

ACADEMY OF PERFORMING ARTS IN PRAGUE

FILM AND TELEVISION FACULTY – FAMU

Department of FAMU International
Cinema and Digital Media – Directing

MASTER'S THESIS

Miss Representation

A Qualitative Study Exploring Gender Imbalance In Cinema

Apoorva Satish

Prague 2019

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ABSTRACT

This study mainly focuses on examining the metamorphoses of female character archetypes in popular fiction films and analyse the crucial impact of such transformations of film characters in gender roles. The study aims to identify and examine female characters appearing in classical feminist texts, theoretical and critical articles, psychoanalytical works in drama therapy and film science. This archetypal research has based itself on the information provided by the sources mentioned above. Furthermore, the study also explores the stereotypical portrayal of female sexuality and the conventional patterns present in the text, communicated to audiences in the context of gender roles.

RESUMÉ

Práce se zaměřuje především na výzkum proměny archetypů ženských postav v populárních hraných filmech a také na analýzu zásadních dopadů takových transformací filmových postav na genderové role. Diplomová práce identifikuje a zkoumá ženské postavy objevující se v klasických feministických textech, teoretických a kritických článcích, psychoanalytických studiích v dramatické terapii a filmové vědě. Archetypální výzkum bude založen na informacích ze zdrojů výše uvedených. Kromě toho se práce také zabývá i tématy spojenými s ženským ideálem, stereotypním zobrazením jejich sexuality a konvenčními vzory sdělovanými publiku v kontextu genderových rolí.

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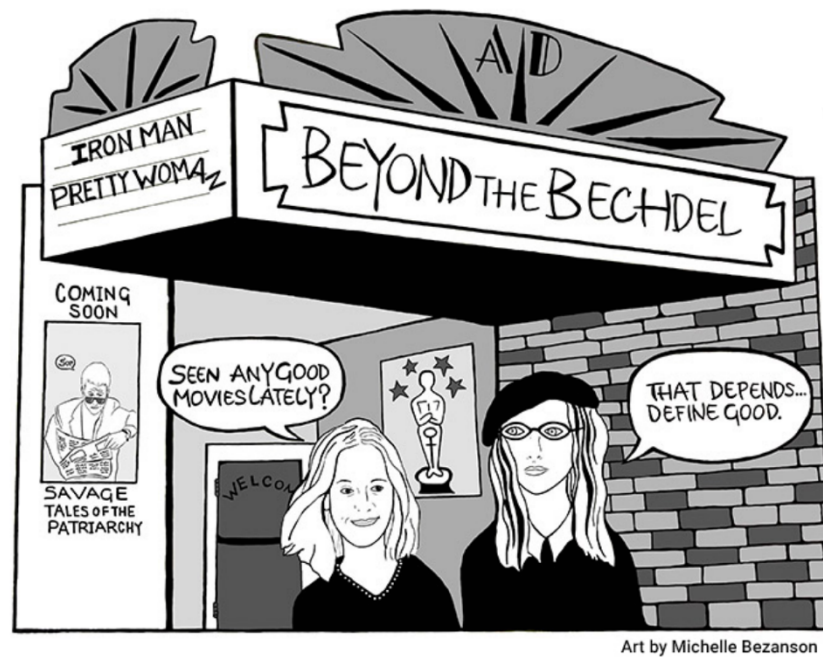
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INTRODUCTION



Under-representation of the female characters in films has been extensively examined within and outside the framework of education. In recent years, it is inevitable to neglect discussions related to gender imbalance, both in films and for female workers in the film industry.

Women across the world face severe inequalities in several fields, including health, finance, education and politics. Persistent gender inequality may risk socio-economic growth and progress. (Roser, 2018). At the most micro level, discrimination hinders girls and women from achieving their personal goals and aspirations. Despite a push to promote women worldwide across fields, one particular field where growth remains dormant is cinema. (Lauzen, 2018).

The discrimination in roles between male and female characters is a feature that has existed for a long time across popular fiction. In 1929, author Virginia Woolf elucidated about the literature of her time-

“All these relationships between women, I thought, rapidly recalling the splendid gallery of fictitious women, are too simple. ... And I tried to remember any case in the course of my reading where two women are represented as friends. ... They are now and then mothers and daughters. But almost without exception, they are shown in their relation to men.” (Woolf, 1929, p. 42)

Researches revealed that female characters in top-grossing films have not meaningfully changed in roughly half a century. (M.Lauzen, 2017). Additionally, women were quintessentially stereotyped and sexualised famous works of fiction, encouraged audiences to view women as weak and docile. (Lauzen, 2018)

Even Hollywood, one of the biggest film industries in the world, has been slow to progress in terms of creating compelling and complex female characters. (Lauzen, 2019) Is the under-representation of female characters in films becoming a global phenomenon?

Women outside cinema started to seek alternative solutions to such problems, which came as a result of feminism. Feminists were quick to detect such discrepancies. Feminist film studies have endured a long battle with the under-representation of women in cinema. (Kuhn, 1994).

Feminist film critics sharply questioned the sexual objectification of women and the voyeuristic fetishes associated with them on-screen. (Chaudhuri, 2006). However, a few individuals argued against this theory by examining contemporary female characters and female protagonists who were breaking free from gender and sex binaries. (Bryson, Bunker, 2015).

The assessment and dialogue relating to female character types, concerning, for example, the term 'strong' female character in the film, has, over this period, become increasingly normative in popular culture and online media. (Kraicer & Piper, 2019)

The relationship between male and female characters have also, as a component of this dialogue, analysed in the context of the female character's substance, character development and strength as it, in turn, relates to the story, and her character.

The power and presence of female characters as they relate to male characters, whether dependently or independently, have furthermore been scrutinised through tests, diagrams and character-type identifications, to the extent that ample blogs, movements and organisations relating to this topic have become prominent, not only in academic research, but as part of the Internet, soon after its inception in 1989.

The current development of online Fourth Wave feminism or cyberfeminism (since 1994) includes an array of gender assessments on the visibility of a female character in film and impacts on the dialogue around the strength of the female character (Luckman, 1999, pp. 36–48)

The arguments presented in this dissertation are in part an exposition of the influence of the online sphere as a developmental platform for cyberfeminism and its role in the representation of female characters in the film.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The first three feminist waves have achieved an adequate groundwork for women – enough not to be concerned with expanding into cyberspace as a revolutionary platform. However, looking at recent studies, it is evident that female representation in Hollywood does not equate to gender equality, and still faces a continuous need for transformation. (Schneir, 1994)

A new study by the Centre for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University reveals that although female protagonists had become prominent in 2018, the representation of female characters has gotten worse overall. (Lauzen, 2018)

The findings of the study were divided into four significant sections (Lauzen, 2018)

1. Female and male characters in top-grossing films.
2. Demographic traits of these characters which includes race, ethnicity, relationship status and profession.
3. Relationship between the on-screen representation of female characters.
4. Behind the scenes employment of woman as writers and directors.

The study revealed that only 35 % of the movies included 10 or more speaking roles for women while a staggering 82% of the films had a minimum of 10 male characters with speaking parts.

“Due to the progress of numerous high profile female-led films in recent years, “there is a growing disconnect...between what we might perceive as being the current status of women in film and their actual status,” (Lauzen, 2018) said Dr Martha Lauzen from Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film at San Diego State University.

In 2016, the largest ever analysis of film dialogue by gender, where over 2000 commercially successful screenplays were studied, revealed that in 82% of the films, men had the top two or three speaking roles, while women had the most dialogues only in 22% of them (movies with women as the lead characters) (Anderson and Daniels, 2016)

A study by Geena Davis Institute revealed that between 2010 and 2013, of the 120 films made worldwide, only 31 % of named characters were female and 23% of the movie had a female lead or a co-protagonist. Women directed a measly 7 % of the films. (Smith, 2014).

Another study by USC Annenberg's Media, Diversity, & Social Change Initiative, analysed 700 top-grossing films worldwide between 2007 and 2014. A total of 30,835 characters were studied across the 100 top-grossing films.

The 100 top movies of 2014, were also examined qualitatively – characters portrayed as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) (Smith, 2015). The study revealed that only 30 % of the speaking characters were female. Only 11 % of the film had gender-balanced casts or featured woman or girls in roughly half of the speaking roles.

In his book *Media, Gender and Identity*, David Gauntlett explains that “the traditional views of a woman as a housewife or low-status worker has been kick-boxed out of the picture by the feisty, successful ‘girl power’ icons”. (Gauntlett, 2008, p. 172) Consequently, contemporary films are slowly beginning to depict female characters as feisty, successful and influential icons, more often in recent times than decades past.

The recent popularity of strong female heroines such as Wonder Woman, Black Widow and Katniss Everdeen in the Hunger Games series may give a hypothesis that women are represented equally and proportionately in films.

However, studies reveal that women are overwhelmingly valued in films purely based on their identification as a mother, wife, or lover. (Female Tribes, 2017). Women are represented as entities who are dependent, over-emotional, and curbed to low-status jobs when compared to enterprising and ambitious male characters. (Female Tribes, 2017).

One of the main reasons why gender stereotypes and traditional views of women in terms of familial and career roles continue to permeate in films could be due to the influence of post-feminism. (Whelehan, 1995)

In her book, *Concepts, Everyday Women's and Gender Studies: Introductory* Catherine M. Orr specifies the defining feature of the movement saying, "Post-feminism assumes that the women's movement took care of oppressive institutions and that now it is up to individual women to make personal choices that simply reinforce those fundamental societal changes." (Braithwaite & Orr, 2017)

In the face of crafting such personal choices, women, particularly in the film, are wedged between challenging demands to be a strong and independent character without losing their femininity. Modern feminists challenge that accepting female sexuality gives women power (Whelehan, 1995)

The other school of feminists, who are conventional and often maintain the same values as the previous waves of feminism contend that women will never achieve the balance in representation until they equally depicted female characters in the film in positions of power, age standards and through their extra-familial ambitions or goals, among other disparities (Charen, 2018)

FEMINISM & FEMINIST FILM THEORY

Feminism is essentially a social movement that has had a colossal impact on film theory and criticism. The term *Feminism* defines the cultural, economic and political movements that target to establish legal protections and equal rights for women.

Feminists predominantly consider cinema to be a medium of cultural practice that represents myths about women and feminist and men and masculinity. Issues of representation and spectatorship form the core of feminist film theory and criticism (Schneir, 1994)

Early feminist criticism, predominantly directed towards Hollywood for their stereotypical representation of women, were considered offensive distortions that affected the female spectators negatively, which triggered the need for better representation of women in cinema. (Schneir, 1994)

The 1970s became the turning point for women in films. Ridley Scott's depiction of Lieutenant Ellen Ripley in *Alien* (1979) marks the beginning of the new female hero. The *Alien* franchise presented a female protagonist who is tough, smart and determined. Ripley became a famous icon for a new and improved powerful woman. However, realisation dawned that just positive images of women in the cinema did not any influence in changing the fundamental structures in the film (Brooks, 2009)

Feminism, as a social movement, has an immense impact on film theory and criticism. Second-wave feminists' achievements made it possible for women to "better understand their politically, socially and economically inferior status." (Bereni, 2016)

Feminist critics have used several strategies to produce a cinematic analysis. American feminists were critical towards classic cinema, particularly with Hollywood receiving most of the objection.

Feminists see films as a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity as well as men and masculinity, in which they regard these types of stereotypical representations as misleading and unrealistic, preferring to construct an ideological image of the woman. (Cook, 2007).

They argue that the “incessant repetition of negative female stereotypes bolstered the prejudices of male viewers,” which in turn strengthen the patriarchal status quo and assert the woman’s inferiority. (OHCHR, 2014)

Spectatorship, feminist film critique and representation are central themes used to investigate stereotypes critically. A suggestion to resolve the issue is for a more positive depiction of women to appear in Hollywood, rather than the various roles meant to cast women as bimbos, faithful homemakers, sexual femme fatale, or self-effacing mothers. However, during the height of second-wave Feminism, such an objective is challenging for more than just one reason. (OHCHR, 2014)

The main problem was and still is that the film directors and producers of classic, as well as contemporary cinema, are men. In their construction of a cinematic narrative, the display of women emerges from a male perspective, displaying them through a male gaze (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 6-18).

Therefore, it is implied that even though the presence of women in mainstream film is vital, she is only a decorative ornament that is not central to the narrative and thus relegating her character to the incidental.

As early feminist film theorists began to realise that positive images were not enough to change underlying structures in film, they turned their attention to understand the pervasive power of patriarchal imagery with the help of structuralist theoretical frameworks (Kuhn & Annette, 1994). These academic discourses, which include semiotics and psychoanalysis, proved to be very productive in analysing how traditional narrative encodes patterns of sexual difference. (Kraicer & Piper, 2019)

The Freudian-Lacanian model of psychotherapy turns out to be the most dominant paradigm in feminist film theory. Feminists and cultural studies share an identical substantive interest in issues of popular culture, subjectivity, power, identities, consumption, and representation. (Schneir, 1994)

Regarding the matters of representation and spectatorship, early feminist film critics turned their attention to the repetitive issues of the female desire, female spectator/look, feminine masquerade and female subjectivity.

Hence, the methodology behind feminist film theory relies heavily on the sociological studies. Feminists have obtained in observing the function of women characters in particular film narratives or genres. Spectatorship, feminist film critique and representation are central themes used to investigate stereotypes critically.

Feminism, as a social movement, has an immense impact on film theory and criticism. Feminist film theory is a formalistic criticism that descended from feminist theory and feminist politics, which developed during the political outbursts of the second-wave Feminism (the 1960s). (Bereni, 2016, pp. 461-482.)

THE THREE WAVES OF FEMINISM

Throughout generations, Feminist activists have campaigned for issues like property, and voting, abortion and reproductive rights; including prenatal care and contraception, contraception, women's legal rights, especially in regard to contracts, protection from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape, body integrity, independence; workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; and against all forms of prejudices women encounter day-to-day. (Female Tribes, 2017)

The history of Feminism mainly comprises of three waves. The first wave transpired between the 19th and early 20th century. First-wave feminists were primarily concerned with women's right to vote. The second wave was more prominent in the 1960s and 1970s, refers to the women's liberation protest and movement for equal social and legal rights. The third wave that began in the 1990s was more of a reaction and continuation of the second-wave Feminism. (Drucker, 2018)

First-wave Feminism also advocated for equal property and contract rights for women, objecting the control over married women by their husbands. Feminist activism in the late 19th century primarily concentrated on women's right to vote. American first-wave Feminism ended with the US constitution passing the 19th Amendment in 1919, granting voting rights for women. (Drucker, 2018)

Feminist activism during the second wave (Between the 1960s - 1980s) centered around issues of discrimination and equality. The slogan, "The Personal is Political," (Rogan & Budgeon, 2018) identified women's political and cultural prejudices as inseparably connected and rallied for women to recognise how sexist power structures dominated their personal lives.

Betty Friedan, a crucial influencer in second-wave Feminism, through her book *The Feminine Mystique*, reprimanded the idea that women found fulfilment only in homemaking and childrearing. (Drucker, 2018)

Friedan's hypothesises that women are victims of false ideas requiring them to find identity in their lives through husbands and children. Consequently, women forget their own identities in that of their family. (Drucker, 2018)

Third-wave Feminism began in the early 1990s, as a reaction to perceived failures of the second wave. The second-wave feminist ideology aimed to defy the definitions of femininity that grew out of the ideas of the second wave, arguing that the second-wave over-emphasised lives of upper-middle-class white women. (Schneir, 1994)

The third wave sees women's experiences as intersectional, illustrating how gender, race, class, religion, ethnicity, and nationality are all crucial factors aspects to be considered while discussing Feminism. It also examines issues related to women's lives on a worldwide basis. (Drucker, 2018)

REFLECTION UPON MAIN THEORISTS

The theoretical framework chosen to analyse the representation of women will be through the lenses of Sigmund Freud, Laura Mulvey, Claire Johnston, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler. The psychoanalytical theorist feminist scholars and film critics rely on (apart from Sigmund Freud) is French psychoanalyst and psychiatrist Jacques Lacan. Although Sigmund Freud is subsidiary material, his work is the basic framework for semiotician Julia Kristeva's theoretical study of abjection and her scholarly work of the parental (maternal as well as paternal) authority within the oedipal complex (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982).

Gender theorist, Judith Butler, on the other hand, uses Freud's concept of how a person's identity models regarding the normal, but Butler revises his notion of the concept's applicability to lesbianism and queer theory. (Butler J. , 1999)

Several feminist researchers position Freud as a theorist who is not a feminist, yet his involvement in psychology has provided vital insight into sexuality and gender. He has contributed to several psychoanalytical terms such as the subconscious or unconscious, the structural theory of the mind known as the id, ego, and super-ego and ofcourse the most important of them all, the Oedipus complex. (Freud, 1917)

In the case of Julia Kristeva, her theory of abjection is relevant in analysing the threats female characters, such as when facing the undead (the corpse) or having to endure injuries resulting in bodily wastes (blood, urine). In the process of abjection of the cadaver, the border between life and death breaks, placing an individual in the position of observing a familiar object become "the abject." (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

Kristeva contends that since the abject is a strong revolt of being that repulses desire, she considers reactions such as loathing and gagging the individual's struggle at preserving themselves from what frightens them. (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

Kristeva's theory of abjection was a ground breaking in postmodern theory as she relocates the origin of psychoanalysis. (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

Kristeva's theory of abjection was a ground breaking in postmodern theory as she relocates the origin of psychoanalysis (Kristeva J. , 1980)

Jeffrey A. Brown's book *Dangerous Curves: Action Heroines, Gender, Fetishism, and Popular Culture* (2011) also take a similar perspective. He also discusses the conflicting meanings associated with the action heroine.

Brown argues that since the action heroine has unfolded in various media forms since the late 1980s, he discusses her immensely popular character type as an example of existing theories about gender as a performance identity. Brown focuses on the disproportionate sexual fetishisation of the action heroines as a central theme in his analysis (Brown, 2011)

FEMINISM & PSYCHOANALYSIS

Feminist critics tried to better understand the effect of the widespread influence of patriarchic imagery with the help of structuralist theoretical frameworks like semiotics and psychoanalysis. Feminist critic Claire Johnston was one of the first few to offer a semiotic point of view on stereotypes. (Johnston, 1973)

Johnston investigated the myth of woman in classic cinema by basing her investigation on “notion of myth” by Roland Barthes which represents the ideological implication that ‘women’ are scrutinised as a structure or convention and the ideological meaning that women have for men. (Johnston, 1973).

The woman as a woman is virtually absent from the text of the film. The critical theoretical shift here is from an understanding of cinema as a reflection of reality to a view of cinema as constructing a particular ideological, view of reality. (Johnston, 1973)

On the other hand, psychoanalysis forms a hypothesis of the unconscious that inevitably ties sexuality and subjectivity together. This hypothesis also discloses how one’s awareness of self, political integrity and likings, are shaped by unconscious impulses and managed by symbolic structures that are way past the purview of personal power. (Mulvey, 1975)

SIGMUND FREUD: PSYCHOANALYSIS

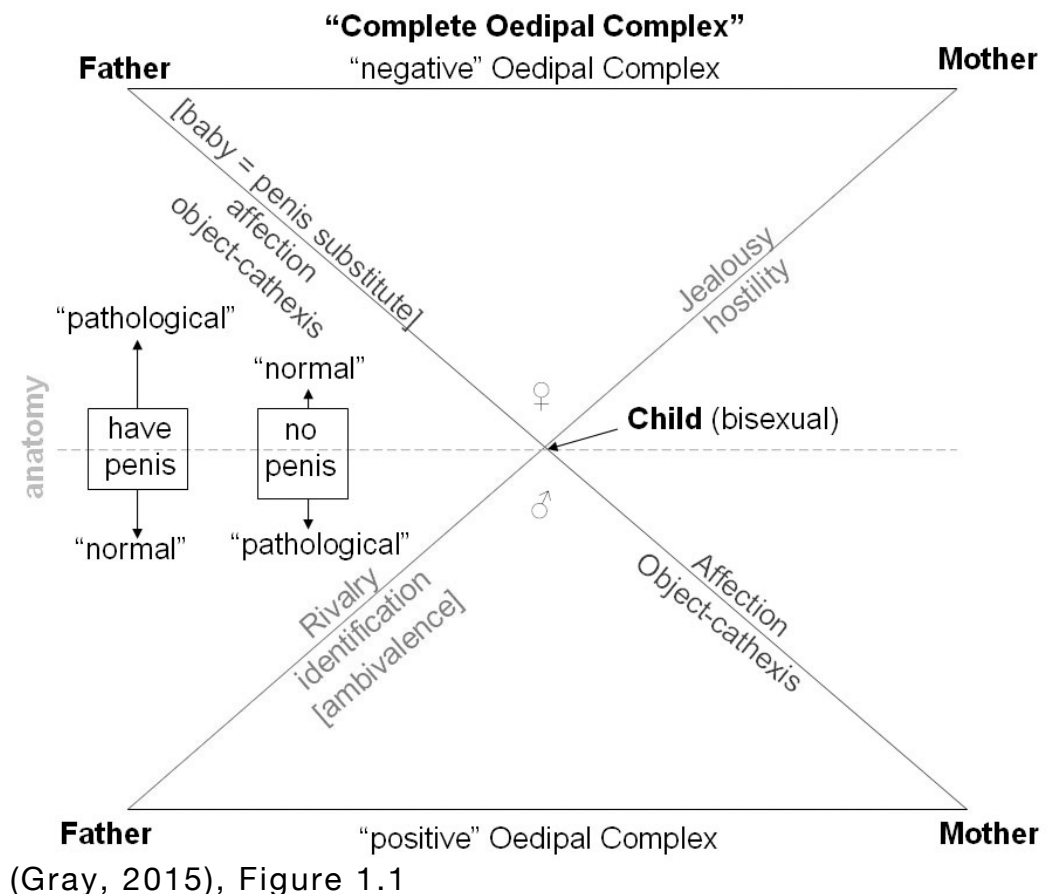
Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud played a significant role in the development of psychoanalysis. During his era, it was common for men to scrutinise women as beings suffering from “Penis envy.” (Freud, 1955) Freud also arguably found a lot of evidence of female sexuality during his practice.” (Freud, A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis , 1917)

The culture of Freud’s time considered women “hysterical” which had a pejorative meaning that suggests women are inherently very emotional. To better understand the development of such traits associated with sexual repression, Freud believed that “the excessive curtailment of female sexuality that characterised his society” was not the reason that women “were ill.” (Wolf & Loguuntur, 1971, pp. 535-554.)

Although Freudian hypothesis of female sexuality does not necessarily portray him as a feminist, his discoveries significantly helped feminists in challenging the patriarchal interpretations of gender and sexuality. (Freud, 1917) Freud elucidates on how the problem to the method of such socialisation affects not just women, but men as well who are constrained to follow certain strict lines of customs, government, cultural norms, economics and education to adopt an appropriate social role. (Freud, 1917)

Regarding sexuality, Freud illustrates how society shapes a person to meet the standards of gender-normative heterosexuality. (Freud, 1955) His analysis of the infant's rudimentary eroticism brings forth the most significant concept developed by him during his clinical practice - the Oedipus complex. (Freud, 1955)

By using the example of Oedipus Rex, Sophocles's Athenian tragedy, Freud suggests that the society carries out abnormal threats like imposing a severe punishment in the form of castration for a male child who sleeps with his mother and murders his father. (Freud, 1917)



By introducing a disciplinary action, the young boy “agrees to forgo his mother as a love object in exchange for keeping his penis,” (Strachey, 1923, pp. 3-66) preventing the murder of his father and instead encourages the young boy to associate and idealise with his father.

By introducing a disciplinary action, the young boy “agrees to forgo his mother as a love object in exchange for keeping his penis,” (Strachey, 1923, pp. 3-66) preventing the murder of his father and instead encourages the young boy to associate and idealise with his father. (Freud, 1917)

Freud regards the Oedipus complex, as a result of socialisation that produces normative masculinity and femininity. Consequently, young girls and boys learn how to enact to the standards of gender-normative heterosexuality suitably. The Oedipus complex is relevant for films that showcase a family structure where the woman, who lacks, is the passive subject and requires completion by her active partner, a male “who does not lack.” (Strachey, 1923, pp. 3-66)

However, it was not evident in the beginning, why feminists used psychoanalysis. (Freud, 1955). The goal of the feminists’ film critics was to disavow the stereotypical depiction of women in film and to fight for a more fair representation of female characters.

Many feminist critics relied on Freud's psychoanalysis as his discoveries were consistent in recognising and investigating the portrayal of women in terms of how they had to look, behave and act. Feminist film theorists apply Freudian- Lacanian psychoanalysis to demonstrate the influence movies have to glue us into their narrative, which includes movies that deliver hidden messages about gender and sexuality. Through psychoanalysis, feminists attempted to bring out the implications of femininity and masculinity not as a biological structure, but as products built around. (Mitchell, 2000)

LAURA MULVEY: VISUAL PLEASURE & NARRATIVE CINEMA

Claire Johnson stated - "If it is to impinge on consciousness, feminist film theory would require 'a revolutionary strategy.'" (Richardson, Gorbman, & Vernallis, 2013) There was a strong need for a method of discovering a more in-depth framework that goes beyond the superficial structure of entertainment and visual pleasure films provide. (Mulvey, 1975)

In addressing this issue, feminist film theorists adopted the method of theoretically combining Lacanian psychoanalysis with structural Marxism and semiotics. Laura Mulvey's groundbreaking 1975 article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" became imperative in developing this approach.

In her pioneering article, Laura Mulvey exercises psychoanalysis to understand how the patriarchic cultural subconscious of the society shapes cinema as a medium and film-watching experience through the notion of scopophilia or the desire to see, a primitive impulse according to Sigmund Freud. (Mulvey, 1975)

Like all drives, Scoptophilia is sexual in origin, and it is one of the main drives that keeps viewers glued to the silver screen. (Mulvey, 1975). Mulvey also suggests that Hollywood films are defined and reinforced by pre-existing social structures which have moulded the "fascinated viewer." (Braudy & Cohen., 1975)

As mentioned earlier, Mulvey's analysis fuses semiotics with the psychoanalysis of desire structures and subjectivity. The semiotic aspect of her interpretation facilitates deciphering of the meanings produced by films while the psychoanalytic aspect provides a significant connection between the cinematic subject, the viewer and his fascination for the form in which cinematic depictions interact subconscious that is shaped by his pre-existing cultural subconscious. (Mulvey, 1975)

Mulvey's central hypothesis is that cinema makes voyeurism into an exclusively male prerogative through narrative and visual techniques. The women are invariably the object the reifying male gaze and never the beneficiary. (Mulvey, 1975). The male gaze is produced utilising association given by the male hero and through the known use of the camera. Mulvey recognises two ways in which Hollywood produces pleasure which arise from different mental tools. (Mulvey, 1975)

The first form of pleasure involves objectifying the image which is related to Scopophilia or the pleasure derived from subjecting someone to one's gaze. The second form of pleasure is the association with the represented figure which is brought about by insufficiencies arising out of what Freud calls Ego. Both tools symbolise the fundamental desires of the male subject. Scopophilia is a structure used in films on an active/passive axis. Moreover, this structure is very much gendered. The male is always on the active side, gazing. (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 834-835)

The woman, however, is on the passive side being the object of his gaze. This axis of passive/active is achieved in two ways. One involved the male character within the diegesis and the camera looking at the woman, directing the viewer's objectifying gaze towards her. (Freud, 1955)

The structure of the cinematic narrative demonstrated the distinction between an active male character and a passive female character. The films surveyed by Mulvey revolve around a domineering, masculine figure with whom the viewers can identify. (Braudy & Cohen., 1975).

This association is similar to Jacques Lacan's mirror stage where he indicates how a child gets enjoyment and pleasure from the association with an idealized mirror image and forms his/her ego ideals based on their perfect image. (Mulvey, 1975)

Similarly, a film viewer derives his narcissistic pleasure from identifying with the perfected image of a human figure on the screen. In both the mirror stage as well as in cinema, such associations with the figure on screen are not a lucid form of awareness. Mulvey insinuates that “the cinematic female figure is quite the paradox.” (Braudy & Cohen., 1975, pp. 833-844)

She merges attraction with playing on the male figures deepest fear, which is castration. The male subconscious holds two ways of escaping his dark fears. One is by demystifying the female figure by punishing or saving her. The other way is through the fetishization of her (for instance as the glamorous unobtainable star). (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 837-842)

According to Mulvey, films attempt to resolve the tension between being attracted to the female and fearing her. Therefore, films provide for the primitive desires of the male characters. (Mulvey, 1975, pp. 835-836). Nonetheless, Mulvey's essay reinforced heterosexuality and assumed that viewers are passive and un-negotiating.

BRACHA L. ETTINGER: THE MATRIXIAL GAZE

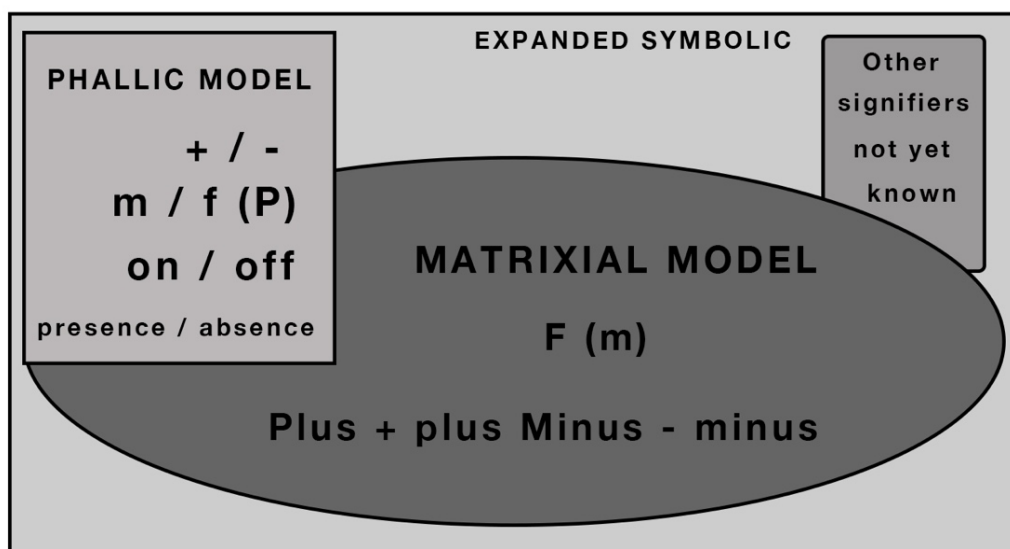
The psychoanalytic theory is highly dependent on the prerogative of the Freudian theory of the unconscious, where the phallus is the signifier linking lack and desire. It also encourages “the model of repression” based upon men’s deep fear for castration, thus struggling to overcome the limitations of learning more about the development of subjectivity. (Boag, 2012)

Feminist film critiques view phallocentrism very differently from what was theorised initially by Freud and Lacan. However, theories of Matrix and metamorphosis have shed new light on phallocentrism in the field of art history. These concepts are related to object relations theory and other intersubjective and self tendencies, which suggests that the Oedipal subject and the Oedipal conditions can blend. Therefore, fetal and female strata of subjectivity can manifest sublimation. (Ettinger B. L., 2006)

Bracha L. Ettinger attempted to invent a paradigm that breaks with both the Freudian-Lacanian model and the intersubjective as a discipline of communication, reconceiving desire as well as the unconscious by association instead to the transgressive encounter between Id and ego that is grounded in the matrilineal womb and a sentiment of affective economy that eludes phallogentrism. (Ettinger B. L., 2006)

Her article also helped understand the entry into the semiotic world, outside the model of castration and the symbolic role of the phallus in it, particularly how it has hypothesised the pre-Oedipal drives associated with archaic mother and the object as a signifier of desire based upon primordial loss. She also theorises with ad from Marguerite Dura's novel, ***Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein*** to propose a radical post Lacanian feminist scenario for the formation or failure of feminine desire rephrasing' Freud's question What does a woman want with it's implied subclause 'from a man to read What does a woman want to become a woman from a women. She proposes for a feminine dimension to the image and gazing that she names fascinace in counterpoint to' Lacan's deadly fascinum. (Ettinger B. L., 1992). Extrapolating from Lacan's latest revisions to his theories of the real and phantasy to bring out it is potential yet subversive continuity, Ettinger works to give form to a subjacent, subsymbolic, stratum of subjectivization that nonetheless has the effect of altering or expanding the symbol itself.

Ettinger's paradigm is a complicated psychoanalytical aesthetic move that serves first to alert us to the exclusivity of the dominant phallic logic while still allowing it a relativised place within an expanded symbolic. (Ettinger B. L., 1992)



(Ettinger B. L., 1992) Figure 1.2

In Ettinger's theories, the symbolic is shifted or returned rather than overturned by a supplementary coshaping-not-quite-logic that she invokes using the term matrixial. She moves beyond the phallic oppositions, masculine/feminine, phallic/other to open space for what coexists with/beside a phallic logic. (Ettinger B. L., 2006)

Phallic logic is still necessary for certain vital elements of subjectivization and access to language. Yet it forecloses a sexual difference that would derive from the feminine.

It is not adequate to an understanding of what is tipped into visibility or cognition through workings of the aesthetics that surface at interfaces of soma and psyche, the archaic and the corporeal which psychoanalysis dares to think and which are sharing with the coming of sexuality. (Ettinger B. L., 1992)

The Matrix emerges as a supplementary, shifting, returning concurrent paradigm where. Web of meaning is woven by a process the artist theorist names metamorphosis. Weaving is a potent and necessary metaphor, an image of decentered field, textuality, a texture, vibrating threads. Such metaphors resonate with while displacing the late Lacanian theory of subjectivity as described in terms of fabric fold or the Möbius strip where Lacan too, was struggling to find images and terms through which to articulate a more complex theory of subjectivity. (Ettinger B. L., 1992)

FEMINISM AND SEMIOTICS

Cinema is an essential medium of representation, a machine that constructs visions and images of the social reality and where the spectator stands in it. However, so far as cinema is directly implicated in the production and reproduction of meanings, values, and ideology in both sociality and subjectivity.

It should be " better understood as a signifying practice, a work of semiosis: a work that produces effects of meaning _ and perception, self-images and subject positions for all those involved, makers and viewers; and thus a semiotic process in which the subject is continually engaged, represented, and inscribed in ideology. (Miller, 2014)

The latter emphasis is entirely consonant with the present concerns of theoretical feminism in its effort to articulate the relations of the female subject to ideology, representation, practice, and its need to reconceptualize women's position in the symbolic.

However, the current theories of the subject-Kristeva's as well as Lacan's- pose severe difficulties for feminist theory. Part of the problem lies in their derivation from, and overwhelming dependence on, linguistics. It may well be, then, that part of the solution is to start elsewhere, which is not to say that we should ignore or discard a useful concept like signifying practice, but rather to propose that we rejoin it from another critical path. (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982). If feminists have been so insistently engaged in practices of cinema, as filmmakers, critics, and theorists, it is because there the stakes are exceptionally high.

The objectification of women and the consequent representation of the female as a locus of sexuality, place of visual pleasure, or bait of the gaze) is very prevalent in our society and culture long before the advent of cinema. Therefore, it constitutes a starting point for understanding sexual differences, and the ideological impact in the development of social subjects and its impact on all forms of subjectivity.

Moreover, in our "civilization of the image," as Barthes has called it, cinema works most effectively as an imaging machine, which by producing images (of women or not of women) also tends to reproduce woman as image. (Lauretis, 1993)

The stakes for women -in cinema, therefore, are very high, and our intervention most important at the theoretical level, if we are to obtain a conceptually rigorous and politically useful grasp of the processes of imaging. In the context of the discussion of iconic signification, the feminist critique of representation has raised many questions that require critical attention and further elaboration. (Lauretis, 1993)

CLAIRE JOHNSTON: WOMEN'S CINEMA

In a broader sense, Counter cinema is a term used for grouping of filmmakers, films and institutions that work against the ideological and formalist control Hollywood cinema has.

Mostly, counter cinema comprises of films that do not have stereotypical or hyper-violent characters and linear plots. It all began with Claire Johnston, a feminist film theoretician, who suggested that women's cinema could work as "counter cinema." (Johnston, 1973). Through awareness of the means of production and resistance of sexist ideologies, women-centric films or films made by women hold the potential to be recognised as an alternative to classic Hollywood films. One of the earliest articles written by Claire Johnston, "Women's Cinema as a Counter Cinema (1973)" deals with feminist film theory and practice. (Johnston, 1973)

In her article, Johnston reveals the existence of the stereotypical portrayal of women since the silent film era and demonstrates the need for a cinema that defies such small conventions and will also be entertaining. Women are often an extension of a male character in mainstream cinema. Johnston also criticises the insignificant role they play in the film. "It is probably true to say that despite the enormous emphasis placed on the woman as spectacle in the cinema, woman as woman is largely absent." (Butler A. , 2019) Several female filmmakers have blended alternative techniques and experimental methods to encourage audience members to critique the visibly transparent images on the screen and to challenge the manipulative ways of making and editing films.

Johnston uses the works of Ida Lupino and Dorothy Arzner as examples to suggest that their films partially change the patriarchal outlook. Understanding the way these films work is crucial for feminist film practice to break through and defy the dominating patriarchal ideology. (Johnston, 1973).

Johnston also illustrates how women's ideological representation is a settlement. The importance of developing a film practice that questions and challenges mainstream dominant cinema movement, which will have links with avant-garde and left-wing film. (Nelmes, 2012).

According to Barthes indicator of "woman" is analysed as a structure, a password or a tradition. This indicator represents the ideological meaning of "woman" for man. When women associate with each other do not have a meaning women are presented as "non-male" negatively. (Bordwell, 1979)

Johnston hopes for a woman's cinema "that collectively works together with no hierarchical structure and using film as a medium, more conventionally, as a political tool and for entertainment. (Johnston, 1973). She also emphasises the need for promoting a cinematic practice that opposes the male-dominated industry. (Johnston, 1973)

JULIA KRISTÉVA: ABJECTION

French Bulgarian author Julia Kristeva became highly influential in feminism. Her published essay "*Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*" (1980) examines the concept of abjection - a term referring to the terrifying and repressed forces that often linger inside an individual's psyche. (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

Kristeva defines the abject as "a reference to the human anxiety created by the possible loss of the distinction between subject/object or between self/other. Abjection is essentially an occurrence in which the abjected "does not respect borders, positions, rules, [and] that which disturbs identity, system, order". (Kristeva & Oliver, 2002)

In her critical examination, Kristeva concentrates principally on religion and art with hints to psychoanalysis and literature. Kristeva "develops her theory about the role of the abject in the construction of cultural norms, seeking to define and delineate the borders between order and that which lies beyond acceptability." In her extensive treatise on the subject, Kristeva draws on the theories of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan to examine the concepts of horror, marginalization, castration, the phallic signifier, the Oedipal Complex, and many others that can be appropriate to feminist criticism and queer theory. (Kristeva J. , 1980)

The central element to Kristeva's theory is the contrast between maternal authority and the law of the father, in which she argues, "that the semiotic process involved with an individual's contact with authority can be contrasted between the alignment of the subject with maternal authority and the association or proper social regulation with the paternal law." (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

Abjection works by separating the human from the non-human, and thereby the monstrous, within human society. Marxist feminist Barbara Creed focuses on the construction of abjection around the feminine body and the notion of the 'border' within horror and slasher films, with her primary focus on the monstrous-feminine as embodying the concept of abjection. (Kristeva J. , 1980)

Borders vary from films to film; it may be the border between human and inhuman, healthy and supernatural, or good and evil. The monstrous can be a production appearing at the crossing of the border, which separates those who choose their proper gender role from those who do not. All that threatens the stability of the symbolic order is abject. However, what is important to remember is that the symbolic order develops from a patriarchal and phallogocentric perspective, which is why the idea of abjection includes the female body and the maternal figure in particular. (Kristeva & Roudiez, 1982)

POPULARISED GENDER INEQUALITY TESTS

Representation tests have the influence to inform the audience about gender imbalance more often on display in popular media.

Observing how films fail these tests, can bring to light the issue of sexism in cinema and aim for a better onscreen representation of women in cinema. (Douglas, 2017)

BECHDEL TEST

Alison Bechdel is an American cartoonist known for her graphic novels, “Are You My Mother?” and “Fun Home.” She is also commonly associated with the Bechdel test, a short and straightforward measure of representation of women in fiction named after her. The test was initially introduced in her comic strip “Dykes to watch out for.” (Garner, 2008)

The strip, which ran between 1983 and 2008, was one of the earliest ongoing depictions of lesbians in popular culture. It chronicled the loves, lives, and politics of a relatively diverse group of characters (most of them lesbians) living in the United States. The comic strip features both gripping topical commentary and humorous soap opera storylines. (Garner, 2008)

Dykes To Watch Out For

by Alison Bechdel



(Bechdel A. , 2005)

The strip was carried in humour newspapers like FunnyTimes and syndicated to several gay and lesbian newspapers, apart from being published on the web. Bechdel who was inspired by Virginia Wolf's essay 'A Room of One's Own', titled her comic strip "The Rule" featuring a multi-racial lesbian couple who resemble future characters Mo and Ginger, considering watching a film that evening while taking a walk. (Bechdel A. , 2005)

Mo explains that she will watch a movie only if it satiates three conditions –

1. The movie must have at least two (named) female characters
2. who talk to each other
3. about something besides a man. (Bechdel, Kelly, & Preuninger, 2005)

Ginger acknowledges that the idea is rigid but good. Not able to find any films that meet their conditions, they go back home together instead. The strip was introduced initially as a winking criticism against male-centric films in another feminist newspaper. The Bechdel test powerfully demonstrates gender imbalance in films. However, the test fails to address the lack of many other equally essential identities that need representation such as race, class, gender identities, age, sexuality and body types.

MAKO MORI TEST

Hollywood has made it challenging to find a movie with a competent, three-dimensional and reliable female protagonist. However, *Pacific Rim* by Guillermo del Toro struck a chord with millennials because of one of the movie's protagonists, Mako Mori, a Japanese woman (performed by Rinko Kikuchi) who co-pilots the film's main Jaeger (a giant monster-fighting robot) and eventually helps to save the world. (Toro, 2013)

The movie, however, has been scrutinised for failing the Bechdel test, which has become a contemporary measure amongst feminist critics to conclude if a movie is feminist or not unilaterally. Tumblr user Chaila has proposed the Mako Mori Test, "to live alongside the Bechdel Test." A test that is meant to work with, not in place of, the Bechdel test to give us a better look at feminist trends in the movie industry. The application of this test might enable interesting discussions of feminism surrounding films which typically seem to be steamrollered by their failure to pass Bechdel. A movie passes the Mako Mori test if the movie has:

- a) a minimum of one female character;
- b) with a narrative arc of her own.
- c) that is not supporting a man's story. (Romano, 2015)



(Douglas, 2017)

Ultimately, even if the Mako Mori Test fails to mature into a measure of representation in the public discourse, conversations about the efficiency of the Bechdel Test will continue. It is interesting to note that some of the most incredibly sexist movies pass Bechdel while still contributing to a harmful message about women. (Douglas, 2017)

Furthermore, if only one woman at a time can be allowed her own nuanced, mature, narrative in a film, then the Mako Mori Test might conclusively enable the status quo rather than critique the widespread patriarchal pattern of filmmaking. (Douglas, 2017)

SEXY LAMP TEST

The Sexy Lamp Test addresses the much-despised and ubiquitous Strong Female Character trope, in which a character is both compelling and female but lacks power or importance. (Berret, 2015). In a 2012 interview with Laura Hudson of Comics Alliance, American comic book writer Kelly Sue DeConnick said:

"As an industry, we have to make more female-led books that are actually worth buying. Nevermind the Bechdel test, try this: if you can replace your female character with a sexy lamp and the story still basically works, maybe you need another draft. They have to be protagonists, not devices. [Before anyone flips out on me, can I point out that I said we need to make "more." I did not say we are not making them. We are making them. Industry-wide, we are making them—but we need to make more." (Hudson, 2012)

The Sexy Lamp test was intended to be funny, but it is interesting in terms of revealing what is genuinely objectification and when a character happens to be sexy but is more than that. Moreover, it works to show us the very different ways that media - especially anime (since it has many media that acknowledges the Female as well as Male Gaze) - tends to deal with male fanservice aimed at women, and female fanservice aimed at men. (Douglas, 2017)

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The study will primarily explore the visibility and nature of female depictions in sampled films but also the complexity of their characters, personality traits, the depth of their stories, and the range of their concerns.

The thesis will also examine as broadly as possible, the interactions between women on the screen presented in the sampled films. The study also aims to understand and compare the extent of female-to-female and male-to-male interactions in such films.

The effectiveness of contemporary methods such as Bechdel Wallace Test, Mako Mori Test and Sexy Lamp Test for analysing gender imbalance in films will also be examined. The study will also analyse the significance of feminist film theories as well as the three waves of feminism, which heavily influenced women's roles in the film.

The study will also examine the effectiveness and use of the fourth wave cyberfeminism to develop the conversation around the portrayal of female characters in the film.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Keeping the aforementioned objectives, the following questions arise:

How effective were the three waves of feminism in bringing strong female characters on screen?

Does 21st Century representation of women in films reflect the collective efforts of the first three feminist waves in terms of gender equality?

What is the significance of fourth wave cyber gender equality tests such as the Bechdel-Wallace, Sexy lamp, Mako Mori Tests in establishing gender equality?

What is the level of accuracy of these gender equality tests?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A multi-stage sampling method to select five movies for examining the patterns of portrayal of female-to-female and male-to-male interactions in cinema was applied. Further, This research study used contemporary methods of gender equality and critical assessment tests, namely, the Bechdel Wallace , Mako Mori and the sexy lamp test to the selected films, to examine and understand the extent of such interactions.

The study also used the lens of feminist film theories to bring forth the influence of these theories as well as the three waves of feminism, on the chosen texts. The study also applied Laura Mulvey's concept of cinematic male gaze, to examine the construction of female characters in Western cinema.

DEFINITIONS

Multi-stage sampling

Multi-stage sampling is an advanced form of cluster sampling, containing two or more stages in sample selection. In simple terms, in multi-stage sampling, large clusters of the samples are divided into smaller cluster through several stages in order to make the primary data collection more manageable and straightforward.

Same-sex-interaction

Same-sex interaction is interaction measured between two or more characters of the same sex. For this study, interaction is defined as when characters talk to each other but also other interactions such as fighting, walking together, dancing or any other direct visible interactions. Interaction in a fight scene will be measured if one of the characters are named or one of the fighting characters is relevant to the plot or story of the film. Scenes involving a verbal exchange between two unnamed characters are also considered as interactions. Phone or radio interactions are measured if it is clear that two individuals have a verbal exchange. While an individual is addressing a group, interaction is measured when somebody approaches or talks to the speaker. Interaction is measured when an individual is interacting with a homogenous group, and the individual is the same sex as the group. Scenes, where interactions between the same sex are interrupted by the opposite sex, are measured until the period where their interaction is interrupted.

FI and MI

FI or female-to-female interaction includes all interactions between two or more female characters. MI or male-to-male interaction includes all interactions between two or more male characters. MI and FI interactions include interaction(s) with children of the same gender.

In films that do not involve human characters, determination of the gender is based on the character's attributes. For example, in Spike Jonze's film, *Her* (2013), Theodore's virtual assistant Samantha, has female attributes, which is conveyed to the audience specifically through a female name and voice.

APPROACH AND JUSTIFICATION

The first stage of sampling capitalised on the recent advent of social media groups exclusively garnering the likes of a cinephile. Social media holds phenomenal success in terms of usage levels and adoption. They cause paradigm shifts on how people interact and connect, on how they share and express ideas, and even on how they engage with organisations, brands and products. Moreover, social media is currently a vital network of consumer knowledge and preferences.

Cinephile groups on social media platforms like Facebook, MUBI and Letterboxd were approached for a list of five films, mainly dealing with Male to female as well as female to female interactions in 4 different categories - Academy Award-winning film, Palm-D'or winning art-house film, a film with a female protagonist and a film directed by a female filmmaker. Over 2,500 film suggestions were received from cinephiles across the world.

For the second stage of narrowing down the sample, twenty of the highly recommended films were selected from the list of 2,500 recommendations. Additionally, these 20 films were further also compared with online film database websites such as IMDB, Rotten tomatoes, Roger Ebert and the Guardian for their ratings. The list was further narrowed down to highly rated 10 films out of the 20.

The third stage of sampling involved eliminating movies that have been repeatedly researched in graduate theses and scholarly papers. Animated movies were not considered for the study because the purpose of the study is specifically to examine interactions between real human characters. This resulted in narrowing down the list to 4 films.

A minimum of 20 years interval has been maintained in order to show the change, if any, of the depictions of female characters over time while keeping the study concise in its examination of the four films vs 2,500 films from all the years between 1939 - 2019. Two decades would provide a statistical difference in the data or the results due to the genres and casts of the films. The Bechdel test which has been in vogue in recent years has inspired this study. Hence, it was more relevant to include contemporary films, to understand the increase in awareness of gender roles in films today. Therefore Avengers: End Game (2019) was added to the narrowed list of 4 films.

Avengers End game is currently a top-grossing film of all time (without inflation adjustment). The final list of 5 sampled films are –

1. The Silence of the Lambs (USA, 1991) - A movie with a female protagonist.
2. Avengers End Game (USA, 2019) - Top grossing film of 2019.
3. The Piano (New Zealand, 1993) - A movie directed by a female filmmaker.
4. Bicycle Thieves (Italy, 1948) - The most voted art film of all time with the greatest number of awards. The most recommended film by cinephiles on social media.
5. Gone With the Wind (USA,1939) - Top grossing film of all time after adjusting inflation.

PLOT OUTLINES

The Silence of the Lambs (USA, 1991) - Skilled FBI agent-in-training, Clarice Starling, is given the assignment to interrogate Dr Hannibal Lecter, a gifted psychiatrist who is also a murderous psychopath, serving life behind bars for various acts of cannibalism and homicide. Lecter has insight On Buffalo Bill, a serial killer on the loose. Clarice must win his cooperation to crack the case.

Avengers End Game (USA, 2019) - Drifting in space with no food or water, Tony Stark (Iron Man) transmits a message to Pepper Potts when his oxygen supply starts to wane while the remaining Avengers -- Black Widow, Thor, Bruce Banner and Captain America -- must figure out a way to bring back their defeated allies for a showdown with Thanos -- the evil demigod who decimated the planet and the universe.

The Piano (New Zealand, 1993) - Following a tedious journey from Scotland, pianist Ada McGrath and Flora, her young daughter, are left with all their belongings, including a piano, on a beach in New Zealand. Ada, who has been mute since childhood, has been sold into marriage by her father to a local man named Alisdair Stewart. While making a limited attempt to warm up to Alisdair, Ada is intrigued by his Maori-friendly acquaintance, George Baines, leading to tense and life-altering conflicts.

Bicycle Thieves (Italy, 1948) - Unemployed Antonio Ricci is overjoyed when he finally finds a job hanging posters around war-torn Rome. However, his job requires him to own a bicycle. His wife, Maria, sells the family's precious bed linens to help retrieve Antonio's bicycle from the pawnshop.

Gone With the Wind (USA,1939) - A Civil War drama, about the life of an ill-tempered southern belle Scarlett O'Hara. Starting with her idyllic on a sprawling plantation, the film traces her survival through the tragic history of the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and her tangled love affairs with Ashley Wilkes and Rhett Butler.

Before, considering the movies for the contemporary gender tests, the FI content to be analysed are divided into two parts.

1. Section 1 contains scenes with measurable interactions, where two or more female characters have a substantial verbal conversation (or a fight).
2. Section 2 contains short scenes with little or no relevant, measurable interaction. Following are some examples of Section 2 FI content.

Content in section 2 is automatically considered insufficient for measuring FI interactions if the communication is less than 4 seconds. A coding scheme will be maintained for the content classified under Section 1. The content will be coded using three variables in order to understand patterns of FI interaction. Following is the coding scheme used for the qualitative content analysis (Bechdel, Mako Mori & Sexy lamp).

Topic of Discussion	Nature of Relationship	Type of Interaction
Plot	Family	Talking
Men	Friends	Fighting
Profession	Colleague	Singing
Marriage/Friendship	Enemy	Shouting
Food	Aquaintance	Dancing
Casual/Small talk	Lover	Sign Language

Table 2.1

From the variables above, it is apparent that a manifest approach has been applied to the content analysis. Manifest content comprises elements that are tangible and materialistic (Berg, 2001, 242).

In such a context, a type of visible interaction between two female characters is considered a substantial tangible variable. It is relevant to use a manifest content approach as it more accurate and leaves little space for multiple interpretations. Hence, the content is an ideal measure for reliability.

FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

This segment aims to lay down the findings and observations from the chosen text. The five films which were chosen were measured for same-sex-interactions, namely, Male-to-male interactions (MI) and female-to-female interaction (FI), which have been carefully measured in time.

The scenes comprising of FI have then been analysed further based on the three variables proposed in the previous section. Additionally, the FI content is then used to investigate whether they pass the contemporary gender tests.

Out of 730 minutes of total running time from the chosen films, a total 115 minutes were FI content. Scenes coded for content (under Section 1) has a total duration of 95 minutes and 40 seconds. Scenes coded for no content (under Section 2) has a total duration of 19 minutes and 20 seconds.

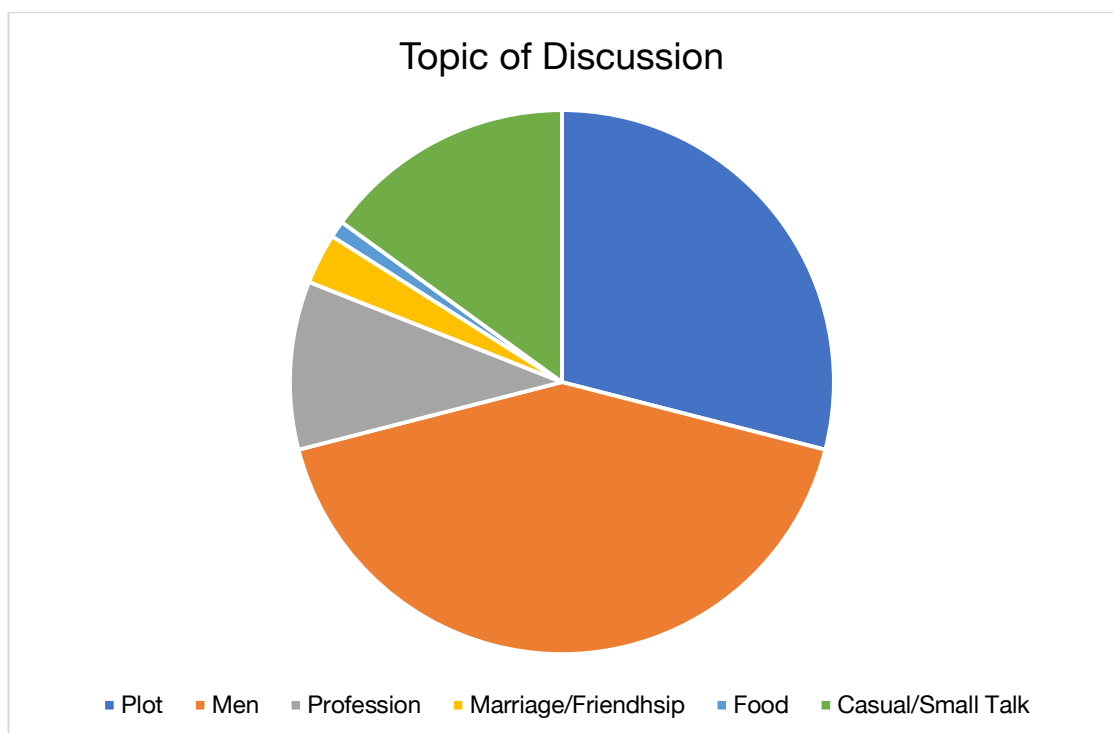
The results focussed on three main variables: Topic of discussion, nature of relationship and type of interaction. The following results expose the context of their interaction.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

Below are the results presented from the content of the FI scenes from all the chosen five films coded for topic of discussion. The topic of discussion between the women analysed in the FI content was predominantly related to men.

Topic of Discussion	Percentage (%)
Plot	29
Men	42
Profession	10
Marriage/Friendship	3
Food	1
Casual/Small Talk	15
Miscellaneous	-

Table 2.2

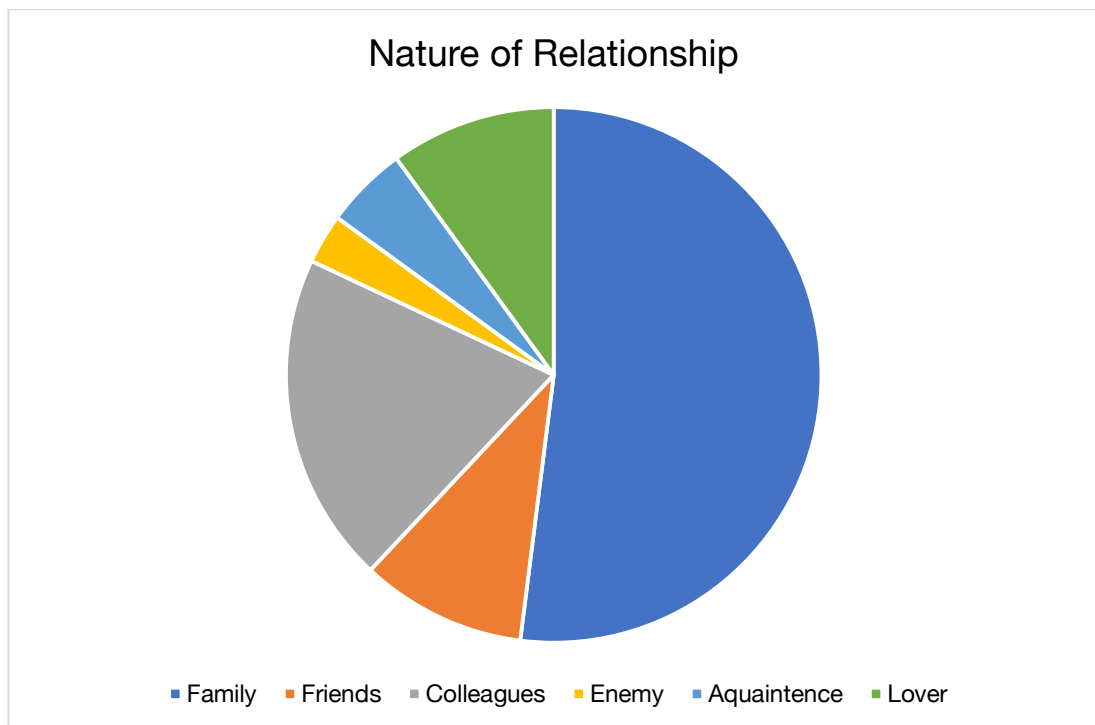


NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

The results explicitly show lead female characters portrayed in familial roles.

Nature of relationship	Percentage (%)
Family	52
Friends	10
Colleagues	20
Enemy	3
Aquaintance	5
Lover	10
Others	-

Table 2.3

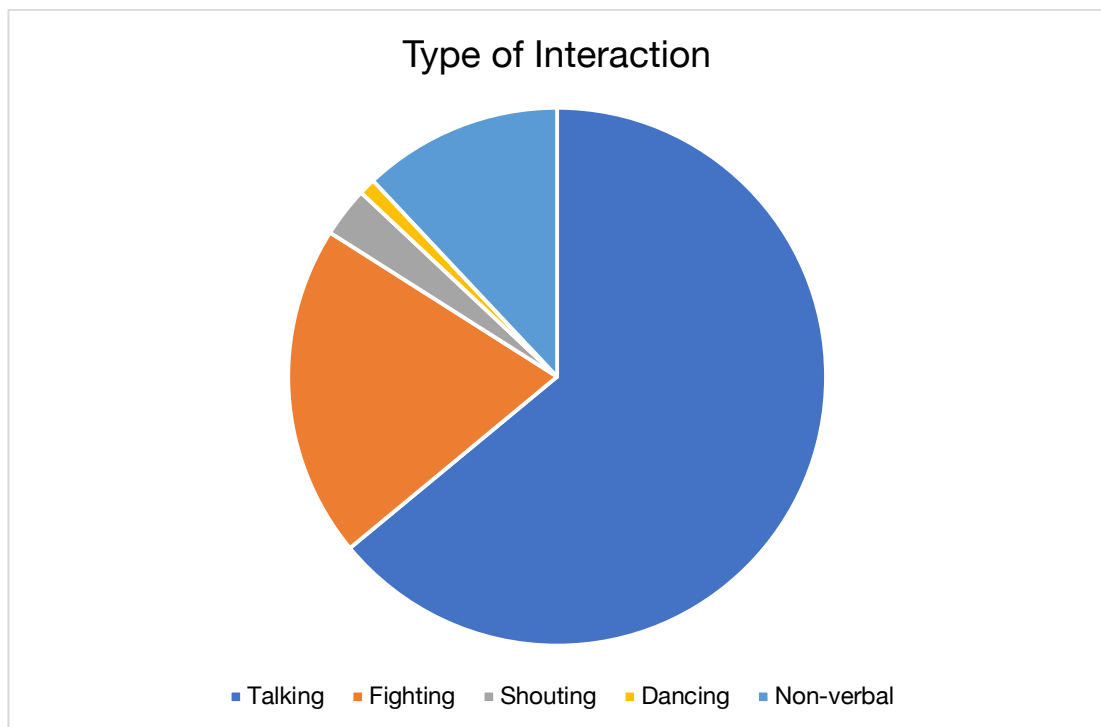


TYPE OF INTERACTION

The results reveal that female characters are predominantly interacting by speaking/talking.

Type of Interaction	Percentage (%)
Talking	64
Fighting	20
Singing	-
Shouting	3
Dancing	1
Non-verbal	12
Miscellaneous	-

Table 2.4



GENDER REPRESENTATION TESTS

Below are the results of the three gender representation tests used to analyse the FI content.

BECHDEL TEST

Table 2.5

Name of the Movie	Named Female characters	Talking to each other	About something other than a man
Silence of the lambs	✓	✓	✓
Avengers:End Game	✓	✓	✓
The Piano	✓	✓	✓
Bicycle Thieves	-	✓	-
Gone with the wind	✓	✓	✓

MAKO MORI TEST

Table 2.6

Name of the movie	Named Female character	Narrative Arc not supporting a man
Silence of the lambs	✓	✓
Avengers:End Game	✓	✓
The Piano	✓	✓
Bicycle Thieves	✓	-
Gone with the wind	✓	-

SEXY LAMP TEST

Table 2.7

Name of the movie	Female character replaced by a sexy lamp.	Effectiveness of Plot
Silence of the lambs	Clarice Starling	x
Avengers:End Game	Black Widow	x
The Piano	Ada	x
Bicycle Thieves	Maria	✓
Gone with the wind	Scarlett	x

AVENGERS : END GAME (2019)

Avengers: End Game has several female characters including Captain Marvel, Nebula and Black widow who contribute to the plot of the film. However, their emotional journeys are weak and underdeveloped. For example, the film barely establishes the Black Widow's ultimate sacrifice to give up on her life.

While several hundred people gather for Iron man's funeral upon his death, Black Widow gets a single mention, and her disappearance is abrupt. Overall, female characters in Avengers: End Game are represented as walking applause lines rather than as individuals. While the male figures enjoy a combined 381 minutes of screen time, their female counterparts only have 116 minutes of consolidated screen time.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

Most of the topics of discussion in the movie with the female characters are plot driven. However, the lead female characters in the film – Black Widow, Captain Marvel and Nebula consistently talk about the male antagonist Thanos. Nebula and Natasha briefly have conversations regarding an earthquake, and a faulty lead, they receive for their space mission. Additionally, Nebula talks to Gamora about their relationship as sisters.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

Most of the female characters are superheroes, and their relationship with each other is principally either friends/colleagues. Nebula although observed initially only as of the daughter of the antagonist Thanos, commands her narrative arc when she despises her father for converting her into a cybernetic assassin while often trying in vain to prove her worth to her father. A couple of other minor female characters like Pepper Potts are portrayed as love interests or in familial roles concerning the male protagonist.

TYPE OF INTERACTION

Since Avengers is an action film, most of the female interactions are in the form of combat and yelling. However, speaking is another type of interaction in the film observed after variables mentioned above.

BECHDEL TEST

The film includes multiple named female characters interact with each other about plot-related subject matters such as earthquakes and the state of the universe post-snap that does not involve a man. While most of their conversations are frequently interrupted by a central male character, the film still manages to pass the Bechdel test.

MAKO MORI TEST

While *the film* barely managed to have two women on screen at the same time for longer than two minutes, it had a female character, Black Widow, whose narrative arc was a major driving force of the plot. Using the Mako Mori Test as a measurement of points the focus away from the film's small quantity of women and towards the way Black Widow is demonstrably capable of commanding her storyline.

SEXY LAMP TEST

Although Black Widow's character drove the narrative plot of the film, the way her story ended is sudden. Black Widow dies on Vormir in order to get the Soul Stone. As a result, she is not even around for the final battle. Having one of the only female characters driving the plot of the film, dying is unusual. Consequently, replacing the black widow with a sexy lamp did not affect 75% of the story. Thus, Avengers: End Game fails the sexy lamp test.

SILENCE OF THE LAMBS (1991)

The Silence of the lambs is explicitly feminist. The film consistently portrays Clarice as a lone woman in the male enclave. For instance, in the scene where she is stepping onto an elevator filled with suited FBI men.

Moreover, her relationship with Lecter is tinged with sadistic, sexualized abuse, as he forces her to discuss traumatic details of her past in return for information about Buffalo Bill. Nevertheless, Clarice is not a passive victim.

Her professional competence and courage enable her to defeat others' efforts to objectify her handily. The movie celebrates her ambition, intelligence and bravery. Since the film has only one main female character, the following observation will focus only on Clarice Starling.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

Although the film barely has any FI content, there are two instances where Clarice Starling has a conversation with another female character, her friend from the FBI Ardelia regarding a plot-driven discussion.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

In the film, the Silence of the Lambs, Clarice is an intelligent and dedicated FBI agent detecting and fighting criminals, particularly serial killers. For instance, the movie opens with a defining image of Clarice Starling as a woman of action: she is running an obstacle course, alone, through the foggy woods.

TYPE OF INTERACTION

Although Clarice is physically very active and always on the move, her interactions predominantly involve speaking. However, the showdown between her and Buffalo Bill, in the end, involves chasing and fighting.

BECHDEL TEST

Clarice Starling studies with her friend from the FBI academy, Ardelia. The two quiz each other for their upcoming tests during physical training. They later volley ideas back and forth about the case, which is about Buffalo Bill (a transgender character). Therefore, the Silence of the Lambs passes the Bechdel test.

MAKO MORI TEST

While trying to crack the case of a serial killer on the loose, Clarice is forced to confront her past by Hannibal Lector, allowing her to find Buffalo Bill in a rural area. As a result, Clarice has a clear narrative arc of her own that does not support any male' character's story. Although the male antagonist supports her narrative arc. Hence, Silence of the lambs passes the Mako Mori test.

SEXY LAMP TEST

The Silence of the Lambs is a rare example of a film that subverts the Male gaze. Throughout the film' Clarice's gaze always goes slightly off to the side as she returns the' men's glares, friend or foe. By continuously steering her eye line of the frame, Clarice changes into the point of view character.

Consequently, the viewer is compelled to identify with a female character, rather than a heterosexual male and therefore considered as an object for voyeuristic pleasure (Fro Clarice's point of view). Upon replacing Clarice with a sexy lamp, it is evident that only 5 % of the story works. Therefore, the Silence of the lambs passes the sexy lamp test.

GONE WITH THE WIND (1939)

Scarlett O'Hara's commitment to her family moves past, merely serving as a good wife. She agrees to marry a man she is not in love with to preserve her family and save her plantation.

She works in the plantation fields herself while buying and running two sawmills so that she can earn money for her household. On the other hand, Scarlett is hardworking and rebels against American society's view of women.

Additionally, *Gone With the Wind* makes it challenging to discuss feminist aspects since most of the white female characters are represented differently from the black female characters. Most of the “black” female characters in the film are underdeveloped, and they almost seem to be portrayed as uneducated/ignored.

Gone With the Wind is a film that makes the Old South appear lovely, which is not very feminist. However, the film does offer some active character roles for women and presents female strength more than most films of its time.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

Majority of the discussions between female characters are casual and often not plot-related. Their conversations are predominantly about men. For example, Mammy and Scarlett mostly have conversations about how to dress well for the ball to look good in front of men or how Scarlett loves her man.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

Scarlett O’Hara's character throughout the film is in the context of her family (as a daughter) and as a lover. Most of the secondary “black” female characters are represented in household or familial roles as well.

TYPE OF INTERACTION

In *Gone with the Wind*, female characters are predominantly speaking except for one scene where a couple of characters are observed to be dancing.

BECHDEL TEST

Throughout the film, Scarlett and Mammy also have several conversations unrelated to the male characters in the film. Melanie and Scarlett have a conversation while registering the pockets of the killed soldier. Scarlett's sisters talk about her "shameful" behaviour at the Twelve Oaks party. Aunt Pittypat, Melanie and some other women talk about Scarlett's behaviour at the ball in Atlanta. Hence, the film passes the Bechdel test.

MAKO MORI TEST

Likewise, two men support Scarlett's narrative arc. Scarlett is too fixated on Ashley Wilkes to realize her pursuit of him is misdirected until his death when she realizes her pursuit of Ashley was a childish romance and she has loved Rhett Butler for some time.

She pursues Rhett from the Wilkes home to their home, only to discover he has given up hope of ever receiving her love and is about to leave her. Wracked with grief but determined to win him back Scarlett returns to Tara to regain her strength and create a plan to reunite with Rhett. Therefore, *Gone with the Wind* passes the Mako Mori test.

SEXY LAMP TEST

Gone with the Wind is entirely dominated by Scarlett. Scarlett is a complex character, perhaps the most complex woman in American literature. There is no denying she makes some mistakes, but the inescapable truth is that Scarlett O'Hara is a successful woman. Besides, Scarlett pursues the love of her life while fighting for her survival in the war plagued South. Replacing her with a sexy lamp makes 90% of the story ineffective. Therefore, Gone with the Wind passes the sexy lamp test.

THE PIANO (1993)

Ada may have endured sexual blackmail, severe domestic violence and attempted rape. However, she is still forced to choose between her cold, abusive husband, and Baines. There is no sense of sisterhood between the film's female characters. Furthermore, Ada's own daughter betrays her.

A key observation that is noteworthy is the troubling notion that Ada has to choose between sex and art. Feminist author Bell Hooks has argued that *The Piano* falls short of being a feminist film because it advances the sexist assumption that heterosexual women will give up their artistic practice to find true love.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

The Piano is the most significant contributor to the total amount of FI content. However, the majority of FI interactions are related to men.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

The two main female characters, Ada and Flora, are represented in relation to the male characters. Additionally, the film is set in the 19th century. Hence, it closely follows the culture and conventions of that period. As a result, the female characters in the film are only portrayed in familial roles.

TYPE OF INTERACTION

In most of the scenes, women are interacting through conversing. While Ada McGrath does not talk, she does interact with her in sign language. It is also observed that Ada's stream of consciousness helps understand her inner emotions in certain parts of the film. For example, the viewer understands that Ada was sold to an arranged marriage through her stream of consciousness. (Stream of consciousness is a style in which a character's thoughts, feelings, and reactions are depicted in a continuous flow uninterrupted by objective description or conventional dialogue).

BECHDEL TEST

Although Ada does not speak, she interacts a lot with her daughter in sign language. The context of the interaction is predominantly about men. However, there are a couple of conversations, involving a scene where Flora is deciphering the sign language. Hence, The Piano passes the test.

MAKO MORI TEST

In the movie the Piano, Ada is initially a character who is quiet, ornery, prudish, and unaffectionate, due to her not being able to have the one thing that allows her to speak her mind and soul – her Piano. Once Baines asks for piano lessons and has Ada come down to his home to play (and follow through with a few requests), He begins to understand her like no one ever has, because he listens to what she plays. Soon after, Ada's walls begin to fall slowly, and the two fall in love. Although a man supports Ada's narrative arc, the Piano passes the Mako Mori test.

SEXY LAMP TEST

70% of the story works when Ada is replaced with a sexy lamp. Therefore, the Piano passes the sexy lamp test. However, the results may be because Ada is electively mute, and the film takes place in a conservative era where the objectification of women was considered normal.

BICYCLE THIEVES (1948)

However, Antonio's new job is doomed when his bicycle is stolen unless he manages to find the thief. With the help of his lively son, Bruno, Antonio desperately searches the city, hoping for justice. Bicycle thieves is primarily a male-driven plot.

The film barely has any significant female character except for Maria the loyal and sacrificing wife who is present only in a couple of scenes. Therefore, the analysis for the film is significantly brief and focuses only on the single named female character in the film.

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION

In Bicycle thieves, there is only one conversation between the female character Maria and an unnamed fortune-teller who talk about the male protagonist and his lost bicycle.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIP

Maria Ricci, who is also a secondary character in the film, is explicitly portrayed only in a familial role, as a wife who makes great sacrifices for her husband.

TYPE OF INTERACTION

The entire FI content in the film, which is not more than 17 minutes in total only contains female character speaking.

BECHDEL TEST

The film has only one named female character (Maria) talking to an unnamed female character (fortune teller) about Antonio, the male protagonist and his lost bicycle. Therefore, the film fails the Bechdel test.

MAKO MORI TEST

In bicycle thieves, at the core of the film, Maria makes sacrifices in order to keep her family safe and happy while putting herself in complete turmoil. Therefore, the film fails the Mako Mori test.

SEXY LAMP TEST

In Bicycle Thieves, Maria is the epitome of sacrifice and a loyal wife. Her character as a "loyal wife" barely has screen time in the film. Replacing her with a sexy lamp does not affect 95% of the story. Therefore, Bicycle Thieves fail the sexy lamp test.

Although the content may seem too narrow to draw comprehensive inferences about female to female interactions, the small quantity of content elucidates how rarely women interact on screen and what happens when they do interact.

Upon carefully examining the metamorphoses of the female character archetypes in the chosen five films, it is observed that although the portrayal female characters have shifted from familial roles towards a character that is a strong, career-oriented and independent woman, the FI interactions on screen are still insignificant and seldom plot-driven.

Despite the significant transformation in the portrayal of female characters in the context of gender roles, almost all the female characters examined in this study were presented with stereotypical characteristics and considerably objectified. For example, Although Clarice Starling, a strong and independent female protagonist (as opposed to Scarlett O Hara, female protagonist who is portrayed in a familial role), she is objectified by almost every male character in the film 'The Silence of the Lambs.

Furthermore, the interpretations mentioned above can be connected to the filmmaking process. It is also observed that when women are involved in the filmmaking process, such as directors or writers, female characters are more prevalent and have a wider remit.

CONCLUSION

The evidence above shows that the female characters have evolved over the decades. The significant changes achieved by feminists through the four waves of feminism have affected female characters in the context of gender roles. First-wave feminism triggered the need for a conversation about women's rights pushing the second wave into a formation, but the latter's achievements benefited women in gaining an equal representation on screen.

Contemporary female characters have evolved into openly taking pleasure in viewing men as well as a woman. Through the research, a broader perspective has indicated that cinema is an authoritative, patriarchal domain. Furthermore, the feminist theory of representation and spectatorship provided an opening for a discussion related to the perceived problems outlined by early feminist film critics.

Inspired by the Bechdel test that points to the lack of female interactions on screen, this study intended to immerse in the subject of female interactions and direct the attention towards the representation of female interactions on screen. In order to see how often female interactions occurred on film female interactions were measured.

It is observed that most of the female-to-female interactions are present in the three films that have a female protagonist, namely - The Piano, Gone with the Wind and The Silence of The Lambs. One difficulty faced during the research process that can be specified is the complexity of the measuring parameter. Sometimes it is challenging to mark when an interaction started, as it does not always clearly start with a conversation.

However, these instances of lack of clarity do not have any great significance for the result as it is only a matter of a couple of seconds and seldom more than that. Through the research, a significant discovery was made. In films where males are protagonists, the same-sex-interactions are significantly deranged and unbalanced between the sexes.

It is observed that when a female character is a protagonist, she is not placed in a female-dominated enclave, and therefore the film has a lower amount of same-sex-interactions. When a male character is a protagonist, he is to a much higher degree placed in a male-dominated enclave, and therefore the amount of same-sex-interactions are significantly higher. A conclusion is that films that have a male protagonist show disinterest in female characters, as they are constantly operating in a male environment.

When the protagonist is a man, two named female characters are not involved in any significant plot driven interaction. Nor do they have a character arc of their own. Furthermore, female characters are only showed concerning their family 90% of the time, even when they are the protagonist or in a dominant role in the film. Female relationships are insignificant in the majority of the films that this study has treated. When two women are shown interacting with each other, it is often in the context of family. It indicates that it is acceptable to portray a leading woman in relation to her family.

Hollywood films are frequently criticised for being stereotypical and underrepresenting women. The outcomes of this study reinforce the extensive underrepresentation of women in film in a radically different light than previously researched. Nevertheless, female characters will continue to defy outdated stereotypical cultural perceptions about gender-appropriate behaviour and model new attitudes about female strength and agency.

In conclusion, contemporary female characters have come to represent an iconic figure of masculinised femininity and female empowerment but fair on screen representation of female characters has a long way to go.

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