

5-15-2009

The Making and Analysis of Covered

Robert Henry Clay
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Clay, Robert Henry, "The Making and Analysis of Covered" (2009). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 937.

<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/937>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

The Making and Analysis of Covered

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
In partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in
Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts
Film Production

by

Robert Clay

B.A. Auburn University, 2006

May, 2009

Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by the University of New Orleans department of Film, Theatre, and Communication Arts. From the wide array of equipment and resources to the willingness of the faculty to provide insight and feedback, this film would not have been made without their much-appreciated efforts.

Throughout the making of this film, my thesis committee members have helped guide me through the process. Robert M. Racine, my major professor, has always made himself available, and his knowledge was invaluable during the progress of the film. The other two professors on my thesis committee, John Overton and Henry Griffin, also provided their own insights on the film and always maintained an open door policy where they always had a moment to discuss my progress.

The locations for my film would not have been possible without the kindness of the following individuals. The University of New Orleans School of Business, which generously allowed me to film a portion of the film in Kirschman Hall. My liaison, Liane Carboni, was instrumental in getting the appropriate permissions for the location. I am also indebted to Cheryl Gautier for allowing me to shoot a majority of my film in her house. She selflessly made her home available for my production which allowed for the majority of locations to be condensed into one area. I cannot express my gratitude enough for this.

My cast and crew were always ready and willing to make this film a reality. Without their total dedication, this film would never have been completed. I would especially like to thank David Hoover for his willingness to fill in for the part of Greg Nowak with only three hours notice. His performance was more than I ever could have

hoped for, and the film is better due to his contribution. Finally, I would like to thank my parents for their constant love and support not only during the making of this film, but always.

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Abstract | vi |
| Chapter 1 | 1 |
| Introduction..... | 1 |
| Chapter 2 | 5 |
| Writing | 5 |
| Directing | 12 |
| Production Design..... | 16 |
| Cinematography | 18 |
| Editing..... | 22 |
| Sound | 25 |
| Technology and Workflow | 28 |
| Chapter 3 | 32 |
| Additional Influences on Story | 32 |
| Chapter 4 | 35 |
| Analysis..... | 35 |
| Chapter 5 | 38 |
| Conclusion | 38 |
| References | 40 |
| Appendices..... | 41 |
| Appendix A: Shooting Script..... | 41 |
| Appendix B: Picture Storyboards | 59 |
| Appendix C: Production Still..... | 65 |
| Appendix D: Audience Comment Sheets | 69 |
| Appendix E: Screening Poster | 78 |
| Appendix F: DVD Cover | 79 |
| Appendix G: The Film (MPEG4 Video) | 80 |
| Vita..... | 81 |

Abstract

This paper thoroughly examines the production of the thesis film, *Covered*. Writing, production design, cinematography, editing, sound, technology, workflow, and direction are discussed with attention to how each uniquely contributed to the story. In an effort to objectively critique the finished film, feedback from test audiences will be examined.

Keywords: Robert Clay, Covered, MFA, Murder, Mother Son

Chapter 1

Introduction

A successful film leads an audience in the exploration of a timely theme, presented as a riveting story played out through the genuine performances of its actors. It was with this spirit that I chose to tell, in my thesis film, a dramatic story that explored the themes of family, trust, and loyalty. The dramatic genre provided the means to challenge my skills as a writer and aspiring director, testing my ability to create convincing characters on paper, and then to mold the actors' performances on the set, so that the audience would be drawn to the world I had created. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the production of my thesis film, *Covered*, including descriptions of the actions I took, as well as explanations of the thought processes that were behind decisions I made. I will evaluate the effectiveness of my work and whether or not I achieved my goal of creating a convincing, dramatic story told without the use of devices.

A brief look at my student film resume reveals a strong preference for the comedic film. I have enjoyed creating films that make audiences laugh. In the comedic film, audience feedback is immediate and certain; if they laugh, the film is successful. My first production at the University of New Orleans, *Anatomy of a Comeback* (2007), was a story about a failed TV actor who was trying to make ends meet by accepting small jobs that capitalized on his past TV popularity. In the story, he unwittingly provides a fledgling game show with its new catch phrase, triggering his comeback into the realm of the celebrity elite. My second production, *Friends Forever* (2008), featured a young magazine writer whose editor gives her a last minute chance to write the cover story for the latest issue. She must juggle the difficult task of writing with an impending deadline,

as well as assist her best friend, who has just been dumped by her boyfriend. The two women use their combined experiences to write a touching article about relationships that is so well received by the magazine's editor and readers that it spring boards the two women to fame and fortune.

These films define the kind of movies I have enjoyed making. Both are upbeat comedies that end with the characters greatly improving their circumstances as a result of their own initiative. These films also share two traits common to my early films, voice over and animation. I relied on both elements extensively to explain gaps in my stories, rather than taking the time to write a complete story, one that had no gaps. I used narration because it was easier than creating situations in which important information was shown rather than told. As I matured as a writer, I realized my use of narration and quick animation interludes was a crutch to make up for poor story telling on my part.

In his book, On Directing Film, David Mamet says of narration, "...the less you narrate, the more the audience is going to say, 'Wow what is going to happen next?'" (71). It was this quote that provided the direction for my thesis film. I determined to write a carefully structured story, with fully developed characters that would need no crutch in order to entertain an audience.

In my search for ideas, I focused on a true incident that happened in a suburb of my home town. The incident involved a teenager, who was accused of drug trafficking, but his father was able to cover up his involvement. While the father was successful in the cover up, one year later the boy was murdered by the other drug dealers involved in the crime. I used this event to shape my story, *Covered*.

In order to create a story that could more deeply explore the theme of family, I wanted the main character to be a mother who discovered a piece of evidence that proved her son guilty of a murder. As she faced this horrible situation, she was forced to evaluate her crumbled relationship with her son, and admit her failures as a mother. Realizing that her son was all she had, she chose to save him, rather than turn him over to the police.

Production design was used to create locations that emphasized specific traits of the characters, and hence, added to the film's effectiveness. While the son only appeared in one brief scene, the design of his bedroom, with model airplanes and baseball trophies decorating the walls, showed that he had not grown up. The mother's office and home were designed to convey her sense of need for organization and control.

The cinematography of the film built on the production design. Shots were created in order to manipulate the emotions of the audience during the progression of the story. The camera only moved to emphasize key emotional moments of the film, as in the mother's heartfelt monologue near the end, when she recalled her son's unconditional love for her. Shot decisions, including the use of a low key lighting set up, were successful in making locations appear uncomfortable and threatening.

The goal in editing was to fine tune the pacing of action and actors' performances, so the audience would be constantly drawn into the story. Ineffective dialogue was removed, so that the lines that remained were critical to the development of the story. Only performances that were essential to the audience's understanding of the story made the final cut.

The sound in the film was used to emphasize how alone Carol was in the story. Key sound effects added a sense of surprise and mystery to critical scenes. The somber music, made up of subdued string instruments, underscored key emotional moments in the film.

The film was shot on the Panasonic HVX-200 so that a professional looking image could be achieved. Because it was important to achieve an emotional response from the audience, it was essential to minimize potential technical shortcomings that could have destroyed audience engagement. This was achieved through the use of various software programs, including *Avid Media Composer* and *Steinberg Nuendo*.

Inspiration for the story, *Covered*, came from several movies that dealt with similar themes. *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980) provided a view of a family struggling to repair their relationships while trying to cope with the death of a son. *In the Valley of Elah* (Paul Haggis, 2007) featured a father who was attempting to solve the murder of his son as a way to posthumously make up for years of neglect.

Audience perception of the film was evaluated during several test screenings in which members of the audience completed comment cards, tailored for the movie. The audiences were made up of people of varying ages and genders. Audience feedback was the primary factor used in making editing decisions.

Chapter 2

Writing

In a broad sense, the screenplay explores the mother-son relationship under extreme circumstances. Specifically, it focuses on maternal love, existing in the background of a strained and superficial mother-son relationship, and how this love impacts a mother's decision to act.

One of the challenges in writing this screenplay was to create a situation that forced the mother, Carol, to make a very tough choice in deciding to protect her son, Austin. Her struggle with the decision is the core of the story, and, as such, it had to create significant uncertainty for the audience as to what she would ultimately choose to do.

Whether or not to cover her son's involvement in a murder forced her to decide if her son was worth saving. She had to acknowledge her empty, damaged relationship with him, and, in her act of covering for him, she embraced him, and attempted to make amends for her failure as a mother.

The viciousness of the son's act would, under normal circumstances, lead an audience to reject any character who attempted to help him. But, by transforming the mother's act of covering up a crime for her son into a heartfelt attempt to save him, the audience could feel sympathy for her, without breaking a moral code.

Robert McKee said in his book Story, "Skill in exposition means making it invisible." (149) To avoid using narration, exposition and conflict had to be shown through action. Each setting allowed the characters to communicate to the audience who they were. In the first act of the film, Carol was at her workplace, where she was faced

with a decision as to whether or not to fire a teacher who had committed a minor offense. In this setting, Carol was able to establish herself as someone who was unbending regarding enforcing rules. She was shown to be in a position of power, and the audience could infer that she had worked hard to get to her position. The audience could also infer that she sacrificed her family life in climbing the career ladder.

In order to make Carol's later struggle with breaking the law more intense, it was necessary to show her in this scene as someone who routinely would not ignore even minor rule infractions. The scene showed that even though the young teacher explained her mistake was common place and could be easily overlooked, Carol fired her.

The relationship between Carol and Austin was also established in this scene. Throughout the meeting with the teacher, Carol was interrupted by her secretary with the message that her son was on the phone. Carol refused the call multiple times, even with the knowledge that the call was urgent. Her behavior suggested that she viewed calls from her son as trivial matters, and that nothing concerning him could be more urgent than her work. The phone call was the inciting incident for Carol because it established her initial problem; her son was in jail.

In the second scene, a police station hallway, Carol was provided with the cold, hard facts of the situation through a lawyer she hired. The police station served as an effective location because it removed Carol from her comfort zone and raised the stakes of the story. The police force was established as an obstacle Carol had to face, and presented her with the real possibility that her son was in serious trouble.

The scene began with Carol sitting alone in a long hallway, which emphasized her isolation and loneliness. The lawyer, Greg Nowak, then entered, sat next to Carol, and

informed her that her son was merely being questioned by the police, but had not been charged with a crime. He also told her that Austin would most likely be released the next day.

A lawyer was a logical character for communicating this critical information, because attorneys are generally viewed as authoritative and knowledgeable figures, and would immediately be trusted by the audience to report only the facts. He also provided a means for Carol to reveal how she was feeling through their interaction.

Although this scene appeared to be simple and straightforward, it was crucial in the broad scope of the story. It established Carol's goal as finding a way to get her son out of jail. Since it seemed that Austin would be released the next day, the obvious solution for Carol was to do nothing. The scene revealed the murdered victim to be someone Carol knew, which should make her final decision more difficult. However, most importantly for the story, the scene established that there was neither evidence nor eye witness accounts that tied Austin to this crime. When Carol later discovered the murder weapon, she held the only piece of evidence that could connect her son to the crime. His fate was completely in her hands.

In the original script, Carol grieved openly in this scene for the murdered girl, whom she knew very well. While this connection with the victim would have made Carol's ultimate choice more complicated, it would have also served to vilify Carol. Since the story is about maternal love and restoration of the mother-son relationship, attempts to humanize the victim were abandoned. Carol's relationship to the victim was shown simply through a photograph that she held in her hand in a later scene.

The story continued when Carol was granted permission to see her son for a moment in a holding room. A nondescript room was selected for this scene, so that focus would be maintained on Carol and Austin. The room mirrored the relationship between the two, as it was an uncomfortable setting in which the characters were forced to position themselves across a table from each other. The distance between mother and son was emphasized in the physical set up of the scene, as well as in the dialogue.

Carol asked Austin for his version of the story and was given an account that matched what the lawyer had already told her. While her goal in the scene was to discover some piece of information that would have supported his innocence, Austin was unable to give her anything helpful. Carol resorted to preaching her mantra, “Just be honest, and everything will be fine.” This line allowed Carol’s belief in the absolutes of right and wrong to be reinforced.

As Carol walked to the door, Austin asked her to do his laundry. This line gave Carol a defined, though seemingly trivial, objective. It was later that Carol remembered the request and wondered whether or not her son was trying to tell her something.

The line was also designed to add suspense, without revealing Austin’s guilt. Austin’s dialogue and actions had to portray the illusion of a shell-shocked teenager, whose girlfriend had just been murdered, in order for there to be a surprise reversal, when his guilt was revealed.

The script called for a “lanky kid with a young face for a teenager.” Such a casting for this character served to mislead the audience into underestimating what he was capable of doing, just as Carol did. The audience was also given several facts that

supported Austin's innocence, which served to further remove suspicion that he was the murderer

Carol's house was the setting for a brief montage in which she was shown busying herself with chores. This action allowed the audience to see that Carol handled stress in her life by staying busy. A close up of a family portrait emphasized that Carol had only Austin. This photograph foreshadowed the emotional speech Carol gave later in the film. The scene also served to draw out the suspense as to when Carol would do Austin's laundry.

The next scene showed Carol in Austin's messy room with a laundry basket in her arms. Model airplanes and baseball trophies decorated the room, suggesting that Austin had never tried to shed the image of a child. Carol immediately began to clean up the room, her actions hinting to the audience that she had not encouraged Austin to grow up.

Since the scene contained no dialogue, it was necessary to move the action quickly, in order to avoid dragging out the suspense. Carol noticed an overflowing laundry hamper, emptied it, and discovered a black trash bag at the bottom. This moment gave the audience its first hint at the forthcoming revelation. Carol dumped the bag on the floor and a loud thud was heard. She removed several items of clothing and discovered a revolver.

The discovery of the gun was plot point I of the story. From the beginning, Carol was constantly reassured that her son was innocent and was about to be freed. The gun served as a reversal in Carol's situation, which forced her to reassess her plight. The discovery of the gun was also a fulfillment audience expectations since hearing Austin ask his mother to do his laundry.

The gun put the responsibility of the murder squarely on Austin's shoulders. He was guilty, and Carol's knowledge of his irrefutable guilt was essential for the future emotional development of the story. Austin included Carol in his guilt by telling her where the gun was. He put the full burden of his guilt and his future on her, with his request for her to "do my laundry."

Carol then knew that her original plan of waiting for Austin to get home would no longer be a plausible course of action. She responded by sitting motionless against a wall, holding a picture of her son and the smiling girl he murdered. Carol was forced into action, when the doorbell rang, and despite her ignoring it, the knocking continued. She rose to answer it.

For the story to proceed, Carol needed a catalyst that would force her to confront her suppressed emotional turmoil. A policeman, sent to her home, to follow up on the murder investigation, fulfilled that purpose. It was necessary for Carol to feel comfortable enough around the officer so that she would let her emotional guard down enough to tell her story about her son. As such, the police officer could not be a menacing, intimidating presence. The arrival of the police officer also served as the midpoint for the story.

Jack Harper was to be a young, nervous rookie, who felt he was imposing by being at Carol's house at such a late hour. In his introduction, he explained that he was supposed to question Carol at the station, but did not get his job done. He said, "They're pretty insistent I get this done as soon as possible." Harper seemed to say that although he was on the police force, he was not one of "them." This key line established Harper,

in Carol's eye, as being unrelated to the policemen that were trying to find evidence to keep her son in jail.

With a police officer in the house, the underlying tension increased as the audience and Carol knew there was a gun in the bedroom. However, Harper was ignorant of this fact. He began his questioning by reading down his list. The questions were routine so the audience would not think that Harper was trying to trick Carol into confessing.

At first, Carol was able to answer without a display of feeling, but the questions continued to come. When Harper asked, "Do you own any guns in your home?", Carol was finally forced to confront her emotions. Emotionally exhausted, she sat down at the table. To the inexperienced Harper, this would be the act of any person who had been through a trying day.

Harper's cell phone rang at this moment. This call from Harper's wife served as plot point II. The call triggered Harper's and Carol's conversation about family and children. It was sufficient motivation for Carol to tell the story she had been thinking about since finding the gun.

Carol's speech served as the way for her to express the emotional conflict she was feeling towards her son. The story climaxed with the simple fact that Austin chose Carol, over all others. Carol's commitment to her son became evident when she told Harper that there were no guns in her home and Harper soon left.

A brief montage was used to end the film. In it, Carol gathered the dirty clothes and gun and hurriedly left the house. Although the actual ending was left open, the audience was presented with enough evidence to believe that Carol was going to destroy

the gun. The audience was left to wonder how this act would affect Carol's future relationship with her son.

Directing

The casting of the film began with a careful analysis of each character, so that the best possible actor for each role could be selected. For the part of Carol, there were two major requirements. First, the actress had to be someone of the appropriate age, who could believably have a 17 year old son. The film would have failed outright if the audience could not have accepted Austin as the actress' son. Second, the actress had to demonstrate the ability to play through Carol's emotional arc during the audition process. Had the actress been unable to draw the audience into her world during her emotional changes, the film would not have been engaging. Finding an actress who met both of these requirements proved to be difficult.

Word of mouth from other graduate students was the most successful method for finding potential actresses, and resulted in two possible considerations. Each actress presented with her own strengths and weaknesses. One actress had a naturally powerful and controlling presence on screen. A confident tone was evident in each of her script readings. Her tone was exactly what was needed to portray Carol in the beginning of the film. However, this actress struggled to shed the authoritative façade when the script called for Carol to breakdown and tell the custody story of Austin. She was never able to give a fully sympathetic delivery of Carol's monologue.

The other actress, Lydia Laine, portrayed a more sympathetic character in her readings of the script. Her natural personality was friendly and social, and it seemed that the audience would have an easier time identifying with her as Carol. During her test

reading of the monologue, she was able to gradually let her emotions progress through the piece. Although she could not, in the audition, demonstrate the powerful personality of Carol, needed at the beginning of the film, she was selected for the part. It appeared that it would be much easier to guide her to display a more powerful character, than it would have been to help the first actress improve her emotional delivery.

The character of Jack Harper was the second most important part in the film, and proved to be the most difficult to cast. The part was written for a specific actor, who was unable to accept the role due to scheduling conflicts. Two open casting calls for the part proved fruitless. Hunter McGregor was finally recommended by both Carmen Torres and Todd Campbell. Hunter had been cast as a police officer in several previous films, including two graduate student projects. After an audition in which he demonstrated his ability to perform the part of a nervous, unsure cop who would not present a threat to Carol, he was cast in the part.

In evaluating the effectiveness of this casting choice, the amount of negative feedback by test audiences toward the Harper character cannot be ignored. Many viewers stated that they had a hard time believing Hunter was a police officer, because of his behavior, and his lack of a uniform. However, Hunter was not to blame for this. The fault was in the creation and screen development of the Harper character. In order to portray Harper as someone Carol could talk to, he could not be a threatening presence. But the decision to have him appear in street clothing, as well as be nervous, conflicted with the audience's expectations of a policeman and caused confusion. It was this confusion that resulted in a negative audience reaction to the Harper character. More

consideration should have been placed on striking a balance between an audience's perception of a police officer and the individual needs of the story.

Phil Karnel, a faculty member in the FTCA department at UNO, was originally cast for the character of Greg Nowak. However, the day of the shoot, Phil was unable to perform due to illness. This led to the biggest challenge faced while shooting. Although rescheduling the shooting of the scene was considered, the decision was made to approach a known actor, who would be able to learn his lines and deliver a strong performance, with only a few hours notice. Dr. David Hoover, the Department Chair for FTCA, was asked to fill the role of Greg Nowak, and he accepted. David brought a "down home" feel to the character. His performance was honest and sincere as he provided Carol with the facts and support in her hour of need.

Austin was only onscreen for one scene and, in this scene, had to give a performance that would mislead the audience, so that they would not be convinced of his guilt. Tyler Russell was cast as Austin, not only because he was a strong actor, but also because he could conceivably play a 17 year old, even though he is in his twenties. Tyler's performance as a baffled, frightened teenager connected with audiences in such a way that very few of them reported that they believed him to be guilty of the murder of his girlfriend. His performance created an ambiguous effect, so that the audience did not realize his guilt initially, but, upon reflection after seeing the film, could view his actions as suspicious.

The role of Beth Wade, the teacher in the first scene, was a late addition to the script. The need for an actress in a short time frame did not allow for an open casting call. Yet, a reliable actress was needed, as the part required the actress to win the

audience's sympathy within a few lines. The role was in strong contrast to the powerful, unyielding Carol. Carmen Torres, a UNO graduate student, was cast in the part.

The success of the performances was due in large part to the fact that the actors fully understood their characters, and the circumstances in which they found themselves. Detailed back story for each character was given to the actors so that they could prepare for their performances. During preproduction of the movie, meetings were held with each actor to talk about his or her character. For example, a meeting with Carmen Torres, who played Beth Wade, focused on how to use the limited amount of screen time, so that the character could achieve a connection with the audience. If the audience perceived Beth as deserving of a second chance for a minor mistake, and saw that Carol refused to bend the rules for this sweet teacher, the result would be that the audience gained a better understanding of Carol's views of right and wrong.

In a meeting about the character of Greg Nowak, it was explained that this lawyer was the first person who appeared to be on Carol's side. The audience needed to understand that in a time of serious need, the only person Carol had to call was a lawyer from work. This would help emphasize how alone Carol was. It was agreed that Greg would act as if he was consoling a total stranger who had just been through a very traumatic experience. His action was to console, and his objective was to comfort. His performance had to be filled with moments of uncomfortable silence as he grappled with what to say next to a familiar woman he barely knew. Such a performance would convince the audience that, except for Austin, Carol was completely alone in the world.

When a performance did not achieve the desired effect, a variety of methods were used to help the actor. For example, in the first scene when Carol finally answered the

phone call from Austin, she needed to show the audience how frustrated and indifferent she felt, even though her secretary had informed her that it was urgent. If Carol were focused on something else, the phone call would obviously appear unimportant to her. However, during numerous takes, Lydia displayed too much concern over Austin when she answered the phone. The first attempt at correcting the performance was to explain that in Carol's mind, it was just a phone call to inform her that they are out of milk in the house. After unsatisfactory several takes, a new tactic was used. Lydia was given a sheet of paper with a sentence written on it. She was charged with copying the sentence perfectly, while she answered the phone. Both her priority and objective were to copy this sentence flawlessly, and to treat the dialogue as a secondary concern. With this new approach, Lydia was able to take the phone call with the indifference needed, and, in two takes, the shot was complete.

Production Design

Through production design, many opportunities were created so that information could be revealed about the characters. Spencer Abadie, the production designer, filled the spaces in all locations, so that each setting conveyed something about the characters. In Carol's office, her sense of professionalism and organization were implied. Several props, including a dual pen mount, were placed prominently on her desk. Encyclopedias in the background suggested a high level of education, as well as an academic setting. The desk and office were meticulously organized and mirrored the control that Carol had over her life. Pictures of Austin were placed on shelves in the back of the room, indicating that family had been a neglected priority in her life.

Although the actual location was an office, it was being used as a storage closet and contained several boxes. One of the stipulations made in allowing the use of the room, was that the boxes could not be moved out of the room. However, if the boxes appeared on film, the audience would infer that Carol was either unorganized or in transit. The problem was solved when several of the boxes were hidden by a large book case. The remaining boxes were covered with a black bed sheet so they would be lost in the shadows at the edge of the frame.

It was necessary for the audience to be able to immediately identify the next location as a police station. Props that would create a convincing setting were essential, as the real location was a hallway in the Kirshman Business building. Again, with permission to shoot in this location, came certain stipulations. Nothing could be attached to the walls with anything other than painter's tape. Since painter's tape can only support very light weight materials, items that could be hung from the walls were limited. Spencer located several 1 inch block letters that were able to be mounted on the wall with the tape. The letters were prominently featured as they spelled out the words, "Vesta Police Dept." in this important scene. This set decoration not only served to orient the audience to the new setting, but also loomed over Carol during the entire scene. The ominous air was completed by a police flag which was also hung from the wall.

The interrogation room was noteworthy for its lack of production design. A simple table and two chairs effectively portrayed the location. Since the focus of this scene was on the characters and their relationship, it was important that nothing in the background distract the audience from the interaction.

Production design played an important role in the creation of Austin's room. While the audience had already met the 17 year old Austin, they saw in his room a place that could have been home to an eleven year old. This set dressing emphasized Carol's view of her son as an immature child. The shelves were packed with little league baseball trophies, model airplanes, and a wooden display that spelled out "Austin." The scene was introduced with a close up of this shelf, which quickly established the discrepancy between the real Austin and his room. Laundry was strewn about the floor, and while this played an important part in the story, it also served to show how irresponsible Austin was with his possessions. Austin's dirty room also indicated that this was an area outside Carol's sphere of influence. Every other location associated with her was organized and clean. The messiness suggested that Carol rarely ventured into this room, confirming the distance between Carol and her son. After she discovered the gun, she sat in the room and stared, trying to reconcile her image of her son with the picture that was quickly unfolding. She had to come to an acceptance of the fact that he was capable of much more than she imagined.

The kitchen was Carol's domain. While it contained dirty dishes in the sink, the overall picture was one of neatness and organization. The dirty dishes demonstrated that Carol left just enough mess behind so that she would always have something with which to busy herself.

Cinematography

Shooting was pre-planned to avoid confusion or delays caused by the camera set ups. Key personnel traveled to the locations weeks in advance, to take detailed still

pictures of the setting. These efforts allowed the production to maximize each setting's unique layout when the shots were pre-planned. For example, the study revealed that in the hallway being used for the police station, there were deep alcoves on one side in which a dolly track could be easily, and unobtrusively, set. As a result, the dolly shot which established the police station was created. The study of the kitchen location revealed that there was not enough room to place the camera in order to film a close up of Carol. A plan was made to place the camera outside the house, and shoot through the kitchen window so that the close ups could be obtained.

When planning the shots, the goal was to maximize the coverage of each scene. This effort proved to be especially beneficial in the kitchen scene. The dialogue exchange between Harper and Carol was covered from seven angles. Each angle captured a specific emotional aspect of the scene. For example, while Carol washed dishes at the sink, a shot was made from Harper's perspective which showed Carol only from her back. This shot reinforced to the audience that, from Harper's perspective, Carol was calmly washing the dishes. Nothing in her behavior would cause him to suspect anything. The shot from Harper's perspective was contrasted with a profile shot of Carol at the sink. From this angle, Carol's facial reactions could be seen by the audience. Her reactions were subtle, often involving a simple glance, but something that could not be seen from Harper's perspective. The audience was able to understand the scene from each character's perspective, due, in large part, to the abundance of angles from which shots were made.

Color temperature was also used to influence the audience's perception in different locations. Warm lighting temperature was used in areas that were in Carol's

comfort zone, in both the office and house locations. Through the use of orange and red tints in these locations, the audience could sense Carol's feelings of comfort and safety. Conversely, a cool temperature was used for settings that were foreign and threatening to Carol. A cool temperature was used in both the police station hallway and in the interrogation room with Austin. Both scenes featured a blue tint to accentuate feelings of danger and suspense.

A low key lighting set up was used for most of the film. In this set up, shadows were emphasized, creating the feelings of uneasiness and mystery. Stanley Kubrick's *Eyes Wide Shut* was referenced in order to identify ways to make a seemingly innocent kitchen appear menacing. Austin's bedroom scene featured a dark room, lit by only a small table lamp and a length of rope light running along a bookcase. The shadows in the room suggested an ominous presence, in contrast to the innocent childish objects located there. When Carol discovered the gun, her face was half in shadow, half in light, which hinted at the coming choice she had to make.

It was important that the lights not distract from the performance. Each light had to be properly motivated, so that the audience would not question the source of a strange light. As such, an abundance of practical lighting was used throughout the film, to suggest the location of a room's light. The multiple practical lights, used in each scene, allowed for freedom to place the film lights with full confidence of their properness in that the audience's eye.

It was often necessary to balance an existing practical light in order for it to fit the lighting set up. In the kitchen scene, the camera pans with Carol and Harper as they walk from the front door to the kitchen. A chandelier was in the middle of the shot. It had six

60 watt light bulbs that washed out the image and destroyed the low key lighting approach. The 60 watt bulbs were replaced with six 2 watt bulbs, which barely emitted any light at all. However, since the 2 watt bulbs did provide a glow, they suggested to the audience that the chandelier was responsible for lighting the scene.

The Lowell lighting kit was used for most of the lighting in the film. These lights are extremely light weight and compact, and can be placed in tight locations or hung from the ceiling. Standard household light bulbs can be used with this kit, which is beneficial in films such as this one, when it is important to mimic the tungsten feel of household bulbs. In the kitchen location, a preexisting row of spot lights was pointed directly on the kitchen counter. However, in the spot where the Harper character stood, there was no light. If left unaltered, the audience may have attempted to find meaning in the fact that Harper enters a shadow area for his questioning. To correct for this, a Lowell light was hung from above, at the same position as the preexisting spotlights, and with the exact bulb used by the other spot lights. This seamlessly tied together the lighting of the room, and served to focus the audience's attention on the performance rather than the lighting.

In *Covered*, camera movements were used to emphasize key emotional moments in the film. Three critical moments were selected for dolly shots. The first dolly shot was used to gradually ease the audience into the police station hallway. The jump from her office to the police station was a major emotional turning point for Carol, who was forced to adapt to the new uncertainties of her situation. The dolly shot emphasized the significant change this character made in a matter of one cut in the edit. In the previous scene, Carol dominated the frame as she fired the young teacher. In the police hallway, Carol appeared diminutive and small in the large space of the hallway. The second dolly

shot was used when Carol told the story of her son at the divorce proceedings. The dolly moved very slowly and almost went unnoticed. As Carol became more emotional during her story, the camera crept in. By the time Carol reached the climax of her story, the camera was tight on her. The audience was able to fully empathize with this distressed mother whose son was all she had.

Editing

After production wrapped, the priority was to quickly assemble a rough cut and begin the process of obtaining feedback. While there were parts of the film that immediately stood out as potential cuts, the first cut was assembled as close to the shooting script as possible. This strategy allowed for the viewing of the story as it was scripted, and presented the opportunity to identify places where either script or performance were lacking.

A common audience complaint from the rough cut was that Carol was being upstaged by the other actors in each scene. It was noted that in some instances, the editing tended to favor stronger performances by supporting actors over sub-par performances by the lead. As a result, scenes lost focus and confused the audience.

For example, the original script for the first scene in which Carol fired the teacher, called for Carol to listen silently while Beth pled her case. The result was a scene that was almost entirely about the Beth character. To remedy this problem, the majority of Beth's lines were edited out, and an increased amount of time was spent focusing on Carol's reaction shots as she listened. With these edits, the audience could focus on the main character, Carol.

The rough cut also provided an opportunity to identify parts of the film which bordered on the melodramatic. The police station hallway scene, in particular, struck a melodramatic chord with several viewers who saw the rough cut. For example, in the original script, Carol openly grieved for the murdered girl. She talked to Greg about having dinner with her, and making strawberry sweet tea, which was the girl's favorite drink. The purpose of this dialogue was to establish a link between Carol and the victim, so that Carol's ultimate decision would be more difficult to make. However, this dialogue caused Carol to shed her emotional shield much too early in the film, and as a result, the audience interpreted it as overly dramatic. This dialogue also caused Carol's major speech at the end of the film to lose its potency, as the audience expected an emotional outburst from her, having seen one earlier in the film. The surprise of her emotional arc was lost.

Major revisions were also required to the scene with Harper at Carol's front door. The original scene featured a bumbling Harper trying to explain why he was on Carol's doorstep, but audiences expressed their inability to accept this man as a police officer. In response to this criticism, Harper's entrance was edited to make him appear more confident. Instead of giving details about his mistakes, in the final cut, he simply identified himself, and asked if he could ask Carol a few questions. These edits brought Harper's character closer to the audience standard for a policeman.

During the filming of the kitchen scene, Carol's performance failed to reach the needed emotional levels during Harper's questioning. When Harper asked several questions in quick succession, Carol was to grow increasingly agitated and angry. However, in response to the questioning, Carol was either extremely agitated, or

incredibly calm. Since the situation occurred near the end of the shooting day, the decision was made to create this build up in editing.

Although there was no emotional build up within the takes themselves, Carol's varied performances on all the takes featured the complete range of emotion needed for the scene. A series of takes was dedicated to Carol simply saying the word "No," with different expression. In editing, the build-up was created using a combination of these takes, with an end result of emotional escalation, which ended with Carol banging her hands on the sink in disgust.

Several people who viewed the rough cut stated that this much of an emotional outburst from Carol and would certainly be an obvious sign of guilt that even a rookie officer could not miss. In response, Carol's reaction to the questioning was then mellowed by using footage from the various "No" takes.

While Carol's performance of the final speech at the film's climax received a positive reaction, there were several complaints about the speech being too slow and lengthy. Comments centered on the unnecessary fillers in the speech. But cuts that could be made were limited, since it was one continuous take on a dolly. The speech was pared down to its essential lines and cut-a-ways of Harper were used whenever a cut in the speech was made. The result was a monologue with a smooth flow, without distractions.

The final version of the film was very well received. Audience reaction to the pacing was almost universally positive. In addition, no audience member reported that they were bored by the movie. These positive reactions resulted from the solid performances by the cast, as well as the strong editing pace of the story.

Sound

While sound is one of the most unnoticed elements of a film when done properly, it is the most noticed when poorly executed. As such, a substantial portion of the budget for *Covered* was allocated to the hiring of an experienced sound mixer and boom operator, so that the best possible production audio could be recorded on-set. With high quality audio, sound could be used to effectively support the emotional development of the story.

One critical task was to find proper sound effects to accompany the emotional events in the script. For example, when Carol emptied the black trash bag containing the murder weapon, a sound was needed to indicate the gun hitting the floor. This sound would also create a sense of mystery and surprise for the audience, as they expected to hear only clothes falling softly to the floor. The loud metallic thud heard in the scene was achieved by recording a large metal weight hitting a wooden floor.

Sound effects also played an important role as Carol sat alone in Austin's room, reeling from the discovery of the gun her son used to murder his girlfriend. As she sat, stunned, a doorbell was heard, followed immediately by persistent knocking. These sound effects were used to increase the suspense of the scene, and create the concern that someone was about to enter the house and catch Carol with the gun. The audience's expectation of danger based on these sounds was in direct contrast to the sight of the timid police officer who was revealed when Carol opened the door. The audience had to

immediately adjust their expectations and question whether or not this officer would be able to discover the gun.

Once picture lock had been achieved, the *Avid* project was imported into *Nuendo*, a stand alone audio adjustment program, in which the sound was mixed for the finished film. Within this program, the overall sound levels were adjusted, so that the variations between shots and takes were smoothed. Even though the film was shot in quiet locations, each camera set up required a new sound set up as well. The slight variations of frequencies, resulting from the multiple takes, had to be blended together, so that smooth transitions from shot to shot could be achieved.

In post production sound, the ambient sound in each scene was modified so that it would reinforce the emotions of the characters. David Sonnenschein stated in his book, Sound Design, that the key element was to “look for the subtext that these environments may lend to the development of the story and characters.” For example, the police station hallway seemed empty because it was devoid of all life, except for the two characters talking to each other. Sound, however, was used to accentuate how alone they actually were. The simple rumble of an air conditioner was used to create a sense of uneasiness. Police car sirens in the distance emphasized the danger of the situation for Carol and her son.

The scene with Carol and Austin at the police station required special attention to sound, due to on-set recording problems. The sound in the scene was originally dominated by a loud air conditioner roar, which made it impossible for the audience to easily hear what the characters were saying. This sound was such a distraction for the audience that that they became removed from the emotional development of the story.

Every attempt to remove the air conditioner roar made the audio even worse. The sound in the scene was finally corrected through the use of ADR, automatic dialogue replacement. In this technique, the actors re-record their dialogue in a controlled sound environment. Both Tyler and Lydia re-recorded their lines in such an environment, attempting to match their previous performances.

In addition to the dialogue, the ambient sound for the entire room had to be recreated. To accomplish this, the air conditioner roar was recorded and placed on an isolated track, so it could be individually adjusted. Sound effects, such as the door opening, and Carol sitting down in the chair, were recorded as well. The end result was a scene in which the sound design was constructed entirely in post production sound. These efforts eliminated every distraction for the audience, so that the emotional development of the story could continue.

Music was also created for the film in *Nuendo*. Music was needed to underscore the key emotional moments of the film, without bringing attention to itself. In order to determine the exact type of music that would best accomplish this task, several temporary music tracks were added to the rough cut of the film. These temporary tracks featured very simple melodies played by somber strings. Audience reaction to the temporary tracks was very positive. However, since the temporary tracks could not be used in the final film cut without copyright violations, original music had to be written that would give the same feel as the temporary tracks had done. The software program Halion *Strings* was used to compose the original music entirely in *Nuendo*. *Halion Strings* is program that contains not only virtual renderings of a real instruments, but also recordings of these string instruments, as played by professional musicians. These

samples are programmed onto a MIDI keyboard. To create music, the exact notes are selected by striking notes on the keyboard. Volume for the various instruments can be adjusted, as well. Because of this program, a virtual professional string section was available for use in creating the original music for *Covered*. The original music underscored the film, and mirrored the style and feel of the well received temporary tracks. The music created with *Halion Strings* and heard in the final cut was very well received by audiences.

Technology and Workflow

Many software programs were used during the production of *Covered*, and the production crew was able to take advantage of recent upgrades in equipment and software made by the UNO film program. The screenwriting program, *Final Draft*, was used extensively in the preproduction stage. The original script was written with this program, and various charts and organizational graphs to aid in filming were exported. The charts used were about characters, props, and location breakdowns. In addition, the program allowed for a PDF version of the script to be easily exported, so that it could be sent to cast and crew.

The storyboarding program, *Frameforge*, was used to create detailed overheads of the sets and locations. These overheads proved to be quite helpful, as the main shooting location was over 45 minutes away. The distance to the location hindered a large tech scout, so the overheads were used to plan the actual storyboards for the film, as well as, assist with the blocking of the actors' movements. With these preliminaries done, the cast and crew could be familiarized with the size and space of each location on the day of the shoot.

Adobe Photoshop CS3 was used to organize the picture storyboards taken by the director of photography. The picture storyboards were taken on location with a digital still camera, which was positioned in a manner similar to what would be the position of the camera on day of the shoot. The storyboards were organized in the shooting order of the day, and given to key personnel on set, including the sound mixer and assistant director.

Entertainment Partner software, *MovieMagic*, also proved useful during the preproduction phase of the film. Both the scheduling and budgeting components of this program were used to create detailed breakdowns of the scenes. These documents were combined in production folders that were given to the key personal on set.

The film was shot on the Panasonic HVX200 camera, which was selected because it was the highest quality camera available through the University equipment room. This camera allowed the film to be shot in high definition on solid state P2 media cards, and since the P2 cards made it unnecessary to record on tape, playback was easily achieved. The HVX200 camera records MXF files onto a P2 card. The size of these files depends on the shooting rate and resolution. *Covered* was shot using the 720p (progressive) at 24 frames per second native. These settings allowed for 40 minutes of footage to be contained on a 16GB P2 card. As the production had access to only two P2 cards, it was necessary to download the footage from one card, while shooting with the other. It was essential to avoid using the camera as a transfer device, because shooting would stop while the camera dumped the footage. A crew member was designated as the P2 specialist, in charge of managing the P2 media. It was this crew member who was responsible for the proper transfer of each card. A laptop was on set for transferring the

P2 media. This was an extremely efficient transfer method, and shooting was never delayed by the transfers. The dailies were available to watch at the end of each shooting day.

Production audio was recorded using the Fostex FR-2 digital audio recorder. The FR-2 records audio on a 2GB Flash card in the form of WAV files. Due to the large capacity of the Flash card, it was never necessary to dump the audio during a day of shooting. The audio mixer was in charge of transferring the sound after the shoot, to two designated hard drives before reformatting the card for the next day's shoot. This strategy allowed for multiple copies of the audio to exist, providing backup in case of damage to one hard drive.

After shooting was complete, the MXF and WAV files were imported into *Avid Media Composer*, so that the files could be edited. The clips were synced with their respective audio tracks, and the cut was assembled. Since only basic titles were required, the *Avid Marquee tool* was sufficient for this task. The scale of the opening title was key framed in this program to create a slight zoom in on the main title. After picture locked had been reached, the director of photography color corrected the film using the *Avid* color correction application.

Once the picture was completely finished, the focus shifted to postproduction sound. The sound was exported from *Avid* as an AAF file, and then imported into *Steinberg Nuendo*, which was used for all the post production audio. The AAF file was advantageous because it maintains audio clips and their relative locations on the timeline, which enabled an easy transition from *Avid* to *Nuendo*. In order to have a reference video track to be used while work was completed on the audio, a Quicktime MOV file was

exported at 15:1 resolution. Since the picture was only to be used as a reference, it was not necessary to have a large, high quality file. Once the audio was corrected, the sound was exported as a stereo WAV file.

The finished picture was exported as a standard-definition MPEG-2 file for the DVD creation. *Adobe Encore* was used for the DVD project. *Photoshop* was used to generate the various menu pages and button roll overs. The stereo audio file and MPEG-2 were synced within the DVD program and exported from *Encore*. In addition to having the finished *Encore* project, a build folder of the DVD was created, and will allow for future creation of the DVD file. In addition to the standard definition version of the film, an uncompressed QuickTime file was exported which can be transferred to various tape mediums.

Chapter 3

Additional Influences on the Story

The basis for the story was an incident that took place in the town of Irondale, Alabama, a suburb of Birmingham. Ryan Fuller (not his real name) was perceived by his peers and teachers to be a poor student, who was away from school, due to truancy and suspensions, more than he was present. He dropped out of high school and became involved with a criminal element. His crimes eventually led to his arrest for the possession of marijuana in his car. Although he could have been charged with drug trafficking, he was released without further investigation.

The story was leaked to the public a month later. The members of the Irondale City Council initiated their own investigation to find out how the story was exposed. The public soon learned that Ryan's father was a member of the city council, and had played a large role in keeping the initial incident from the public. He had used his connections to completely absolve his son of any wrong doing. The person responsible for the leak was never found, however, and the public soon forgot about the story.

Two years later, Ryan was shot and killed by drug dealers during a botched drug sell. The story's tragic ending demonstrated that the father's actions, though seemingly to protect his son, only hastened Ryan's death. Because he was not punished for his crime, the son continued with his illegal behavior, and his murder was the result.

Changes were made to the actual event in the writing of the screenplay, *Covered*. The main character needed to be a woman, as it was believed that audiences could better sympathize with a lonely mother who chose to protect her son, rather than a stronger

father. The actual murder was deemphasized, as well. The murder in *Covered* was only the catalyst for bringing mother and son together.

Several Hollywood films were used to provide a springboard for ideas as to how to approach this topic. As stated earlier, the main influence was the film *Ordinary People* (1980) by Robert Redford. In this film, a family struggled to stay together after one son was killed in a boating accident, and the other son, unsuccessfully, attempted suicide.

While this movie dealt with the themes of lost love and death, it ended on an optimistic tone, with the father and remaining son beginning the repair of their relationship. The feeling of optimism that a parent and child could be reunited provided the inspiration for the ending of *Covered*. While Carol's choice to protect her son will likely end in disaster for him, the strong maternal feelings she displays when her child is in trouble touch the audience.

In the Valley of Elah (2007) by Paul Haggis provided guidance in dealing with a family torn apart by a murder. In this film, a father learned that his son was AWOL from his military base. The father began an investigation into the son's disappearance and discovered that his son had been murdered. The father grieved over the loss of his son and mourned the fact that he might have done something to help him. The father found the murderer, but it did not bring the closure he sought.

The father in this movie provided inspiration for the development of the character of Carol. In the film, the father is a retired career man who made his way up the ladder with hard work and long hours. His choice to focus on his career resulted in his having only a superficial relationship with his son. The father attempted to solve his son's

murder as a means of making up for years of neglecting him. Carol is in a similar situation, except she feels there is still time to remedy the situation and save her relationship with her son.

Chapter 4

Analysis

In order to gauge audience perception of the film, test screenings were held as soon as a rough cut could be shown. These screening sessions were one-on-one viewings, in which the viewer's reactions were closely observed throughout the film. The test screeners were carefully selected, and included film students as well as persons with no background in film studies. As such, initial feedback consisted of both story critiques and technical comments. It was because of this early feedback that several critical problems, pacing and performance deficits, were identified.

Once a second cut was made, the film was shown to a broader audience, which included people of varying ages and genders. Comment cards were distributed to the audience in order to gather information about specific parts of the film, such as the level of sympathy felt for Carol. Questions ranged from the broad, "Did you feel this film was boring?", to the specific, "Were you surprised by the revelation of the gun?" Use of the comment cards also enabled audience members to make additional comments or ask more questions. An analysis of these cards revealed several common concerns and praises.

A common criticism was that the first scene, in Carol's office, was confusing. Several screeners were unsure as to why the scene was even included in the film as it did not directly relate to the murder. The teacher, Beth, who was being fired also confused screeners. Because the majority of the Beth's speech was edited out, the exact conflict between Carol and Beth was ambiguous. Since the purpose of the scene was to show Carol rigorously enforcing rules, regardless of the details of a situation, it was felt that the

scene was satisfactory. However, with the knowledge that the scene was obviously confusing to the viewers, some of Beth's lines were added back into her speech, to clarify that her offense was minor and might be overlooked. While the reworked scene still retained a sense of mystery, future audiences seemed to accept it as an introduction to Carol's character.

The most severe criticism was directed toward the character of Jack Harper, and this criticism was universal among audiences. The viewers could not accept him as a police officer. He was thought to be too young, more akin to a high school teacher, than a police officer. One viewer stated, "He was a bit fidgety but not in a way that conveyed a nervous detective, more like a fidgety actor." They also felt that even a nervous police officer would have recognized the signs of guilt in Carol when she banged her hands on the sink. Decisions concerning his costume played a role in these perceptions and could not be modified. To address other concerns, Harper's performance was edited so that it lost some of its unappealing nature. Carol's reaction to Harper's questioning was also edited, so that audiences could understand why he was not suspicious of her.

Another criticism from some was that Carol never fully debated the decision as to what to do with the gun. They felt she made the decision as soon as she found the gun, and it was only a matter of having the time to destroy the evidence, and, thus, save her son. Both writing and editing decisions caused these audience perceptions. One cause was that the murdered girl was a total stranger to the audience, and, seemingly to Carol, as attempts to humanize the victim were edited out. For some audience members, this made Carol's choice one sided, and, there was no surprise when Carol chose her son. One screener wrote, "I felt she was not debating the issue, and her speech at the end was

merely justification.” However, this complaint is equaled by praises for Carol’s performance when she does decide to choose her son. Though the decision to save her son might not have been a surprise, Carol’s heartfelt speech connected with the majority of viewers. Instead of the film’s climax being achieved through Carol’s action of choosing her son, it was reached when she expressed her reasons for choosing him.

Many areas of the film were found by audiences to be quite successful, even from the first cut. 90% of screeners reported that they were able to clearly follow the progression of the story. This percentage confirmed that the goal of screenwriting, to present a clear story without the assistance of narration, was achieved. Viewers did not find the film melodramatic.

The most important response from audience members was the very positive reaction to Carol’s character. The primary goal of this screen play was to create a sympathetic main character, who would retain the audience’s sympathy despite her criminal act. The majority of audience members stated that they did feel sympathy for Carol, and not one reported that they disliked her. One screener wrote, “I did connect with her as a mother distraught because of her situation. I began thinking of how awful it would be to have a son ruin his life like that.” The connection audiences expressed with Carol was important evidence that the primary goal of this project was achieved. The film was perceived by audiences and crew to be a success.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

Many worthwhile lessons were learned during the production of *Covered*. While the goal of telling a dramatic story without relying on narration was accomplished, during the editing of the film, certain lines in the script stood out as causing a melodramatic feel to particular scenes. These lines should have been removed during the script writing stage, and would have been, had enough outside feedback been sought. Fortunately, the lines were removed from the finished film. The lesson learned was that a polished script is essential when creating a film, and it is a writer's duty to get feedback about the script from fellow writers, as well as impartial readers.

In casting for the role of Jack Harper, the actor's resume was used to find him suitable for the part, rather than a full audition process. The role was challenging, since the character was required to go against type, and, more effort should have been made to ensure that the audience could believe the performance. Correction might have been as simple as putting the actor in a police uniform, or it may have required a total rewrite of the character. The casting lesson learned was actors must be selected that will be an acceptable fit, in the audience's eye, for the role.

Rehearsals for the film were deliberately kept to a minimum, in order to encourage spontaneous performances during production. However, some of the actors were not experienced enough to effectively perform with this method. Unrehearsed parts of the script were often the hardest to shoot, as the actor had to do multiple takes before achieving a satisfactory performance. Even the smallest of tasks, such as listening and reacting to a fellow actor, presented difficulty for some of the actors on set. In contrast,

performances of the parts of the story that were sufficiently rehearsed turned out extremely well. The speech that Carol gives at the end of the film was rehearsed several times, and the performance fleshed out, before the actress even arrived on the set. The result was a performance universally praised by audiences. The fact that rehearsals covering the entire script are necessary, not just those for important moments of a film, was a valuable lesson learned.

Another important lesson was that an experienced crew is essential to any film project. The crew of *Covered* was made up of talented individuals, placed in key positions, such as director of photography, production design, and sound mixer. The crew adopted the director's vision for the film, and through their collaboration, this vision was achieved.

A festival strategy plan has been developed and will be implemented beginning at the end of April. The film will be submitted to festivals in the Southeast, such as the New Orleans Film Festival, and the Birmingham Sidewalk Film Festival. The film will also be submitted to other short film festivals that encourage dramatic material. While it is too early to know if the film will be accepted by any of these festivals, the extremely positive audience response to *Covered* is an indication of a strong future for the film.

References

- Anatomy of a Comeback*. Dir. Robert Clay. Bolt Action Productions. 2007.
- Eyes Wide Shut*. Dir. Stanley Kubrick. Warner Brothers Pictures. 1999.
- Friends Forever*. Dir. Robert Clay. Bolt Action Productions. 2008.
- In the Valley of Elah*. Dir. Paul Haggis. Summit Entertainment. 2007.
- Ordinary People*. Dir. Robert Redford. Paramount Pictures. 1980.
- Mamet, David. *On Directing Film*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- McKee, Robert. *Story*. New York: Regan Books, 2001.
- Sonnenschein, David. *Sound Design*. Studio City: Michael Wiese Productions, 2001.

Appendices

Appendix A: Shooting Script

Covered
by
Robert Clay

1

INT. CAROL'S OFFICE - NIGHT

1

A woman sits behind a desk in a dimly lit office. She wears a business suit. She is CAROL FISHER.

Another woman sits across from her. She is teary eyed and appears to be holding back more. She is BETH WADE.

BETH

I know how this looks. I do, but it's not just me. Bryce Robinson, Melissa Fontaine, they all do it. Take your pick of any teacher in our department. It's not because their bad teachers, it's because these meetings are a complete waste of time.

CAROL

Beth, that's not...

There is a vibrating sound.

Carol looks down to see her phone receiving a call.

She hits a button to block the call.

CAROL

That's not really for you to determine.

BETH

No one wants to have them. Not the students or the parents. So I don't have them, but the board requires signed paperwork. So I just fill it out myself. It needs a parental signature so I fill that out too.

A buzz comes through on the intercom.

SECRETARY

Sorry to interrupt Carol, but I have your son on the phone.

CAROL

Have him call back.

BETH

Look it was wrong, and I shouldn't have done it, but no one got hurt.

There is another buzz.

SECRETARY

I'm sorry Carol, but he says it's urgent.

CAROL

Maddie, it's not urgent. No calls.

BETH

Carol, this won't happen again. I know it was wrong. I'll hold the meetings from now on. Please.

Carol sighs.

CAROL

I'm sorry Beth.

Beth covers her mouth. She begins to cry as she quickly leaves the room.

Carol leans forward and rests her head in her hand for a moment.

She then punches the intercom button.

CAROL

Maddie, next time I'm in a meeting and I say no calls I mean no calls.

SECRETARY

Sorry Carol.

Carol rubs her forehead.

SECRETARY

He's waiting on line one.

CAROL

Alright.

Carol hits a button the phone.

CAROL

Austin? I specifically told you not to call me during these hours. What do you need?

There is silence on the receiver.

AUSTIN

(on phone)

Mom? They're telling me I only get one phone call.

Carol is adjusting papers on her desk.

CAROL
(sarcastically)
One phone call? What are you in
jail?

AUSTIN
Yeah.

Carol sits up in her chair.

AUSTIN
I think I need a lawyer.

CAROL
What are you talking about?
Austin?

AUSTIN
Lindsey's dead. They think I did
it.

CAROL
I...I don't understand. Lindsey?
Lindsey Fields?

AUSTIN
Yeah.

Carol grips the phone tighter.

CAROL
Austin, that's an obscene thing to
joke about.

AUSTIN
They're saying my times up. Can
you down here? Please. Please
come down.

CAROL
Alright. Alright, I'm on my way.

The phone clicks.

Carol pauses a moment.

She picks up a remote and turns on a small TV in her office.

A female reporter is on.

REPORTER

(on tv)

...outside the Vesta Police Department, where an ongoing story has taken a tragic turn. Police have confirmed the identity of a body found earlier today as that of 18 year old, Lindsey Fields. Details have not been released, but officials say they do suspect foul play. Several individuals are being questioned in relation to the murder. We'll have the full story for you tonight at 10.

Carol hits the buzzer.

CAROL

Get me the number for Greg Nowak.

SECRETARY

I think their office is closed for the night.

CAROL

Get me his home number then.

SECRETARY

Right.

Carol stares out the window of her office.

2 INT. HALLWAY OF POLICE STATION - NIGHT

2

Carol sits in one of several chairs that line the hallway.

A man in a business suit carrying a briefcase walks down the hall. He is GREG NOWAK.

He sits next to Carol.

GREG

He's being held for questioning. They don't have anything to charge him with.

CAROL

They can't seriously think he killed her?

GREG

He's just the last known person to see her alive. It's a knee jerk reaction. I've already talked to Judge Carlile. He thinks we can get him out by tomorrow.

CAROL

What happened?

GREG

They were out together. They skipped school. Went to see a movie. Afterwards, he claims he dropped her off at her house. No one was home so we can't clarify that. 2 hours later her body is found in a dumpster behind the park with a bullet wound to the chest.

Carol buries her head in her hands.

GREG

It could be anything. Robbery gone bad. Kidnapping.

CAROL

My god. Lindsey. Steven and Wendy, I can't imagine. I should call them.

GREG

I would wait.

CAROL

No, I should call.

GREG

Carol, your son is being held in connection with her murder.

CAROL

The charges of which have no basis. You said it yourself.

GREG

I know. Still. I would wait.

CAROL

The girl might as well have been part of our family, Greg. I would help her with her calculus, cheer for her at volleyball games.

(MORE)

6.

CAROL (cont'd)

She was over for dinner last week.
I made her strawberry sweet tea.
There's a whole box in the kitchen
for when she'd come over.

GREG

I'm sorry Carol.

They both sit silently in the hall for a moment.

CAROL

Can I see him?

Greg stares ahead.

CAROL

Please Greg.

He nods.

GREG

I can probably get you a few
minutes. Come on.

3

INT. POLICE STATION ROOM - NIGHT

3

Carol is led into a small room.

A lanky kid sits with his head down at a table.

He looks up to reveal a young face for a teenager. He is
AUSTIN FISHER.

She sits down opposite him.

CAROL

Are you ok?

AUSTIN

Fine. Just lots of questions.
They really think I killed her.

CAROL

They don't know what to think. I
have a lawyer here from our office.
He says you could come home as
early as tomorrow.

Austin remains silent.

CAROL

Honey. What happened?

AUSTIN

We skipped 5th and 6th period.
Went to a movie. Not a very good
one. Something Lindsey wanted to
see. When it was over I dropped
her off at her house and went home.
That's where they picked me up.

CAROL

And no one was at her house? A
witness? Someone who could verify
this?

AUSTIN

Her parents are out of town.

CAROL

We'll find someone. In the mean
time just be honest. Be honest and
it'll be fine.

They both sit silently a moment.

AUSTIN

I'm going to prison for this aren't
I?

CAROL

Of course you're not. You're
coming home.

AUSTIN

Right.

CAROL

They're going to come get me in a
second. Do you need anything.

Austin shakes his head.

Carol stands up to leave.

AUSTIN

Wait. Could you do my laundry for
me? Please?

Carol laughs weakly.

CAROL

Sure. See you soon.

She hugs him and leaves.

8.

4 INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

4

Portraits of Austin as a younger child, and of Austin and Carol are scattered throughout the room.

Carol can be seen in the background vacuuming.

She has changed into scrub pants and a sweat shirt.

KITCHEN

Carol is scrubbing out a pan. It is one of many dirty dishes that appear to have been building up over several days.

OFFICE

Carol sits at a desk illuminated by a solitary desk lamp.

She dons a pair of reading glasses as she reviews a form, but she can't seem to work.

5 BEDROOM

5

Carol enters into a bedroom carrying a laundry basket.

The room is covered in dirty clothes that are strewn about.

Little league baseball trophies, and model airplanes decorate the shelves.

Carol throws pieces of clothing into the basket.

She notices an overflowing laundry hamper in the corner. She starts to unload that.

After removing several of the top clothing items, she notices a black trash bag stuffed into the hamper.

She pulls out the bag and dumps the contents on to the floor.

There is a loud CLANK as something metal strikes the hardwood floors.

Several light colored shirts fall out of the bag as well. They are stained.

Carol kneels down to examine the contents. She removes a dirty shirt to reveal a HANDGUN hiding underneath.

She stares at it a moment. She then examines the dirty shirt she is holding. It is stained with blotches of dark red.

She throws it to the floor.

She begins to slowly back up until she hits the wall.

She looks at the desk where there's a picture of Austin and girl.

BEDROOM - LATER

Carol is seated on the floor leaning against the wall.

The gun sits in the middle of the room and the T-shirt is stretched out.

There is an unmistakable streak of four fingers as they drag off the shirt.

She gently holds a model airplane in her hand.

Suddenly the sound of the DOOR BELL cuts the silence.

Carol's head shoots up. She does not move.

A moment passes before the doorbell rings again.

CAROL
(to herself)
Go away, go away.

Another moment passes. There is a KNOCK on the door.

She hurries off the bed.

As she leaves, she throws the bed sheets over the gun and shirt.

6 FRONT DOOR HALLWAY

6

Carol opens the door to reveal a younger man wearing a business suit, and glasses. He is only slightly taller than Carol. He is MICHAEL HARPER.

HARPER
Hi. My name is Sergeant Harper.
I'm with the Vesta Police
Department.

Carol grips the door knob tighter. She waits for Harper to say something else.

CAROL
Yes?

HARPER
I'm sorry to come by your house
like this, but I missed you at the
station.

Harper nervously plays with a note pad in his hand.

HARPER
I was hoping I might ask you a few
questions about your son.

CAROL
He's already being interviewed at
the station.

HARPER
Right. We like to interview the
parents as well. It's just
procedure. Trying to build a time
line of events.

Harper laughs.

HARPER
The thing is, I kind of blew it. I
was supposed to do this at the
station, but I, well I missed you.
They're pretty insistent I get it
done as soon as possible. So I
thought I'd come by and see if you
had a free moment.

Carol smiles weakly.

CAROL
Of course.

She opens the door for him.

HARPER
Thank you.

7 INT. KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS 7
Carol guides Harper into the kitchen.
She takes up a sponge and starts scrubbing a pot in the sink.

HARPER
You have a very nice home.

CAROL
Thank you. Can I get you something
to eat or drink?

HARPER
Uh, no thank you. My wife has a
plate in the oven for me.

Carol continues scrubbing with her back to him.

CAROL
So how can I help you?

HARPER
Right. I just have a few
questions...

Harper scans through his small note pad.

HARPER
I'm trying to create a time line of
events for your son. Could you
recount his activities from the
times you saw him today?

Harper CLICKS his pen ready to write.

CAROL
Well, let's see. I drove him to
school at 8. He skipped out of his
last two classes to watch a movie
with...her. He came straight home.

HARPER
He told you that?

CAROL
He told me the last part.

HARPER
How was he behaving this morning?

CAROL
Normal. Nothing out of the
ordinary. Ate breakfast and went
to school.

HARPER
Did he seem upset or angered by
anything?

CAROL
No.

HARPER
Had he been acting strange or
abnormal lately?

CAROL
No.

HARPER
Is there anything you can think of
that might have been causing him
excessive stress or anxiety?

CAROL
No.

HARPER
Did he mention Lindsey Fields in
any recent conversations he had
with you?

CAROL
No.

HARPER
How would you describe their
relationship?

CAROL
Friends. They dated on and off.
Never seemed to work out though.

Harper continues to write.

HARPER
Do you own any guns in your home?

Carol bangs her hands on the sink.

Harper looks up from his note pad.

CAROL
Why?

HARPER
I'm just trying to....

CAROL
I know what you're trying to do
Sergeant Harper.

HARPER
I'm sorry if I...

CAROL
No.

Harper pauses.

CAROL
No we don't have any guns in the house.

Carol glances on the counter. She sees a box of Strawberry Ice Tea.

She slowly moves to the kitchen table, steadying herself against the counter as she moves.

Harper watches.

HARPER
Mrs. Fisher I apologize. I didn't mean to insinuate that your...

Carol holds up her hand in a 'stop' motion.

CAROL
It's just a little overwhelming having the police in your kitchen asking where your son was.

HARPER
Mrs. Fisher, it really is just routine. We have...

A cell phone RINGS.

Harper cuts off mid-sentence and digs in his pocket.

He pulls out his phone and quickly answers.

HARPER
(whispers)
Hey babe, let me call you back.
Love you.

He puts the phone back in his pocket.

HARPER
I was saying I'm sorry if I...

CAROL
How long have you been married?

Harper is caught off guard by this question. It takes a moment to register with him.

HARPER
Three years.

CAROL
Kids?

HARPER
One. Three months old.

Carol stares at the table. Harper tries to smooth things over.

HARPER
Speaking of, it's my night for the
diapers so if you feel you need to
add anything please take your time.

Harper smiles.

Carol laughs, but it quickly turns into a sob. She is breathing heavy.

HARPER
Are you alright?

CAROL
(shakes her head)
No.

Carol tries to regain her composure.

HARPER
I'm sorry. I realize this must be
difficult. I think I'm about done
anyway.

Harper puts his note pad away and begins to walk away.

CAROL
Boy or girl?

Harper stops in his tracks.

HARPER
Sorry?

CAROL
Is it a boy or girl?

HARPER
Girl. Laura.

Carol smiles as she wipes away tears.

CAROL
I bet she's cute.

HARPER
Yeah she is. I mean at that age
they have to be right?

Carol laughs.

CAROL
So diaper duty huh?

HARPER
Yeah. Every Monday, Wednesday,
Friday.

CAROL
Put this stuff called Baker Cream
on her. It cuts down on the diaper
rash.

HARPER
Oh Yeah? I probably should take
more time to do that.

CAROL
It's just one of those things you
pick up.

HARPER
Well I'll have plenty of time to
try it out. She's a messy one.

Carol laughs.

CAROL
Oh so was mine. It can be rough.
3 a.m. Bottle feedings and the
crying, but as they get older, they
can just have these moments where
they amaze you. 3 months old is
too young, but just wait. I can
remember there was this time with
my son. It was the last day of the
divorce proceedings of all places,
for my ex husband and I.
Everything was set except for
custody. Total impasse.
(MORE)

CAROL (cont'd)

So the Judge decides to let Austin choose. And I'm furious. He couldn't have been more than 8 or 9. That's just a horrible situation to put a child in. But, still, he brings Austin in, and there we are, me and Ron. And I know what's going to happen. Ron is moving to big house. Swimming pool, basketball goal. I didn't have anything. Just an apartment, 1000 a month in child support. In my mind I know I'm going to lose him. So the judge tells Austin 'you have to choose'. And he doesn't say anything. He just stands there a moment, and then walks up to me and grabs my hand.

Carol is crying now.

CAROL

He grabs my hand, and he chooses me.

She clears her throat and tries to regain her composure.

CAROL

He chose me Sergeant Harper.

Harper puts his note pad away. He begins walking to the door. He turns.

HARPER

I apologize again for disturbing you tonight. I hope you have a good evening.

He leaves the kitchen and walks out the front door.

Carol remains at the table.

8 INT. KITCHEN - LATER

8

Carol is sitting in her chair. She very calmly wipes the remaining tears away and walks out of the room.

INT. AUSTIN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

Carol quickly flings the bed sheets over the gun and clothes, and gathers the bundle.

17.

She is wearing a pair of latex gloves.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Carol backs out of the drive way and pulls off.

THE END

Appendix B: Storyboards



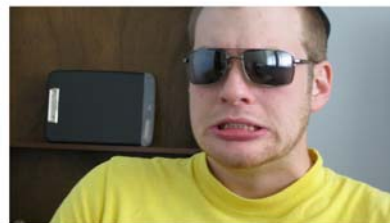
1A



1B



1C



1D



1E



1F



1G



1H



3A



3A END



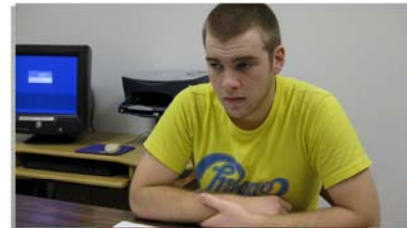
3B



3C



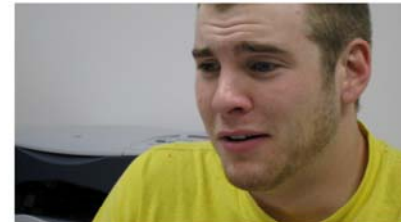
3D



3E



3F



3G



3H



5A



5B



5C



5D



5E



5F



6A



6B



6C



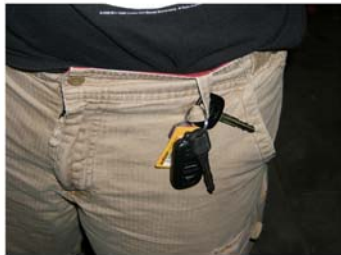
6D



6E



6F



6G



6H



7A



7B



7C



7D



7E



7F



7G



7H



7J



7K



7L



7M



7K



7L



7M



7P



7R



7Q

Appendix C: Production Stills









Appendix D: Audience Comment Sheets

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | X | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | | | X | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | | X |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | | | X | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | X | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | | X | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | X | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

Sympathetic

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

I think that Harper probably knew by the reaction of Carol that her son committed the murder.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?
Why or Why not?

Towards the end, yes. She doesn't want to see her boy go to prison.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

Do you have any other opinions?

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 24

Gender Male

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | X | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | X | | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | X | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | X | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | | I | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | X | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | X | | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | X | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

WELL OTHER THEN ~~HAR~~ ACTING BEING KIND OF WEAK OVERALL, SHE STILL DEVELOPED A FAIRLY BELIEVABLE CHARACTER, ^{EVEN} IF THE ACTING IS STILL BLAND.

What were you feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

ITS HUNTER!
MAYBE CUT DOWN SOME OF HIS DIALOGUE
HE'S A LITTLE TOO HAPPY GO LUCKY.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?

Why or Why not?

CAROL SEEMED TO BE EVALUATING THE WORTH OF HUMAN LIFE UNTIL HARPER SHOWED UP. THAN SHE CHOSE HER SON BECAUSE HE LOSE HER.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

SOME OF THE OPENING SEEMED TO NOT PERTAIN TO ANYTHING. MAYBE MAKE IT BETTER.

Do you have any other opinions?

TIGHTEN IT UP, THERE'S A LOOSE FEELING ~~AS~~ AS OF NOW THAT CAN BE FIXED IN EDITING.

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 22

Gender male

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | X | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | | X | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | X | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | X | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | X | | X | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | X | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | X | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | | X | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

I felt she was believable

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

not much.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?
Why or Why not?

I felt she was not debating that she had decided and her talk at the end was justification

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

The cop just seemed to leave w/o putting much pressure on her.

Do you have any other opinions?

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 30ish

Gender F

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | | ✓ | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | | ✓ | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | | | ✓ | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | ✓ | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | ✓ | | | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | | | ✓ | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | ✓ | | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | | ✓ | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | | | ✓ | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

Cold, Static

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

Sympathetic, Soft

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?

Why or Why not?

I was not convinced that Carol experienced such conflict. (N/A)

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

You open w/Ecu of a family picture but you didn't sell that shot long enough; it took too long for me to make the connection b/w 'Carol' & her son

- All dialogue : no action but great lighting continuity, coverage of CU/MS reaction(s) : good, sound editing : pacing

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 25

Gender M

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | X | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | X | | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | X | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | X | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | | X | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | X | | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | X | | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | X | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

I felt sorry for her. I did connect with her as a mother distraught because of her situation. I began thinking of how awful it would be to have a son ruin his life like that. Then I began thinking of how she would be affected even if he was released.

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

I thought the cop was not as well casted. He did not have the edge that most cops give off. He was not 'business' enough. He was a bit fidgety but not in a way that conveyed a quirky detective, more like a fidgety actor.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence? Why or Why not?

Not so much. Until the end I thought that she was at a loss for a decision. Then, at the end when she gathered up the items, I thought she was leading toward destroying the evidence. Then, when it ended unconcluded, I knew that there was room for speculation.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

I had a preemptive understanding because you gave me a synopsis before so I may have had some insight. It was not too confusing, only the opening with the female client. I don't know what that was about.

Do you have any other opinions?

I did not like the shot when the cop arrived at the house and walked in. As he was walking in I felt that it needed some editing. I felt that the cop was the weakest character. Also, there is a transition while the mother is sitting at the table where the camera drops down and I noticed. It was on her, then on something else, then when it returned, it was in a different position, but noticeably.

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 35

Gender M

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | x | | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | x | | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | | X | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | x | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | X | | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | X | | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | x | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | x | | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

I wasn't sure about her at first, but as the problems continued to mount, I began to feel for her.

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

Indifferent. The character was very odd for a police officer. I assume this was the point, but I think he may be too far from the convention.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?
Why or Why not?

Yes. I guessed that she would save her son, but it was just a guess. I think the struggle came through.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

I still don't understand what the scene in the beginning was about.

Do you have any other opinions?

As a mother, this story really connected with feelings. I was getting goose bumps during her speech at the end.

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 47

Gender F

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | x | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | | | x | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | x | | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | x | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | x | | | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | x | | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | | x | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | | x | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | | | x | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

The mother seemed to feel that she had an obligation to her son. The son seemed to expect that his mother would attempt to destroy the evidence, and I believe she felt that she was obligated to do this because of his decision to live with her vice the father. I felt that she ultimately made the wrong decision. I think I a lot of ways the story was too short to get a feel for the mother-son relationship. All we have is a single anecdote from some years before.

What were you feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

I felt that the cop didn't seem believable. He didn't strike me as a police officer, both in manner and bearing. The actor, I believe was wrong for this role.

What were you feelings of the behavior of Austin (Son)?

It seemed that he was still in shock after having learned that his girlfriend had been murdered. He still seemed innocent of the crime due to the previous lawyer scene.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence? Why or Why not?

I did feel that she was debating the subject. This was made very clear in the numerous close-ups of her staring into space, film grammar for "I'm thinking heavily on serious matters." But without any other signs of her relationship with her son or her relationship with the girlfriend, it is impossible to say just what the deciding factor was.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

The film is not confusing. It is presented in a very straightforward manner.

Do you have any other opinions?

I feel that the initial scene of the mother firing the girl in the office does offer some ideas on her thought processes. She is evidently firing this girl for an infraction that, according to the girl, is quite common in this workcenter. This shows Carol as being somewhat of a hardliner on certain issues. It would seem , then that she would turn in her son, despite his choosing to live with her and his obvious wish that she destroy evidence in the house. But, yet again, the lack of any understanding of the relationship between her son and the relationship with the girl in the first scene make her thought processes hard to guess at.

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 38

Gender Male

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Agree | <input type="checkbox"/> Indifferent | <input type="checkbox"/> Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | | X | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | | X | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | | X | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | X | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | X | |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | X | | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | X | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | X | | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | | X | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?

She showed very strong will and moral flexibility. Like any good mother, she chose to do whatever it takes to protect her child, even though she believes him responsible for a horrendous crime. The actress playing Carol really shined during her monologue.

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?

He seemed fresh out of the academy and not very bright. Normally, I imagine detectives with coarse and unforgiving personalities, perhaps because of what they have seen in the field. However, Harper seemed too nice for his line of work and a bit too awkward. I think the actor portraying Harper was miscast.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence? Why or Why not?

Yes, I felt Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence. At first, she was staring at the picture of her son's girlfriend. You could tell she knew her moral obligation to turn in this evidence against her son. However, after Carol's monologue, it was evident that she would do whatever it took to protect her son.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.

The woman explaining herself to Carol in the opening of the film confused me. Why is she defending herself? Why does the audience need to see this particular scene?

Do you have any other opinions?

The actor playing Carol's lawyer did a very believable job. Also, the two dolly shots were well done. Even though there were a few audio problems, the overall technique was good, as was the writing.

PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 24

Gender Male

COMMENT SHEET

| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Indifferent | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
|--|----------------|-------|-------------|----------|-------------------|
| I liked this movie | x | | | | |
| I felt the characters were believable | x | | | | |
| I was able to clearly follow the story | x | | | | |
| I felt the casting was appropriate | | x | | | |
| I was bored by this movie | | | | | x |
| I was surprised by the revelation of the gun | | | x | | |
| I felt the movie was paced well | | x | | | |
| I was satisfied by the ending | | | x | | |
| I felt sympathy for Carol at the end | x | | | | |

What were your feelings towards the character of Carol (Mother)?
 Her conflict really came through. Her speech she gives at the end is a very powerful performance that I felt hit all the right notes.

What were your feelings towards the character of Harper (Cop)?
 I'm not sure. He seemed like he was a bit off. I'm not sure he was the best choice to play the role of a police officer.

Did you feel Carol was debating between turning her son in or destroying the evidence?
 Why or Why not?
 Yes. The look on her face says it all. The amount of close-ups allotted to her reveal that she is truly struggling with the choice.

Explain any elements that confused you during the film.
 The first scene was a bit confusing. I assume that this was just to show Carol enforcing the rules.

Do you have any other opinions?
 I feel the music was a good choice for the majority of the film. I would consider taking it out for the scene with Carol and Austin.

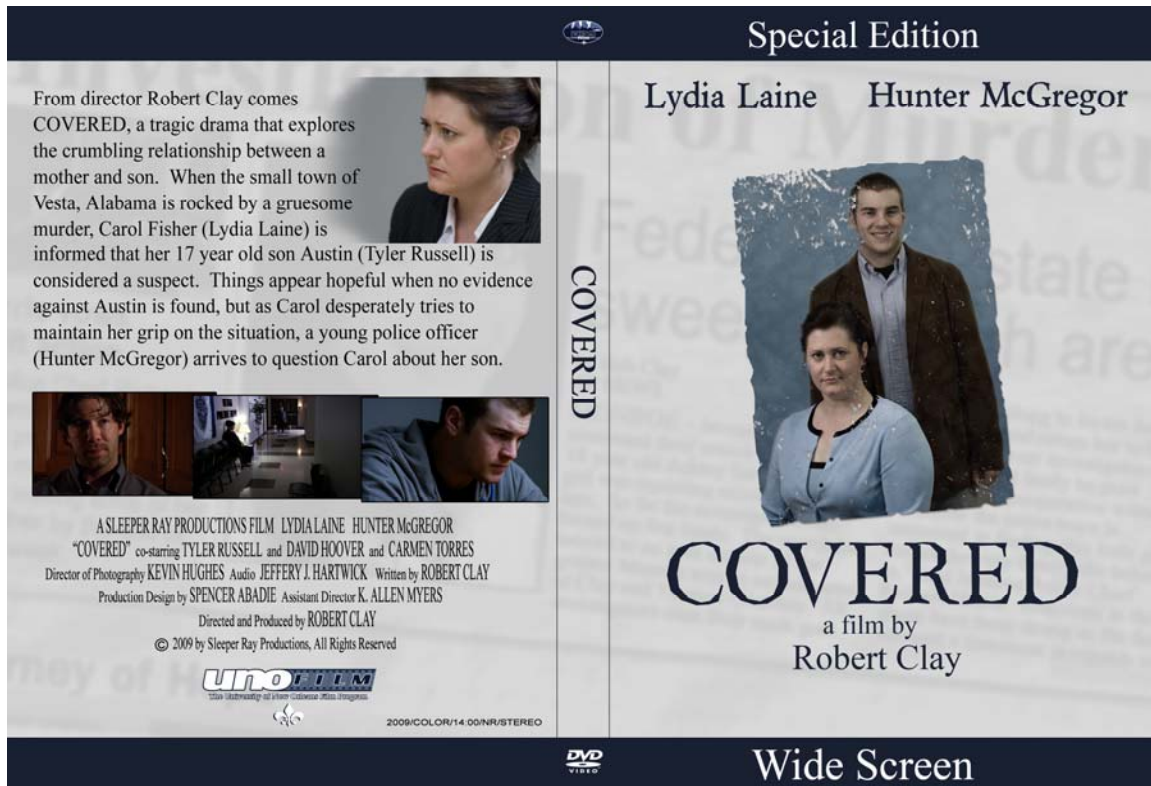
PLEASE FILL IN THE FOLLOWING:

AGE 43

Gender F



Appendix F: DVD Cover





Vita

Robert Clay was born in Birmingham, AL on September 17, 1983. He graduated from Shades Valley High School in Irondale, Alabama. The following August, he enrolled into Auburn University in Auburn, Alabama where he would receive his Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communications as well as a minor in English. He next entered the University of New Orleans in August 2006 to pursue his candidacy for Master of Fine Arts in Film Production. He graduates in May 2009.