

IF RAPE WAS LEGAL ACT LIKE A LADY IT WAS A JOKE IT'S ADORABLE WHEN A PRETTY GIRL TRIES TO BE FUNNY
IT TAKES TWO YOU'RE NOT A REAL WOMAN IF YOU DON'T WANT KIDS TAKE IT AS A COMPLIMENT NOT ALL MEN
SHE DIDN'T ACTUALLY SAY NO YOU'RE SUCH A TEASE BOYS WON'T LIKE YOU IF YOU TALK SO HYSTERIA
PRUDE AS TIME PASSES, THE JOY OF THE VICTORY FADES, JUST LIKE A WIFE BECOME OLD AND LOSES HER CHARM
YOU'RE CUTE WHEN YOU CRY IF RAPE IS INEVITABLE, JUST RELAX AND ENJOY IT SLUT YOU'RE OVERREACTING
BIG TITS DOESN'T COUNT IF SHE IS FAT GRAB THEM BY THE PUSSY A HOLE IS A HOLE I PAID FOR YOUR DRINK
YOU NEED A MAN THE FEMALE BODY HAS WAYS TO SHUT DOWN IF SHE DID INDEED GO THROUGH A LEGITIMATE RAPE
SHE SAID YES TO THE PARTY
WHY ARE WOMEN SO ANGRY
YOU ARE SO ADORABLE
I HOPE SHE GETS RAPED
SHE DIDN'T PUT UP A FIGHT
LEGITIMATE RAPE
A DRUNK CAN CONSENT
IT WASN'T RAPE-RAPE
GIRLS ARE SO SENSITIVE
YOU SHOULD SMILE MORE
AT LEAST YOU ARE PRETTY
TOO UGLY TO BE RAPED
IT'S NOT RAPE IF IT'S ORAL
HE HAS A BRIGHT FUTURE
THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT
WOMEN ARE CRAZY
ASKING FOR CONSENT RUINS THE MOOD YOU SHOWED CONCERN AND CONSIDERATION BY WEARING A CONTRACEPTIVE
WOMEN SHOULD AVIOD DRESSING LIKE SLUTS IN ORDER NOT TO BE VICTIMIZED BIMBO HE'S A GENTLEMAN PUSSY
PAIN AND SEX SOMETIMES GO TOGETHER HONEST RAPE TRAMP HE'S PICKING ON YOU BECAUSE HE LIKES YOU
WHEN A WOMAN SAYS NO, SHE DOESN'T ALWAYS MEAN IT RAPE VICTIMS SHOULD MAKE THE BEST OF A BAD SITUATION
TATTOOS ARE TOO MASCULINE FOR A WOMAN DON'T GET RAPED YOU CAN'T RAPE THE WILLING HOW TO AVOID RAPE
SHE MUST HAVE SLEPT HER WAY INTO THE JOB HE HAS DENIED AND I FEEL BAD THAT THIS IS HAPPENING TO HIM
WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST TELL THE POLICE YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE BEEN THAT DRUNK CUNT IT'S IN MEN'S BIOLOGY
WHY COULDN'T YOU JUST KEEP YOUR KNEES TOGETHER A GIRL IS FAR MORE RESPONSIBLE FOR RAPE THAN A BOY
WHORE YOU LOOK LIKE THE TYPE THAT IS INTO BDSM SHE HAS NO PHYSICAL INJURIES HE'S A NICE GUY
WHEN SHE PUSHES YOU AWAY, PULL HER CLOSER PSYCHO YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN MORE CAREFUL WRENCH
DON'T TELL ANYONE, HE MIGHT GO TO JAIL HUSSY HE COMES FROM A GOOD FAMILY SHE JUST REGRETTED IT
IT'S NOT RAPE WHEN YOU ARE MARRIED FLOOZY INNOCENT UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY SHE JUST MADE A BAD CHOICE
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE WALKED ALONE HE'S A NICE GUY SHE MADE HERSELF VULNERABLE SHE'S TOO MANNISH
SHE COULDN'T REMEMBER EVERYTHING MAN-HATER WE GET THESE ACCUSATIONS ALL THE TIME LIKE A GIRL
THAT'S GOOD, FOR A GIRL DRAMA QUEEN SHE HAD A REPUTATION FOR SLEEPING AROUND SHE'S SUCH A DIVA
NATURE INTENTED WOMEN TO BE OUR SLAVES. THEY ARE OUR PROPERTY WOMEN, YOU HAVE TO TREAT THEM LIKE SHIT
WOMEN ARE WEAKER IN THE HEAD SHE WAS ASKING FOR IT KNOW YOUR PLACE, WOMAN OVERLY SENSITIVE
IT WOULD BE OVER FASTER IF YOU STOPPED STRUGGLING WOMEN WERE MADE TO BE EITHERR WIVES OR PROSTITUTES
ANYONE CAN MAKE AN ACCUSATION I PAID FOR YOUR DRINK THERE WASN'T SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE MANSPLAINING
YOU DESERVED IT SHAME ON YOU, WOMAN IT'S SUPPOSED TO HURT YOU'RE A GIRL. YOU SHOULD KNOW BETTER
RAPABLE THERE'S NO USE IN CRYING ABOUT IT WHY DIDN'T YOU SCREAM? I HOPE YOU LEARNED YOUR LESSON
I THOUGHT YOU LIKED HIM YOU'RE SMARTER THAN THAT IT COULD BE WORSE THAT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ME
YOU LED HIM ON THAT'S NOT RAPE THAT WAS SEX. YOU COULD HAVE AVOIDED IT WHY DIDN'T YOU REPORT IT?

THE RAPE OF WOMEN

A STUDY OF FEMALE FILM CHARACTER'S INFLUENCE ON RAPE CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

Voldtægtskultur er omdrejningspunktet i dette speciale, med henblik på at give eksempler på, hvad der kan have indflydelse på voldtægt som kultur. Specialet bruger specifikt kvindelige filmkarakterer som eksempel på baggrunden for voldtægt som kultur. For at eksemplificerer kvindelige filmkarakterers indflydelse på voldtægtskultur tager dette speciale udgangspunkt i filmene: *Charlie's Angels* (2019), *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020), and *Promising Young Woman* (2020). Specialet er inddelt i to sektioner, med henblik på at fokusere på det kvindelige syn på kvindelige filmkarakterer i den første del og det mandlige syn på kvindelige filmkarakterer i den anden del.

I den første sektion med det kvindelige syn på kvindelige filmkarakterer, bliver der redegjort for henholdsvis Judith Butlers kønsteori og kropsbillede-teori af Frederick et al, Myers et al og Kinnally et al. Butlers kønsteori er brugt på filmene med henblik på at teoretisere, hvordan kvinder efterligner kvindelige filmkarakterers kønspræsentationer, fordi disse viser idealet for kvindelighed. Kropsbillede-teorien er brugt med henblik på at opnå en forståelse for, hvordan den slanke kropstype, som synes at være idealet i medier, påvirker det kvindelige publikum. Analysen af de udvalgte film med disse teorier konkluderer, at det kvindelige publikum kan blive påvirket negativt, da de igennem filmene, opnår en forståelse af, at de skal tilegne sig stereotypiske mandlige karaktertræk, som selvstændighed, styrke og mod, og forlægge stereotypiske kvindelige karaktertræk, som empati, hengivenhed og venlighed. Derudover kan det kvindelige publikum opnå en fornemmelse af, at udseende er det vigtigste aspekt ved at være en kvinde – den slanke og generelt overnaturligt smukke kvinde bliver det uopnåelige skønhedsideal for det kvindelige publikum. Ydermere, viser *Promising Young Woman* filmen, hvordan kvinders forfængelighed ofte bliver brugt til at bebrejde dem for, hvordan de bliver behandlet af mænd. Hvis kvinder derimod prøver at modsætte sig deres underlegenhed bliver de ofte sindssyge og tage ting for personligt.

I den anden sektion med det mandlige syn på kvindelige filmkarakterer bliver der redegjort for henholdsvis Laura Mulveys mandlige blik teori og Martha Nussbaums objektiveringsteori. Det mandlige blik teorien er brugt med henblik på at teoretisere, hvordan mænd opfatter kvindelige filmkarakterer, mens objektiveringsteorien er brugt med henblik på at identificere, hvordan mænd behandler kvinder som objekter i stedet for mennesker. Analysen af de udvalgte film med disse teorier kan konkludere, at kvinders udseende og væremåde i film ofte er brugt med henblik på at mænd skal finde kvinden attraktiv, så han igennem filmen kan udleve sine begærer. Kvinder bliver derfor ofte brugt som objekter for at mænd kan udleve deres fantasier. Ydermere, viser *Promising Young*

Woman filmen, hvordan samfundets mænd ikke bare objektiverer kvinder på deres skærme, men også i virkeligheden, da mændene bruger kvinder til deres egne fornøjelser, mens kvinderne ikke har noget at skulle have sagt i måden de bliver brugt på.

Diskussionen i specialet bliver brugt til at udvide voldtægtskulturen, for at se på hvilke problematikker voldtægt som kultur danner. *Promising Young Woman* filmen bliver her understøttet af dokumentarerne *Audrie and Daisy* (2016) og *Roll Red Roll* (2018), med henblik på at bringe specialet ud i den virkelige verden. Det bliver her konkluderet, at samfundet bruger flere kræfter på at beskytte deres mænd end deres kvinder. Kvinder bliver ofte beskyldt for selv at være skyld i måden de bliver behandlet på af mænd – også deres voldtægt. I stedet for at give mænd skylden for de voldtægter de begår, beskylder samfundet ofte kvinder for set at være skyld i det, fordi de havde for lidt tøj på, var for fulde, eller for at lyve for at få opmærksomhed.

Dette speciale kan derfor konkludere, at ideen om voldtægtskultur bliver støttet af måden kvinder bliver portrætteret i medierne, hvilket bliver understøttet af de udvalgte teorier, som beskriver køn og dets rolle i det nutidige samfunds normer.

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As millions of women know all too well, no one ever avoided a rape by wearing a longer skirt.

- Anne K. Ream, writer and longtime gender issues activist

Either harassment of women has escalated in recent years, especially online harassment, or women are finally speaking out and demanding change to the continued harassment against them (Vickery et al., 2018, 16-17). In the past 150 years, the social status of women in Western society has improved considerably. However, the equalization of men and women is still far from achieved (Lorber, 2000, 80). Gender divisions are so frequent in the everyday life of Western society that it almost seems 'natural' for most people (80). Misogyny is so ingrained in society that most people do not even realize when they are degrading to women. Women are viewed in a heteronormative masculine perspective, often by both genders, which creates a society where men are superior and women are inferior. Women are raised to make themselves attractive to men, which means women's value depends on men's validation (Nicholls, 2021, 26). When a society is divided between a superior and inferior gender, writer Tracey Nicholls argues that it becomes rather natural for the superior group to inflict its desires onto the inferior group (26). Therefore, rape culture seems to come fairly natural in a society with an unequal gender perspective. Women are raised to support the entitlement of men; they are raised to choose safety over freedom, as men are entitled to do what they want (30). Rape is not an action driven by lust or passion but by violence and entitlement - misogyny (33). Media reinforces the heteronormative masculine perspective and its norms, which means it mediates misogyny. Women are subject to stereotypical media portrayals, denying them agency in any form, as they are reduced to nothing more than their appearance (Vickery et al., 7). Jacqueline Ryan Vickery et al. argue that since the media mainly depicts women in these powerless, stereotypical portrayals, it normalizes the harassment women go through in their everyday lives – it normalizes misogyny in society (7).

Based on the above, this master's thesis will examine how female characters in films can influence rape culture. This is done with the intent to further examine what problems rape as a culture forms. To examine these, the master's thesis will be divided into two more significant sections and a discussion; the two first sections will take different point of views onto how female characters are perceived – the female and male point of view – while the discussion will expand on the problematics of rape as a culture. In order to study how women perceive female characters and what problematics that brings with it, the theories of gender performativity by Judith Butler and body image will be defined, with the intention of applying these to the films: *Charlie's Angels* (2019), *Birds of Prey: And*

*the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn*¹ (2020), and *Promising Young Woman* (2020). The theories are applied to these films with the purpose of exemplifying how females perceive female film characters. To study how men perceive female characters and what problems that creates, the theories of the male gaze by Laura Mulvey and objectivity by Martha Nussbaum will be defined with the intention of applying these to the films mentioned above. In order to transfer this master's thesis even further out in contemporary society, the discussion of this master's thesis will take a further look into what problematics rape as a culture creates. This will be done by examining the film *Promising Young Woman* and relate and expand it further by using the documentaries: *Audrie and Daisy* (2016) and *Roll Red Roll* (2018).

METHOD

In order to answer the problem formulation for this master's thesis: how female characters in films can influence rape culture the three films: *Birds of Prey: And the Fantabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn* (2020) and *Charlie's Angels* (2019) have been chosen to exemplify the depiction of women in films. They have been selected since I wanted newer, more contemporary, films to get a more recent view of female characters in films, while they simultaneously have had a large audience, since those have had an impact on a large demographic.

In regards to solving the problem formulation, it is also quite relevant to talk about the action-comedy subgenre in relation to these films, as the genre comes with its own norms and values, which influence the gender perspective. Comedy is very versatile and can often relieve tension, which is why it is so popular when connected to action. Action's appeal is generated by suspense and violence and often has to be counterbalanced with other elements to be effective (King, 2019). The humor associated with the genre of comedy is often used as comic relief to counterbalance the suspense. Cynthia M. King argues that "many forms of cruelty inspire laughter, and many forms of comedy are brutal and perilous" (King). Action-comedy combines the frantic plot of action with satire and wit from comedy. Hostile humor is often culminated in "trash talk" battles combined with physical violence (King); this is often done to soften the violence with childish trash talk. Action often builds the tension, and humor is often used to relieve this tension by changing the uneasy expectation for something considerably suspenseful to happen into basically nothing – here, laughter becomes an outlet for that unused energy (King). In film history, a male character is traditionally the protagonist in the

¹ This will be referred to as *Birds of Prey* for the rest of the project

plot, and female characters often do not take a considerable part in the plot in the films. Female characters are often used as the motivation for the action from the male characters; Women in films are used to inspire the man's agency. The films used for this project are more "feministic" because female characters are the protagonists and play an important part in the action (if not the most critical part). Though female characters are included in the action of the plot, it is still within the limits of traditional action films' heteronormative norms and values. Thereby, the female protagonists have to embody both the traditional, active male character and the traditional beautiful and passive female character. Humor is used in this regard to comedically depict how females embody the active characters and how other characters relate to this, as this is not the norm for female characters. Humor is often used as comic relief, which in female action-comedies is often used to soften the blow of misogyny and sexism against the female characters (King).

Promising Young Woman (2020) has been chosen for this project with the intention of adding a more relatable portrayal of women as the other films can be seen as more unrealistic to happen in real life. Thereby, portraying a story more viewers can relate to. This film also gives a further view into rape culture, as that is the whole center point of both the film and this project. Other examples of women in films will be mentioned in footnotes to fan out the examples even further by recognizing that there are many other examples than those given through the two more obscure films that have been chosen. *Promising Young Woman* will also be used in the discussion of this master's thesis. At the same time, it will draw upon the documentaries *Roll Red Roll* (2018) and *Audrie and Daisy* (2016) with the intention of expanding the project even further into contemporary society, both documentaries are concerned with rape culture. They follow sexual assault victims after their rape to display how society treats them after the public has known their assaults. Not only are the documentaries used to show that *Promising Young Woman* is not that far from reality (though the humor used in it might make it seem like it – humor as comic relief), but also to examine rape as a culture even further.

The analysis, along with the discussion, will through thorough examining show how the media (films in particular) contributes to society's view on women, which then in turn influence the idea of rape culture in a patriarchal society.

FRAMEWORK

Gender

“One is not born a woman, but, rather becomes one” (Quote by Simone de Beauvoir in Butler, 1990, 11). In the second wave of feminism sex and gender were differentiated, where sex is seen as biological, and gender is seen as culturally constructed (Rampton, 4). In 1990, Judith Butler wrote the book *Gender Trouble*, dismissing the differentiation between sex and gender. She argues: “[...] perhaps this construct called “sex” is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all” (Butler, 1990, 9-10). Butler argues that “sex itself is a gendered category” (10). Furthermore, she argues that the limits of sex and gender are set in the hegemonic cultural discourse (12); The hegemonic cultural discourse limits the extension in which sex and gender could essentially develop. Thereby, sex and gender are both set to generate a hierarchical system in society, where “man” and “male” are on top.²

Waves of feminism

“[...] it is too simplistic to believe that those who advocate for feminism define it as a “woman against man” fight. [...] Sexist thoughts and actions are the roots of the problem, regardless of whether they are perpetrated by males or females” Tanya Prewitt-White and Leslee A. Fisher argue in their chapter *What is feminism?* (Prewitt-White, 2020, 1). Feminism is not a women-against-men fight; women do not want to take the place of men or be superior to them – they want to be their equals, and at the same time, men should accordingly be allowed to reap some of the benefits showing emotion, since this is considered a feminine trait. Feminism is advocating against the oppression of all people – “regardless of race, class, sexuality, ableism, and ethnicity as it relates to sexism” (1). Feminists recognize that our experience of navigating and living in society is influenced by gender; thereby, gender is an essential part of our everyday life (2). Feminism is often talked about as waves in history to understand how it evolved in society. This project will focus on the waves of feminism in America, as the Western culture is the standpoint of the examination.

The first wave of feminism began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth Centuries and lasted until the 1930s (Rampton, 2008, 1). Sally J. Scholz argues that “[...] the first wave focused on women gaining status as human beings with full civil, intellectual, social, economic, and legal rights”

² This theory will be further explained and expanded on under The Perfect Woman section.

(Scholz, 2012, 6). The first wave focused on gaining the same legal rights for women as men had (Rampton, 1). Western, white, cis-gendered women from the middle class generally led the first wave (Prewitt-White, 4). The American society saw women acting in a way they would call “un-ladylike,” as women demonstrated and did public speaking, which at that time was very unusual for women, as they did not have a voice in the public sphere (Rampton, 2). In 1848, the Declaration of Sentiments was signed, which insisted on “women’s right to education, property, a profession as well as the right to vote” (Prewitt-White, 5). The first wave faded out after the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 (5). After the first wave of feminism from 1930 to 1960, there was a pause as men “returned from World War II and regained jobs that women had taken over in their absence. Once men returned to the United States, women were then expected to return to their roles as housewives, mothers and caregivers” (6).

The second wave of feminism started in the 1960s and continued into the 1990s (Rampton, 3). While Western, white women mainly led the first wave, the second wave sought solidarity amongst all women (Scholz, 7). Through this wave, sex and gender were differentiated, sex being biological, and gender being culturally constructed (Rampton, 4). The dominant issues were sexuality and reproductive rights, as women wanted the right to control their own bodies (3). This led to the right to abortion and access to the contraceptive pill, and the acceptance of female sexuality (5). Furthermore, women wanted the right to equal educational opportunities, which meant higher education for women, which expanded the feminist way of thinking (Prewitt-White, 6). Women felt like “objects of beauty dominated by patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paying jobs” (Rampton, 3). Women wanted the right to control their own lives; if they wanted to focus on their career and not have children, they could do that; if they wanted to stay home and be the caretaker for their children, they could do that (Prewitt-White, 2). They fought to be able to make their own decisions and not have their lives mapped out for them in advance. The energy in this wave was “focused on passing the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing social equality regardless of sex” (Rampton, 3). Furthermore, they made an effort to “demonstrate that race, class, and gender oppression are all related,” which furthered the efforts to “rid society top-to-bottom of sexism” (4). The second wave of feminism wanted women to have the same opportunities in society as men.

The third wave of feminism began in the mid-90s and lasted until the 2010s (4). The goal of this wave was to destabilize many constructs, such as “body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity” (4). The scholars and activists attempted to “operate outside the binaries of experience [...]

and instead recognize and embrace layers of oppression and the contradictions and multiplicity of identit(ies)” (Prewitt-White, 7). Women wanted to get rid of the notion that there is one way to be a woman and instead understand that womanhood can be many things and is different for every woman. Rampton argues that “its transversal politics means that differences such as those of ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, etc. are celebrated and recognized as dynamic, situational, and provisional” (Rampton, 5). Women wanted to define feminine beauty for themselves as subjects and “not as objects of a sexist patriarchy” (4). This meant that the notion of gender became unbalanced “in a way that encourages experimentation and creative thought” (5). Women wanted to be able to be anything they wanted – just as most men could in society. They took back terms like “bitch” and “slut” to “deprive it of verbal weapons” (4). The third wave wanted to break away from oppressional sexism in all its forms.

Some feminists argue that we are now in the fourth wave of feminism which began in the 2010s and is still ongoing (Prewitt-White, 8). The fourth wave focuses on “women’s physical accomplishments and possibilities” (Scholz, 7). Rampton also argues that “the fourth wave of feminism is emerging because (mostly) young women and men realize that the third wave is either overly optimistic or hampered by blinders” (Rampton, 6). Indicating that (mainly) young people have realized that the sexism, the third wave tried to break away from, is still present in contemporary society. Fourth-wave feminists do not only refer to the struggles of women, as gender equality, in general, is also an essential issue (7). The struggles of women can only be fully understood through intersectionality, as “feminism is part of a larger consciousness of oppression along racism, ageism, classism, ableism and sexual orientation” (7). Social media has given unlimited opportunities to research “feminist consideration, education, interest and resistant. Thus, the online universe has been claimed as the birthplace of fourth-wave feminism” (Prewitt-White, 8). Central issues are receiving both national and international attention by mainstream press;

“Problems like sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, unequal pay, slut-shaming, the pressure on women to conform to a single and unrealistic body-type and the realization that gains female representation in politics and business, for example, are very slight” (Rampton, 6-7).

Rampton argues, “the beauty of the fourth wave is that there is a place in it for all – together “(7). Though the female status in society has developed due to the waves of feminism, women are still often reduced to stereotypical gender norms in media.

Male gaze and objectivity

“[Freud] associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze”, Laura Mulvey writes in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey¹, 1973, 59). In her essay, Mulvey argues that men get pleasure by looking at women on TV; furthermore, they get pleasure when looking at women as sexual objects (58). Furthermore, Mulvey argues that the female character on TV only has two functions – being the sexual desire of the male characters on TV; and being the object of sexual desire for the male spectators (62). The male spectators identify themselves with the male protagonist, and through him, they can possess the sexual object they see in the female character (64). In her essay *Objectification* (1995), Martha Nussbaum argues that objectification occurs when an unwilling person is treated as an object by another person (Nussbaum, 257). Thereby, the male gaze objectifies female characters for the pleasure of men. Nussbaum developed seven notions of objectification, which goes from treating “the object as a tool of his or her purposes” to treating “the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account” (Nussbaum, 257). The male gaze uses female characters as a tool for men’s sexual pleasure – as a way for the male spectator to possess the passive, sexual object they see on TV.³

Rape culture

“On TV programs and ads, in newspapers, novels, poetry, songs, opera, rock, and rap, on every billboard, in every shop window, on every museum wall we found evidence of rape culture. We began to understand the ways girls and boys are programmed to be victims and rapists [...]” (quote by Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth; in Nicholls, 2021, 29). The term ‘rape culture’ emerged in the United States during the second wave of feminism (32). “[G]rowing feminist awareness of the pervasiveness and normalization of rape was part of Second Wave contributions to building more gender-equal societies [...]” (32). The second wave’s understanding of rape explains, it is not “an action that men are driven to because they are mentally defective or overwhelmed by lust, passion, or the wiles of seductive women; it is intentional violence” (33). Nicholls argues that sexism comes in two forms: hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (35). Hostile sexism is identified as misogyny (this form will be expanded in the later section ‘Misogyny’), while benevolent sexism is connected to chivalry where women are placed on a pedestal and are stripped of power (35). Nicholls states that Fraser argues,

³ The male gaze and objectification theories will be explained further under the section of the male view on women in films in this project.

rape and chivalry depend on each other: “it is because of the threat of rape that women are through to need men’s protection, and it is through chivalry’s imputation of vulnerability and diminished agency that women are made more vulnerable to rape” (35-36).

Rape culture is a society in which “a powerful man you refuse to have sex with can end your career,” it is a society that “raises their girls with the message that they need to make themselves attractive to men, that their value and well-being depends on male validation” (26). Patriarchy societies normalize male superiority and female inferiority, which means power is put in the hands of men, and women are thereby dependent on men’s generosity (30). Nicholls, furthermore, explains it as:

“If we are ‘good girls,’ we are delicate (weak), trustworthy stewards of household budgets, and willing pupils of authoritative, learned men. If we are ‘bad girls,’ we are schemers and temptresses, materialistic (unfeminine, if we attempt economic autonomy), and, if we presume to know more (or other) than what is given to us by men who are our teachers, intellectually arrogant” (30).

In short, women are only doing the ‘right thing, when they are submissive to men. Furthermore, Nicholls argues that when social relations are defined between superiority and inferiority, it becomes natural for the dominant group to impose its desire and will onto the inferior (30). Rape culture “normalizes and excuses rape” as the superior group is prioritized over “the comfort, safety and dignity” of the inferior group, who are seen as “prey” (26). Rape culture is where:

“men are raised from the time they are boys to feel entitled to women’s attention, women’s care, and women’s bodies. Women are raised from the time we are girls to also believe that men are entitled to these things, or at least, we are raised to be wary about openly contesting that entitlement” (30-31).

Thereby, rape culture is something people are taught. Boys are raised to feel entitled, while girls are raised to confirm this entitlement. With this entitlement comes the problem of not raising boys not to rape but teaching girls not to get raped. Girls and women are taught to be careful when going out in society, which often means choosing safety over freedom. Nicholls exemplifies: “we stay home instead of going out in public, we stick together in groups and do things like deputising one of our group to stay at the table in a bar and watch our drinks when others of us head to the bathroom or dance floor” (37). Women are taught to stay together and never to go anywhere alone. Moreover, this means that we identify harassment and other non-consensual experiences as “regrettable risks of dating in the modern world” (32).

Rape culture is a struggle women have to survive on a daily basis (36). Nicholls states that Fiona Vera-Gray documented that “at least 80% of women living in cities... have been subjected to harassment or violence in public” (36). This is just what happens in public. What about the harassment that happens in their own homes through social media? Nicholls argues that globalization has normalized men as hunters for sex, and women are guardians of their own virtue (27). When women fail to protect their virtue, they are shamed and even victim blamed. Women are expected to “take responsibility for men’s sexual desire” (27). Nicholls argues that violence against women is a pandemic in cultures all over the world (31). Women are particularly vulnerable to this simply because of their gender.

Misogyny

The concept of misogyny (hate against women) argues that women are harassed by men simply because they are women (Vickery et al., 2018, 13). This might seem extreme to some people; however, women are condemned to stereotypical media portrayals in which they seem to only care about their appearance. When women are depicted as perfect, beautiful, sex symbols; “society also adopts and reflects this construction of idealized femininity that is devoid of power, humanity, and agency” (8). Thereby, these stereotypical portrayals of women add to how women are perceived in society. As a result, women learn “the most important thing about them is their appearance” and are reduced to only their appearance, which denies them power, whether it be sexual, physical, or intellectual (8).

In the book *Mediating Misogyny* (2018), Vickery et al. argue, “women and the world are viewed from a male perspective in which women are presented as objects of heterosexual male pleasure. Consequently, women also learn to view themselves from a heteronormative masculine perspective” (7). Media reinforces patriarchal norms, which include mediating misogyny. Furthermore, media enlarges unattainable beauty standards for women (8), which creates body dissatisfaction and lower self-worth, as women continue to try to reach beauty standards, they can never achieve. Vickery et al. state, “the stereotypical, mediated portrayals of women as sexual objects, judged by their appearance, and as passive members of society who lack power, contributes to the normalization of violence, shaming, and abuse against women [...]” (7). Thereby, Vickery et al. argue that how the media depicts women normalizes their harassment in society. Normalizing harassment against women could, in theory, lead to rape culture. If women are seen as sexual objects for men’s pleasure, what stops men from treating women this way? When women are depicted as objects, nothing stops men from feeling entitled to act like they keep women’s ownership.

“[...] digital platforms have become just one more space where hierarchies of gender, race class, sexuality, and other constructed differences are reproduced. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are not the problem – misogyny perpetuates with or without social media – yes the persistent, searchable, and scalable affordances of social media render interactions more visible [...], including sexist and racist attitudes” (Vickery et al., 10).

Thereby, they argue that though social media makes misogyny easier, it is not its cause. What then is the cause of misogyny? For a long time, women have been subjected to misogyny, including sexist portrayals in media (7). Could media be the cause of the continuous misogyny? Saying that only the media aspect is the reason behind misogyny would be naïve, but could the depiction of women in media be part of it?

THE PERFECT WOMAN: the feminine view on women in films

This section will examine what happens or could happen to females when they watch portrayals of women in films. Firstly, the theories of gender and body image in relation to television will be explained in order to understand why female film characters could be problematic. Lastly, the theories will be applied to the films *Charlie's Angels*, *Birds of Prey*, and *Promising Young Woman* as examples of what could happen to females when they see women in films.

Gender and performativity

“Gender is built into the Western world’s overall social system, interpenetrating the organization of the production of goods and services, kinship and family, sexuality, emotional relationships and the minutiae of daily life” (Lorber, 2000, 83). Gender is structurally built into almost everything in Western society; therefore, gender is essential for understanding how women are treated in society and how this differs from how men are treated.

Many feminist writers argue that sex is the biological sex one is born with, while gender is culturally constructed (Butler, 8). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler argues that masculinity could just as easily represent a female body as a male body, just as femininity could represent a male or female body (9) She argues that though one might have a “female” body, one could still identify as male and vice versa. To poststructuralists, like Butler, “there is no pre-discursive identity, as even our understanding of biological sex is discursively produced” (Hall, 1999, 187). Butler argues that the distinction between gender and sex is meaningless as sex is culturally constructed since the way one is

supposed to act or look due to one's sex is a culturally constructed norm (9). Even biologists argue that the binary view on sex is "overly simplistic and that sex should be viewed as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy" (Morgenroth and Ryan, 2018), indicating that sex is not as simple as it is made out to be. Butler argues that there should not be a binary view on sex, as there is no right and/or wrong way to be one's sex – one does not have to fit into either the male or female category. However, society's gender norms regulate and police what is seen as acceptable, which is done through people in society. Through society's view on gender norms, gender follows sex, and desire follows gender (Lloyd, 1999, 198); if you are born with a vagina, you are a female and, therefore, are attracted to males – if you are born with a penis, you are male and, therefore, are attracted to females. Gender norms would have it this way; however, Butler argues, "gender does not necessarily follow from sex, and desire, or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender" (Butler, 185). Thereby, even though one is born with a penis, one is not necessarily male and not necessarily attracted to females. However, Butler still argues, there are limits to how independent gender can be as "limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (12). This indicates that though gender, to Butler, seems independent, it is still set within the boundaries of the heterosexual hegemonic culture.

Gender norms divide people into two groups – male and female – through people's behavior, emotions, and appearance (Lorber, 82). "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender;" Butler writes, "that identity is performatively constructed by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 34). Thereby arguing that one expresses one's gender while one simultaneously is appointed a gender by the way one expresses oneself. Butler argues that gender is always a doing - a performance – as gender is what one expresses through how one acts, the way one expresses who one is (34). Gender is the performance of certain signs which through norms are appointed to a specific gender – male or female; it is a process of re-signifying these "gender signs" to express you as a person. Thereby, gender is nothing without the "bodily gestures, movements and styles constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler, 191). Furthermore, Butler argues that "it [gender] is a production which, in effect – that is, in its effect – postures as an imitation" (188). Gender is not just a performance; it is also an imitation – a repetition – of how other people perform their gender. Thereby, repetition is essential to performativity, not just miming other people's gender performance but also repeating one's own. Still, gender performance is related to what gender signifies within the limits of the hegemonic cultural discourse (Lloyd, 203). A girl will imitate her mother, aunts, female friends, and even females she meets on the street. She will look at the females in her life, the females

she meets through her life, and unconsciously repeat some of their feminine traits to perform her own female gender. Intimated by Butler, one could say “that the performance is an expression of the ‘will’ or ‘choice’ of the performer. Thus, a performance may draw on the conventions of gender, but the performer decides which gender s/he wishes to act out” (Lloyd, 202). Thereby saying, one chooses which gender one wishes to perform; however, this performance draws on the convention of gender norms. Though it seems as if one chooses how one wants to perform one’s gender, it is not possible to have complete control of one’s gender performance (Lloyd, 203).

Globalization makes it easier for people to observe other people of the same gender, which means that in contemporary society, one is able to imitate people one has not even seen in real life. Popular media is a considerable concept from which one can imitate people without meeting them in real life. Television viewing is a normal part of Western culture, which means it is normal to see people on TV and unconsciously imitate them. Furthermore, this means that how people look on TV influence the way one sees one’s gender; a simplified example of this is if one is a feminine (as opposed to a masculine) woman, and all the feminine women one sees on TV has long blond hair, one will unconsciously begin to connect long, blond hair to femininity. This means that one might grow one’s hair out, and one might even bleach it blonde to look like what one sees as feminine. Television often depicts men with stereotypical male traits and women with stereotypical female traits. Stereotypical male traits are often characteristics such as independence, strength, courage, and leadership. Stereotypical female traits are often more nurturing characteristics such as cooperativeness, empathy, affection, helpfulness, and kindness. These characteristics have become stereotypes for each gender because they are often related to one gender and not the other.

Body Image in relation to Television

“Slender women are routinely featured as attractive in popular media, and women who internalize these slender ideals are less satisfied with their bodies,” David A. Frederick et al. writes in the essay *Correlates of appearance and weight satisfaction in a U.S. National Sample: Personality, attachment style, television viewing, self-esteem, and life satisfaction* (Frederick et al., 2016, 193). The essay examines how appearance dissatisfaction can relate to viewing television as earlier research suggests these correlate to body image (192). The essay found a connection between viewing TV and appearance dissatisfaction, as the people who watched more TV were less satisfied with their appearance and weight (195). It is not clear what body size these people have; however, seeing more TV means that one sees more of these beautiful, slender women to whom one compares oneself. As mentioned

in the performativity theory chapter, one compares one's femininity to other females. Suppose one mostly observes slender, seemingly perfect women. In that case, one begins to see this as the picture of femininity, thereby feeling dissatisfied with one's appearance if one does not look like what one sees in popular media. Frederick et al. found that "Underweight women, normal-weight men and women, and overweight men were most likely to be very extremely satisfied with their appearance and their weight." They state this is consistent with the Western importance for women to be slender and for men to be athletic or lean (200). It is worth noting that the study found that men scored higher than women when it came to satisfaction with appearance and weight, while women scored higher when it came to unsatisfactory with appearance (198). Thereby, the study concludes that women are more unsatisfied with their appearance than men.

The article *The Elastic Body Image: The Effect of Television Advertising and Programming on Body Image Distortions in Young Women* found that 50% of girls in 9th to 12th grade described themselves as fat, even though only 25% could be described as obese or somewhat obese (Myers et al., 1992, 112). In addition, the article describes a "body size disturbance" problem as "underweight subjects significantly overestimated their body size when compared to normal-weight subjects" (114). Thus, when one compares oneself to others – or compare one's body to others' – one might get a wrong idea of what size one really is, as one can feel bigger than one is. The article, furthermore, describes that more than 95% of the studied women overestimated their body size by 25% on the average - and these were the women who did not suffer from eating disorders, which seems to be a problem when seeing oneself as bigger than one is (114).

Another problem with popular media mainly featuring slender women is that these at the same time are shown as the symbol of success. In the article *Body Image and the Role of Television: Clarifying and Modelling the Effect of Television on Body Dissatisfaction* they observed that

"many actresses and media figures were significantly thinner than the average American woman. Additionally, many attractive media characters are presented as holding successful positions, and the actors/actresses are depicted at glamorous events where they are symbols of success" (Kinnally et al., 2014, 216).

Watching slender, successful women in popular media could lead to women connecting the slender body type with success – thereby, one is successful when one is slender. However, as the article states, women in popular media are often thinner than the average American woman, which means that women are chasing a body type that most women do not have. This slender – or thin – ideal thereby sets unrealistic body goals for women who want to embody these ideals, which can lead to body

dissatisfaction (221). The article also argues that “it only takes 30 minutes of TV viewing to influence the perceptions of body shape” (221), which means that television influence women’s perception of body shape by observing mostly slender – or thin – women. Kinnally et al. also argue, like the performativity theory states, the effects of TV consumption are made through repetition, which indicates that the more women see the body ideal in popular media, they begin to see this as a social value (217).

The Perfect Woman

Women are often portrayed in the same stereotypical tropes when they are depicted in films. The most stereotypical role a woman can play is the damsel in distress, which is seen less and less in recent years. As mentioned in the gender and performativity chapter of the theory, people mimic other people’s gender performances in order to create their own. Women no longer want to mimic helpless creatures who always need a man to take care of them. Instead, they want to mimic stronger female characters, which have created other (stronger) stereotypical tropes. The cool girl trope and tough girl trope are often used on female characters to make them appear stronger and more independent. This is a positive aspect as the female characters are more three-dimensional and actually do something for the plot development of the story instead of just being the ones who need saving. However, these tropes often repress stereotypical feminine traits, as these would be seen as weaknesses. Thereby, female audiences keep seeing that they have to abandon feminine traits to be seen as strong.

Charlie’s Angels (2019) depicts this very notion through the agent, Jane Kano (Ella Balinska). Jane is a mixture of the cool girl and the tough girl tropes, as she portrays physical strength and has a very logical mind⁴. In the beginning of the film, she is seen as a strong and emotionless woman. She does not seem to want friends or even to connect to new people, which is depicted through her reluctance to work with the free-spirited Sabina (Kristen Steward) even though someone she trusts, asks her to do it (*Charlie’s Angels*, 26:54). She prefers to work alone, which is a stereotypical masculine trait, as most men believe that they can do everything by themselves and do not need help. Stereotypical feminine traits like emotions and close relations are not associated with Jane until she gets sad and cries when she is not sure if Sabina will survive after the Townsend Agency Headquarters is blown up with them inside it (1:29:22). Jane is powerful and tough throughout the whole film, and

⁴ Other examples of the stereotypical tough girl are Natasha Romanoff/ Black Widow (Scarlett Johansson) in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie) in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*. Both of these women show a lot of strength, while they show very little emotion.

this does not change after she shows emotions to Sabina, so why could she not show emotions before? Emotions are seen as weak, so she cannot reveal any to follow the cool and tough girl tropes. However, for the female audience to connect with her, she eventually has to show emotion, which is then repressed again afterward. The female audience gets the idea that it is seen as a weakness to show emotions and only reveal them when it becomes impossible to conceal. Showing stereotypically masculine traits are seen as strong, while stereotypically feminine traits are seen as weak.

In *Birds of Prey* (2020), the female characters; Helena Bartinelli/Huntress (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) and Dinah Lance/Black Canary (Jurnee Smollett), also follow the emotionless nature of the tough girl trope. Both women keep to themselves; Dinah lives to work, while Helena lives to avenge her murdered family. Neither one seems to want to connect to other people; that is until the teenager, Cassandra Cain (Ella Jay Basco), is in trouble (*Birds of Prey*, 1:19:00). The compassion and affection for Cassandra are what bring the four main female characters together. Stereotypical feminine traits bring the women together in order to protect Cassandra, which in the end, is why they are able to save her. Not only are they able to save her, but they also end up helping each other. Women helping women is a very feministic aspect, which is also shown earlier in the film, when Dinah helps Harley Quinn after a night out. Harley Quinn is very drunk and is standing with a guy behind a club. The man tries to get her in the back of a truck when Dinah eventually saves her from what could have been a sexual assault, as Harley was too drunk to even stand on her own legs (thereby, also too drunk to know what was happening or could have happened to her) (1:18:48).

Women helping women is a very positive aspect that is seen more and more. However, the film *Promising Young Woman* (2020) displays how women helping women is not necessarily the case. The film displays how no one seemed to believe her when Nina was raped as they did not actually see it. The film displays how people only believe or are worried about females when it happens to be someone they love. When Cassandra is having a conversation with the Dean of the University they went to, the Dean explains that they get accusations of sexual assault all the time. However, there is insufficient evidence if the victim has been drinking or maybe could not remember everything. She asks Cassandra if they are supposed to ruin a man's life every time the university gets an accusation like that and the fact that they should give the boys the benefit of the doubt⁵. However, when Cassandra explains to the Dean that her daughter is at an apartment with boys and alcohol, the Dean is apprehensive about her daughter, thereby hypocritically not giving these boys

⁵ Another relevant aspect here is the usage of 'boy', which indicates, the Dean sees this as boyish pranks. This correlates to the phrase 'boys will be boys' – indicating that it should not be taken seriously, it is just a boyish prank.

the benefit of the doubt (*Promising Young Woman*, 47:16). This exemplifies the point that proximity to the victim has a part to play in how the situation is handled; The Dean no longer gives the boys the benefit of the doubt - not when it is her own daughter. The film also deals with the rape culture problem in the way that sometimes even women do not believe women when they say that they have been sexually assaulted. Cassandra has a conversation with a former friend of her and Nina's, and when she asks her about what happened back then, the friend makes excuses like, she was not the only one who did not believe it, and when you have a reputation for sleeping around, how do you expect someone to be on your side when you have sex with someone you do not want to. This thought process is synonymous with 'the boy who cried wolf'. She even says the phrase "I don't make the rules," indicating that this is not just her, but this is the norm of society that you should take the consequences, however harmful they are when you have made yourself vulnerable (38:51). Once again, the old school friend reacts differently when she is the one who might have been sexually assaulted as she wakes up in a hotel room with a guy, not remembering how she got there or what happened because she was very drunk (45:28). This displays one of the problems with rape culture: when you do not see it like Dinah did with Harley Quinn or if it is not someone you know or if the person has some kind of reputation, you are prone not to believe that they have been sexually assaulted, especially if there are not hard-hitting evidence of it. Is it right that we as a society do not take every rape accusation seriously?

Sabina Wilson in *Charlie's Angels* depicts a very stereotypical cool girl⁶. She is a very uninhibited, careless woman, who is never seen as very emotional. This sets an impossible standard for women: women have to repress their emotional nature to become "cool" women. Sabina is very easygoing and does not seem to care about what anybody thinks of her, while she at the same time is effortlessly attractive⁷. The cool girl falls short if she is not extremely hot while at the same time portraying the stereotypical masculine traits. Sabina is a male fantasy, as she is basically a man in a hot female body – the male dream-girl. This furthers the notion that a woman's appearance is one of the most important aspects of her. Women learn that their appearance is the essential aspect of them, as it simultaneously denies them any form of power, which is a part of society's misogyny, and this thought process

⁶ Other examples of the stereotypical cool girl are Robin Scherbatsky (Cobie Smulders) in *How I Met Your Mother*, Andie (Kate Hudson) in *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, and Mikaela Banes (Meghan Fox) in *Transformers*. These women are depicted as "one of the guys" and show very little emotion.

⁷ The terms "attractive" or "objectively attractive" will be applied throughout the analyses in this thesis. This means the character(s) fulfils several aspects of what society deems attractive for any female to have - whether it be physically or character traits.

contributes to the patriarchal society. At the beginning of the film, when the audience is introduced to Sabina for the first time, she even plays to her uninhibited nature combined with her beauty, as she actually explains to her target that it takes a man an additional seven seconds to perceive a woman as a threat than he would a man (3:21). She plays to the fact that her beauty makes men underestimate her until she finally shows that she is a tough girl who can fight just as well as a man (or maybe even better). Sabina thereby uses the way women are perceived to her advantage.

Another stereotypical female trope, often combined with the cool girl trope, is the crazy woman. Harley Quinn (Margot Robbie) depicts the crazy, cool girl trope with her uninhibited personality and sexuality. The crazy, cool girl does not care what society thinks of her, and she plays by her own rules – though she is still cute enough not to be perceived as terrifying. She shows an appealing level of danger without being “too dangerous”⁸. Harley Quinn has a very childish behavior like jumping up and down while she claps her hands together when she is excited (2:40), or when she sticks her tongue out to another woman (14:14), and her shrill laugh and voice in general. These are reasons behind why she is not seen as too terrifying because her childish behavior makes her seem less dangerous. Harley Quinn challenges the system that harms or holds her back (another aspect of the cool, crazy girl trope), which is depicted as she shows her society that she can get by without a man protecting her. Harley Quinn explains in the film that she, at first, does not tell anyone about her breakup with the Joker because doing so means she is no longer under the protection of a powerful man (4:53), which means other men can harm her without repercussions – which is precisely what happens after she makes their breakup public (13:47). This gives the idea that a woman should not stand on her own, as she needs a man to protect her. However, as the film evolves, Harley Quinn and her new squad of women prove they do not need a man to take care of them – they can handle the problems themselves. After Harley Quinn has made her break up with the Joker public, you really see how, especially the men, in society believes that a woman is nothing without a man. Her old enemies suddenly go up against her, which they did not do when she was with the Joker. She is a woman in a man’s world; she fights against the patriarchy, which is very “un-ladylike”, which often results in a woman being referred to as crazy or hysteric.

The film *Promising Young Woman* also depicts how men do not like it when women react differently than what they expect. This is depicted in the beginning of the film after Cassandra has called out the first guy for trying to rape her. She is walking down the street, past a few men, who are standing on the other side of the street, as they begin to catcall her. Instead of doing something the

⁸ This idea has been present throughout movie history and is exemplified in the femme fatale.

men would expect, like running away, she just stands still and looks at them. The men do not like this and end up yelling, “Fuck you then” and “Can’t you take a joke?” (8:48). Furthermore, she is called crazy or psycho for exposing the men, who take her home when she pretends to be blackout drunk (53:58). This indicates that men expect women to be timid when they approach them and when they do not react the way the men would expect, women are called crazy or psycho. If a man did the same thing, they would not think of him as crazy; they would say that he is a strong and fearful man. This indicates how differently society sees men and women, even if they behave the same. The different reactions come into play when the expectations are not met.

Both *Birds of Prey* and *Charlie’s Angels* portray some of the aspects of how it is to be a professional woman in a man’s world. This is depicted through the police officer Renee Montoya (Rosie Perez) in *Birds of Prey*, as she is the only woman in the police station. The stereotypical tough girl trope also indicates that when a woman works in a man’s world, she has to be tough; she has to abandon every feminine trait in order to be taken seriously by men. There is nothing stereotypical feminine about Montoya as she needs to act like a man to be taken seriously in her profession⁹. She seems to be very good at her job, as we see how great she is to detect what has happened at a crime scene with the evidence she sees (9:43). However, despite of this, we also see how the men at her job get promoted for her work, and they get her cases when they do not believe her hunch based on the lack of hard evidence (19:40). Her male coworkers make fun of her and patronize her; however, her tough girl nature makes her talk back (17:35); she does not accept that patronizing behavior from anyone, which is a stereotypical male trait. This shows the film’s audience that you have to abandon your femininity to be taken seriously, especially when you are in a typically male profession.

Elena Houghlin (Naomi Scott) in *Charlie’s Angels*, furthermore, illustrates what it is like to work in a man’s world. Elena portrays the smart girl trope in the beginning of the film, as she is Chief Tech Engineer at Broke Industries. Clearly, someone must be pretty smart to be Chief Tech Engineer, despite this, her conversation with her (male) boss shows that he does not value her opinion; he talks over her and does not allow her to be an active part of their conversation (8:03). Her boss talks to her like she is dumb, however, when she threatens to go over his head and talk to the company’s owner, he indicates that she is too smart to go forward with it (9:17). He also patronizes and generalizes the female gender by proclaiming that they can get Calisto in pastel colors, as if that is the only thing

⁹ Another example is Gracie Hart (Sandra Bullock) in the beginning of *Miss Congeniality*. Her coworkers see her as “one of the guys”, and she does not show any stereotypical feminine traits – she is even opposed to being more feminine, as she goes undercover in the beauty pageant.

women care about (15:29). The misogyny present here again reduces women to only care about appearances, as he thinks that is the only aspect they know anything about. Being a beautiful woman in a big company also attracts sexual harassment, which is seen when a security guy searches Elena, and only her, when she arrives at work - she does not seem surprised, indicating that this has happened before (31:10). Furthermore, the security guy patronizes her as he ends the conversation with “Don’t forget to smile.” Not only does it indicate that he has the right to have a say in how she presents herself, but it is also an indication of the fact that women are supposed to do anything they can to look beautiful and, most importantly, to be approachable.

In *Birds of Prey*, after Harley Quinn has made her break up with the Joker public, Roman Sionis (Ewan McGregor) says, “she belongs to me,” indicating that he sees women as property and not that she is not with another man, she is now his property ¹⁰(36:12). When women are seen as property, they are by default not seen as human beings, thereby reducing them to objects - and objects can be owned. Both films depict men not only to see women as property but also to underestimate them all the time. Men in both films think that they are stronger and smarter than women, which in the end is why they always lose. Women are smart enough to recognize their strengths and weaknesses, which seems to be celebrated in *Charlie’s Angels* as they in the small group often compliment each other on their strengths.

At the end of *Charlie’s Angels*, we furthermore see, Charlie is actually a woman (whereas Charlie is a man in the original films) (1:43:09). Her having to pretend to be a man indicates once again that men underestimate women, and for her to get men to listen to her, or maybe even work for her, she has to pretend to be a man herself. This indicates that men do not listen to women or at least will not listen to them when they are in superior positions. They will also never work for women as they will not be inferior to women in any way. Misogyny reduces women to basically nothing (objects), only their appearance has any importance; women are not supposed to feel smart or powerful – they need to be inferior to men in every way possible in every way.

Though these earlier examples show how tough and cool the female characters in both films are, one must remember that these qualities do not matter if they are not objectively attractive. They are only seen as tough and cool because they, at the same time, are inherently beautiful – without their

¹⁰ Women are just supposed to put up with this, which is also evident in the film *The Assistant* (2019). The main character, Jane (Julia Garner), begins to realize that her boss has sex with women who want to work with him. Through conversations with her coworkers at the firm, Jane realizes that she is expected to be okay with it and not do anything about it.

beautiful bodies and appearances, they would be seen as unappealing¹¹. Female characters' beautiful appearance in films is essential; they evidently need to act like a man while looking like a feminine woman. Most female characters have slender body types, which indicates that you should be slender to live the lives they do¹². This can be troublesome for the female audience as not everybody has that body type. This is problematic because female audience members may feel that they do not look right. After all, the women they see in films can be very different from how they see themselves. This can give females body image issues as they feel like they have to look like the women they see in films. Looking at the female characters in both *Birds of Prey* and *Charlie's Angels*, all of them have a slender body type. These are just two examples of the slender body type representation in mainstream popular media. One could argue that the characters in both films are slender because of what they do for a living, however, none of the women are very muscular, which theoretically would also happen due to all the training they do. However, muscularity is not the ideal body type for women, and thereby, this is not something they embody. Most of the women in both films also wear clothes to accentuate this slender body type. The woman has to be stereotypically female in appearance to make up for their masculine character traits.

In *Charlie's Angels*, the three main characters, Jane, Sabina, and Elena, have many costume changes; one thing these costumes have in common is that they all draw attention to their slender bodies. They are very often shown wearing short, tight skirts or shorts or wearing crop tops or dresses which accentuate their breasts. Even in the fight scenes, they wear tight tops or crop tops with either some kind of tight pants or shorts, sometimes even jeans or some kind of leather pants, which theoretically would not be very comfortable or easy to fight in.

In *Birds of Prey*, Dinah and Helena are always wearing long pants and some kind of crop top, which in Dinah's case always accentuates her breasts. Harley Quinn is mainly seen wearing short, ripped shorts with either a crop top/sports bra and with either a t-shirt or jacket over it. Furthermore, she is wearing the same sports bra at the end of the film with overalls zipped down at the front to show her stomach. Though her costumes provide more coverage than her costume in her first film, *Suicide Squad* (where she is seen wearing very short hot pants), she is still wearing clothes to draw attention to her body, whether it emphasizes her legs, her stomach, or her arms. These examples show how female characters in films accentuate their slender bodies, which, as mentioned in the theory,

¹¹ Once again *Miss Congeniality's* Gracie Hart is a great example to this as she is only noticed by men after her makeover.

¹² It would be easier to give examples of women in films who do not have a slender body type (as the slender body type is the norm) – and these are often the comic release of the story.

can lead to body size issues in female audiences. When most women in films draw attention to these slender body ideals, it can lead to an audience with body dissatisfaction if they do not embody the slender body type themselves. As mentioned in the theory, comparing yourself to this specific body type and not feeling like you look like that can lead to body size disturbance which means, you feel bigger than you are. When most women in popular media show this slender body type, it also gives the idea that this is a social value, and thereby, if you do not look like this, you are less socially valuable. Slenderness can also be seen as an ideal for success as all these popular, successful women have this slender body type.

Unlike the other women in these two films, Montoya is dressed in professional clothes, a blue shirt, and long pants. Where the slender figure of the other main female characters in both films is in focus in their clothes, Montoya does not wear revealing or close-fitting clothes throughout the film¹³. However, it is essential to remember that she is a police officer working in a man's world, and as mentioned earlier in this analysis, she has abandoned all her feminine traits in order to fit in and be accepted by the men at her workplace or in society in general. Therefore, if she was to wear less clothes than these "professional-looking" clothes, she would not be taken seriously, which is evident in the scene where she is wearing an oversized T-shirt saying, "I shaved my balls for this," as she has a meeting with her boss. She is only wearing this shirt because she smells like garbage (because Harley Quinn threw it on her), and this was the only clothing item she could wear. Although this is a compelling case for her not to wear what she usually would, her boss still tells her that they have a dress code she needs to uphold, not understanding the special circumstances.

Society's beauty standards can be seen through media, which includes films. The examination above shows that a widespread beauty standard for women is the slender body type. Performativity explains that you mimic what you see, which means that you want to mimic the beauty standards you are exposed to through your everyday life, including media. Seeing films, exposes you to the slender body ideal, which means you want to embody that. As mentioned earlier, this can cause body dissatisfaction and lead audience members to feel less valuable, because Hollywood sets impossible beauty standards for women to live by. A slender body might be obtainable for most people, however, looking at the food and drink intake of these popular female tropes gives a wrong idea of how to obtain it. Sabina in *Charlie's Angels* talks about food and drinks throughout the film, indicating that she takes these seriously. Once again, this is a stereotypical cool girl trait, as the cool girl loves to eat and

¹³ Neither does Cassandra, however, that is most likely due to her young age. She does wear shorts though to accentuate her legs.

drink, much like a stereotypical man does, and she does not care if the food is healthy or not. The same goes for Harley Quinn in *Birds of Prey*, as the only thing we see her eat is cereal, cheese in a can, ice cream, and her beloved, greasy “perfect egg sandwich,” not to mention her heavy drinking in the beginning of the film. The female audiences want to embody what they see in films, however, achieving the slender body type while eating like these feministic female characters is not attainable by most people. This furthers both body dissatisfaction and body size disturbances in the female audience.

In *Promising Young Woman*, Cassandra is exploiting these exact beauty standards to get guys to notice her and bring her home in order for her to expose them. When she goes out to do this, she is wearing darker, more revealing, and mysterious clothes, compared to what she wears in her everyday life (she wears a lot of pastel colors when she is not trying to expose the men who take her home). She also wears heavy makeup when she goes out, which men do not really like, according to one of the guys she exposes (they are, oddly enough, still bringing her home with them, though). We also see her following a makeup tutorial on something called “Blow Job Lips” before one of her nights out (13:29), which indicates that she follows the beauty standards in society, as this tutorial seems to be popular. This also gives the idea that in order for a woman to get noticed by men, she has to look a certain way. If she does not, she is practically invisible (as Sabina says in *Charlie's Angels*, “If you’re beautiful, nothing else is really expected of you if you’re not, you’re pretty much rendered invisible” (2:27)). This is emphasized by Cassandra as she tells Al Monroe (Chris Lowell) that she was not “super fuckable back then” (1:28:55), indicating that she might not have followed the societal beauty standards in college, whether that being the slender body type or the appearance.

Performativity suggests that someone mimics what they see (the societal beauty standard is often what is represented in mainstream media). This is why it should come as no surprise that someone would mimic what they see in films. When it is a beauty standard in films, you cannot expect women in real life not to uphold the same standard. Therefore, it begs the question of why women in films wear short dresses and booty-shorts, if you would not have women in real life doing it, as it is an aspect you would use to blame them for violence against them (whether it be physical or psychological)?

THE SEX SYMBOL: the male view on women in films

In this section, I will examine what happens or could happen when males watch the portrayals of women in films. Firstly, the theories of the male gaze and objectivity will be explained with the intention to apply these to the examples of women in films. Lastly, the theories will be applied to the films *Charlie's Angels*, *Birds of Prey*, and *Promising Young* as examples of what could happen when males watch women in films.

The male gaze

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female,” Laura Mulvey writes in her paper *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey¹, 62). This indicates that the pleasure in looking, which is present when watching TV, is split between the active male part and the passive female part.

Mulvey's theory about the male gaze has its base in psychoanalysis; as she argues, it demonstrates “the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (57). In psychoanalysis, the man is signified as the bearer of the penis, the power, while the woman signifies the lack of a penis (57). The man has something the woman wants, and thereby, has some control over her. In patriarchal culture, the woman symbolizes the male other, the passive to the male active. Mulvey argues that “the cinema poses questions of the ways the unconscious (formed by the dominant order) structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking” (58). Films work as another world where the man can live out his fantasies by enforcing them on “the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (58). Mulvey states:

“Playing on the tension between controlling the dimension of space (editing, narrative) and film as controlling the dimension of space (changes in distance, editing), cinematic codes create a gaze, a world, and an object, thereby producing an illusion cut to the measure of desire” (67).

Furthermore, the male fantasy of ambition is lived out on screen in order for the male spectator to experience the action displayed and, in the end, the pleasure of possessing the female figure (Mulvey², 1981, 13). The patriarchal order codes the erotic into films as a way to utilize the image of the superior male and the submissive female (Mulvey¹, 59).

The role of the male protagonist is to make things happen – forwarding the story - while the female is reduced to her looks (63). The female figure has two functions in the film: being the erotic object for the characters on screen and being the erotic object for the male spectator (62). Mulvey

argues that “the male figure cannot bear the burden of sexual objectification”; that burden is placed on the female figure (63). The female figure signifies desire, which means she is styled accordingly to the fantasy of the “determining male gaze”; she is styled for a “strong visual and erotic impact” (62). Mulvey uses a quote by Budd Boetticher to explain this:

“What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself, the woman has not the slightest importance” (62).

This indicates that the female figure is only essential in the sense that she inspires the hero by her beauty; she is not essential by herself. She is an object through which the male protagonist gets sparked to carry the story in a specific direction. He intends to possess her and will do anything to make that happen. When the female figure falls in love with the male protagonist, she becomes his property. Through his identification with the male protagonist, the spectator can indirectly possess her too (64).

As mentioned in the chapter on gender theory, people identify with the people they see on TV. Mulvey argues, stars work as the ego ideal – the ideal you – and through the screen, “the glamorous impersonates the ordinary,” which indicates that you see the ideal you on-screen playing out your fantasy (61). The glamorous looks of the male stars in films are for the spectator to identify with his ideal, while the looks of the female stars are to be the erotic object (63). Mulvey introduces Freud’s concept of scopophilia (the pleasure of looking) and argues that Freud “associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (59). This indicated that though scopophilia is the pleasure of looking, it furthermore is the pleasure of using people as objects for one’s own pleasure. Thereby, scopophilia can be explained as the pleasure of looking at people as objects existing for one’s gaze. The concept then works as the erotic basis for the pleasure felt when looking at other people as objects for one’s own pleasure (60). The female figure in a film is thereby included as a “passive image of visual perfection” to play to the desire of males (both on-screen and in front of it) (66).

The films used in this project are more “feministic,” which means that the male gaze should, in theory, not be as present compared to more classical films. However, it will come to show that it is not as easy to escape the male gaze as one might think. Mulvey’s paper on the male gaze was published in 1973, which today is almost fifty years ago, one would think that it would be outdated, however, the following analysis will show that is not the case. The male gaze is deeply imprinted in how films are made, that it is not easy to escape it altogether.

Objectification

“[...] objectification entails making into a thing, treating as a thing, something that is really not a thing,” Martha Nussbaum writes in her essay *Objectification* (Nussbaum, 1995, 257). Objectification occurs when an unwilling person is treated as an object by another person. Szymanski et al. argue that women are objectified more often than men, which has been proven by examining depictions of women in different media such as films, commercials, music videos, et cetera (Szymanski et al.1, 2011, 10). Furthermore, they argue that sexual objectification happens through media depictions of women where their bodies are emphasized. Moreover, it happens to women in person when they experience catcalling, unwanted sexual remarks and sexual advances, and rape (Szymanski et al.2, 2011, 108). Thereby, objectification happens to women through multiple channels in their everyday life. As Nussbaum explains, objectification occurs when a person is treated as an object and not a human being. Szymanski et al., furthermore, argue that sexual objectification happens to women when their body or parts of the body are separated from the rest of their person and are seen as physical objects of men’s sexual desire (Szymanski et al.1, 8).

Furthermore, Nussbaum developed the following seven notions of how a person can treat another person as an object:

1. Instrumentality: The objectifier treats the object as a tool for his or her purposes.
2. Denial of autonomy: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in autonomy and self-determination.
3. Inertness: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in agency and perhaps also inactivity.
4. Fungibility: The objectifier treats the object as interchangeable (a) with other objects of the same type and/or (b) with objects of other types.
5. Violability: The objectifier treats the object as lacking in boundary-integrity, as something that it is permissible to break up, smash, break into.
6. Ownership: The objectifier treats the object as something owned by another, can be bought or sold, et cetera.
7. Denial of subjectivity: The objectifier treats the object as something whose experience and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account (Nussbaum, 257).

Out of these seven notions, Nussbaum argues that Instrumentality is the most troublesome, as this dehumanizes the objectified person, which seems to bring other forms of objectification with it (265). Fredrickson et al. argue that all forms of objectification have one thing in common: treating a person

as a body (Fredrickson et al., 1997, 174). Thereby, women are only seen as their bodies and not as people. When women are only seen as their bodies, every part of them can be sexualized and used for other people's purposes.

The Sex Symbol

Birds of Prey and *Charlie's Angels* can be seen as feministic films, as female characters are the protagonists of their respective stories. Though this is true, the male gaze and objectification are still important aspects of both films and are still present, which the following analysis will demonstrate.

As mentioned in the analysis of the feminine view on female characters, female characters are not only used for the female spectators to identify themselves with. The women in the films are also there to play an essential role for the pleasure of male spectators. In the beginning of film history, female characters would often play the part of the damsel in distress, as they were mainly used as the motivation for the male characters. Therefore, female characters always needed to look traditionally and objectively attractive in order to catch the eye of both the male characters and the spectators. Although female characters are, for the most part, not embodying the classic damsel in distress character anymore, they are still stuck in a position where they have to look good for the male characters and spectators. For example, the way female characters look, for instance, the way they dress, can very well be related to catch the eye of the male spectators¹⁴.

Though male characters are not the protagonists in *Birds of Prey* and *Charlie's Angels*, and both films consist of important female characters, the way the main female characters look is quite clearly executed in such a way as to attract and to catch the eye of the male spectators, and at times the few male characters in the films. Looking at the costume designs for the main female characters, which is also touched upon in the chapter on the feminine view on the female character, the women mostly wear clothes that are either close-fitting or revealing in certain areas, for instance, the chest, stomach, or legs.

In *Birds of Prey*, Harley Quinn, as the main female character, has several costume changes, which, as mentioned before, all accentuate some part of her body¹⁵. In the beginning of the film, she is out

¹⁴ It would be easier to mention examples of female characters that are not sexualized for the male gaze, as this seems to be the norm in films. An example of a female character who is not sexualized would be Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) in *Alien* (1979). The role of Ripley was originally intended for a man, therefore, she is not dressed or even seen as a woman for the pleasure of the male gaze – she does not look different from the male characters.

¹⁵ Other examples of women's costumes which accentuate their bodies could be Natasha Romanoff/ Black Widow in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and Mikaela Banes in *Transformers*. These either wear tight or revealing clothes.

drinking; she wears long tight pants and a long blazer with a see-through shirt underneath it in these scenes. Not much is left to the imagination regarding her upper body, as everything is visible, including her bra underneath the see-through shirt. Later, Harley Quinn is seen at a Roller Derby competition, where she wears a bodystocking with long sleeves and nothing on her legs. The neckline is pretty low, which means her chest is revealed, while the part of her thighs that is visible is covered in fishnet stockings¹⁶. As mentioned earlier in the feminine view of female film characters, she also wears a pink crop top or sports bra with shorts and a see-through jacket with big arms. Again, a lot of her body is in focus with the intention of men being able to feel pleasure from seeing as much skin as possible. She later changes the jacket to a T-shirt on top of the sports bra, making the outfit a bit less revealing, as she now has business to attend to. However, the legs are still very much in focus to sexualize the character for the pleasure of men. In the big fight scene, Harley Quinn is wearing overalls with a sports bra; here, the stomach and arms are in focus, as they are visible, while the pants still sit tight on her legs - still making them in focus, just not as revealing. Her outfits are revealing in some places, which is most likely for the men, both male characters and male spectators, to find pleasure in looking at her. She does not particularly dress in a more revealing way than other women, we see through these scenes, however, she is the one in focus – or her body is in focus. As mentioned in the male gaze section in the theory, men find pleasure in looking at women as objects for their pleasure, therefore, men will find pleasure in imagining that she is dressed in revealing clothes just for their pleasure. Furthermore, when Harley Quinn breaks Cassandra Cain out in the scene in prison, it begins to rain (45:51); soaking women through is often used to sexualize women even further as their clothes get see-through and clings to their bodies. Even though Quinn becomes very wet, her makeup still sits perfectly on her face, which either means she is wearing a highly effective brand of waterproof makeup, or the filmmakers are purposely keeping her makeup intact so she can still look beautiful for the pleasure of the men watching her. Harley Quinn's makeup is not affected by any circumstances throughout the entire film. However, after the big fight at the end of the film, her eyeliner is running (1:32:45), which offers a more realistic image. However, her lipstick is somehow still unsmudged, which gives the idea that her makeup cannot be ruined as she thereby would not look as beautiful – and for the male gaze, she has to look beautiful. She is an erotic object for the male spectators, and in order for the spectators to see her this way, she has to look attractive no matter what. The reason behind the importance of the presence of the male gaze can be found in the lack of

¹⁶ Fishnet stockings are stereotypically seen as a very sexual piece of clothing – mostly because fishnet stockings are mostly used on prostitutes, strippers and burlesque dancers in films, see for instance *Burlesque* (2010) and *Hustlers* (2019)

a male character the male audience can identify themselves with. In order to appeal to the male demographic, there must be some kind of self-projection, which comes out in the form of entitlement to the female.

Dinah Lance is another female in *Birds of Prey*, whose body is in focus, which is evident from her clothes. She works as a singer in Roman Sionis' club, so the first outfit she is wearing is a type of dress filled with holes, and she is wearing fishnet stockings, which once again is a very stereotypical "sexy" clothing item. The other outfit we see her wearing is the long pants and the crop top; the crop top she is wearing is a tight gold crop top with a bra insertion in black. The crop top puts Dinah's breasts in focus in the outfit. Her outfits are clearly put together with the intention of men finding her attractive. Furthermore, Sionis calls her his little songbird, which indicates that the dress mentioned first might be worn for him. She works as a singer in his club and, therefore, she has to please him not only audibly but also visually. Though it might only be Harley Quinn and Dinah in this film, whose outfits are put together with the intention of men deriving pleasure from looking at them, it seems that every film made has to be at least one objectively attractive woman, because it seems to be very important to give pleasure to the male spectators.

The framing of the picture and the camera movement can also support the male gaze, for example, when used as a point of view shot. At the club, there is a clear example of the use of point of view to underline the presence of the male gaze. First, we see a shot of Dinah, then the shot changes to a shot of Sionis looking at her, a shot back at Dinah, and again a shot back at Sionis (25:14). We see Dinah from Sionis' point of view; how she stands as she sings and the way she moves. By filming the scene this way, Dinah does not only bring pleasure to Sionis, as he looks at her but also the male spectators, as they can put themselves in Sionis' place and feel pleasure from looking at her too.

Similarly, *Charlie's Angels'* main female characters appear attractive to catch the eye of the male spectators. Generally speaking, when looking at the clothes they are wearing throughout the film, there is not one outfit where the three angels do not look objectively attractive. The few times we see them without makeup, and in casual outfits, they still look good. The actresses cast for the film are, objectively speaking, very attractive and do not seem to have any visible flaws in their appearance, whether it be their bodies or their skin – they are all slender women without any apparent imperfections on their face. As mentioned in the male gaze theory section, Mulvey argues, "the glamorous impersonates the ordinary" in films, which means ideal-looking women are chosen for parts of ordinary people. One could argue that spies are not "ordinary" people, and looking very attractive might

be necessary for the job, however, in real life, less attractive people might also possess this job, as it should primarily be about skills and not looks.

As mentioned earlier, the camera's framing is often applied in regards to the male gaze, as it mainly focuses on the attractive parts of the women on screen – this is done for the male spectators to find pleasure in what they see. Though the camera framing interestingly enough does not focus much on their bodies throughout this film, it tends to be used as the male gaze whenever the characters are really dressed up. At Brock's party at the end of the film, Elena gets dressed up in a red dress with a low-cut neckline to highlight her breasts. Elena gets a few dresses to pick from, picked out by John Bosley (Patrick Stewart), and one can only assume that the dresses are the same style, and this exact dress is not the only one that is a bit revealing. Bosley knows he might not let her live, as he only needs her to reprogram Colisto into his care, which means the dresses are for his pleasure, thus making not only her look for the night but her entire existence his to possess. The camera's framing also suggests that the low-cut dress is for the male spectators, as the framing is either a full-body frame to see the whole dress or a medium close-up frame to show off her neckline and up (1:27:19). Thereby, both the male character in the film and the male spectators get pleasure from looking at Elena in the dress. When Sabina and Jane show up at the party, they immediately head to the dancefloor and start dancing (1:29:12). The camera pans down their bodies in order to show the entirety of their outfits. Both women wear short dresses or playsuits with bare legs, while Jane's dress also has a low-cut neckline. Here, the film again applies point-of-view shots to showcase pander to the male gaze; The camera goes back and forth between men looking at them and seeing what they look at – Jane and Sabina. The women are dressed for the male gaze, both on screen and audience, as men often play out their fantasies when they see films, therefore, the women become erotic objects and have to look the part.

Women playing the part of the erotic object is also evident when Jane opens a condiment pack with her teeth for Langston (Noah Centineo), assembles his sandwich, and wants to give it to him. He says: "You put your mouth on it. [...] Twenty billion bacteria are residing in the mouth." This indicates that he is a bit of a germaphobe and does not want to eat the sandwich, as Jane's mouth has been on it. She gives him a flirty comment and takes a bite of the sandwich; suddenly, he does not care about the bacteria and begins to eat the sandwich himself (36:50). Of course, this would not have played out the same way if Jane was not a beautiful woman – in which case, he would probably just be grossed out by the whole thing.

Sabina is, as mentioned in the feminine view on female characters, the male fantasy. She is an attractive woman with the qualities of a stereotypical man; Sabina has a very uninhibited, sexual personality, which she exploits to get men's attention. She is not exactly the cool male fantasy for the male characters in the film. Her cool girl persona is more for the male spectators, as the male characters do not see much of her whole person. She likes food and alcohol, much like a man, which is mainly seen through her interactions with Jane, as she makes small comments to her, like saying Jane should eat some gluten to relax (5:52) or after drinking two drinks at Brock's party, asking her if she wanted one (1:29:50). Her personality is very easy going and she does not care about what other people think of her. Furthermore, her sexual nature is also present in order to appease the male spectators, as we see her checking out an attractive woman at the gym (32:04) and sexualizes holding Elena's hand to get her fingerprints (32:50). The male spectators find her very attractive for her looks and personality, but they also identify with her. As she sexualizes other women, the male spectators get to flirt with and appreciate other women through her. Sabina knows precisely how to act and look to distract men from seeing her as a threat, which is evident in the film's first scene. As mentioned, the camera framing is often used to satisfy the male gaze, which is seen at the beginning of *Charlie's Angels*. The camera focuses on Sabina's face from the shoulders and up; the frame the male target sees of her as they talk. The camera tracks him as he takes a grape and feeds it to her. She lets him put the grape in her mouth, and she licks his finger as he takes his hand back (0:32). The male spectators can very easily put themselves in the place of the male target due to this camera framing; They feel the pleasure he is feeling by looking at her, and they might even feel like she is flirting just with them. Furthermore, the camera pans down Sabina's body as she takes off her shoes and places her feet between the man's legs while he graces her bare legs with his hand (1:10). The camera tracks Sabina's movements in order for the male spectator to feel pleasure by looking at her and almost feel her legs as the male target graces them. She exploits the fact that men underestimate beautiful women, as they believe beautiful women do not need to do anything but look good. Evidently, she knows how to look like a woman without much more than her looks, as we see her wearing long, blond wigs when she needs to be able to catch the eye of a man in order to distract him from her actual goal. Sabina thereby uses male chauvinism and the ideas of the patriarchal society as weapons against their enforcers. Another short shot, which is just for the male gaze, is Sabina at the gym, as she steals a keycard from a man from Elena's work (31:55). The shot is filmed with a full-body frame, as we see her whole body and the fact that her shorts do not cover all of her butt. Sabina does not interact with

anybody at this point, and we do not see other people looking at her – the shot is only for spectators to sexualize her body by looking at her butt in very short shorts.

The male gaze is also very present in the film *Promising Young Woman*. An interesting example of the male gaze in this film is the difference between what Cassandra, the main character, wears when she goes about her everyday life and her outfits when she is out to expose male predators. Her everyday clothing is very colorful and vibrant; she wears a lot of pastel colors, like pink, blue and green, while her outfits at the clubs are darker colors. For instance, in her everyday life, we see her wearing a light pink sweater with light denim jeans or a light blue dress, while we see her wearing a black, low-cut T-shirt with a dark animal print skirt, or a black and silver, sequenced tube-dress. This indicates that men are more likely to take her home if she wears less colorful and more sultry clothing. Furthermore, Cassandra wears heavier makeup when she goes to the clubs than she does in her everyday life. It is pretty normal for women to wear more makeup when they go out, as they might want to increase the effort they put into their looks. It is quite interesting that the second guy, we see Cassandra exposing, asks her why she wears so much makeup, as he likes women with less makeup (15:41). Oftentimes, this is a pretty normal thing for men to say they prefer¹⁷, however, they still take her home when she wears all that makeup, which indicates that men might say one thing but want another. There is a reason behind why Cassandra puts more makeup on when she wants to expose guys – and it evidently works every time. The male gaze is arguably essential in this film as Cassandra has to satisfy the male gaze in order for men to bring her home so she can expose their true intentions. It is imperative for her to wear what men will find attractive in a club setting, as she needs to catch the eyes of men in order to teach them a lesson, so they hopefully will never try to take advantage of women again. Cassandra looks good and really put together throughout the whole film, whether she is going out or going through her everyday life. The male gaze of the male spectators is also critical for this film to have men see the whole film to get the message across to them. Thereby, it is essential to make the film a social commentary with a message the makers want to convey clearly. Men might be more prone to finish the whole film and listen to the women in it if the main character is an attractive woman – as they fulfill their scopophilia (pleasure of looking) while watching it.

¹⁷ It is seen all over social media that men want women with more natural makeup, as women are often called out for wearing “too much” makeup and are called clowns because of it.

The male gaze is closely connected to objectification, which is mentioned in the male gaze chapter in the theory. Objectification is treating a person like an object instead of a human being¹⁸. This happens to the female characters in all three films, both in the story and the audience watching them. Objectification in the films is primarily evident when the female characters are in contact with men. In *Charlie's Angels*, when Elena has a meeting with her (male) boss, he treats her like an object whose opinions do not matter. Elena does not get to be an active part of their conversation, as her boss keeps interrupting her and does not really listen to her when she tries to explain the problems with Colisto, which she wants to fix if she is given a chance (29:04). Using the notions of Martha Nussbaum (explained in the Objectification section in the theory), Elena's boss denies her subjectivity, as he does not think that her opinions matter. In contrast, he simultaneously only uses her for her competencies to build Colisto, which is the notion of Instrumentality. In the beginning of the film, Sabina also explains the notion of Inertness, as she explains how men do not expect anything from women; "If you are beautiful, nothing else is really expected of you," (2:27) and "Did you know it takes men an additional seven seconds to conceive a woman as a threat compared to a man?" (3:21). This indicates that men do not believe women have any agency, any power – they believe women are incapable of doing anything active and threatening. They are seen as the "passive image of visual perfection," as Mulvey puts it (Mulvey1, 66). Furthermore, this is evident as the men in the film keep underestimating the women; they do not believe that women can beat them, even if they, like John Bosley, have seen it happen multiple times.

In *Birds of Prey*, Harley Quinn also explains how women are objects to men; In the beginning of the film, when she describes her past, she explains that she was the brains behind the Joker's most extensive stunts, while he took all the credit for it (1:41). This is precisely what Elena's boss does in *Charlie's Angels*, as he keeps taking the credit for Colisto, even though he is not the one who made it (14:04). Montoya getting cheated of her promotion, as her male partner got all the credit for solving a big case, is another example (8:23). The women are objectified to the notion of Instrumentality, as they are treated as tools for men's purposes and do not get any credit for their part in the successes.

After Sionis finds out that Harley Quinn is no longer with the Joker, he says: "she belongs to me" (36:12), which indicates that he feels ownership over her, which is also evident in how he treats Dinah, who is called "his little songbird." Evidently, he feels like he has ownership over women and can treat them and do with them whatever he wants.

¹⁸ Other examples of women treated as objects could be Lauren (Reese Witherspoon in *This Means War* (2012) and Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) in *Pretty Woman* (1990). Both women are treated as objects, which the men want to possess.

Though objectification does not seem obvious in *Charlie's Angels* and *Birds of Prey*, most likely because the female characters do not have many close encounters with men, *Promising Young Woman* deals a lot with men's objectification of women. For instance, it is quite interesting to see the contrast between what the men say and what they do because most of them talk like they are "gentlemen" and have the utmost respect for women. However, their actions tell another story. In the beginning of the film, we see Jerry (Adam Brody) talking with his friends at the bar. The friends talk about how someone could easily take advantage of the drunk woman they see (Cassandra) – "that's just asking for it" – they begin to talk about taking advantage of her as a challenge. Jerry seems repulsed by the whole conversation and ends up walking over to her himself, "to check if she is okay." He seems like a genuinely nice guy who wants to make sure she gets home safely, so he offers to take her home. On the car ride home, he suddenly asks her if she wants to go to his place and have a quick drink before she gets home – she is obviously already acting like she is too intoxicated to drink more. He takes her hesitation to the question as a yes and gives the driver his address instead of hers. At his apartment, he pours them a drink – pours her double the amount of what he pours himself. He begins with apologizing for his friends at the bar – "They are assholes" – and he begins to give her compliments on how beautiful she is. He then starts a very one-sided kiss – as she is not actively participating in the kissing. She stops the kissing by telling him she needs to lie down, which he gladly helps her with, as he leads her to his bed. She obviously wanted to lie down because she is very intoxicated and wants to sleep, which he ignores by telling her not to go to sleep. He begins kissing her and unbuttoning her shirt. She keeps asking him what he is doing – clearly, acting too intoxicated to understand what is happening to her – and he keeps telling her: "It's okay, you're safe," while he continues to kiss her down her body, while he takes off her underwear (6:39). He talks to Cassandra as if he has respect for her and is concerned about her safety, while he simultaneously treats her like an object that does not really have a say in what is happening. Many of Nussbaum's notions can be used to describe how he objectifies her through this small sequence in the film; Instrumentality, because Jerry uses Cassandra as a tool for sex; Denial of autonomy, because he does not listen to her when she does not seem comfortable with not understanding what is going on; Violability, because he does not respect her boundaries and wants to have sex with her, even though she is too drunk to understand what is happening; and Denial of subjectivity, because he treats her like it does not matter what she feels about the whole situation, as long as he gets what he wants. He takes advantage of the fact that she is drunk and does not understand what is happening.

A similar situation occurs with another guy, we see Cassandra exposing. The guy, Neil (Christopher Mintz-Plasse), first of all, does not care that she does not want to do coke, even when she pretends to be too drunk to do it (she blows on it instead of inhaling), he ends up putting it on her teeth instead (15:18). This is a denial of autonomy, as he treats her like she does not know what she wants – he knows better. Cassandra ends up saying she needs a glass of water, to which he rolls his eyes and gets it for her. She pretends to be sleeping when he comes back, to which he yells at her to wake her up. He asks her if she feels better after she has had a sip of water – she says no, which he chooses to ignore. Cassandra says she needs to go home multiple times, to which he says “no” or “you don’t want to go” (17:08). Once again, multiple of Nussbaum’s notions are at play here; Instrumentality, because Neil uses her as an object for sex; Denial of autonomy, because he treats her like she does not know what is best for herself; Violability, because he does not respect her boundaries when she wants to go home and continues kissing her; and Denial of subjectivity, because he does not care what she wants – what he wants is more important. Similar to Jerry, Neil takes advantage of the fact that Cassandra seems too drunk to understand what is happening. Both men do not care that she cannot fully understand what is happening and deny her when she says something they do not want her to do – like sleep or go home. They both talk to her like they are perfect gentlemen who respect her, however, the way they act is the exact opposite.

Objectification does not have to be as intense as in these instances to be present. Objectification can be present in more minor things like catcalling. Violability is a notion to be mentioned here, as the catcaller treats the object as someone whose boundaries do not matter. When the three workers catcall Cassandra (8:25), they do not care that she does not want their “compliments”; they do not care that it usually does not feel particularly nice to be called from the other side of the street. She gets denied being seen as a human being and is treated as an object; they can do whatever they want to.

PROBLEMS WITH RAPE CULTURE

The Perfect Woman and The Sex Symbol chapters of this master’s thesis have exemplified how female characters in films are portrayed can be problematic in relation to rape culture. The framework for this project explained, 1) what rape culture is, 2) how is rape a culture, and why is it so problematic?

Misogyny is, as mentioned in the framework for this project, a substantial aspect of rape culture. Through misogyny, women are perceived as inferior to the superior man and have no power or agency. When women are perceived as inferior through the patriarchal society, which the media supports, it should come as no surprise that women are treated this way, predominantly by men. Women are reduced to objects, which men treat however they want to; men can do whatever they want to do to women without dealing with the consequences – I would argue that this is one of the main reasons rape culture exists. If a man can do whatever he wants to do with or to a woman as an object, what stops him from having sex with her, even if she refuses?

Not only does rape culture cause men to rape women (or make men feel entitled to have sex with women without their consent), furthermore, it creates other problematics, such as victim blaming and protecting the perpetrators. The analysis in this master's thesis has already examined these aspects of the reasons behind rape culture; therefore, this discussion will repeat some of the things already mentioned and expand on it further, which will provide a clearer understanding of the thesis statement.

Victim blaming is already mentioned in the feminine view on female characters in this master's thesis through Cassandra's conversation with her former friend in *Promising Young Woman*. Cassandra's former friend expresses the opinion that when someone has made themselves vulnerable by getting so intoxicated that they end up sleeping with someone "you don't want to," they are to blame, not the offender (38:41). She indicates people do not believe someone who has a reputation of sleeping around or being drunk on a regular basis, and that is just the way society works: "I'm not the only one who didn't believe it. [...] I don't make the rules" (38:51). The documentary *Audrie and Daisy* validates this unfortunate aspect of society, as Daisy explains how people verbally attacked her and called her a liar after being raped (50:20). The sheriff in the documentary even expresses that rape is a popular word to throw around and that we as a society should not "underestimate the need for attention. Especially young girls" (55:16). Thus, women and girls are blamed for making themselves vulnerable to want attention instead of blaming men or boys for raping them. In *Roll Red Roll*, Alexandria Goddard (a crime blogger) even points out multiple times that the whole town was talking bad about the rape victim; "It wasn't just that she was raped. They humiliated her" (15:47). Victim blaming in society is so ingrained that people entirely humiliate the victims instead of listening to them and blame the perpetrators. In *Audrie and Daisy*, Delaney says that the aftermath of her sexual assault was even worse than the sexual assault itself due to the victim blaming (21:56). Evidently,

sexual assault victims are completely humiliated for coming forward with a rape accusation, and people somehow still believe they use rape as an excuse.

Refusing to take rape accusations seriously goes hand in hand with the notion of victim blaming. When the authorities and society, in general, do not take rape accusations seriously, they are essentially blaming the victim for not being careful or for making up the assault. Not only does Cassandra's conversation with her former friend in *Promising Young Woman* depict this, but it is also evident in her conversation with the Dean at the university. The Dean explains how the university should give "the boys" the benefit of the doubt if there is insufficient evidence and/or if the victim has been drinking and do not remember everything (45:28). The Dean says: "we don't like to admit it when we have made ourselves vulnerable and made a bad choice" (45:43) and asks Cassandra the question if they (society) should ruin a man's life every time they get a rape accusation. This scene exemplifies the saying that has become synonymous with protecting the men behind the assaults, which is "boys will be boys" - indicating that the nature of men has to be considered and thereby making it the woman's problem to take necessary precautions. In *Audrie and Daisy*, the sheriff says about Daisy's rape: "Nothing that happened that night ever, ever rose to the level of the elements of the crime of rape" (59:16). He even avoids the question when the interviewer asks if it is considered consensual sex when one part is intoxicated and not fully conscious. This shows that when there is no hard-hitting evidence of sexual assault, the accusation is not taken seriously. They are more prone to take the boys' word for it than the girls'. In *Roll Red Roll*, DJ Bloomdaddy (a local talk show host) says in a voiceover:

"You know, anybody can make an allegation. These girls at these parties sometimes maybe drink a little bit too much, sometimes they get a little promiscuous, all of a sudden, they're being called, you know, a whore, what have you. And it's really easy to all of a sudden say you were taken advantage of rather than own up to the fact that, "Hey, look, I did what I did." He was seduced, too, yeah... It's easier to tell your parents you were raped than, "Hey, Mom, Dad, I got drunk, and decided to let three guys have their way with me." (14:55)

Not only are women being blamed for lying about rape, but they are also being blamed for using it as an excuse – an easy way out – if people begin to say bad things about them. My question to this statement by DJ Bloomdaddy is: If you decided to have sex with three guys, why would you tell your parents? Even if your parents heard about it from other people, you could deny it. The earlier section showed how people humiliate the victim, so why would anyone put themselves through that if the accusation is not true? These are often questions that have not been contemplated or answered. Again,

without hard-hitting evidence, people tend not to believe the victim. Evidently, people would rather believe the boys and not the girls, which is consistent with the fact that society teaches girls how not to get raped and does not teach boys not to rape. One of the girls in *Roll Red Roll* even indicates this by saying: “You will be more safe with them (red: her friends) than with the boys” (7:20).

Protecting the boys and not the girls is another fundamental problem with rape culture. In *Audrie and Daisy*, the sheriff expresses a “fatal flaw” in society – we always blame the boys; “It’s not always the boys” he says, “girls have as much culpability in this world as boys do” (1:07:05). The football team coach in *Roll Red Roll* also does not believe that the boys raped someone (28:19). He even says that he asked the boys about it, and he believed them when they said they did not do it. This begs the question: what makes the boys believable and the girls liars? What makes the sheriff believe the boys when they say they did not rape someone, but he does not believe the girls when they say they were raped. “We have to give these boys the benefit of the doubt” (Dean Walker in *Promising Young Woman*, 46:06) – but why do we, as a society, often only give the boys the benefit of the doubt and not the girls? *Promising Young Woman* also depicts how the boys have each other’s backs – even when it comes to rape. In the film, we see how Joe (Max Greenfield) helps Al Monroe get rid of Cassandra’s body. Even though this is now a murder case and not rape, this gives the viewer a clear indication of how much guys will help protect each other. To begin with, Joe thinks Al has slept with the stripper (Cassandra), and she is sleeping; he tells him that “What happens on tour stays on tour” (1:37:02). This gives the impression that they can do whatever they want to do when they are just the guys because they keep each other’s secrets. When he finds out that Al has actually killed the woman, Al freaks out and does not know what to do, to which Joe says:

“This is not your fault. [...] It was an accident, right? Hey! It was an accident. [...] No one is gonna go to jail because no one is ever going to find out. If anybody asks, we saw her leave last night. She stripped, and then she left. [...] We are going to take care of this” (1:38:58)

This forms a pretty clear picture of how some boys or men protect each other when one (or some) of them has done something illegal. This example is a bit more intense, as we are talking about murder; however, the fact is, there has been other guys present or pictures or videos sent around in all examples of rape in *Roll Red Roll*, *Audrie and Daisy*, and *Promising Young Woman* – therefore, more people than just the rapists knew about the rapes. Despite this, no one reported it to the police, and all of them refused to give too many details when being questioned by the police.

Trivializing sexual assault and how rape is talked about is another fundamental aspect of rape as a culture. *Roll Red Roll* demonstrates this throughout the entire documentary. A man from the town

of Steubenville expresses how he thinks the party (where the girl was raped) went down, and it demonstrates how people trivialize sexual assault: “I think it was a party that got out of hand” (13:21). The community does not take the rape accusations seriously but just thinks that something happened that the girl is embarrassed about. DJ Bloomdaddy’s quote from earlier expresses the exact same thing; something might have happened at the party, however, whatever it was, the boys did nothing wrong, and the girl is just lying to save her reputation. Everybody talks about how the boys did nothing, and the girl needs to take responsibility for what has happened to her and stop accusing them of rape – even the girls. “When you put yourself in that situation, you have to take some responsibility for your actions” (20:15), a girl from the school says. Another girl points out: “Yes, the boys were definitely not in the right, but she was also at a party she probably shouldn’t have been at. She has to take responsibility for the choice she made to go to that party” (20:08). The latter says the boys were “not in the right”; however, the girl still needs to take responsibility for what happened to her. The fact that the girl was completely intoxicated to the point of blackouts and could not take care of herself is her own responsibility – yes – however, how can the rape be? She might have agreed to drink, however, she never agreed to have sex with anyone. How can an act that she is playing no active role in be her responsibility? The disturbing thing about taking responsibility for drinking too much, which might have led to her rape, is that we do not say the same thing to boys because they do not have the same risks¹⁹. Most boys are not afraid to get raped if they drink too much because it does not happen to them as much as it happens to girls. Furthermore, the situation is never reversed; The boys drinking too much could be what was leading to rape. Misogyny is, again, one of the reasons behind this, because women, not men, are seen as inferior beings, objects, which men can treat however they want. Misogyny is also reflected in the way boys talk about girls and/or rape:

“That girl.. [...] She is so raped right now. Dead body. [...] You don’t need any foreplay with a dead girl. If it ain’t wet now, it ain’t ever going to be wet. To be honest. Trust me, I’m a doctor. She’s dead because there’s a naked picture on her... a wang in the butthole. And she wasn’t moving. There’s usually a reaction to that. [...] She’s deader than O.J.’s wife. [...] She’s dead. [...] They raped her harder than that cop raped Marsellus Wallace in Pulp Fiction. They raped her quicker than Mike Tyson raped that one girl... Is it really rape because you don’t know if she wanted it? She might have wanted it”²⁰(43:18).

¹⁹ Thereby, not saying that boys do not get raped, that understanding is another problem with rape culture – the understanding that boys do not get raped.

²⁰ The small remarks from the other boys in the video have been cut out to focus on what the boy, who talks the most, says. “[...]” have been used to cut out the small remarks from the other boys.

This is a recaption of what one of the boys says in a video, where a bunch of boys has been sent a picture of the sexual assault victim. The boy, who says this, is laughing throughout the whole video, and so are his friends. Objectively, this is quite disturbing, especially when they are talking about a human being. It comes to show how little people think of women in society (especially when sex is involved) – they are objects which no one really cares about. The boy says several times that the girl is raped and calls her a “dead body”, that is how little he thinks of her. The girl is just an object, boys can have sex with, joke about, and even kill – and all the boys do is laugh about it. They do not seem to have a smitch of empathy for the girl like she is not a human being like them. This is just a quote from one boy, so one could argue that it does not mean that anybody else feels that way; however, looking at all the earlier examples, it becomes evident that this is how society treats women. If society treats women like inanimate objects, why would boys or men not do the same?

CONCLUSION

This master’s thesis set out to examine how female characters in films can influence rape culture. Though Western society’s view on women has improved considerably, men and women are still not equal. Gender divisions and misogyny are so engrained in society; most people do not even realize how degrading they still are to women. Gender is viewed in a heteronormative masculine perspective, meaning men are seen as superior, while women are seen as inferior. When this is how gender is viewed, it should come as no big surprise that rape has become a culture based on the idea that men feel entitled, and women support this entitlement. Media reinforces the norms of the heteronormative masculine perspective, which essentially means that women are displayed in stereotypical portrayals, which deny them any power. These depictions of women are harming in the way that they normalize the harassment women go through every day – which in the end can lead to rape as a culture.

The Perfect Woman section examined the feminine view on female film characters with the intention of examining what problems these can bring in female viewers. To do this, the theories of gender (and gender performativity) and body image were defined. Gender theory by Judith Butler defines gender and sex as two culturally constructed aspects, which categorizes people into two groups; the male and female groups. Though Butler argues that both gender and sex should be independents, as one decides for oneself which gender one is, both have limits set within heterosexual hegemonic norms. Gender performativity deals with the idea of how one presents one’s gender to the world – it is performed through how one moves, behaves, dresses, et cetera. Thus, Butler argues,

gender performativity is a repetition of other people's gender performances and the repetition of one's own. With that in mind, the female characters one sees on TV could essentially influence how one sees and performs one's gender. The body image theory falls under the scope of the performativity theory, as one could want to mimic what one sees on TV. The theorists used for this master's thesis argue that most females in media have slender bodies which the viewers compare themselves with. This causes many female viewers to be dissatisfied with their bodies and overall appearance. The theorists also argue that this causes body size disturbance in female audiences, as they overestimate their body size. Moreover, the slenderness of women in popular media causes women to view slenderness as a sign of success, which means they see slenderness as success, and when they cannot achieve this body type, they feel unsuccessful.

These theories were applied to the films *Charlie's Angels* (2019), *Birds of Prey* (2020), and *Promising Young Woman* (2020) to exemplify how female film characters can influence a female audience. Through this analysis of the female characters, especially in *Charlie's Angels* and *Birds of Prey*, this master's thesis found that the female characters are stronger and more independent, compared to earlier characters who often played the stereotypical damsel in distress. Though this notion is true, through the theories, the thesis found that they still display some problems, which can be said is due to the heterosexual hegemonic norms, Butler mentions in her gender theory. The female characters often have to abandon stereotypical feminine traits, like emotions, to be seen as strong females. Furthermore, the female characters are nothing if they are not attractive, which for the female gaze means, women feel like they have to look attractive all the time. Female beauty standards are often depicted through films, which means the female audience feels like it has to look like the female film characters. The female audience becomes distressed about these unattainable standards if they cannot live up to them. The film *Promising Young Woman* is applied to expand on these notions further to connect them to rape culture. This master's thesis found that there are different norms for men and women, and because of the heterosexual hegemonic norms, females always fall short compared to males due to the misogynic nature of these norms. Women are supposed to take responsibility for the actions of men – like rape, and if they stand up for their rights as equal human beings, they are often called crazy.

The Sex Symbol chapter examined the male view on female film characters with the intention of examining how these characters are seen from a male point of view. To do this, the theories of the male gaze and objectification were defined and applied on the films. The theory of the male gaze by Laura Mulvey studies the role of male and female film characters. Mulvey argues that the female

character's only role is motivating the male protagonist and being the erotic object for the male characters and spectators. Both the male characters and male spectators feel pleasure by looking at the female character as an object made for their desires, this is also called scopophilia. The female character is passive, as she is only present to invoke motivation in the male protagonist – she is nothing in herself and she exists only in relation to the man. The male protagonist wants to possess the female, and he will do anything to do so. The male spectator identifies with the male protagonist, and through him, the spectator can possess the female too. The female character is reduced to her looks, as these are supposed to invoke desire in the male protagonists and spectators. She is present to help the male spectators play out their desires and fantasies on screen. She is nothing more than an object for the pleasure of the men – on and off screen. Objectification by Martha Nussbaum argues that objectification occurs when a person is treated as an inanimate object instead of a living human being. Nussbaum created seven different notions in which a person can treat another person as an object. The notions are: treating another person as an object for their own purposes, as lacking in self-determination, as lacking in agency, as being interchangeable, as lacking boundary-integrity, as something owned by another, and denial of their subjectivity. All forms of objectification entail treating another person as a body and not a person.

These theories were applied to the *films Charlie's Angels, Birds of Prey, and Promising Young Woman* to exemplify how female film characters are seen from a male point of view. This master's thesis found that the male gaze is still very present in contemporary films through the analysis of these female characters. Female film characters have to look good to pleasure the male spectators – and the male film characters, even if there are not many of them in the film. Both the female characters' appearance and often the camera framing and movements are intentionally used to pleasure the male spectators to make them play out their desires and fantasies through the film. Once again, the film *Promising Young Woman* expands these notions to examine how these influence rape culture. Through the study of this film it is evident that when the male gaze treats women as objects, it coheres to why men treat women this way. The film's main character exploits the male gaze to make it apparent when men treat women like beautiful objects for their own pleasure, which is an essential aspect of rape culture.

Lastly, rape culture was expanded upon in the discussion section, as it discussed some of the biggest problems with rape as a culture. *Promising Young Woman* was supported by the documentaries *Audrie and Daisy* (2016) and *Roll Red Roll* (2018) to expand on the film's depiction of rape culture into contemporary society. The discussion debated on some of the essential problems with

rape as a culture, such as victim blaming, protecting boys, and the way rape is talked about. The discussion indicated that males are viewed as more important than females in contemporary society, as girls and women often are held accountable for their rape. Females are blamed for wearing too little clothes, getting too drunk, and lying to get attention – the boys are not blamed for anything unless there is hard-hitting evidence of their guilt. Rape accusations are not taken seriously because “we have to give the boys the benefit of the doubt.” To conclude, the idea of rape culture is supported by the way the media portrays women. We identify with what we see on the screen, which is evident in this master’s thesis by the use of theories that describes gender and the role it has on the contemporary society’s norms.

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