

A Critical and Semiotic Analysis of the Shift in Women's Erotic and Romantic Roles in Action Movies and Movie Posters across Three Eras of Hollywood

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Abstract

Adopting CDA and social semiotic analytical frameworks, the research investigated 30 action movies and accompanying posters from 1930 to 2012, with the following objectives: (1) to examine verbal and non-verbal elements in women's representation, and (2) to trace significant changes in the romantic and erotic roles of female characters across three eras of Hollywood. Lovers showed their emotions in the most appealing and polite manner during the classical era, but they were more multifaceted during the last two eras. The new Hollywood era turned a blind eye to skin color by including indigenous lovers in the starring roles in movies and portraying them in movie posters. The post-classical movies contained the highest number of erotic roles. Women were shown in the most demeaning forms with nudity or seductive poses in the post-classical movie posters. Women used the most impolite speech in the post-classical movies. They were also addressed as sex objects by male leads in this era.

Keywords: stereotype, semiotics, erotic role, romantic role, Hollywood era

1. Introduction

Popular culture has reinforced the idea that women and men are different. Gender stereotypes are very influential and they affect the conceptualization of women and men as well as establish social categories for gender. Men are generally stereotyped as competent, assertive, independent, and achievement-oriented whereas women are generally stereotyped as warm, sociable, interdependent, and relationship-oriented (Langford & MacKinnon, 2000). Stereotypes may lead to some specific gender roles that are defined by behavior. When people associate a pattern of behavior with women or men, they may come to believe that the behavior is inevitably associated with one gender but not the other.

As a social discourse, media helps to form beliefs, values and subjectivities as well as people's sense of themselves and their place in the world (Fairclough, 1989, p. 5). Media are used to propagate notions about what it means to be a woman in a specific culture. One can find the stereotypes of gender as the most obvious form of discrimination, particularly in the mass media. Movies suggest messages about "societal behaviors" (Griffin, 2006, p. 361). Females make up half the population of the world but they appear less frequently than do males in movies. However, when they are shown on the screen, their presence is highlighted as being hyper-attractive or hyper-sexual.

Some of the widely circulated images of women in Hollywood movies provoke a collective sense of the norm of femininity and the way that women should act and look (King, 2002; Steinke, 2005). An examination of past American filmmaking reveals that the new movies have combined contradictory genres, styles and star images.

As the core element, the genre of a movie makes a distinction between male and female roles. Action movies attract the most number of audiences with the most salient categories of gender binary (Tasker, 2004). The men are trained to fight and win as the action figures while the women are still in need of protection no matter how intelligent they are. The romantic theme attracts audiences emotionally. In action movies, female leads were cast in the role of love interests that portrayed them as women who desired to love someone or who sought after someone to love them.

On the other hand, feminist critics have argued about the representation of women in sexual contexts. They deconstructed various types of codes and messages in film narratives that reemphasized the patriarchal system by depicting women “as objects of sexual desires” (Kaplan, 2002, p. 20). Hollywood featured sexual content to address the decline in cinema attendance and audiences later found it to be acceptable. The representation of sex became a commercial imperative in action movies. Van Ginneken (2007) stated that “drives such as sex and eroticism have become more pliable and pervasive” (p. 107).

The main focus of this paper is to discuss the romantic and erotic roles of women in action movies since the classical Hollywood era. In addition, the portrayal of women in the accompanying movie posters will be discussed.

2. Gender Stereotype

A wealth of literature by previous film scholars focused on the portrayals of female characters during the past decades that had represented the new models of heroic identity in the 1980s and the 1990s. These heroic representations continued to have a gradual but constant shift from violent hard male bodies to more femininity-oriented action heroes but various shifts in the representation of strong women became a cause for confusion. The problematic status of female characters in police movies was examined by some film scholars (Tasker, 1995; Mizejewski, 2004; King, 2008). These researchers emphasized an oddity about women being portrayed as the police. They tended to be more professionally smooth than their male counterparts and they were less criticized for being too obedient or hostile.

Other researchers found females difficult to conceptualize as heroes since they acted in the space between the traditional roles of the male and female genders (Gaines, 2011). Many new theorists discovered that the link between role and sex has become completely simplified, pessimistic and dualistic. The best examples can be found in the fetishitized women of Pygmalion fantasies who have become an archetype in movies and television. These women were trained by the state as assassins, and at the same time, they clearly showed the objectification of women (Brown, 1996; Grindstaff, 2001; Schubart, 2007). These researchers mostly focused on women’s action roles in the new Hollywood. The shift in the representation of women in romantic and erotic roles, based on Hollywood’s classification in terms of the classical (1930-1948), post-classical (1949-1975) and new Hollywood (1976-2012) eras, remains to be understood. These changes in movies and movie posters can be explicated through a critical discourse and social semiotics analysis.

3. CDA and Semiotics as Analytical Frameworks

Critical discourse theories are sets of ‘thinking tools’ which are used to work with the ‘practical problems and puzzles’ of research (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 160). Critical discourse is used to reveal connections which may be hidden from people, such as “the connections between language, power, and ideology” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 5). Fairclough’s (1995) analytic framework has three levels of analysis: the text analysis (description), processing analysis (interpretation) and social analysis (explanation). The micro level is

concerned with language use, discourse, and verbal interaction. The issues of power, dominance and inequality between social groups are related to a macro level of analysis.

There are three aspect of critical discourse analysis. First, it analyzes text in the context of the real world and considers the most relevant textual elements. Second, it draws attention to the imbalance, injustice and inequality in a society. Third, it studies the subtle messages to reveal negative practices in written, spoken and visual texts. This study focuses on the micro level to investigate how text practices are ideologically shaped through a series of relationships between power and struggle in Hollywood action movies and movie posters. By its own nature, the interactional discourse in this medium may produce certain types of stereotypes and cultural prejudices.

On the other hand, the visual mode has the same semantic system that language has. Using semiotics in media studies provides a rich base for the critical studies of visual images. Social semiotics, the science of signs, is useful for exploring the subtle messages in the texts of movie posters. It provides detailed and explicit ways for analyzing the meanings established by the syntactic relationships between people, places and things depicted in images. In semiotic research, data analysis begins by identifying segments in a dataset to respond to the research questions (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Focusing on movie posters as print media for advertising movies, the present study posits that posters can be a form of visual discourse. The main challenge of this study is to explore how the designs of movie posters convey the ideological biases.

4. Sampling and Data Collection

This study is a textual descriptive research. The samples were selected from 30 Hollywood action movies. This study also examines the underlying meanings of action movie posters since their design is a rich source of ideological signifiers. The sample selection was done based on the following criteria: (i) The movies must be top-grossing ones since they often have a worldwide appeal and can facilitate and maintain limited attitudes and beliefs about stereotypes such as sexy and domesticated women; (ii) The specific time period of analysis covers American movies dated between 1930 and 2012; (iii) For each movie chosen, both movie footage and accompanying posters must be available to provide richer data for the research; (iv) If there are several movies in a series with a recurring lead character, only one of the top-grossing movies is chosen, for example, the *James Bond* movies; (v) The movies have to include at least one female character; and (vi) The title and the slogan of the poster should be in English in order to get the underlying meanings.

In this study, data were collected from Internet websites such as www.imbd.com, www.standTV.com and www.worldwideboxoffice.com which included comprehensive data. The box-office movie lists were checked in order to select only action movies (Appendix A). The majority of the classical and post-classical movies were downloaded from the website www.retrofilms.in. There was full and free access to some of the classical Hollywood movies (1930-1948) on www.youtube.com. Other movie websites, such as www.megashare.info, provided the researcher with free access to the new Hollywood movies. The movie scripts were downloaded from the website www.subscenes.com to analyze the characters' language. The following websites were used for the selection of movie posters: www.movieposter.com, www.allposters.com and www.impawards.com.

5. Data Analysis

This study is a textual analysis which used CDA to find out the codes of movie and movie poster texts. At the micro level, various analytical tools were employed to illustrate the verbal and visual textual signs and meanings. Lakoff's (1975) deficit theory was used to explore the style of speech of the female characters. This analysis investigated elements such as tag questions, expletives, types of lexical choice, and super-politeness.

The analysis also explored how the male characters addressed the women. The modal verbs were analyzed to explore certainty and strong obligation (must, should, definitely, always), as well as uncertainty and weak obligation (could, possibly, perhaps, may). Bordwell's (1991) explicit or implicit concepts were used to explore the underlying meanings of the titles and taglines of movie posters.

This study employed other analytical tools to investigate the non-verbal elements in movies and movie posters. Wood's (2009) elements of non-verbal communications were used to analyze females' non-verbal behavior. These categories include facial expressions, smile, proxemics (physical and personal territory), haptics (touch), appearance and paralanguage (voice). The ideological meanings of movie posters were analyzed by employing Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) framework of reading images. This framework can be described in terms of three types of functions that operate via the patterns of experience, social interaction and ideological positions that represent linguistics and non-linguistics in terms of metafunctions. These metafunctions are categorized as representational, interactional and compositional.

The main focus of the representational metafunction was the conceptual process which included the classification levels. The classification structures represent participants as belonging to a class, order or category that separate them from or relate them to the other participants. In a tree structure, at least one set of participants plays the role of subordinate when placed at the lower level. At least one set of participants is at the top or super-ordinate level of the taxonomy with respect to other participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

An interactive metafunction shows the relationship between participants and viewers by using the structures of basic features such as distance (size of frame) and visual modality (reality value). The size of frame or the distance of shot creates different types of relationships between the represented participants and the viewers. A close-up shot (head and shoulder) suggests a close personal relationship. A medium shot represents a friendly atmosphere while the long shot indicates an impersonal relationship (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Visual modality considers how the participants in the image seem to be real and natural. The modality marker such as "color variation" is used as an important method of expressing visual modality; the more the color is reduced, the less the reality is expected (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 165).

In the analysis of the compositional metafunction, this study focused on information values that could be realized via the placement of the elements of a composition. The elements placed on the left of the image are presented as given or known things and the element on the right is new. The top of the image is ideal or highly valued because it is the most salient part but the elements that are placed at the bottom show more oriented information. The centre is the nucleus of information and all other elements around it have a subordinate sense (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996).

5. Results

A total of 30 top-grossing action movies were analyzed. The findings showed certain verbal and non-verbal elements in the categories of romantic and erotic roles. These roles underwent specific shifts.

5.1. Romantic Roles

Love stories have become expected sub-plots and the secondary focus in action movies. Romance enhances the plot but it does not serve as the real purpose of the story. This study explored different types of romantic roles such as girlfriend, mistress, fiancée, lovers at first sight, patriotic lovers, love triangles, obsessed lovers, childhood sweetheart and soft-hearted lover. To investigate a few of these roles, this study focused on the romantic roles of women in *Sergeant York* (1930), *Red River* (1948), *El Cid* (1961) and *Spider-Man 2* (2004).

Sergeant York represented Grace Williams as a childhood sweetheart dressed in a peasant costume. She was depicted as a respectable, plain, and virtuous woman who belonged to a little known minority group on the eastern part of America. To reveal her love, she ran to Alvin who worked the land. She approached Alvin slowly and kissed him quickly. Then, she said, "That's what I was wanting to tell you." Grace had a recognizable Southern accent. By using a tag question, she wanted to confess her emotions. The main topic of her conversation was the criteria for her marriage and how to behave politely to people. The poster of *Sergeant York* showed Grace on the left as the representative of the family-oriented Appalachian people. Alvin's head was angled downward to imply the effect of the underlying power of women in his life and how he became tamed by Grace's *External Feminine* (McGhee, 1999, p.187).

Red River introduced Fen, Thomas Dunson's mistress, as a 'soft-hearted lover'. Fen appeared in a long bright classic dress. Her white pretty complexion and feminine voice showed her soft and peaceful character. Fen revealed various passive and submissive messages with the frequent use of imperatives such as "hold me in your arms... feel me". Fen became the clichéd image of a woman who wanted to reconcile love and work when she asserted, "The sun only shines half of the time; the other half is night." Fen showed the most appealing and polite manner in her imperatives. In the movie poster, the small shots of Tess and Clift and their placement on the left indicated their marginalized roles as lovers (Appendix B 10).

In the *El Cid* movie, Chimene played the role of 'rekindled lover'. She showed that her emotions swung between love and hate. A sincere love was revealed by her soft gestures and facial expression but there were scenes when camera shots focused on Chimene's endless agony and anger. Her dialogue revealed her paradoxical feelings of love and hate. In a few sentences, she used the intensifier 'so' to reinforce her happiness about visiting Rodrigo. The use of a modal verb showed her intention to practice the feeling of hate in "I will learn to hate you". Modality also showed her transformation into 'a rekindled lover' when she asked, 'Can you forgive me Rodrigo?' As the daughter of the king's noblest champion, Chimene engaged in royal and polite conversation. The *El Cid* movie poster captured the image of Chemine within Rodrigo's arms at the top in central position to create the most romantic sense (Appendix C 3). All the elements were designed to reinforce Rodrigo's heroic role. The movie title suggested the merciful nature of the male hero.

Mary Jane Watson acted as a soft-hearted lover in *Spider-Man 2*. In a few scenes, she approached Peter to show her romantic feelings. Her eyes searched for Peter in all places. She frequently asked questions to make sure about Peter's feelings. Mary Jane's use of the modal verb "had to" in "I do what I had to do" showed the fact that she decided to be with Peter rather than to marry John Jameson. The climax of her romantic role was revealed in this utterance: "So here I am standing at your doorway ... I have been always at your doorway". In the movie poster, Mary within Spiderman's arm was presented in a frontal medium shot to confirm her damsel in distress role (Appendix D 5). The movie title referred to the man with supernatural power who fights against evil. In general, women as love seekers were soft and kind characters.

5.2. Erotic Roles

The cinematic representation of women as sexual objects began with the classical Hollywood era and their depictions as erotic objects for the cinematic gaze continues up to the present time. The main categories of women's roles can be classified as 'promiscuous or loose women', and as 'alluring' and 'seducing women'. This study focuses on *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930), *Blazing Saddles* (1974), *King Kong* (1933), and *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011) to elaborate on the roles of promiscuous and alluring women.

The movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* expanded some sequences in which three hungry women chose to exchange sex for the soldier's food. When the French women saw bread in the soldier's hand, they approached the river while nodding and beckoning for him to come over. The French women were almost voiceless,

murmuring a little about the food, “bread, good”. At dinner time, the French women hurriedly seized the food and ate it ravenously. When the men reconvened to swim back across the river, one of Paul’s friends noted that the experience was worth more than their army’s loaf of bread. The presence of French women was necessary in men’s maturation. Kelly (1996, p. 46) asserted that “the movie reduced the women’s identity to the rank of prostitution”. The movie poster excluded female characters; it represented the close shot of Paul Baumer as one of the iconic figures of war soldiers (Appendix B 1). The title is mocking the whole story.

The image of promiscuous woman was different in *Blazing Saddles*. The movie introduced a lusty woman, Lili’s appearance showed her identity. She was dressed in a black full-bodied corset that was decorated with some lace and roses. Her make-up was complete with light beige eye shadow, long eyelashes and bright red lipstick. In the dancing and singing sequence, the camera showed plenty of sexy legs from a low angle. Lili walked through the scene in order to show more parts of her body. While singing, she took a chair, turned it backwards and sat on it with her legs opened wide. After a few seconds, male audiences had a better view when she stood up and put her right leg on the chair.

Lili reduced the entire male audience to fools both in the lyrics and in her conversation. In the middle of the song, she addressed one of the cowboys, “Hello, handsome, is that a ten-gallon hat - or are you just enjoying the show?” This line was a variation of “one of the most infamous pronouncements that was used by Mae West before” (Varner, 2009, p. 22). She confessed her promiscuous role in her song when she sang, “I have been with many men again and again.” The movie poster of *Blazing Saddles* showed the demeaning figure of a female character dressed in a saloon girl’s outfit, lying down and holding onto the black sheriff’s leg (Appendix C 9). Lili was the central focus in the middle of the image. However, the repetition of various brown shades decreased the reality level of the image.

Hollywood movies placed women in alluring roles. In *King Kong*, Ann’s role as the golden woman was foregrounded. In the cinematic lighting, her white dress and skin increased her whiteness and beauty. Her voice and girlish manner attracted the ship’s crew. Ann, as a white woman, signified a powerful mystique that led to “the subjectivity of men and beasts, black and white” (Young, 2006, p. 6). Carl Denham announced his priority in choosing an actress when he said that “she must have a pretty face”. The modal verb ‘must’ in his sentence revealed the intentional irony of the filmmaker to show “the pure purpose of the plot” (Wright, 2005, p. 201). Denham revealed his main intention when he said, “Public want pretty girl.” This indicated the desirability of blonde women. She had to be the ideal beauty of American society, a fair-skinned blonde with blue eyes, pretty face and a perfect figure. At the end of the movie, the filmmaker insisted that woman’s beauty can be fatal: “It was beauty killed the beast.” In her conversation, Ann showed her low self-esteem when she denied her extraordinary beauty: “There are a lot of girls like me”. The use of questions and tag questions showed her uncertainty about her appearance: “Suppose I don’t photograph well? ... Looks kind of silly, don’t it?” The movie poster of *King Kong* showed Ann as a damsel in distress. As Kong’s prisoner, her image was unclear (Appendix B 2).

In *Transformers: Dark of the Moon*, Carly acted as the one-dimensional and the hyper-sexualized girl. In the beginning, the camera filmed from behind and focused on Carly who was barely clothed and climbing upstairs. The filmmaker provided a comic erotic scene when Sam got close to Carly in the kitchen while his small robot examined Carly’s legs from underneath her skirt and told him, “She is good.”. In this way, Carly’s body became an object of desire for males, even for male robots.

Later, Carly was reduced to an object. Her boss (Patrick Demsey) compared her to a 1939 Delahaye 165 Cabriolet when he said, “Look at the curves. Elegant, isn’t it? Beautiful, sensual and built to evoke the body of the ideal woman.” The camera also zoomed in on Carly’s stiletto heels and ran through her white tight and sexy dress, then stopped at her smiling face. In Sam’s office, Carly became the center of attention of a group of male staff, including his boss who bent his head to get a better view of her behind.

Throughout the movie, Carly's entire purpose was to be attractive and make others comment about her beauty and sexiness. She had a super-sexy intonation in all the conversations with the male characters. Carly's choice of lexical items referred to her feminine interests such as having luxury things, and going to parties. In the movie poster, Carly's role as the damsel in distress is implicitly expressed by foregrounding the Auto robot in a gigantic size, and Sam as her protector is placed in front of her.

5.3. Changes in Romantic and Erotic Roles

The results of this study suggested some shifts in romantic and erotic roles across the three eras of Hollywood. One of the important changes is that the number of movies which included romantic and erotic roles fluctuated. Table 1 provides some information about these changes.

Table 1. Changes in Number of Movies Portraying Women in Romantic and Erotic Roles across Three Eras of Hollywood

Eras of Hollywood	Classical Hollywood	Post-classical Hollywood	New Hollywood
	Percentage (Number of Movies)	Percentage (Number of Movies)	Percentage (Number of Movies)
Romantic Roles	90% (9)	50% (5)	80% (8)
Erotic Roles	50% (5)	50% (5)	40% (4)

The goal of many characters of the classical movies has been "to win the love of a man or a woman" (Bordwell, Staiger & Thompson, 1985, p. 16). While almost all (90%) of the classical action movies included love in the film narrative, this theme showed a drastic decrease from 15 movies to just six (40%) during the post-classical era. It is salient to note that romantic roles rose sharply in the new Hollywood era; 14 out of 15 movies (93%) put emphasis on this theme.

On the other hand, women's portrayal in erotic roles reflected the social view of gender in each period of Hollywood. In the classical era, half of the movies (50%) demonstrated female characters as sex symbols. In the post-classical cinema, representations of women in erotic roles reached the highest peak at 67% (ten movies out of 15) that indicated a greater tendency towards watching female characters as sex objects. However, six out of 15 movies of the new Hollywood era had erotic roles for women, indicating a remarkable decrease of 21% in comparison to the previous era.

5.4. Changes in Romantic Roles

As a basic change, the findings showed that more sexy scenes were included in a few movies such as *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003) which spoiled the pure romance of the storyline. As for other changes, it should be mentioned that the initiator of romantic scenes was not always the male character. While the flame of love was usually lit by the male character as a conventional rule in all classical movies, *Red River* was an exception. Tess Millay who fell in love with Mathew Garth made the first move to voice her feelings. In *Spider-Man 2*, Mary Jane tried to make her relationship with Peter Parker stronger by revealing her romantic feelings.

Female lovers were portrayed as simple, kind-hearted and submissive throughout the classical and post-classical eras. In the new Hollywood era, female characters became more multifaceted; they represented romance in more complex forms. The female lead lived a pirate's life in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest*

(2006); another preferred a dream life in *Inception* (2010); and yet another woman broke through the barrier of racial conflict to win her lover's heart in *Avatar* (2009).

In the romance category, women used various types of verbal elements to express their emotions. In the classical era, imperatives had a significant role in the expression of love. The voice used to make demands or to ask for favors (referred to in this study as a 'demanding voice') presented the female characters as weak and passive, such as in *Red River* in which Fen and Tess verbalized their soft emotions when they made requests such as "hold me in your arms" and "talk to me". The movie *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937) mixed the elements of love with a sense of patriotism to reduce the submissive nature of the female character. Flavia's imperative style showed that she demanded to stay in the position of a queen rather than as a lover, saying, "Help me to do what I must." The lover's demanding voice in *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003) constructed a caring and supportive image of the female character when Arwen asked her father to re-forged the sword for her lover.

Female lovers mostly used 'love', 'want', 'know' and 'feel' to reveal their love interests in the classical and post-classical movies such as *Red River*, *Ben-Hur* (1959) and *El Cid*. In the new Hollywood, women used newer words to voice their interests and deep emotions. They expressed their love by employing verbs like 'need' and 'see'. In the fantasy world of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*, Arwen employed a collection of verbs such as 'choose', 'wish' and 'regret' that placed her in the category of the kindest and most caring lover. In *Avatar*, the romance was conveyed through new types of expression. Neytiri did not use any imperatives or interrogatives to express her love. She addressed Jake with a short sentence: "I see you". The verb 'see' implied a spiritual sense. Neytiri taught Jake to reveal his romantic feelings in a way beyond his physical vision and it was a type of proposal based on the culture in Neytiri's tribe.

There were also some slight changes in the representation of women in movie posters. Female lovers remained in the central position with close shots in six of the classical posters. *Red River* (Appendix B 10) almost excluded female characters. Tess was presented in the smallest size as an insignificant element on the left side. In the post-classical era, only three posters represented the theme of romance. The poster of *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) completely marginalized Etta Place in terms of size and oblique shot (Appendix C 8). The black-and-white visual rendered Etta's image the least ideal character.

In the new era, the closeness and equality of characters in *Avatar* can be translated as a more complicated relationship (Appendix D 8). Adamson (2012, p. 144) reads this romantic relationship as the emphasis on "the emergence of indigenous cosmopolitics" by which was meant that Hollywood has become color blind in showing a black woman in a central role. Arwen in the movie poster of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the Kings* was the only lover whose image was captured in a long shot (Appendix C 3). Her downcast head showed a peaceful and submissive nature. Her image appeared vague in dark brown and black colors to show her minor role.

5.4. Changes in Erotic Roles

This study also explored a few significant changes in stereotypical depictions of female characters as sex objects, across the three eras of Hollywood action movies. In the classical era, women's revealing clothes or semi-naked bodies were sexually charged temptations to male audiences. Although most movies did not show any exposed private body parts, *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935) became a matter of debate for showing too much of the female figure.

In the post-classical period, women played more erotic roles. Female characters used their alluring bodies to seduce lead males in order to complete their missions while the rest merely appeared for male visual pleasure. *Thunderball* (1965) became the most famous movie in the *James Bond* series that presented overt sex. All the

beautiful good or bad women were highly attracted to James Bond. They wanted him “any time, any place” (Black, 2005, p. 108).

In the new Hollywood, filmmakers mixed various elements of defensive action, romance and eroticism. An extended but not very explicit sex scene between the male and female characters showed them engaged in carefully choreographed caresses in *The Matrix-Reloaded*. The unexpected scene caught the audience unawares as they watched the erotic sight of Trinity and Neo in the nude. The camera focused on the hair, nude bodies and faces of the male and female characters.

This study explored a trivial change in the representation of leading female characters in the *James Bond* series of the 2000s. In *Casino Royale* (2005), Bond showed exaggerated sentiment in his sexual encounter with Vesper Lynd. Audiences could see that his desire and enjoyment of being with Vesper forced him to hold back on his relationship with Solange, the villain’s wife. The female villain had distinctive characteristics and changes in traits in *Casino Royale*. Vesper’s influence on Bond created a combination of romance and sex that was a slight shift in the continuation of the Bond formula.

Across the Hollywood eras, women used various verbal elements to portray their erotic roles. In the post-classical era, the conversations of women with erotic roles showed them to be overly loose women. *Thunderball* represented women who had extraordinary desire for James Bond. Fiona’s questions showed her seductive and sex-seeker role. She played the traditional sex role to highlight Bond’s control and power over her when she stated, “I feel like I’m in a cage.” Among the selected movies, *Blazing Saddles* introduced the most degrading image of female characters. Lili had the most impolite style of speech in her song and conversation. She made known her power to seduce when she referred to herself as the goddess of desire. All of Lili’s conversations confirmed her role as a promiscuous woman. In the new Hollywood era, *Casino Royale* suggested that Solange did her best to show off her alluring nature. Her question and tag question revealed that she knew about Bond’s ability to manipulate married women, “You like married women, don’t you, James?”

Movie posters saw a shift in design. The female character in *The Outlaw* (1943) became the obvious icon of sexual appeal (Appendix A 9). Rio wore an oft-unbuttoned, low-cut peasant blouse that seemed too shocking for the audience in 1941. Her image became the most outstanding example of a female character’s hyper-sexuality. The picture of her occupied the entire poster from left to right. The full frontal shot made Jane Russell the eye candy for male audiences.

In the posters of movies such as *In Like Flint* (1970) and *Thunderball*, the hyper-sexual representation of women became unnatural and cartoonish due to the unclear lines of the body shown (Appendix B 5, B 7). The female participants could not make contact with the viewers because of the small size of their pictures and the public shots. The movie tagline of *In Like Flint*, “In action, in danger, in the Virgin Islands where the gay guys are girls!” introduced women as villains. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*’s tagline pointed to male heroes who shared a woman, “You never met a pair like Butch and the Kid. They’re taking trains..., they’re taking banks ...and they’re taking one piece of baggage”. In general, the portrayals of women in erotic roles changed from the semi-naked images of the classical era to the explicit sex scenes of the last two eras.

6. Discussion

In the romantic depiction of women, the present study found that soft and polite lovers in the classical and post-classical movies transformed into multifaceted love seekers in the new era. Female lovers participated in battles and tough competitions and they sacrificed their lives for their lovers. These shifts could be read as a result of the feminist movements.

Tasker (2004) confirmed that there was sporadic integration of women in the action movies in the late 1980s and the 1990s as the women played both action and romantic roles. Heij’s study (2006) found a major

transformation in the women's roles; they fought their lovers as the next logical step in the evolution of the feminist movement. Gallagher (2006) also asserted that women have been integrated into action narratives to play the more traditional role of the romantic heroine in more recent movies. Brown's (2011) investigation of the new Hollywood movies showed the exploration of the new version of women in multiple roles that constructed a certain message of post-feminism. In this version, female characters can play the roles of an action hero and a dependent lover with mixed exotic elements in her representation.

This study concluded that Hollywood movies have established the stereotypical depiction of female characters as sex objects more specifically in the post-classical era. Women were reduced to parts of body such as legs or breasts by camera shots. Gerhard (2000) believed that women's hyper-sexuality during the post-classical Hollywood was the effect of feminism that showed both their oppression and liberation. Press (2003) mentioned the prevalence of women wearing super-sexy costumes in the blockbuster movies of the last two eras.

King (2004) found a connection between the abolition of Hay's Code in the late 1960s with the beginning of a new liberal cinema in which women played no positive roles. Hay's Code or Pre-code Hollywood restricted nudity and sexual content in mainstream movies. After this era, female characters were given a hyper-sexual identity; they attracted the masculine gaze and made an erotic spectacle of their naked bodies.

Caplen (2010) stated that gender fluidity and the shift in females' erotic roles could be read as the impact of the social forces such as waves of feminism. These figures of sexually liberated females illuminated the new freedom that resulted from feminism. Tasker (1995) argued that post-feminism discourse was shown in a series of tensions in the new Hollywood. Lovers were featured femme fatales or aggressive characters. The post-feminist contradictions were also played out by showing excessive eroticization during the 1990s.

The present study found that Hollywood action movies and movie posters included woman of color as the American feminine ideal. As Negra (2001) argued, this ethnic woman could not be considered a mere primitive, animalistic or exotic construction because the ideological and cultural work she performed was complicated and variable. Ramoutar (2006) investigated the portrayal of women of color in interracial relationships in Hollywood blockbusters from 1967 to 2005. His findings indicated that interracial relationships are rarely shown in popular films. Women of color usually had problematic, conflicted and sexualized portrayals. Their interracial relationships were likely to end with the man or woman dead as an obligation. Women were portrayed as vulnerable, over-sexualized and lived in a violent world.

6. Conclusion

In general, women are still being sidelined, stereotyped and sexualized in Hollywood action movies. The success of these movies at the domestic and international box office can be attributed to the persistence of American movies on portraying women as romantic and erotic. The movie industry has a great influence over how people see the world. By repeatedly showing these stereotypical representations of women, action movies promote certain depictions of women that do not show women's characteristics as a whole.

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APPENDIX A

High-grossing action movies of the classical Hollywood (1930-1948)

No.	Year	Movie	Amount Grossed (Million)
1	1936	<i>Flash Gordon</i>	\$27,107,960
2	1941	<i>Sergeant York</i>	\$16,361,885
3	1943	<i>The Outlaw</i>	\$11,063,500
4	1948	<i>Red River</i>	\$9,012,000
5	1937	<i>The Prisoner of Zenda</i>	\$5,628,000
6	1935	<i>Mutiny on the Bounty</i>	\$4,460,000
7	1938	<i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i>	\$3,981,000
8	1930	<i>All Quiet on the Western Front</i>	\$3,000,000
9	1933	<i>King Kong</i>	\$1,171,189
10	1939	<i>Stagecoach</i>	\$1,103,757

High-grossing action movies of the postclassical Hollywood (1949-1975)

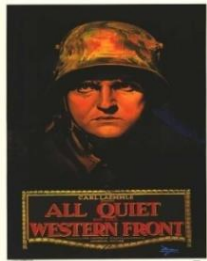
No.	Year	Movie	Amount Grossed (Million)
1	1961	<i>El Cid</i>	\$26,620,000
2	1974	<i>Blazing Saddles</i>	\$119,500,000
3	1974	<i>The Towering Inferno</i>	\$116,000,000
4	1969	<i>Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid</i>	\$96,700,000
5	1959	<i>Ben-Hur</i>	\$74,000,000
6	1965	<i>Thunderball</i>	\$63,595,658
7	1971	<i>The French Connection</i>	\$51,700,000
8	1970	<i>Little Big Man</i>	\$31,559,552
9	1959	<i>North by Northwest</i>	\$13,300,000
10	1967	<i>In Like Flint</i>	\$13,000,000

High-grossing action movies of the new Hollywood (1976-2012)

No.	Year	Movie	Amount Grossed
1	2009	<i>Avatar</i>	\$2,782,275,172
2	2011	<i>Transformers: Dark of the Moon</i>	\$1,123,746,996
3	2003	<i>The Lord of Rings: The Return of the King</i>	\$1,119,929,521
4	2006	<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest</i>	\$1,066,179,725
5	2012	<i>The Dark Knight Rises</i>	\$1,013,114,000
6	1996	<i>Independence Day</i>	\$817,400,891
7	2004	<i>Spider-Man 2</i>	\$783,766,341
8	2003	<i>The Matrix Reloaded</i>	\$742,128,461
9	2012	<i>The Hunger Games</i>	\$672,826,249
10	2005	<i>Casino Royale</i>	\$594,239,066

APPENDIX B

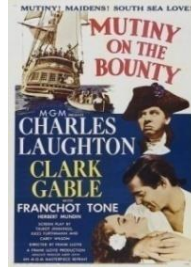
Movie Posters of Classical Hollywood (1930-1948)



(1) *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930)



(2) *King Kong* (1933)



(3) *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935)



(4) *Flash Gordon* (1936)



(5) *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1937)



(6) *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)



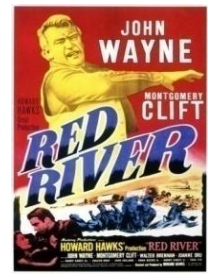
(7) *Stagecoach* (1939)



(8) *Sergeant York* (1941)



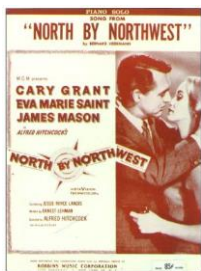
(9) *The Outlaw* (1941)



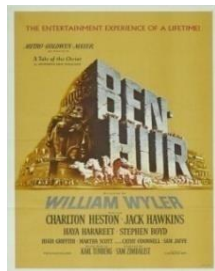
(10) *Red River* (1948)

APPENDIX C

Movie Posters of Postclassical Hollywood (1949-1975)



(1) *North by Northwest* (1959)



(2) *Ben-Hur* (1959)



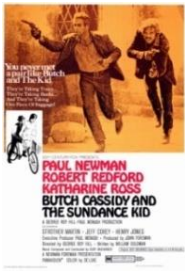
(3) *El Cid* (1961)



(4) *Thunderball* (1965)



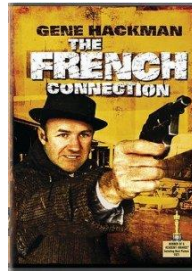
(5) *In Like Flint* (1967)



(6) *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969)



(7) *Little Big Man* (1970)



(8) *The French Connection* (1971)



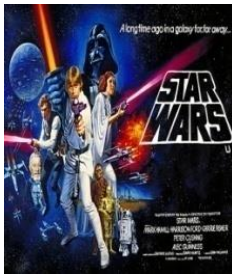
(9) *Blazing Saddles* (1974)



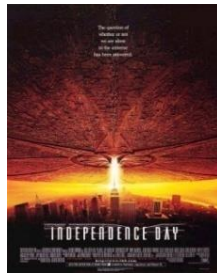
(10) *The Towering Inferno* (1974)

APPENDIX D

Movie Posters of New Hollywood (1976-2012)



(1) *Star Wars* (1977)



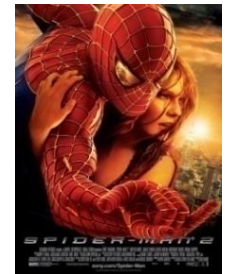
(2) *Independence Day* (1996)



(3) *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (2003)



(4) *The Matrix Reloaded* (2003)



(5) *Spider-Man 2* (2004)



(6) *Casino Royale* (2006)



(7) *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006)



(8) *Avatar* (2009)



(9) *Inception* (2010)



(10) *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011)