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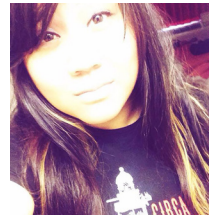
## **Moises Ortiz Kristich: CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF (PRESIDENT)**

Moises Kristich is a 4th year Film and Media Studies Major and will be graduating this spring quarter. He was born in Colombia but was raised in San Martin/Gilroy, California. His hobbies include running on the beach, swimming and making road trips to see his friends in the Sonoma Valley. After graduation, he intends on enjoying his summer back home before he pursues his MA in counselor education at San Jose State University.



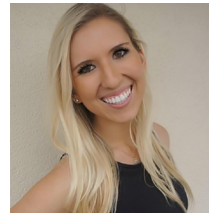
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Phoebe DeLeon is a graduating senior in Film and Media Studies. After graduation, she hopes to get into writing or producing for film and/or television. Most of all, she cannot wait to have a semi-normal sleep schedule again.



## **Olivia Nemeč: ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Olivia Nemeč is a fourth year student studying Film and Media with a minor in Professional Writing and Civil Engagement. Her passion for Film, Media, and Writing come from her belief that together they are prime vehicles for initiating cultural change.



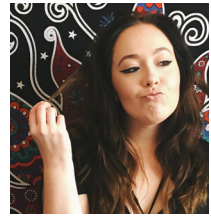
## **Olivia Pla: COPY EDITOR**

Olivia Pla is currently a second year film and statistics major at UCSB, making her part-STEM and better than everyone else here. In her free time she might be found eating almost anything from Trader Joe's, FaceTiming her Chihuahua back home, or being late to join in on internet and meme trends. After graduating, she hopes to finally figure out how statistics relates to film.



### **Kayla Thompson: COPY EDITOR (SECRETARY)**

Kayla is a third year transfer student, double majoring in Communication and Film and Media Studies. She transferred from Porterville College with her Associate's and Certificate in Communication Studies. She has an immense love for music and her pets, and believes the best study breaks involve Netflix and YouTube.



### **Leanne Royo: COPY EDITOR (TREASURER)**

Leanne Royo is a recently graduated Film & Media Studies major with an English minor. While figuring out postgrad life, she hopes to one day go to grad school and pursue a PhD in Cinema Studies. Her research interests include the Disney Corporation, animation theory, social media, and fan culture. In addition to her love of film & television, she is also hopelessly addicted to Harry Potter, video games, and really good food. #FAMSTClassOf2016!



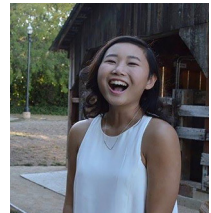
### **Hailey Hepperle: PUBLICITY**

Hailey is a third year transfer student from San Joaquin Delta College. Here at UCSB she is an active member of Gamma Phi Beta and is majoring in Sociology, minoring in Applied Psychology. She is currently working as an office assistant in Downtown Santa Barbara and is a volunteer for the Goleta Railroad Museum.



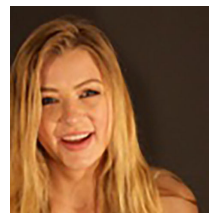
### **Frances Tang: LAYOUT EDITOR**

Frances is a first-year from the Bay Area. She is a communication major that is hoping to double major in Asian American Studies. In her free time, she enjoys taking naps and practicing kendo.



### **Sophie Mendell: COVER & DESIGN ARTIST**

Sophie Mendell is a first year CCS Biochemistry student. She's from Valencia, California and is a member of alpha delta pi at UCSB. She's very passionate about her golden retriever, Lulu and just dogs in general.







# A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

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This past academic year has been challenging intellectually, socially, as well as politically. With everything going on within our nation and internationally this year, it was necessary to make a statement about these events and occurrences. On behalf of this year's Focus Media Journal staff, we would like to introduce you to the 37th edition of Focus Media Journal.

With such negative feelings of contempt and anger circulating, as well as many concerns about the overall safety of all individuals within the country, we as a staff thought it was vital to take a stance against all the bigotry and hate. We struggled to pick a theme, as we wanted to be sympathetic to all levels of adversity. It was through that very struggle that our theme was able to emerge. This year's theme is "Declaration of the Voices" (or Voice it!). We believe that here at the University of California, Santa Barbara, it is imperative to voice what we believe and stand up for those who do not have a voice due to the current societal structure in which we exist. This theme was a collective team effort, and we would like to thank our wonderful Film and Media faculty and graduate students for giving us all the support that we needed through this school year. The journal is broken down into three subsections with Declaration of The Voices being the main theme, the subsection will follow accordingly; Declaration of the Voices: The Voice of Social Awareness, The Voice of Race, Gender and Diversity and The Voice of the Digital Evolution.

Focus was established back in 1979 and holds an integral place within the Film and Media Studies department at UCSB. Joe Palladino, who is the Film and Media Studies advisor and founder of Focus, has played a vital role in making sure Focus is not only alive and well but also thrives. We would like to take a moment to sincerely thank Joe Palladino for guiding us through this whole process! With the exception of the editors-in-chief, many of our staff members were new to Focus this year. The staff took this new project on and made the journal their own. We are proud of all their help and support. We could not have done it without them!

Without further ado, we are proud to present the 37th Edition of the Focus Media Journal. We hope that you enjoy the academic and scholarly research in this year's edition. As a committee and staff, we thank you for reading and continuing to support Focus Media Journal.

Sincerely,

Moises Ortiz Kristich & Phoebe DeLeon

Co-Editors-in-Chief

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VOICE OF



SOCIAL  
AWARENESS

# AFFECT: THE ULTIMATE MEANS TO INFLUENCE SOCIAL CHANGE

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Jacqueline Kane

You don't consciously give yourself goosebumps. Those small bumps are an uncontrollable bodily response to some outside stimuli; some other embodied substance, which lies in the exterior of your physical being, is capable of initiating the process of muscle contractions inside of you. This process often happens while watching a film or television show when you get scared, become inspired, or are otherwise emotionally touched. When utilized effectively, motion pictures have the ability to affect viewers in such an unconscious way. Through this ability to create affective responses, film can influence people's emotions regarding matters depicted on screen. When achieved on a wide scale, the collective emotional product has the capacity to lead to a change in hegemony.

To further explain this, a detailed description of affect is necessary. Affect is closely related to feelings and emotions. The distinction between the two is the relation they have to the self. Feelings are personal and remain within the body. Emotions are the projections of feelings outwardly toward society. These can be genuine or faked, but they are meant to represent one's feelings. Affect occurs before

emotions and before feelings. When considering feelings as personal, affect is prepersonal. As Eric Shouse describes, "affect is a non-conscious experience of intensity" (Shouse, 2005), meaning that it is an uncontrollable sensation. Greg Seigworth and Melissa Gregg stress the 'in-between-ness' of affect. Affect is relational and acts as the force which connects two distinct entities, existing predominantly between rather than within. As this relates to humans, affect is our first form of contact with matter outside ourselves. It is an extension of ourselves and of our spiritual embodiment, yet it is also a part of our outside environment. The same way that skin is the outermost barrier of our physical body, connecting our being to the outside world, affect is our spiritual body's outermost layer. In this way "affect marks a body's belonging to a world of encounters" (Seigworth, 2010).

The concept of affect is important when studying the ways cinema influences audiences and their emotions. Getting goosebumps from an inspirational scene or screaming during the climax of a horror film are examples of when a viewer has been touched on an affective level. How exactly do filmmakers reach their audience in

such way? What is it about what's on screen that allows spectators to unconsciously experience certain affective responses?

Greg Smith considers these questions when analyzing Sergei Eisenstein's work on emotion in cinema. Through the concepts of affect and "low level sensory phenomenon," Eisenstein believes that spectators can be trained to create new meanings based on existing associations. The new associations are created and maintained through each individual's past experiences. Having a negative experience with a gun will create negative associates for guns in the future; this works the same for positive experiences and all experiences in between. These associations are the link between affect and feelings. Such feelings "can be transferred from one object to another, associating an unconditioned (or already conditioned) response with a new object" (Smith, 2004). Thus, Smith argues that associations possess a flexibility which enables them to train audiences "to get them to break from the emotional habits they have developed" (Smith, 2004).

With that said, some films are more successful than others at generating affect in their audience. Certain criteria in the elements of film must be present to set up the conditions for affect to transverse. Filmmakers need the audience to not only

see what the characters on screen are going through, but they need them to *feel* what they are going through. In other words, "simply presenting an audience with an emotional event does not necessarily activate their emotional processes. If an audience completes an emotional process...their individual emotional systems are initiated" (Smith, 2004). To achieve this, gaps are strategically left in the plot, allowing viewers to experience what is happening in the story as if they were one of the characters. For example, an audience would not feel frightened while watching a horror film if it followed the attacker on their attempts to surprise the victims. The reason horror films scare audiences is because the audience doesn't know who the attacker is or when they will attack, just like the protagonist in the film. This replicates the process of emotional development, therefore producing affect in the audience.

In addition to the inclusion of narrative gaps, skillful control and awareness of the kinds of associations expressed in a film has a powerful influence on the production of affect. Eisenstein argues that it is important for the filmmaker to narrow down the associations presented in a film so that they evoke a targeted association rather than an ambiguous one. Using aimed control over the *mise-en-scène*, the director has the ability to incite

specific reactions from and for a viewer. Take the inclusion of a fight scene in a film for an example. If the choice is to show the fight from a static bystander's point of view, the audience is simply watching a fight. However, if the fight is presented through multiple cuts between shots of sweat dripping down a guy's face, feet scrambling on the concrete, and an arm swing towards someone's head, the combination of these separate ideas gives the audience the experience of being involved in the fight. Not only does style of narration create gaps for the audience to fill in themselves, but it also directs them to focus on a specific idea. Instead of associating with a fight, the audience experiences a fist flying towards them. This guided interpretation directs viewers to perceive the desired affect created by the filmmaker.

One of the most influential details a filmmaker can direct the audience to see is the human face. Angel and Gibbs, in an essay detailing the relation between media, affect, and the face, argue for the importance of the human face in human communication. They observe that "we don't notice the work of the face because of how commonplace it is" (Gibbs, 2006). We rely on facial expressions as a tool for survival to give us information about how others feel. Since it is rooted in human nature, facial interpretation happens

automatically and subconsciously. This makes the face the perfect agent to penetrate the audience's mind unnoticeably.

This holds true in the Freeform television show, *The Fosters*. One of the many successes of the show is its ability to capture heartwarming genuine emotions of real family issues. One of the ways *The Fosters* accomplishes this is by relying on the characters' faces long enough to capture a facial reaction. Rather than cutting to a shot of Callie smiling after her mom signs the adoption papers, the show's producers cut to her before she smiles, and remain on her face until her reaction changes to one that is slightly melancholic. The emotional impact of her reaction is expanded by including cuts of equal length and intention of other character's faces. This editing strategy highlights Brandon's slightly bittersweet reaction, as he realizes that he has just lost any chance of being with the girl he loves. The scene ends with a camera pan following the entire family posing for a picture. It is clear from their facial reactions that everyone is happy; the joy cannot be contained. After watching the family struggle for the whole first season with being able to adopt Callie and Jude, the moment of realization that it will finally happen, brings smiles—and maybe a few tears—to viewers faces.

Films that understand how to



use these techniques—narrative gaps, association specificity, and facial expressions—can structure the story and the *mise-en-scène* to produce the desired affect. Because of the emotional and transformative power of affect, films have the potential to impact society. Eisenstein noted that “cinema [is] a factor for exercising emotional influences over the masses” (Smith, 2004). On an individual level, affect evoked by film [and television] has the ability to influence the kinds of associations people can arrive at when formulating meaning. This means that film has the potential to inform personal and collective beliefs. Implemented on a mass scale, dominant ideology can be influenced and changed through film and television.

When we consider affect as a process, we see more clearly the powerful potential for the medium. Sigmund Freud and Sergei Eisenstein independent of each other comment on the relation between affect and thought. Freud believed that the “passages of affect persi in immediate adjacency to the movements of thought” (Seigworth, 2010). Gregg and Seigworth point out that thought itself can be considered a body, where body is defined as having the “capacity to affect and to be affected.” Since bodies relate to other entities through affect, thought is innately connected and dependent on

affect, supporting Freud’s claim. Eisenstein’s “hierarchy of cinematic means” explains his idea of the “pinnacle of cinematic achievement.” It begins with “the simplest physiological stimuli” then it proceeds to “a primitive emotional appeal.” After reaching those two achievements, the ultimate sign of success is “intellectual montage,” in which a film reaches its audience on an *intellectual* level. Passing this intellectual level is when societal change happens.

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# MAE WEST: DISMANTLING CENSORSHIP AND TOLERANCE

Dani Rodriguez

## When She's Bad is She Better?

Fresh off Broadway, Mae West rose to film fame in the early 1930s because of her open sexuality and free flowing wit. At the time, a fear of overt sexuality led to a conservative backlash following the publication of the Payne Fund Studies in 1929–1932, which found links between media exposure and a variety of effects on children.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, the rise of the Legion of Decency, a national clan of dedicated religious members who boycotted films that violated their moral standards, also contributed to the backlash.<sup>2</sup> Due to the reaction of reform groups like these, censorship efforts to curb West's sexuality appeared at the industry, state, and local levels. A multifaceted perspective on these three different levels of review offers a new point of examination of censorship in reaction to institutional and social pressures and their effects on audiences. In the following essay I examine how these processes are revealed through Mae West's career in film.

According to Richard Maltby, author of various works on industrial censorship, film regulation was the responsibility of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (MPPDA),

established in 1922 and led by Will Hays. The MPPDA's central concern was to limit social backlash and keep government censorship of the film industry at bay. The MPPDA's strategies to do so included evaluations and negotiations with the producers while threatening that MPPDA members will withhold rejected films in their theatres.<sup>3</sup> The MPPDA's Studio Relations Committee (SRC), headed by James Wingate, culminated the efforts of state and foreign censors, as well as the reactions of reform groups.<sup>4</sup> The SRC sought to create a systematic version of censorship that worked as a "mediating position between authors and audiences and a cultural median point."<sup>5</sup> However, their censorship efforts were not well enforced until 1934 with the creation of the Production Code Administration (PCA), now headed by Joseph Breen, in response to the pressures of reform groups and negative publicity.<sup>6</sup> These new censorship practices allowed the MPPDA to infiltrate the production and distribution of motion pictures, including West's.

While the MPPDA was afraid of governmental censorship, the system at the time included state censorship boards that rejected and passed films in whole or in part.

State boards, housed in Florida, New York, Massachusetts, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland, each had their own set of standards, although some overlapped.<sup>8</sup> Yet each exceeded the standard of the industry, highlighting the disjuncture between the censorship processes of the state and the industry. Without the possibility of intervening in the production process, these censors could and sometimes would disrupt the harmony of films.

Mae West was a well-publicized victim of such censorship which may have not only helped her career, but also led to her demise. As Marybeth Hamilton, author of one of Mae West's biographies, *When I'm Bad I'm Better*, writes, "Censorship actually enhanced her appeal. Not only West, but also her censors, sought to mediate sex so as to appeal to the widest range of viewers."<sup>8</sup> With West's transition to film, she again pushed the boundaries of sexuality and tolerance, but now her performances were regulated by the MPPDA and attacked by critics who railed against her and/or her sexuality, including William Randolph Hearst, the Legion of Decency, various women's clubs, and many concerned parents and exhibitors.<sup>9</sup> West's specific style, ability to turn any line into an innuendo, and showmen's personality allowed her to be a great success and sufficient match to the Hays

organization and its censorship efforts.

During the 1930s era of censorship, there were three successive levels of filmic censorship review evaluation, negotiation, elimination, and presentation: the industry (MPPDA), the state censors, and the exhibitors. A multifaceted perspective of analyzing each step allows for a greater understanding of the complexity of the censorship process at all levels, highlighting the efforts of the industry to fend off external agencies of government regulation and societal pressures to produce films the public would support. However, such industry and governmental censorship did not always reflect the audiences within its region. West's career offers a new perspective of examining this process across these three different levels highlighting their different intentions, changes, and pressures. The response to West's blatant sexuality differed at the industrial level, the state level, and the exhibition level, creating a disjointed system of review that could ruin the intended narrative harmony of films. Through a multifaceted approach of examining the censorship of West's films, *She Done Him Wrong* (dir. Lowell Sherman, US, 1933), *Belle of the Nineties* (dir. Leo McCarey, US, 1934), and *Klondike Annie* (dir. Raoul Walsh, US, 1936), I propose that the disjuncture in censorship

at each of these levels reveals the different intentions and processes films underwent at this time while illustrating the diversity and complexity of the system.

### ***Diamond Lil* for the Big Screen**

Following her success on Broadway, Mae West signed with Paramount and wrote a screenplay based on *Diamond Lil*, one of her controversial plays, resulting in a fury of backlash due<sup>10</sup> to the MPPDA's "Formula," a standard which was designed to prevent the creation of a film based on books or plays containing "salacious or otherwise harmful" material.<sup>11</sup> In order for the script to move forward, the MPPDA claimed that it must refrain from any similarity to the play *Diamond Lil* or it would be rejected.<sup>12</sup> The film was retitled *She Done Him Wrong* and follows Lady Lou, a femme fatale singer who encounters drama, love, and danger at the hands of her former violent criminal boyfriend Chick Clark, a the shifty couple Rita and Sergei, and undercover cop Captain Cummings.<sup>13</sup> Several changes were made through script revisions, such as the addition of Lou's engagement in the final scene. However, with the engagement ring and sudden commitment of bouncy Lady Lou came a drawn out fight scene between her and Rita.<sup>14</sup> Industrial censors feared comparisons to *Diamond*

*Lil* by glorifying sex through blatant references and innuendos so much so that her lack of marriage was a more contentious moment of censorship rather than her violent fight with Rita. The MPPDA aimed to implement their suggestions in order to create a film that was more acceptable to the state censors, framing their own efforts through the states' previous eliminations to create a systematic form of censorship. However, the states' eliminations demonstrate that this process does not necessarily reflect the region's definitions of "decent" for exhibition.

The states banned specific innuendos along the lines of sexuality, disregard for authority, and crime. Despite similarities to content omitted during MPPDA negotiations, the states reflected regional differences. For example, in relation to the other states, Ohio removed innuendos including those referencing sex, crime, specifically stealing and talk of jail, as well as references to any relationship not monogamous.<sup>15</sup> In turn, Massachusetts required eliminations only for their Sunday showings, restricting nudity, sex, suggestive songs, and references to prostitution.<sup>16</sup> Pennsylvania also eliminated nudity, the questioning of authority figures, obvious sexual flirting, insinuations of prostitution, innuendos that subverted male superiority, and promiscuous dancing and songs.<sup>17</sup> In contrast,

New York simply eliminated close and distant views of the picture of a naked woman in a saloon.<sup>18</sup> Like the MPPDA, the states' aimed to censor sexuality in favor of their moral standards, yet they reflected more regional preferences rather than a single set of standards creating a more tailored version of censorship.

Censorship boards in Pennsylvania and Ohio had more eliminations than New York and Massachusetts, which only banned sequences for Sunday viewings. This stringency in censorship also mirrors the rise of the Legion of Decency, which formed the year after this film was released. In 1934 churches began to experiment banning films in an attempt to enforce their own standards of decency. It worked in some places, like Columbus, Ohio, where state eliminations of *She Done Him Wrong* increased, but not in New York,<sup>19</sup> where censors were more liberal, highlighting regional differences that the MPPDA could not satisfy. The correlation between religious boycotts and conservative censorship is reflected in the degree of eliminations of state censors, which accounts for a disjuncture in the review process. This disjuncture is also evident at the independent exhibition level, showcasing the differences even a single state can have with regard to their moral standards.

During this period, *Motion*

*Picture Herald* had a weekly installment, "What the Picture Did for Me," in which "the theatre men of the nation serve one another with information on the box office performance of product for their mutual benefit."<sup>20</sup> Since exhibitors had a financial motive to understand their audiences, I examined their responses to see the public's reaction to West and their understanding of the censorship she faced. Overall, for *She Done Him Wrong* the reception was positive in small and large cities, resulting in good business despite West's sexuality and the amount of state eliminations. As an exhibitor in Sodus, New York stated, "we did the best business of the year, but the picture didn't please well."<sup>21</sup> While this piece was from New York, which I previously classified as liberal in comparison to other states, it came from Sodus, a city next to Rochester which had a rising Legion of Decency membership the following year, showing the complex diversity a state can have. Some reviewers were sure to share that the severity of eliminations would change the final cut of the film, warning, "If you happen to come within censored areas, it is difficult to tell just what you are going to have left to show when the censors get through."<sup>22</sup> These reviewers not only recognized the power of censorship to change the final film form, but also understood that West's sexuality was

ensorable material. This reveals the complexity of regional censorship, the audience's understanding of the process, and the result on the film's final presentation.

### **The Botched Belle**

West's next film, *Belle of the Nineties*, was released during the rise of the Legion of Decency in 1934. All over the country, nearly one million Catholics and almost as many Protestants joined to protest the exhibition of films against their moral standards, resulting in large attendance losses in religious areas.<sup>23</sup> In June, because of these reactions, major film producers spoke before the Catholic Bishops' Committee on Motion Pictures, pledging to implement a stronger self-regulation operation with sufficient moral standards that would be enforced by Joseph Breen by July 1st.<sup>24</sup> In the coming years, the Legion would classify hundreds of films into three groups: A: Approved for adults and children, B: Banned for children and restricted to adults, and C: condemned.<sup>25</sup> Some of Mae West's films fell into this last category, pushing what the Legion and other reform groups believed was disgraceful. This rise in institutional pressures from organizations like the Legion led to the MPPDA's reinforcement of their censorship process, which was reflected in their review of this film.

*Belle of the Nineties* was initially reviewed by the MPPDA under the title, *It Ain't No Sin*.<sup>26</sup> The film followed Ruby Carter, an entertainer, who was tied between thief Tiger Kid and Ace Lamont, a club owner, as they try to steal Ruby's jewels. However, she foils their plan and plots her own revenge. The narrative ends with Lamont's death and Ruby and Tiger Kid's wedding.<sup>27</sup> However, initial reactions to the film left Breen "gravely concerned" with the vulgarity, glorification of crime, and prostitution.<sup>28</sup> Three months later, *It Ain't No Sin* was rejected from the PCA and some state censors.<sup>29</sup> To be accepted Paramount retitled and recut the film: *Belle of the Nineties*. Most of the innuendos that existed in the initial versions of the script never made it to the screen. Instead, the eventual nuptials between Ruby and Tiger were added.<sup>30</sup> In the midst of the Legion of Decency's rise, the moral tolerance that West originally tested was completely rejected. A tame re-cut to remove overt sexuality was also re-reviewed by the state censor boards where few eliminations were made.

*Belle of the Nineties* passed in both Kansas<sup>31</sup> and New York without eliminations<sup>32</sup> and little was cut in the remaining states. Pennsylvania eliminated a couple of remaining innuendos as well as scenes of Ruby and Tiger's bodies pressed against each other.<sup>33</sup>

Ohio eliminated Ruby insinuating a fight, repeated innuendos, and references to scamming people out of money.<sup>34</sup> Both Ohio and Pennsylvania became hubs for the Legion and their moral boycott efforts, hence their eliminations were more drastic than those of other states. The small number of cuts signals not only the rise in power of reform groups and their pressure on the MPPDA, but the rise of MPPDA enforcement in reaction to such sexuality. However, this process of repeated renaming and re-cutting of *Belle of the Nineties* resulted in inharmonious films in which the initial intention and performance of a well-known showman is cut short.

Many reviews of *Belle of the Nineties*, both national and local, address how this repeated censorship process led to a ruined picture. *Motion Picture Reviews*, written by The Women's University Club, Los Angeles, states, "This story of a mauve decade entertainer has been so emasculated by censorship that the principal remaining criticism is dullness."<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, *Variety* states that the film underwent a "scissoring operation ... following the New York regents frown" of *It Ain't No Sin* and the amount of publicity surrounding the controversial nature of the film.<sup>36</sup> Local exhibitors, most of whom denounced the film, believed that this negative press and accompanying

censorship ruined it. They stated, "The Decency campaign, with everybody hearing the picture had been changed, retitled twice, etc. . . . took the edge off Mae"<sup>37</sup> and the film was "spoiled in our town I think by the publicity it received when retakes were taken so many times."<sup>38</sup> Not only did the repeated censorship process lead to an incoherent recut of the film, but the Legion's protests generated a controversy creating a priming effect that fed the supposed disgrace of the film. This repetition of the evaluation and negotiation process with the MPPDA and state censors led to a film poisoned by re-cutting that disappointed many locals for its lack of fluidity and negative press. However, it was not absolute. In Ohio, where the Legion was gaining force, and who originally rejected *It Ain't No Sin*, an exhibitor claimed that the film gave them "the best business of the year," further revealing the process' complexity.<sup>39</sup>

### **Hearst vs. Religion vs. Annie vs. West**

Released in 1936, *Klondike Annie* followed the story of Frisco Doll (West) who is charged with a murder that she claims was done in self-defense. She flees to Alaska where she meets a Salvation Army social worker, Annie, whose identity she assumes after Annie's death. Posing as Annie, Doll finds

her faith and returns to face the trial.<sup>40</sup> The industry's initial fears stemmed from Annie's original occupation as a nun and a possible institutional pushback due to misrepresentation.<sup>41</sup> Breen preferred Annie to be a settlement worker, a detail that would enhance Doll's good deeds.<sup>42</sup> Thereafter, the completed film moved to the state censors.<sup>43</sup> At the state level, Massachusetts and Kansas passed the film without eliminations.<sup>44</sup> The remaining state boards did require cuts, but to a lesser degree than West's previous films. However, the controversy surrounding the film was not simply solved with this character change.

*Klondike Annie's* release was met with negative press due to William Randolph Hearst's statement denouncing the film questioning how it passed the censors so easily. He banned advertisements for *Klondike Annie* in all of his papers despite there being no record of state censors rejecting the film. However, the media attention that Hearst enacted, as predicted, improved *Klondike Annie's* box office projections.<sup>45</sup> Hearst claimed that "it was Miss Mae West's screen plays which were largely responsible for the uprising of the churches and the moral elements of the community against the filth in moving pictures." Furthermore, the film was denounced by various religious groups despite the Legion of

Decency declaring that *Klondike Annie* was class 'B' or "objectionable in part," and restricted admission to adults, a more relaxed classification than West's previous films.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, despite the MPPDA's enforcement and attempt to eliminate religious background with Annie's character change, some considered it a disgrace despite the Legion's rating. While the MPPDA was beginning to curb West's sexuality, as exhibitor responses pointed out, the restrictions were not always to the degree audiences or a powerful newspaper mogul like Hearst prefers.

The public's reactions to *Klondike Annie* were mostly negative, highlighting West's decline due to the censorship of her films. At a preview in Glendale, the *Motion Picture Herald* reported, "audience reaction vividly denoted thrill and surprise that might be interpreted as shock. . . [This] audience reaction gives every indication that this should appease the most rabid."<sup>47</sup> Alice Simmons, an exhibitor in Jefferson, Texas, stated that her patrons "seemed to be falling out with Mae."<sup>48</sup> L. A. Irwin, an exhibitor in Penacook, New Hampshire, claimed the film was "a washout for us financially and otherwise. Folks only yawned. Paramount should forget Mae for a while or give her something worth doing."<sup>49</sup> With the reinforcement of the MPPDA and the rise of religious social groups, West's knack



for pushing the limits of what was sexually tolerable faded.

This censorship process as examined through West's career highlights the complexity of the three different levels of review: the industry, state, and local, showing the regional and social differences, the social institutions and reform groups' pressures, as well as the reception of the audience all as factors in this process. This new perspective of the censorship process of films in the 1930s through these three different levels of review allows for a more complex understanding of this system as well as the contingent factors that pressured each of these levels and affected these films' reception. Mae West's career becomes a vessel for revealing difficulties in formulating a standardized censorship system due to the level of diversity and institutional powers at play. Furthermore, her career illustrates the consequences of a multi-level censorship system at the detriment of a film's harmony as well as the extent of regional sexual tolerance. Review of this process allows for a greater understanding beyond the traditional industrial perspective to reveal patterns of censorship at the state and local levels. This spread, and the subsequent reactions of each level of censorship, highlights West's role in the reinforcement of the MPPDA as well as the nation's cultural shift to a more

conservative audience. As Joseph Breen wrote, "As long as we have Mae West on our hands with the particular kind of story which she goes in for, we are going to have trouble."<sup>50</sup> With West, there was always trouble.

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## Endnotes

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# THE SURVEILLANCE INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Mark Pinedo

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Throughout radio and television history, one thing has always remained pivotal to their business - - the audience. In today's age, media is constantly undergoing transformation, as TV and media digital convergence accelerates and the longstanding consumer habits continue to be upended. Due to this, the media's landscape is often described as growing increasingly 'fragmented', or rather, becoming increasingly interconnected, with consumers seamlessly accessing content across more screens than ever before. As a result of this changing landscape, an abundance of issues and solutions facing marketers and publishers have come to fruition - - such as, how to effectively advertise across multi-media platforms and how consumers' purchasing behavior is shifting over time. comScore, a cross-platform measurement company that 'precisely' measures audiences, brands and consumer behavior everywhere - has grown increasingly popular amongst media conglomerates. However, to the digital audience, this business is subliminally monetizing off of users' data usage via surveillance. Cohesively, comScore has built a systematic understanding of how audience members engage with particular content, however, at

the cost of exploiting users' privacy to third-party participants such as websites, businesses, and corporations. In this case, it is pivotal for consumers in the Digital Age to have a fundamental understanding of the implications that follow when businesses are reconstructing the idea of a Military Industrial Complex into an Industrial Complex of Surveillance.

Founded in July 1999 in Reston, Virginia, comScore has emerged in the digital age as a fundamental global media measurement and analytics company that provides marketing data and analytics to many of the world's largest enterprises, media and advertising agencies, and publishers. The company was co-founded by Gian Fulgoni and Magid Abraham, who both worked for the market research company Information Resources, Inc. (IRI). Interestingly, the both comScore and (IRI) are similar for their ways of incorporating Big Data as a tool for understanding consumer behavior. Information Resources Inc., (IRI) integrates the world's largest set of otherwise disconnected purchase, media, social, causal and loyalty data to help CPG, retail, over-the-counter health care and media companies grow their business.<sup>1</sup> This information is pivotal

as it allows for an understanding of how the notion of Big Data as a means of surveillance transpired in the creation of comScore. In the early 2000's, the traditional methods that companies were using in order to track online behavior proved to be insufficient. The frequent disparity between the traditions of census-based site analytics data and panel-based audience measurement data has long been a weak point for digital media measurement. Because the two measurement techniques differ in objectives, they operate different counting technologies - which often results in differing metrics that constitute confusion and uncertainty among businesses, publishers, and advertisers. Due to the constraints of these traditional methodologies, Magid and Gian developed the Unified Digital Measurement, or known as 'UDM'. This new methodology that implemented a panel-centric unified solution to audience measurement, creating a blend of these two methodologies into a 'best of breed' approach that provides a direct link between census and panel approaches.<sup>2</sup> With this new system, participating companies place tags on all their content - web pages, videos, apps, and ads, and these calls are recorded by comScore servers every time content is accessed. Furthermore, the methodology operates as a way to combine panel and server-side

metrics in order to calculate audience reach in a manner that is not affected by variables such as cookie deletion and cookie blocking/rejecting. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the infrastructure of comScore's business: they are masking strategies of surveillance as 'innovative' methodologies that allow for an understanding of consumer behavior. However, the cost at which this is operating is beyond our scope of comprehension.

comScore has grown increasingly significant in the Digital Age as media conglomerates utilize their methodology as a basis for understanding the digital audience. The current media landscape has grown increasingly interconnected, with consumers having the ability to access content across more screens than ever before. Due to this, the lines between desktop, mobile, TV and film are beginning to blur as the various platforms are often more disguised by differences in use case than by the underlying technology. As a result, the digital sphere of content has grown increasingly fragmented. Journalist Guy Bergstrom from thebalance.com, a personal finance company for consumers, discusses fragmented audiences and how they are closely associated with mass media. According to Bergstrom, the fragmented audience is the division of audience members into small groups due to the wide spectrum of media

outlets.<sup>3</sup> The division in mass media audience has constituted for troubles amongst advertisers as the specialization of publications and broadcast opportunities becomes more diverse. In today's media age, the way people gather news is now through an abundance of outlets, there are hundreds of channels on cable and internet radio. Therefore, it is essential for businesses in the Digital Age to understand how to reach more than a slice of the population by publicizing in multiple outlets such as newspapers, radio, television and the internet. The whole point of mass communication is reaching the masses. This highlights the significance of comScore as they provide key information regarding how to understand the ways in which the digital audience behaves online. Their systematic means of surveillance are regarded as essential by media conglomerates, which drives the continual exploitation of privacy.

The underlying tensions in utilizing privacy as a means to monetize surfaced in the early 2010's, when comScore was hit with a class action. On August 23, 2011, the online data research company was faced with a lawsuit in Illinois with claims that the business collects personal information from consumers' computers to, in turn, sell this data to well-known media outlets without the users' knowledge or consent.<sup>4</sup> Illinois resident Mike Harris and California

resident Jeff Dunstan claimed that the company's software often comes attached to other applications that the user actively downloads, but does not inform the consumer that comScore's surveillance program is also being installed. comScore managed to seamlessly implement an apparatus of control in the form of 'clickbait'; while users were under the impression that they were downloading a product, it was at the expense of their privacy. According to *Law360*, the software is allegedly designed to track and record computer users' information including passwords, credit and debit cards, Social Security numbers, search engine queries, frequently visited websites, products purchased online and advertisements that the user clicked.<sup>5</sup> This highlights the need to understand what lies beneath comScore's data gathering techniques as it is far more sinister and shocking to all but the few who fully understand its business practices. For nearly three years after the two proposed classes seek to include anyone who has had comScore's software installed on their computers and anyone who incurred costs in their removal of the software, comScore proposed a settlement. On June 4, 2014, comScore struck a \$14 million settlement with what is believed to be the largest class ever certified for a violation of federal electronic privacy laws composed

of Web users who allegedly had the online analytics giant's data-harvesting software installed on their computers without consent.<sup>6</sup> The consequences that followed were miniscule: comScore had to cover \$4.6M in attorneys' fees for the plaintiffs and were required to alter their privacy policies and end user license agreements to bring its disclosures in line with its data collection practices.<sup>7</sup> The ways in which the judicial system handled this situation highlights what the digital audience's privacy is worth — the punishment for exploiting individual's privacy was a mere slap on the wrist. This emphasizes the dangerous implications that follow for consumers in the Digital Age when businesses are utilizing surveillance as an apparatus of control with minimal repercussions.

The composition of comScore and that is representative of a Military Industrial Complex, the shareholders in the company must be explored. This company is comprised of three different businesses that specialize in various areas of the media industry. On February, 1, 2016, comScore and Rentrak, a media measurement company, struck deals between media outlets and their advertisers.<sup>8</sup> This merger represented more than just a partnership—it was the initiating factor for the construction of the Surveillance Industrial Complex. Rentrak is not an independent

business, in fact, it is partnered with WPP, a British world leader in advertising and marketing services. On October 9, 2014, Rentrak acquired the U.S. television measurement business of WPP's Kantar business unit for \$98M in Rentrak Common stock.<sup>9</sup> The new combination gave Rentrak more weight in its ongoing efforts to quietly provide an alternative to the more established measurement services, mainly those run by Nielsen. However, as part of the deal, WPP purchased shares directly from the company for \$56M in cash, giving WPP a final ownership stake of 16.7% of Rentrak's stock. This is significant as it exemplifies the ways in which the composition of comScore is multi-layered. The layers appear more controversial as the understanding of how these individual shareholders operate. WPP companies exist to help their clients compete successfully: in marketing strategy, advertising, every form of marketing communication and in monitoring progress.<sup>10</sup> Thus, WPP too utilizes Big Data surveillance as a means to compute a systematic understanding for the digital audience's behavior. Therefore, comScore is indeed an Industrial Complex of Surveillance, as it is comprised of multiple layers, with each having a designated operant objective of how to utilize surveillance as an apparatus of control.

As comScore manifested a

partnership with Rentrak, this merger represents a stronger apparatus of control, as their ability to surveil has expanded beyond their traditional operations. Rentrak enhanced comScore's initial capacity and strategy to understand the ways consumers are engaging with content in the digital world. Rentrak, which measures video-on-demand, theatrical film box office and set-top box data that tracks how people watch TV and comScore, which measures consumer web activity have established comScore's new systematic understanding of the digital audience, known as, "Media Metrix Multi-Platform". The system provides the industry's first comprehensive view of the consumption habits of a particular digital audience and the competitors, along with demographics and cross-visitation information, across desktop computers, smartphones and tablets.<sup>11</sup> This exemplifies how comScore has expanded means of surveillance due to the merger. Previously, comScore was constrained to consumer web activity. However, Rentrak allowed for an 'all encompassing' mode of surveillance across virtually every screen that solicits content. This is further expressed as the Media Metrix Multi-Platform measures audience composition and performance within key user segments to target based on a variety of demographic, lifestyle, product

ownership and behavioral characteristics. The extent at which comScore's means of understanding consumers has navigated beyond means of traditional comprehension, to the point at which the merger is likely to vie with Nielsen, to offer data that can form the backbone of deals struck between media outlets and their advertisers.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the publication of the merger, Nielsen and CBS unveiled an expanded initiative to measure the viewers who purchase the streaming-video service known as "CBS All Access".<sup>13</sup> In due time, the deal will allow CBS to include digital audience measurement in TV ratings. Nielsen's deliberate choice to strike back highlights how the battle for cross-screen measurement dominance has been occurring over the previous years. Recently, a source proves who is arising as a victor in this battle. On March 13, 2017, comScore signed an expansion agreement with Sinclair Broadcast Group, adding WSBT (CBS) South Bend, ind., KUQI (FOX) Corpus Chirsti, Texas and KHGI (ABC) and KFXL (FOX) Lincoln & Hastings-Kearney, Neb.<sup>14</sup> With this new expansion, comScore is now providing its local measurement currency to 704 television stations representing 82 ownership groups. The merger between comScore and Rentrak has proven itself as significant as it has expanded and enhanced the strength



of their apparatus of control, replaced Nielsen ratings, and established their work as a trustworthy contemporary media practice amongst media conglomerates.

As comScore has implemented sophisticated algorithms to observe, analyze, and identify users through large surveillance networks online, case studies show that computer algorithms have the capacity to infer categories of identity. A study conducted by John Cheney-Lippold, an Assistant Professor of American Culture at the University of Michigan, analyzes this phenomenon in his article, “A New Algorithmic Identity, *Soft Biopolitics and the Modulation of Control*”. Cheney-Lippold examines the nuanced ways that algorithmic inference works as a mode of control, of processes of identification that structure and regulate our lives online within the context of online marketing and algorithmic categorization.<sup>15</sup> This closely correlates with comScore’s means of shaping a systematic understanding for the digital audience. Cheney-Lippold establishes the connections between web analytic firms that are actively amassing information on individuals to shape a ‘new algorithmic identity’. Businesses use statistical commonality models to determine one’s gender, class, or race in an automatic manner at the same time as it defines the actual meaning of gender, class, or race

themselves.<sup>16</sup> comScore as well as other web analytic businesses have the ability to move the practice of identification into an entirely digital, and thus measurable, plane. This exemplifies the dangerous implications of the Surveillance Industrial Complex; our interactions on the internet are becoming apparent in our everyday reality, however, in the form of an algorithmic identification.

The use of Big Data as a means of surveillance has grown increasingly intrusive among individuals on a global level. comScore has cohesively established itself as a Surveillance Industrial Complex at the cost of exploiting the digital audience’s privacy for mere monetizing purposes. As their apparatus of control grows stronger with mergers, partnerships, and innovative technology, it is imperative that consumers in the Digital Age understand how these systems operate. Consumers must proactively seek subjective truths of their own reality as media conglomerates utilize a ‘free space’ as a tool to intrusively implement the notion of an objective reality that computer algorithms aspire to configure.

In truth, we are more than an algorithm, we are complex beings who are beyond the scope of an autonomous system. The purpose of this paper is to establish a fundamental understanding for the ways in which the Surveillance Industrial Complex functions and

what we, as consumers in the Digital Age, can do in order to protect ourselves and our privacy. If we continue to participate in this malicious flux of consumption at the cost of our privacy, this will prevail. Be knowledgeable, be diligent, be heard.

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# BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF CONTROL: A RESEARCH PAPER LOOKING INTO THE DANGERS AND TRUE COSTS OF SMART HOME TECHNOLOGY TO OUR PRIVACY AND CIVIL FREEDOMS

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Charles Pearson

## Introduction

Ask yourself honestly: how many liberties are you willing to give up for added convenience to your daily life? Smart technology has revolutionized communication and basic utility in the world today. Normally convoluted mechanisms and processes of daily life become simplified as applications and developed algorithms can collect/interpret data to efficiently solve life's problems. Regulating exercise, eating and sleeping habits, movie and television services, communication with friends and family, making financial transactions, and a plethora of other once relatively complicated systems have never been easier than in the modern world of the smartphone. This is now moving one step forward: the interconnected smart home. Imagine a future where your house can perfectly regulate itself: ideal internal temperatures that also ensure the most efficient uses of energy and electricity, 24-hour smart camera surveillance to keep your family safe, gardening and sprinkler systems designed specifically to ensure the flourishing of the house's specific flora, cleaning systems that thoroughly disinfect

to ensure the most pristine and hygienic conditions. All of this and more may be inherent aspects of daily life in the near future and will exponentially increase levels of convenience in our daily lives, but at what cost? How much data will be collected, analyzed, and shared as a result of these technologies, and what will that mean for our social liberties?

I am arguing that the penetration of surveilling and data collecting smart technologies in our homes make us ever more vulnerable for private companies like Google's Nest and governing bodies to exert unwarranted authority against our civil rights; the loss of privacy and liberties from smart home technology and the internet of things may very well be greater than the added utility to our daily lives given current services and trends in the industry.

My research is organized around one central question: how can a smart technology company use pervasive power to undercut our privacy and subjugate our freedoms? The conclusion I reached is that a company must (1) collect and share superfluous amounts of data in order to be able to analyze through convoluted algorithms,

(2) have its products extensively permeated into households and deeply integrated in daily social life, and (3) be willing to use the collected data as a mechanism of power and control or share it with those who can and will abuse this data.

This paper will analyze the services of one smart home company, Nest, now owned by the world's highest market valued company (at \$498 billion in 2016 according to Kerry Close from Time) and technological superpower Google. Evidence from a variety of written publications, as well as from Nest's website, will be used to test the companies against the three listed points above to demonstrate the very real possibility and likelihood for overabundant data collection/sharing and unbearable levels of surveillance as a result of this smart home technology to be used to undermine our social liberties and freedoms.

### **Overview of Nest as a Product and Data Collecting Service**

“Nest is home... Nest is focused on making simple, human, delightful things. That's how we're creating the thoughtful home: A home that takes care of the people inside it and the world around it.” This is taken directly from Nest's website; their stated goal is to create a smarter and more efficient home space.

Nest was co-founded in 2010 by former Apple executive and engineer Tony Fadell, who is famous for designing iPod. The company gained prominence for the development of the first version of the Nest Learning Thermostat and a line of other products like the smart smoke detector. The thermostat sold well; its sleek hardware and calculative algorithms, that allow the product to become more efficient over time, garnered much attention especially from Google (Gurman). In 2014, Google's parent company, Alphabet, purchased Nest in a \$3.2 billion deal. Since this purchase Nest has unveiled plans for numerous other products, mainly the Nest indoor and outdoor cameras. The products are also designed to work with other Google smart home technology, like the Google Home, to respond to voice activated demands among other utilities. The design of Nest's products is not only to create simpler, more efficient versions of household appliances, but to make ones that truly learn from collected data to become more efficient over time (Wohlsen).

Marcus Wohlsen, from Wired, infers that the value Nest is accumulating from its products “stems from the connections it is forging among its devices themselves. Nest's thermostat, for instance, doesn't just turn itself on and off when you tell it. Over time, as the Nest Learning Thermostat uses its

sensors to train itself according to your comings and goings, the entire network of Nests in homes across the country becomes smarter. The paramount value of the devices, in a sense, lies not in the hardware itself but the interconnectedness of that hardware. As the devices talk to each other, by building an aggregate picture of human behavior, they anticipate what we want before even we know.” In response to the forged relationship between Nest and Google, Wohlsen argues Nest “provides Google an ideal platform for stretching the power of its own intelligent machines beyond the web and into the internet of things.” As Nest continues to expand on the breadth of smart home products it designs and sells, these individual products will develop more complex algorithms, effectively becoming smarter and more accurate at predicting and responding to human behaviors.

### **Content of EULAs and Terms of Agreement**

The partnership of Nest and Google, with their combined expertise in developing hardware, algorithms, and sleek designs, gives them a seemingly endless potential for data harvesting. The central research tool used in this paper - to determine what data is collected, how it can be shared, and what this means for the

consumer and society as a whole - is the more than 16,000-word Nest privacy statement for products, terms of service, and End User License Agreement on their website that entails what the user agrees to upon use of product. All quotes in this section come directly from these stated terms of agreement.

“Your personal information may be collected, processed and stored by Nest or its service providers in the United States and other countries where our servers reside.”

“We may record and process video and/or audio recordings from the device.”

“We may process information from your Nest Cam so that we can send you alerts when something happens. In addition, if you have the recording features enabled, we will capture, process and retain video and audio data recordings from your device for the duration of your recording subscription period.”

“We will collect and store information that will allow us to save or share your content as directed by you through the Services.”

“If you have multiple Nest Products interfacing with one another, the products will share certain information with each other, such as data on whether something in the room is moving, temperature data, and the occurrence of smoke or CO alarms. This sharing may occur



locally among connected devices (both Nest and third-party devices). Sharing can also occur between Nest Products and your mobile device or application, or among Nest's servers."

"We use this information to provide, develop and improve Nest Products and services, including to make assessments and recommendations about products, safety, or energy use. We may use your contact details to send you this information, or to ask you to participate in surveys about your Nest use, and to send you other communications from Nest."

"We may also use this information in an aggregated, non-identified form for research purposes and to help us make sales, marketing, and business decisions."

"Upon the sale or transfer of the company and/or all or part of its assets, your personal information may be among the items sold or transferred. We will request a purchaser to treat our data under the privacy statement in place at the time of its collection."

"For legal reasons: We may provide information to a third party if we believe in good faith that we are required to do so for legal reasons. For example, we may disclose information in response to legal process and we may disclose information in response to lawful requests by public authorities in the United States and other

countries for the purposes of law enforcement and national security."

"As described below, you are consenting to automatic software update of the services and of the products connected to the services. If you do not agree, you should not use the services."

"Nest is not responsible for third parties or their products and services, including, without limitation, the App Stores."

These are just several excerpts from the expansive terms of agreement. Basically, the terms disclose that Nest collects and stores fundamentally all possible data from their products, including images and recordings from cameras. They have regulations on how this data can be shared, but there are many exceptions. One such exception is for the sake of national security, which is a broad term and one that can be easily manipulated by the government's own agenda. Additionally, third party developers' products interacting with Nest products, including Google Android phone apps, and Google's other Smart Home technologies like the Google Home, Wemo switch, LIFX, SkyBell, and Misfit Sleeptracker, can share this data as well; where the restrictions of their own terms of service and EULAs may apply. Simply using a Nest product is seen as consent to this extensive list of agreements that the majority

of Nest users are unlikely to read.

All of this is highly limiting to the user's ability to control how they use their products and what information is being shared, but it goes even farther: "You hereby waive California civil code section 1542 in connection with the foregoing, which states: 'A general release does not extend to claims which the creditor does not know or suspect to exist in his or her favor at the time of executing the release, which if known by him or her must have materially affected his or her settlement with the debtor.' You hereby waive any similar provision in any other jurisdiction." This confusing statement essentially relieves the company of responsibility for third party developers interacting with the product. More so than that, this service agreement waives rights citizens have as dictated by the state; Nest is writing in and out its own governing laws for its services.

The most intrusive and undemocratic excerpt of the agreement is stated in this excerpt: Nest reserves the right, at any time, to modify, suspend, or discontinue the Services or any part thereof with or without notice. You agree that Nest will not be liable to you or to any third party for any modification, suspension, or discontinuance of the Services or any part thereof." So Nest has the ability to change its services at

any time, without notification, and simply continuing the use of the product assumes your understanding and consent of these changes. Not only do these terms of agreement demonstrate the breadth of data collection and sharing that Nest and Google is attempting, but at any time these terms can be altered; it is up to the user to find these changes themselves and evaluate their relevance. Suddenly, the greater convenience of using these products seems questionable.

### **How Terms of Agreement are Enforced**

How can this long, confusing, responsibility-shirking terms of agreement - apparently able to change without notification and probably unseen by the majority of Nest users - possibly be legal? Aaron Perzanowski and Jason Schultz describe in the 4th chapter of their book, *The End of Ownership*, the origins of EULAs (End User License Agreements) and how they have evolved to be treated as binding contracts between parties.

Fundamentally, EULAs are held up in court because of a hole in section 117 of the 1980 amended Copyright Act. The amendment extended copyright protection for companies, but section 117 also gave product owners of computer programs certain rights and protections. However, EULAs work

by denying the existence of a sale; the consumer licenses the use of the products from the seller and does not actually own the product, so they do not have these same kind of ownership rights. The use of this product is thus only permitted through abiding by the given license as dictated by EULAs and terms of agreement. As it stands now, this interpretation is held up in United States courts; their claim is, generally, that the standardized contracts decrease costs for the sellers and, in turn, market competition will protect the consumer from abusive EULAs. However, given the vast majority of technology and software producers make use of overbearingly long and complex EULAs, the case becomes that EULAs like Nest's are able to list overbearingly restrictive terms of service that will be upheld in the court of law, and market competition has yet to pose any kind of threat against such restrictive terms of agreement.

### **Trends in Proliferation of Other Smart Technology**

The evidence detailed above demonstrates the expanse of data that Nest and Google are able to collect, but this only becomes a true reality if people are buying and using their services and products. The smart home technology industry is relatively new and, as BI Intelligence states, the smart

home industry has yet to really boom. Therefore, I looked into the trends of a slightly older smart technology to see how it developed and became integrated into consumer lives and society as a whole: the smartphone.

Pew Research Center has done many studies on smartphone usage and proliferation in the United States. According to these studies, the number of Americans that own smartphones have risen from 35% in 2011 to 77% as of November, 2016. This is an incredible increase in just a five year span. This number is skewed by the low permeation of smartphones in older generation Americans. Looking at the age range of Americans 18 to 29, the number of smartphones owners increases to 92%. Younger generations have rapidly adopted the smartphone as it hastily becomes a staple of daily life, despite expensive costs (the cost of a new iPhone 7 from Apple's website today is \$649). With smart home technology sporting sleek designs, simple interfaces, similar price models, and being produced by the same smartphone companies, it is very likely that smart home technology will mirror the proliferation of smartphones.

This points to the expanse of smartphone distribution, but not the extent of product usage on an individual basis or how dependent users are upon them. According to another Pew Research Center

study conducted in 2014, 80% of Americans believe smartphones are worth the investment and 46% claim they are dependent on their smartphone and could not live without it. Not only do the vast majority of Americans own smartphones, but nearly half of them feel dependent on the smartphone in order to function, and this is only as of 2014. As far as dependency is concerned, smart home technology is exceptionally likely to follow in this manner: the greater organization and convenience of smart home technology will very likely create dependent users as smartphones already have. This means that Google and Nest can not only collect and share extensive amounts of data, but as people become more dependent, they can enforce even stricter terms of agreement and EULAs.

### **Google's Deduced Ethical Code on Data Collection and Sharing**

Nest's terms of agreement leave open the possibility of over-extensive data collection and sharing, and trends likely meaning an increase in the penetration of smart home technology. However, this does not necessarily denote that Google will utilize this tremendous power to subjugate our freedoms or maximize their profits off of this collected data in ways that can harm us or intrude on our privacy and rights. My stated thesis

is wholly dependent on Google wanting to abuse this collected data; this next section will, therefore, analyze some of the legal and political scandals Google has found itself in order to create a picture of how Google is likely to utilize the mass of data they can collect.

Nathan Newman, from the Huffington Post, describes several specific occurrences of Google running into legal problems and backlash due to its extensive policy of over-surveillance of collected user data. I have included several excerpts from his article below.

“Google’s illegal “wi-spy” program of collecting user data over home wi-fi hubs using its Street View cars has led to investigations and fines for violations of the law in countries around the world. Investigators were outraged when they reviewed the downloaded data and found Google had collected massive amounts of personal emails and data revealing everything from people’s medical histories to their sexual preference to marital infidelity. (Google’s defense that it was all okay because they never looked at the illegally collected data is eerily similar to the NSA’s).”

“When challenged on its illegal data collection, the company lied and stonewalled investigators around the world, with the Federal Communications Commission

finding the company guilty of ‘willfully’ ignoring subpoenas to delay investigations into the scandal, fining the company in a 25-page condemnation in April 2012 that concluded ‘Google’s failure to cooperate with the Bureau was in many or all cases deliberate.’”

“Both Google and Facebook were charged with violating privacy laws in launching their social media networks and both had to agree to 20-year consent decrees to monitor their privacy policies. But a year after entering its consent decree, the Federal Trade Commission found Google had secretly placed ‘cookies’ to track the online activities of people using the Safari web browser, despite having publicly ‘told these users they would automatically be opted out of such tracking.’ Google had deliberately found a vulnerability in Safari’s ‘default cookie-blocking setting’ in order to collect the information for its advertising data collection purposes, while publicly misrepresenting to users that it was not doing so. The company paid a \$22.5 million fine for this illegal data collection operation.”

Another article from Wired, written by Kim Zetter, describes how the EFF found Google breaking its privacy statement with illegal unconsented data collection of underage children. This should not be too surprising; Google relies heavily on ad revenue, with its AdSense division reporting

\$79.4 billion in its 2016 Q4 earnings call (BI Intelligence). Still, these legal disputes illustrate the extent to which Google is willing to go to collect as much data as possible to monetize on its profits. This is a very scary situation from such an encompassing company. Other companies like Apple likely follow a similar pattern, but the extent of this paper will focus on Google and the above demonstrates Google’s less-than-saintly ethical code on data collection.

Even though these excerpts demonstrate the extent of data collection Google goes to in order to most effectively monetize on data it can collect, they do not necessarily denote Google will use this data or share it with those who will use this data in order to over-surveil our lives and subjugate our freedoms. A few years ago, many journals reported on leaked documents from the NSA’s PRISM program that show that the government agency had obtained data from several large technology firms, including Google (Greenwald). Alexis Kleinman, from the Huffington Post, reports that while Google and many of the other involved firms have claimed that they were not aware of this extensive extraction of their collected user data by the NSA, the NSA’s general counsel, Rajesh De, stated that the tech companies were aware and assisted in the NSA’s program and that “they

would have received legal process in order to assist the government.” Regardless of whether one agrees that Google did in fact assist in the NSA’s endeavors, the fact remains that extensive and encompassing amounts of private data proven to be collected by Google have landed in the hands of the government. I do not find it necessary to explain the extreme dangers that come along with a company like the NSA having such extensive collected data on its citizens, as that would be befitting of another research paper, but the danger of any government having such lucrative information on its citizens is extremely hazardous to social freedoms and rights. So what will this mean as even more extensive smart home technology expands and perforates into more and more American homes?

## **Conclusion**

Based on Google-owned Nest’s entrenching terms of agreement that allow Google to collect extensive user data, the likelihood of its permeation into a large proportion of American homes, and the extent to which Google will go to ensure maximum monetization of data collection which can include the sharing of such data with government agencies, I am concluding that penetration of surveilling and data collecting smart technologies in our homes does make us

exceedingly susceptible for private companies like Google and governing bodies like the NSA to infringe on our civil rights; the loss of privacy and liberties from smart home technology and the internet of things may very well be greater than the added utility to our daily lives, given everything discussed prior. Companies like Apple join Google and Nest in the budding industry of smart home technology and creating interconnected smart homes across the country, maybe even the world. The future of our social liberties and rights rests in the hands of these multi-billion dollar industries, and this is, quite simply, a frightening reality.

## **Where Do We Go from Here?**

Technological evolution is an inevitability of time and should not be seen as a deterrent to our lives; technological development is a great thing. However, what this paper is meant to demonstrate is that private companies and government bodies and regulations have laid down infrastructures of control so that these technological developments can very easily hurt us more-so than they aid us; what we as citizens of a supposed free nation should do is look to ways to instead build technological infrastructures that will protect and defend our civil liberties and rights. This

is a difficult problem to address, but I suppose that an effective course of action, concerning smart homes specifically, may be boycotting or refusal to purchase smart home technologies until the methodology of court ruling over EULAs and the established regulations defending buyers, or more so those licensing these, products can be respectively renegotiated and expanded. These products will bring greater convenience to daily life, but we as a society should take the time to ensure that this greater convenience is not at the cost of the degradation of civil independence and our personal rights. To those who think it may very well be too late for such practices, my parting words are to never lose hope and never give up on your fellow man.

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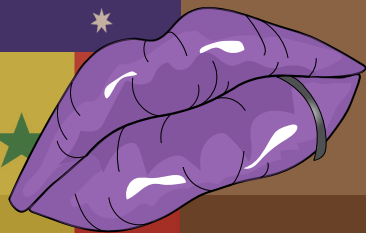
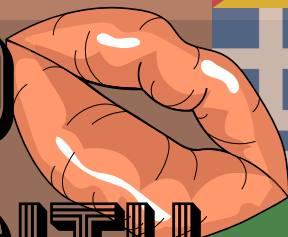
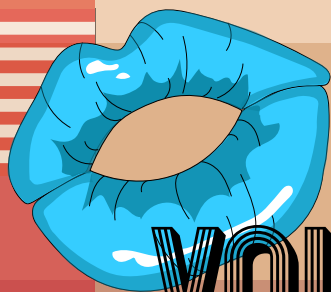
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**VOICE OF  
RACE,  
GENDER,  
AND  
DIVERSITY**



# SHONDALAND: BEAUTY COMPLEXITY, AND INTERSECTIONALITY

Alix Rives

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Shonda Rhimes is an award winning television producer, writer, and director; who also happens to be an African American woman. She is the creator, writer, and executive producer of many hit ABC television series including *Grey's Anatomy* (2005-Present), *Scandal* (2012-Present), and *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-Present). Her shows are incredibly unique and range from various ends of the dramatic spectrum. *Grey's Anatomy* follows surgeon Meredith Grey and her peers as they make their way from interns to residents, and all the mishaps, tragedies, love stories, and triumphs that they encounter along the way. *Scandal* follows Olivia Pope, former presidential advisor and current political "fixer", and her team of misfits as they attempt to fix the various political scandals in Washington D.C. *How to Get Away With Murder* surrounds Annalise Keating and her group of law students as they attempt to defend their clients, while simultaneously trying to cover up their own heinous crimes. These 3 shows are some of Rhimes' most popular works and despite their differences; a connecting factor throughout all of her shows is

diversity. None of her casts are all white and all of them have female characters as leads. Shonda Rhimes also does not speak of her shows as if they are doing something revolutionary for television. Her intention is to create shows that represent the realities of our society (Fogel). And the reality is that we live in a diverse society that consists of complex humans who are flawed, yet beautiful.

Intersectional feminism, or intersexuality, is an overarching branch of feminism that recognizes that not all women face the same issues and oppression as heterosexual white women, whether this means fighting racism and sexism at the same time, or battling against homophobia and sexism. It acknowledges that certain groups such as African American women, homosexual women, transwomen, and disabled women face struggles alongside the universal oppression that comes with being a woman (Vidal). The concept of intersectionality is not a new one, but its inclusion in feminism is only starting to gain traction and popularity. It is an important transition because despite the fact that women got the right to vote 97 years ago, there are still

vast inequalities between women and men, and these gaps are even wider for women of color.

It is important to acknowledge that women of color have more disadvantages than white women, and it is even more important to do things to try and close the gaps and decrease the inequalities. With the emergence of intersectionality within the feminist movement itself, its representation in film, television, and other mainstream entertainment should increase accordingly. Since the 50s, television has been an important part of households across America. It has addressed issues facing the common man, commented on political events, and showed people families that represented their own. However, the presentation of women's issues, specifically minority women, in television is only at the beginning stages, and film is even further behind. When *Scandal* premiered in April 2012, Kerry Washington "was the first black female lead on primetime in 40 years" (Blay). On the other hand, it would be incredibly easy to name 10, even 20, white men who have led primetime shows in the past 50 years. This gap in television representation shows that all Americans are not being represented on their television screens. This gap is even wider, when naming women of color, or even white women, who have been the creator or showrunner on a series.

As Stephanie B. Goldberg quoted in her article, "the power must be behind the camera in order to make a difference" (Goldberg 41). In order for women to get proper representation in the media, women need to be able to gain positions of power within the industry. With new female-created shows like Netflix's *Orange is the New Black* (2013-Present), and Shondaland productions, we are only starting to see intersectional issues being addressed and seen as equally important. Shonda Rhimes presents the important factors of intersectional feminism and its desires to create an equal world for women of all types through her representation of female beauty, the complexity of her female characters, and the attention brought to minority issues in the various processes from development to airing of her shows.

One of the main intersectional issues that Shonda Rhimes tackles is the portrayal of conventional female beauty in the media. All over the media we see pictures and videos of what a woman should look like and how she should dress. In many cases this is an image of a slim white woman with long blonde hair and blue eyes, who wears short clothes and makeup. She is also sexualized, but she can not cross the line of being "overly sexual". This female trope for beauty is recreated in everything from commercials, to magazines,

to movies, and of course, television. Shonda Rhimes' programs work to dismantle the ideas that society has of female beauty and reshape what it means to be beautiful.

In a season 1 episode of *How to Get Away with Murder* titled, "Let's Get to Scooping" there is a scene where after a long day at work, Annalise Keating sits down at her vanity and takes off her wig, her fake eyelashes, and the rest of her makeup. In doing so, she exposes the raw and emotional person hidden underneath her hard exterior. After taking off all the makeup, her husband walks in and kisses her on the cheek. Despite the fact that this is such a natural occurrence that happens to women everyday, we rarely get the chance to see it on the screen. Instead, we are continuously fed the images of the done-up girl who goes to sleep in her makeup and wakes up looking fresh and brand new.

In shows such as Freeform's *Baby Daddy* (2012-Present) and The CW's *90210* (2008-2013), the characters rarely go without makeup or a nice outfit, and if they ever do, it is reason for concern. In a *90210* episode titled, "Dude, Where's My Husband" Naomi who recently divorced her husband walks around her house in sweats and no makeup. As her friends worry over her strange behavior one says, "she hasn't even been plucking her eyebrows".

The concern they show over her lack of makeup mirrors the concern that we have as a society for women who are not always "done-up". The image of a woman without makeup and in her pajamas is most often used to represent feelings of sadness, humiliation, or even depression. This obsession with how women should look is very harmful to women of all ages and colors, and it is a big talking point in intersectional feminism. In *Baby Daddy*, a show with a majority white cast, the female characters are placed into specific tropes. Riley, the main character's best friend, is always at the center of a love triangle. Even though she is an independent woman, who works as a lawyer, she always seems to be reduced to the uptight girl who can not have fun unless a man is forcing her to. Similarly, the mother of the main character, Bonnie, is placed into the trope of being irresponsible and always in need of rescue. These traditional, and harmful, tropes label women as being side characters whose only purpose is to advance the main man's story. One important portion of the scene from *How to Get Away with Murder* is Annalise taking off her wig and what it means for black representation. African American women, even more so than white women, must deal with ridiculous beauty expectations. Their skin tone cannot be too harsh and

hair quality must be white passing, which is not only a ridiculous expectation, but also a racist one. Because of these expectations, Shonda Rhimes' portrayal of a beautiful black woman who strips down from her "done-up" look is incredibly important. It shows women that beauty is not something that we owe anyone and that even when we take off our makeup, people will still love us the same. The significant way in which Shonda Rhimes dismantles our perception of beauty is only the first in many ways that her shows advance intersectional feminist beliefs and ideals.

The next way that Shonda Rhimes' television shows lead the entertainment industry in acknowledging intersectional feminism is through her use of complex female characters. Throughout the history of film and television, female characters are usually not as well written and thought through as their male counterparts. They often follow female stereotypes of being weak, naïve, victims, or even sexual objects. According to research done by Gaye Tuchman in the 70s, "only 45% of the people presented on television have been women" (Tuchman 531) and to make this worse, the women that are presented are usually stereotyped. Many critics of feminism, and intersectionality, may argue that these numbers have increased drastically since the 1970s.

However, research from 2016 shows that, "Across platforms, females comprised 39% of all speaking characters" and of these characters, "71% of females were White...17% were Black...5% were Latina...5% were Asian... and 2% were of some other race or ethnicity (Lauzen 2). Even though the representation of minority women has improved drastically since the 70s, it still has a long way to go. Tuchman also writes on the types of roles women typically get staving, "The media's deleterious role models, when internalized, prevent and impede female accomplishments. They also encourage both women and men to define women in terms of men (as sex objects) or in the context of the family (as wives and mothers)" (Tuchman 531). From shows in the 50s like CBS's *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957) to more recent shows like ABC's *The Middle* (2009-Present), women are often portrayed as being the subservient mother who is only there to serve her family. And if they are not portrayed this way, then often times we can see them being sexually objectified like Megan Fox in FOX's *New Girl* (2011-Present) and Gloria in ABC's *Modern Family* (2009-Present) – which can also be seen as exoticizing because of the use of her accent and "Latina body" as a sexual object. On top of minority women having incredibly low representation,

these women often played very racially stereotyped roles such as the Hispanic maid, the “black family matriarch”, or Asian nurse. In contrast to these very basic characters that are used as plot devices and side characters to the male lead, Shonda Rhimes creates a vast array of complex female characters who speak for themselves and are not used to back up the men that they are surrounded by.

Throughout both *How to Get Away With Murder* and *Scandal* there are an abundance of complex female characters. Every character introduced to the shows has a purpose and unique qualities and none of them fit into stereotypical boxes of what women should be like. We see this in both of the main characters Olivia Pope and Annalise Keating, as well as with many of the supporting characters. Neither of the women are placed into typical African American roles of being from impoverished neighborhoods and enduring “the struggle”. In *Scandal*, Olivia Pope comes from a wealthy family and has a job at the white house as a political fixer. Throughout the show she makes many mistakes, such as helping fix the presidential election and even attempting to kill her father, however, she is also a loving person who takes care of her friends in their times of need. She is also in a love triangle for most of the show, however, her love for both men never out

shadows her individuality and she is never reduced to just being “the mistress” or “the girlfriend”. First and foremost, she is her own person. This display of a female minority character who does not let the labels of “black” or “woman” stop her or even affect how she lives her life, is incredibly important to intersectional feminism. In television we rarely get to see these characters as more than just a sideshow, let alone at the forefront of the entire series. Another significant quality of the female characters is how they are allowed to be women. In many television shows and movies, attempts to make the “strong, independent, woman” character are often misguided and end up portraying a cold-hearted woman rather than accurately depicting life for real woman. In *How to Get Away with Murder*, Shonda Rhimes is able to successfully depict two women who are both very different and shows how women realistically do not fit under the “dramatic crying mess” stereotype or the “stiff cold-hearted” stereotype, but instead show qualities that represent a whole spectrum of emotion.

In another season 1 episode of *How to Get Away With Murder* called, “Smile, or Go to Jail” we get to see the reactions of multiple women after they accidentally kill their boss’ murderous husband. One of the women, Laurel – a Latina woman, is calm and



collected and attempting to calm down Michaela – an African American woman, who is hysterically crying and in immense distress over what is occurring. However, their actions and emotional response to such a traumatic experience not only differ from each other, but also differ from who they are normally. Their reactions to the dead body are in no way an indicator of being a stereotypical emotional woman on Michaela's side or a cold-hearted woman on Laurel's side – instead their reactions are both viable and understandable for the given situation. In their every day lives, they are normally well-balanced people (apart from the murdering) and have issues that they deal with in different, yet both reasonable, ways. Neither woman is placed into a box and we get to see each woman experience a wide range of emotions without succumbing to them, which is an issue that female characters in older television often had. Not only this, but neither woman was asked to portray their character in any type of ethnic way. Their ethnicities were never brought up in an attempt to create a stereotype and before being black or Latina, they are just humans dealing with human issues. This is only one of the many ways that the female characters in Rhimes' shows demonstrate their complexity and their ability to be real, flawed human beings with a

wide variety of emotions, abilities, and characteristics. Through this use of complex characters we are able to draw conclusions of how these shows are capable of carrying an intersectional feminist viewpoint and sheds light on the realities of being minority women in America.

The last significant way in which Shonda Rhimes' television productions are able to advance intersectional feminism and inform people about the differences and inequalities faced by women, and specifically minority women, is through her acknowledgement of minority issues, specifically the lack of minorities in the entertainment industry and even issues of police brutality and discrimination. The production of television shows with all white casts is nothing new and has been the norm since the start of television. We see the reality of all white casts in earlier shows like *How I Met Your Mother*, *Modern Family* and *Friends*. This is an issue not only for minority actors, but also the minorities themselves that are misrepresented or maybe not even represented at all. There is also the concern that in order to address the abundance of minority issues that plague our society, there must be minority characters on the show. When Shonda Rhimes was in the casting stage for *Grey's Anatomy* she implemented a process known as colorblind casting, which is the

practice of casting a role without considering race, and sometimes gender (Fogel). The role is initially race-less and is given to the actor of best fit, regardless of their race. This practice is criticized sometimes because of how it can result in all-white casts in scenarios where there should not be an all-white cast, such as with *Friends* and *The Class*. However, in an article by Vorris Nunley he explains how Rhimes' intention with the casting was to dismantle the assumptions that life revolves around "whiteness and maleness," which she ultimately did (Nunley 336). Shonda Rhimes manages to balance on a fine line between ignoring race completely and preventing it from playing too big of a role, where stereotypes could be created. In the creation and development of her characters she allows race to play a role in the lives of her characters, but not enough where it could distract from her ultimate goal – television where the characters are all equal in ability, quantity, and quality. In her newer shows *Scandal* and *How to Get Away With Murder*, not only are her casts more purposefully diverse, but also the diversity of the characters sometimes plays an important role in the plot.

In a season 4 episode of *Scandal* titled, "The Lawn Chair" we see the show go to a place that very few shows risk going with its attack on police brutality. In the

episode there is a cop that shoots an unarmed black man and attempts to cover it up by planting a knife at the crime scene. The shooting causes an outrage in the neighborhood and crowds gather around the body for days refusing to leave before justice is served. Olivia Pope is asked to come in, on behalf of the police, in order to fix the issue. Initially, she attempts to make the protestors look bad in order to help the police, but throughout the episode she realizes that the real criminal was the cop who shot the unarmed black man and all those helping him cover it up. By the end of the episode she confronts the cop, who turns out to be incredibly racist, disrespectful, and self-involved. It ends with justice being served as the cop, along with those who helped him hide the crime, are arrested and an investigation is opened into the police precinct. This episode brought a really important minority issue to primetime television and presented the issue with respect, urgency, and insight.

To conclude, Shonda Rhimes advances intersectional feminism through her representation of female beauty, the complexity of her female characters, and the attention brought to minority issues in her shows. Shonda Rhimes is the creator, writer, and executive producer of hit television series such as *Grey's Anatomy*, *Scandal*, and *How to Get Away with Murder*.

*Scandal* follows Olivia Pope, former presidential advisor and current political “fixer”, and her team of misfits as they attempt to fix political scandals in Washington D.C. *How to Get Away With Murder* follows Annalise Keating and her group of law students as they defend their clients, while simultaneously trying to cover up their own murders they have committed. Throughout her shows, she implements a wide range of diversity. In creating diverse shows, her intention is to represent the realities of our diverse society, which consists of complex humans who are flawed, yet beautiful. Intersectional feminism is a branch of feminism that recognizes that not all women face the same issues and oppression as heterosexual white women. It acknowledges that certain groups such as African American women, homosexual women, transwomen, and disabled women face struggles alongside the universal oppression that comes with being a woman (Vidal). The presentation of the issues of minority women in television is only at the beginning stages, and as Stephanie B. Goldberg quoted in her article, “the power must be behind the camera in order to make a difference” (Goldberg 41). In order for women to get proper representation in the media, women need to be able to gain positions of power within the industry. With new female-led shows like *Orange is*

*the New Black*, and Shondaland productions, we are only starting to see intersectional issues being addressed.

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# THE GLOBAL APPEAL OF *MULAN* IN THE FORMATION OF TRANSNATIONAL ASIAN IDENTITIES

Leanne Royo

The story of Mulan is fictional, mythical, and—it can be traced as far back as “The Ballad of Mulan” around 6 A.D. and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *The Woman Warrior* (1976). It remains a universal story that has in recent years attained a wider globalized status with the release of the Walt Disney adaptation of *Mulan* (dir. Tony Bancroft and Barry Cook, 1998). In order to explore the effects of Hollywood interpretations of Asian narratives, I will compare and contrast Disney’s animated *Mulan* and China’s live action *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* (dir. Jing Ma and Wei Dong, 2009) which was made in part as a response to the Disneyfied and Hollywood imperialistic view of China that Disney’s *Mulan* represents. I will analyze the cultural significance of *Mulan* and how *Rise of a Warrior* was made as a counter-narrative that sought to differentiate itself from Disney’s fairytale narrative.

By analyzing these two variations of the Mulan tale, I also want to acknowledge the importance of female-driven narratives that are not contrived from stereotypical princess stories, but also do not adhere to stereotypical Asian female tropes.” The Mulan character

is exceptional, as she stands apart from those stereotypes and conventions, yet is utilized differently by Disney and the Chinese production in order to promote differing political and cultural agendas. It therefore places the ideal of Mulan in a precarious position that is counterintuitive to the very ideals of an empowering, independent, woman of color, which I hope to address in order to properly define Mulan in terms of a transnational Asian identity.

The intent of Walt Disney’s *Mulan* stemmed largely from the studio’s desire to diversify and commodify their content.<sup>1</sup> At the time, the Disney Renaissance was in full swing with the animation studios intending to create films to reach a broader audience, including films such as *Aladdin* (dir. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992), *The Lion King* (dir. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff, 1994) and *Pocahontas* (dir. Mike Gabriel and Eric Goldberg, 1995), which were early attempts at diversification for the studio. With *Mulan*, the studio was able to “introduce the character to a significantly broader range of viewers through its wide circulation in the international film market [with] its promotion aimed

at the whole family,”<sup>22</sup> a clear indication that the studio was deliberately globalizing the appeal of Disney by presenting diverse characters. The studio sent animators on research trips to China in order to learn about Chinese art aesthetics and landscapes as well as to “show ‘respect’ to the cultural origin of the [film].”<sup>23</sup> They also drew heavily from the folklore of the Hua Mulan tale, which emphasizes “filial piety”<sup>24</sup> and obedience as well as notions of family honor and heroism.

Though Disney’s *Mulan* became fairly successful in Asia with decent reception in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the audience reception in Mainland China only grossed one-sixth of the anticipated box office income.<sup>5</sup> Much of the core audience received the Disney adaptation because of the widespread appeal of the Disney name, but also because it depicted a pro-feminist Asian woman, which was unprecedented for the commercial and family-friendly Disney studio. But while Disney’s *Mulan* fulfilled audience’s needs for diversity, many critics also condemned the film because of its whitewashed representation of Chinese culture. The change from the folktale moniker Hua Mulan to the easier pronunciation of Fa Mulan and the insertion of the alternate identity “Ping” was questionable to an audience that was familiar with the Hua Mulan tale.

This was just one of many infractions that the animators committed in their attempts to highlight cultural legitimacy. The over-use of the dragon motif (from the Mooshu/Mushu character down to the flag of the Han emperor) and the gratuitous addition of martial arts gave the film a reputation for “reflect[ing] the American concept of ‘Chinatown’”<sup>26</sup> rather than being a depiction that did justice to an authentic Chinese culture.

With the narrative being based heavily on the original Hua Mulan folklore, changes to the plot and ending caused criticism of Disney’s *Mulan*. For instance, the casting of Eddie Murphy as the anthropomorphic dragon sidekick was an appeal on Disney’s part for some celebrity pull for the film, which had cast mainly Asian-American actors who did not have much celebrity behind them for the sake of authenticity.<sup>7</sup> The changes in story, such as Mulan being more of a bungling warrior as opposed to a burgeoning military general and the emphasis on a love-interest with Captain Li Shang made for a mixed reception from Asian audiences who felt those changes were unnecessary and did not do justice to the origins of Mulan.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the depiction of the Huns as the enemy of the Chinese Han dynasty did not sit well with Asian audiences who were aware of the historical inaccuracies, which—though based

more on legend rather than fact—were seen as subconscious internalized racism on the animators parts. By creating the Huns versus the Hans dynamic, the animation differentiates them in body-type and skin tone and manufactures an interracial tension on screen and off.<sup>9</sup>

However, Disney's *Mulan* was not the first film adaptation to make major changes to the Mulan tale. China responded to the Disneyfied *Mulan* with the big-budget *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior* in order to depict a Mulan that was more authentic to China's own interpretation of the tale. It contained many similar aspects to Disney's version, which of course stems from the original "Ballad of Mulan," of which the entire legend is based, containing the same "daughter leaving home to fight in her father's place" narrative.<sup>10</sup> Despite their intentions to create a film that differs from its animated American counterpart, China's version emphasizes heroism, honor, and family—all ideals that are contained with the Disney narrative and the folklore. Yet in its attempt to set itself apart, the live-action adaptation also made errors that did not go unnoticed by the audience.

The filmmakers' stylistic choices, which included multiple uses of lens flares and strange transitions with white fading in/out, combined with the awkwardly slow pace did not make for the

exciting action-packed epic that China was hoping for.<sup>11</sup> The inclusion of a Caucasian Russian pop-star, Vitas, in the minor role of a Rouran servant, Wude, was a gratuitous choice, as he was cast mainly to cater to the large amounts of Chinese fans that he has (an example of the use of celebrity pull in *Mulan*, similar to Disney's use of Eddie Murphy). The film in fact starts off with the minor character, Wude, attempting to engage in martial arts, which was certainly appealing Vitas' Asian fan base and a clear "marketing decision."<sup>12</sup> This inclusion of an actor that is clearly not a realistic depiction of a Chinese man makes the Chinese critique of Disney's *Mulan*'s authenticity seem somewhat hypocritical.

With these differences and similarities between Disney's *Mulan* and live-action *Mulan: Rise of a Warrior*, it becomes clear that the universal appeal of the Mulan tale stems from the "Ballad" and "Woman Warrior" stories, and not so much from the ensuing globalization of the films themselves. In particular, it is the use of cross-dressing in relation to female agency that becomes the broad appeal of *Mulan*, in addition to the character being one of the only female role models in mainstream media for Asian women.<sup>13</sup> The emphasis on filial piety and family roles, while demeaning to some extent, is also appealing to



the cultural values of Asian audiences and lends itself to the success of the Disney film, which utilizes the father-daughter relationship trope and senseless acts of heroism to their advantage (both are tropes that are utilized throughout Disney's film history). For the most part, Mulan's personality contains many universal appeals, and she is given a "formulaic characterization" that makes her "marketable in the studio's globalized entertainment economy."<sup>14</sup>

With this context, the filmic representations of the Mulan character then become problematic to defining an identity for Mulan as a woman, and Mulan as a symbol of a nation. While she is clearly a heroic figure in folklore, *Rise of a Warrior's* attempts to depict that imagery becomes contradictory, as the Mulan characterization in that film is frequently tested for her emotional capacity as a warrior and as a woman. She manages to attain the status of a general mainly through her skills as a martial artist and brave fighter, but is constantly being juxtaposed with scenes that suggest that the loss of her comrades and brothers is an unwanted feminine trait. Additionally, the supposed loss of her love interest Wentai—who pretends to die in a melodramatic war sequence as a means of teaching Mulan to find her inner strength—perpetuates the idea of male reliance necessary for

character development, which is counterintuitive to the female agency that defines the Mulan character. A major difference between *Rise of a Warrior* and the Disney version is that in *Rise of a Warrior*, Mulan, upon returning home, gives up her romantic love interest, Prince Wentai, who we learn is engaged to the former enemy Rouran princess as a duty to her country. Her country needs the alliance more than Mulan needs Prince Wentai. While she is able to uphold her duty and honor for her country and becomes a national hero, her reward is to return to her role of filial piety and to once again sacrifice her personal happiness for that of her country.

The Disney adaptation, on the other hand, gives Mulan even less reason to leave home, as she is shown to know little about fighting or war in general. She is never promoted and spends only a short time on the battlefield, compared to the alleged 12 years that Hua Mulan spends as a general. Disney's Mulan also includes the use of Mulan's alternate ego "Ping" and is one of the few adaptations that depicts the reveal of Mulan's true gender prior to the heroic saving of China, which some viewed as a means to further dramatize the plot and also play into Mulan's search for an identity.<sup>15</sup> After learning of the Huns revival, Mulan takes the initiative to save China not as Ping, the son of the

hero Fa Zhou, but as a Chinese citizen and as a woman, though still enlisting the help of her comrades along the way. The film also concludes with a somewhat gratuitous romantic interest between Mulan and Captain Shang—it is in the service of giving the story the classic Disney fairytale happy ending and glosses over the fact that Mulan has returned to a life of filial piety and a possible future as a housewife.

How these tropes and narrative create a global appeal is due, as I mention before, to the universal themes of the Mulan legend. She is clever, beautiful, and yet manages to become a courageous warrior that overcomes adversity for her family but also her country, and the ways in which these different adaptations utilize that universal story is a key to understanding how transnational Asian identities are formed. Even as a response to the Americanized, Disneyfied, idealized view of the Mulan character, the Chinese adaptation is informed by that characterization despite its misgivings and is just another example of how the Mulan folktale retains its longevity and still transforms today.

## Endnotes

1. Lan Dong, "Of Animation and Mulan's International Fame."
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ivy Haoyin Hsieh and Marylou M. Matoush, "Filial Daughter, Woman Warrior, or Identity- Seeking Fairytale Princess: Fostering Critical Awareness Through Mulan."
5. Lan Dong 170.
6. Lan Dong 169.
7. Sheng-mei Ma 151.
8. Ibid.
9. Lan Dong 162.
10. Derek Elley, "Film Review: 'Mulan,'" *Variety*.
11. Ibid.
12. For more on Vitas, see Ling Woo Liu, *China vs Disney* <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1944598,00.html>.
13. Jinhua Li *Mulan* (1998) and *Hua Mulan* (2009): National Myth and Trans-Cultural Intertextuality," *Heroism and Gender in War Film*.
14. Ibid.
15. Lan Dong 180.

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# THE MEANING OF MEXICAN: LUPE VÉLEZ AND MEXICAN REPRESENTATION IN THE 1930s

Mason Foster

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Notorious for her persona as the “Mexican Spitfire” and her dramatic death, Lupe Vélez has been studied and analyzed in several of the most circulated books of Hollywood’s darkest secrets. Vélez has been the sensationalized and widely contested subject of Andy Warhol’s film *Lupe* (1965), Michelle Vogel’s biography *Lupe Vélez: The Life and Career of Hollywood’s “Mexican Spitfire,”* and Kenneth Anger’s *Hollywood Babylon* due to her infamous suicide. Yet, the obsession with Vélez’s highly cinematic death has overshadowed greater research of the impact of her life. Beginning her career in 1927 in the short *Sailor’s Beware* (Fred Guiol and Hal Roach) and ending it in 1944 with the Mexican production *Naná* (Roberto Gavaldon), Vélez lived through the various phases of the Great Depression as what Sturtevant calls a “nationally specific” representation of Mexico and Mexicans.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Vélez’s significance as a representation of Mexicans in the U.S. raises questions about the commentaries being made about the Mexican community through her. By analyzing her roles and discussions about her in fan magazines, it’s clear that Lupe

Vélez’s celebrity persona changed from the period before the Great Depression to the period of Repatriation during the 1920’s and then again during the post Great Depression years. Remarkably, it is also evident that discussions about average Mexican Americans changed as discussions about her shifted.

Prior to the Great Depression, Vélez was an up and coming star acting alongside major names like Douglas Fairbanks in *The Gaucho* (F. Richard Jones, 1927) and Gary Cooper in *Wolf Song* (Victor Fleming, 1929) yet, her public persona was not comparable to theirs. While these men were characterized as heroic cowboys and champions of the Western world, Vélez was constantly distinguished as a child.<sup>2</sup> In a 1929 issue of *The New Movie Magazine*, the biography of Lupe Vélez described her as a “poor little child” not only at the beginning of her life, but also as a 21 year old woman.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, in a 1928 issue of *Screenland*, Vélez was identified as “an amusing child,” and in Helen Ludlam’s “Whoopie Hollywood?” from the same issue, the tour Vélez gives of her house is compared to “a child showing of her dolls.”<sup>4</sup>

This childish representation of Vélez in gossip magazines was also furthered by implying immaturity, playfulness, and lack of manners, for example, in a 1930 issue of *Motion Picture Classic* Vélez is said to be too irresponsible to save her money. According to “Last Minute News,” Vélez “can’t help spending generously.”<sup>5</sup> In “Grace Kingsley’s Gossip,” a column of *Screenland* magazine, Vélez’s entertaining of many men is considered a “usual” occurrence, stressing her playful sexuality.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, when Grace Kingsley addresses Lupe as an “amusing child,” she explains that her childishness derives from her “frankness” when discussing men, drawing attention to Vélez’s unconventional manners.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it’s clear that across these three different film and star gossip magazines, a major aspect of Vélez’s early celebrity persona was her alleged childish behavior.

Because the Great Depression lasted longer than the US was prepared for, it is evident that there was a regression of the characterization of Mexican migrants and Mexican Americans throughout the Great Depression as mass deportation and repatriation became the assumed solution to Anglo American unemployment. Prior to the Great Depression, Mexican Americans and migrants had been received into urban American communities like Los Angeles

and Chicago as “handsome young Mexicans” who had “won a degree of welcome.”<sup>8</sup> However, after the stock market crash of 1929, Mexicans were seen as a threat to the U.S. workforce, particularly those who were willing to go on strike for equal payment as their white coworkers. In Francisco Balderama’s *Decade of Betrayal: Mexican Repatriation in the 1930’s*, he states that approximately “1 million Mexican Americans and Mexican nationals” were forced to leave their homes and move south of the border as a result of a “formal deportation campaign [of] the federal government,” “efforts by major industries,” “as well as efforts on the local and state level.”<sup>9</sup>

Like Vélez, these men and women were also subjected to belittling depictions as they were often compared to kids. East Texas Congressman John C. Box who notoriously tried to expand the restrictions on immigration with his “Box Bill” allegedly called Mexican farmers

“A class of people who have not the ability to rise, who have not the initiative, who are children, who do not want to own land, who can be directed by men in the upper stratum of society.”<sup>10</sup>

Mexican migrants or Mexican-Americans could also be compared to children through implicit rhetoric rather than explicitly labeling them as childlike. For example, major newspapers

consistently used the term “peon” to address Mexicans.<sup>11</sup> To be a peon meant to be an unskilled laborer, seen as “profitable because he is ignorant” allowing for Mexican laborers to be viewed as a “controllable workforce.”<sup>12</sup> Although, these accounts of Anglo-American centric newspapers do not directly liken Mexican Americans to kids, they do reveal the creation of a new terminology with infantilizing traits such as ignorance and obedience. Thus, Vélez’s representation as an “amusing child” can be read as only one small piece of a larger trend in media of the 1930s.

Simultaneously, Mexican stars also found themselves to be unwanted in the United States as a perceived burden. In *Independent Stardom, Freelance Women in the Hollywood Studio System*, Emily Carman notes that even highly promoted stars like Dolores Del Rio found that “leading Hollywood roles dried up” for those with an ethnic presence.<sup>13</sup> Consequently Dolores Del Rio sought out work in Mexico as did several other Mexican actors and actresses. Like Del Rio, Lupe Vélez went back to Mexico to find work due to a period from 1932 to 1937 in which she struggled to find roles even after she had already worked with Cecil B. DeMille and Jimmy Durante.<sup>14</sup> Unlike Del Rio, however, Vélez was unsuccessful in Mexican cinema. In her essay, “Spitfire: Lupe Vélez and the

Ambivalent Pleasures of Ethnic Masquerade,” Sturtevant details this lay period of Lupe’s acting as a “regression of her career,” marking it as the cause of her status as a B-level actress after the 1930s.<sup>15</sup> Unable to negotiate deals with studios in Hollywood due to her ethnicity, Velez was also pushed out of the U.S. during the 1930s. Along with several other women she was subjected to “perpetual typecasting” and during the 1940s devolved from a dramatic actress to the “Mexican Spitfire” stereotype.<sup>16</sup> By 1937, the “Mexican Spitfire” emerged as the embodiment of the childish persona which had been used to describe Vélez by gossip magazines. Rather than playing characters that take initiative like Anita in *Hell Harbor* (Henry King, 1930) or that are loyal like Naturich in *The Squaw Man* (Cecil B. DeMille, 1914), after the repatriation period Lupe Vélez found herself stuck in the persona of the dim-witted and ill-tempered Carmelita. Sturtevant compares Vélez’s behavior in the string of *Mexican Spitfire* films to that of a kid throwing temper tantrums, being irrational, and sometimes violent.<sup>17</sup> Examples of this can be seen particularly in the first of the set of [RKO Pictures] films like *The Girl From Mexico* (Leslie Goodwins, 1939) in which Carmelita spits her tongue out at non-Mexican bikers, pushes people into fountains, and throws herself into the boxing ring

when she's called names.

Additionally, Sturtevant notes that Carmelita, unlike the earlier dramatic characters of Vélez's career, was an "intruder" of white American life.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Anita in *Cuban Love Song* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1931) had been the object of desire of an American marine, Carmelita and the other comedic characters Vélez played were the riotous girl that Dennis had to take responsibility of. The roles given to her depicted a "volatile" woman which contributed to her off screen persona as "fiery-tempered."<sup>19</sup> Remarkably at the same time that Vélez's childish persona became more violent the idea of the peon underwent a shift in meaning. Prior to the Great Depression, the peon could be considered "docile" and controllable which made them the "ideal immigrant."<sup>20</sup> According to a 1926 issue of *The Independent*, "docility and good nature... make the Mexican laborer popular with his American boss."<sup>21</sup> By the 1930s however, the peon had become threatening. "Peon" was used more frequently in criminal stories that told of loosely proven Mexican laborers "crouching and creeping" on white women than in stories of ideal laborers.<sup>22</sup> Suddenly, Mexicans became known as "a real social problem."<sup>23</sup> By 1934, President Herbert Hoover's Republican Party Platform considered Mexicans immigrants to be such a threat that he proposed

"Rigid examination of applicants in foreign countries" to prevent Mexican migrants from coming to the United States.<sup>24</sup> Through this politically vague rhetoric, Mexican migrants were referred to as "criminals and other undesirable classes."<sup>25</sup> From this shift, it is apparent that under the rhetorical umbrella of "the childish Mexican" there was "the docile peon" and later "the criminal," which coincided with Vélez's shift from dramas to B-level comedies.

Sadly, even in death Lupe continued to be described as childish. According to Kenneth Anger's *Hollywood Babylon*, Vélez's maid claimed that Lupe looked "like a child taking nappy...like a good little girl" on the day of her burial.<sup>26</sup> In 1952, *Modern Screen* looked back on Velez as the "fiery, laughing little Mexican girl...who never found happiness in Hollywood."<sup>27</sup> Still, although she never seemed to shed this derogatory trait she shared with the peon, nostalgia allowed her public persona to revert back to the more docile and tolerable Mexican child. As early as January of 1945, just a month after her death, *Modern Screen* looked back on her life in a tribute issue of their magazine. In this issue, she was addressed as "Dear Lupe" instead of "the fiery Latina."<sup>28</sup> This sudden love for Lupe may be the one way she did not represent the Mexican population in the U.S. Unlike Lupe, people of

Mexican descent in the U.S. continued to face ethnic mistreatment and misrepresentation through World War II and up to today.

From these findings, it's apparent that not only was Lupe Vélez belittled throughout her career, but analysis of Mexican representation reveals that Vélez's case was indicative of greater issues of racial stereotyping in American media. Nevertheless, there are other demographics that should also be taken into consideration. Although Vélez has been seen as "a more specific ethnic representation," to exclude Dolores Del Rio, a more high-brow film star from a study of Mexican representation in the United States excludes a massive part of this idealized Mexican identity. Additionally, although Vélez was labeled as a little girl regularly throughout her career, she's not the only film star who was addressed this way. Nevertheless, it's Vélez who seemed to be unable to escape this childish ideal as it reached beyond gossip columns and manifested into the "Mexican Spitfire" stereotype, instilling the belief that to be childish, to be violent, to be ignorant, is what it means to be Mexican.

## Endnotes

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# AUTEUR THEORY IN RELATION TO BLACK WOMEN FILMMAKERS

Cassidy Pyle

The auteur theory of film is an analytical framework that is utilized by many film scholars and students alike. Established in a 1954 *Cahiers du Cinéma* article by François Truffaut, the theory first existed as a counterpoint to the mainstream, conservative view of film at that time in Europe. The major feature of the theory was the recognition of the auteur, defined as a director or other creative intelligence with a recognizable and distinctive style. The implications of this theory were evident in the Hollywood system of filmmaking and film analysis by the early 1960s, as Andrew Sarris, a prominent film critic, brought the theory as well as the word “auteur” into the lexicon of American filmmakers, critics, and scholars. Directors who infused their own stylistic conventions into the Hollywood system became increasingly praised. Even without a complete understanding of the nuances of auteur theory, audiences can easily see the effects of auteur theory on Hollywood cinema. The names of prominent directors -- Hitchcock, Tarantino, Welles, Hawks, Ford, Chaplin, etc. -- are etched in our collective memory as well as our cultural canon. The popularization and romanticization of the director as auteur has given rise to a number

of criticisms, primarily from feminist scholars and scholars of color.

Many critics of the auteur theory have cited the very list of directors popularized by Andrew Sarris' *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968* as well as popular contemporary directors like Tarantino and Scorsese, pointing out a very important demographic trait: most, if not all, of these directors are men, and white men at that. While the theoretical framework of the “politiques des auteurs” is not directly to blame for the prevalence of white male directors and the virtual absence of women and women of color directors in the mainstream, the popularization and romanticization of auteur theory does put the white male director in a privileged position. White males found themselves statistically more likely to be put in a position of high authority on a film set due to the rampant and overt racism and sexism of the time.

However, the obsession with auteurs elevated the status of many of these white male directors from filmmakers to icons, making them appear larger and more prominent in the rearview mirror of film history. White male directors often infused stylistic elements for which they became known, such

as Godard's jump cuts, although it is debatable whether these directors had purposely made these choices or whether it was one of pure pragmatism. In the case of Godard's jump cuts, it has been said that he was simply trying to make the film shorter. Still, film scholars analyze the effects of these jump cuts and *Breathless* continues to be one of the most famous films of all time. Despite not having an artistic or cinematic reasoning behind his techniques, students cannot open a film textbook without seeing Godard. The same could not be said for directors who were women, especially women of color, who are often absent in film textbooks or are included as a footnote. The stylistic choices of women of color filmmakers were often made out of pragmatism, as they worked with few resources. However, many of their stylistic choices were also deliberate reflections of the unique experiences that they faced as a result of their multiple marginalized identities. Bell hooks articulates this disparity between male and female directors as well as black and white directors, writing, "embedded in the body of ideas that ensure that some folks will be interrogated about their choices and not others is the both racist and sexist assumption that integrity of artistic vision matters more to the filmmaker who is white and male than to those who are nonwhite and/or

female" (hooks 86). Another major criticism of auteur theory that goes hand in hand with hooks' argument is that the romanticization of the auteur downplays the collaborative film-making process, forming a (western, patriarchal) hierarchy that posits the director at the top of such a hierarchy and ignores figures like the screenwriter, producer, distributor, exhibitionist, production assistants, makeup artists, and costume/set designers that contribute the mise-en-scene and other elements that allow the director to get across his "artistic vision" in the first place.

Black women filmmakers, as a result of racism and sexism as well as the focus on auteurs, were rendered virtually invisible. A question that exists in the mind of many feminist film scholars and film scholars of color is this: can black women filmmakers be auteurs? In essence, the answer would be yes. Black women can and have historically used unique stylistic elements in their work. However, the word "auteur" is a loaded one. In fact, I would argue that auteur has two meanings. One is the historical meaning widely used in film scholar circles, derived from *Cahiers du Cinema* and used by critics like Andre Bazin, Andrew Sarris, David Bordwell, and Roger Ebert, among others, to determine which filmmakers were worthy of such a title. These are the auteurs that film students and

scholars see in textbooks: Godard, Ford, Chaplin, etc. It is important to recognize that they may have also had genuine artistic and personal visions for their films, but they also were the auteurs who received the bulk of the limelight and recognition for their work. This essay seeks not to strip white male auteurs of their artistry, but rather to point to the disparities between treatment of white male filmmakers and women of color filmmakers, using auteur theory as an analytical framework. The other is the genuine, non-pretentious, and non-exclusionary meaning of the word. It is someone who exhibits stylistic vision that largely stems from introspective thought and a life of deep sensory experience that manifests itself into thoughtful, purposeful work. These auteurs may be rewarded with recognition as well – it is crucial to note that the two are not mutually exclusive. However, women of color filmmakers and auteurs tend to get far less recognition than their white male counterparts. With this knowledge, it is important to recognize black women who are auteurs in both senses of the word. This includes auteurs who have been heralded by the mainstream film community, such as Ava Duvernay and Julie Dash, and auteurs who invoke the title through their work irrespective of its recognition by a mainstream film community, such as

Jacqueline Shearer.

One black woman filmmaker who has been given the title of “auteur” by the mainstream film community is Julie Dash, director of *Daughters of the Dust* (1991). This monumental film was the first full-length feature film directed by a Black woman. Being the “first” definitely helped posit Dash as an auteur, according to a largely white and male film community that lacked the knowledge and familiarity of a long legacy of films by black women. This word, auteur, refers to more than a title or an acceptance by white male film buffs and scholars when it is used to describe Julie Dash. Dash can also be seen as an auteur in the genuine, non-pretentious, non-exclusionary sense of the word. She was an important member of the “L.A. Rebellion”, a group of black UCLA filmmakers in the 1970s and 1980s who rejected Eurocentric models of filmmaking and not only sought out, but produced previously hidden stories of black people. Her distinct vision and purpose for filmmaking allowed her to produce a distinct and authoritative style of filmmaking.

Other black women filmmakers are not traditionally branded with the title “auteur” but can be thought of as auteurs in the purest sense due to the authentic and unique stylistic elements in their films. One such woman is Jacqueline Shearer, who worked on

“A Minor Altercation” (1978) as well as a part of the “Eyes on the Prize” series entitled “Keys to the Kingdom” (1990) and a historical war documentary called “Massachusetts 54th Colored Infantry” (1991). Although her films are incredibly influential, she is not posited as an “auteur” by the mainstream community of film scholars. In the purest sense of the word, Jacqueline Shearer is an auteur in her ability to craft outstanding politically charged films with authentic stylistic markers that parted from the norms of documentary filmmaking at the time. For instance, during her work on “Eyes on the Prize” as well as “Massachusetts 54th Colored Infantry”, she was most known for her inclusion of period music. Shearer’s inclusion of music that was popular during the time period not only added texture and intensity to the films, but also showed authenticity and a commitment to historical accuracies. She became known for these soundtracks, remarking that she had “gotten a lot of favorable comments on the soundtrack in *The Massachusetts 54th*” and that “it wasn’t just historically accurate, it was fun to play around with too” (Shearer 389). Music was an especially significant stylistic marker for Shearer, as she noted “how critical music and song have been throughout the course of African American

history” (Shearer 389). Another illustration of her commitment to authenticity is her refusal to rely on dramatic re-enactments by Hollywood A-listers for her war documentary, instead using the few existing sketches and paintings from the period to make up for the fact that there were no photos of the period. This lack of resources provided Shearer with “an obstacle that only strengthened [her] resolve to picture it” (Shearer 122). Her stylistic techniques were a purposeful manipulation of existing resources, something she compares to quilting, an act primarily done by women of color in order to create practical art out of scattered resources. Her incredible manipulation of the score of her films points to her legacy as an impactful black woman filmmaker with a profound awareness of her history, vision, and purpose.

Black women have constantly embedded innovative filmmaking techniques, stemming both from a mastery of the medium of film as well as a lack of resources. Despite their demonstrations of skill and style, these filmmakers have been routinely excluded from public consciousness. To exist as an auteur under an exclusive, sexist, and racist framework should not be the goal. Rather, filmmakers should follow in the footsteps of those like Jacqueline Shearer who seek to transform norms of filmmaking in order to politicize

elements of daily life that are not frequently brought into the public sphere or into public discourse. True auteurs make purposeful and personal stylistic choices. These choices are not made in a vacuum, but rather stem from a purposeful use of existing resources in a way that breaks with tradition. Based on this understanding of the auteur, black women filmmakers like Julie Dash and Jacqueline Shearer can and should be prominent faces of auteur theory along with white male filmmakers like Alfred Hitchcock and John Ford who currently and overwhelmingly represent it.

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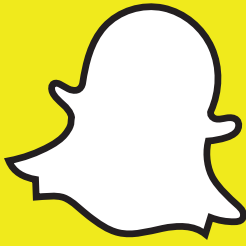
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VOICE OF  
THE DIGITAL  
EVOLUTION



# EXPLORING ABUSIVE SHIPPING IN THE *JESSICA JONES* FANDOM

Elizabeth Orson

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Marvel's *Jessica Jones*, a Netflix Original Series, has received noteworthy critical and popular praise since it first aired on Netflix on November 20th, 2015.<sup>1</sup> In its first season the show has tackled issues including sexism, rape, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among others. It has done this through employing a strong female protagonist who breaks with gendered stereotypes of femininity – a nuanced, three-dimensional character, her vulnerability and strength come across in equal measure. The series' focus on complex social issues and its evocative protagonist has gathered it a rather large and vocal group of fans that often work to interpret the show's themes in a variety of ways. Some of these fans are self-identified "shippers" who "ship" a variety of characters on the show; this practice of "shipping," which had existed long before the creation of *Jessica Jones*, occurs when fans support the romantic coupling of two or more characters in a fictional narrative. One popular ship is that of the abusive relationship between the series protagonist, Jessica, and the series antagonist, Kilgrave. Fans commonly refer to this ship as Jessica/Kilgrave, Kiljones, or Jessigrave, and are

a vocal presence on websites such as Tumblr and YouTube. In the series, Jessica is an ex-superhero private investigator who has super strength. It is shown that she has lived a life filled with trauma and tragedy, and the show makes it clear that she suffers from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of her being abused by Kilgrave. Kevin Thompson, who goes by the more sinister moniker of Kilgrave, is depicted as an abusive, power-hungry man who has the ability to control other people's thoughts and actions. It is through this use of his powers that Kilgrave abuses, rapes, and traumatizes Jessica and the other characters that appear throughout the show. Thus, in order to better understand why certain fans are shipping a strong female character like Jessica with her abuser, I will engage with and analyze fan videos and commentary posted on Tumblr and YouTube by Jessica/Kilgrave shippers. In particular, I will look at the way fans (and their anti-shipper counterparts) negotiate and reinterpret Kilgrave's character in relation to themes of obsession and power on the show in order to justify their shipping habits.

Though "fandom" has existed

since the 1960s (and debatably before) with the creation of the groundbreaking science-fiction television series, *Star Trek*, the digital era has transformed the way fans relate with literary, filmic, and televisual texts.<sup>2</sup> “Fandom,” which can be used “generally to define all fan communities and fan activity as one enormous, nebulous collective”<sup>3</sup> or to refer to a single “collective entity, a community of people, or fans, that actively, and often creatively, engage with a particular...text,”<sup>4</sup> has developed and expanded with the growth of digital media. For the purposes of this paper, fandom will refer to a specific community of fans who engage with the television series *Jessica Jones* through the use of digital media platforms. Within the *Jessica Jones* fandom, there are many people who self-identify as “shippers.” The term “shipper” refers to “fans who are much more interested in the triumphs and tribulations of romantic relationships than in other aspects of the dramatic text.”<sup>5</sup> Shippers often choose two (or more) characters from within a media text that they believe have romantic potential and “ship” them, even if the relationship between those characters is not considered “canon” on the show. “Canon” refers to the official material provided by a media text about that text’s diegetic world and the characters that inhabit it.<sup>6</sup> “Fanon” is fans’

self-manufactured canon of fan-texts that exist outside the approved canon of the actual text, though the fanon draws from the canon to create these fan-texts.

These fan-texts are numerous and often vary in media format. Videos are one of the most common media formats for fan-texts on the Internet, as is exemplified by the proliferation of “fanvids” that can be viewed online. “Fanvids” are often “montages of visual material culled from mass media source texts and set to music”<sup>7</sup> and have become increasingly popular in recent years; this growth is in large part due to the digital age and the increased accessibility fans have to editing software and digital platforms on which they can distribute their work. YouTube is the largest platform for fanvids, though fans also share them on blogging sites such as Tumblr. Tumblr is a popular blogging website where fans can create their own blog through which they can write posts, follow bloggers with similar interests, and “reblog” or share posts written by others. On Tumblr fans from different fandoms and from within the same fandom can interact with one another and create communities where they can critique the media they consume, share spoilers, and discuss their shipping habits.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, each of these media platforms allow for fans who disagree with each other to come into

contact and argue about whose interpretation of the show is correct and whose interpretation is divergent. Fans that are shippers are particularly susceptible to disagreements online because they are often in direct conflict with fans that do not ship the same relationship; these fans are often referred to as “anti-shippers,” particularly if they voice their anti-shipper sentiments on shippers’ posts and fan-texts.<sup>9</sup>

Though anti-shippers and shippers come into contact on various websites, Tumblr is the most common platform for heated discussion and exchange between the two groups – particularly with regards to negotiating and interpreting Kilgrave’s character and actions. In a post written by the shipper jessigrave but reblogged by the user kat123, the issue of Kilgrave’s problematic childhood and backstory comes into play. The post states:

“I felt sorry for kilgrave because he had his power forced upon him after horrible child abuse...I felt sorry for kilgrave because there was no one to tell him how to use his powers for good as a child / I felt sorry for kilgrave because he fell in love with a woman and showed that love the only way he knew how to / I felt sorry for kilgrave because life was completely against him from the moment he was born and unfortunately

he had to suffer for it.”<sup>10</sup>

The author makes it clear that their opinion regarding Kilgrave changed upon learning about his backstory in the series’ eighth episode “AKA WWJD?” in which Kilgrave reveals to Jessica the abusive nature of his childhood and how he acquired his powers via his parent’s experimentations on him. Though the series goes on to illustrate that his version of his backstory is less than reliable, and that he is truly an irredeemable villain, the author of this post chooses to empathize with Kilgrave. In “Rooting for the Bad Guy” the authors argue that as we learn about others and their life circumstances, our perception of them changes.<sup>11</sup> In the case of jessigrave, kat123, and the forty-one other people that reblogged jessigrave’s post, learning more about Kilgrave’s backstory enabled them to empathize with him despite knowing that he is a villainous character who repeatedly (and mercilessly) murders and controls other characters. Knowing that his abusive, evil character is at least in part a result of his horrific childhood makes it easier for fans to create fan-texts in which his character takes part in a redemptive arc and ultimately unites with Jessica in a romantic relationship. According to Maddy Myers, fans often participate in “woobification,” where abusive characters (like Kilgrave) are redeemed and rewritten “as

sympathetic, misunderstood figures.”<sup>12</sup> This process of woobification is inspired by the common trope of redemption arcs for abusive characters. In this trope, an awful, irredeemable villain meets a “good girl” who redeems him and, by the end of the story, the villain changes his ways and becomes good for her. This arc is mirrored in *Jessica Jones*, but, instead of being redeemed, Kilgrave is killed by Jessica because she understands him to be an irredeemably evil human being.<sup>13</sup> Myers goes on to argue that because fans have seen this redemption trope so often it is difficult for them to understand the break in this pattern that occurs in *Jessica Jones* in which the abusive male character is punished for his actions.<sup>14</sup> Fans’ shipping of Jessica and Kilgrave within the *Jessica Jones* fandom may thus be seen as a result of both an empathy for Kilgrave because of his abusive childhood and a misguided desire for redemption for the abusive male villain.

While some shippers, such as jessgrave and kat123, believe in redeeming Kilgrave, others accept him as the villain that he is. In a blog post between shakespearememe, an anti-shipper, and yourshipisfine, a shipper, the two discuss Kilgrave’s abusive behavior and his inability to be redeemed. In the post, shakespearememe writes, “obviously there is sexual tension” between Jessica and

Kilgrave but “why would you ship someone with their abuser and their rapist I mean come on do people not see that he is an unredeemable [sic] abuser ????” and that shipping him w[ith] Jessica is defending her abuse ????”<sup>15</sup> In response, yourshipisfine writes, “because some people are really into fucked up relationships and dynamics like that.”<sup>16</sup> In this interaction, the shipper makes it clear that part of the appeal of shipping Jessica and Kilgrave is particularly because of the fact that Kilgrave is Jessica’s abuser. This abusive dynamic fascinates many of these shippers, and most of them acknowledge this in their posts or descriptions of their fan-texts. Yourshipisfine articulates the position many Jessica/Kilgrave shipper take when arguing with anti-shippers over the problematic nature of shipping Jessica and Kilgrave together: “yeah, we know it’s fucked up and wrong, that’s one of the main reasons why we ship it”<sup>17</sup> when arguing with anti-shippers over the problematic nature of shipping Jessica and Kilgrave together. In acknowledging that the abuse between Jessica and Kilgrave is what interests them, these shippers recognize that their interpretation of the relationship between Jessica and Kilgrave is going against the one supported by both the anti-shippers and the canonical text. These shippers resist the dominant discourse from other

fans that says that people should not ship Jessica and Kilgrave and continue shipping them as a form of “psychological reactance,”<sup>18</sup> in which fans react against the seeming limitation of their freedom and choices by others. Psychological reactance allows for the shippers to “find the bad guy more desirable”<sup>19</sup> which in turn enables them to find the relationship between Jessica and Kilgrave to be desirable and fascinating as opposed to problematic and disturbing. For this reason, one could also argue that fans that ship Jessica and Kilgrave together do so in part as a way of reacting against dominant discourse from society that depicts relationships like Jessica and Kilgrave’s as troubling and problematic in nature.

This back-and-forth between shippers and anti-shippers can also be seen on YouTube, especially in the descriptions and comments sections of the fan videos created to explore the Jessica/Kilgrave relationship. These videos are particularly important as they often reveal the shipper/anti-shipper binary to be more fluid than it appears at first glance. Many fanvids posted display negotiated viewings of Kilgrave’s character, particularly with regards to his obsession with Jessica. In the show, Kilgrave tells Jessica that everything he has done to her has been because he loves her. To many fans though, Kilgrave’s love for

Jessica can also be perceived as obsession. In the fanvid, “Kilgrave + Jessica | Every breath you take” by xMyOwnRainbowx,<sup>20</sup> the editor addresses the love/obsession dynamic in both the video and in her description. In the video, Kilgrave’s obsessive behavior is made evident by the combination of the edited clips and music. The song “Every Breath You Take,” a song about stalking, plays in the background as compiled clips of Jessica and Kilgrave play out. The fanvid includes a twenty-three second segment of show in which Kilgrave tells Jessica, “I was trying to show you what I see. That I’m the only one who matches you, who challenges you, who’d do anything for you. I love you,” to which Jessica responds, “you deranged prick, you’ve never loved anyone in your repulsive life.”<sup>21</sup> The creator juxtaposes this conversation with a clip of Jessica and Kilgrave kissing while she was under his mind control. The video then cuts to a clip showing the moment when they met where Kilgrave stares at Jessica with a mix of shock and wonder, then the moment in which Kilgrave says he loves her and Jessica retorts. The editor then cuts to shots of Jessica and Kilgrave seeing each other in person for the first time after he originally used mind control on her; this image is overlaid by a line of text quoting Jessica saying “you’ve never loved anyone in



your repulsive life.”<sup>22</sup> As the voiceover of their interaction fades out, the video then cuts to a clip of an overwhelmed Jessica seeing photos of herself pasted all over the walls of Kilgrave’s apartment which then shifts to a shot of Kilgrave staring longingly at a photo of Jessica on his phone. Despite being such a short segment this piece of the video does a wonderful job emphasizing Kilgrave’s obsession with Jessica through juxtaposing his confession of love with images of his controlling behavior towards her.

At the same time, xMyOwnRainbowx negotiates her readings of obsession and love in the show in her video description where states that she does not ship Jessica and Kilgrave romantically, but that she loves “their dynamics.” She states, “I enjoy seeing them both in one scene, I love how dark and twisted their relationship is and yes, I have to admit, I feel a lot of chemistry between them...”<sup>23</sup> Upon reading the description, it becomes apparent that this fan is diverging from the shipper/anti-shipper binary. According to xMyOwnRainbowx, she is occupying a space between shipping and anti-shipping where she is able to be interested in the dynamics of the characters while understanding their relationship to be problematic. Drawing on Judith Mayne’s article “Paradoxes of Spectatorship,” xMyOwnRainbowx is producing a “negotiated

reading” of the text, in which she situates herself in a more “ambivalent” ideological position than that of the shippers and anti-shippers.<sup>24</sup> She goes on to write that she empathizes with Kilgrave despite him being a villain and believes that “he really loves Jessica but he just doesn’t get what love really is. [H]e maybe really believed that she was with him from her own will and then when he realised she doesn’t love him, he was just so desperate to get her back that he would do anything to get his dream came true.”<sup>25</sup> In this section of her description xMyOwnRainbowx negotiates her position regarding Kilgrave’s love for Jessica – her video leans towards portraying it as obsession, but this part of her description shows her tackling with the possibility that Kilgrave may have loved Jessica in his own twisted way. This fluctuating stance regarding Kilgrave’s obsession/love with Jessica is a byproduct of xMyOwnRainbowx’s negotiated reading of the text and can itself be problematic – particularly because the video has been fairly widely received with over 10,000 views. As Mayne argues in her article, just because a spectator is engaging with a text and attempting to interpret its meaning does not mean that the spectator’s interpretations will be “contestatory.”<sup>26</sup> By arguing that Kilgrave’s love for Jessica may be genuine love as opposed

to obsession, xMyOwnRainbowx is enabling harmful discourse whereby obsession and love get confused and obsessive, abusive behavior becomes normalized.

This obsession/love paradigm ties in with Kilgrave's desire for power and control, as can be clearly seen in the fanvid, "jessica jones & kilgrave || we'll shine together" by vconersev.<sup>27</sup> Through the clips she edits together, the creator makes it clear that Kilgrave's need to control Jessica, particularly after he has lost his ability to control her with his mind, results in his obsession with her. The video begins with a shot of a silhouetted Jessica standing in front of Kilgrave with a title saying "Jessica & Kilgrave – Umbrella." A slow, haunting version of the song "Umbrella" plays in the background. Kilgrave's voiceover simultaneously plays over the images, and in it he says that Jessica is "the first thing, excuse me, person, that I ever wanted that walked away from me."<sup>28</sup> This segment makes it clear that part of what makes Jessica alluring to Kilgrave is the fact that she was able to break free of his control and that he hopes to regain that control over her. In the article "What *Jessica Jones* Teaches Us About Abuse and Trauma," the author argues that "abusers are motivated by a need for power and control over others, and that is exactly what motivates Kilgrave. He garners great pleasure from

making people do what he wants, and he is most pleased when he can control Jessica."<sup>29</sup> This desire that Kilgrave has to exert control over Jessica is thus a vital part of how the fanvid portrays him as her abuser.

This abusive controlling power dynamic that exists between Jessica and Kilgrave tends to fascinate shippers, as is evidenced by the almost 15,000 views that vconersev's video has received and by earlier instances in which fans have written about their interest in the dynamic on the show (sometimes resulting in a denial of its problematic nature). In the description for her fanvid vconersev writes that she herself is a "low-key" shipper and that "Jessica and Kilgrave have weird chemistry. But it doesn't mean that I support what he does to her or that the rape was okay."<sup>30</sup> In this description vconersev points out the fact that the chemistry that exists between the two characters (and that she explores vis-à-vis her video) is both fascinating and troubling. As can be seen in the description, this power dynamic and chemistry is problematic and controversial because it is strongly tied to the rape and abuse that Jessica experienced while under Kilgrave's control. Philip Rumney and Rachel Fenton argue that if a rape victim has "temporarily lost her capacity to choose, she is not consenting."<sup>31</sup> This definition of

consent is important because it relates directly to Jessica's rape; when she and Kilgrave were together, Jessica had lost her ability to choose because he controlled her mind. This loss of control made it impossible for her to consent when they had sex, which thus makes it rape. The clips in which Jessica experiences moments of PTSD used in *vconersev's* fanvid are particularly enlightening because they show the traumatic effects of rape on Jessica by making it evident that Kilgrave still retains some semblance of mental power over her even after she has physically escaped him. In her article "What Rape Apologists Need to Learn From Jessica Jones," Natalie Zutter writes that "as in most rape narratives, it's not about the sex, it's about the power. It's about the knowledge that you've been violated, that the person who has taken control leaves a part of himself inside you."<sup>32</sup> This is crucial to understanding Jessica and her PTSD because, despite his inability to control her again, Jessica lives with the trauma of having her agency taken away by Kilgrave. Her fear of being unable to control her own actions and thoughts is directly related to the rape she experienced at Kilgrave's hand. Though shippers and anti-shippers alike acknowledge that Kilgrave raped Jessica, many shippers choose to ignore this in favor of "exploring the dynamic"

between them without having to think about the fact that they are shipping a rape victim with her rapist. Even those shippers who claim not to be rape apologists or defenders of rapists are still perpetuating rape culture by creating fan-texts in which an abuser is able to be in a romantic relationship with the woman he abused.

It is vital to understand Jessica/Kilgrave shippers' shipping habits so that their oftentimes-unintentional perpetuation of rape culture becomes clear. As Debra Ferreday eloquently puts it in her article, "Game of Thrones Rape Culture and Feminist Fandom":

"the Internet and media has become a site of struggle over sexual violence, both in reproducing rape culture and in resisting it...The very term 'rape culture' indicates the need to understand rape as culture; as a complex social phenomenon that is not limited to discrete criminal acts perpetrated by a few violent individuals but is the product of gendered, raced and classed social relations that are central to patriarchal and heterosexist culture."<sup>33</sup>

For this reason, it is crucial to examine the problematic discourse regarding abusive relationships that gets perpetuated by Jessica/Kilgrave shippers as they go about creating and sharing fan-texts. One cannot view these shippers' fan-texts in isolation – in order to

understand the consequences of their content, they must be understood in the larger context of rape culture. Though many of these shippers acknowledge that the dynamic between Jessica and Kilgrave is one which they would not excuse in real life, by supporting a fictional abusive relationship they are furthering narratives that silence victims and perpetuating violence against women. While it is important to acknowledge Jessica/Kilgrave shippers and their ideological positions as valid and real, it is also important to consider the fact that their shipping practices can have unintended and harmful results. Along this same line of thought, it is absolutely vital to remember that, despite being actively engaged with media texts, fan communities are still strongly influenced by the media they consume and do not always resist the cultural norms in which that media is produced.

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# ANIMATED DISNEY MOVIES: GENDER PORTRAYAL AND MEDIA IMPACT ON CHILDREN OVER TIME

Shanna Benji

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Animated Disney characters possess individualized physical characteristics that are unique. Often, characters are most notable for their looks, such as their hair and clothing. Ariel's (*The Little Mermaid*) red hair is as much a part of her character as Belle's (from *Beauty and the Beast*) yellow gown is a part of hers (Trousdale and Wise, *The Little Mermaid*, 1989; Clements and Musker, *Beauty and the Beast*, 1991). Each character, especially the lead ones, are designed with great detail and precision to provide final animated products that audiences ultimately remember and cherish. With the years of pre-production work involved in the making of each film, coupled with the hundreds of employees dedicated to each project, the Walt Disney Company does everything in its power to focus its energy and resources into every aspect of their films. Given this knowledge, it is interesting to note that *Cinderella*'s title character from the 1950 classic and Elsa from the 2013 film *Frozen* both have light blue dresses, pale complexions, and blonde hair—a combination given to just these two animated Disney stars (Geronimi, Jackson, and Luske,

*Cinderella*, 1950; Buck and Lee, *Frozen*, 2013). With Disney leaving virtually no room for oversights in clashing character designs, what is the significance of the similarities between Cinderella and Elsa? Considering the circumstances surrounding each protagonist's life, how each finds refuge, and the influence of each of their physical appearances, how do these factors make it so that Cinderella and Elsa can be compared as foils to each other? Furthermore, how do each of these characters and their accompanying stories serve as reflections and social influences of their respective time periods?

Through the vessel of physical appearances, Disney sets up a comparison between Cinderella and Elsa in ways that make social commentary on gender roles. Particularly, in comparison to one another, these characters provide insight into values, such as those related to romance and self reliance, that were pertinent during each movie's respective time period. In literary terms, a foil is "a character whose qualities emphasize another's (usually the protagonist's) by providing a sharp contrast" (Auger, 114). Within the



context of animated Disney movies, Cinderella and Elsa can be considered foils to each other. Interestingly, Collier-Meek notices that almost all Disney movies follow the pattern of the pretty damsel in distress princess needing to be saved by her prince charming, with the exception of *Frozen*. Looking through a different lens, Do Rozario and Martyn et al. elaborate on how Disney princesses in fact hold a greater function and more power than merely being innocent and in need of saviors. In many ways, Elsa serves as an updated version of Cinderella through her actions and through the cultural and societal norms that each represents. Elsa reflects the strength and independence of women that mirrors and supports the renewed sense of feminism in the nation in the early 21st century, while Cinderella mirrors what life was like in the United States when *Cinderella* premiered in 1950, between the first two waves of feminism (Rampton, 2015).

### **Disney, Media Consumption, and Effects on Children**

Since the release of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, Walt Disney Animation has captivated audiences with their movies and has become a household name not only throughout the United States but worldwide

as well (Cottrell, et al., *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, 1932). Holding the title of “the world’s largest media conglomerate” (Siklos, 14), the Walt Disney Company has one of the largest and youngest consumer markets worldwide, which serves as a reminder that their messages are being absorbed by and impact one of the youngest target demographics through their films and corresponding merchandise sales.

The notion that the media serves as an important avenue in the socialization of children is heightened by the facts that “young children are immersed in media-rich worlds,” wherein, as of 2003, “thirty percent of children under three years old and 43 percent of four- to six-year-olds have a television in their bedrooms, and one-quarter of children under six years old have a VCR/DVD player in their bedrooms,” (Martin and Kayzak, 317). The fact that the television, as the paradigm of the greatest vehicle of media emission, increasingly resides in children’s bedrooms makes the weight of media’s presence in American society more tangible. Socializing factors, the main ones for children being family, peers, culture and mass media, are important in every community as they instill values and are formative forces for people (John, 205). These elements are particularly important when examining children because

they are essential tools and skills that teach children how to act and what to believe in terms of their social roles as they grow and become more immersed into their communities.

Suneé Jones, a professor at the University of Pretoria, remarks that watching these movies socializes children to adhere to specific social norms at very young ages, such as those regarding gender roles (45). These norms range on matters of sexuality, appearance, and more. Due to the overwhelming presence of repeated social norm representations, the messages portrayed in these movies can be very instrumental to what kids grow to value in their lives and in society. Since most children watch the same animated Disney movies multiple times, rising numbers of children worldwide are exposed to a repeated set of messages related to gender roles and cultural norms (Bazzini, et al. 2700), such as those that praise specific and narrow beauty standards and that portray women in need of being rescued by men. These presented norms place women and men on different platforms in society and call into question whether women are needed for much else other than being sexual and social objects for men.

Understanding that the media serves as a leading socializing factor in people's lives, Callister, Robinson, and Clark discuss

several factors that influence how children come to understand and exist in their potential roles in society based off the media. The forefront of these factors include amount of media consumption, level of realistic portrayals of families on television, and children's limited exposure to other families besides their own. As television and the media grow as socializing forces, their impacts on the psyches of young ones grow too. These authors state that programming for kids does not mirror realities of societal norms proportionally; for example, "the percentage of nuclear families on children's programs is higher than in the US population" (155). Children learn so much about their worlds from mediated messages that "some scholars argue that television families exercise as much influence on real families as the home environment and parents do" (Callister, Robinson, and Clark, 142). The significance of the media in shaping children is so pivotal that the gap between reality and false, mediated depictions of reality prime children with unrealistic expectations for life. Similarly, Jones notes that children's movies and literature emit messages about societies that resonant with and impact viewers in the long run, even when not portraying realistic norms.

With regard to gender roles in animated Disney movies, Martin

and Kazyak argue that despite being G-rated films, the vast majority of these films in a study of 20 children's films from the years of 1990 and 2005, contain subliminal and overt messages about heterosexuality and the objectification of women, with *The Polar Express* and *The Rugrats Movie* being the only two films without any hetero-romantic reference (Martin and Kazyak, 322; Zemeckis, *The Polar Express*, 2004; Kovalyov and Virglen, *The Rugrats Movie*, 1998). These messages presented in animated Disney films influence how children form their beliefs on how they think they "should" think and behave, sometimes limiting the range of accepted values in given societies. The overwhelming proportion of portrayed heterosexual norms in virtually every animated Disney film belittles underrepresented forms of sexuality (e.g. homosexual, transsexual, pansexual, asexual, etc.) by not showing them at the same rates in their movies, and, as such, marginalizing these groups. Although the media is not the sole source of socialization for children, it is a major one especially in an age in which media has a continuously growing presence in everyday life.

### **Close Up On Cinderella**

In *Cinderella*, the protagonist's name comes from "cinders" (or ashes) as she was forced into

unfavorable living conditions by her wicked stepmother. Made to tend to housework and to sleep on the floor by the fireplace, Cinderella is often covered in the cinders from the fireplace, revealing that the origin of her name is a reflection of the poor living conditions she endured.

The version of *Cinderella* depicted in Disney's famous rendition of the tale is from 1950. In the time period following World War II, life in America was largely focused on the family unit and national pride. Having the country's men back from the war abroad and women no longer needed in the workforce, housewives became the symbol of the ideal American woman. Although coerced into her enslavement in her own home, Cinderella remains positive, submissive, and a good homemaker in the way she cares for the upkeep of the property and family. In a nutshell: she is the perfect woman of her time in America.

Strong feelings of nationalism ran high during and after World War II. Work on *Cinderella* began in 1944, at the tail end of the war (History.com Staff, 2). As an ideal housewife who becomes the love interest of the prince, Cinderella mirrors the national sentiment of the time, while also serving as an example of what this society expected of women. For kids watching the film in the '50s, Cinderella served as a role model to young

women while young boys who watched picked up social values of chivalry and charm. Through their films, Disney “civilizes by entertaining—presenting examples of ideal types modeling proper behavior and comic anti-types showing us the results of improper behavior” (Wood, 26). For viewers today, Cinderella’s traditional “Happily Ever After” homemaker life presents only one of the many potential life paths.

### **Examining Elsa**

Over 60 years after the premiere of Disney’s *Cinderella*, the worldwide powerhouse of a media conglomerate released *Frozen*, which has since become “the fifth-highest-grossing film of all time and by far the highest-grossing animation” (Konnikova, 1). In contrast to the 1950s when *Cinderella* was released, nationwide discussions and mindsets around 2013 were influenced by a renewed wave of social justice campaigns (e.g. free the nipple) (Patterson, 2), and powerful new age feminism sentiment spread within the nation in the first decades of the 21st century (e.g. *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.* Supreme Court decision regarding female contraceptives covered by worker’s healthcare) (Liptak, 2). These major changes in national thought patterns provided a new climate in which Disney revamped a classic

princess and released *Frozen*.

Unlike Cinderella, Elsa finds strength within herself as a strong, independent woman, and with the support of her sister, learns how to embrace her powers and return home as a leader. Through her strength and perseverance, Elsa serves as a role model to modern viewers and kids about the capacity people innately have in the quest for personal champions. Especially with regard to women’s roles, Elsa (both in the movie and through the accompanying fanbase of the film) reminds viewers of the barriers women leaders break down and overcome.

### **Letting Go of the Dreams that You Wish Your Heart Makes: Elsa as a Revamped Cinderella**

Both *Cinderella* and *Frozen* tell the tales of rich girls following the deaths of their parents. Both Elsa and Cinderella come from wealthy and powerful roots: Elsa’s parents are royalty while the opening narration for *Cinderella* reveals that she grows up with “a kind and devoted father, [who] gave his beloved child every luxury and comfort”. Despite both originating from high status and luxury, Elsa and Cinderella lose the sources of their authority early on and each become oppressed by those closest to her.

While Elsa is locked away, Cinderella is exploited to the point of

virtual enslavement by her stepmother. With regard to the oppression each one faces, each woman copes with her isolation differently. Cinderella tends to the needs of her step family, while Elsa stays on her own, locked up away with her powers. However, something both women share in common is that they both make do with creating their own company; Cinderella befriends mice and the birds while Elsa finds company in her snowy powers.

Despite their trials and tribulations, Cinderella and Elsa both overcome their issues and find the moment that frees them from their isolated lives; both doing so in different ways. Cinderella's fairy godmother comes to her rescue—making her a dress, giving her a carriage, and sending her off to the ball—so that she can ultimately meet Prince Charming and have her “happily ever after moment.” Alternatively, Elsa finds her support system through her sister and by coming to terms with her own abilities. While Cinderella is in competition with her stepsisters, Elsa's sister supports her powers and helps her reach her full potential. Elsa finds strength within herself and with the additional support from her sister, while Cinderella is handed her freedom through the magical doings of her fairy godmother and being swept off her feet by the prince. Elsa finds her freedom through her own

agency, whereas others give Cinderella her new life.

Despite the isolation each character faces early on, by the end of each movie it is evident that Cinderella embodies a sort of dependency on others that Elsa lacks; while Cinderella remains under the horrendous conditions of her wicked stepmother's household, Elsa leads an, albeit lonely, independent and self sufficient life. In the lyrics of the Academy Award Winning song “Let it Go” from *Frozen*, Elsa sings “Don't let them in, don't let them see, be the good girl you always have to be,” at the beginning of the song, but ultimately ends her anthem with “I don't care what they're going to say[...], that perfect girl is gone.” In this way, Elsa may be referencing the older, more traditional view that women should be seen and not heard, that they should “sit like ladies” and “speak only when spoken to,” which was much more popular when *Cinderella* premiered. However, in taking the more modern approach, Elsa ends the song—marking her moment of freedom and self acceptance—acknowledging that it is impossible to reach the paradigm of the “perfect girl” and that she does not care what others think of her. Elsa represents a confident and powerful woman in this pivotal scene.

Furthermore, beyond the characters and storyline, *Frozen* symbolizes the strides made in

Hollywood and in 2013 American society with regard to women's roles through the filmmakers. Jennifer Lee, "who co-wrote and co-directed the blockbuster *Frozen*, is the very first female director at the studio" (LaPorte, 1). Being the first female director for a company which is almost a century old speaks volumes to the history and changing future of the Walt Disney Company. Lee's links to *Frozen* bolster the argument that *Frozen* is a story that celebrates women, especially in comparison to *Cinderella*, which had only male directors.

### **Shortcomings with the Media's Influence**

As previously noted, children pick up on a lot from these films, but some sources indicate that the public overgeneralizes just how influential the media is in viewers' lives. For example, Bazzini, et al. discuss that the "beauty-goodness" stereotype is present in animated Disney movies, but that this "exposure did not increase children's use of the stereotype" in their own lives (2687). These authors explain that humans naturally possess an innate beauty-goodness favoring system, and that there remains room to examine how increased exposure to the stereotype via films promotes that naturally occurring mindset. In other words, these researchers

make the argument that the media does not play a significant socializing role in the lives of young viewers, despite popular belief suggesting otherwise. According to these researchers, media exposure does not have strong enough implications on the ways children behave in society for there to be cause for concern about long-term effects of animated Disney movies and future behaviors of viewers. This argument counters the notion that messages in animated Disney movies help shape the youth of America in ways that significantly impact their thoughts and behaviors.

### **Weaknesses on the Shortcomings of the Media's Influence**

Despite the results Bazzini, et al. found about the lack of impact animated Disney movies have on the thoughts and behaviors of kids, it is important to note that the small sample size of 21 movies limits the findings of this study. According to the Central Limit Theory, a sufficiently large sample size, typically of 30 or more participants, is needed as a minimum to lend fair, unbiased results (LaMorte, 1). Additionally, this study only looked at single viewings of these films, whereas most children watch these movies several times. These limitations coupled with the range of literature discussing how children's programming has

a growing presence and influence in the lives of young audiences beyond movie-watching settings indicates that the study by Bazzini, et al. is not one that holds enough merit to completely undermine the focus of this paper.

## Conclusion

As products and representations of each of their time periods, Elsa and Cinderella are icons of their times. While they look alike and share similar significant physical characteristics, Elsa and Cinderella are two drastically different characters. These characters share similar life experiences but vary in their ways of coping with their respective situations. Cinderella's appearance plays into her demure character, who is ultimately saved from the oppression her stepsisters and stepmother impose on her, while Elsa's revamped rendition of the same physical looks is associated with her self-empowerment and with leading her to find her own strength and confidence in returning home from her isolation. Both face similar struggles, but each character approaches her story differently. Through Cinderella's hard times, she is granted magical wishes and handed her Prince Charming to make her life seemingly perfect. Through Elsa's personal obstacles, she shows that embracing her struggles helps find strength and welcome differences.

In a way, Cinderella does not necessarily represent a woman with no free will, but rather one exercising her right to be a homemaker in a way that is equally as respectable as Elsa's decision to be a single ruler.

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# A LITTLE LADY AND HER NOT-SO-LITTLE GUN: A CLOSE READING OF THE 2016 FILM

## *JANE GOT A GUN*

Elizabeth Gibbons

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The Western is the classic American film genre that focuses on the space and themes of the West, depicting the trials and tribulations of the American way on the western frontier. The cowboys and Indians and the damsels in distress that prevail in the American culture come from this genre. Westerns have always held a place in popular imagination, but the genre suffered a decline in the late 20th century. However, after the 1980s, westerns started to make a comeback, though they were not as popular as the classic westerns of generations previous. These new westerns, that have been called “revisionist” and now “feminist”, showcase certain American values such as the centrality of the individual, the inevitability of progress, the virtues of capitalism, and the necessity of force and the law (Keller 47). These values are not necessarily new to westerns; individuality and the law are constant themes throughout the genre, but the new films used new characters to revitalize old narratives and express new versions of old themes. *Jane Got a Gun*, the 2016 revisionist and feminist western starring Natalie Portman, showcases all the American values of

classic westerns, but with a feminist twist, and uses the western genre as a space to explore and explain modern ideas of gender roles, femininity, and masculinity.

It should be noted that *Jane Got a Gun* is not the only Western with a strong female lead, however, I chose to focus on this film in particular because of its recent release date and mass availability. *Jane Got a Gun* is significant because it represents a shift in American identity, seen through social changes that are reflected in media. This new society and new identity is more gender inclusive and cognizant of the complexity of the individual. In *Jane Got a Gun*, Jane must defend her home and her dying husband against the criminal gang known as the Bishop Boys. She relies on the help of Dan, a gunslinger from her past, but the film is ultimately about her discovering her own bravery and protecting herself as much as she protects her family

In America society, the West and the frontier act as a touchstone of national identity, and the western has proven itself to be a critical way of interpreting America to itself (O’Connor and Rollins 1-2). Westerns create a narrative,

historically based and socially relevant, of mythic proportions. In these films, we can see the social and political concerns of the era they were produced in, not necessarily the era they represent. As Edward Countryman says, the Myth of the West is the “most powerful tool for understanding America itself” (Keller 49). Questions of masculinity, manhood, and the social expectations of men are seen clearly through the cowboy heroes in westerns. More interestingly, questions of femininity, the social role of women, and the relationship between men and women can also be seen through the protagonist and through the women surrounding him. In *Jane Got a Gun*, questions of feminism, and gender roles are explored through the actions of the hero, and the men around her explore social duties and American values of manliness.

### **Feminism in Westerns and *Jane Got a Gun***

The Myth of the West was a persuasive force in American life and the western has created an identity that has persisted in the American mind, used as a backdrop for interactions and relationships that characterize American values (O'Connor and Rollin 6). In the film, *Jane Got a Gun*, Jane epitomizes the values of motherhood, love, and self-reliance, values that

are characteristically American and serve to solidify Jane's social role as a mother. However, Jane is also vengeful, resourceful, and resorts to violence when needed, which fits into the cowboy trope of classic westerns. This complexity in a female character is not new for the western genre, but it does illustrate trends in gender identity, namely the increased equality for women in the home and the workplace as well as increased appreciation for the complexity and fluidity of femininity.

Traditionally, women in westerns have no consequence because they do not drive the plot, they further male action (Schwarz 46). However, Jane is the main character, the narrative revolves around her actions and men play secondary roles. This is a clear diversion from the characteristics of classic narratives and fits in firmly with modern feminist films being produced and the revisionist westerns that are making a comeback. Cultural anthropologist Maureen T. Schwarz created a checklist to determine when a western could be deemed a feminist film and it is this checklist that will allow us to analyze modern ideas of gender identity and western tropes in *Jane Got a Gun*. She says, for a western to be feminist,

“the plot must constitute a subversion of and a challenge to a mainstream text; the actions of a female protagonist must drive

the plot rather than simply provide a reason for action; the dialogue of one or more female protagonists must challenge and subvert masculine discourse as well as convey agency; meanings must be plural rather than singular” (Schwarz 45).

The narrative and characters of *Jane Got a Gun* fit firmly in this definition, and yet there are moments in the film and especially in Jane’s character that are decidedly “old-school” and reflect 19th century ideas of femininity, namely The Cult of True Womanhood. These ideas are enmeshed in American culture because of their prevalence in media. However, if we were to break this definition down piece by piece, we can see how *Jane Got a Gun*, despite its connections to older ideas of gender, is still a deeply feminist western film that reflects a more nuanced and contemporary understanding of gender roles.

Jane is domestic; she bakes bread, watches over her child, and maintains the house, without falling into the role of submissive wife. Jane does not yield to the men around her nor does she blindly accept orders, instead she acts on her own accord and does as she sees fit, such as when she buys pounds of ammunition and firearms that she uses to protect her homestead despite her husband telling her to simply run away. Jane is pious, she is a devoted wife

and mother and her love of family drives her actions, but she is not pure. Jane is an agent of murder and revenge; she does not extend forgiveness nor does she wait to be attacked – she shoots first and she shoots to kill. In her following of the Cult of True Womanhood, she represents how the ideology of a submissive woman is still relevant in modern American identity and gender roles and how our past is not too far away from us. In her defiance of it, she represents current ideas of equality, strong femininity, and agency that are reshaping social ideas of gender in contemporary society. Jane is a complex character with multiple meanings. Her complexity is indicative of modern day feminism and illustrates the complex, fluid gender ideology we have today.

This complexity fits into Schwarz’s definition, which can be broken up and used to analyze all aspects of the film. Firstly, the plot must be a challenge to a mainstream text. The plot of *Jane Got a Gun* is straightforward, Jane must team up with her ex-fiancé, Dan, to defend her home and family against the criminal gang known as the Bishop Boys. Jane is the defender. She is the protagonist and dictates Dan’s actions with her unquestionable leadership. This is a direct challenge to the classic westerns that firmly place women in supporting or victim roles. However, it is the genre

itself that allows Jane to “explore her own power to protect her family” (Weinstein Company 4). Jane’s ability to not only survive, but thrive, in such a masculine, unforgiving environment further illustrates her capabilities and her complexity as a character. The western frontier was a harsh place, and self-determination and empowerment were vital to survival. Jane takes the leading role of cowboy; thus, the genre and narrative conventions allow her to be a strong feminist character.

Secondly, the actions of the female must drive the plot. The narrative revolves entirely around Jane, her family, and her actions. Again, this is a diversion from the classic female characters who serve to drive men’s actions, and thus act as secondary characters. Further, Jane is not looking for redemption nor does she redeem anyone in the narrative. She is entirely dependent on her own actions and the narrative is entirely dependent on her. However, this does not imply that Dan takes a secondary role or is not equally critical to the plot. Although he is not the protagonist, his actions are as important as Jane’s because they facilitate the action. This equal character/equal actions belongs to the theory of liberal feminism in westerns. Liberal feminism states that any differences between men and women are social differences and that men and women are

inherently equal (Baglia 495). Jane and Dan fight equally. Jane drives the plot, but her strength and leadership do not diminish the male characters around her, which is in line with contemporary ideas of feminism.

Thirdly, the female dialogue must challenge masculine dialogue and convey agency. This is most notably seen in one line of dialogue said by Jane to Dan after he asks her to simply leave her dying husband and take herself and her child to safety. She denies his request with determination.

*Dan: You have to go Jane...*

*Jane: I been running my whole life. Don't end. They come to my house, I'm gonna protect it. Whatever happens, I got to put my face to it. (Jane Got a Gun 1:12).*

In doing so, she discovers aspects of herself that she, and other women in westerns, had sought in the men around her. It is Jane who takes control of her life, it is Jane who protects herself against men who want to control her body, and it is Jane who ultimately reunites her family and heads further west. By “putting her face to it” she challenges the masculine dialogue that portrays her as weak and takes control, showing her agency and locking her in as a feminist character.

Finally, meanings must be plural rather than singular. Jane and Dan are complex characters, both

representing new and old ideas of gender, which makes their interactions more complex and truly illustrates the idea of plural meanings that Schwarz defines as feminist. Jane is both mother and murderer. Dan is both helper and leader. As Judith Grant explains, feminist theory is concerned with the very redefinition of “woman” and *Jane Got a Gun* redefines woman as complex, layered, and reflective of contemporary clashes of old and new gender ideologies in our modern American society (Kaminski 422). Thus, *Jane Got a Gun* fits all of Schwarz’s categories of being a feminist film.

### **Masculinity and Femininity**

*Jane Got a Gun* redefines manhood to fit a more nuanced understanding of gender roles that are developing in modern American society and are reflected in Jane and Dan’s characters. Manhood in the west was often mobilized in relation to gender and was a way to “define, disrupt, or maintain” male privilege and gender roles in American society. Traditional westerns established manhood as being physically strong and “unabashedly cowboy” in nature (McCall 8, 2). The rise of the cowboy in the American imagination, which quickly became a cultural icon of manliness, representing honor, physical strength, and truly American individualism,

cemented this idea of masculinity (Garceau 152).

In *Jane Got a Gun*, male power is defined by Jane’s husband who provides for her and Dan who protects her. Dan also does most of the physical work in protecting her homestead, which illustrates his physical strength and aligns him with more traditional ideas of manhood. Bishop, the villain of the narrative, is both the provider and the protector on the wagon train going west, but ultimately defines male privilege by his ability to take advantage of Jane sexually, forcing her to work in the brothel. Bishop and Dan are both “unabashedly” cowboy in their demeanor.

Dan is the contemplative, loner cowboy from classic westerns who expresses a complete range of emotions, including tears of sadness and mourning. Bishop is the violent, charming villain whose motivations range from money, to power, to sex, but, despite his violence, is unwilling to harm a child. These characteristics align both men with traditional ideas of masculinity but creates a complex character, much like Jane’s, that reflects both classic and contemporary ideas of gender. This is significant and empowering because it helps break down the harmful gender stereotypes of masculinity seen in classic westerns and older American society. By allowing men to have a larger range of

emotion and motivation, *Jane Got a Gun* creates a more complex male character that is equal to the female character and is indicative of larger trends in American society towards gender equality.

Jane herself disrupts the idea of classic manhood by taking on the persona of the cowboy and by contradicting the men. She drives the plot and disrupts the idea of the submissive woman by reclaiming her own body and standing her ground against Bishop and his crew. This disruption of classic manhood is justified by the men around her who do not question her authority and instead respond to her as an equal, thus representing the modern ideas of equal genders. In all fairness, Dan does “take over” some of the plot points as the conflict unfolds, but he does not wrestle control away from Jane nor does he deny Jane her autonomy. Dan maintains the classic ideas of manhood by acting as protector of Jane and by falling into the role of father and husband at the end when Jane and her re-connected family head further west to California. Just as Jane epitomizes some of the ideology of the Cult of True Womanhood and thus the prevalence of classic gender roles still in our society, so does Dan when he takes on both roles of father and helper, illustrating how gender roles are fluid and how the classic ideas from the western frontier are still in use,

even if they are coupled with more modern ideas of gender. Further, by working with Jane and accepting her authority and opinions, he illustrates gender equality in process and is thus a feminist character.

*Jane Got a Gun* represents a new, more fluid idea, of femininity, and masculinity, which is more indicative of modern society. This fluidity is what Laura McCall calls hegemonic masculinity (or femininity in this case), which is always “in process” and shapes the images and ideas of manhood and womanhood that become institutionalized by their repetition in mass media, such as films (McCall 6). The use of such ideology in the character of Jane and the narrative itself shows that hegemonic femininity is a constantly evolving process and, as films continue to showcase this new type of woman, a woman who is strong, protective, and equal to (as opposed to beholden to) the men around her. Traditional westerns emphasize white masculinity and identity, in more contemporary westerns such as *Jane Got a Gun*, the emphasis has shifted to white female identity, which shows how American society has evolved to be more gender inclusive (Schwarz 54). The fluidity of masculinity and femininity and the shift in emphasis are indicative of larger societal and ideological shifts in contemporary American culture and identity.

Historically, gender on the western frontier was very significant, Laura McCall calls it “a laboratory of gender where competing systems of social organization came into contact, generating conflict as well as consensus” (McCall 6). This conflict and consensus are reflected in Jane’s character which is a mixture of whore, housewife, and gunslinger yet is connected by her love for her family, which drives her actions. This conflict bound together by love questions the stereotypical gender roles of mother and wife for a more complex woman. This conflict and consensus is further reflected in her costume. Westerns have an established pictorial language that, traditionally, measured the manliness of their characters; the cowboy hat, gun, and attitude all fit that pictorial language (McCall 4). Jane fits this codes with the man’s wide brimmed cowboy hat, the gun(s), the horse, and her air of independence and willingness to kill – she is a cowboy in every traditional way. Her costume is very no-nonsense and although fitted and full of flower designs, is done in somber, faded tones that only hint at her underlying femininity (Weinstein Company 11). Jane’s costume displays her prowess and her agency. It denies the male gaze that would otherwise focus on her body and forces the audience to associate her costume with cowboy manliness, thus detracting

from her femininity and further emphasizing the nuanced gender norms her character portrays.

### ***Jane Got a Gun, Classic Westerns, and Historical Accuracy***

In classic westerns, the films that have created the idea of a shared American identity, the “good woman”, the wives, mothers, and teachers on the frontier, portray images perpetuated by the 1820s ideology of the Cult of True Womanhood. This ideology advocated four virtues for American woman to ensure a morally strong society and to represent “civilization” in the Wild West: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Schwarz 54). This is historically accurate; on the western frontier, women were thought to represent the “glue” of social relationships and were expected to represent, and indeed enforce, moral standards (Johnson 45). Jane denies the idea of women representing civilization, the primary role for female characters in classic westerns, when she goes West on her own and again when she and her new husband build a homestead alone in the middle of the desert. In both examples, she rejects the idea of going west to better others, instead she chooses to better herself and later protect herself. Furthermore, Jane actively murders members of the Bishop Boy gang without seeking



salvation or defending the morality of her actions. It could be argued that the opening monologue of the film, when Jane tells her daughter that good people will always be good, is a moral statement and is indicative of Jane's morality, but it is not representative of the historical place for women in the west. Instead, by separating Jane from morality, the film separates femininity from moral goodness. In classic westerns, women were morally good and the guiding light for the men around them, while in *Jane Got a Gun*, Jane's femininity and ability to love and be a wife and mother is separated from her morality, which allows her character to break the strict gender codes.

Traditionally, women stand for love and forgiveness to balance the cowboy's manly violence and revenge (Schwarz 57). Jane still loves and her actions are motivated by love, which is a more feminine approach to her otherwise completely masculine actions. However, she still actively seeks revenge in the form of violence, making her both the "good woman" and the cowboy. This dual characterization allows her to represent both the female trope and the male trope from classic westerns and further illustrates the complexity of gender roles and female characters. Jane represents the new society of gender equality and female agency by rejecting many of the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood,

illustrating the change in American society, but her acceptance of the maternal aspects of the ideology represent the liminal presence of classic gender roles.

In the John Wayne and Clint Eastwood Westerns, male roles overshadowed women who instead played either the whore or the virtuous woman. Jane is the protagonist seconded by the male characters around her and plays both roles of the whore and the mother, which goes directly against the classic genre and makes *Jane Got a Gun* both revisionist and feminist. Women in classic westerns are "dependent upon male enterprise and valor for their survival" (Schwarz 54). Jane is dependent on Dan, her former fiancé and now hired gunslinger, for his knowledge about warfare to aid in her survival, but she is in no way dependent on his "valor". Jane is not so much "dependent" as she is untested, uneducated, and in need of practical help. Dan does not rouse Jane to action, he does not convince her to stand her ground, and she rejects his request for her to run just as easily as she rejected her husband's request. Instead, Dan is a source of practical knowledge for Jane and his characterization and actions as such redefine manhood. In fact, screenwriter Anthony Tambakis wrote that in the arc of *Jane Got a Gun* "[we were building towards] a woman who discovers her own sense of

self and her own courage, and self-actualizes” (Weinstein Company 5-6). This turns the western archetype on its head and breaks completely from the classic western.

## Counter

Barry Langford and Jay Baglia pose interesting arguments that go against the accepted views. Baglia writes that women in westerns represent a range of “feminist frameworks” and although he concedes that women are often “overshadowed by the male’s prominence”, they still represent feminist ideologies if we analyze them in depth (Baglia 491-492). Jane is in no way overshadowed by her male characters, nor is her character so weak that an “in depth” analysis must be used to understand her place in feminist theory. Baglia writes as if women are still lesser characters, which may be true in some films, but in *Jane Got a Gun*, his argument falls short.

Langford writes that as the western declined in popularity in the 1970s, the focus of American identity, society, and gender politics shifted to new pop-culture models (Langford 26). He suggests that the western is no longer as critical as it once was to society; however, older westerns are still important in their reflection of American society and new westerns are critical cultural forms that are used to explore new and

complicated ideologies. Both Langford and Baglia’s arguments are couched in feminist language and their articles focus on larger ideas of the analysis of film using gender theory and the creation of American social identity; in fact, their counter arguments are rebutted in their own papers and are very weak in nature.

## Conclusion

Barry Langford argues that the stylized and settled universe, the narrative structure, and the character conventions of the Western are so established, that any deviation from them is obvious and thus intended for a purpose, making the west as a space vital for critical analysis of contemporary American society (Langford 27). *Jane Got a Gun* both deviates from and plays into the western universe with the intention of showcasing new ideas of gender in already accepted characters. Jane, as the token woman and the idealistic cowboy, symbolically aligns women with more classically masculine ideas of individuality, strength, and self-reliance. By playing into the stylized and settled universe of the western, Jane’s divergence from the classic woman is more acceptable because of the duality she holds by playing both the leading masculine character and the female role. Furthermore, her divergence is immediately seen

and recognized as an act of empowerment.

However, westerns do not dictate society, they represent it. Jane does not dictate future advances in gender ideology, but instead reflects the chaotic nature of our shifting culture. Her character, in her reconciliation with herself as both mother and murderer, reconciles the often-contradictory gender ideas of contemporary American society. Producer Zach Schiller says that *Jane Got a Gun* tells the story of a “strong independent woman [who] speaks to what is going on in the world today” (Weinstein Company 5).

Older westerns, where women were either whores or housewives, where a woman’s opinion was rejected out of hand and her needs were never addressed, and where men must be rigidly, violently masculine or they were not truly men, reflected a society that was rife with gender conflict. *Jane Got a Gun*’s feminist narrative and complex characterization is significant to modern American society and identity because it represents a society that is more gender inclusive, female friendly, and cognizant of the complexity of the individual. This new society represents a political and social shift and creates a new idea of American identity.

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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**JACQUELINE KANE** graduated from UCSB in Winter 2017 as a double major in Film & Media Studies along with Environmental Studies. She plans on communicating environmental messages through media and film. You may find her outside hugging trees or gazing up at the stars pondering about the universe.

**DANI RODRIGUEZ** is a 3rd year Film and Communications double major who is really interested in the Constitutional issues of censorship both from a film and communications perspective. In her off time she makes films with my friends, paints landscapes, and bakes really good cookies.

**MARK PINEDO** is from Los Angeles, California and will be receiving a degree in Film and Media Studies. After graduation he plans to move back to LA to pursue a career in the digital distribution industry. He has a passion for business development, acting as air traffic control for television productions. Ideally within a couple of years he will be producing content for the world to enjoy. Stay tuned!

**CHARLES PEARSON** is a third-year Art History and Math double major at UCSB. He is an aspiring architect and intends to enroll in a Masters of Architecture program after his time is finished here in pursuit of this goal. His driving ambition is to be able to bring aesthetically pleasing, affordable, and environmentally sustainable housing and public institutions to people here and around the globe.

**ALIX RIVES** is a 3rd year Psychology and Film & Media Studies double major. She loves screenwriting, learning about the minds of criminals, and watching Netflix. She's very excited to be sharing her piece on intersectional feminism in TV.

**LEANNE ROYO** is a recently graduated Film and Media Studies major with an English minor. While figuring out postgrad life, she hopes to one day go to grad school and pursue a PhD in cinema studies. Her research interests include the Disney Corporation, animation theory, social media, and fan culture.

#FAMSTClassof2016

**MASON FOSTER** is a 2nd year film and media studies student at UCSB. As a teenager in small town Temecula, California her goal was to become a filmmaker who would change the world to be everything that she imagined it could be. As a college student she's had the privilege of inspiring that change in my writing, filmmaking, and personal life and she hopes to continue doing so.

**CASSIDY PYLE** is a second year Film and Media Studies and Communication double major with a minor in Feminist Studies. She spends her time doing advocacy based work for women using an intersectional framework as well as in mentoring roles for struggling students. Her primary professional goal is to fuse media and activism in a way that serves and uplifts marginalized women.

**ELIZABETH ORSON** is a fourth year Film and Media Studies major at UCSB who is graduating in Spring of 2017. She has a passion for writing and research and hopes to pursue them by attending graduate school. When she's not writing she enjoys playing sports, watching TV, and spending time with her family and friends.

**SHANNA BENJI** is a first generation Iranian-American Jew entering her senior year at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Currently studying Communication, Shanna aspires to one day work within the entertainment industry. During her time at UCSB, Shanna has held many leadership positions and has served on the board of several student organizations, including Women of Media and being president of the sorority Sigma Alpha Epsilon Pi. Shanna is excited about her first published piece and looks forward to working on similar projects in the future.

**ELIZABETH GIBBONS** is a graduating history major with a soft spot for films. She loves any movie that is beautiful, funny, or has a strong female lead. After graduation, Elizabeth is moving to D.C. where she will be a research assistant at the Smithsonian NMNH.





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Department of Film and Media Studies  
2433 Social Sciences and Media Studies  
Building  
University of California, Santa Barbara  
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