directly from what Needy comes to hear and comprehend through Jennifer's own testimony. When Jennifer finally verbalizes what Low Shoulder and the band did to her, this marks the first moment in which the violence inflicted upon her is articulated in language. Needy hears this account directly from Jennifer, and the testimony profoundly alters her understanding of both the severity of the harm and its lasting effects. Her visible grief and concern indicate that she recognizes the magnitude of what Jennifer has endured. This can be understood by Herman about the consequences of being a witness. According to her, "Both victims and witnesses are affected by the dialectic of trauma. It is challenging for an observer to maintain composure and objectivity, to see more than a few bits of the image at once, to remember every piece, and to put them all together. Finding a vocabulary that accurately and convincingly captures what has been observed is even more challenging. The credibility of those who try to explain the acts they have seen is also at risk" (Herman, 13). Needy might not be the eye witness of what happened to her friend but she is a witness to the

severity of that event. It refers that Jennifer's transformation into a predatory, violent force externalizes the consequences of the ritualized exploitation she suffers, turning her body into a site of horror and making visible the trauma that was previously concealed. Consequently, Needy, in turn, internalizes much of this horror, absorbing both the emotional labor of their friendship and the residual effects of Jennifer's predation. This dynamic establishes a shared trauma in which the boundaries between victim and witness, perpetrator and bystander, become blurred. Needy's subsequent aggression and eventual acts of violence, including the killing of Low Shoulder represent the externalization of trauma that she had previously contained. Whereas, Jennifer's monstrous actions make the trauma materially manifest, Needy's responses demonstrate how trauma circulates relationally as if it is not contained within a single body but moves across social and affective networks, shaping behavior, identity, and moral decision-making.

To conclude, In *Jennifer's Body*, trauma is first externalized through Jennifer's violent, demonic transformation, making her rage, victimization, and loss of control visible. By the end, Needy also externalizes Jennifer's trauma, channeling her friend's pain and anger into decisive action, confronting the source of destruction, and reclaiming agency. Together, they show that trauma is not contained within a single individual but can ripple outward, shaping behavior, identity, and relationships. The film thus dramatizes how trauma can be both destructive and mobilizing, manifesting differently in those affected yet connecting them through shared trauma.

Chapter 4.3

The Unspeakability and Speakability of Trauma in *Sorry, Baby*

Sorry, Baby, directed by Eva Victor, explores the complex ways trauma shapes the mind, body, and social experience. The film follows Agnes as she navigates the aftermath of a sexual assault by a figure of authority, revealing how trauma manifests in both embodied and social forms. Drawing on Judith Herman's concept of hyperarousal, the analysis examines Agnes' heightened alertness, emotional regulation, and bodily responses to trauma. Furthermore, this analysis uses Michelle Balaev's concept of pluralistic trauma model to demonstrate that traumatic experiences, while disruptive, can still be articulated in recursive, fragmented, and embodied ways that extend beyond conventional narratives, including humor, gestures, and partial disclosures.

The first chapter of *Sorry, Baby*, "The Year with the Baby," opens during a period that initially seems ordinary. Agnes appears to be "trying" to lead a normal life, but the visit of her friend Lydie quickly reveals underlying concern. Lydie's worry signals to the audience that something significantly bad has already occurred, even though the nature of the incident remains undisclosed. As the chapter progresses, a social gathering brings discussions of theses and academic advancement into focus. During this conversation, Natasha, an acquaintance, implies that Agnes has things "easy," which visibly unsettles her. This is the first instance in the film where an emotional trigger is depicted without explicit explanation. Lydie notices the shift in Agnes' demeanor and offers consolation, marking a subtle but significant insight into Agnes' fragile emotional state. Later, when Lydie asks if Agnes ever leaves the house, she notes that Agnes is still occupying the same office space. Agnes admits that in order to leave that place, she

would need to explain why being there feels strange or uncomfortable, an explanation she is unwilling to provide. This reluctance to verbalize discomfort reflects the psychological weight of trauma, the very act of articulating her feelings would force her to confront and acknowledge the event all over again. Agnes' hypervigilance is further demonstrated through small but telling behaviors such as unlocking her front door at night, looking outside, finding nothing, and then relocking it, which align with what Judith Herman describes as hyperarousal, a state in which the survivor remains persistently alert and on edge, as though danger could reappear at any moment (35). These instances collectively point to the enduring impact of a yet-unnamed traumatic incident and the persistent sense of insecurity even within her own home. In the later chapters, once it is revealed what has happened to Agnes, the audience begins to notice this same pattern repeating across different moments in the film. Wherever Agnes is in the house, she is frequently shown looking toward the windows. Eventually, the film shows Agnes covering the windows with pages from her thesis, a gesture that transforms the domestic space from one of exposure into one of enclosure. By blocking the windows, Agnes limits both her visibility and her capacity to see outward, creating a boundary between herself and the external world. This act can be read as an extension of her heightened vigilance, where hyperarousal not only keeps her watchful but also compels her to control the conditions of being seen and seeing.

The following chapter, "The Year with the Bad Thing," moves backward in time to gradually reconstruct the circumstances that lead Agnes to her supervisor's house, where the "bad thing" occurs. Agnes initially goes to discuss her thesis, but the interaction escalates into her being raped. Upon leaving the house, the camera captures Agnes in visible shock, she appears dissociated, barely blinking, as if her mind is only partially present. Herman notes that "traumatic experience may register as unreal, producing a sense of detachment in which the

survivor feels separated from their own body and watches the event from an external vantage point” (42-43). This is one of the film’s most deliberate choices, where the audience is denied access to the interior of the house, seeing only an exterior shot held as time passes. The scene lasts a full minute, emphasizing the passage of the day while Agnes remains inside, neither fully participating nor fully absent, which can also be read as a visual analogue of dissociation. Here, trauma is not presented as an event to witness, but as a psychic aftermath, marked by freezing, temporal distortion, and the withdrawal of the self even as the body continues. It deliberately positions the audience to inhabit a parallel psychological state, allowing viewers to emotionally experience a portion of what Agnes herself is going through. When Agnes finally returns home, Lydie immediately senses that something has happened. In the subsequent bathtub scene, Agnes begins to describe what happened, attempting to piece together the sequence of events and make sense of what occurred. Her narrative is fragmented, and Lydie often confirms or affirms her words, using phrases such as “sounds like that,” which quietly acknowledge the rape without forcing a label. This interplay highlights one of the central dialectics of psychological trauma, as Herman explains, “the struggle between voicing traumatic events and denying such atrocities” (2). In Agnes’ case, she was describing everything she remembered, all the actions that happened at that house.

Sorry, Baby depicts trauma as both disrupted and partially articulated. As it is repeatedly shown throughout the film that Agnes struggles to name or utter the word ‘rape’, it does seem to be aligned with the idea of traditional trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth or Judith Herman emphasizes: that trauma is so overwhelming that words cannot fully capture it. Caruth notes that traumatic event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (4). Moreover, Herman starts her book by

defining the ‘unspeakable’ in which the victim of an atrocity banishes the act from their consciousness as some things cannot be said out loud; yet these atrocities refuse to be buried (1). In the movie when Agnes first talks about her rape to Lydie, it did have pauses and fragmentation and while listening to her Lydie recognizes what happened to Agnes. Like Agnes, Lydie also does not say the word ‘rape’ rather in that scene she says it “sounds like that”, “that's the thing” (00:36:52). This reluctance does go with Caruth's understanding of trauma as resistant to full linguistic capture.

However, Agnes' experience does not conform entirely to a model of silence or inaccessibility. Although she avoids explicit terminology, she nevertheless provides as much a detailed description as she remembers of that event to Lydie. Her testimony may seem fragmented but it was not absent. This is where pluralistic trauma theory provides another fitting perspective for understanding trauma. Balaev argues that “trauma disrupts memory without foreclosing its expressive or epistemological possibilities”(2). In this model of trauma theory, she extends the discussion of how the articulation of trauma may happen through indirect language, and non-linear narration. This becomes visible in Agnes's interaction with a stranger following a panic attack. Here, she explains that “something bad has happened to her” and when the stranger asks “how bad”, she replies, “pretty bad”. It implies that Agnes is not fully denying the severity of what happened, to which she further includes “she remembers moments of it”, “she feels it in her body”(00:77:00). It shows she is not suffering from uncertainty or erasure of her trauma. Agnes knows the severity of what happened without articulating it as a discrete event, suggesting that traumatic knowledge operates independently of precise language. Balaev states that “the recursive and repressed nature of trauma does not remove its expressive potential, but rather these elements allow trauma to be articulated” (4). It indicates that repetition or repression, these

are not obstacles rather they are part of how trauma “speaks”. The director has stated that one of the guiding principles of the film was a refusal to allow the audience to know what happened to Agnes before Agnes herself is able to confront and articulate it. The revelation of the rape occurs only when Agnes chooses to speak about it, in her own voice, and to the extent that she is able and willing to do so. By withholding both visual depiction and narrative certainty, the film resists the expectation that trauma must be proven through visibility or immediately stabilized through language. This approach also reflects pluralistic theory’s emphasis on the unspeakable and partially speakable dimensions of trauma. Trauma is not instantly narratable; survivors often grapple with how, when, and whether to speak. Agnes’s eventual narration delivered in fragments, euphemisms, and relationally to Lydie ,exemplifies this, showing that trauma can be speakable under conditions of perceived safety, trust, and control. The film further expands this pluralistic representation through Agnes’s consistent use of humor, irony, and sarcasm. For Agnes humor becomes a deliberate, socially attuned mode of articulation, a way of managing the recursive and embodied effects of trauma while simultaneously negotiating the social norms that dictate how a “proper” survivor should behave. When Agnes and Lydie were joking even in hospital settings, it challenges the normative expectations of rape victims and their trauma as well. By portraying humor as a survival strategy, *Sorry, Baby* reinforces the pluralistic view that trauma manifests through diverse emotional registers, rather than a singular affective script.

While talking about rape or rape victims it is also important to acknowledge the social, cultural and political aspects around it. Agnes not uttering the word rape can also be understood within the social stigma surrounding rape or sexual violence. In a society where rape remains a deeply taboo subject, its disclosure often subjects victims or survivors to fear, pity or moral scrutiny. Agnes’s negotiation of her trauma reflects not only personal or psychological disruption

but also the social construction of what it means to be a “rape victim.” In the hospital scene, she emphasizes that there was no violent attack in the stereotypical sense, implicitly questioning whether her experience qualifies her for the social category of survivor. This scene highlights the pervasive influence of patriarchal narratives that define victimhood narrowly, valorizing stories that conform to the “perfect victim” script that are clear, visibly harmed, and consistently devastated. Her insistence in the hospital that there was no violent “attack” reflects an internalized hierarchy of violence as she implicitly compares her experience to more visibly brutal forms of sexual violence. This phenomenon is just not a personal confusion but social conditioning, produced by a culture that ranks trauma and police survivor legitimacy.

Chapter 4.4

The Compounding Effect of Institutional Betrayal on Sexual Trauma

This chapter examines how *Sorry, Baby* represents institutional betrayal as a force that exacerbates sexual trauma. Rather than depicting Agnes's suffering as solely the result of interpersonal violence, the film situates her experience within institutional structures, particularly the university, medical system, and legal discourse that fail to provide safety, recognition, or meaningful support. Drawing on Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal, this chapter analyzes how such failures not only compound Agnes's trauma but also shape her reluctance to disclose, report, or fully articulate what happened, revealing how institutional power becomes a secondary site of trauma.

While Agnes's trauma unfolds internally and interpersonally, it is also shaped by the institutional contexts in which it occurs. Agnes's trauma is inseparable from the power dynamics in which it occurs because the assault is not a random act of violence; it is perpetrated by her academic supervisor, someone who embodies mentorship, evaluation, and control over her professional trajectory. This betrayal of trust is central to Agnes' difficulty in understanding and naming what happened. In the second chapter, Agnes' admiration for her supervisor is made evident. In one scene, while in his office, she praises his book and writing, demonstrating the respect and esteem she holds for him as a mentor. The supervisor, in turn, compliments Agnes' own writing, describing it as "extraordinary." Later in the film it could be seen that this very word, "extraordinary" becomes a triggering term for Agnes, linked to her traumatic experience. In another scene, where Lydie and Agnes's conversation leads to if the supervisor ever makes a move on Agnes, even then Agnes makes it clear that she would not really welcome such attention. This conversation has the tone of friendly banter, yet it underscores Agnes'

unwillingness to entertain a romantic or sexual relationship with him. This tension highlights the intersection of admiration, authority, and personal boundaries, which frames the institutional betrayal she experiences. Jennifer Freyd first introduced the phenomenon of betrayal trauma theory where she states that, “Trauma is particularly more damaging when it is perpetrated by someone the survivor depends on or trusts” (Freyd, 1) and “consistent with betrayal trauma theory, sexually assaulted women who also experienced institutional betrayal experience higher levels of several posttraumatic symptoms” (Smith & Freyd, 578). It shows how the very figure meant to guide and protect Agnes becomes the locus of betrayal. Additionally, in the courtroom scene, where Agnes applies for impartial juror, she makes this statement that “I want him to stop being someone who does that and if he went to jail, he'd just be someone who does that, who's now in jail.” Agnes’ reluctance to report the assault is not framed as confusion about its severity, but as an attempt to preserve a reality in which her supervisor is not “someone who does that.” Her statement that she does not want him to go to jail because “then he would just be that” reflects an inability, or refusal to collapse him into a singular identity as an abuser. This exacerbative effect of institutional betrayal is particularly interesting as the betrayal necessarily occurred apart from the sexual assault itself—either in events leading up to the sexual assault or in those following it (Smith & Freyd, 5). The courtroom scene further reveals the subtle impact of Agnes’ trauma on her sense of self. When asked to describe herself, she initially ticks “intelligent” and “smart,” then crosses them out and selects “tall,” a more objective, physical descriptor. This shift reflects a diminished confidence in her abilities after the rape. When previously portrayed as academically capable and self-assured, Agnes now seems to question whether her accomplishments were truly hers or shaped by her supervisor’s predatory attention. Even remarks from Natasha, implying Agnes had it “easy” and was universally liked, further

intensify this uncertainty. By choosing a neutral, uncontested trait, Agnes signals how post-rape trauma, compounded by institutional betrayal, reshapes self-perception and undermines trust in one's own achievements. Moreover, The university's response is similarly marked by deferral and containment. When Agnes speaks with the female administrators, their language emphasizes understanding without action. Their reassurance "we understand, we're women too" (00:48:00) functions as a rhetorical gesture that substitutes solidarity for accountability. This exchange highlights the ways in which social or gendered solidarity can sometimes operate performatively, offering emotional recognition without addressing the structural or systemic conditions that enabled her rape. For Agnes, this rhetorical support may paradoxically reinforce her reluctance to speak out, where her trauma is acknowledged in mere words but not validated through meaningful action, demonstrating one of the reasons victims and/or survivors often remain silent when their experiences are not truly recognized or acted upon. The institutional environment is further complicated by peer dynamics, as seen in Agnes's interaction with Natasha. Natasha, a fellow student characterized by jealousy and insecurity, reveals that she had a sexual encounter with the supervisor. Agnes reacts with shock, asking whether it was consensual, to which Natasha responds affirmatively. While Natasha's disclosure initially seems innocuous, it exposes how institutional power imbalances are normalized and perpetuated, even by peers. Natasha herself becomes a product of the patriarchal system, internalizing norms that obscure exploitation. Agnes' panic attack following the revelation demonstrates the psychological impact of this structural complicity where abuse is not only enacted by the authority figure but also facilitated through silence and normalization within the institutional culture. Importantly, Natasha's role is not one of blame; rather, it illustrates how patriarchal structures shape behavior, enforce secrecy, and sustain abuse.

Furthermore, when Lydie takes Agnes to the hospital it was quite evident that the doctor's tone was procedural rather than empathetic. His responses lack attunement to Agnes' emotional state, treating the situation as routine rather than traumatic. Freyd argues that institutional betrayal occurs not only through overt harm, but through omission, what institutions fail to do. Here, the absence of emotional validation compounds Agnes's distress. The university's response is similarly marked by deferral and containment. When Agnes speaks with female administrators, their language emphasizes understanding without action. Their reassurance, "we understand, we're women too" functions as a rhetorical gesture that substitutes empathy for accountability. While the administrators acknowledge Agnes's distress, they simultaneously assert the limits of their authority, presenting the situation as one in which intervention is either impossible or inappropriate. Even before Agnes formally discloses what has happened to her. When her friend asks why she continues to work in the same office, Agnes explains that leaving would require her to explain why the space makes her uncomfortable, something she explicitly refuses to do. This can also imply that Agnes's reluctance is not rooted in avoidance alone, but in an awareness that explanation within such spaces demands exposure, vulnerability, and the risk of disbelief. This hesitation suggests that the university does not function as a space where women can safely name their harm without consequence.

Conclusion

This research paper has thoroughly analyzed *Jennifer's Body* and *Sorry, Baby* to examine how women's post-rape trauma is represented in contemporary cinema. Through close textual and cinematic analysis, the thesis focused on character behavior, narrative development, and visual choices to understand how trauma is portrayed as an ongoing experience rather than a single, contained event. By examining two films with distinct narrative styles and tonal approaches, the study demonstrates how post-rape trauma can be represented through both externalized and internalized responses, highlighting its psychological, relational, and social dimensions. The study applied Judith Herman's trauma framework to understand psychological and relational responses to sexual violence, the pluralistic trauma model to explore how trauma can be expressed through multiple coexisting modes, and Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal to examine how systemic failures exacerbate victims and/or survivors' experiences.

In *Jennifer's Body*, the analysis revealed that Jennifer's trauma is expressed through externalization and reenactment. Her violent and predatory behavior functions as an attempt to reclaim power and agency following sexual violation, while also illustrating how trauma can become misdirected and cycle into further harm. The study also examined Needy's role to show how trauma can be shared and absorbed within close relationships, demonstrating that post-rape trauma does not exist in isolation but can affect those emotionally and morally connected to the victim.

The examination of *Sorry, Baby* focused on how post-rape trauma produces hyperalertness that leads survivors to construct heightened boundaries between themselves and

the outside world, a strategy that functions as self-protection. Furthermore, the application of the pluralistic trauma model demonstrated that trauma is not fundamentally unspeakable; rather, it expresses itself through multiple coexisting modes. Agnes's trauma becomes legible through bodily responses, humor, and fragmentation. The analysis also incorporated Jennifer Freyd's concept of institutional betrayal to show how institutional indifference and symbolic validation without action intensify sexual trauma, deepening isolation and mistrust.

To conclude, there is no single way to recognize trauma, just as there is no singular way to be a victim or a survivor. Post-rape trauma exists across multiple layers and nuances, shaped by individual experience, context, and response. As seen through differing cinematic approaches, trauma can be communicated through unconventional forms such as rage, humor, partial speech, restraint, or even the monstrous, each offering a distinct way of making trauma visible. These representations do not claim to define trauma exhaustively but instead highlight its multidimensional nature and the need for broader recognition. Such diversity underscores the importance of continued attention within trauma studies to survivors of sexual violence, emphasizing that trauma is multidimensional and must be acknowledged in all the varied ways it manifests.

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