



CATOLICA  
ESCOLA DAS ARTES

PORTO

# **Women's Role in Action Films: A Case Study of Female Stereotype and Representation**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa  
para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Som e Imagem

*Manuela Leong do Espírito Santo*

Setembro 2017



CATOLICA  
ESCOLA DAS ARTES

PORTO

# **Women's Role in Action Films: A Case Study of Female Stereotype and Representation**

Universidade Católica Portuguesa  
para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Som e Imagem

- Especialização em Cinema e Audiovisual -

*Manuela Leong do Espírito Santo*

Professor Orientador: Carlos Ruiz

Setembro 2017

## **Dedication**

This report is dedicated to my university - *Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Escola das Artes*, where I can find all equipment and support to complete my work and study. To those professors who helped me in as many ways as they were able, those who guided, educated me and helped me develop into who I am today. To my professor Carlos Ruiz, who greatly inspired during the research and studies and was always there to advise me and show me a different perspective. To my schoolmates who helped me with language problems, and encouraged me to give my best. To the women warriors who are fighting to get their places in the film industry, who are struggling to free themselves from gender stereotypes. To my mother Man I Espirito Santo, who always takes care of me and supports my choices, despite her being half-way around the world. I know I couldn't have finished it without your concern and help.

## **Acknowledgements**

My deep gratitude goes first to my university - *Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Escola das Artes*, to which I travelled from half the world away, Catolica gave me the perfect opportunity to study in this beautiful country and provided all kinds of resources to support my study. Not to mention the school also gave me this amazing chance to work here in Portugal. Special thanks to my coordinator Carlos Ruiz, who inspired me to work on this subject. With the knowledge he has, he always gave me amazing ideas and advice towards the subject so I could explore more in this area. His enthusiasm in gender equality and female portrayal inspired me greatly. So much so, that I found this topic to be incredibly interesting and as a woman has helped me to want to do something to improve the status of women in the film industry, together with his inspiration, which has given me the motivation to learn more in the future. My thanks also to all the professors who taught me and guided me while I was studying there, who gave me lectures and helped to improve my skill in cinematography. Finally, I want to acknowledge my mother Man I Espirito Santo, who is the greatest mum ever and who gives me unending love and support. I love you and I hope to make you proud in the future.

## **Abstract**

This study explores and discusses female portrayal in Hollywood action movies. As a woman, I have always questioned the status of women in cinema, and find that female stereotypes are usually negative. Firstly, I explain the concepts of mass media and femininity in films. The section will deal with questions like how are women normally portrayed in action films, why does the female stereotype exist, how are women different in different movies and what are the common features they all have. With these questions, I consulted many different sources and did research, shown in the bibliography, and have tried to find an answer. It is clear to see that gender stereotypes within movies have a huge connection with society as a whole; it affects society across many generations. There are many films that don't use females in the lead role and in this study, I will raise some exceptions to this, expectations that are not portraying women in a stereotypical way.

After introducing and explaining the facts, there is a section that describes my method of finding the characters that are exceptions. After finding them, I analyse their differences and similarities in films. In order to explore and study these characters, the research takes into account their appearance, personality, position in the film and dialogue. With the study results, I conclude each of them and come up with a summary of how they are being portrayed. Together with all the conclusions of the characters, I compare them to one another in terms of how different they are in the films, which kind of female they stand for and how they reflect women in society. After this conclusion of comparison, I explore more about the changes of female portrayal now and then.

<Keywords: female representation, gender and identity, female hero characters, action films, Hollywood, female stereotypes, contemporary>

## **List of Table**

1. Genres Market Share .....	2
2. Top-Grossing Genres 1995 to 2017 .....	3
3. Scale of women portray as sex object on media in the U.S .....	5

## List of Figure

1. Ad. of Burger King .....	4
2. Ad. of Protein World .....	4
3. Movie sequence of <i>Alien</i> (00:23:27-00:24:15) .....	22
4. Movie sequence of <i>Alien</i> (00:36:25-00:37:05) .....	23
5. Movie sequence of <i>Alien</i> (00:45:41-00:46:47) .....	25
6. Movie sequence of <i>Alien</i> (01:35:04-01:36:14) .....	27
7. Movie sequence of <i>The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo</i> (00:06:26-00:08:53) ....	37
8. Movie sequence of <i>The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo</i> (00:07:25) .....	37
9. Movie sequence of <i>The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo</i> (00:35:45-00:38:06) ....	38
10. Movie sequence of <i>The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo</i> (00:45:27-00:47:13) ....	39
11. Movie sequence of <i>The Girl with The Dragon Tattoo</i> (01:07:29) .....	40
12. Movie sequence of <i>The Hunger Games</i> (00:15:27-00:16:49) .....	50
13. Movie sequence of <i>The Hunger Games</i> (00:16:16) .....	51
14. Movie sequence of <i>The Hunger Games</i> (00:18:07-00:19:29) .....	52
15. Movie sequence of <i>The Hunger Games</i> (00:46:14-00:47:32) .....	53
16. Movie sequence of <i>The Hunger Games</i> (01:40:48) .....	54

# Table of Contents

<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	i
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	ii
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	iii
<b>List of Table</b> .....	iv
<b>List of Figure</b> .....	v
<b>1 STATUS OF WOMEN PORTRAYAL IN FILM INDUSTRY</b>	
1.1 Introduction	
1.1.1 Introducing Mass Media .....	1
1.1.2 Women in Mass Media.....	3
1.2 Female Stereotype	
1.2.1 The Concept of Female Stereotypes .....	6
1.2.2 Female Stereotypes and Society.....	8
1.2.3 Conclusion .....	10
<b>2 FEMININITY AND GENDER</b>	
2.1 Female Identity in Films .....	12
2.2 Heroine in Modern Action Films.....	14
<b>3 CASE STUDY ON FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN ACTION FILM</b>	
3.1 Structure of Research.....	15
3.2 Research Methodology .....	16
<b>4 FILMS ANALYSIS AND STUDIES</b>	
4.1 “The Raising of a Heroine” - Ellen Ripley in <i>Alien</i>	
4.1.1 Storyline .....	19
4.1.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse .....	21
4.1.3 Conclusion .....	28
4.2 “Girl Gone Wild” - Lisbeth Salander in <i>The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo</i>	
4.2.1 Storyline .....	30
4.2.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse .....	33
4.2.3 Conclusion .....	42
4.3 “The Girl on Fire” - Katniss Everdeen in <i>The Hunger Games</i>	
4.3.1 Storyline .....	44
4.3.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse.....	49
4.3.3 Conclusion .....	55
<b>5 CONCLUSIONS</b> .....	56
Bibliography and other references.....	61

# 1 Status of Women Portrayal in Film Industry

## 1.1 Introduction

### 1.1.1 Introducing Mass Media

We live in a media-rich world in which information updates rapidly. People rely on media and live with it. As one of the principle methods of communicating with the whole world, the media disseminates and exchanges information and ideas to every corner of the world. According to the *Dictionary of Media and communications*<sup>1</sup>, the word “media” is defined as any form that transmits information; from newspapers and magazines to websites and videos, these media make up mass communication. And once the information reaches large audiences through these platforms, it becomes “mass media.” Denis McQuail, a British communication theorist, identifies the main features of mass media in his book *Towards a Sociology of Mass Communications*. These are some of the points about mass media he makes within:

- mass media usually requires complex, formal organisation,
- content is directed toward large audiences,
- it is public and the content is open to everyone,
- audiences are heterogeneous,
- the ‘Mass Media’ establishes simultaneous contact with a large number of people who live at a distance from each other,
- the relationship between media personalities and audience members is mediated (non-direct),
- the audience is part of a mass culture.<sup>2</sup>

In his words, mass media is a tool whereby we are able to transmit whatever we wish to say instantly, to a significant audience. With modern technology, people no longer need to wait for days to read news, and there is a vast number of videos and pictures on the Internet for them to see, with these videos/images allowing people to be immediately

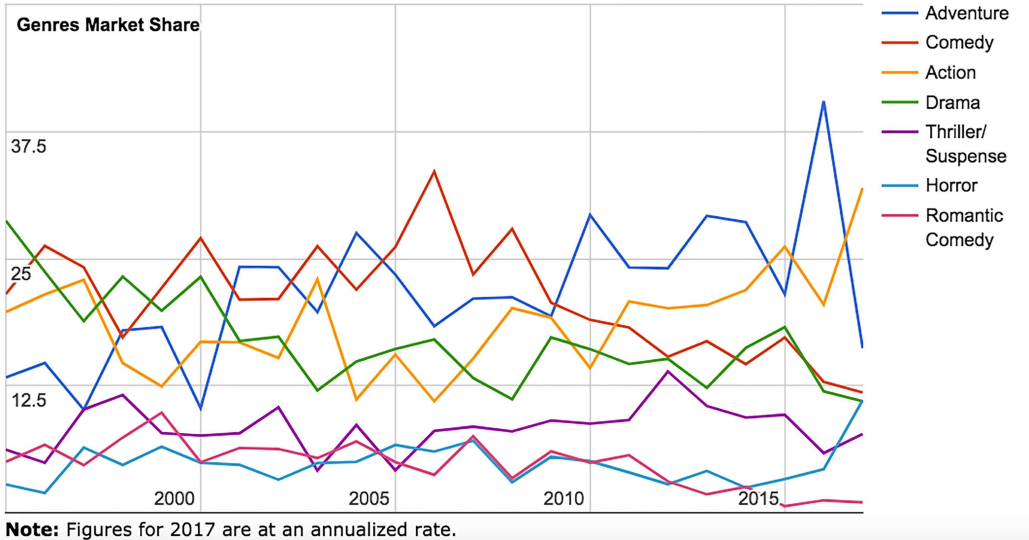
---

<sup>1</sup> Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.188

<sup>2</sup> Aikau, H. (2007). *Feminist waves, feminist generations*. Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

informed. Media also is a tool for learning. With television and the internet people can now learn everything they wish, quickly and efficiently. Mass media is also interactive. The senders give out information, the audience receive these messages, and they provide feedback to the senders. By receiving feedback, senders know what the viewers' favourites are, therefore they can continue to make content that the audience likes. In this regard, the mass media business is like supply and demand. Among all these media, film is one of the strongest and most direct media. There are many reasons for a film to be made, some entertain, some tell a story, some educate but most of them are made to convey emotions to the audience. Viewers get involved and express themselves through films. During the centuries since its creation, the film industry has developed an enormous audience, and many different genres of film have emerged. The action film is a genre in which a protagonist faces a series of challenges that contain fighting, adventure, physical threats, psycho twists, and many of them feature a superhero in the storyline. According to the *Dictionary of Media and Communications*, action genre is a story that revolves around martial arts action or some other form of violent battle, featuring lots of action sequences.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1



Genres Market Share

<sup>3</sup> Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.8

Table 2

### Top-Grossing Genres 1995 to 2017

	Movies	Total Gross	Average Gross	Market Share
1 <b>Adventure</b>	727	\$46,442,841,423	\$64,236,295	22.46%
2 <b>Comedy</b>	2,338	\$43,406,424,033	\$18,565,622	20.99%
3 <b>Action</b>	848	\$38,858,946,141	\$45,824,229	18.79%
4 <b>Drama</b>	4,556	\$33,744,945,740	\$7,413,289	16.33%
5 <b>Thriller/Suspense</b>	923	\$17,336,642,448	\$18,782,359	8.38%
6 <b>Horror</b>	502	\$9,774,893,945	\$19,470,492	4.77%
7 <b>Romantic Comedy</b>	547	\$9,481,459,824	\$17,316,951	4.58%
8 <b>Musical</b>	147	\$2,720,771,260	\$18,507,100	1.31%
9 <b>Documentary</b>	1,925	\$2,033,077,161	\$1,055,495	0.98%
10 <b>Black Comedy</b>	157	\$1,295,016,476	\$8,247,443	0.63%

Top-Grossing Genres 1995 to 2017

As you can see in these two tables from the website – ‘The Numbers’<sup>4</sup>, action films have become the second top-grossing genre on average. However, we can see in Table 1 that in 2017 action films won first place in market share. This data shows us that action movies have not only become the most popular genre among audiences, but also the highest grossing. Action movies have had an effect on many different generations by influencing their opinions. Most often, they are targeted at male audiences as their storylines are seen as traditionally masculine and therefore have more male characters as leading protagonists. By appealing to a wide age-range within this demographic, action films have become one of the highest grossing film genres.

#### 1.1.2 Women in Mass Media

It is very common to see female figures everywhere in the media; TV shows, advertisements, magazines being just some examples. It seems the audience prefer to see female in these media because of their features. Women are often seen to give an impression of being soft, gentle, small and beautiful, but these traits can also bring some

<sup>4</sup> The-numbers.com. (2017). *The Numbers - Movie Market Summary 1995 to 2017*. [online] Available at: <http://www.the-numbers.com/market/> [Accessed 1 Jun. 2017].

negative imagery, such as soft being fragile, gentle being not strong enough, small can instead mean invisible and beauty instead being sexual objectification. It is easy to see the exaggerated sexuality and sexual features on women's body in mass media.



Figure 1: Ad. of Burger King

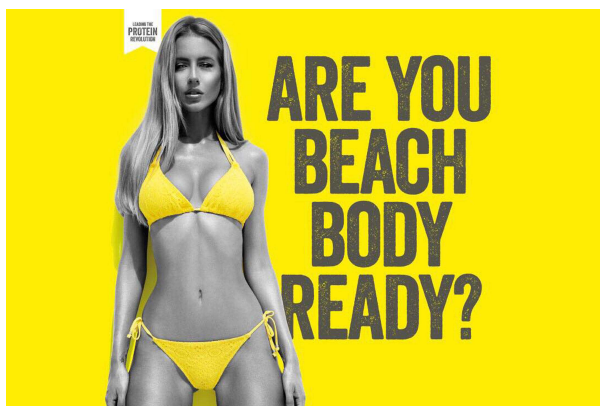


Figure 2: Ad. of Protein World

These advertisements are typical examples of using the sexuality of women to sell their products. There are countless images like this, many included in campaigns that stretch all the way back to the 1960s. The first example given here is from Burger King, a blond lady opens her mouth for a long burger in her red lipstick. The caption says, "It'll blow your mind away," with extra emphasis in size on the words "it'll blow." Being blond and wearing red lipstick is a common enough occurrence, but media have given these attributes new, more sexualised meanings. The phallic-shaped burger with the caption "it'll blow" transmits a very powerful metaphor, which objectively has nothing to do with the burger and the image is, of course, an advertisement clearly aimed at male customers. The second example is an ad targeting the female market. Again, a young blond girl posing on the poster in a bikini with the caption says, "are you beach body ready?". Clearly, it is a question aimed at their potential female customers. Firstly, what is the definition of a "beach body"? To Protein World, this girl's body is the dreamy, beach body archetype that they want to sell. They create this imaginary standard, so anyone who does not fit this standard therefore 'needs' to go to Protein World to get 'beach body ready'. This is the

stereotype with which the mass media continue to label women and attempt exclude everyone who is not of that standard. Women have to feel good about themselves by following these stereotypes, and this is what the mass media has been telling us to do.

Table 3

Mean Percentage of coded advertisements within magazine category presenting women as sex objects, victims, and aggressors.

Magazine Categories	Sex Objects	Victims			Aggressors		
		Total	Sexualised	Non-sexualised	Total	Sexualised	Non-sexualised
Men's	75.98	15.36	12.95	2.72	6.95	6.23	0.71
Women's	55.71	12.62	8.96	3.76	0.71	0.51	0.20
Adolescent Girls	64.15	8.84	6.43	3.83	3.01	0.18	2.83
Entertainment	44.43	6.83	2.88	3.95	5.32	4.46	0.86
News and Business	8.09	0.64	0.64	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Special Interest	18.16	1.66	0.61	1.66	0.00	0.00	0.00
<i>Mean</i>	51.80	9.51	6.90	2.98	3.23	2.43	0.81

#### Scale of women portray as sex object on media in the U.S

Table 3<sup>5</sup> shows the scale of sexual objectification of women in American magazines. Whether in men's, women's or even girls' categories, there are still high proportions of sexualised female images and through this, the world has become accustomed to seeing women in such a way. From these figures, it is easy to imagine new generation growing up objectifying women everywhere. Simone de Beauvoir, a well-known existentialist, said in her book *The Second Sex*<sup>6</sup>, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Women are told how to be women and are moulded by society. We see countless images that try to tell us how to act like a female, from the day we are born. These pictures are selected, copied, communicated and twisted, with the end result often being an unending circle of author drawing stereotype from audience, only for the audience to then copy said stereotype and so on. At the same time, the mass media plays a very significant role in social culture, or rather, the mass media is very authoritative in influencing the audience. These stereotyped messages have considerable influence on society and also became a guidebook to every woman.

<sup>5</sup> Stankiewicz, J. and Rosselli, F. (2008). *Women as Sex Objects and Victims in Print Advertisements*. Springer Science + Business Media. 58(7-8), p.579-589.

<sup>6</sup> Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books. p. 267

## 1.2 Female Stereotype

### 1.2.1 The Concept of Female Stereotypes

Although we are living in the 21st century, gender stereotyping is still a big issue. Gender stereotypes are formed depending on tradition, political reasons, culture and so on. Society creates roles for genders and that influences us a lot. Although it can be hard to believe, mass media actually put this gender stereotyped mindset to us every day, through commercials, videos, books etc, often without being noticed. From childhood, society has already decided for us - pink is for girls and blue is for boys, girls should play with dolls and boys with robots etc. Whilst this is not a role per se, we still follow these norms without any reason. If a girl likes to play with cars, that might often be seen as strange, but there is no reason for such thinking. With these strong subconscious influence, society keeps putting gender in particular boxes. By growing up whilst seeing those strong gender stereotypes in movies, tv shows and magazines, people as a whole accept these ideas and it slowly becomes the norm that everyone should follow. If anyone doesn't follow the norms, they would be considered as acting strangely and not within these established norms.

Since the late 1960s, masculine action films have dominated the silver screen. It often seems like the male protagonist had taken the whole medium for itself. It is not usual to see a female lead role in an action film, but when we do see one, it is always stereotyped. We can see many examples in western movies, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), *A Fistful of Dollars* (1964), all feature strong examples of masculinity, and we barely see a female role in the movie. James Bond films are also big culprits, with *Goldfinger* (1964) and *Dr. No* (1962) being just two examples in which women participated in the stories but were solely there to be seduced; they act almost exclusively as sex objects. The target audiences of these movies are the male group; violence, guns fight and masculine dominance are the main elements in these movies. Women, on the other hand, play roles in these movies only as sexy agents that seduce the hero, the damsel in distress waiting to be rescued, or the stupid girl that stands in the way of his success. The addition of a female character is often just to please the male audience, not to actually affect the storyline. This culture has remained and still affects a lot of modern cinema. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), the beginning of the Indiana Jones franchise, is so well-known that the character

has become one of the most famous in cinema as he is the hero of the nation. The American Film Institute ranked Indiana Jones as the second most major film star of all time.<sup>7</sup> In such a masculine movie, women don't play a major role at any significant level. They are excluded in any of the action storylines, there only to accompany Indiana on his adventures. It is sad that women only can be the side-dish of the movie as they scream about snakes, cry for help and fall helplessly into bed with Indy. And there are many movies with a lot of examples just like this. In *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*<sup>8</sup>, Gallagher agrees that popular film and literature shape contemporary cultural ideology and reflect the popular imagination. The reason for the appearance of these female characters in a masculine action film is to fulfil men's imagination and their desires and complete the adventure. However, as time changes, female roles in action movies are also changing. With the first and second wave of feminism activities, people brought more awareness to the importance of female position in mass media. Business women, female leaders, female fighters - women are slowly taking charge and showing the world that they are not just a fragile, breakable object. However, female roles have become a bigger part in modern cinema, but it is just another form of stereotyping women.

From housewives to superheroes, the role of women seems to have changed a lot, but when we look at the examples, we realise it just jump from one category to another. In the broad context of today's society, the vast wave of globalisation reaches every corner of the world in every aspect. After all these years of unremitting efforts to fight the patriarchy, the status of women has seen some level of improvement. In contemporary society, the positions and roles of women are improving year upon year. The modern female hero in action movies is no longer the housewife or the victim, mostly, and in most of the recent wave of action movies, there is always at least one female character in the squad. A prime example is *The Avengers* (2012); Of the seven main superheroes, one is Natasha Romanoff aka Black Widow, played by Scarlett Johansson, as the female superhero, she is always strong and will fight to the end. *Kick-Ass* (2010) is another example, Chloe Grace Moretz playing the role of Hit-girl, the sole girl fighter in the film and, although she was just a

---

<sup>7</sup> *AFI'S 100 YEARS...100 HEROES AND VILLAINS*. (n.d.). Los Angeles: American Film Institute.

<sup>8</sup> Gallagher, M. (2016). *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.5

little girl, it counts. *The Italian Job* (2003), Stella Bridger, daughter of the detective, is the smart secret-lock opener, although she doesn't play a big part in the film. *Now You See Me* (2013), there is a female magician in the Four Horsemen. In all of these example, the female role plays a good part in the movie, but one has to admit that they are never the main protagonist of the film, the purpose of them being in the movies is to make gender balance or they just simply need a female character because an all-male cast may be too boring to watch. In order to please the audience and keep up with modern times, filmmakers started to put women as one of the leading roles.

### **1.2.2 Female Stereotypes and Society**

The mass media usually summarises and categorises gender characteristics from the perspective of male-dominated cultural centres. Women are easily portrayed as subordinate to men, ornamental and sex objects, whilst on the other hand, men are usually the creators in the centre and are dominant in gender relations. The gender roles of men and women, as the last paragraph mentioned, are being stereotyped by the mass media. In society, the role of men is mainly professional, high-level, a person in charge; the portrayal of women in the media is different; most are portrayed as a traditional woman, caring and home-minded. In the workplace, men are often bosses; women are secretaries; men are doctors, women are nurses; men are scientists, women are assistants; men are leaders, women are followers. These stereotypes were created at least one hundred years ago, and they've stayed in people's mind because the media is telling people this is normal and that we should accept it. Over the years, society has become comfortable with these stereotypes and live with them, women are chasing equality and others are judged by the norm, and yet no one has thought about changing the standard. Molly Haskell, an American feminist film critic, says that media and cinema reflect "society's accepted role definitions' and also define femininity, writing that, 'film is a rich field for the mining of female stereotypes... If we see stereotypes in film, it is because stereotypes existed in society'.<sup>9</sup> Cinema takes

---

<sup>9</sup> Haskell and Dargis (n.d.). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, Third Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.30

inspiration from life and uses that inspiration in stories. The mass media has been using it to entertain audiences, and define the image of women. Instead of using the media as a tool to change this situation, most women just swallow it. But, historically, some women haven't been able to stand this, and have wanted to enact a change. There are some waves of feminism that have increased awareness of these stereotypes in the world. As the *Dictionary of Mass Media* notes,

“Starting in the 1960s, influencing theories of culture, gender, and the like. The first one, called strictly “feminism,” took the general slant on sexual culture as serving male-oriented interests and, thus, catering to male voyeurism; the second main wave, called “postfeminism,” starting in the 1980s, took the view that females have actually always been in charge of the gaze themselves, that is, that while the voyeurs may be men, what they look at is under the control of women.”<sup>10</sup>

Feminists recognised this social inequality and injustice against women, and that it led to some disadvantages. The purpose of feminism is to eliminate such inequalities. Feminism proves women's values and defines the dignity of women and their contribution to culture and the society. Women started to realise they have a say in what is projected in the media. “Cinema Woman is a Popcorn Venus, a delectable but insubstantial hybrid of cultural distortions.”<sup>11</sup>, Marjorie Rosen. In the first wave of feminism, women were demanding full equality with men, they protested the perceived difference in physically or mentally ability between men and women, and demanded that the social level of women should be equal to that of men. In the mid-1970s, with the onset of second wave feminism, feminists started to debate female identity and women's individuality. More articles and movies presented these theories and ideas to the public. Feminists celebrated their identity, at the same time they also tried to produce new forms of the “image of women” in mass media.<sup>12</sup> In the second wave of feminism, feminist critics sought to define which are the “negative” and “damaging” images of women in media. As the result of the gender equality movement, women started to appear on the silver screen in a stronger image. Business women in suits; women that are in charge of their own life; women that have more

---

<sup>10</sup> Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.121

<sup>11</sup> Rosen, M. (1974). *Popcorn Venus*. New York, NY: Avon Books, p.10.

<sup>12</sup> Aikau, H. (2007). *Feminist waves, feminist generations*. Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

responsibilities; women that fight with guns and swords. Women started to use media as a tool to tell the world that women are not weak. Just as Haskell says, cinema is the reflection of society, the portrayal of women in contemporary film is how women behave in real life. The stronger image of women in film proves the “image of women” is changing. Female stereotypes and society have a very tight relationship, not only can one not live without the other, they also affect each other.

### 1.2.3 Conclusion

According to Judith Lorber, professor of Women’s Studies at Brooklyn College, "Gender is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of our expectations of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced."<sup>13</sup>. As Lorber notes, people often easily assign gender into two categories, those categories being men and women. They have their cultural expectations of each category. The media plays a major part in influencing change in society and while we find some cinema portrays men and women as equals, this hasn't always been the case. In fiction films, the male is often portrayed as a fierce hero, while females are generally portrayed as fragile and as sex objects. Specific attention is paid to physical appearance, women often needing to look more feminine and weak to fit into the traditional gender expectations. Usually, women are the helpless, fragile character, this so the male can rescue them from danger or from being killed.

1) Women and girls are weak, emotional, helpless, and unable to solve mathematical and science problems on their own.

2) Women and girls are more concerned with relationships and more focused on marriage and romance. Their set roles are given as mothers and caregivers above all else.

3) Women and girls value their sexual attractiveness and physical traits above everything else. They need to fit into the social beauty standard and look flawless, these

---

<sup>13</sup> Lorber, J. & Farrell, S. (1991). *The Social construction of gender* (1st ed.). Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications. p.324

standards being those that the mass media industry has established. Females, indeed, need to look feminine.

USJ Today's Laura Petrecca interviewed American actress and producer Geena Davis about whether female stereotypes in movies have an adverse effect. She agreed that media has a huge social responsibility to show female characters in a more positive light. She believed that stereotypes do influence the expectations of society, with girls' self-esteem decreasing and boys' self-esteem increasing from watching films.<sup>14</sup> If films show women in a positive and empowering light on the screen, it has an enormous impact on the audience and can influence changes.

According to findings from research conducted by The USC Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism, and commissioned by The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media:

- “Of the 5,799 speaking or named characters on screen, 31% were female and 69% were male.

- Male characters disproportionately held more powerful occupations than their female counterparts. Only 14% of business executives were female and just 10% of top-level politicians were women.

- Just a quarter of the films examined had a girl or woman as a lead or co-lead driving the plot.

- Only 10% of the sample group had a "balanced cast" that featured girls or women in 45% to 54.9% of all speaking roles.”<sup>15</sup>

Hollywood filmmakers started to take notice of these facts, since the voice of feminism was getting louder. In recent years, there has been a handful of movies about young women who are capable, strong, focused or able to throw a punch, and these kinds of images which challenge the traditional gender stereotype. Jeffrey A. Brown, an American professor of Bowling Green State University who researches gender and body issues in cinema, has proposed that the increase in action heroines over the past 20 years is “an indication of changing cultural, gendered, and economic conditions.” He believes that

---

<sup>14</sup> Geena Davis: *Stereotypes in movies has negative effect.* (2014). *USA TODAY*. [online] Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/09/23/geena-davis-hollywood-stereotypes-remain/16080085/> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2016].

<sup>15</sup> Smith, S. (2008). *Gender Stereotypes: An analysis of popular films and Tv.* Annenberg School for Communication. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media

these action heroines in films can be role models for women, but “a number of cultural concerns about femininity affect media representation and this still need to be negotiated.”<sup>16</sup> This is particularly evident in action films, with one such example being Katniss Everdeen, the lead female character in ‘The Hunger Games’ series; she is a prime figure of this transformation, a heroine who struggles for survival, dignity and justice, all without being needlessly over-sexualised. With the raised profile of feminism, correct or not, it has still somewhat helped people to realise the importance of, and act towards, gender equality.

This bibliographical research points to the fact that women are still portrayed in a negative, stereotyped manner, as sex objects and/or fragile, that means that non-stereotypical cinema is still an exception. The percentage of women being in the lead role in films is very low and men still make up the majority of lead roles in the action genre.

## **2 Femininity and Gender**

### **2.1 Female Identity in Films**

Image and gender identity has greatly influenced the public through mass media. According to Simone de Beauvoir's in *The Second Sex*, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.”<sup>17</sup> This is one of, if not the most famous statement from de Beauvoir. Her point is that femininity is not a product of differences in psychology or biology but, in fact, femininity is a construction of civilisation, and that men and women don't have any differences, only those assigned to them. A woman isn't born with a certain character; she is shaped and formed by the society and culture in which she lives. Biology doesn't identify a woman, what identifies a woman as a woman is society and man. The world has

---

<sup>16</sup> Brown, J. (2015). *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture*. 1st ed. Mississippi: Univ. Press of Mississippi. p.4

<sup>17</sup> Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books. p. 267

given an impression to women that they need to be passive, secondary and sensitive. All these elements that society has assigned to women are based on the patriarchy system; women cannot be their individual selves because they live under the thumb of the patriarchy. Men and women are both human, but why women are labelled as “the other”? Why haven’t women raised objections to the patriarchy? “The other” is another important statement from de Beauvoir, “Thus humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being.”<sup>18</sup> The genuine meaning of “the other” is those don't own or have lost self-consciousness. As a well-known feminist in the 20th century, Simone de Beauvoir raised a direct question that challenged the patriarchy that no one had ever dare to challenge. The statement together with the second wave of feminism affected many films at the time.

Just like the identity of women is defined by society, female characters in films are also defined by society.<sup>19</sup> Women used to be submissive and secondary, they never played the big part or made any changes in the past and they could have even been taken out from the storyline without making a substantial difference to the plot. Many years, people have become accustomed to seeing the iconic distinction of masculinity and femininity in films. Masculinity represents the heroic, dominant, patriarchy whereas femininity represents sensitivity, submissiveness, weakness and sexuality. Gender is divided into two roles and supported by the whole film industry. There is much literature that proves the statement and which raises thousands of examples of how women are portrayed with negative stereotypes. In *Beyond the Second Sex*, Sanday argues that women are not just the second sex or “the other,” women are able to fight and make their voice heard. Women are being trapped in the traditional stereotype category, their ability and power are buried under the patriarchy, and they need to be liberated.<sup>20</sup> This literary research point to the fact that the female stereotype does exist in the cinema industry and has a significant influence on the society and that the portrayal of women is harmful and needs to be changed.

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.4

<sup>19</sup> Haskell and Dargis (n.d.). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, Third Edition*. University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.30

<sup>20</sup> Sanday, P. (1996). *Beyond the second sex*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press.

## 2.2 Heroine in Modern Action Films

Some feminist waves in history improved female position in the world. Since the 1970's and the second wave of feminism, the portrayal of women has achieved a breakthrough, with the new image of women slowly establishing itself. We can see these changes in action films, women moving from weak and fragile, to strong and empowered. Women have become more independent and free. They are not just a beautiful body to be looked at by the audience, but are also wise and determined.

“I’m going to make movies the way I see fit, No thrifless, mindless women. No dumb situations. I know I have to go slow. But I’m going to sneak up on them little by little and then I’m going to create a monster. This girl isn’t just another body for their cameras.”<sup>21</sup>

This is a quote from one of the greatest female heroes in modern cinema, Pam Grier. From her action characters in *Coffy* (1973) and *Foxy Brown* (1974), her badass and aggressive portrayals “have bruised the man’s masculinity.” From then on, two types of heroine appeared. One is the female warrior, and the other is the female saviour. In films such as *Alien* (1979), *Star Wars* (1977), *Terminator* (1984) and *The Matrix* (1999), there are some classic female warriors. They are not only powerful and decisive, but they are the embodiment of wisdom and beauty. Although they couldn't entirely replace the male as the central protagonist, they become key to the plot and the male character recognises there would be more obstacles without their support.<sup>22</sup> For the female saviour, there are fewer examples, but we can still find some. Wonder Woman from *Wonder Woman* (2017), Dr. Elizabeth from *Prometheus* (2012), these are two characters that are the hero of the movie; they survive until the end, they fight the evil forces, and they are absolutely the lead characters in the storyline. The improvement of the female image makes the role of women in action films more diverse and colourful. Regardless of age, class or profession, women can become the protagonist of a film and “Woman Power” is being taken increasingly seriously, day by day. We can see from these action movies that women are no longer just the victim or sidekick, instead they are the saviour or the leader. These women may play

---

<sup>21</sup> Jacobson, M. and Price, R. (2007). *Teenage Hipster In The Modern World*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc. p.2

<sup>22</sup> Li. L (2016). *The raising of Female character in Hollywood*. Nanjing Normal University

the hero, they may be a villain or they may be the classic beauty, but they are also brave and determined; the power of woman in cinema is growing, and it is unstoppable. *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) won the most Oscars at the 88th Academy Awards in 2016 and it is easy to see the contribution of female characters in the film and how they played such a huge part of the film. *Wonder Woman* (2017) shows us that a woman can be the lead character as well as the saviour and there are more films like this on the way; “Woman Power” is coming and it cannot be ignored.

### **3 Case Study on Female Representation in Action Film**

#### **3.1 Structure of Research**

As a woman in the film industry, I often question how women are portrayed in cinema and the way that the character’s appearance in the movies affects women and girls. In order to see how negative stereotypes of women influence society and how women are being portrayed in cinema in different ways, I will study three female characters in action films that are exceptions - and analyse them from a woman’s point of view.

The research will be divided into five chapters. In the first chapter, I will talk about the status of female portrayal in the film industry. The brief will introduce mass media and women in movies. To explain the existence of female negative stereotypes, I will give examples of how women are being portrayed in mass media and how that affects society. I will also discuss the cases which are already being studied. From these cases, I explore more about the subject and the position of women in contemporary cinema.

The second chapter is about femininity and gender and in this chapter and I will study feminine and gender identities in films. I bring up my research from other academic works and explore the fact that identity of female in general films. From the first wave of feminism to today, I will discover the reason why women are being portrayed in certain

way. The second part of chapter two is about the status of the female hero. Facts have proven that the stereotype of female is changing in a positive way. Many movies now have women as lead characters, and the heroine is the new trend of cinema. In the second part, I raise examples of the new female heroes and study how they are different. From these studies I understand the status of female is raising and it is a fact that cannot be ignored.

Chapter three will explain the methods I used during the research. It will provide a discussion of the methods and techniques used in the study. It will also describe the subjects of the study, explaining how the objects are chosen, and how they are being analysed and applied. After explaining the characters, in chapter four I discuss each character in detail. In the sub-chapter, there is a full film study for each film. In order to help the reader to understand the film, the first part will be some technical facts and a summary of the film. Then from the whole film, I will select some scenes that are important in shaping of the characters. From these sequences, I will analyse the characters' personalities, their appearance, their relationship to others and how they are described in the films; how they become the principle characters in the film and what makes them the hero. I will study the dialogues, movie sequences and the cinematography with their actions, makeup and the camera movements also being very important to the characters. After analysing all of this, I will gather all the study results and compare one to another. Due to different characters, there are many different ways to portray them. With the inclusion of the bibliography research, in the last chapter I will make my conclusion about the comparison of these characters, and also the change of the portrayal of women, both then and now.

### **3.2 Research Methodology**

This part will discuss the methods and techniques used in the research. It also describes the subjects of the study, explains how the objects are chosen, and how they are being analysed and applied.

Case study, archival research, grounded theory and content analysis are the main types of research used in the study. First of all, I need to raise the central argument of the dissertation. In this research, I am studying and exploring female representation in action films. Along with this, I will also investigate and study the differences between how women in lead roles are portrayed now compared to in the past, their impact on the storyline and their background stories. How do they influence society? What do they represent in these action films and what kind of symbol and objects they are presented as in the films? To answer these questions, we need to seek the answers from other sources. There are some books and articles that talk about related subjects, as well as the theories. In order to study them, I need to collect sources that are linked to the relationships between Hollywood action movies and femininity. Moreover, sources that talk about the characters and in which the author is going to study and support the argument. I will gather the theories from the books and analyse them, creating a literature review and conclusion.

To prove that there are exceptions of there not being female stereotypes in action films, I selected three female action characters from the selected movies to study and analyse. To distinguish the non-stereotyped exceptions from all the movies, I found some stereotyped female characters in Hollywood action films in order to raise examples of how women are being exploited as objects and victims. First, from general movies, I picked the ones that don't use a female lead character, thousands of movies would therefore be easily discounted. Then, from these action films which do feature female lead characters, I selected ones that have strong female stereotypes for the characters, such as those portrayed as sex objects or dressing up in a sexualised manner. After distinguish the films, I find the three female action hero to represent the exceptions.

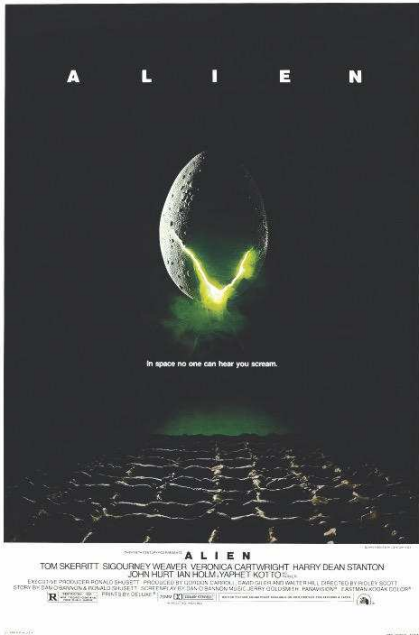
After I found my three representative characters, I watched each film and analysed the characters' personalities, physical appearance and the way they are portrayed differently in these movies. The first movie I chose is *Alien* (1979), about a space creature killing a spaceship crew and Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) killing the creature in the end as the lone survivor. *Alien* is one of the first and a classic example of feminine movies. Almost 40 years ago, Ellen Ripley, as the first breakthrough action heroine and not the traditional female character, she who is a survivor and not a victim. It is so rare to find films from 40 years ago that portrayed women in as strong a light as this one, yet she is just an ordinary woman after all. After a classic feminine movie, the second one is *The Girl with the*

*Dragon Tattoo* (2011), which is more recent and has entirely different style compared to the first film. The movie is about journalist Mikael Blomqvist (Daniel Craig) investigating a missing woman from a wealthy family, with the help of a computer hacker Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara). Lisbeth Salander is the study object as she is one the focuses of the film and she is robust and independent. Although there are not many fight scenes in the movie, she became the action heroine because she fights society's rule and is herself. Being a non-mainstream style of female character, Lisbeth created beauty in her own way, showing people that there is not just one way to be beautiful; being confident, independent, smart and active is also an attraction of being a woman. Lastly, the third character is Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), from *The Hunger Games* (2012). Katniss volunteers in lieu of her younger sister to participate in the Hunger Games, the Hunger Games is a worldwide killing game that representatives from all regions of the nation who fight until there is only one left standing. Katniss, with no doubt, is the hero of the movie. Not only does she win the game, but she also struggles with the system. In the end, she became the symbol of revolution and saves people in the nation from the dictatorship. The character has become the most popular heroine at the moment, and she has influenced lots of teenagers. She doesn't just exist in the movie, she lives in people's heart and proves to them that female power is getting bigger. The enthusiastic response from the public shows that people love the character and respect her as a woman. Generally, whether or not this is a feminine film, the public needs an example of this, a woman being independent and fruitful but not needing to appear masculine.

These three characters affect different generations at different levels, being portraying in different ways, dressing in different clothes and fighting in different ways; the one thing they have common is that they all represent the new image of women show the world that women are not just accessories. Next, I will compare the three characters in those three action films and see how they are presented differently, how it was described at the time and how it is now. Then, I will come up with a conclusion of women's position in contemporary cinema. After gathering the studies from literature and movie case studies, I will explore the theories in those resources that matched the case studies, to examine how they match and what the differences are. And finally, I will raise more questions from it and conclude the whole dissertation.

## 4 Films Analysis and Studies

### 4.1 “The Raising of a Heroine” - Ellen Ripley in *Alien*



Director: Ridley Scott

Writers: Dan O'Bannon, Ronald Shusett

Stars: Sigourney Weaver, Tom Skerritt

Runtime: 1 hr 57 min (117 min)

Release Date: 22 June 1979 (USA)

#### 4.1.1 Storyline

*Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979), directed by Ridley Scott, is a movie about an extra-terrestrial creature, the titular ‘alien’, that attacks and kills a spaceship crew and Ellen Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) finally defeats the creature and is the lone survivor. The story takes place on the spacecraft *Nostromo* on its return journey to Earth, with a 7-member crew consisting of 5 men and 2 women. The crew receives an unknown signal and investigate, coming across an abandoned spaceship. A dead body is found along with a huge amount of eggs, one of which opens and unleashes the giant scorpion-like creature held inside. It then turns into an alien creature and attacks Kane, sucking onto his face. The rest of the crew insist on bringing him back to the ship while Ripley strongly disagrees with it. Ash and Dallas try to cut the alien out and examine it but some liquid drips out and eats through the hull. The crew realises they are taking a big risk and have gotten into trouble, but still they want to make it back to Earth and allow scientist Ash to continue

examining the creature. Once again, Ripley disagrees and asks the captain, Dallas, to throw the creature out of the airlock and of course, he doesn't take her advice. With that, they decide to travel back to Earth and hope there will be a way to save the afflicted Kane. Sometime later Kane wakes up and it seems that he is all right; the crew immediately ask him what happened and he is incapable of remembering a single thing about the event. But during the crew dinner, something suddenly bursts out from inside Kane's chest, killing him. It is an unknown, small, snake like creature with teeth and it quickly escapes. Dallas forms the crew into two groups to catch the alien but the alien grows rapidly into a much bigger alien that proceeds to attack another crew member, Brett. Ash, as the scientist, suggests that someone tries to burn the alien in the vent system that it has been using to move about the ship. Ripley is first to volunteer and Dallas asks Ash to go with her. Ripley leaves with Ash, and the rest of the crew stays together. While Ripley and Ash are away searching for the alien, and unbeknownst to them, it secretly attacks the crew and kills Dallas. With the death of the captain, Ripley becomes the highest-ranking officer on the ship. She then finds out from the "Mother" computer, that the mission they now have is to return with the alien so it can be analysed and that the crew has been deemed expendable. Ripley does not understand why and Ash attempts to stop her from telling the others. They get into a fight and Ash tries to kill Ripley but Parker, another of the crew, arrives and beats Ash over the head, so much so that his previously robotic head falls off. The crew discover that Ash is a robot and this explains why Ash has been protecting the alien, as the company to which the ship belongs want the alien as a weapon. Ripley decides not to execute the order from "Mother" and instead brings the surviving crew to the shuttle. While they are moving, the alien appears and kills Parker and Lambert. As the last crew member that is still standing, Ripley runs for her life to escape from the alien and activates the ship's self-destruct mechanism, returning only to rescue her cat. In the last minutes, she manages to escape in the shuttle while the ship blows into pieces. Ripley flies the shuttle away, thinking she is going back to Earth safely, only to then see the alien on the shuttle with her. The film then proceeds to explain how Ripley fights the alien alone in the shuttle.

### 4.1.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse

The Alien series is well-known, not just because of its storyline, but also because it is the first film to put a female character in a leading role. The first Alien came out forty-four years ago, at the height of second-wave feminism. The workplace, reproductive rights and official legal inequalities<sup>23</sup> were the main issues at that time. As the first “heroine” existing in film, the appearance of Ripley did change the transitional image of action cinema. At that time, the idea of making a female the hero of the movie was not popular and a risky move, since the majority of action movies are put the male as the victor and the female as the loser or victim. By making Ripley the heroine of the film, Alien stood out and emphasised the changing face of feminism in cinema and without a doubt, Ripely became a feminist icon in cinema and beyond.

Ripley, unlike many other female characters in action films, is an ordinary woman. She is different to other female characters like the Bond Girls of the Bond series or Serleena in *Men in Black* (Barry Sonnenfeld, 2002) and Agent 99 in *Get Smart* (Peter Segal, 2008). She differs too from those newer heroines like *Wonder Woman* (Patty Jenkins, 2017), *Catwoman* (Pitof, 2004) and Natalie Cook/Dylan Sanders/Alex Munday in *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000). She doesn't practice martial arts, she doesn't have super powers nor does she have an odd character or dresses in sexy outfits. She is physically fit but with only above average strength, she is brave but still scares and cries when she fights the alien, she is smart but not sufficiently skilled in everything. At the beginning of the film, she is just like the rest of the crew members, no one could have picked her as the last one standing. The seven members all have different positions, captain Dallas is in charge, but he is relaxed, Ripley and Ash are confident and seem like they might be fighting for Dallas's position. Ripley likes to take control as she insists on keeping wounded Kane out of the ship, while Lambert and Kane are soft, friendly easy-going people. Parker and his assistant engineering technician Brett are the rough workers, and their only concern is getting paid. In the film, the first scene that shows the relationship between Ripley and the others is at 00:23:27.

---

<sup>23</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). *women's movement / political and social movement*. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/womens-movement> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2017].

Figure 3



(00:23:27 - 00:24:15)

She is having a conversation with Parker and Brett about sharing while they are fixing the equipment of the ship. Parker teases Ripley by pretending not to hear what she said and is obviously annoyed by her management, so she finally gets up and tells him to “fuck off” and turns away. After Ripley leaves, they gripe behind her back and are disrespectful towards her. Parker and Brett laugh about their prank, and Parker angrily exclaims, “son of a bitch,” as Ximena observes, Parker’s behaviour explains that “his macho posturing partly comes from attraction to Ripley, an attraction he can only express through antagonism.”<sup>24</sup> That is a very clear example of showing that men, at least Parker and Brett, are not very happy with being supervised by women, and they feel that following orders given by a woman is a joke.

Later, at 00:36:25, one of the most famous scenes of the movie occurs. When Dallas tries to bring the wounded Kane into the ship without leaving him in isolation for 24 hours, Ripley vehemently refuses, citing containment protocols, and she reminds them all that they could be infected or could die if she lets them in. While the rest of the crew, even the captain, asks her to open the airlock, she refuses until eventually Ash breaks protocol and lets them in, without her permission.

---

<sup>24</sup> Gallardo C, X. and Smith, C. (2004). *Alien woman*. New York: Continuum.

Figure 4



(00:36:25 - 00:37:05)

Here is the dialogue from 00:36:16 - 00:36:58.

Dallas

Something has attached itself to him. We have to get him to the infirmary right away.

Ripley

What kind of thing? I need a clear definition.

Dallas

An organism. Open the hatch.

Ripley

Wait a minute. If we let it in, the ship could be infected. You know the quarantine procedure. Twenty-four hours for decontamination.

Dallas

He could die in twenty-four hours. Open the hatch.

Ripley

Listen to me, if we break quarantine, we could all die.

Lambert

Look, could you open the god-damned hatch? We have to get him inside.

Ripley

No. I can't do that and if you were in my position, you'd do the same.

Dallas

Ripley, this is an order. Open that hatch right now, do you hear me?

Ripley

Yes.

Dallas

Ripley. This is an order. Do you hear me?

Ripley

Yes. I read you. The answer is negative.

At that point, Ripley stands against everyone, but she holds her ground, because she knows this is the right thing to do. It would later turn out that Ripley was right. This scene shows Ripley's confidence and determination that she can work without emotions impeding her judgement. Although it is inhuman not to save her shipmate, she didn't consider for a second letting Kane in, and she was determined of this because she knew that she had to be responsible for everyone on the ship. She was trying to protect the crew from the situation, something which is usually done by a man most storylines. Here, this is a big contrast between the captain Dallas, and Ripley; one is more human and putting their emotions first, while the other is more persistent in setting reason above emotion.

At 00:45:49, Ripley tells Ash that he should have followed her order when Dallas asked to open the airlock for Kane. She reminds him that when Dallas and Kane are off the ship, she is in command and that the crew should follow her orders. Ripley is as aggressive and self-confident as men by confronting Ash, who explicitly disobeyed her order not to let them in. She doesn't hesitate to have this conversation with Ash, because she knows what is the right thing to do and she needs to do it. And yet, her actions are presented as "highly transgressive"<sup>25</sup> according to Ximena. On the other hand, Ash becomes disturbed and annoyed, although he should be the one who apologises. After Ash tells her that Kane was attacked by an unknown creature and might be dangerous, Ripley answers him "And you let him in."

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

Figure 5



(00:45:41 - 00:46:47)

By answering in this way, she is aggressively challenging Ash, meaning he should have listened to her and respected her. The conversation carries on with a tense atmosphere when Ash answers her "I was obeying the order, remember," the order to which he was referring was the order from captain Dallas, but who was potentially compromised at the time, meaning that his order was invalid. Ash ignored this fact and refused to obey a woman, not just because he underestimates her ability and discriminates against women, but also because he wanted to let the creature onto the ship as this was his secret mission. Maybe Ash was expecting Ripley to roll over and have no hard feelings about his protocol breach and disobeying of orders, but Ripley came straight to Ash and confronted him about his actions. By doing this, Ripley is teaching Ash a lesson: Women can also be as demanding and powerful as men when it comes to making decisions, nor can women be ignored. Ripley also shows her strong personality as a confident and responsible woman, and with this she shows that no one can underestimate what women can do. This event changes the whole concept of women, while women used to be the ones who are weak and fragile, Ripley changes the concept of women in action movies, and even in real life. At the end of the scene, Ash said, "I do take my responsibilities as seriously as you, you know" just to show his respect to Ripley and end the conversation.

Until this point, it seems that Ripley has more masculinity than femininity, by showing her self-esteem and demanding character, but in fact, she never lost her femininity throughout the film. After all, she is just an average woman who doesn't have a knowledge of martial arts, and she has a typical women's reaction when the alien attacked her and she has a cautious and attentive personality. Her appearance is very different from the heroines in most of the action films, just an ordinary woman with long hair, not a particularly

masculine body shape, a regular female voice, and most importantly, she does not wear a skinny jumpsuit like almost every other female heroine wears. Contrasting with other action films, she is never sexualised because of her looks, and when Ash beats her, there is no holding back because she is a woman. As women, we can always relate to the character of Ripley; she gives modern women a real role model, showing that women can also be responsible and energetic and yet can also be feminine and healthy. Lambert, the other female crew member on the ship, has a completely different character to Ripley, and there is a big contrast between the two of them. Although Lambert wears short hair and smokes, she plays a very typical female trope in horror/action films, as she is visually scared, crying and obeying other without thinking for herself. When the alien kills Dallas, Lambert panics and becomes hysterical, wanting to escape from the danger, while Ripley was as calm as her male counterpart Ash, trying to fight back. However, she is simply a stereotyped female, the perspective that the mass media keeps putting in our head to make us believe how women should or would behave in such a situation. A man can totally replace the character of Ripley, and the story continues very well. In an interview that David Konow did with the screenwriter of *Alien*, Dan O'Bannon, O'Bannon revealed the background story of the character Ripley; at the very beginning, Ripley was originally written as a man, and then changed to a woman. "Everyone's gender in the script was deliberately left up in the air. I figured that the gender of each character would be determined at the time they were cast, and I wrote that into the first script, it's right there on the last page."<sup>26</sup> The creation of this first female her was an accident. They made the decision when they saw Sigourney, "They came up with this Sigourney Weaver girl. They actually did a screen test with her, and everybody was favourably impressed." And he understood that the fact of making a female the lead actress was not something trendy, but O'Bannon said, "I don't see it as that revolutionary to cast a woman as the lead in an action picture. It didn't boggle me then, and it doesn't boggle me now. My concept from scratch was that this would be a co-ed crew. I thought there was no reason you had to adhere to the convention of the all-male crew anymore." What O'Bannon said was very advanced at the time, and it was a bold move to have a female hero and lone survivor in an action movie when the majority of audiences are men.

---

<sup>26</sup> Tested. (2017). *Dan O'Bannon and The Origins of Alien - Tested.com*. [online] Available at: <http://www.tested.com/art/movies/458897-dan-obannon-and-origins-alien/> [Accessed 1 Apr. 2017].

In the director's cut, there is a scene that makes a big contribution to the story and makes Ripley even more of a hero. After the alien kills all the crew, Ripley finds an area in the ship that has been turned into the alien's nest and where she finds Dallas, who is alive but only just. He is pinned to the wall, and he moans to Ripley "Kill me," Ripley delivers mercy by burning the whole area, and she moves on. As the captain, Dallas was in complete command of both the ship and the crew but since, at this point, he is trapped and helpless, he has to ask Ripley to end his life. To request help from a subordinate, Dallas has to swallow his pride and be brave enough to ask. In the scene, Dallas is positioned above Ripley and she has look up as him, but in fact, he is in a terrible situation, and she is the only one who can save him from his torture. At this point, the feminine power of Ripley increases exponentially and as the lone survivor, she successfully transforms into the hero of the movie.

Figure 6



(01:35:04 - 01:36:14)

Throughout the film, the appearance of Ripley is always neutral; she doesn't wear heavy makeup or dress femininely. Apparently, all crew members wear the same uniform, but she never appears sexually. The portrayal of the female image always stems from the appearance like body shape or hair and we can always tell the personality from these details. The traditional way of portraying a sexual woman would be giving her long wavy hair, red lips and a sexy dress that accentuates her curvy body shape and flirty facial expressions. Of course, these are not the only things that denote femininity, but we have to admit that these are the symbols that lead to sex. Traditionally, sex objects and gun fights make the perfect match in action films. The fight scenes cover the need for action in the movie, while the sex object is the perfect accompaniment for all of this action. Take, for

example, the Bond girls or the girls in the Mission Impossible series; all of them exist as a very feminine sex object. By having these girls, male audiences would feel more masculine by seeing another feminine creature, and that is what gives them satisfaction. Ripley has none of these feminine features, and yet she is not very masculine at the same time. From her outlook, she has standard length hair that all women would wear, her hair is fixed up, and it clearly seems like she doesn't like to spend a lot of time fixing her hair, and that brings a lot convenience to her character.

### **4.1.3 Conclusion**

Along with the hair and her figure, her dress is another important feature that represents the female image and defines the body shape. Not only does an outfit serve just to cover one's body, from it we can always tell one's gender identity, class, taste, profession, cultural background and so on. These elements are what makes a character's personality. We know that there are two main reasons for how and why men and women dress; one is to expose their sexual attractiveness and the other is just to make themselves feel good and comfortable. If we want to impress someone, whether it be a lover, a friend or a stranger, we should choose a standout outfit that can show our attractive spots and if we want to be comfortable we would choose something looser. A quality outfit should bring out one's self-value. What makes an outfit different from other elements is that you can change your outfits every day while you cannot just change your hair, face or body shape every day depending on your mood. Ripley, in the film, has been wearing the same neutral uniform as the others, and does not show gender specific features. We cannot tell her and other crew members class, personalities or preferences from such a neutral outfit. We understand that they are not here to impress anybody, no one wants to stand out and that they are just professional employees trying to get the job done and back to the Earth. At the end of the movie, when Ripley finally escapes onto the shuttle and is ready to fly away, she undresses herself and presents her female body. After fighting the alien, she is exhausted, sweaty and she slowly lets down her guard and her clothing and tries to breathe a little. This is the first time we have a glimpse of Ripley's sexuality. Generously showing

her skin, back and her nipples under the white undershirt, the director is not hesitant at all to show the audience her feminine side. But suddenly, she is scared by the unexpected alien dropping into the shuttle. A. Susan Owen describes the camera movement of this scene in her book: "In terms of technical composition, the viewing audience is positioned to gaze voyeuristically at Ripley's body ... however, the audience is also positioned with her in relation to the menacing threat of the Alien ... The shock of discovery is visually conveyed through Ripley's subjective point of view - positioning the audience with her as feminine and vulnerable... Significantly, the extreme low angle point of view shots framing Ripley's crotch as she scrambles into protective gear are not positioned from the Alien's point of view."<sup>27</sup> So with this camera technique, the audiences share their perspective with Ripley, they see what Ripley sees and they feel what Ripley feels. The appearance of the alien forces her to put on her giant space suit and get ready to fight again.

Ellen Ripley in *Alien* is just an ordinary woman that to whom all kinds of women can relate. In fact, in real life it is not hard to find a woman who is responsible and brave like her and what makes us see Ripley as unique is that we do not usually see a woman acting this way in media. As the audience, we are used to seeing women being sexual and fragile in major mass media which gives us an illusion that this is how women should behave. Ripley gives a whole new concept of being a strong woman. By being the heroine, she is not only one of the first leading actress' in action cinema, but her impact on cinema in general has been monumental. She defied the role of women in mass media by presenting us with an original, confident and empowering kickass heroine. With no doubt, her example affected many female portrayals in action films for many years after. Although she is the warrior in the film, the character she represents is still a masculine warrior. Throughout the film, it rare to notice her feminine feature, more we see is her aggressive, extreme actions when she fights with the alien. Can we say Ripley is a heroine? Yes, we can. But at the same time, I also believe that she should be fighting the alien in a feminine way.

---

<sup>27</sup> Owen, A., Berg, L. and Stein, S. (2007). *Bad girls*. New York: Lang. p.34

## 4.2 “Girl gone wild” - Lisbeth Salander in The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo



Director: David Fincher

Writers: Steven Zaillian (screenplay),  
Stieg Larsson (novel)

Stars: Ronney Mara, Daniel Craig

Runtime: 2 hr 38 min (158 min)

Release Date: 21 December 2011 (USA)

### 4.2.1 Storyline

*The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (David Fincher, 2011), is a psychological/action film directed by David Fincher, based on the novel named *Men Who Hate Women* by Swedish writer Stieg Larsson. It tells the story of journalist Mikael Blomqvist (Daniel Craig) as he investigates the case of a missing woman from a wealthy family, with the help of computer hacker Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara). The story takes place in Stockholm, Sweden and opens with a phone call between two men discussing a package of a framed plant display. We then see Mikael Blomqvist, the co-owner and journalist of Millennium magazine, leaving a courthouse with reporters following him. Apparently, Mikael was sued because of his investigation into a very powerful businessman, Hans-Erik Wennerstrom, and Mikael loses the case. The movie goes on and reveals that Mikael has been having a secret love affair with his business partner, while both of them have their own families. The film jumps to another scene, the scene of the first appearance of the female lead of the film,

Lisbeth Salander. Before she shows up, there are shots of her riding on a macho motorcycle, but her face remains covered. The mysterious Lisbeth appears with the cover voice of her boss Dragan saying, “No one here likes her very much,” “I prefer for her not to meet the clients,” and warning the client, “I’m concerned you won’t like her. She is different.” He describes her as being distinct in every way. This gives the audiences a first impression of what an odd personality we are expecting. Then finally, a long shot following her walking down the hallway, a woman with a punk side-trim hairstyle, a conspicuous tattoo and quirky earrings. Lisbeth distinctly stands out in the corporate office with her all black outfit and unusual hair style, compared to the other employees in suits and ties, she is different. Obviously, she is very good at her job as a hacker— her boss does not care what she looks like, they value her for her work. So, Lisbeth’s boss, Dragan, sets up a meeting between her and the attorney of Henrik Vanger to talk about her investigation of Mikael. Apparently, Henrik wants to hire Mikael to investigate the case of his missing grand-niece Harriet, who disappeared 40 years ago, but he needs to know Mikael has a clean profile and is a man that can be trusted. Lisbeth does a full and in-depth investigation of Mikael, even into his personal life. All of this reveals that he is a decent person, who is not hiding anything. Henrik invites Mikael to his mansion and explains to him the whole story of the missing case. 40 years ago, at a family dinner, Harriet went missing, and someone has been mailing him a framed plant picture every year. With no results from police or private investigators, this has driven Henrik crazy over 40 years but he is not planning on giving up. By hiring Mikael to solve the case, he offers Mikael not just double his salary but also damaging information about Wennerstrom. Mikael takes the offer and considers it a getaway from all the mess. To help Mikael, Lisbeth is introduced by Henrik, due to her skill in investigating people and her being a quiet person.

At this point of the movie, we have already learned that Lisbeth is under state legal guardianship due to diagnosed mental incompetency, and after her guardian suffers a stroke she is assigned a new guardian, lawyer Nils Bjurman. Different to the previous guardian, Bjurman is going to take control of her finance and be very strict with her, even threatening her if she doesn’t go along with his new rules. When they first meet each other, he has already shown his disapproval by pointing out Lisbeth’s eyebrow piercing. At the second meeting, Bjurman asked her a series of questions about her sexual history. Later in the story, it is revealed that Bjurman is a sex offender and he takes advantage of Lisbeth

whenever she asks him for money, and he eventually violently rapes her. But what he doesn't know is that Lisbeth had a hidden video camera and had recorded the rape. The next meeting, she shows up with a gun, rapes him with a dildo, tattoos "I am a rapist pig" on his chest and stomach and blackmails him into giving her back full control of her money.

Martin, the brother of the missing girl Harriet, invites Mikael to a dinner in his house and they talk about Harriet. Martin seems to care a lot about his sister and is very gloomy when he talks about the day of her disappearance. Mikael also has another meeting, with Harriet's mother Cecelia, and finds out Harriet is the same age as a relative named Anita who now lives in London and can tell Mikael more stories of Harriet. Michael pays a visit to London and talks to Anita, and she claims that Harriet at that time was very distraught, yet she was trying to hide her emotions from her family. Anita also mentions that she started studying the Bible, which becomes a significant clue in the case. At the beginning of Mikael's investigation, he was given Harriet's old notebook, and he found some random names and numbers on the last page. It was mistaken as local phone numbers, but when Mikael's daughter visits him on the way to a bible camp, she tells that the random numbers are in fact Bible references. With help from Lisbeth, together they discover these numbers are connected to a series of murders of young women from 1947 through to 1967, all victims being either Jewish or having biblical names. As well as that, Lisbeth finds more crimes from the list. As some of the Vangers are anti-Semites, they come to view the anti-Semites in the family with suspicion. All of these murders are all somehow connected to Martin and Gottfried, the father of Harriet. Mikael and Lisbeth suspect that Martin and Gottfried, as the anti-Semites in the family, might be responsible for this series of murders. After finding more evidence, Mikael starts suspecting Martin as the murderer and Martin, to stop him from investigating further, kills Mikael's cat to send him a warning and a "message" that he should halt the investigation. Without fear, Mikael keeps looking for more evidence and theorises that Harriet might have kept the notes about her father and brother's sin and ran away. He breaks into Martin's house to find more clues, but Martin catches him and intends to kill him. While Mikael is locked in a room and tortured by Martin, Martin confesses to the series of murders, but denies killing Harriet. The second that Mikael is about to die, Lisbeth appears and saves him like a hero, she chases after

Martin on her motorcycle and to end this action scene, Martin loses control of his vehicle and the SUV he is in catches fire. Lisbeth goes back to Martin and takes care of him.

After all these dramas, Lisbeth starts to develop some feelings for Mikael and starts to confess about her past, that she tried to kill her father when she was 12 and how she was burnt in a fire and that the dragon tattoo covers the scars. To find Harriet, Mikael returns her closest relative, Anita, who is currently in England, whom he suspects probably knows where Harriet is. Anita keeps saying that she doesn't have a clue where Harriet went but deep down in Mikael's heart, he can tell the Anita he is talking to is actually Harriet herself. After Mikael confronts her, she confesses that she was sexually abused by her father and brother for many years because she knew that they had murdered so many innocent girls. She had no choice but to run away and use the identity of Anita to hide from them. With the death of her brother, she is finally free to return to Sweden where she reunites with Henrik. With the case solved, Henrik gives Mikael the information on Wennerstrom to use against him, but it turns out that the evidence is useless. Lisbeth, as a great hacker, hacks into Wennerstrom's computer and finds the proof of Wennerstrom's crimes that Mikael needs. Not only this, she also hacks into his bank accounts and transfers a large sum of money to her accounts. As the story comes to an end, Lisbeth gradually opens her heart and reveals that she is in love with Mikael, she thinks maybe there will be a chance between her and Mikael after what they have been through together. On the way to give a Christmas present to Mikael, Lisbeth sees him with Erika, his secret lover, hugging each other and walking towards a taxi. With a little emotional outburst, she stands for a second and then throws the present and rides away.

#### **4.2.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse**

The movie was originally made in Sweden, and this version by David Fincher is a remake. Doubtlessly, there are lots of articles that focus on the comparison of the two different versions, but I will only focus on the characters from Fincher's version. Lisbeth Salander has lots of elements that make her special, and I will analyse her appearance, personality and also the cinematography in her scenes.

With her punk-rock hair, big tattoos and eye-catching piercings, there is no doubt that the image of “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo,” Lisbeth Salander is one that stands out as a memorable character. She breaks the boundaries of how a typical woman should act and dress, the actress is experiencing a breakthrough in Hollywood cinema and apparently, it has been a major success for her as well. In an interview, Rooney Mara said this is a gender-neutral film, “It is a very different dynamic between men and women”<sup>28</sup>. Compared to other female heroes, Lisbeth has no fighting skills, like Ripley in *Alien*, but she is not an ordinary woman to whom other women can relate. What makes her different from others is obviously her appearance, along with her strong personality and how she interacts with other characters in the story. With the rich narrative, the director gave us a journey of how Lisbeth became who she is with multiple story lines. What Fincher said in his interview makes a fair point of why she should be one of the heroines, he said “... from a secondary character to a primary character, when she fights, she fights for her own voice.”<sup>29</sup> Lisbeth only appears in the middle of the film and she was only there to help Mikael solve the case, she was still a “sidekick,” and Mikael was still the hero and took all the credit. But as the story progresses, she becomes the primary character, she works harder and sacrifices more to earn respect from other characters and the audience. In the end, she becomes the focus of the story and the other characters are there just to support her.

The name of the original novel is *Men Who Hate Women*, revealing women are being hated and at low positions. Throughout the film, all the women are victims, either being killed or running away; Lisbeth was one of them but she stands out and uses her personality to get away from the situation by being sharp and cruel. Before she even shows up, through others’ conversations about her, we already have a clue that she will be someone different and that she has a bright and vibrant character. With high expectations from the audience, she is fearless and never fails to meet the audience’s expectations. She appears as unique as she is first described by her boss - bony, with a punk hair style, huge smoky eye makeup, and wearing nose and ear piercings that are not soon forgettable. The image of a tomboy, rebelliously wearing strange outfits, she pops on the screen. This definition of the feminine image flips the whole concept of how men see women in a

---

<sup>28</sup> YouTube. (2017). *DSH - The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Bonus 3) HD*.avi. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS7zGydJbtI> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

<sup>29</sup> YouTube. (2017). *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo- Behind The Scenes*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu9M199NgRw> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

patriarchal society; with this great subversion, it is women's resistance to the male perspective. The story was written from a patriarchal perspective and the image of the female is portrayed as an object, so that men would enjoy watching. Either they create the female image from their aesthetic standards, or women project themselves under the influence of male preference. To ingratiate the male preference, women are usually portrayed as sexualised and fragile. However, in *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Lisbeth doesn't appear like a traditional female, not with all the makeup, hair, accessories and the colours she wears. Furthermore, the way she talks, the way she stands and the way she works cannot fulfil a man's pleasure. This is how Fincher described how Lisbeth behaves in his interview, "Physically as skinny as she (Mara Rooney) is right now, she is kind of gawky and she is supposed to be kind of bony. I just said, you know, I don't want you to stand like a girl, I want you to stand like a fourteen-year-old boy. So, I want you to go take skateboarding lessons, because I want you to have that weird centre of gravity, you know, and I felt it was important that she be a little androgynous."<sup>30</sup> You can't find the typical stereotype in Lisbeth, and he is showing the new definition of the diversity of modern female. From the male perspective, being androgynous is not very attractive, and when Lisbeth's boss suggests to people that, "you won't like her" before they meet her, her appearance draws them antipathy from them.

In fact, Lisbeth is smart, intelligent and highly-skilled at investigating, but due to her growing up without parents the government provided a guardian for her, to take care of her education and finance. The financial help from the government cannot sustain her lifestyle, so she has to work hard to get extra money. She doesn't talk much, at the beginning of the film, with a long-shot to express her extraordinary detective and computer skills. She is always straight to the point and performs exceptionally for her employer, her ability is even more advanced than most of the men who look down on her. Feminist film criticism assumes that the classic cinema language of capitalism is full of the idea of the patriarchal system.<sup>31</sup> The female image is facing an unfair distortion, and females have even become the victim of male desire and invasion. In the classic Hollywood film script, women have a typified lack of personality, autonomy and social rights under the patriarchal system.

---

<sup>30</sup> YouTube. (2017). *Millenium: Extras The Look Of Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd1-6YicIEY> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017]. 08:58 - 09:19

<sup>31</sup> Erens, P. (1990). *Issues in feminist film criticism (1st ed.)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Therefore, to create a new modern type of movie that relates to female emotions, the old classic cinema language has to be free from tradition, and unconventional. A woman with strong working skills must be paired with a “demonised” personality, like being emotionally broken, antisocial or not having a successful love life. In this case, Lisbeth is written as a woman that is under guardianship and constant watch due to her drinking and smoking problems, unable to take care of herself and having weird living style, but in fact, who should be the one being supervised? It is instead the perverted man who is raping innocent girls that should be under guard and watched.

The first impression of Lisbeth’s style in the film is that she is a motorcycle girl who likes to dress in black and to have a punk hair style. A long-shot of her walking down the hallway in the office is spectacular; from the back we can tell that she dresses in contrast with the office environment, we can say she is not moulded by her surroundings - other employees in suits and dress, white cold temperature office light, busying working environment. She is working her outfit and walking casually in the hallway. From her back, we can see her tattoos and the earrings that she’s wearing - big spirals with spikes on them, so we can see that she has a spiky personality. As the story goes on, we hear about her backstory and we understand that she’s been abused, so she is protecting herself by wearing spiky jewellery so that you wouldn’t necessarily want to talk or hug this person because they are spiky and you are afraid that you will get hurt. Costume designer Trish Summerville is showing the character’s personality with her outfit and accessories, and she wanted the character to be able to “fade into the shadows, not drawing attention to herself, at the same time [as being] very off-putting”<sup>32</sup>. To relate more with the character, Rooney Mara even had a real eyebrow piercing so she can live with it during shooting. The wardrobe department also did an excellent job of completing the character; hoodies are her shell and protection and the black outfits are for her to fade into the shadows.

---

<sup>32</sup> YouTube. (2017). *Millenium: Extras The Look Of Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd1-6YicIEY> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

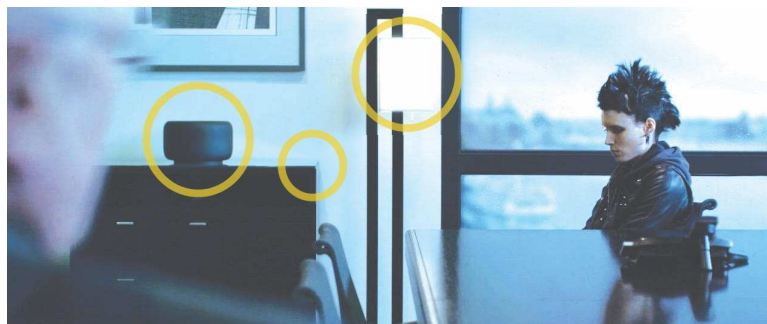
Figure 7



(00:06:26 - 00:08:58)

At the first meeting between the boss and the attorney, Lisbeth is sitting behind the table, far from the two of them and hiding herself, facing the exit. She is looking away from these people and at the end of every sentence, she tries to leave, like “are we done? I’m gonna go.” and the audience start to get a good idea about her. Speaking of cinematography, we can also find some square imagery in the shot, a square lamp with a square stand, square desk, square frame, square windows - everything in this room is very square, black and white and orderly. That symbolises that the room is full of discipline and order, with no room for humanity - they are here to work, not to make friends.

Figure 8



(00:07:26)

Fincher always shows the story and character's personality instead of explicitly telling the audience. When Lisbeth first meets her new guardian, as usual, she sits far away from the person she is talking to and avoids long conversation. It doesn't mean that she is not good with people or that she is antisocial, it is just that she is creating a boundary from the outside world to protect herself. We can see a man sitting across from her, in a decent suit, with beautiful watch, a family picture frame placed on the desk and an award displayed on the shelf behind him. We understand he is well educated and a family man from this setting. But Lisbeth doesn't buy it, she is looking at him full of doubt, and again with her spiky earrings on, she knows this is all dressed up. In the end, it turns out she was right about him. At the meeting, she leaves angrily, goes into the lift and slams the door. She knows this is not a good beginning and in the lift shot, it is she is trapped in the room as we can see through the lift window.

Figure 9



(00:35:45- 00:38:06)

Although Lisbeth has a strong personality, she is just a victim from the male perspective. She has lived on her own since she was little, there is no one she can count on; Lisbeth can take care of herself for sure, but because some of her behaviour doesn't fit with society, she is considered as having no ability to look after herself and dependent. Every month she needs to ask for money from her guardian, whom she does not even know. The first time Lisbeth comes back to the office when she needs money for a new laptop. An over-the-shoulder shot of her guardian above her, looking down on her and follows up with a close up of Lisbeth with her spiky earring.

Figure 10



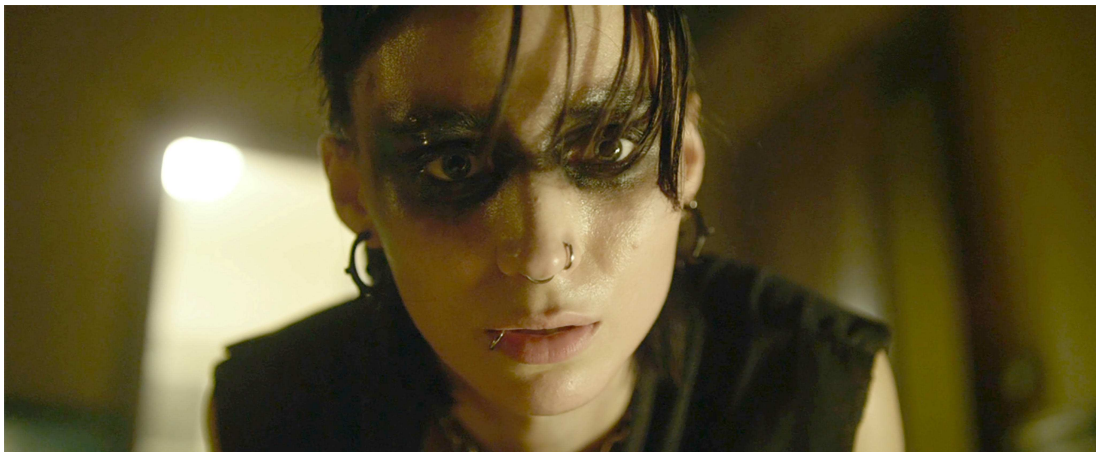
(00:45:27 - 00:47:13)

She is powerless as she is in a lower position and is asking things from him; he obviously takes advantage of her. When the guardian forces her face to his penis for a blowjob, she knows this is the only way to survive under his rule, and she is willing to give in, to get something that she thinks is more important. To get through it, she just closes her eyes, pretends this is a nightmare and swallows it because she is a strong woman. With her strong personality, we all think she would fight back, but she did not. She is doing this for her job; she is surprisingly rational. On the other hand, she is a victim of society, deep down she understands how society discriminates against her, even although she asks for

help, no one will come and save her. She knows she has to finish this on her own terms. So, the second time that she needs money, she brings a camera with her and plans to record the whole process, assuming a blow job is as far as it will go, but this time her guardian ties her up and savagely rapes her. In order to take back control, Lisbeth needs to sacrifice herself, but the real criminal is never legally punished.

Lisbeth is a heroine, not because she kicks someone, not because she saves the world, not because she is the survivor, but because she saves herself - she becomes a heroine from her salvation. She understands that in this world, no could save her but herself and that she has to use her own methods to keep her dignity. So, the next time, she goes again to her guardian but this time prepared. Lisbeth went to a sex toy shop and bought a dildo, she got a tattoo gun and ink and even rope, she is and she is planning to get her revenge. Lisbeth goes there, with her crazy black smoky eye makeup, drawing attention for the first time, claiming to be “insane,” and it is like she has to make a statement to the world. She grew up with a complicated background, which forms her cold and eccentric personality. Lisbeth is tough on herself to try and prove that she can do what men can do. She doesn't want much, the only thing she wants is to be entirely independent. She became the finest hacker in the company and although her life is tough, she is still working hard to be what she wants to be. From how she was trying to protect Mikael's personal love life information when she did a full investigation of him, we know that she maybe looks strange, and we all have negative assumptions based on her appearance, but she has a kind heart, and a high moral standard.

Figure 11



(01:07:29)

In the film, her guardian describes her as an anti-social person, but she has her own life. She goes out to drink and relax like most of us, she sometimes brings girlfriends home and these are her methods to be herself. And sometimes she is also feminine, when she is careful to discover all the details to track down the case and when she is thoughtfully taking care of Mikael when he's wounded. When Lisbeth and Mikael stay in the same room, Lisbeth takes the initiative to have sex with Mikael. Out of his expectation, this also reveals she is a feminist when it comes to sexual rights. She understands men and women should be treated equally; women also can take the lead in having sex. And she is also being mature enough to take care of the emotions, not asking for return or love, just being an adult and fulfilling what she wants. Although she is a woman being oppressed by society, she is fighting all the time. Although she emits a dissatisfaction with society, she does her best to fight for herself and prove that she is worthy of societal respect, even if she is treated like an outsider because of how she looks and acts.

At the end of the film, Lisbeth rides her motorbike in her black jacket, bringing the elegant suit which costs her a lot as a Christmas gift to Mikael. She instead sees him leaving the house with his secret lover. As bisexual, the way that Lisbeth looks at herself is more from a male perspective, or maybe it's the fourth gaze, out of the three male gazes from feminist film critic Laura Mulvey. In 1975, Mulvey coined the phrase *male gaze*, and it consists of three perspectives: that of the person behind the camera; that of the character within the representation or film itself; and that of the spectator.<sup>33</sup> According to Mulvey, the concept of the three male gazes is a controlling force in cinema and putting female in the sex object category is to please male viewers. As a female, Lisbeth is depicting herself as one of these perspectives, but in a feminine way. That is why it counts as the fourth viewpoint. These gazes and judgments together build the image of the female, replace what women should feel about themselves and give them a guideline of how to be a woman that men love. These women have to live their whole life under these fictitious gazes. Although Lisbeth is bisexual, she is still a girl that hungers for the male gaze and approval. Because of her love of Mikael, she helps him day and night with the case, and in the end, she even risks her life to save him. A traditional male hero in classic masculine

---

<sup>33</sup> Mulvey, L., Rose, R. and Lewis, M. (1975.). '*Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*' 1975. Oxford University Press

film has been replaced by a female hero, which is a major breakthrough in Hollywood movie culture. We have to admit the female position of society is upgraded. She thought that after she saved his life, their relationship would be changed to another level, but things do not always fall as we want. Once a lonely child, the woman is once again being abandoned. The end of the story isn't Lisbeth going up there to fight the secret lover for Mikael, she instead stands there for a while, sorts out what she should do and throws her nice present into the trash can, and then puts on her helmet as if nothing happened, and rides away on her cool motorcycle. This is not a happy ending according to the social standard, from the perspective of someone watching the film; she should be happy in love with Mikael after what they have been through, and maybe she will become more socially accepted. But the truth is, this is her salvation. She lost in love and found out that no one can save her expect herself, that no men are reliable, that women have to be responsible their own behaviour and not to regret what she had done.

### **4.2.3 Conclusion**

Over the course of the film, female characters are mostly being underestimated, tortured, murdered, sexually abused or they are being subdued. This therefore gives an explanation to the title of the book, *Men who hate women* (in Swedish). Men bully women because they hate them, and Lisbeth is the only woman in the film that stands up to men and tells them to stop. Harriet tried to do that when she discovered the truth of her family, of what evil things they have done, but she couldn't go further. She had all the evidence, but she chose to escape because she is not strong enough to fight. Instead of solving the problem or telling the world what the truth is, she disappeared. The story is based on a patriarchal society, with all the violence from men to women that exists in the film, it is not very hard to see that men are getting satisfaction through these actions towards women and they make them feel privileged. Raewyn Connel asserts that, "Violence is not an individual pathology but a logical consequence of men's collective privilege. Violence grows out of inequality, sustains inequality, and is a response to the contemporary challenge to

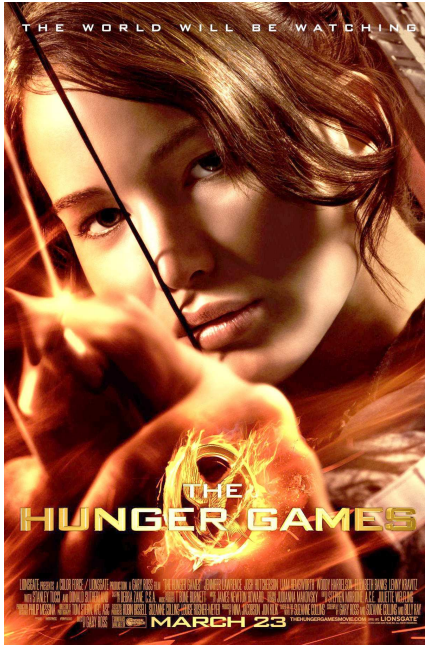
inequality.”<sup>34</sup> Men always feel good about themselves for no reason, and this is the result of this patriarchal world – men putting themselves first and women as secondary. Lisbeth, despite her appearance, might not be the perfect person to change the situation due to her “anti-social” attitude, but it seems she doesn't care about how others treat her. And she has the most complex characteristic combination; she is cold and dark on the outside but warm and kind inside her heart. She is also fragile, that's why she is always in her “shell,” which is her protection from being hurt, emotionally or physically. She is trying to make a change, to do something different and at the same time she is so strong. Through her transition, she becomes her own hero.

Compare to Ripley, the characterised of Lisbeth is more emotional, throughout the story, we are able to walk into her inner world, to understand her from inside. She has several storylines that talk about her background but they all point to the fact that she is a psycho and freak. No one likes to be around with Lisbeth because she is anti-social. It seems like in every action movie, a successful heroine has to have something wrong with her character. We all know that she is fearless, but her character is still trap in the male gaze. When women play action heroines, they tend to be like an overacted badass like a guy or to be anti-social. In Lisbeth, we can see that female action hero is still portrayed in a stereotypical way, a woman cannot have both, a heroine cannot just simply be a woman and the hero.

---

<sup>34</sup> Connell, R. (2014). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity. p.245

### 4.3 “The Girl on Fire” - Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games*



Director: Gary Ross  
Writers: Gary Ross, Suzanne Collins  
Starts: Jennifer Lawrence,  
Josh Hutcherson  
Runtime: 2 hr 22 min (142 min)  
Release Date: 23 March 2012 (USA)

#### 4.3.1 Storyline

*The Hunger Games* (2012), takes place in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic future in the fictional nation of Panem that is divided into 12 districts and the Capitol. To prevent future rebellions and remember the past insurgency, every year two young representatives, called “tributes,” are selected from each district randomly by lottery to participate in the Hunger Games. The Hunger Games is a show televised around the nation to entertain and in which the twenty-four ‘tributes’ must kill each other, until only one remains. Katniss Everdeen (Jennifer Lawrence), a girl from the poorest district, District 12, volunteers to take her younger sister’s place and participate in the game. Together with Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson), the second tribute from District 12, Katniss is sent to the Capitol for intense training before the games in which they will fight to the death to become the victor of the seventy-fourth annual Hunger Games.

Katniss and her friend, Gale Hawthorne (Liam Hemsworth) have lived their lives in poverty and always dreamt of getting away, but it is very hard without being caught. Having never escaped the district and now as tribute, Katniss and Peeta travel to the Capitol together with their guard. On the train they are served delicious foods and wines and people are treating them like they are very important people. But with the thought that they might lose their life at the end of the trip, and that their families are starving back at home, they're not able to enjoy it at all. When they reach the Capitol, they see the extravagance of life there, people live in luxury, dressing in fancy clothes and having elegant life styles. They are introduced to their mentor, and former winner of the Hunger Games, Haymitch Abernathy (Woody Harrelson). Haymitch is an alcoholic and always has a bottle in his hand, but he seems to be friendly towards them. He shares his experience of winning the game with them, saying that the more sponsors they can get, the more weapons and survival tools they will receive in the game, and to do that they have to become the public favourite. A large cheering crowd is expecting their train as it arrives in the Capitol, Peeta generously waves to the crowd and shows interest but Katniss refuses to do so, she feels uncomfortable with not knowing what is coming next. Haymitch tells her that this is the time when she should show herself to the people and start getting interested in people. She then meets Cinna (Lenny Kravitz), her stylist, and Cinna tells her that they need to make the audience remember them and like them by giving a good impression. Cinna designs her black dress that will burst into flames, without harming Katniss, to show her bravery for the Gala Entry Parade. It is their first official appearance to the audience who watch the game and the outfits make Katniss and Peeta stand out from the other tributes and makes a great first impression on the crowd.

Before the game starts, the tributes must go through fight training for them to select their weapon and to practice their fighting skills. Every tribute is showing their strengths and to deter their competitors. Katniss is a skilled archer, so for the game she chooses a bow and arrows as her weapon. Peeta, on the other hand, although he has a muscular body shape, has never really trained with a weapon. He is underestimated and bullied by the other tributes, and so Katniss encourages him by suggesting him to lift a massive weight up in the training room. When other tributes see his strength, he starts to gain some respects from the others and is no longer seen as the underdog. Whilst the training continues, each tribute has to show off their skills to the game makers and the sponsors.

When Katniss's turn arrives, she misses her first arrow, and the crowd begins to lose interest and belief in her. In the showcase, the sponsors and game makers see the tributes as ferocious animals, like gladiators, to entertain them; the better they fight, the better show they have. By the first missing shot, the sponsors lose interest in her, and nobody even pays attention to her when she shoots the second shot. Katniss knows she needs to gain their respect and show them she is a strong competitor. She shoots her third arrow straight through the apple in the mouth of a roast pig, right in front of the sponsors, she then thanks them for their consideration and leaves them all in shock. At the end of the showcase, all tributes are ranked by their performance from 0 to 12, most of the tributes receive a high score, but Katniss scores an 11, the highest of all, while Peeta receives an 8. She has successfully impressed the sponsors, and show them that she is a strong competitor. As well as the showcase, there is a Hunger Games TV chat show before the game begins. The chat show is aimed to interview each tribute individually, present them to the audience, show off their personality and let the audience choose their favourite. By getting the highest score in the showcase, Katniss realises how important it is to gain attention and become the audience's favourite. She laughs and plays with the interviewer and shows the crowd her lovely personality, aside from that, she also shows her dress which moults in flames when she twirls, impressing them and getting everyone's attention. The crowd loves her and the interviewer gives her the nickname 'Girl on Fire'. At this point, the fearless, brave and strong personality of Katniss has already built endeared her to everyone. During Peeta's interview, he knows what to do to impress the audience, and at the end of his interview, he reveals his crush on Katniss, and the crowd feels pity for him because they know there will be only one survivor at the end of the game, and they'll never be together. Katniss is mad about Peeta's confession, but it appears that the crowd likes the story. Haymitch mentions to them he could maybe sell the couple as lovers in the game, aiming to gain them support during the game

Finally, the game begins, Haymitch gives them advise and tells them what to avoid. Then Katniss and Peeta must fend for themselves. All tributes have a tracking device injected into their arms, so the game makers will know where they are located and their state of health during the match. As the game will be televised, all footage is directly streamed, and the host of the show announces who has died in the arena, both to the tributes and the audience. As the horn sounds, the tributes run towards the centre, trying to

get weapons and a survival backpack. Many of them are killed in the process, and Katniss manages to get a pack, while avoiding attacks, she takes the advice from Haymitch and runs far from the centre to the water area. Then she hides in a tree to get some sleep. The tributes are informed that in the first 8 hours, thirteen tributes were killed. Meanwhile, Peeta joins a group of tributes and plans on leading them to Katniss, as without a doubt Katniss is the strongest of all, and she is the main target to put down. But she is hiding in the woods and getting closer to the border of the arena, and the game makers start a fire in the forest to force her into the centre. They know the audience wants to see them fight! She struggles to escape the fire with a burn on her thigh and then bumps into a group of tributes who have forged an alliance to help each other in the game. Some tributes in this alliance are trained illegally before they volunteered the game, before they were 18 years old. They are cruel, aggressive and would do anything to win, in other words, they were bred for the Games. Katniss manages to climb up the tree with her wound. Peeta, in the allied group, suggests they can wait for her to come down for water and supplies.

It is there that she meets Rue, a girl from District 11. Rue tells her there is a Trackerjacker nest that she can use it to attack the group. Katniss manages to crack the nest with a branch and release Trackerjackers, the bees attack the group of tributes below, and some of them are unable to get away from the Trackerjackers. During the chaos, Katniss climbs down the tree and grabs her weapon, escaping from the bees, Katniss collapses and goes into a coma. Rue saves and takes care of her for two days, keeps her safe and doesn't consider killing her as she is supposed to do. Katniss thanks her and they form a team to fight against the others. Their plan is for the most part, to survive and they do not intend to kill others. The more time they spend together, the more the two girls bond and they even develop a system to track each other by using a Mockingjay's song. But then once, when they are planning to take some supplies, they are attacked by the others, Katniss uses the Mockingjay's voice to find Rue but then finds her trapped under a net built by another tribute. Katniss shoots the tribute with an arrow and, at the same time, that tribute also shoots an arrow that, instead of going into Katniss's heart, pierces Rue's. Katniss spreads some flowers over Rue and says goodbye to her and her innocence. After giving Rue a decent funeral, Katniss must go on with the game, and with Rue's spirit and support with her, she vows to win the game. In District 11, where Rue is from, her father is so shocked and starts to lose himself after seeing his daughter's death on the live stream. As Katniss

makes the three-fingered salute – that later become the symbol of the story, she also shows her respect to Rue and the anger inside her. To calm and give hope to the people of District 11, the President decides to change the rules of the game, instead of having one lone survivor, two tributes from the same area will be the winner of this year's Hunger Game. This change will give hope to the viewers, and teen romance has always been peoples' favourite.

With the announcement of the changing of the rule, Katniss searches for Peeta and finds out he is wounded. To save Peeta, she needs to go back to the starting point to get medicine. But at the same time, it is hazardous for her to go since every remaining tribute will go there and she will have to fight. Peeta begs her to stay with him instead of risking her life to save him. Katniss tells him she will be fine then before she departs, the two teenagers kiss. After some fight scenes at the starting point of the Games, Katniss manages to return with the medicine to save Peeta. The bond between these two has slowly developed. The next day, the two go out to search for food, where Peeta finds one tribute dead with a handful of berries in her hand, they learn these are extremely poisonous. Suddenly some brutal dogs start to chase them and push them to climb to a higher platform, where the only other remaining tribute is also holding out. The dogs are barking and ready to kill, and at this point of the game, only the three of them are still in the game, but because the winners can only be from the same district, the other tribute must die. He plans to fight them, so they fight, and he is finally thrown from the platform to the ground and dogs below. Katniss shoots an arrow, killing him and ending his torture. The instant that they think it's all over and they've won, an announcement says that there will be only one winner. Peeta begs Katniss to kill him so she can win. Katniss is shocked and angry, takes out the poison berries and readies herself to eat them. She suggests Peeta has some too, so instead of having one winner there will be no winner at all. But before they take the berries, the game makers announce that they are both the winners of this year's annual Hunger Games, and soon they will be interviewed. The audience's hearts are melted by these two young teenagers' romantic story, and this screen couple pulls it off. In the end, Peeta and Katniss travel back to District 12 and are welcomed by a big crowd. Watching Katniss try to commit suicide with Peeta, and the action that challenged the government, the President wonders if having two victors in the Hunger Games is a good idea, or maybe it will lead to another revolution?

### 4.3.2 Sequences Studies and Analyse

Katniss is not a perfect girl, it is easy to acknowledge that. The flaw of her character is valid and understandable. Sophia McDougall wrote in one of her articles, “Why I hate strong female characters” that she thinks nowadays, strong female characters are unreal, they all know how to fight and be “kickass,” but at the same time they are still the princess nevertheless. Here, I quote from her:

“I want a wealth of complex female protagonists who can be either strong or weak or both or neither, because they are more than strength or weakness. Badass gunslingers and martial artists sure, but also interesting women who are shy and quiet and do, sometimes, put up with others’ shit because in real life there’s often no practical alternative. And besides heroines, I want to see women in as many and varied secondary and character roles as men: female sidekicks, mentors, comic relief, rivals, villains.”<sup>35</sup>

Indeed, the narrative of strong female characters is regularly not well written. There is only one girl on a team with five boys, and she ‘kicks ass’ to then become the heroine. We don’t know why she behaves like that and her background stories, we won’t get much about her characteristics from what she’s done because the story is never about the girl. In this case, the character of Katniss is very well developed. We can see she is not easy to be near and thorny, on some level she is as thorny as Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. Based on her background, it’s not easy to find out she doesn’t trust people easily. She protects her sister with her own life, but at the same time, she is dissatisfied with their mother’s failure. Although she hates the rulers of this cruel world, she is still willing to sacrifice herself to protect as many lives she could. She even lies with Peeta so they can survive and get revenge later. Her flaw is that she chooses not to fight the system but to bear with it. Later in the story, she will stop being silent but will start to fight back against the system by becoming people’s champion, the Mockingjay. The movie shows us that females can also be the spark of a political revolution. Her transition from being a nobody that only wants to stand out to save her family’s life, to a revolutionary icon has a powerful

---

<sup>35</sup> Newstatesman.com. (2017). *I hate Strong Female Characters*. [online] Available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/08/i-hate-strong-female-characters> [Accessed 15 May 2017].

impact on how women rule the world. And how a very limited, young female hero can make her own choice and start a revolution.<sup>36</sup>

At the beginning of the film, when Katniss's younger sister is announced as the tribute of their district, she feels alone, and everybody around her just clears the way for her. Her mother doesn't say anything, just be a little bit sad. Katniss on the other hand seems very shocked and distraught that her younger sister has been selected. Prim fixes her shirt like a big girl because she knows she needs to be strong to handle what's coming next. As Prim is walking toward the stage, Katniss runs out from the crowd and shouts Prim's name; she cannot bear to see her baby sister go through the cruel Hunger Games as everyone knows that no one can survive it intact. Katniss is dressed in a simple grey dress, like all the other girls in the scene, as has her regular long hair tied up. She isn't wearing any makeup, and we can easily see that she is not from a wealthy family. Katniss shouts, "I volunteer, I volunteer as Tribute!" as she pushes the guards away.

Figure 12



(00:15:27 - 00:16:49)

---

<sup>36</sup> Dunn, G. and Michaud, N. (2012). *The Hunger Games and philosophy*. 1st ed. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

She is being isolated, of course, no one will help her, even her mother doesn't say anything, everyone knows it is suicide. Katniss doesn't hesitate for a second because she knows that she has a better chance of winning the game than Prim. As Prim is being pulled away from her, she has made up her mind and walks to the stage with no regrets. But all these happen too quick and the uncertainty in her mind is making her shake, as we notice in the camera movements when Katniss is walking up to the stage.

Figure 13



(00:16:16)

The tilted camera movements show Katniss's mental state at that moment and also explains her dizzy feeling when thinking about the future. It feels like the world is collapsing and she can't rely on anything. From now on, she has no one to support her except herself. Although she is hesitant about what to think, she is still standing with two feet on the ground and trying to be strong for her family.<sup>37</sup> When Effie asks the crowd to give a big applause to Katniss for her bravery, the group make a hand gesture instead of clapping for her. The three-finger salute represents hope, and it shows admiration and it means goodbye to someone you love. Later we understand in the film how the salute becomes a symbol of the first riots up against the Capitol. This scene is full of emotions, and from now on, we can see the mental state of Katniss change as the film progresses.

Later, when Katniss is waiting to join the others at the Capitol, she has a chance to say goodbye to her family and friends, Prim gives her a Mockingjay pin. The Mockingjay is a small gesture of rebellion against the Capitol, and later on, the Mockingjay becomes an essential element in helping her to win the game. When she says goodbye to her sister, she

---

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.,

is full of love and worry, she will do whatever it takes to protect her baby sister. Also, when she hugs Gale, she shows that she is a young woman with loads of emotions and she can be as loveable as anybody else. When she says goodbye to her mother, however, her attitude changes. She stares straight into her mother's eyes and says, "No matter what you feel, you have to be there for her, do you understand?" Katniss knows what she has gotten herself into but to calm everyone, she must take care of everything before she leaves. In this scene, we see how strong Katniss is as a woman and that she is not a coward. Maybe she is unsure about the future, but she never thinks of taking a step back.

Figure 14

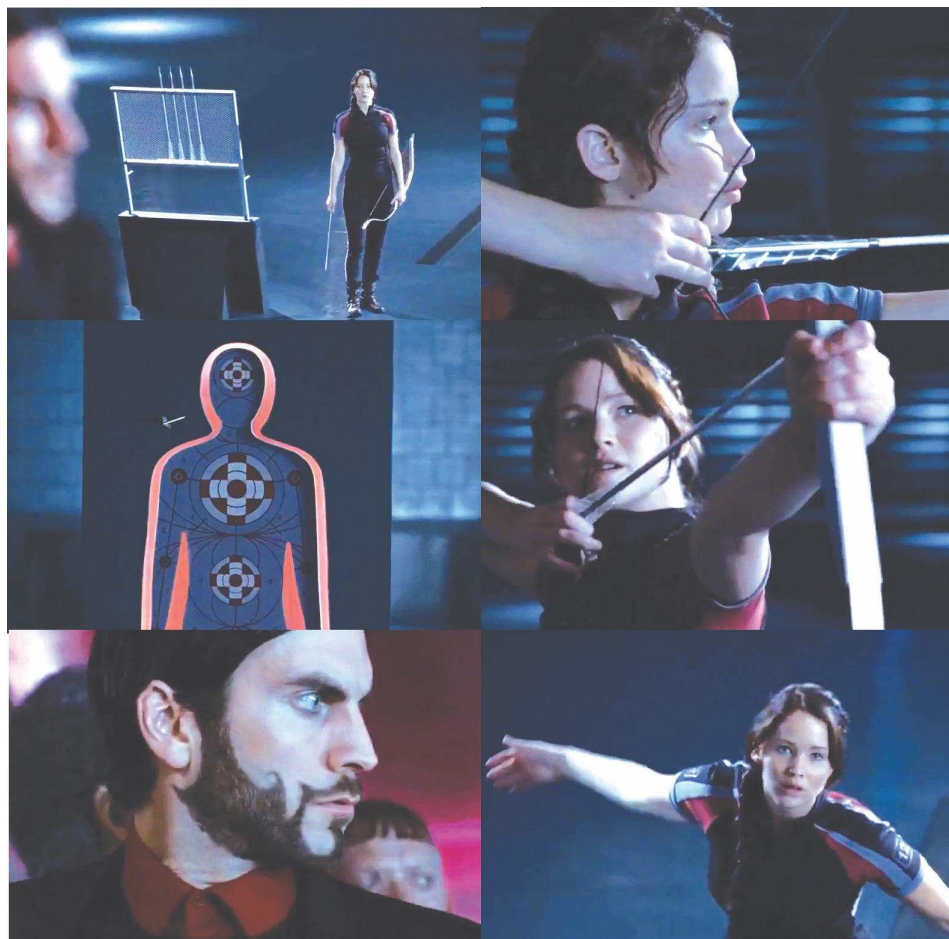


(00:18:07 - 00:19:29)

In another scene, when Katniss and Peeta are riding the train to the Capitol, they ask advice from Haymitch Abernathy. Haymitch is drunk and not taking them seriously and when they ask him how to find shelter in the match, he is babbling. Katniss loses patience and stabs a knife on the table between his fingers. This movement alarms Haymitch so much so that he is forced to see how serious they are about this, also giving him a glimpse of Katniss's determination.

There is another scene that shows Katniss's determination. In the scene in which of all the tributes are showcasing their fighting skills to the sponsors, Katniss presents her archery skill but she misses the first shot and with this failure, she loses the attention of the sponsors and realises that she needs to regain their attention. Katniss is such a strong woman that she would never bow to others, but she does so after she shoots an arrow into the apple in the guest room. The arrow shoots the apple so fast and with such power, that she draws all attention in the room. As the scene closes, she bows to the guest and says, "Thank you for your consideration." Katniss despises this game and the system from the bottom of her heart, and she feels like she is a clown, there only for the entertainment of the people in the room. This time Katniss is showing to the sponsors that she is a badass, she is angry and she is not a contestant that should be underestimated.

Figure 15

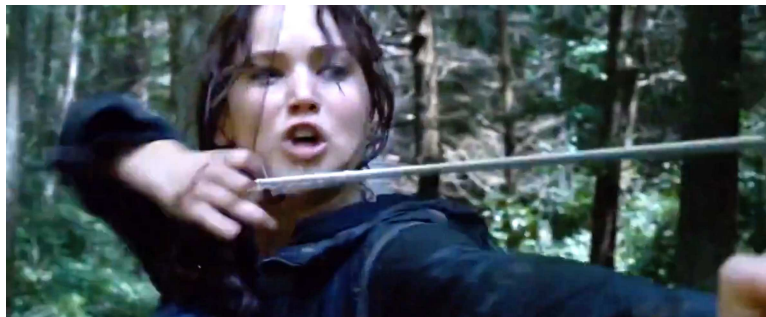


(00:45:14 - 00:47:32)

During the public parade, Katniss appears as “The Girl on Fire” with a flaming black outfit. At first, she was feeling slightly uncomfortable with the crowd and her makeup and she flinches when Peeta tries to hold her hand. But after this, she understands that it’s all for show, she sacrifices her dignity to please the audience in order to gain something that might benefit her. In this scene, we see that Katniss is getting softer and getting to know how to play the role, yet she is still the determined and forceful woman that we saw originally.

At the beginning of the Game, Katniss doesn’t want to hurt anybody; she plans to hide somewhere in the woods and survive for as long as possible in the match. But after the death of Rue, the girl from District 11 who had helped her during the game, she becomes mad and wild. With this surge of anger, she wants to win the game for Rue, the last kind soul that she sees in the game. She makes up her mind and decides to kill everyone and finish this horrible game.

Figure 16



(01:40:48)

The movie tries to give us one side of Katniss that is always in control, perceptive and rational, but there is another side of her that is caring and emotional. When Katniss and Peeta are hiding in the cave, Peeta is seriously injured and Katniss is taking care of him; Katniss wants to go out to bring medicine to heal Peeta, but he begs her to stay with him. Katniss insists on going and kisses Peeta to reveal her feelings towards him. Katniss is very hard before the kiss, but after the kiss she becomes softer and more considerate. After they’ve been through all the hardships and the suffering, they finally let go of their stress and fall in love with each other. They are prepared to be selfless, to contribute and to

sacrifice for their love. Katniss is a woman, she makes her own decisions, she never regrets them and she finishes what she started, and yet she has the softest heart.

### 4.3.3 Conclusion

By making \$408 million in the US & Canada, and \$286.4 million in other countries, we can agree that *The Hunger Games* was a worldwide financial success, without even mentioning the influence it had over audiences. *The Hunger Games* is a dystopian science fiction action movie from 2012, directed by Gary Ross. As an action-driven movie from Hollywood, very rarely is this sort of story built from a girl's perspective – but Katniss Everdeen is the centre of the film and everything revolves around her. The character has become a female role model for women, in particular for teenagers, as the primary viewers of the movie. Compared with traditional Hollywood hero movie culture, *The Hunger Games* breaks the boundaries of the way that the mainstream media portrays the female hero. Katniss is a classic example of feminist criticism, she is doing the action as a typical female figure, and she is proud to be one. Such a young female hero in an oppressive, numb and tyrannical world, making such a far-reaching choice and setting off a wave of revolution is rare in mainstream media.

The portrayal of woman has a lot of differences compared with other commercial movies. Katniss, as the main character of the film, wears less makeup or sometimes wears no makeup at all, her outfits are usually very simple and the choice of colours is very plain and simple. Through the screen, we can see her slightly chubby and freckly face and we can see her athletic body type, but it is not flaunted deliberately to be obviously pretty or to impress someone. And instead of giving her the perfect female cinematic image, they gave her skills in archery, flexible body movement and a creative mindset. She volunteers to replace her sister in participating in the Hunger Games, and draw the attention of many people. When she is in the Game itself, she doesn't want to harm people, everything she does is to protect herself. After Rue is killed, she spreads flowers around and across Rue's body, even though she is still being hunted, but taking the time to bury Rue, that breaks with the spirit of the Hunger Games – to hunt and kill each other. As this is her silent

protest to the Capitol and with her actions, she wins respect from the people in District 11. In the end, to protect the individuals in pain and to free herself, she becomes the Mockingjay and is determined to overthrow the government. The character of her courageous and kind heart is so forthright that nobody cares about her appearance; it breaks the rules of how the mainstream female is portrayed, and peels off the fake image of sexy female heroes. Katniss, in this case, without all the fancy outfits and boyfriends, without the fortune, fame and power, is the character of a true heroine. Compare to Ripley and Lisbeth, she is more completed as a female hero by being woman and hero in the same time. First of all, she is socially stable and has good relations with people, she is able to love and be loved. Katniss has everything a woman should have in her appearance, she never tried act like a man or try to hide the feminine side of her. Second of all, she is capable, tough and brave, she is a true hero.

## 5 Conclusions

From the first film *Alien* (1979) to the last, *The Hunger Games* (2012), the position of women has changed a lot on the silver screen. Although they are all representing the image of women at a different stage, they are all trying to get rid of the old image of women. Ellen Ripley, as the first heroine in history, has inspired many female characters in the past. After 40 years, Ellen Ripley is still an iconic heroine in film history, and she set the standard for how a female character should be described in an action movie. She stands for strong, fearless and macho women, when she fights, she fights like a beast. She doesn't care so much about her appearance and her character is so macho that even a man can play her part. The character is tough, she appealed to men and she didn't have to use her sex appeal to do so. She is brave, intelligent, powerful and a warrior and she didn't need help or to be rescued by a man.<sup>38</sup> Without being too masculine, Ripley is androgynous and she stands for what we need in a woman in society, not being too feminine in a sexual way; or

---

<sup>38</sup> Knight, G. (2010). *Female Action Heroes*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. p.98

not being too masculine in an odd way. Still, considering the social situation 40 years ago, the design of this character was very advanced. Many years after *Alien*, there were some heroines that appeared from time to time, for instance, Catwoman in *Batman Returns* (1992), Alice in *Resident Evil* (2002) and The Bride in *Kill Bill* (2003), but they all appeared over-sexualised. Doubtless, they all fight very well, and were not just the sidekick of the male hero, but their costumes were so highly sexualised that it was no wonder that people questioned whether these characters were made for female or for male audiences. But now and then, we see a female heroine who is not so mainstreamed, for instance, Lisbeth Salander from *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, one of the less traditionally beautiful female heroes.

Compared to Ripley, Lisbeth has more character in herself. We see a young girl with an odd style who likes to be in the dark, doesn't like to talk much and who at first appearance, is anything but a girl. Lisbeth is considered a freak in society. From her appearance, we can see more stories and personality in her. In the movie, not just once but many times, we can see that she is not people's favourite in most scenes. Her appearance is very masculine and society is just not used to seeing girls appear this way. They are not used to seeing female lead characters who don't fit with the male gaze. But then we know that the strong impression that she is giving is just a shell, the shell for her to keep her distance from the world, from others and from danger. Under the cold, dark outfits and the spiky piercings, she is smart and a real human being with real emotions. From the love she has for Mikael, we can clearly see her ability to love and to be loved. Unlike Ripley, she is not fighting against a particular object but for herself, and the system in which she lives. She needs to fight for her own place in society to prove that a woman like her can also be depended on. But it is sad to see that a girl needs to be a freak to break the society gender role. By going so extreme in her style, she is giving the impression to people that a female hero has to have something wrong with her. As for being the hero, she cannot be mentally stable or socially acceptable, she needs to be either anti-social or crazy. But then we have someone that has both, someone who is not too masculine or too crazy: Katniss Everdeen.

Katniss Everdeen, from *The Hunger Games*, is closer in appearance to Ripley than to Lisbeth. Both Katniss and Ripley look like ordinary girls from the outlook, they look harmless and not so bothered about how they look. Not only they are similar in their appearances, but they both also survive until the end of the film. As an audience, we can

totally feel Katniss' emotions throughout the film. She is a flesh and blood human, a true woman. She doesn't appear like another typical Hollywood female strong character: strong women=manly women. It seems like to be a female hero, she needs to have superior physical strength like men, kick asses and break walls, destroying things without any female features. In *The Hunger Games*, we can forget all the traditional female stereotypes, we can see a female hero without the male gaze. From the history of Hollywood action movies, it is difficult to find action heroine like Katniss, but I am able to find some. Lara Croft from *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*(2001), Evelyn Salt in *Salt*(2010), Diana Prince from *Wonder Woman*(2017), these are great examples of strong female hero, but I found they are either being too masculine or too feminine, there is no something in the middle or combined. Katniss, in this case, breaks through the traditional female stereotypes on female action character. Her character is a perfect combination of aggression and attractiveness. From the scene analysis, we see that she has feelings and weaknesses. She is taking on the role of her father in the family after his death, she is the main breadwinner of her family and that makes her become a quiet person, but only because she needs to be mature enough to take care of the family. Withdrawn from others, she internalises her emotions but also has the overwhelming desire to protect the innocent. Katniss is emotionally stable, she falls in love just like any other teenage girls and she has a strong relationship with her sister. The character sends a strong message that girls can be both strong and beautiful. Beautiful is not equal to sexy, a heroin doesn't need to be sexy to fight, she can also show her strength by being confident. Compared to Ripley and Lisbeth, the way Katniss was portrayed as a much more defined and more rounded character. She has her feminine side and is emotional and vulnerable, showing that in reality, she is still a teenage girl at heart; and she also shows more of a so-called 'traditionally masculine' side, a side that shows dominance and determination to fulfil her goals and ignite the revolution. Katniss is an idealised antiauthoritarian female hero, who is not interested in makeup and outfits, as she would rather bring down the system by making a bow and arrows. She is also portrayed as being confused and stubborn, but to be such a young person and have the weight of supporting your family in any world, let alone the dystopian world laid out in *The Hunger Games*, is a true hardship. To me, Katniss Everdeen is a real hero who just happens to be a woman.

In a wholly, male dominated world, being a woman is not easy. Being a powerful woman is even harder. The thing that the three of these characters have in common is that they are not afraid of the power, and that they are not trapped within this female stereotype. They are doing their utmost to prove to the world that all women are beautiful. They show the world in action movies, that women don't need to sell their pretty faces or sexy bodies to gain the respect that they are due.

The mass media reflects the real situation in society. According to the image of women in movies, we can tell that female status is improving. From the 1960s-70s, when women were still the 'housewife,' most of the female imagery we saw in movies was about women being the good housewife. Society and media told girls to be housewives and to be submissive, but as the economy and morality changed over time, women took on more responsibility in the workplace, home, in society, and in politics; women were standing up and telling people that they wouldn't be overlooked. With the feminist advocacy, and the efforts of gender-equality rights groups, the social expectations of female gender roles have changed. Giving women a significant level of equal rights and opportunities with men, women can have their place in their field of work and they can be financially independent career women. From respecting tradition to challenging culture, women are no longer in this submissive role, and the family is no longer their only stage to shine. Their self-consciousness is stronger than ever and they have their own social circles. They are never willing to be their husband's assistants, and they focus on attaining their own self-worth. Since the status of women is developing, the gender stereotype is becoming increasingly more blurred.

In recent years, due to the reality of social and mass media joint efforts, the image of women has improved a lot on the silver screen. We can see that the status of women has been boosted, but there are still shortcomings. It is the 21st century, and it is still very hard in films to find female hero characters that act like a woman. The task of removing the stereotyped female image still has a long way to go. Of course, this does not imply that we should make up a synthetic image radically, blindly shaping the female image into perfection. The purpose is to pursue gender equality impartiality and also be real about it. Though certainly, there will be more and more female heroes that will make us proud. We don't need a woman who fights like a man, we need a woman who is being a hero in her

own way. It is time for us to embrace and celebrate our braveness and strength by being a true woman.

## Bibliography and other references

- Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.188
- Aikau, H. (2007). *Feminist waves, feminist generations*. Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.8
- The-numbers.com. (2017). *The Numbers - Movie Market Summary 1995 to 2017*. [online] Available at: <http://www.the-numbers.com/market/> [Accessed 1 Jun. 2017].
- Stankiewicz, J. and Rosselli, F. (2008). *Women as Sex Objects and Victims in Print Advertisements*. Springer Science + Business Media. 58(7-8), p.579-589.
- Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books. p.267
- AFI'S 100 YEARS... 100 HEROES AND VILLAINS*. (n.d.). Los Angeles: American Film Institute.
- Gallagher, M. (2016). *Action Figures: Men, Action Films, and Contemporary Adventure Narratives*. Palgrave Macmillan. p.5
- Haskell and Dargis (n.d.). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Third Edition. University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.30
- Danesi, M. (2009). *Dictionary of media and communications*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe. p.121
- Rosen, M. (1974). *Popcorn Venus*. New York, NY: Avon Books, p.10.
- Aikau, H. (2007). *Feminist waves, feminist generations*. Minneapolis, Minn. [u.a.]: Univ. of Minnesota Press.
- Lorber, J. & Farrell, S. (1991). *The Social construction of gender* (1st ed.). Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications. p.324
- Geena Davis: Stereotypes in movies has negative effect. (2014). *USA TODAY*. [online] Available at: <http://www.usatoday.com/story/money/business/2014/09/23/geena-davis-hollywood-sterotypes-remain/16080085/> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2016].
- Smith, S. (2008). *Gender Stereotypes: An analysis of popular films and Tv*. Annenberg School for Communication. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media
- Brown, J. (2015). *Beyond Bombshells: The New Action Heroine in Popular Culture*. 1st ed. Mississippi: Univ. Press of Mississippi. p.4
- Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. New York, N.Y.: Vintage Books. p. 267, p.4
- Haskell and Dargis (n.d.). *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, Third Edition. University of Chicago Press, 2016. p.30
- Sanday, P. (1996). *Beyond the second sex*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Philadelphia Press.
- Jacobson, M. and Price, R. (2007). *Teenage Hipster In The Modern World*. Grove/Atlantic, Inc. p.2
- Li, L. (2016). *The raising of Female character in Hollywood*. Nanjing Normal University
- Encyclopedia Britannica. (2017). *women's movement / political and social movement*. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/womens-movement> [Accessed 1 Mar. 2017].
- Gallardo C, X. and Smith, C. (2004). *Alien woman*. New York: Continuum.
- Tested. (2017). *Dan O'Bannon and The Origins of Alien - Tested.com*. [online] Available at: <http://www.tested.com/art/movies/458897-dan-obannon-and-origins-alien/> [Accessed 1 Apr. 2017].
- Owen, A., Berg, L. and Stein, S. (2007). *Bad girls*. New York: Lang. p.34
- YouTube. (2017). *DSH - The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo (Bonus 3)* HD.avi. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jS7zGydJbtI> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

YouTube. (2017). *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo- Behind The Scenes*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hu9M199NgRw> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

YouTube. (2017). *Millenium: Extras The Look Of Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd1-6YicIEY> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017]. 08:58 - 09:19

Erens, P. (1990). *Issues in feminist film criticism (1st ed.)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

YouTube. (2017). *Millenium: Extras The Look Of Lisbeth Salander (Rooney Mara)*. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yd1-6YicIEY> [Accessed 15 Apr. 2017].

Mulvey, L., Rose, R. and Lewis, M. (1975.). '*Visual pleasure and narrative cinema*' 1975. Oxford University Press

Connell, R. (2014). *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity. p.245

Newstatesman.com. (2017). *I hate Strong Female Characters*. [online] Available at: <http://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2013/08/i-hate-strong-female-characters> [Accessed 15 May 2017].

Dunn, G. and Michaud, N. (2012). *The Hunger Games and philosophy*. 1st ed. Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Knight, G. (2010). *Female Action Heroes*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO. p.98