

The Analysis of Female Characters in *Why Women Kill* from the Perspective of Postmodern Feminism

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Abstract

Why Women Kill is a popular American TV set released in 2019. Since it first appeared on CBS, it has received considerable attention from the public. There are three female characters, a perfect housewife--Beth Ann, a socialite--Simone Grove, and a legal elite--Taylor Harding, living in different ages, but all trapped in their own marriages. Although this TV set focuses on the meaning of marriage, characters' talking and behaviors can be analyzed from the perspective of Postmodern Feminism which is the development of Feminism and also an advanced form of it, though Postmodern Feminism has its own weak points. This paper will talk about the three female characters from this perspective and conclude some enlightenment for the modern women and their marriages.

Keywords

Postmodern Feminism; Why Women Kill; Female characters; Marriage.

1. Introduction

After two feminist waves, post feminism originated in the 1960s. As the name suggests, it is the abbreviation of postmodernism and feminism, but it cannot be simply regarded as the marriage of the two, and its essence is the complex product of feminism. The theory mainly includes the following viewpoints. Firstly, it opposes grand narration and advocates the establishment of decentralized local small theory. Next, it abandons the dualistic thinking mode of traditional metaphysics, advocates that women return to nature. Thirdly, it opposes essentialism and universalism, affirms gender differences, emphasizes the differences in social status, race, class and culture among women, and advocates that in the social and political practice of striving for equality between men and women. People should consider our own goals with the interests and destiny of the whole human society in mind. Furthermore, the theory emphasizes women's subject consciousness, affirms differences, shifts from politics to personal experience, and advocates diversified ways to pursue equality. It can be said that post feminism aims to deconstruct the dualistic logic of men and women, puts women in the real environment of history, nationality and race, and builds a pluralistic and different female world, so as to end male centrism and realize the equality of social status of men and women. This equality does not mean that women enter the male field, require women's rights and interests, and measure women's liberation by male standards, but that women strive to be a good woman by their own standards. These theories are not only the innovation and development of feminism, but also provide new enlightenment for the individual pursuit and choice of oppressed women.

Times are advancing, and so are women. In the 1980s, Postmodern Feminism began to develop, it evolved from feminism, and tried to be more academic and systematic. Feminism aims to help women to change their low social status, however, Postmodern Feminism acknowledges that there are differences between women and men but essentially, they are equal, which means that women can't be required by the male standard, and they should set up their own standards

to be wonderful women. The American TV set, *Why Women Kill*, centers on the meaning of marriage, and presents three female characters living in different ages. This paper will only focus on their events that can be analyzed from the perspective of Postmodern Feminism, and be attempted to get some inspiration for the modern women.

2. Beth Ann-- A Housewife Only Belonging to Her Husband

The story of Beth Ann happens in the 1960s, and she seems to live a happy life together with her husband, but behind the happiness, Beth Ann gradually grows up to be a feminist with her own ideas. Everyday, she wears plain clothes and has the same haircut all year round, because in the beginning of plot, her husband, Rob, always makes her believe that she is born to take good care of him. When their neighbors go to their home to say hello, Beth Ann is the one who has the mission to refill Rob's tea with his tapping.

Sheila: If you want more coffee, ask for it. Just tapping your cup? Come on. That's how you treat a maid, not your wife.

Beth Ann: I consider it an honor to take care of him. (Rob wears a satisfied smile at this moment.)

By analyzing the dialogue between the two different women, we can conclude that Sheila has her own identity and she knows that women live for themselves instead of others, but Beth Ann isn't that lucky at that moment. What makes Beth Ann have the idea to change is that she knows that Rob has an affair with a young and beautiful girl who has her dream. Then she begins to ask Rob and herself, "I don't have a job. All I do is to take care of you. But when you are not here anymore, who will I be?". And what Rob answers makes me heartbroken--"My widow?" From this scenario, we get that Rob has assimilated by the male-dominated society, however, that Beth Ann begins to realize to build her own identity makes me feel happy.

Of course, the traditional ideas cannot be changed overnight. She believes that her husband is looking for another lover because she is not good enough, so she is bent on saving her husband. Sheila, her neighbor encourages her to take the initiative to defend and shape the marriage that she wants. However, whether she dresses herself up carefully or tries to please her husband, Rob's enthusiasm is always extinguished by his own indifference. In order to know herself and her enemy, Beth conceals her identity and took the initiative to meet her husband's lover, April. From seeing April as a rival in love at the beginning, to testing and then to appreciation, Beth can't help becoming a good friend with April. It can be said that April further opens the door of the new world and Beth's independent consciousness. April is a new woman with the characteristics of a new era. Her view of marriage and love is trendy: She falls in love with a married man and does not aim at marriage; She is financially independent because although her salary as a waiter in the restaurant is not high, she can support herself. April is affecting Beth from spirit to body, making her live more and more "self". She is not only her husband's wife, but also herself. Beth's sense of independence is gradually awakened and began to regain her hobby of playing the piano. She becomes the focus of talking and laughing at Rob's banquet with her boss and complained about another female neighbor who is subjected to domestic violence. But at this time, she still wants to resolve the family crisis peacefully: in order to keep her husband, she tells a lie that she has cancer, trying to persuade April to move elsewhere, and even is willing to raise her husband and April's child. However, to her surprise, her husband, who has cried to her the night before and promised not to abandon her, can propose to April the next day. He says that After Beth die of illness, he will marry April. Frustrated, Beth finally gives up saving her marriage and wants to leave quietly, but inadvertently learns the truth of her daughter's death in the early years. It turns out that Rob blamed his wife for his daughter's death in order to hide his cheating fault, so that a heartbroken mother could bear the pain of guilt and self-blame. Angry at Rob's infidelity, Beth joins hands with the female neighbor who has suffered domestic violence for a long time, makes use of their husbands' character to let

them eat the consequences, and finally achieves the double liberation of her mind and body. After Rob's death, Beth completely gets rid of the guilt and bondage brought about by her "dereliction of duty" as a mother, raised April's daughter with April, and realizes her wish to be a mother; April insists on her dream, fulfills her wish, becomes a female singer, and goes on Broadway stage. Family is no longer their bondage, and no one can stop them from shining. In 1984, when Beth gave Simone the key to her house, unlike the housewife who always wore sweet skirts before, she wore trousers that symbolized avant-garde and freedom, showing an independent, confident and powerful new female image. She told Simone that the key to happiness was not to regret her choice!

Beth Ann's story is about revenge, fighting against a terrible man. What's more, I think that it is a process about being herself from the perspective of post-modern feminism because finally, she becomes herself rather than an accessory of men and gains her own life. She doesn't hold the opinion that it's her mission to take care of men anymore and she wants to be pretty for herself.

3. Simone Grove-- A Socialite Living with Men's Love

In 1984, Simone, the second heroine, appears in full glory. Unlike Beth's sweet and lovely white housewife image when she appears, Simone, a multi gold celebrity played by Chinese actress Yuling Liu, has a strong aura and exudes a confident light all over her body. As her husband Carl says, from the way she walks, she knows she is charming. Simone boasts that her life is perfect: she has strong economic strength (property comes from her first two husbands), her gallery is managed by her third husband Carl, and her life is beauty and party.

However, the news that Carl is gay broke this seemingly happy and perfect life in an instant. On the contrary, Simone can't rub the sand in her eyes and angrily asks Carl to pack up and leave quietly. Knowing that his husband threatens himself with sleeping pills, he wakes him up with a crisp slap in the face, then turns around and calmly calls an ambulance. This operation is not overbearing. However, Simone cares too much about the external evaluation of herself and loves face more than anything. Even when calling an ambulance to save Carl, she thinks they should give the onlookers a perfect excuse.

After Carl is sent to the hospital, she drinks alone at home and says to Tommy, the big boy who comes to comfort her neighbor, "My first husband likes wine better than me, the second likes cocaine better than me, and the third likes men better than me. Do you see the law? I always think I'm a great woman, but how great can I be if no one wants to love me?" It can be seen that Simone's definition of happiness still lies in whether she has a happy marriage and whether a man loves herself. At this time, Simone is shocked and comforted by Tommy's kiss and confession, but she doesn't really take it to heart. Then, when she calms down and goes to the hospital to see Carl, she makes a plan: they should divorce gracefully and beautifully, so beautiful that others are still jealous of divorce. At this moment, it is her husband Carl who tries hard to save the marriage. After the bitter drama of fake suicide is exposed, he tears his face and begins to threaten openly: "If you want a divorce, I'll tell everyone the truth and make you lose face." Carl's threat and her daughter's marriage forced Simone to compromise to maintain a seemingly bright marriage. Resenting that her best friend doesn't tell herself the truth of Carl's cheating earlier, but sees her joke, Simone accepts the courtship of her best friend's 18-year-old son Tommy and begins a love forgetting relationship that nourishes her. As her love with Tommy becomes more and more serious, she becomes more and more generous. Her relationship with Carl begins to move from resentment to friendship, and even brings Carl back to his boyfriend. Although Carl relies more on Simone materially, Simone is willing to pay for the consideration, understanding and respect she receives from Carl. After Carl suffers from AIDS, Simone stands firm beside him, and faces him with discrimination and blind eyes. She

sells her collection and gives him financial support to treat diseases, and even gives up her love affair with Tommy. She takes off her exaggerated and gorgeous dress, puts on a plain white dress, cuts her hair short, and holds Carl's hand to give him spiritual strength. At this time, she radiates the brilliance of love from her heart. Before Carl dies, she changes into a red dress, dances the last tango with him, and helps him end his life with dignity.

In the 1980s, Simone's women's liberation movement has been vigorously carried out and achieved great results, and women's status has also been significantly improved. Therefore, Simone's ideas are more open and her behavior is more free and easy. She is confident and proud: she knows she is charming and will use her feminine charm to make men revolve around her; Her marriage attitude is open-minded: "if you agree, you will come and go if you disagree", and she is not afraid of divorce; Her outlook on love is bold and avant-garde: for the love of 18-year-old Tommy, she is from rejection to acceptance to investment, and enjoys this forgetful love. This also reflects the fact that feminists and minority groups stood on the United Front against discrimination and unfair treatment at that time. However, she still regards marriage as women's greatest achievement and the greatest source of happiness, which shows that she does not have real spiritual independence and still ties women's value to marriage.

Simone Grove, a socialite, lived in the 1980s, and the stylist took a lot of care and energy to show some characteristics of that time. Simone boasts of plenty of money and she wants others to believe that she has a perfect life. However, unfortunately Simone's third husband cheats her and falls in love with another man, which really hurts her. Even in this moment, the most heartbroken thing in Simone's heart is that no man loves her. It is believed that women's life meaning only depends on the love of men in her mind. And let's talk about Carl now. Carl doesn't love Simone in that way, but he indeed regards her as the person he loves the most, and in fact, he always treats Simone in a very gentle way, which makes the whole story moving. And in the end, we can also see Simone's growth. When her husband is alive, Simone's gallery is managed by her husband. She is only interested in beauty and parties. After her husband's death, she sets up her own foundation to contribute to the medical research on AIDS. At this time, although her appearance is not as bright as before, she is more independent and confident because of her strong heart.

Sometimes we will think that if a woman is independent in economy, she won't need a man's love to prove that she is successful. But we can have a look at Simone: she gets a host of luxuries that other women desire for, but she still desires for love of men. The reason of that lies in Simone herself, because she isn't strong enough mentally at first which is strongly implicated in the way of education. Her mother told her, "If you want to sleep on expensive sheets, choose wisely who you sleep next to." When Simone was young, she was told to depend on men rather than herself. That is because in that age, women's social status was still low and they couldn't have their own identity. But Simone is lucky and I think Carl's gentleness makes her become strong and stimulates her inside kindness even though the love is the kind between men and women. So this story tells that only deep love and care can save a woman who is abused by the man-dominated society.

4. Taylor Harding-- A Legal Elite Enjoying An Open Marriage

The third heroine Taylor is a black woman. Her story takes place in 2019. With the continuous improvement of women's social status and economic ability, men's position as the only economic pillar of the family is no longer as solid as before. Because of the change of family economic structure, the status of both sexes has also changed, which has also impacted the traditional marriage system. Taylor meets her white husband Eli at the women's parade. Taylor is giving a speech on the abolition of patriarchy. Eli is deeply attracted by her wisdom and temperament. As a bisexual, Taylor does not cover up or compromise, but hopes that his other

half can fully respect his sexual orientation. Therefore, they try "open marriage", and can have their own lovers on the basis of honesty and trust. Taylor is a highly capable professional lawyer with a high income and relatively stable. She supports the family and provides housing loans alone, while Eli is a screenwriter who hasn't sold the script for two years. Strong women, bisexuality, cross race and open marriage are all pioneering. It can be seen that the improvement of non-white women's social and family status, the gradual infiltration of LGBT groups into the mainstream and the rise of the affirmative action movement.

In the story of Taylor and Eli, the strong gender status of women and the weak gender status of men and the new partner way of open marriage are the focus of attention and discussion. Contrary to the early American family model, the wife Taylor not only supports her husband materially, but also takes the absolute initiative in emotional relations. One day Taylor breaks the agreement and takes his lover Jade home, breaking the original family balance. At first, Eli strongly opposes his wife taking the "third party" home, but when he sees Jade, he is immediately attracted by the young and beautiful Jade and has no resistance. Jade cleans the room, cooks delicious food, and takes care of all the people in the house. More importantly, she also likes Eli's works, which makes Eli feel worshipped. After the agreed stay time of Jade expired, Eli "magnanimously" agreed to leave Jade to continue living in the name of taking care of his wife's mood, and soon happily realizes the life of three people living together. However, in this strange relationship of three people living together, thunder is buried everywhere: when Taylor is found staring at Jade with loving eyes, Eli is jealous and dissatisfied, because such eyes have not appeared for a long time and have focused on herself; Because Taylor goes out to work every day, while Eli and Jade stays at home, their relationship becomes closer and closer; Jade connives at Eli's relapse with a history of drug abuse to get writing inspiration and gives advice to Eli's script, but Taylor is in danger of being betrayed... As a result, Eli's relationship with Taylor becomes more and more estranged. When Eli's script is sold, she listens to Jade's advice, and Taylor is forced to move out of the house. The wise Taylor immediately takes advantage of her lawyer and begins to fight back. She bails Jade's ex boyfriend out of prison, exposes Jade's hidden selfishness, hypocrisy and malice, and digs out her past criminal history. Jade, who is stimulated, goes crazy. First she cuts his ex boyfriend to death with a knife, and then tries to blackmail Taylor for a huge sum of money. If the blackmail fails, she stabs Eli, and then fights with Taylor. Taylor finally kills Jade in self-defense. At the end of the play, Taylor sells his big house and is ready to move back to his old apartment and accompany Eli to detoxify. The two people unanimously decide to suspend open marriage, pay more attention to each other and enjoy their world.

As a pioneer woman in a new era, Taylor has gained everything that male roles have in the traditional context. She has strong ability, social status, economic strength, voice and freedom to choose her own marriage form. However, her marriage also has various problems. The fact that her husband has no income for a long time added to her anxiety and pressure. In order to maintain her husband's self-esteem, she has to press the question to avoid talking, and has to relieve her anxiety through her lover. Taking the lover home is tantamount to leading a wolf into the house. People have to face the complex relationship between the three, resulting in a series of problems in the family. Finally, Taylor abandons his part of self (bisexuality) and chooses to focus on the existing relationship with Eli. Just like the tango in the play, there are retreats and advances. Compared with the stimulating open marriage, the conservative two-person world seems to be more secure, which also implies some self-regulation of the sexual liberation movement and the feminist movement.

Taylor is a symbol of new era with excellent capacity for work, which makes her enjoy a high social status. In her marriage, she is the breadwinner and her husband always shows respect for her. But in the TV set, Taylor's marriage is not very happy, because Jade appears in her home. In fact, Taylor, the breadwinner, knows that Jade is the only way of amusement and relaxation

for her, which her husband can't give. She is too tired to be the only one that supports the family. And her husband, although he can accept the open marriage and acclaims that he never minds Taylor doesn't do housework, when Jade does everything for him, obviously he enjoys women serving and adoring him.

From the analysis, we can get that in a marriage, women and men are both equal, and they need to be cooperative. From the perspective of Postmodern Feminism, we should realize the differences between male and female, and lay the stress on the equality. I think that no matter you are a man or woman, as long as love brings you two to marriage, you should be supportive for each other, and only in this way, the marriage will be truly happy.

5. Conclusion

No matter how the times develop, women in each era have their own difficulties and struggles. In the first story, in the traditional marriage of male dominated external and female dominated internal, the root of Beth's tragedy lies in her lack of economic independence, no sense of identity in marriage, and no social status and social identity outside marriage. In the next story, Simone is economically independent and has a strong character, but she does not have real spiritual independence. She cares too much about other people's eyes and is still bound by the expectations of society for marriage and women. Until the last story, the importance of individualism gradually surpasses other things. Coupled with the change of gender status in marriage, the traditional family model and marriage boundary become more uncertain and vague. Elite lawyer, Taylor, has a successful career and independent thought. On the surface, she controls all her life and practices open marriage according to her own will, but she is extremely tired in her heart. The entry of lover Jade easily breaks the delicate and fragile balance. However, we can also see the growth and self-redemption of each heroine. Beth gets the freedom and the life she wants after the awakening of her independent consciousness. Simone can finally face the eyes of others fearlessly, while the avant-garde Taylor chooses to return to the traditional marriage of the two worlds. Whether it's a bold step forward or a little step back, everyone is trying to find a better life in their mind.

Why Women Kill, this TV set, places three female roles in three times in carefully set scenes, conflicts with different men, and shows the process of women from the germination of independent consciousness to independence, self-esteem and self-love, and then to being in the same position and getting rid of power repression. With the development of the times, the marriage model is constantly renovated, the diversified sexual orientation is gradually open, and women are gradually moving from passive to dominant position. They are aware of their own value and explore their own value, support social minorities to strive for rights, pursue for economic ability comparable to men, and finally pursue for gender equality. The experiences and actions of the three heroines in the play just correspond to the various difficulties faced by women in society and the feminist thinking and resistance to these difficulties, reflecting the equal rights road of American women.

The tango in the play is also the director and screenwriter's strong confession to the true meaning of happy marriage, the reflection on women's self-realization, the destruction of male dominated society, the torture of gender identity, the response to social avant-garde thought, and also a way to find self. Everyone explores the relationship between the sexes in the dance, knows himself and seeks happiness. As an artistic expression, Tango's sexy and gorgeous dance steps "contain more delicate life perception and repeated taste and thinking of thoughts beyond emotion" (Huang Yi and Gui Shinan, 2007), expressing the arduous love in social confusion, the sigh of fate and the exploration of human nature. The proper use of Tango Dance in the play has greatly enhanced the appeal of TV dramas.

After analyzing the three different female characters in *Why Women Kill*, we can know that the attitude of the public towards females is changing and it is the microcosm of the development of feminism. In this TV set, all three characters fight for their self-identity and equality, and finally they win. It is women's inside love and gentleness that save them. Although in the real world there are still a few people who don't respect women and stubbornly hold the idea that women are just accessories of men, most women won't passively submit to all unjust treatment and have begun to fight for themselves, which is a big step for human development. From the perspective of Postmodern Feminism, men and women are equal and it's not right to use men's standard to ask women to do the same thing because there are a lot of differences between men and women, which is quite important. *Why Women Kill* is a successful TV set, because it finds an echo with female viewers, and its humorous lines and authentic scenes also attract them. The most important thing is that it encourages women to do what they want to do, and hopes that women won't bind themselves to men and pursue their own bright future.

There are many female themed American dramas similar to *Why Women Kill* and *Desperate Housewife*. By closely connecting the realistic characteristics of the times with the female situation in the drama, it shows us the contradiction and struggle of women's desire for independence. With the advancement of social civilization and the improvement of creative skills, TV set creators continue to break through and innovate in shaping women's images while inheriting them. Although there are some limitations and shortcomings, it is undeniable that the women in the play re-examine their personal life, constantly explore their own values, and seek healthy and intimate relations, which brings the audience deep thinking and strong inspiration, and brings the practical issues such as gender equality and equal rights into the public view, which is beneficial to produce positive effects in real life. In contrast, in China some domestic reality TV dramas, such as *ALL IS WELL*, *A Little Reunion*, *Nothing But Thirty* and *My Best Friend's Story*, which have been popular in recent years, have traced women's living conditions and delicately handled gender relations. However, looking at the overall TV drama market, whether as a protagonist or supporting actor, there is still a stereotyped and unremarkable trend in women's life choices and life trajectories. The gender conflicts in marriage are dispelled by family affection, the differential treatment of men and women in the workplace is replaced by more acute social problems, and the gender stereotypes and materialized women in life are ignored and shelved because of their long existence. The prevalence of female themed American dramas in China gives enlightenment to domestic dramas: Women groups with different identities should be given more voice in creation, describe their real life situation, while deeply observing their inner world, have the courage to explore the social and cultural roots behind them, and shape the female images in domestic dramas more real and full, so as to be deeply rooted in the hearts of the audience.

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