

REFRAMING THE GAZE: HOW WOMEN FILMMAKERS
INFLUENCE THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN ON-SCREEN

by

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This thesis was inspired by my passion for women filmmakers and my curiosity about how a filmmaker's gender identity informs how women are represented in films. I investigated the complicated history of women's role in Hollywood to learn why there are few female directors and writers working in Hollywood presently. I examined how the male-dominated film industry affects the representation of women on-screen using the concepts of the male gaze and the Bechdel test. I argued that if men create a distinctly male point of view in their filmmaking, women therefore create a female point of view, also known as the female gaze. I found that having men or women in creative production roles (directing, writing, cinematography, or producing) strongly affects how women in a film are portrayed in Hollywood films. To put theory into practice, I wrote, directed, and edited a short film with a female protagonist and recruited a film crew of all women to help me construct the female gaze.

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Introduction

As a student and an avid film-watcher, I have noticed the unequal ratio of women to men working in the film industry. This lack of female representation behind-the-scenes has led to an oversaturation of Hollywood films made from a predominantly male point of view. Because women are often left out of writing, directing, and producing, their voices and experiences are absent in popular films. The exclusion of women from the film industry leads to misrepresentation of female characters and the prominence of a male gaze on-screen. These results influence how women are depicted on-screen and, on a more extreme level, how women are viewed in American society.

This thesis examines why women today are underrepresented in Hollywood film crew roles and if this disparity has a historical precedence. With a focus on Hollywood specifically, I aim to explore what women's roles in the film industry were between approximately 1900 and 1950 and track how that role has changed since that time. Additionally, I will examine why women's involvement in the film industry has changed, and what the reasons were for this shift. I also will analyze the effect that a majority-male creative crew has on the representation of women on-screen by investigating the concept of the male gaze and how it is constructed.

In response to issues I have found through my research, I have also chosen the portfolio option to put theory into practice and challenge the current gender dynamics in Hollywood by recruiting a majority-women film crew and by writing, directing, producing, and editing the film myself. By doing so, I aim to answer the questions of how the female gaze operates in contrast to the male gaze and if the gaze is partially

constructed by the filmmaker. This research proves that placing women in creative film production roles positively influences how women are depicted in movies.

Background

The History of Women in Hollywood

By tracking the complicated history of women in the film industry, it becomes clear why there are few women working in Hollywood today as writers, directors, cinematographers, producers, and executive producers. Contrary to popular belief, Hollywood has not always been entirely male-dominated. According to film critic and author Alicia Malone, in the 1900s through to the early 1920s, “half of all movies made in the United States were written by women, many famous actresses ran their own production companies, and the first person to be titled ‘Film Editor’ was a woman” (*Backwards* 18). Once silent films were invented and screened, they quickly rose in popularity. The surge in crowds at vaudeville shows and Nickelodeon theaters created a higher demand for new films almost weekly. Film studios were built because of this demand; thus, the process of making films became more efficient (*Backwards* 19). As silent films became longer, they were screened in elaborate, upscale “movie palaces” that were designed to attract “a more upmarket crowd” compared to the working-class audiences who frequented the cheaper Nickelodeons (19). Movie palace owners specifically targeted female audiences, thinking that “if [they] could entice white middle-class women into theaters, it would push out the raucous working-class crowd. These women would bring their husbands, and the theaters could charge more for tickets, advertising it as an elegant night out” (*Backwards* 19). To draw women to the new theaters, movie palaces were strategically built near shopping centers, owners advertised their theaters in magazines and printed coupons along with the ads, and free

childcare was offered on-site so mothers could treat themselves to the moviegoing experience (19).

Film studios wanted to take advantage of this specific demographic, so female writers and directors were hired to ensure that their movies would appeal to women. The studios believed that these women filmmakers “[lent] a moral tone to the movies that the middle classes appreciated” (Karen Ward Mahar qtd. in *Backwards* 20). Surprisingly, women played a huge role in the early days of filmmaking.

There are a few reasons why women’s involvement changed. First, many filmmakers struggled to make the change from silent film to “talkies” (movies with sound) because they were inexperienced with the new sound technology. Actors had a difficult transition as well, because they had to learn how to act using their voice instead of relying on elaborate gestures and physical movements as they had for silent films. Second, a few studios rose to the top on the success of their first talkies, while independent studios, often owned by women, could not compete, simply due to a lack of finances (*Backwards* 20).

Alice Guy Blaché was one of the women whose studio, Solax Studios, was shuttered during this time, which was especially devastating because she was the first woman to start her own movie studio (20). As the Great Depression bankrupted small studios, the new goal of moviemaking was financial gain (20). Author and film critic Alicia Malone explains:

Filmmaking started to be looked at as a business instead of a creative enterprise, and corporate structures were implemented, complete with executives in charge. At this time, women were not perceived as being business-minded or executive material, so positions of power on a movie set, such as directing, now were given to men. (*Backwards* 20-21)

In other words, when filmmaking became more business-oriented, most women were pushed out of positions of creative power on sets and into roles in studio offices.

While a few notable women directors and writers, such as Dorothy Arzner and Frances Marion, were prominent during the changing Hollywood landscape of the mid-1920s through the 1940s, many women began working in more socially acceptable, “feminine” professions within the film industry, such as secretary work and service roles (Hill 4). Specific to film studio lots, women worked as producer’s assistants, maids for studio personnel, tutors for child actors, and service workers in the studio commissaries (Hill 4). Between 1920 and 1980, women also served as casting directors or assistants, costume designers (often hand-sewing and embroidering garments), script supervisors, editors, production coordinators, and junior story executives (Hill 5). Positions like these were, and are still, considered “below-the-line” jobs (meaning they are not paid as high as positions with creative and financial influence), and carry the stigma of being “women’s work” (5). Author Erin Hill defines “women’s work” as “insignificant, tedious, low-status, and noncreative,” compared to the “more important, prestigious, or creative... ‘men’s work’” (5).

Today, jobs in script supervision, casting, and costuming are still predominantly held by women, and these jobs continue to be perceived as “women’s work” (Hill 5). Other positions, such as directors’ or producers’ assistants have slowly become more gender-integrated, yet they “retain the stigma of having been women’s work in the past, an association that contributes to continued low pay and poor working conditions” (5). Here, Hill succinctly explains the present gender disparity in Hollywood:

The same de facto occupational segregation that links women to certain types of media production work effectively dissociates them from others, thereby perpetuating male domination in fields with the greatest prestige and power, the most creative status, and the highest incomes. (Hill 5-6)

As Hill states, creative fields and positions of power in the film industry continue to be held primarily by men, due to the decades-long, sexist perception of which jobs women are capable of doing. Obviously, many financial and social factors influenced how women could contribute to film production throughout history, and these perceptions persist in the 21st century.

Today, women are still not being hired as often as men. In fact, Martha M. Lauzen found that “women comprised 18% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 domestic grossing films” of 2017 (Lauzen 2017, 1). This statistic has remained roughly the same since San Diego State University’s first “Celluloid Ceiling” study in 1998, which is troubling. There is no shortage of women filmmakers; almost half of New York University and University of Southern California film school graduates are women (Murphy). According to Susan Sandler, a faculty advisor for NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts, there are simply fewer opportunities for women after they graduate:

The talent is equal, and the opportunities just drop off for women completely. Studios are not trusting women with big budgets; they are not trusting women all across the board in terms of films that are studio-generated. (Murphy)

Thus, the major film studios do not recruit women to write or direct their films. Sandler believes that the film industry “lives by a ‘mantra’ that says that women only make movies for and about women – which is ‘really tired,’ since women can direct stories about men just as men have about women since the dawn of Hollywood” (Murphy).

The notion that women filmmakers' stories would solely be about women and be targeted at a female demographic is misogynistic and outdated. Furthermore, notable directors like Kathryn Bigelow and Ava DuVernay have made successful films that focus on male protagonists, thus breaking this stereotype surrounding women directors. However, when women create films about characters who are women, they are often represented more realistically and multi-dimensionally on-screen than when men write them.

The Bechdel Test

Recent studies have shown that the presence (and quality) of female characters correlates to the screenwriter's gender. By using the guidelines of the Bechdel Test, created by cartoonist Alison Bechdel, researchers can see if the cliché "write what you know" proves true — that is, whether men and women tend to write about characters of their own gender (Friedman et al). The Bechdel Test itself is simple yet telling. To pass this test, a film must have 1) at least two women characters 2) who talk to each other about 3) something other than a man (Friedman et al). Friedman et al. examined the 200 highest grossing films from 1995 to 2015, and the results show that gender composition affects a film's Bechdel test result. They discovered, "When writing teams are entirely male, about 50% of films fail the Bechdel test. Add a woman to the mix and only a third of films fail. The seven films written entirely by women all pass the Bechdel test" (Friedman et al). While these findings are most likely a correlative trend, it is noteworthy that the more women on a writing team, the more likely the film will pass the Bechdel Test. Since only 200 films is a relatively small data set, the researchers also

looked at all 4,000 films logged on bechdeltest.com, a website that tracks which films pass the test. The figure below summarizes the researchers' findings.

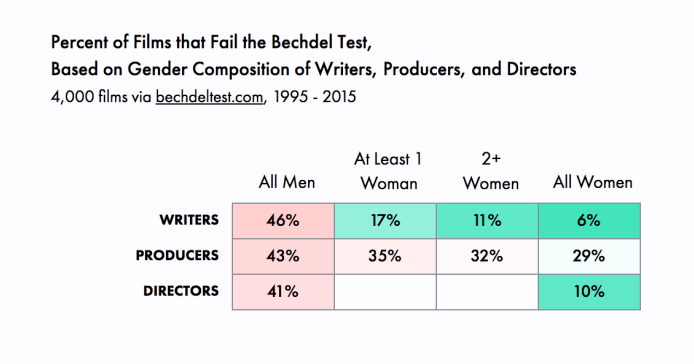


Figure 1: Percent of Films that Fail the Bechdel Test, Based on Gender Composition of Writers, Producers, and Directors. From Friedman et al.

Clearly, while having only women in writing, producing, or directing roles does not automatically mean a film will pass the Bechdel Test, it decreases a film's chance of failing. The difference in statistics based on gender composition suggests that when women are involved in writing a script or directing a film, more care is put into representing women characters beyond tokenism or romantic interests, since there is more than one woman in the film and they talk about something other than a man.

However, there are several inadequacies with the Bechdel Test. For example, the test does not consider how the women characters are portrayed, and requiring a film to have just two female characters who talk to each other at least once is not an adequate model of good female representation. For example, two women in a film could have a simple conversation about literally anything other than a man (for example, the weather

or makeup products) and the film would pass the Bechdel Test. From a critical standpoint, the Bechdel Test is a crude and simple way to judge films, but the test and the above study serve as a starting point for thinking about women's roles behind-the-scenes and how they can affect women characters in film.

Male Gaze vs. Female Gaze

Another way of analyzing the filmmaker's role in portraying women on-screen is to examine how women are presented visually and from whose point of view they are depicted. A prominent concept in feminist film theory is the concept of the male gaze, in which the camera and the male characters on-screen force a viewer to adopt a distinctly heterosexual and male point of view of women characters. The male gaze is prominent in Hollywood filmmaking, which is an industry that is oversaturated with men making the creative decisions for a film. Arguably, the filmmaker's perspective influences their creative decisions, which affects how women are portrayed in a film.

So, what exactly is the male gaze? Laura Mulvey, the feminist film critic who coined the term in her controversial 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," writes:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly... women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*. (Mulvey 19)

Here, Mulvey means that the male gaze is the point of view of the heterosexual male, and Hollywood films often force audiences of all genders to take on this gaze as well through the male characters' point of view and the cinematography to view women on-

screen as sexual objects. Though Mulvey analyzed classical Hollywood specifically, there are still many examples of the male gaze in today's Hollywood films. A blatant example that exemplifies the male gaze is a scene from Michael Bay's *Transformers* involving the male protagonist (Shia LaBeouf) and his conventionally attractive love interest, played by Megan Fox. In this particular scene, Fox's character wears a short skirt and a cropped, low-cut shirt. The character's costume for this scene connotes the "to-be-looked-at-ness" that Laura Mulvey writes about. The costume also draws attention to the character's body and bare skin. Additionally, the scene uses cinematography to contribute to the male gaze. In a wider shot that shows both characters, we see that LaBeouf's character is looking at Fox's body while she investigates an issue with his car's engine. In the wide shot, the camera is on Fox's left, while LaBeouf is on her right. When the scene cuts to a closer shot of just Fox's character, the angle is now from her right side, which is also LaBeouf's character's point of view. The angle is reinforced as a point of view shot as the camera smoothly tilts down from Fox's eyes and pans over her bare stomach and legs, thus requiring the audience to look at her from the male character's perspective. In all, the male gaze often objectifies women by taking on a specifically male perspective through the camera work and characters in a film; these elements are creative decisions of the filmmakers, who, in Hollywood, are predominantly male.

The reverse of the male gaze would be the female gaze, in which a film would force a viewer to take on a distinctly female perspective of the film and of the women characters on-screen. However, many film critics are still debating an exact definition of the female gaze, as it does not operate in the same sexualizing manner as the male gaze.

For example, Anna Kaplan argues that “female characters can possess the look and even make the male character the object of her gaze, but, being a woman, her desire has no power” (qtd. in Smelik 495). In other words, the female gaze is not an inherently sexual one, since socially, women are not given the power to sexualize men.

Additionally, Jill Soloway, the creator of the Amazon Prime television show *Transparent*, argues that “the female gaze is really about using the presence of a female perspective on screen to emphasize the story’s emotions and characters” (Forster). This means that when a story is told from a woman character’s point of view, the audience simply takes on that perspective as well. Journalist Stefani Forster points out that the female gaze is also often “defined by what it doesn’t show, what it refuses to linger on” (Forster).

The cinematography utilized for a rape scene in an episode of the television series *The Handmaid’s Tale* exemplifies the above idea. Instead of focusing on the protagonist’s rapist or the violence of the act, “The frame is focused on her face, before panning blurrily downwards to her torso and legs. Her character disengages from what is happening to her. The camera direction forces us to feel and experience that moment with her” (Forster). In this example, the female gaze allows the audience to empathize with the protagonist during this traumatizing event. The cinematography also places the viewer within the character’s headspace by focusing primarily on the protagonist and her reaction rather than showing everything that is happening in the scene from an indistinct point of view. In summary, instead of simply attempting to assert female dominance and objectify men in the manner women are objectified, the female gaze

puts the viewer into the woman character's perspective and focuses on the story's emotions.

Arguably, the male gaze is influenced at least somewhat by the man (or men) creating the film, because it is "a byproduct of our imbalanced world, one where men hold the majority of the power" (*Gaze* 10). I believe that the female gaze operates in the same way: that women filmmakers influence how women are portrayed on-screen. However, when women direct Hollywood films depicting women, the female characters are not as sexualized as they would often be through a male filmmaker's perspective. For example, based on a study of the top 100 grossing films of 2014, "women are nearly three times as likely as men to appear partially or fully nude in movies (26% and 9%, respectively)," while women accounted for 7% of directors of the top 250 grossing films of the same year ("Report on the Status of Women and Girls in California" 31 and *The Celluloid Ceiling* 2014, 1). These statistics show that having women in main creative positions affects how women are portrayed in film.

In conclusion, women's influence in directing, writing, and cinematography roles impacts how women characters are represented on-screen emotionally and visually. This idea interests me and informs my filmmaking, because I want to create positive, realistic depictions of women in film. What if a film were not only directed or written by women, but what if the whole crew were made up of women? This has certainly been done before by independent filmmakers, but I wanted to experience having an all-women crew while giving my peers an opportunity to work in roles they may not have had a chance to work in before. To challenge the Hollywood norm, I decided to recruit as many women crew members as I could.

The Filmmaking Process

Methodology

For the creative portion of this thesis, I decided to write and direct a short film from a woman's point of view with a women-majority crew. The crew ended up being entirely women, which was meaningful to me because I wanted to create an accepting, comfortable learning environment on set for my peers. I also was able to have a variety of female viewpoints who could contribute ideas and feedback on set. The film itself is about a college-age journalist who faces antagonism from her boss while trying to recover something that was stolen from her. In the end, the protagonist solves the mystery and, in doing so, finds her true passion. Overall, it took months of planning, outlining, writing, and revising to finish the short screenplay.

Short films can be anywhere from two to forty minutes long, but I have learned that the ideal length is around 12-15 minutes for full narrative development, exploration of conflict and character, and for film festival submissions. In a traditional Hollywood narrative, the first act sets up the problem for the protagonist and ends with the inciting incident. This is an event that brings the conflict to light and forces the protagonist to act, which puts her on the path toward her goal (Cowgill 68). In the second act, the conflict rises to a final crisis point, which is the most intense obstacle the main character faces or the final decision she must make. The screenplay's third act builds from the crisis point to the climax (the most exciting or emotional point in the story) and resolution that resolves the plot. While this structure seems simple enough, it becomes complicated when you start developing a character who must go through this journey.

Story does not exist without a compelling protagonist. It is the writer's job to design a character with a specific desire that will force her to act, therefore shaping a plot believable for the protagonist. According to screenwriter and author Robert McKee, there are two primary aspects of character design: characterization and true character (McKee 375). Characterization is all the observable traits of a character, including physical appearance, personality, sexual orientation, values, and behaviors. While the writer's goal is to invent characters with unique characterization, it is more important that these characters can express their true selves. True character is a person's true nature, which is revealed when a character is under extreme pressure. The decisions a character makes when faced with stress or a dilemma illuminates who she really is. In addition, "the greater the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character," meaning that as pressure builds, more of a character's true character is revealed (McKee 375). What makes a character compelling is when there are contradictions within true character or between characterization and true character (McKee 378). These concepts may seem straightforward, but it takes many careful revisions to make sure these storytelling elements are working well in your script. Overall, writing a traditional short narrative screenplay requires careful thought, adherence to a specific structure, and intriguing, complex characters.

Within the Hollywood industry, it is very rare for writers to direct their own scripts, but I felt it was appropriate for me to write and direct my thesis project in order to combine all the skills I have learned in my classes. However, until I took the Art of Directing course last spring, I had only a vague idea of what a director's role is.

To the average film viewer, the director's role is unclear. Simply put, the director is "responsible for the details, quality, and meaning of the final film" (Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier 4). Additionally, the director's job is "to coordinate the collective expertise of [the film's cast and crew] and inspire its creative energy into producing a single, stylistically unified and coherent cinematic story" (Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier 4). During pre-production, the planning stages of a film, the director either works with writers or writes the script; assembles a cast and crew with (or without) a producer; and develops the technical and stylistic approach with the heads of the camera, lighting, sound, and art departments. During the filming process, the director has two goals: "stage the scene for the camera and assure that the performances are strong, consistent and appropriate" (Rabiger and Hurbis-Cherrier 5). If pre-production planning goes well, the director will be able to focus on creating the film and adjusting the script during filming and will not have to worry too much about the specifics of each department. Lastly, in the post-production stage of commercial or Hollywood films, the director typically works with the editor to deliver a "director's cut" to the producer, who is authorized to make changes. Ultimately, the director is responsible for everything the audience sees, hears, and feels when watching the final film.

Of course, one of the main responsibilities a director has is to work with actors to craft the desired performance. There are many strategies for directing actors, but I will briefly describe the approaches I used in making my thesis film. One method is to use verbs to explain the character's intention in a scene. This gives the actor something that they can interpret and portray actively. Simply telling an actor to "look sad" in a scene will not work because it is not specific enough. Verbs like "slouch," "frown," or

“pout” tell the actor exactly what she needs to do in the scene in order to get the message across to the viewer. Before I began filming this project, I wrote down a verb related to each emotional or action beat on a copy of my script. I brought that copy to set each day, so if I got stuck while directing, I could refer back to my notes. For a scene in which my protagonist is trying to get a confession out of someone, the verbs I gave my actress for the scene were “pry” and “inquire,” while the other character was trying to “deflect” suspicion and “conceal” information. Giving an actor active verbs to work with helped me clearly communicate my vision.

Another directorial method is to prompt the actor to conjure an image in her head. The image itself varies depending on the situation, but the actor can pull from her memory or use substitutions. The director and actor must find a way to evoke an image with the lines being spoken. For example, at a turning point in my film, the protagonist’s boss rips up an article she had been working on. I told my actress to recall something she had made and was proud of. Then, I told her to react as if someone had just destroyed that important project or item. On screen, her reaction to the article being ripped up is subtle, but the emotion I wanted as a director is there. Furthermore, if the actor does not have a memory or personal experience that could serve as an image, she could use a substitution. An example of this could be that the actress playing the protagonist and the actor playing her boss are good friends. Occasionally, it would be difficult to get the right tone between the two actors for a certain scene. I suggested that the actress substitute “someone from her own life” that would cause her to feel the emotion or attitude written in the script (Weston 110). Images and substitutions “do not need to be exact, but they need to be specific and strong” (Weston 110). Again, these

are just a couple approaches to directing actors, but they were extremely helpful to me when working with my cast.

Reflection

Throughout my filmmaking process, there have been many ups and downs. I have certainly learned a lot about filmmaking, since this was the largest project I have ever completed. I learned that you should always double-check your equipment before leaving the rental facility, in case anything is missing or broken. I learned that having a good producer and assistant director is key, but also that when it comes to independent filmmaking, sometimes it's better to do things yourself, just so you know they will get done when and how you want them to. When it comes to cinematography, I discovered that I know just simple basics, so I was extremely grateful to have a talented, hardworking, and knowledgeable director of photography. I learned that clearly communicating your vision with actors is important for efficiency on set and for the editing room. As I edited this project, I could tell that as I got more comfortable with directing these actors, the scenes improved over time. For example, the scenes we shot later in production were overall more dynamic performance-wise, because I was becoming more used to working with these actors and this crew.

I also learned a lot about myself as a filmmaker. Once I got into the rhythm of filming, I enjoyed directing. I liked creating a story using actors and I loved seeing my writing come to life. I discovered that I am good under pressure, such as dealing with time constraints and location issues. I found that even when things seem impossible, I will find some way to solve the problem. I learned that having a crew of exclusively women was refreshing compared to my filming experiences in my classes. In classes

that required the students to produce short films in groups, I found that some of the men in my groups were overbearing and somewhat disrespectful to the women in my group. Behaviors like giving unsolicited advice or feedback while a woman was directing, trying to take over the equipment from a woman without asking, and depicting women poorly in their projects were common throughout my coursework. With a crew of all women, none of these behaviors were present on set. I never felt rushed while directing and no one spoke to me or my crew in a condescending manner. The other women on my crew often said this project was the most fun they've had working on a film or that the environment was refreshing and fun compared to their prior experiences, which was my ultimate goal for this project. Being able to choose who I worked with was a luxury that I probably won't experience in the professional world. Despite the low points of this project, I am glad that I decided to make a short film as part of my thesis, because I now have a wide variety of new knowledge about filmmaking that cannot easily be taught in a classroom.

My film embodies the female gaze because it uses the female protagonist's perspective to emphasize the emotions in the film. For example, the film tells a story about the protagonist overcoming sexism in the workplace by proving herself as a journalist. As a woman, I used my point of view and my lived experiences to inform how the screenplay was written. The way the antagonist character treats the protagonist is portrayed as unfair and harsh in the film, because the story is told from a female protagonist's point of view. When people watch the film, they will be able to sympathize with and relate to the protagonist because the story is presented through her point of view.

Another way I used the female gaze in my film is through the cinematography. I wanted to emphasize the protagonist's emotional beats throughout the film, so I primarily framed her in medium close-ups and close-ups. There are party scenes in which the character wears more "revealing" clothes, but the camera does not linger on parts of her body. Her clothing in those scenes help establish the character's personality and background. At the beginning of the film, she is the life of the party and is preoccupied with posting photos on social media, and her clothing reinforces her "party girl" image. However, her character arc proves that she is not one-dimensional. In the climactic scene, the protagonist wears a typical party outfit rather than a Halloween costume, because at that point in the story, she is more concerned with catching the thief than looking nice for photos. In all, my film represents the female gaze through the female protagonist's point of view and the cinematography to emphasize the emotions of the story.

Looking forward, I will be able to use what I learned during the process of creating this film to improve future film projects. In the future, I want to aim for a more balanced representation of gender behind-the-scenes to examine how having a gender-balanced crew with a female director would impact the film's gaze. I would also want to explore how I personally would direct a film with a male protagonist, because I would bring a different perspective to a male character's story. I also want to keep exploring the concept of the female gaze and how personal experiences shape this gaze. While this thesis focuses on a gender binary, there is presumably a different version of the gaze for every gender. With the knowledge I gained from this thesis, I hope to keep exploring the female gaze and other possible forms of "the gaze."

Conclusion

Women were very active in the early years of film in the United States. They were writers, directors, editors, and founders of independent production companies. This changed when studios realized that films, especially talkies, were highly profitable. Women were pushed out of Hollywood as financial gain became the main goal of moviemaking and larger studios adopted strategic business models. Because of this change, men have dominated the film industry ever since, which has led to a distinctly male point of view being represented on-screen. Since men are predominantly the people in charge of directing, writing, shooting, and producing Hollywood films, their voice and their gaze are highly present. However, when women hold positions of creative power on a film set, their point of view becomes present, which makes female characters in the film more well-rounded and true to life. This is evident because a film is more likely to pass the Bechdel Test when women are involved as writers, producers, or directors.

Writing and directing my own short film and hiring a film crew of all women has affected how the female characters are represented in my film. My protagonist is seen as a “party girl” in the beginning, but eventually she discovers her passion for journalism. She progresses from unfocused and social media-obsessed to determined and self-assured, which makes her a dynamic, well-rounded character. The protagonist’s misogynistic boss is condescending toward her, but she stands up for herself in the end. Having a woman as my director of photography helped contribute to the female gaze, because we collaborated on creating shots that portrayed the female characters as people, not objects. My crew’s collective knowledge of what we dislike

about how women are portrayed in mainstream Hollywood films helped inform my filmmaking.

Women filmmakers are important to the film landscape because it helps diversify the types of stories being told. Half of the world's population is female, so it only makes sense that there should be equal representation of women and men working in the industry. Society needs well-written, multi-dimensional female characters because it will change the way we view women in real life. Of course, women are not the only people who can write women characters, but when they do, the characters seem more authentic. With the recent success of women-directed movies like *Wonder Woman* (2017) and *Captain Marvel* (2019), audiences have proven to Hollywood that female leads and women directors are profitable. Hopefully, major production companies will recognize that viewers want to see different viewpoints on-screen.

However, this change will not happen immediately. As consumers, we must continue to show the industry what we want to see. This means being selective in what movies we choose to give our money to through box office sales. It's also important to support independent films made by women. In this digital age, where there is simply too much media to consume, spreading the word about an independent film you saw at a festival or on a streaming platform goes a long way. To support women in film, start watching their movies.

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