

# Electra in the 1990s

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## Abstract

This paper will consider existing scholarship that addresses Jung's Electra complex within 1990s' American cinema. The Electra complex was coined by Jung in 1913 as the female equivalent of Freud's Oedipus complex (1899). The primary focus will be a cycle of 1990s films that represents a teenage girl (teen fatale) and her relationship with an older man, either her own father or a father figure. The central argument of this paper is that most male filmmakers unconsciously employ a set of conventions and tropes that evoke the Electra complex (as described by Carl Jung), in order to sexualise the teen fatales in selected mainstream films from the 1990s. It is argued that this unconscious aspect of 1990s filmmaking arises through castration anxiety leading to narratives that punish female characters for being powerful and creating a threat against them through fetishistic and sadistic scopophilia. This paper therefore aims to contribute to a gap in knowledge by analysing how some female directors consciously deploy Electra tropes, to represent the teen fatale through female power and to reject the male culture of filmmaking through the female gaze. The male directed films can be considered anti-feminist and misogynistic by using the teen fatale which is in keeping with a backlash towards powerful female characters who corrupt male counterparts. The 1990s was a progressive time as more women were active within the film industry and were consciously making differences and rejecting how male filmmakers portrayed female characters.

**Keywords:** Electra Complex, Female Filmmakers, *Poison Ivy* (1992), *The Crush* (1993)