The Roles and Portrayal of Women in Film Over Time: A Content Analysis of Films from 1939-2002

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The Roles and Portrayal of Women in Film Over Time:

A Content Analysis of Films from 1939-2002

Allison M. Simon

Messiah College
Accepted by the Faculty of

The Department of Psychology

Messiah College, Grantham, PA

In fulfillment of the requirements for the

Undergraduate Honors for Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degree

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The Roles and Portrayal of Women in Film Over Time:
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Allison M. Simon
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Abstract

Based on the critiques of feminist film theorists, the present study examined the portrayal of women in film over time. A content analysis of Academy Award winning films from 1939-2001 revealed that there were significantly fewer female characters than male characters overall, with minority females being particularly under-represented as compared to whites and the actual population. Females tended to be shown in low-status occupations with few changes overall, though occupational variety increased after 1970. Though large cultural trends seemed to be somewhat reflected in the portrayal of women in film across the decades, generally the data of this study were characterized by the startling consistency of female portrayal over time. It was suggested that the relatively small change overall in the portrayal of women in Academy Award winning films may reflect the values of the white, male majority of filmmakers and film elite rather than overall American population. Future research should investigate the same questions within a different film genre such as each year’s top-grossing films in order to determine if the same trends are reflected.
The Role and Portrayal of Women in Film Over Time:
A Content Analysis of Film from 1939-2002

Feminist film theory developed in the early 1970's as a reaction to what feminists viewed as an "oppressive ideology and stereotyping" of women in contemporary film (Thornham, 1999, p. 10). Members of the movement spoke out against the under-representation of women in film, the damaging portrayal of women as mere sex objects and companions of men, the lack of women in professional settings, and the negative character traits films assigned to women (Kaplan, 1983; Mulvey, 1975; Smith, 1972; Tasker, 1998; Thornham, 1999). Much of the support for their claims comes from anecdotal evidence and unsystematic observations, however. Very little empirical research has been conducted on the roles and portrayal of women in film, particularly with the aim of noting trends and changes over time.

Laura Mulvey can be credited as one of the leading voices for feminist film theory in the 1970's. Her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" reflects the general disapproval of a growing number of critics who attack the objectification of women in film and Hollywood's historic tendency to ascribe to women the status of pleasure-provider in a patriarchal industry. Thus, Mulvey approaches women's place in film from a psychoanalytic viewpoint, drawing on Freud's ideas of scopophilia and castration anxiety, the pleasure of looking upon others as objects and the displeasure and fear of women who remind men of the horrors of losing their penis. In a male world, she argues, this anxiety and pleasure in looking manifests itself as a negative or unrealistically positive portrayal of women in film in an attempt to ease those anxieties. Therefore, in American film, women tend to be shown as only super-sexual beings, displayed for the pleasure of the audience and the other male characters, or as the recipients of guilt and punishment, a means of relaxing the castration anxiety women evoke in men. E. Ann
Kaplan (1983) echoes Mulvey’s analysis but adds onto this idea of the “male gaze” that, “in defining and dominating woman as erotic object, [it] manages to repress the relations for woman in her place as Mother—leaving a gap not ‘colonized’ by man, through which, hopefully, woman can begin to create a discourse, a voice, a place for herself as subject” (p. 2). She also comments on the inadequacies of early feminists film theorists’ use of mainly sociological and political methodology and notes the addition of structuralism, psychoanalysis, and semiology to feminist analysis to remedy those shortcomings (Kaplan, 1983).

Similarly, Sharon Smith’s 1972 writings voiced her concern that women were historically left out of film and literature or shown only in the context of a sexual reward or obstacle to a man. Men, however, typically received many types of roles in many different settings. She writes, “the role of a woman in a film almost always revolves around her physical attraction and the mating games she plays with the male characters…women provide trouble or sexual interludes for the male characters, or are not present at all” (Smith, S., 1972, p. 14). On the rare occasion when a woman is central to the plot, “she is generally shown as confused, or helpless and in danger, or passive, or as a purely sexual being” (Smith, S., p. 14-15). She, like Thornham (1999) noted feminist film theory’s aim to end the stereotyping and oppression of women in film by” transforming the film-making practice” (p. 10).

Still other feminists like Valerie Smith (1998) and Yvonne Tasker (1998) approach film theory from a more diverse viewpoint where they note the additional plight of Hispanic and nonwhite women in the film industry by identifying some of the other factors that contribute to the oppression of individuals in addition to gender (e.g. race and social class). For the purposes of this paper and its focus on film, this theory notes the unique challenge minority women face of being underrepresented and stereotyped as women and also as a member of a minority group.
Tasker (1998) writes, “the popular cinema’s constant framing of women in terms of sexuality is in turn re-framed and modified by discourses of ‘race.’ Whilst for white performers these stereotypes can produce major roles, such opportunities are rarer for Black women, already operating in relation to stereotypical constructions of sexuality” (p. 4). There is a need, then, not just to transform the perception and portrayal of women in film, but also the representation of minorities, specifically, minority women.

While some writers focus on the objectification of women, the negative traits assigned to them, and the unique plight of minority women, others focus on the relationship of women to the workforce in cinema. With the increase of American women in the labor force and the resulting changes in gender roles (i.e. the father must take on more typically “female” responsibilities Fingerman, 1989; Pietropinto, 1986), one might expect an increase in the portrayal and respect of working women in film. In Working Girls, Tasker (1998) notes, however, that even as women began to proliferate in the labor force and hold an increasing number of film roles in a professional setting, the result was not more respect for women, but the sexualization of the women’s work. She writes, “across a variety of popular genres, Hollywood representation is characterized by an insistent equation between working women, women’s work and some form of sexual(ised) performance” (p. 3). Particularly, she notes the modern influx of romanticized (and un-romanticized) portrayals of women as prostitutes in film. According to Tasker and other feminists, even today women are still mainly sexual in film and winning prestigious awards for their roles in predominantly sexual occupations or sexualized occupations.

Thirty years after the beginning of feminist film theory, researchers and writers continue to evaluate society’s progress and gauge the results of the women’s movement and attempts to promote a more egalitarian view of women in society. In the Winter 1999 issue of Media Report
to *Women*, a report documented the portrayal of women on prime-time television for the 1997-1998 season indicating that only 39% of television characters were women with minority women being particularly under-represented at 12% African American, 2% Asian, and 1% Hispanic ("Status of women weak," 1999). Similarly, A Screen Actors Guild study of the 1993 television season found that only 1/3 of television characters were women and the number fell to 1 out of 5 characters on Saturday mornings, with minorities being particularly underrepresented (Armstrong, 1993). Other studies show similar findings with relation to the under-representation of women and minorities as actors, directors, and writers and their typically lower financial earnings as compared to men (Karlak & Swertlow, 1993; Goldrick-Jones, 1995; Corliss, 1991; Dawes, 1990).

Still, some studies report that the representation of women on television is changing. Signorielli and Bacue (1999) studied Prime-Time television content for 3 decades and found significant decreases in the gap between the number of male and female characters (from 28.3% female in the 1970’s to 40.0% female in the 1990’s.) Signorielli and Bacue also documented that women on television are less likely to hold traditional female occupations than in the past though they are still less likely than men to be shown as working outside the home. Still, they note that after this initial drop in the number of women in traditional female jobs, the rate increased once again in the 1990’s (from 11.4% to 17.1% of all female characters). Another study of the portrayal of characters and work on television in the 1990’s found that, although women were still less likely than men to have a visible occupation, both sexes were just as likely to have professional and white-collar jobs when the occupation was known (Signorielli & Kahlenberg, 2001). Still, Signorielli and Kahlenberg also report that men were cast in a wider variety of occupations than women and that minority characters were less likely to be depicted as having an
occupation than white characters (36.9% of minority characters were not working or an
occupation could not be determined as compared to 29.3% of white characters).

Though these studies are strong indicators of popular media trends in television, the
world of film has its own unique characteristics that must be studied in their own light. Levy
(1990) argues that the film industry is “a major economic institution which also fulfills
ideological functions through its transmission of cultural norms...Films also signify values and
meanings through their narratives and characters” (p. 54). This idea was the foundation for his
study of Academy Award winning films from 1927 to the 1980’s. More specifically, Levy
examined the issue of gender in terms of specific film genres, attributes of the American screen
heroine, and the gendered expectations of men and women related to the family, careers,
perceptions, and relationships. He found that in terms of genres, men dominated the biographical
and action/adventure films while women won awards predominantly for romantic melodramas.
Screen heroines were typically young and beautiful while men had a much broader range of
acceptable age and level of attractiveness. While men’s marital status was less important to their
roles, women were shown as married more often than men with the addition that marriage was
more central to their character’s role. As Levy writes, “marriage has functioned as the most
frequent solution to the heroine’s problems, narratively, from the point of view of the story, and
ideologically, from the point of view of the dominant culture” (p. 61). Levy’s findings related to
occupation are perhaps the most telling for the purposes of the present study. Men were
significantly more likely to be engaged in gainful work than women as well as portrayed in a
greater variety of positions. Employed women typically found themselves in the service or
entertainment industry with actresses and prostitutes being the most common positions held by
women (Levy, 1990).
Certainly one issue with studies of past films is their emersion in the culture that created them. It is not unlikely that historically women were portrayed less often in gainful occupations and in a narrower range since women in the United States were less likely to be in the labor force than men and, until recently, were typically confined to stereotyped occupations. Therefore, it is important to examine not only the history of the portrayal of women in film, but also how the portrayal has evolved and developed over time, particularly in relation to cultural movements. For example, Levy’s film study also noted the changes in film portrayals of women in the late 1970’s when they were more likely to be portrayed as career-oriented professionals with a wider range of occupations than in past decades. They also were less defined by their familial life and more likely to be concerned with the public political domain (as opposed to the private domestic realm). This was an advancement from the past when, as Levy writes, “the most negative screen portrayals, which either trivialized women’s domestic roles and/or condemned career women, occurred in the late 1960’s and early 1970s—just when women were beginning to leave their mark off screen, in the social structure” (p. 74).

Clearly, the birth of the feminist film movement in the 1970’s indicated a concern writers like Sharon Smith, Haskell, and Mulvey had with the way women were portrayed in film up until that time. Writings of contemporary feminists and authors like Tasker, Valerie Smith, and Dawidoff, indicate that the concerns of early feminists, though possibly manifesting themselves in different forms, generally remain in contemporary films. Thus, today’s writers and researchers seem to indicate that women are still underrepresented, objectified, and attributed negative character traits in today’s popular films, even if this may be changing to some extent.

Certainly culture influences media portrayals of women and society, but many would argue that the values projected into the media then reflect back on the culture in a reciprocal
relationship. Dawidoff (1989) refers to Molly Haskell’s *From Reverence to Rape* and adds her own commentary about the film industry’s role in relegating women back to their subordinate position after the men returned from World War II. They note that before and during the war, women were typically celebrated in film as strong, important, and worthy of respect. They successfully performed the roles of men in the workplace and society while they were gone. When the men returned, however, the soldiers desired their dominant place in society, requiring the removal of women from the public sphere and pushed back into the home. Thus, the roles of women in film drastically changed as they moved from respected members of the workforce and family to predominantly sex objects and entertainers. This era was defined by movies that “give us women hanging around in various poses, playing if not being dumb, waiting for men who have high-powered jobs to notice them” (Dawidoff, 1989, p. 60). Dawidoff provides an even more scathing attack of the film industry in the ‘50s when she writes,

> While Brando, Clift, and Dean movies about alienated men were inherently sympathetic to them and evoked waves, if not floods of identification in the audiences, the movies that concerned women were hostile to them, shooting right into the cleavage (see *The Outlaw*), tracking jiggling flesh (see any Marilyn Monroe or Jayne Mansfield movie), zooming into the maiden bed (see *Pillow Talk*), photographing women as if they were helpless, laughable victims of unwieldy, even unnatural anatomy...the majority of ‘50s women, the camera leeringly hints, are about to strip, beg, and roll over (p. 60).

Dawidoff attacks these films because she believes they severely harm the way in which society viewed women; they were sex objects in film and demeaned in society. Film impacted cultural values, just as cultural values may impact film.

Today, organizations and writers are recognizing the negative impact film and the media can have on the perceptions of various groups. The Morning Star Commission, for example, conducted a study released in 1998 that was funded by Hadassah-Southern California (Kushner, 1998). In the study, researchers examined the public’s perceptions of Jewish women based in
large part on the negative stereotypes they continuously witnessed on television and in films. Specifically, Jewish women were portrayed as “pushy, controlling, selfish, unattractive, [and] materialistic,” among other things (Kushner, p.3). These negative images, the Commission argued, contributed to the stereotyped images of Jewish women held by both Jewish and non-Jewish individuals. The results so concerned the Commission that they are now working to promote a better, more accurate image of Jewish women in film and the media (Kushner, 1998).

Other researchers have documented the ability of the media, specifically the news media, to influence public opinion, especially when multiple parties reinforce the same view (Anastasio, Rose, & Chapman, 1999).

Clearly, it is difficult to determine whether cultural values contribute to film or film contributes to cultural values. It may be argued that this difficulty arises from the fact that film images and cultural values are dialectically related, just as Sharon Smith (1972) argues in her critiques. This relationship, regardless of the reference point at which one begins (culture or film), demonstrates the need to understand and study the way in which popular cinema portrays women. Whether film has the power to impact the values society places on women or reflects already existing values, it is important to know how women were represented in film over time, how they are presented today, and which areas have changed and which have remained relatively constant. In order to make any evaluation of cultural values and their projection to and from films, we must first systematically determine the portrayal of women in film and the trends over time.

The purpose of this present study involves evaluating the claims of feminist film theorists by examining the roles and portrayal of women in film from 1939-2002. Seventy films (65 Academy Award winning films) were compared and analyzed from decade to decade in order to
document trends over time and determine which aspects of female representation have changed and which have remained the same. Specifically, this study examined the overall number of female characters (as compared to males), the occupations held by the female characters, the primary role of the female characters in the film, and the number of minority female characters depicted. The data were analyzed and interpreted in light of feminist film theory in an attempt to give an overall statement about the current status of women in film and their representation over time. Based on previous research and the tenets of feminist film theory it was hypothesized that,

H1: Female characters would be underrepresented in film as compared to males.
H2: Minority women would be underrepresented as compared to white women.
H3: Women across time would be depicted as holding low-status traditional female occupations, though occupational variety would increase during and after the 1970's.
H4: Using the combined data on the roles, occupations, and percentages of women and minority characters, the portrayal of women would correspond with large cultural movements throughout the decades.

Method

Materials

An original instrument developed by the researcher was used to analyze the films in accordance with the parameters outlined in the research question: number of male/female characters, persons of color, female occupations, and primary female roles (see Appendix 1).

Sixty-five Academy Award winning films from 1939-2001 (10 from each decade) were analyzed including the pictures that won “Best Motion Picture of the Year” and “Best Performance by an Actress in a Leading Role.” Academy Award winning films were chosen due to the unique ascribed excellence and popularity of these films as a result of their endorsement by the most established and powerful members of the film industry: “Because the Academy numbers among the members of the most gifted and skilled artists and craftsmen in the motion
picture world, its Award stands alone as an indication of what top filmmakers feel are the year’s top achievements” (“History and structure,” 2003). In addition, 6 People’s Choice Award winning films from 1997-2002 were viewed with the similar rationale that they would be most indicative of current popular beliefs about which films, and by implication their content, embody excellence. Academy Award winning films are nominated and chosen by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Scientists, an organization consisting of over 6,000 craftspeople. People’s Choice Awards are chosen by popular opinion polls of the general population. For a complete listing of the films viewed, see Appendix 2.

Procedure

Data for each film were recorded on the original instrument. For this study, the protagonist of the film was identified and defined as “the main character of the film around which the story revolved.” Major and minor male characters were operationally defined and tallied as well as the number of minority characters. For each female character, her role and occupation were identified as well as her race. Roles were classified as protagonist, love, sex, professional, authority, colleague, subordinate, filial, antagonist, none, or other. Occupations were classified into 16 categories: not employed, unknown, homemaker, maid, nurse, retail worker, teacher, entertainer, assistant/secretary, sex, doctor, general professional, waitress, student, nun, or other. For a complete list of operational definitions of all the categories reported on the instrument see Appendix 3.

Results

The overall mean number of female characters per film was 11.16 or 29.51% of all characters. Table 1 contains the mean number of female characters by decade demonstrating the consistently lower percentage of females over time as compared to the mean number of male
characters. The combined mean number of black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander females was .73 or 1.9% of all characters (for a breakdown by decade see Table 2).

In terms of female characters’ occupation, 65% could be identified with 23.03% of those having no occupation and 11.17% occupied primarily as a homemaker. For a complete listing of the mean number of female occupations and their percentages overall, see Table 3. Overall there is little change over time in how women are depicted in or out of the workforce with a few exceptions (see Figure 1). The first exception involves the 1980s which contained the greatest percentage of women as “professionals” with a total of 15.94%. Second, a female was much more likely to have an occupation related to “sex” and less likely to have a “professional” occupation in the 1950s than any other decade. Third, in terms of work variety, there has been a general (and sometimes stark) increase in the “other” category since the 1970s. Finally, the percentage of homemakers depicted decreased each decade until the 1980s when it increased to pre-1950’s levels.

In terms of roles, “none” and “colleague” were the most frequent classifications for every decade except the 1970s where “sex” and “antagonist” were ranked 1st and 2nd respectively. Women were classified has having purely sexual roles least frequently in the 1940s (10th) and 1980’s (tied for last) and most frequently in the 1950s (3rd) and 1970s (1st). Female protagonists were most common in the 1940s and 1980s and least common in the 1970s and 1950s. For a complete list of frequencies of roles for each decade see Table 4.

Discussion

As hypothesized there has been relatively little change over time in the portrayal of women in film in terms of numbers of characters, ethnicity, and occupation. The data support H1 in that over time women were significantly under-represented as compared to men, almost 1:3
overall. Also, H2 was supported by the very low percentage of Black, Hispanic, and Asian female characters. In accordance with H3, even women’s occupations, perhaps the most noticeable real world change in women’s status since the late 1930s, show very little change in Academy Award winning film portrayals. And finally, H4 was supported by some interesting trends and changes that emerged after analyzing the film data for this study.

First of all, despite the earlier claims of relatively consistent portrayals of women, the data does seem to reflect some of the cultural trends of the decades in which the films were made, supporting H4. For example, the claim of many feminist film theorists about the extreme sexualization and privatization of women in the 1950s seems supported by the data. The occupation of “sex” significantly increased at the same time that the number of women depicted in professional occupations decreased from 6.44% to zero. Of the identified occupations of women in the 1950s, 44.62% were either homemakers, some kind of sex dealer (prostitute, male escort, stripper...etc.), or had no occupation at all (usually in the form of a wealthy woman who had no need to care for a home). In contrast, the previous decade of the 1940s had more professionals, secretaries, waitresses, nuns, retail workers, teachers, and entertainers than women occupied in the field of sex. It seems possible that this trend can be explained in terms of World War II and the need for women to enter the labor force and take leadership in the absence of the men who were off fighting. When the men returned at the end of the 1940s and early 1950s, a campaign to return women to the domestic sphere ensued resulting in the view of women as primarily sexual beings (Smith, S., 1972).

After many of the feminist film theorists began decrying the damaging portrayals of women in the late 1960s and 1970s as part of the women’s movement, other trends seem to have emerged in the films. First of all, women occupied primarily as homemakers hit the lowest point
of all six decades in the 1970s at the same time that women with no occupation (9.59%) dropped for the first time from the most frequent occupation to the 4th most frequent (behind “other,” “nurse,” and “retail”). This trend remained until the 1990’s when “none” jumped back to the top position at 29.30% of identified female occupations. In addition, the dramatic increase of the “other” category in the 1970s (from 10.53% to 27.40%) seems to indicate a change from the portrayal of women in common traditional female occupations to, at the very least, females’ depiction in a wider variety of occupations. While the women’s movement may have had a noticeable effect on women’s occupations, it clearly had no effect on increasing the total number of female characters since the 1970s total of 29.43% was actually a drop from the previous decade (35.69%) and was nearly identical to the overall average of 29.51%.

Another societal movement may be reflected in the data collected for this study: the Civil Rights movement. The number of ethnic minority females (black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander) increased from a mere 0.94% of all characters in the 1950s to 3.1% in the 1960s. Though not proportional to the number of non-white-European-American individuals in the actual population, this increase does represent a 5% change from the previous decade (from 3.4% of females to 8.7%). Though dropping again in the 1970’s, the proportion of female minority characters increased to the 1960’s level in the 1980’s and hovered between 8 and 9% for the next two decades.

In addition to noting trends and changes in the portrayal of women in film over time, this study also intended to evaluate the current status of women in film as compared to films of the past and the actual present population. The films analyzed from the 1990s had the unique feature of including films that won the People’s Choice Award in addition to the Academy Award winning films. The significance of the inclusion of these films lies in their endorsement by the
general population rather than only a small proportion of the film elite. As a result, it can be surmised that the data from the 1990s and early 2000s more directly reflect the films deemed excellent by the attitudes of Americans than the films of previous decades which did not include People’s Choice winners.

Perhaps the most startling feature of the films in the present decade is the low percentage of characters that are female (25.22%), the lowest percentage of all the decades. Thus, instead of improving in terms of representation, it appears that female actresses today have fewer roles to choose from than in the past if they are intent on starring or participating in Academy Award winning films. This percentage is especially low when compared to the percentage of the actual population of the United States that is female: 50.95% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). In addition, though higher than in pre-1960 films, the average percentage of minority females in the 1990s was only 8.6% of female characters, well below the 37.3% of Hispanic and nonwhite individuals in the actual population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Especially poignant is the lack of major non-white and Hispanic female characters. In fact, the first non-white female protagonist did not appear until actress Halle Berry won an Academy Award for “Monster’s Ball” in 2001. Even in this film, however, she played the part of a waitress who engaged in a graphic sexual scene with a significantly older white male, bearing all of her anatomy. The appearance of nudity was not unique to this film, however, as female nudity (showing the entire breast) occurred in 6 of the 12 Academy Award winning films analyzed from 1991-2001. While women’s genitals were also shown on occasion (“Boys Don’t Cry,” for example) no male penises were shown in any of the films, though a few showed the buttocks (“American Beauty”). Thus, it seems that women not only have fewer roles than men in the 1990’s, but are also expected to present themselves as sexual beings more graphically and more frequently than men. Still, it should be noted that
having an occupation related to sex was more common in the 1950s than in the 1990s. It seems then, at least according to the variables studied, that the decade of the 1990s not only showed little progression in terms of the representation of women and minorities in film, but actual regression in some categories.

One possible explanation for the relatively small change in the portrayal of women in Academy Award winning films involves the consistent under-representation of women and minorities behind the scenes of these films, as reported by Karlak and Swertlow (1993). If white males continue to dominate the writing, directing, and production of films, then it is conceivable that they would infuse their particular values into the film, regardless of changes in the status of other social groups within the society. In fact, a powerful group may perceive an increase in status for less-privileged groups as a threat, leading to an even poorer and more negative representation of those groups in an attempt to mitigate their threat. Support for this theory could lie in the unusually high portrayal of women as sex objects and antagonists to male protagonists in the 1970s.

A second explanation for these findings may reflect the possibility that Academy Award winning films are poor indicators of film trends since they more closely reflect the values of the white, male film elite that endorse them rather than the general population of film viewers (C. Downing, personal communication, December 8, 2003). For the purposes of this study, the multitude of films produced each year had to be condensed into a manageable quantity. The rationale for choosing Academy Award films was explained earlier, yet clearly the results of this study would vary depending on the category of film studied. Future researchers may want to consider analyzing other classifications of films like each year’s top-grossing films. These films
may be particularly meaningful since they are more representative of their popularity in the general population.

Another direction for future research includes developing explanations for what appears to be a backslide in the portrayal of women in the 1990s as compared to previous decades, as well as identifying cultural movements that may have influenced this trend. And finally, researchers may want to more thoroughly investigate the nature of the relationship between film content and the personal values of its viewers, focusing specifically on if and how the representation of women in film influences the perception of women in society.
References


Table 1

*Mean Number of Female Characters by Decade*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>% Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>11.16</td>
<td>26.66</td>
<td>29.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1949</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>28.58</td>
<td>30.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>23.30</td>
<td>27.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>22.70</td>
<td>35.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970-1979</td>
<td>10.80</td>
<td>25.90</td>
<td>29.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>18.10</td>
<td>35.59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-2002</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>34.61</td>
<td>25.22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

Mean Number of black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander Females by Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>% Female of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td>2.03</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939-1949</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1950-1959</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-1969</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>3.1%</td>
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<td>1970-1979</td>
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<td>1980-1989</td>
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<tr>
<td>1990-2002</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
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Table 3

*Mean Number of Female Occupations*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Mean Number per Film (Percentage)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Mean</td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1.67</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0.81</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maid</td>
<td>0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant/Secretary</td>
<td>0.47</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generic Professional</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Entertainer</td>
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<td>Waitress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nun</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>0.17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Doctor</td>
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Table 4

*Ranked Frequencies of Female Roles per Film by Decade*

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<td>Other .00</td>
<td>Other .10</td>
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<td>Colleague 1.67</td>
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<tr>
<td>None 1.10</td>
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<td>Professional .70</td>
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<td>Filial .60</td>
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<td>Love .40</td>
<td>Love .20</td>
<td>Love .39</td>
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<td>Subordinate .30</td>
<td>Subordinate .20</td>
<td>Sex .22</td>
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<td>Sex .00</td>
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<td>Other .00</td>
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Figure Caption

*Figure 1.* The frequency (%) of identified female occupations depicted by decade.
Figure 1

Occupations Over Time

Frequency (%)

None  Homemaker  Maid  Nurse  Retail  Teacher  Entertainer  Secretary  Sex  Doctor  Professional  Waitress  Student  Other  Nun

Occupation

- 1940's
- 1950's
- 1960's
- 1970's
- 1980's
- 1990's
# Appendix 1

## Film Analysis Instrument

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<thead>
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<th>Film Title:</th>
<th>Year:</th>
<th>Male Characters Tally</th>
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### Protagonist:

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<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Primary Role</th>
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### Women of Color Tally

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Minor Female Characters Names</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
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</table>

### Men of Color Tally
Appendix 2

Films Analyzed from 1939-2002

**Best Picture**

2001 A BEAUTIFUL MIND
1999 AMERICAN BEAUTY
1997 TITANIC
1995 BRAVEHEART
1993 SCHINDLER'S LIST
1991 THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS
1989 DRIVING MISS DAISY
1988 RAINMAN
1985 OUT OF AFRICA
1983 TERMS OF ENDEARMENT
1981 CHARIOTS OF FIRE
1979 KRAMER VS. KRAMER
1977 ANNIE HALL
1975 ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
1973 THE STING
1971 THE FRENCH CONNECTION
1969 MIDNIGHT COWBOY
1967 IN THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT
1965 THE SOUND OF MUSIC
1963 TOM JONES
1961 WEST SIDE STORY
1959 BEN-HUR
1957 THE BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI
1955 MARTY
1953 FROM HERE TO ETERNITY
1951 AN AMERICAN IN PARIS
1949 ALL THE KING'S MEN
1947 GENTLEMAN'S AGREEMENT
1945 THE LOST WEEKEND
1943 CASABLANCA
1941 HOW GREEN WAS MY VALLEY
1939 GONE WITH THE WIND

**Best Actress in Leading Role**

2001 Halle Berry – MONSTERS BALL
1999 Hilary Swank - BOYS DON'T CRY
1997 Helen Hunt - AS GOOD AS IT GETS
1995 Susan Sarandon - DEAD MAN WALKING
1993 Holly Hunter - THE PIANO
1991 Jodie Foster - THE SILENCE OF THE LAMBS
1989 Jessica Tandy - DRIVING MISS DAISY
1987 Cher – MOONSTRUCK
1985 Geraldine Page - THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL
1984 Sally Field - PLACES IN THE HEART
1983 Shirley MacLaine - TERMS OF ENDEARMENT
1981 Katharine Hepburn - ON GOLDEN POND
1979 Sally Field - NORMA RAE
1977 Diane Keaton - ANNIE HALL
1975 Louise Fletcher - ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST
1973 Glenda Jackson - A TOUCH OF CLASS
1972 Liza Minnelli – CABARET
1968 Barbra Streisand - FUNNY GIRL
1967 Katharine Hepburn - GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER
1965 Julie Christie – DARLING
1963 Patricia Neal – HUD
1962 Anne Bancroft - THE MIRACLE WORKER
1959 Simone Signoret - ROOM AT THE TOP
1957 Joanne Woodward - THE THREE FACES OF EVE
1954 Grace Kelly - THE COUNTRY GIRL
1953 Audrey Hepburn - ROMAN HOLIDAY
1951 Vivien Leigh - A STREETCAR NAMED DESIRE
1949 Olivia de Havilland - THE HEIRESS
1947 Loretta Young - THE FARMER'S DAUGHTER
1945 Joan Crawford - MILDRED PIERCE
1943 Jennifer Jones - THE SONG OF BERNADETTE
1941 Joan Fontaine – SUSPICION
1939 Vivien Leigh - GONE WITH THE WIND

People's Choice Awards (1997-2002)

2002 SHREK
2001 THE GREEN MILE
2000 THE SIXTH SENSE
1999 TITANIC
1998 JERRY MAGUIRE
1997 INDEPENDENCE DAY
Appendix 3

Operational Definitions

Protagonist—the main character of the film around which the story revolved

Major Characters—the protagonist and other characters who have a significant role in the film and appear and interact regularly throughout the film

Minor Characters—characters who speak at least one line and/or have a definitive purpose to the plot (e.g. a deaf character who cannot speak may still be a minor character)

Role—the purpose and relationship of the character to the protagonist

Love—the character romantically pursues or is romantically pursued by the protagonist

Sex—the character is used or viewed only for sexual gratification by the protagonist

Authority—the character has control over the protagonist

Colleague—the character accompanies or associates with the protagonist as an equal without the element of romantic love or sex

Subordinate—the character is controlled by the protagonist

Filial—the character is a family relation of the protagonist (sister, daughter, mother, wife)

Antagonist—the character is portrayed as an obstacle or enemy of the protagonist

Professional—the relationship of the character and protagonist involves only the exchange of goods and services as established by the occupations of both (e.g. character serves protagonist coffee as a waitress); distinguished from “colleague” by lack of emotional involvement with protagonist

None—the character does not have a direct relationship with the protagonist

Other—the character has a relationship with the protagonist that does not fit one of the established categories

Occupation—the way in which the character occupies most of her time either earning money or caring for a family full-time

None—the character neither earns money nor cares for a family full-time (e.g. wealthy heiress)

Unknown—the occupation of the character is not observable
Homemaker—the character maintains a home for a husband, children, or both full-time

Maid—the character provides household services to another character whether in the form of servant-hood, slavery, or otherwise

Nurse—the character works as an assistant in medical aid and caring for others

Retail—the character works in a store whether at the register, as a saleswoman, or otherwise

Teacher—the character provides formal instruction of children whether in the school or in the home

Entertainer—the character is responsible for the professional amusement of others (theater, circus, acting...etc.)

Assistant/Secretary—the character serves as an assistant in an office or similar setting to another character

Sex—the character provides sexual services to other characters (includes prostitution, gentlemen's clubs...etc.)

Student—the character is occupied primarily by pursuing post-high school education.

Nun—the character is occupied primarily as a member of a Catholic religious order

Other—the character’s occupation does not fit in any of the above-mentioned categories