The Image of Women Constructed by Inequality in Films: A Theoretical Analyze and Countermeasure to Its Main Drivers and Effects

Jiayi Fu *

School of Shanghai Experimental Foreign Language School, 200093 Shanghai, China

* Corresponding Author Email: 201026010127@stu.swmu.edu.cn

Abstract. At the beginning of the 21st century, since Kathryn Bigelow became the first female Oscar winner in 2010 with “The Hurt Locker”, there has been a growing focus on the unequally constructed images of women in films and the unfair treatment they receive. Since the birth of film, its discourse power has been in the hands of men. However, in the past decade, some female directors represented by Kathryn Bigelow, transformed the film industry dominated by male’s discourse power and won the right of female voice. The main purpose of this paper is twofold: (1) to analyze the main drivers of unequal female images in film. (2) to solve to the idea of "male gaze" in film. To achieve the goals, this study emphasizes the concept of the male gaze, analyzes the unconscious male perspective dominance and objectification in film. And focus on the presentation of the objectified image of the woman being viewed, an extensive literature review was conducted. In addition, the article clearly points out women's resistance to the gender ideology of patriarchal society, and discusses how to take countermeasures to win women's voice in films and reduce gender differences.

Keywords: Unfair treatment; male gaze; objectification; gender ideology; patriarchal society.

1. Introduction

With the vigorous promotion of the film industry, the image of women constructed by inequality in movies undoubtedly reflects the status of female roles in real society to a certain extent, which is a neglect of freedom of female image in movies. Under the continuous film publicity, how to protect women from the influence of the media and from being bound by the image of women under the male gaze in the movie. And how to defend the rights and situation of women in movies? This is worth thinking about. This paper analyzes the concept of male gaze and conducts an extensive literature review on the presentation of objectified images of viewed women. It cites several theories of feminist film studies to help people understand the unfair treatment of female characters in films and make relevant recommendations to promote and diversify the image of female characters in films. The content of the films is shaping this society to a certain extent, and they are shaping the consciousness, life and emotions of our next generation. The portrayal of unequal female’s image in film media will promote prejudice against some women in reality. The research significance of this article is to hope that women in future films can pursue their own will and passion, rather than just being bound to the stereotypical images from male’s perspective, and hope that women can grow up in a world where their voices are relied on and can be given equal opportunities to pursue freedom.

2. The Image of Women Constructed by Inequality in Films

2.1. The Main Drivers of Unequal Female Images in Film

One of the first essays on feminist film theory and practice was written by Claire Johnston in 1973, entitled Women's Cinema as a Counter Cinema. Johnston demonstrates how women have been represented in movies in stereotypical ways since the silent era and makes the case for a cinema that defies such restrictive norms while still being enjoyable. Johnston critiques the limited role that women are given in movies, saying: "Although women as spectacle are given a lot of attention in movies, it is definitely realistic to state that women as individuals are mainly absent" [1]. Before the

70s of the 20th century, most of the important roles in movies were dominated by men, so there was also the neglect and unequal treatment of female characters in film works. Much of this is due to gender stereotypes that lead filmmakers to ignore female roles and lack confidence in them. According to the relevant survey, female characters are expected by film makers to notice care-looking problems (For example, education, family ,childcare,) and away from "masculine" issues (such as gun control and defense), lest they be accused of incompetence and lack of leadership [2]. The majority of coverage of female politicians focuses on their attractiveness and personal lives [3]. About their family status as well [4]. They accepted personality traits, rather than proposed policies [5]. In recent coverage of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin,stereotypes of powerful women are filled with images of mothers, sexual objects [6]. Therefore, most female characters in the film are marginalized characters and do not have absolute right to speak and interpret the importance of female characters.

A method of portraying and observing women that empowers men while sexualizing and humiliating women is known as the "male gaze" [7]. The masculine gaze prevents women from being empowered [7]. A woman is clearly positioned as the object of heterosexual male desire in the male gaze. Her thoughts, feelings, and sexual aspirations are less important than how they are defined by masculine desire. Under traditional social standards in the past, it was generally believed that the role of women should be to support and obey the image of their husbands and caring for the family. In past film works, most female characters did not have independent thoughts and consciousness, resulting in the general belief that female roles were unnecessary. What is shown to us in the film is that supporting husbands to take care of their children is their only task as women, and they do not have great abilities and talents compared to men. And this is not the case. Behind the ideology of gender stereotypes is largely due to the patriarchy of the media when it began to become famous. Most decisions are made by men in a patriarchal society in order for them to demonstrate their dominance and position and to take advantage of patriarchal manipulation's practical benefits. They significantly restrict the role of women, particularly through the media. The portrayal of women in such films has always been one of submission, gentleness, emotion, and a focus on the family. Their behavior patterns became the same under the "male gaze". And they invariably complied with this idea, with few objections.

Jessica Rauch from the University of Nevada did study on the topic of "Gender Differences in Superhero Character," which is a prime example. She has investigated the roles, personas, and violence that exist in superhero films. Research shows that gender differences are more pronounced in hero movies. For those who watch the film, it also shapes the consciousness, life and emotions of our next generation to a certain extent. Gender stereotypes in movies can negatively affect children's perception, self-awareness, values, relationships, and career aspirations. This is an undeniably influential point. The study has examined roles, appearances, and violence as Portrayed in Superhero Movies, another finding we get from the research is the shaping of male characters in movies is usually longer and fuller, while the shaping of female characters is single and relatively stereotyped. One female for every 2.13 male characters has acted on the screen. Most male characters are portrayed as powerful and muscular, while most female charaters are portrayed as sexy, slender, and attractive, it is a kind of classic stereotype [8]. In movies, actors are likelier to have many special, attractive abilities and use multiple weapons than actresses. Male characters, who are thought to have outstanding learning abilities, strong hands, both advocating teamwork and at creative, were more likely to be a hero not working in a group (71.9%) than female characters. The majority of female characters (66%) were seen as working with a cast of characters, and 46.8% were thought of as supporting roles. The female characters have been excessively sexualized and objectified. We must thus resolve this problem.

The male gaze is unfriendly and offensive to women in particular compared to the female gaze [9]. In the male gaze, a woman is positioned visibly as the object of heterosexual male desire. Her thoughts, feelings, and sexual aspirations are less important than how they are defined by masculine desire. The characters are not objectified when the female desire is shown and represented through the female

gaze. The female gaze is a new perspective which is more of an appreciative gaze that is friendly to female. One reason is that women can empathize and understand women's feelings in the same way. This concept is still being explored. Mulvey believes that because the male protagonists in Hollywood movies are the same while controlling the action and women in the narrative, the male viewer indulges in a relatively direct identity, that is, identity substituting into the ideal self. In contrast, female audiences have chosen to identify with both the men who substitute into the screen and the women who substitute into the screen, especially those women who have the ability to charm men. Whenever they choose the latter identity, they learn to objectify themselves in it for pleasure. Moreover, like their other selves on screen, they are complacent about conforming to heterosexual patriarchal fantasies and becoming the mythical capitalized woman, hoping to one day arouse male desire.

2.2. The Solutions of the Idea of "Male Gaze" in Film

To achieve the goals, this study emphasizes the concept of the male gaze [7]. Therefore, how to defend the rights and situation of women in movies and break people's stereotypes of women in movies is a crucial issue that needs to be solved. The production of film and television works to a certain extent reflects the difficulties encountered by different characters in reality and reflecting social status. The portrayal of unequal female images in film media will promote prejudice against some women in reality and easily shape people's thoughts and behaviors. It is undeniable that women do not want their image in movies to be overly sexualized, and the fact that women must appease males means that women's sexual behavior is influenced by their appearance, age, and other factors [10]. The sexual activity of female characters in the film hopes that women in future movies can pursue their will and passion, breaking the traditional female role. It is not just being bound to the stereotypical image of the male perspective, appearing in the form of being gazed at by men, making them lose their dignity, and even some people will mistakenly identify with this image. Women hope to have a certain say in many film and television works, which is the goal we all pursue.

Claire Johnston asserts that women's movies could act as "counter cinema" [11]. By being conscious of the means of production and opposing sexist notions, films made by women have the potential to provide an alternative to traditional Hollywood productions. Despite the stereotyped nature of gender roles in European cinema, some feminist filmmakers considered avant-garde film as a potential escape from the confines of conventional cinema [1]. In the 70s of the 20th centuries, many feminist filmmakers took inspiration from avant-garde art films and applied them to discuss issues related to the women's movement. One of the first essays on feminist film theory and practice was written by Claire Johnston in 1973, entitled Women's Cinema as a Counter Cinema. Since the era of silent film, Johnston shows how stereotypes about women have persisted in the media. In the films of that era, women were often used as support roles, and even appeared very little in films, and the status of women in the film industry was extremely low. the importance of creating a cinematic practice that confronts and examines the prevailing mainstream filmmaking movement. It related to avant-garde and left-wing film [1]. So, what we have to do is to promote and produce more women's films. Most of the women in the movies we watch are objects of desire, stared at by men, confined to a passive state, "waiting to be killed, waiting to be saved, waiting to be loved." If women want to change their predicament, they must actively strive for the subject of desire and the subject of viewing.

An excellent film called 《Delphine, et carole, insoumuses》(2019). It's a documentary directed by Callisto McNulty. In the 70s of the 20th century, feminist Delphine and Carole held a camera, carrying out radical struggles with an arrogant, uncompromising and humorous attitude, and using images to record the style and trend of the French feminist movement. After their deaths, Delphine's granddaughter Callisto compiled them into pieces. The documentaries about the struggle of women who used cameras as weapons in the New Wave era. They filmed the injustices suffered by actresses in the show business, the injustices suffered by female workers in factories, the struggle for the rights of female workers. All of our women's issues today were discussed half a century ago. They said: Compared with the women suffragists of the early twentieth century, they are too moderate, but we are more moderate than them, because the sharp topics in them have no chance to be discussed in

China today. When Delphine was speaking out for feminism in the film industry, there were some fearful and intentional people in the French film industry who wanted to attack her career, and they teamed up with film companies and some male directors to try to make her have no films, but these narrow male thinking could not bind Delphine, and she did not need their "ban". After that, Delphine never played any more non-feminist roles. Whether it is the stereotypes of women in film and television works, the power relations in the work and democratic space, or the rights of reproductive rights and lesbians and even sex workers, it is worth re-examining today. Today, when women's rights are constantly mentioned, it also makes us realize that "feminism" is not a simple label, but also a perspective used to observe the world. At the end of the documentary 《Delphine, et carole, insoumuses》, Delphine is asked what she thinks is the key to feminism. Delphine replied: "Communicate with other women first, listen to them first, and then express yourself. I have to do it. If I can't talk about other women, about women in general, then I can't live." If women don't write their own stories, who else can write women's stories? The documentary of 《Delphine, et carole, insoumuses》 tells us: these films are free from the traditional male gaze, and the images are very expressive in contemporary art images, and understanding these films not only makes us grateful for the great progress made by these great predecessors through their struggle, but also helps us to think further, think about how to accurately represent women on the screen, think about how to participate in, today's women's activities, how to think about how to get rid of patriarchy.

《Delphine, et carole, insoumuses》(2019) is a documentary that reflects the harsh truth: literature and film are dominated by men, full of male gazes and discipline of women. We need more women to speak up, do film production and write bravely, so that the world can see what women really are. Many awakened women will have a sense of powerlessness when they see the truth of patriarchy. But writing is something that everyone is capable of doing. Society's stereotypes of women should be created by us. Most of the literary film and television works we come into contact with are male narratives, which makes us mistakenly think that women are emotional and vexatious. Nowadays, in this era of national self-media, we all have the opportunity to speak out bravely on the Internet. It is hoped that women can show their independent spiritual thoughts and break stereotypes. There are many more films and television works such as Delphine, et carole, insoumuses, which to some extent counter the male gaze and promote the diverse ideological and spiritual articles of women. Women have the right to be the subject of the narrative rather than the object of the gaze. In a society where media dissemination is mainstream, women have many channels to fight for their voice. In the film, too, society sets up a perfect image for women, making them constantly repress themselves to meet this standard. Women in the film industry have a voice. To date, most of the films we have worked with have portrayed women by male directors, so the role of women in influencing the creation of self-facets has become particularly important. Only women bravely speak out and make films with women as the main body can break prejudice and fight for their right to speak in the film.

3. Conclusion

This essay examines the main drivers of female image inequality in film, explains the idea of the "male gaze", and analyzes the unconscious male perspective domination and objectification in film. Focusing on the presentation of objectified images of viewed women, an extensive literature review was conducted. Traditional media and film works, as important channels for ideological production, have shaped the world form for people through the description, definition and construction of power images. Review the image of women in it. It will be found that female roles are still in a state of stereotype, and even reinforce social stereotypes. Therefore, the article clearly points out women's resistance to the gender ideology of patriarchy, and discusses how to solve this phenomenon, how to win women's voice in movies, and reduce stereotypes. According to relevant surveys, women are less involved in movies. And what we need to do is break the traditional female role. Women have the right to be the subject of the narrative rather than the object of the gaze, and women can create more female-centered films. 《Delphine, et carole, insoumuses》, an excellent women's documentary,

breaks away from the traditional male gaze and makes humans think about how to accurately present women on the screen, understand that female images are not just beautiful on the outside, and think about how to participate in today's women's activities, fight for the equality of women in movies, and break stereotypes. Women's films are more female-centered narrative genre films today, starting from women's inner growth and change, highlighting that characters follow their hearts in the face of choice. This will undoubtedly change people's attitudes towards the image of women in films. People need more objective narrative and humanistic care, rebuilding the discourse space for women in films, promoting female subjects to penetrate into the central world from the edge of discourse power, and stimulating the display of women's inner knowledge and ability. Let women continue to create and build their unique ideas. In the future, social media will definitely become an indispensable part of our lives. Noise offers us the chance to improve ourselves and live in a more accepting world. According to the level of interest given to issues pertaining to women, more and more individuals are starting to consider the irrationality of intrinsic cognition, and communicators have gradually complied with feminist demands. People gradually dispel the preconceived notions about women's difficulties that social media's features have engendered, and they alter the fundamental assumptions underlying mass communication so that women's subjectivity can join it. At the same time, promote film reporting news, reshape women's images, and enhance women's subjectivity from a broader social level.

References

[1] Nelmes J. Introduction to Film Studies. London: Routledge, 1996.

[2] Huddy L, Terkildsen N. Gender stereotvres and the perceptions of male and female candidates. American Journal of Political Science, 1993, 37(1): 119-147.

[3] Ross K. Women framed: the gendered turn in mediated politics. In K. Ross & C.M. Byerly (Eds.) Women and media: international per-spectives. Blackwell, 2004.

[4] Kittilson M, Fridkin K. Gender, candidate portrayals and elec tion campaigns: A comparative perspective. Politics & Gender, 2008, 4: 371-39.

[5] Kahn K.F. The distorted mirror: Press coverage of women candi dates for statewide oftice. The Journal of Politics, 1994, 56(1): 154-173.

[6] Carlin D.B, Wintrey X.L. Have you come a long way, baby? Chinton, Sarah Palin, and sexism in 2008 campaign coverage. Communication Studies, 2009, 60(4): 326-343.

[7] Loreck, J. Explainer: what does the 'male gaze' mean, and what about a female gaze? The Conversation, 2016.

[8] Buriro W.M, Buriro G.A, Syed G.K. Gender representation in pakistani television commercials. ResearchGate, 2019, 5-8.

[9] Ayala D. The female gaze: simply, what is it?|by daila ayala. Sociomix, 2022.

[10] Marcos-Ramos M, González-De-Garay B. Gender representation in subscription video-on-demand Spanish TV series. International Journal of Communication, 2021, 15: 583.

[11] Anderson. Retrieved from www.screenforum.blogspot.com/2011/06/counter-cinema.html, 2012.