



NORMALIZING MALE DOMINANCE

A Study in Gender Representation in 2015 Films

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INTRODUCTION

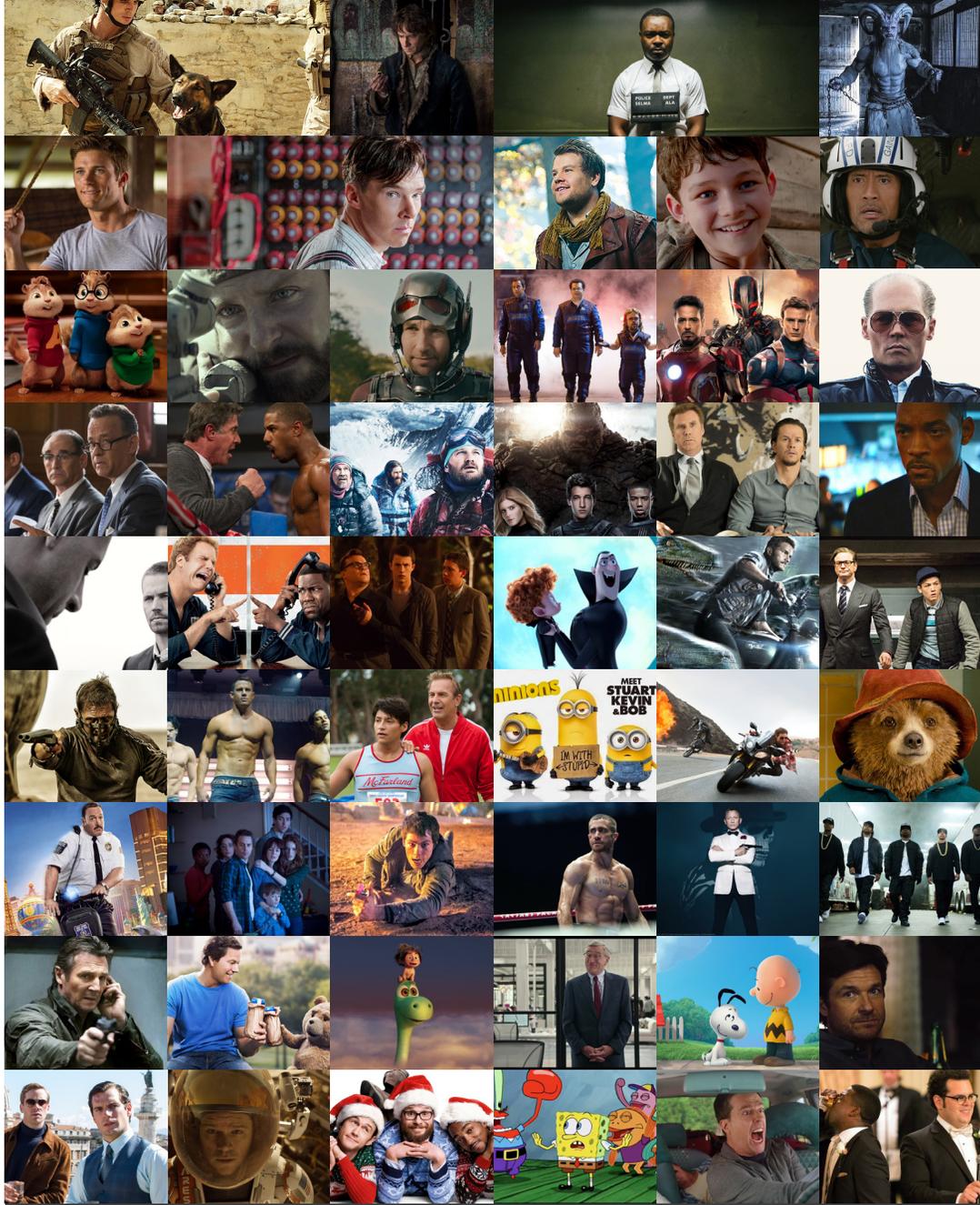
In 2012, we conducted a [study looking at gender representation](#) in Hollywood films. In that study we determined that the overwhelming majority of movies reflected a male-dominant cultural narrative, based, in part, on the actual numbers of leader characters.

However, we also determined, based on content analysis, that the top films of 2012 were also perpetuating male-dominant stereotypes. In addition, women were disproportionately represented as sexualized objects, as needed “to be saved,” whereas men were disproportionately represented in a hyper-masculine way, with little or no emotions, rarely vulnerable and depicted as the more assertive and confident characters.

In the current film study, we looked at the [top seventy-five highest grossing films of the year for 2015](#). Some of these films were released in late 2014, for example *The Hobbit*, but did not make the bulk of their money until 2015. There is one exception in the top 75 films, with *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, a cult classic, coming in at number 22 in the top 75 grossing films for 2015.

As in the 2012 study, we looked at the actual number of leader characters based on gender and conducted some content analysis looking at gender roles. Our interest in this study is to see whether or not Hollywood films affirm gender stereotypes or if they are willing to challenge gender norms and reflect a wide variety of gender representation that does not fall into the male-dominant narrative.

What follows is a data poster on gender representation, some categorical analysis of the films we looked at from 2015 and some concluding observations.



Of the top 74 highest grossing films of 2015
51 of the lead characters were male
 and
only 23 were female



ACTION

Jupiter Ascending has best [been described](#) as: "someone carefully noted down your early pubescent fantasies and then threw 100 MILLION DOLLARS at them?" It was quickly deemed as a cult-classic for the Tumblr generation. It is wild, silly, and aims at defeating the capitalistic ways of the universal patriarchy. Mila Kunis plays in the main character, Jupiter, the tradition nobody from nowhere who rises up to save the world. This deviates from cinematic-norms because this role is traditionally played by a male character. More so, the film depicts her as a poor immigrant. It is a fresh concept to depict the lead character role as a poor, female, immigrant.

The vision of the patriarchy is something a bit different. The lead villain, Balem, played by Academy Award Winning Eddie Redmayne, has ascribed to him a bit of a feminine undertone. Though he is constantly shirtless, he is also wearing quite heavy make-up. Also, the root cause of his evil plan is to harvest to humans of earth so that he may stay young, a characteristic or goal that is most-often ascribed to female characters.

In a very Channing Tatum way, he spends most of the movie shirtless, being the protector and love interest, who ends up saving the princess. That aspect of the story line offers nothing new or fresh.

In some ways, this movie offers the spotlight on a new type of character, specifically in her background. But, with the aspect of her need to be "saved," it falls into a familiar gender role.

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Expectations for non-traditional gender roles in the spy-comedy spoof nature of Kingsman were not high to start with. The movie was heartily centered around three male characters: the lead spy-in-training (Eggsy), the father-like spy, and the male villain who wants to take over the world. The lead character's mother was shown as weak and abused, needing to be saved by her son. The villain had a female counterpart who kicked butt, but was defeated by the male lead. There was a crass ending wherein the lead character was offered sexual favors in return for getting the Scandinavian princess out

of jail. Those favors closed the film with a close-up of her rear end. It was all very predictable in its stereotypical gender roles.



The only way in which it diverged from those typical roles was by having Eggsy have a female best friend. Roxy, who was also a spy-in-training, and who ends up receiving the single open spy job instead of Eggsy, offered a respite from the stereotypes of the film. She was never sexualized, she was not a potential love interest, and they worked well together without any played out male/female tension. It was a refreshing role that will hopefully continue in the film's sequel.

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Insurgent was more of the same gender roles that we saw in the first Divergent film and have seen in the Hunger Games films. Utopian era female hero, backed by men, physically fit and traditionally beautiful. As [one blog](#) puts it: The film "Insurgent" bends gender binaries, but does so in a very safe and limited way, still clinging to a mainstream ideal of gender roles, beauty, race, and sexuality.

In this utopian era factioned society, men and women have similar roles in their groups, gender aside. This is seen especially in the group of which Tris is a part, "Dauntless." Both men and women are strong fighters are they are taught the same values together. Though not a revolutionary idea, this is a meaningful point in the traditional gender roles we see in Hollywood today.

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Scorch Trials is a good sequel to Maze Runner, though it lost the appeal of character development since this sequel is more focused on fight scenes. There are good female characters like Brenda and Theresa but they have minimal roles. It is nice to see Brenda as a female character who is a strong

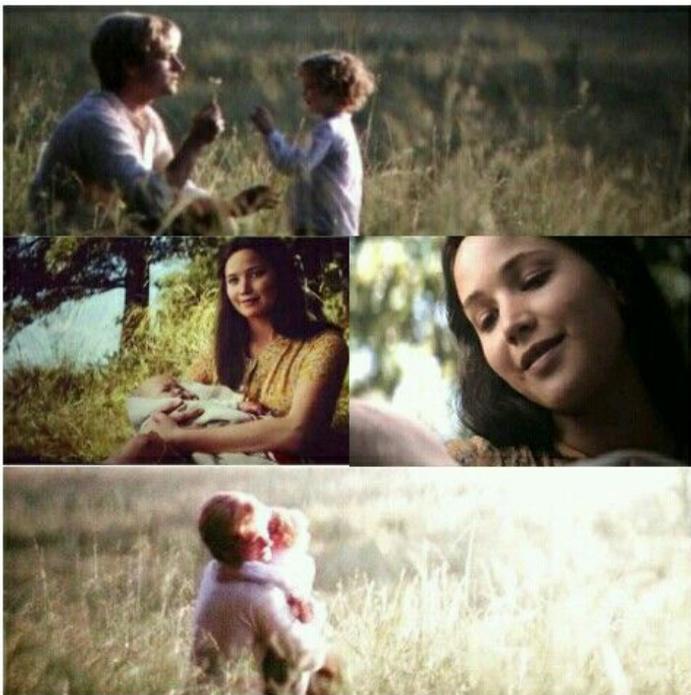
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shooter, which is a role that is traditionally reserved for men, but Theresa is really reduced in this film to a sad female who isn't able to trust.

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In the 2012 Movie Study, we discussed the first Hunger Games movies. Now with the 2015 debut of *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire Part 2*, we have seen the series come to an end, it's strong female protagonist with it. Through the series, we have seen a progressive and less than roles for the lead characters; Katniss' aversion to relationships, Peeta's sensitivity, the androgyny of the citizens of the capitol. *Catching Fire Part 2* offered many of the same sentiments.

One addition since the first movie that is certainly worthwhile to point out is the role of President Coin. Female leaders are played out in such a variety of ways, from sensitive to cruel. President Coin was done in a way that would be very similar to a male leader. Her femininity was not taken into account in a way that affected her leadership, she acted ruthlessly and manipulatively, outside of her gender.



The epilogue of *Catching Fire Part 2* was disjointed from the role that we had seen Katniss play in the previous three films. Even before she was called to play in the games, she was a hunter, a protector, not

at all typical of the other females in her district or in their utopian world. However, the epilogue put her in a dress, in a dreamy field, holding a baby and watching her husband play with their toddler. It was disappointing because there was the opportunity to show them in less traditional gender roles based on the themes of the series, however the film ended with them in hyper traditional gender roles.

Also, to take a small step outside of gender into the beauty side of Hollywood - In the book series, Peeta lost his leg after the first Hunger Games. That is not portrayed in any of the movies, which is unfortunate because it would have been a strong way for an influential franchise to support the disability community. However, presumably in Hollywood's effort to normalize whole body beauty, this plot point was left out of all of the movies.

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In the 2012 Film Study we discussed in depth the unfortunate portrayal of the Black Widow, Natasha Romanoff. *Avengers: Age of Ultron* takes it one step further into the opposite direction of female success in the *Avengers* movies.

Even if we count Captain America's distasteful comment about the level of flirtation the Romanoff has with some of her male counterparts, the worst part of the degradation of women in this film starts with Romanoff's origin story. Her story focuses on being trained from a young age to be a killer, which included making her sterile. The film goes on to show her envying the family that Hawkeye has created, including his pregnant wife.

So, she is the only female superhero that is included across the *Avengers* franchise, and she is repeated shown kicking butt, but now she'll only feel complete or only be good enough if she can settle down and have kids and a family? In the 3rd top grossing film of 2015, that is a pathetic representation of women.

Similarly, *Fantastic Four* continues the Marvel trend of 4:1 men to women ratio. A love triangle leading the world to destruction is another Marvel storyline that emphasises the role of women as lovers and

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side kicks.

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Ant Man offers yet another look at the vast gender misrepresentation across the Marvel Universe. The entire plot of the film is this: Hope wants to be the super hero. She understands the shrinking technology, she understands the ants, she is ready for this. Her father Hank, and his project funding, is traumatized by the loss of Hope's mother by this technology so she is forbidden to do it. Scott does not want to be the super hero. He is blackmailed into this roll and very aware of the fact that he is expendable. The message is this: women must be protected, even if it is against their will, and men will make the ultimate sacrifice to protect them, even if it is against their will.

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Furious 7 brought back some of the strongest female characters in film. Michelle Rodriguez's Letty is consistently a strong character on her own, more so than most. Though she is put in a myriad of dangerous situations, she never appears to be the "damsel in distress" waiting for one of the men to come save her. She is individually strong and an equal member of the team. She is certainly sexualized as a woman, but to a similar degree as the men.

Though a sub character, Elsa Pataky's character, Elena Neves, FBI agent and partner to Dwayne Johnson's, Hobbs, plays a similar role to Letty. She is also a romantic interest, and she is also put in dangerous situations, but she is ultimately level to her male counterpart.

The franchise continues to use minor plot character women as sex objects, but they exceed in some key areas. For example, the team is planning to rescue a "hacker." Someone they are envisioning as a nerdy male. When they find the individual, they are surprised to see that it is a young woman. That role has been played out by men in major media.

Another key point was the addition of Ronda Rousey as a bodyguard for one of the villains. Ronda's cult following as being a strong woman, in real life, added to the break in gender norms for this film. Her fight scene with Michelle Rodriguez was one of the

most enjoyable parts of the film.



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San Andreas is a very typical Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson film where in he saves the world and gets the girl. In this case, the girl is his daughter and his soon to be ex-wife, with whom he ends up reconciling. The film is full of action, and a predictable plot. The daughter find a love interest who helps to save her life. The film does nothing to contradict traditional stereotypes.

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Terminator: Genisys features a reboot of the female heroine Sarah Conner. Conner has long been the female badass fighting the war against the machines, in many different varieties. This latest film features her in the same role. Trained from a young age, raised by a machine, to fight the war against the machines. In this Terminator story, Sarah's son John is fighting the machines in the future. In order to win the war, he sends one of his soldiers back in time to protect his mother. Unbeknownst to this soldier, though known to John and Sarah, this soldier, Kyle Reese, will be his father.

These dynamics create an interesting relationship between Kyle and Sarah. Sarah knows that she is supposed to fall in love with him, as does her Terminator protector, Pops. The relationship between Pops and Sarah and Kyle and Sarah are similar - both want to protect her. One as a father and one as a lover. When her son, who has been transformed into a machine, comes to kill her in the future, both Pops

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and Kyle are in full protector mode.

This creates a Sarah Conner that needs to be protected. One that is a mother, though not necessarily maternal to her son, and more so to the young version of Kyle Reese (these timelines are confusing, so track with me). This Sarah Conner is not the self-sufficient strong hero of the past. She can fight well, but ends up being protected by these two male characters, whether she needs it or not. The entire film is a male-dominated fight-for-Sarah-fest.

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Mad Max: Fury Road received many accolades and much criticism for being coined a "[feminist masterpiece](#)." Various white, right-wing, male websites called for boycotting of the film after seeing Furiosa's role in the preview. From the beginning of production, it was clear that it was not going to be traditional Mad Max film.

In a Vanity Fair interview, Director George Miller declared himself a feminist. He went on in another interview at Cannes to discuss how that view influenced the film, specifically citing that women are not objects, and he could not have the five wives being stolen from one man by another, which is where Furiosa's huge role came into play.



Furiosa and Max, played by Charlize Theron and Tom Hardy, respectively, are being called co-leads in this film. Though the film starts with Max and his struggle for survival, it ends up really focusing on Furiosa, a respected leader, and her fight to save the five wives. Points to note about Furiosa: though she is a female and physically disabled, neither are ever referenced in a way that would deem her less than capable. In fact, Furiosa is strongly featured in the first fight, whereas Max is restrained for most of it. The goal of their trip across the desert is to find a utopia of other women. In this aspect, the movie seems to defy Hollywood standards by creating an action film that features women supporting other women.

It also cannot be overlooked that the women in the film are not used as sex objects for the furthering of the plot. Though the wives are the sex slaves of the dictator, they are never seen as being used for such on screen. Also, the wives live in revealing outfits, but they are never oogled at by the end, specifically Max. This may be attributed to the female editor of the film, or the fact that a feminist activist, creator of The Vagina Monologues, Eve Ensler, was consulted for the film.

The role that Max played in the film cannot be overlooked. Max's character supported gender reversal in the film by not acting as the women's lone-wolf savior. He, Furiosa, and the wives mutually saved each other multiple times in the film. Also, when Furiosa is injured, Max takes on the traditionally female role of a care-taker.

However, in the end, it does end up Max being the one who "knows best," and who saves the day. Furthermore, the hypocrisy is never brought up that a man who values the chastity of his women would keep him in such reveals strips of clothing. Furthermore, the society values males and male children, and all of the soldiers are male. There is also a scene that featured obese women having their breast milk harvested. While the film does make some gender deviant strides, it supports a few too many of the traditional stereotypes of male dominance in cinema.

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Taken 3, Spectre, Mission Impossible: Rogue Nation,

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Black Mass, and Jurassic World are all films that feature the male character being the protector, having to save a female, and being the focus of the plot. There are female characters in each film, but they are primarily there to be saved by the male. They succeed at their goal to be white male's fantasy films.

The Daniel Craig/Bond franchise's one redeeming female character, M, did not survive Skyfall, so now they government is being shown as being controlled by all white males. The other female franchise character who is female, MoneyPenny, has been taken out of the field in Spectre and is resigned to a desk job.

Creed also bring a level of hyper-masculinity to the Rocky Balboa series, which is to be expected at this point. Fighting, family, and honor are the ideals of the franchise, which has supported male dominance in cinema since 1976. The bit of difference that has been offered by this film was the role of Bianca, played by Tessa Thompson. Bianca falls outside the realm of the traditional sports girlfriend because she strives to do more in her life and relationship than to prop up Donny for success. She has her own plans, life, feelings, which does add a level of "sophistication" to an otherwise hyper-male film.

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One of the most [perfect comments](#) I have seen in regard to The Man from U.N.C.L.E. is, "What if everyone in the '60's were gorgeous and '60's gender politics weren't a thing."



Guy Richie creates a world with a powerful female villain, a female car mechanic, and men who argue over women's fashion. However, we are still seeing the men making the plans, arguing over the girl, telling her what they know is best, and arguing

amongst themselves about how is better and more manlier. The gender-role swaps are fun, but they are by no means aiding in the breakdown of women's displacement in cinema.

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The Martian is a scientifically beautiful movie with wonderful cinematography and a unique set of characters. The film, however, is missing a level of deeper exploration into their characters. We are privy to the highly specific details of how Mark Watney is able to get off of the planet - however we do not get the information how he mentally survives the planet, and the emotional trauma that must be attached to that experience.

In space, the crew leader Melissa Lewis, played by Jessica Chastain, approaches the situation very methodically. She is the straight-forward leader who is balancing doing the right thing with following orders. The film does not play on her emotions when it comes to Watney, they treat her almost as they would a male leader. The other female on the team is Kate Mara's Beth Johanssen. She is the team's techie - another divergence from the stereotypical male nerd tech guy in the top 60 films of 2015.



Back on Earth, Kristen Wiig's Annie acts as the public relations diva for the male leaders of NASA. Her role in the film is not much more than cleaning up after these men.

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In perhaps the most gender-forward film of 2015, Star Wars: The Force Awakens offers a surprising female-supported plot. The film's lead, Rey, played by Daisy Ridley, is a character that will be inspirational to women of all age for years to come.

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Within the first ten minutes of the film, we encounter Rey fighting off two goons while her soon-to-be counterpart looks on from the sideline completely shocked. Next, while they're running away from an attack on their planet, he keeps offering his hand to her, and she aptly tells him off. She is a highly capable pilot, fighter, and eventually Jedi. She earns the ultimate trust of Han Solo as he lets her fly his precious Millennium Falcon. She outfights the main male villain, and ends the film by completing a task that no one before her was able to do. She is a modern day, female King Arthur, and a true hero (sorry, Princess Elsa) for young women.

Force Awakens also brings about the return of Princess Leia. In the original three films, she was shown as a capable fighter, but simultaneously demoted to the role of supporting the male plot figures as a motivator in a love interest. She is back in Force Awakens as the strong female General who is leading the Resistance, without any help from Han or Luke. It is a strong comeback for an iconic character.



In other aspects of the film, having female characters in mid-size roles ended up making them more iconic than they would have been with male actors. Having Gwendoline Christie star as Captain Phasma, the leader of the storm troopers made the character stand out as a strong leader, even without taking off her now archetypal chrome helmet. Had a male been cast for that role, then the character would have barely stood out on his own. The same can be said for Lupita Nyong'o's Maz Kanata. Maz, who has been deemed "the female yoda," brings a special bond with Rey that would not be there had she been another male character. It speaks highly of the trust in this woman that she would hold the last light

saber, and it speaks volumes about the film that they would give that role to a woman.

Altogether, the film makes strides. Not only for the series, but for the genre, and the industry as a whole. From the addition of female storm troopers and fighter pilots, to the leading ladies, the series has come a long way from the beginning, where outside of Princess Leia, there was only 66 seconds of female dialogue in all of the first three movies. Certainly a highlight for the year in destruction male dominance in Hollywood.

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From the beginning *Sicario* faced a major amount of tension in the gender arena. There was pressure from the industry for Emily Blunt's lead character, Kate Mercer, to be changed to a male role. In a way, the film works so well the way it does, because that role is held by a female. However, that is only the case because of the way in which we see females in film.

The film starts by showing Kate in her role as leading a SWAT team into a tense situation. As the "house of horrors" unfolds, we continue to see her in a leadership roles, being able to handle the rooms of dead bodies that are too much for her male counterpart to take in. This sets her up as being superbly apt in her role as a leading a male-dominated team in a male-dominated profession.

The film continues by having Kate added to a Task Force to combat the rampant drug wars in US, because of her skills on the SWAT team. In her meeting with the team leader he asked her if she is married or has kids. Though they may, it seems this question is only typically asked of women, as if it affects their ability to complete a job.

Later, as the task force is kicked off, and she is thrown into a very different situation than the one in which she was asked to participate, she asks many questions and is very blase non-answers. When her male counterpart rejoins the team and is asking her similar questions, to which she does not have the answers, he calls over the two team leaders and demands they answer the questions, or Kate will no longer participate in the team, and he receives the

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answers. Implying that they were fine with giving Kate non-answers, when they are called out by another male, who threatens them on Kate's behalf, the answers are given to him.

In one of the most poignant gender plot points, Kate is drinking in a bar and approached by a man whom she ends up taking home. As she realizes that he is a hitman, she begins to try and fight him. She ends up nearly dead when one of the male leads of the task force saves her life. She then realizes that she was used for bait. It is hard to imagine a similar situation if that role was a male. It would seem less likely that the film would show him quickly overpowered by a female hitman, and nearly impossible that they would show that scene being played out by two men. In this instance, the female character was easily overpowered by a large man, and saved by another.



From there, Kate is helpless. As the movie progresses it is apparent that she is not the main character, and is only there to ease the way for the government's illegal activities in Mexico. She is their patsy and she is stuck in that either supporting their decisions or dying.

Again, it seems less likely that this role would be played by a man. It is rare to see a male lead role play helpless, where we have grown accustomed to this feeling in a female role. Furthermore, Kate's character is the only large female role, there is only one of female character even shown and she is the wife of a corrupt policeman with few lines and no influence. Additionally, the task force, which is made up of all men, if addressed as "boys" in about every other

scene, even though Kate is a part of it.

Though movie is unique and exciting, it furthers the degradation of females in Hollywood.

COMEDY

The Intern - This film has a female lead character who owns her own start-up company, played by Anne Hathaway. However, the film focuses on her relationship with an older male (Robert DeNiro) who becomes her intern. The intern ends up mentoring the female executive on how to run her business and how to save her marriage. The film does have a stay at home dad, which challenges gender roles, but ultimately the film reinforces gender stereotypes by making the older male intern the person with wisdom, who helps the female executive from selling her company and ending her marriage. Even as the head of a start-up company, the female executive often comes across as incompetent and directionless.

show who is the better man. Ferrell's character ends up trying to out macho Mark Wahlberg's character, thus reinforcing a form of hyper-masculinity throughout the film.



Sisters - In this comedy, with Tina Fey and Amy Poehler, we find two sisters whose lives are out of control. Their parents are selling their childhood home, so they decide to throw one last major party. The film is sort of a female version of *The Hangover*, but this does not create or affirm gender equity, it only reaffirms the notion that women can also engage in the same sort of ridiculous behavior that men do.....to a point. *Sisters* is also like *The Hangover*, in that men are still disproportionately in charge of sexual intimacy. Where *Sisters* fails miserably is that it doesn't break free from male dominated norms and gender stereotypes and only replaces stupid male behavior with stupid female behavior.

Daddy's Home - This is a comedy involving a current husband (Will Ferrell) and an ex-husband (Mark Wahlberg) who engage in a form of competition to

The Night Before - This film is about three guys who have spend Christmas together for years after one of them loses their parents. The film does demonstrate a form of loyalty amongst men, but often at the expense of women who are often portrayed as sex objects for the three male lead characters.

Goosebumps - This movie is based on literary characters that come to life out of the books of a male author (Jack Black). He is overly protective of his daughter who is the love interest of a boy is just moved in next door. The film is really a high school romance comedy that doesn't challenge gender norms and only ends up continuing an old patriarchal formula, where the guy saves the girl.

Ted 2 - This is the sequel to the Mark Wahlberg film involving a male identified teddy bear that comes to life. Wahlberg's character and the teddy bear continue to act like men who are permanently stuck in adolescence. The film also engages in sexist representation that is often demeaning to women.



COMEDY CONT.

Paul Blart: Mall Cop II - This sequel involves the same lead male character played by Kevin James. The gender representation in this film is similar to the first one in that the mall cop saves the day against a male thief stealing items from a hotel in Las Vegas. The thief takes the mall cop's daughter, who he also ends up saving, thus affirming normative gender stereotypes. There are a few female characters that don't mimic dominant gender norms, but their role is very limited in the film.

Spy - In this comedy, Melissa McCarthy is a desk-bound CIA analyst who volunteers to go undercover to infiltrate the world of a deadly arms dealer. Melissa McCarthy is paired up with a CIA agent, played by Jason Stratham. In many ways this film breaks away from gender stereotypes, since McCarthy's character plays the main role by bringing in the international arms dealer the CIA is after. Stratham's character is a not so bright CIA agent, while McCarthy is more savvy, thus reversing the dominant gender roles.



Pixels - This mostly male dominated character film is about aliens who see a video launched by NASA of a video game contest and use it to take over the earth by mimicking video game characters from the 1980s. The male lead characters played by Adam Sandler, Kevin James, Josh Gad and Peter Dinklage were all gamers as kids and are given the chance to save the world. The male characters display numerous male stereotypes, such as insecurity, low self esteem and objectification of women. The character played by Josh Gad encounters a female videogame character sent to kill him, but instead tells her how he has fantasized about her, leading to her falling in love with him. The character played by Peter Dinklage,

who was in prison, makes a demand that he wants to have sex with Serena Williams and Martha Stewart at the same time, which ends up becoming a reality for him. Lastly, the character played by Adam Sandler continuously flirts with the character played by Michelle Monaghan and in the end he winds her over. Most of the gender dynamics in this film reflect male adolescent behavior, which tends to be the case with films involving Adam Sandler.

Vacation - This is a continuation of the Vacation movie series from the 1980s, with Ed Helms and Christina Applegate as the parents and their two boys. The film follows many of the same wacky antics as the original Vacation films, with Dad making bad choices that end in poorly. However, the question should be asked why there was no female character played by one of the siblings. Why have two male characters for the children? It doesn't make any sense as to why that was the only casting difference from the first Vacation film. Lastly, there was one fundamental difference in this version, one that dealt with the mother, played by Christina Applegate. About a third of the way into the film they stop off at the college that the mom attended. The students were having a drinking game to raise money for charity. Other female students see her and come to "honor" her legacy as the creator of the drinking game. The current students said things to her like, "is it true you'd show your tits to anyone?" and "I heard you fucked Anthony Hopkins." This in no way makes the film any funnier, rather it further degrades women.

Pitch Perfect 2 - This sequel to the 2012 original is more of the same, with the Barden Bellas losing their national championship only to be replaced by the German Team. To get back at the German Team, they compete on the international level and end up winning. The Barden Bellas are an all female group of singers, yet the gender dynamics are not very progressive. On top of that, one of the Barden officials, who is also an a cappella commentator, often engages in sexist and demeaning commentary. The film is primarily a fun songfest, but too often the women in the group are distracted by male singers from the same campus, thus perpetuating many gender stereotypes.

COMEDY CONT.

Get Hard - This film uses satire about race and class. Will Ferrell plays a millionaire who gets caught in a money scandal and Kevin Hart is the guy who washes his car. After being arrested, Hart says he will help Ferrell to get ready for prison, even though he has never been there himself. The film follows a 30-day countdown to Ferrell going to prison where all sorts of things happen to him in preparation. In the end the people responsible for the larger money scandal are caught. The gender roles in this film are not only male dominated, but quite often they reflect the dominant stereotypes about what it means to be a man. Women played very small roles and the 2 love interests of Ferrell are both hypersexualized. There are also other instances where women are objectified and on several occasions are topless.



Hot Pursuit - This movie features two female lead characters, a cop played by Reese Witherspoon and a woman connected to the drug cartels, played by Sofia Vergara. The cop leaves a murder scene with the woman connected to the drug cartel while other cops and drug cartel members chase them across Texas.



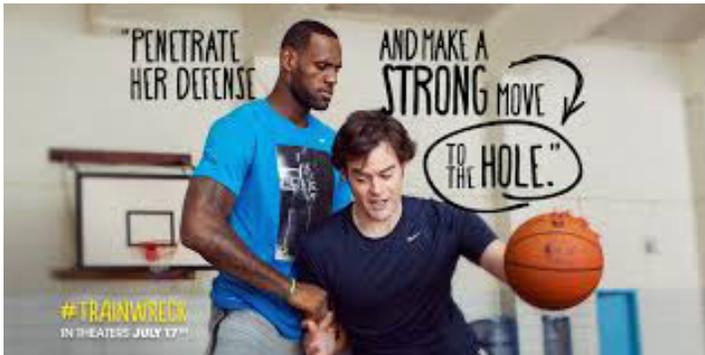
They two women find themselves in varying predicaments, constantly trying to stay ahead of those in pursuit. Sofia's character tries to educate Reese Witherspoon's character about being a woman and not being so uptight. This advice is in order for her to get a man.

Despite there being two female lead characters, the film perpetuate gender stereotypes and are never seen possessing strong qualities or challenging gender norms. The men in the film also fall into gender stereotypes and are either cartel members, corrupt cops or a love interest of Reese Witherspoon's character.

ROMANTIC COMEDY

With Amy Schumer's *Trainwreck*, it is a widely debated toss-up on whether or not this movie does anything to further women's roles in film, or if it mostly reinforces them. Amy's character is seen as the "playboy" type, specifically because she knows what she wants in the bedroom and she is career oriented. When the movie was first released, she was coined a feminist icon for the millennial generation. However, it seems as though she took on the role of the dominant woman, she was still the familiar character of a drunk, party girl, with daddy issues. Her romantic encounters are not fueled by a strong sense of self and control, but with a large bottle of alcohol as a drunken mess.

[One review](#) stated: I think I'd like the film less if Amy's character had a series of healthy, sex-positive one night stands. What impressed me was simply the fact that we got to see a woman on screen that wants and expects to be sexually satisfied by her partners.



That review can be challenged in two major ways: First, why would the film be less impressive if she was having positive romantic experiences? Have we fallen so far in our cinematic expectations that we can be entertained by a perverbal "trainwreck" of a female and not expect anything substantive out of it. If Amy Schumer is such the comedic genius, then why does her humor resort to relying on bad-sex jokes, like every other mainstream comedian? It would seem that a true genius would be able to take a strong female character and make people laugh, without having to resort to crude behavior and alcohol. Secondly, she did not necessarily voice her wants and expectations from her partners. She settles for mediocre and awkward. Essentially the misfortune with the female representation in this film is that it shows young girls that it is okay not to be valued for

your personality and that alcohol and sex are the answers.

And how does this feminist icon end the film? By doing everything she so stood against - falling in love happily ever after with the traditional doctor who wants her to settle down, get married, and have kids.

This film had to potential to truly play with the role of females in film, to show strong relationships between women supporting women, and to prove that there are many more options than settling down to prove your womanhood and adulthood. Unfortunately, it chose to present very media- and hetero-normative gender roles, and relied on over-played jokes.



The Wedding Ringer is much less complex and features a myriad of stereotypical male and female relationships. Even the relationship between the main couple is based on her only marrying a "guy like Doug" (not stereotypically physically fit or attractive) because she was tired of dating "jerks" and him only loving her because he was excited that a "pretty girl" talked to him. The movie is full of adolescent male jokes and bachelor party stereotypes. There is even a blonde bimbo in a bikini top licking the groom's face. This film is one of too many similar forgettable rom-coms that reinforce gender norms.

HORROR

Krampus - This film is an interesting twist on Santa Claus or rather an evil Claus, known as Krampus. Two families are stuck in a wicked snow storm and are targeted by Krampus and his evil minions. Gender roles are fairly mainstream, with men attempting to be the protectors and women the nurturers. There is a Grandmother character that predicts the Krampus will come and she is depicted almost as a witch who often seems to welcome the evil upon the families. Her role fits an old narrative, where older women are often seen as crones or witches.



The Visit - In this film, two siblings visit their Grandparents house and discover that they engage in strange and harmful behavior at night. Gender roles are more normative during the day, but at night the Grandparents act very differently. The brother and sister both display courageous character, considering the harrowing circumstances they face. However, for the most part the film doesn't do much to challenge the dominant gender norms.

Poltergeist - The gender roles in this film reflect the dominant cultural norms. A family with a mom, dad, older daughter, son and younger daughter move into a haunted house. The youngest daughter gets taken by the poltergeist. The dad a a male priest end up being the "saviors," rescuing the little girls, thus reinforcing gender norms.



Insidious: Chapter 3 - This film is actually a prequel to the original film and deals with how the character Elise Rainer got involved. She reluctantly agreed to help a young woman who is trying to connect with her deceased mother, when another dead person attempts to control her and bring her to the world of the dead. Elise tries on several occasions to reach the deceased mom and eventually is successful, which ends up saving the young woman. The gender dynamics in this film are fairly stereotypical, although the older woman (Elise) shows a great deal of courage and empathy for the young girl who is being tormented by the dead.

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Southpaw - This is a film about a boxer, who loses his wife, then has his daughter taken from him. Most of the film is about the boxer attempting to make a comeback and regain his daughter's trust. In many ways the film normalizes gender roles, particularly for men. However, the movie does demonstrate a father's commitment to his daughter and a certain transformation of character that reflects vulnerability.

Selma - This movie is based on the Civil Rights movement in the US and specifically around the organizing surround the march in Selma, Alabama in 1965. The main characters are Dr. King and his inner circle of men, but the film does give a fair amount of attention to Coretta Scott King and Diane Nash. Nash was a courageous young organizer in the civil rights movement and it was great to see her character depicted in the film. However, the film relied too heavily on male organizers, even though historically there were thousands of black women that were behind the scenes doing much of the organizing work for the movement. The film could have done a better job of depicting this reality and missed a big opportunity to set some of the record straight on the role of black women in the civil rights movement.



Joy - Joy is the story about a woman who persisted in her dream to support herself and her family by creating a product that was made famous through the Home Shopping Network. The main character, played by Jennifer Lawrence, struggles to get support from her immediate family and must go out on her own to make a name for herself. The main character is a confident, resilient and persistent

woman who demonstrates that women can be successful in business.



The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies - This is the third film in the Hobbit Trilogy from director Peter Jackson. In terms of gender representation, the overwhelming representation is male. Most of the male characters reflect the stereotypical male representation, with a great deal of violence, machismo and little emotion. There are some sensitivity demonstrated with some of the male characters, such as Bilbo, who shows tremendous empathy towards others; Gandolf, who finds the good in others; Kili, who shows vulnerability Tauriel; and Bard, who shows tremendous loyalty and care for his children. There are only two prominent female characters, Tauriel and Galadriel. Galadriel demonstrates great courage and self-sacrifice when confronted by Sauron. However, Tauriel is the lead female character, who also shows tremendous self-sacrifice, courage and vulnerability. She also demonstrates a great deal of courage, leadership and a willingness to challenge male leaders on numerous occasions.

American Sniper - This film depicts a US soldier who does several tours of duty after 9/11 and serves as a sniper. The character is based upon a real soldier who reflects hyper-masculinity and throughout the film struggles with intimate relationships, particularly with his wife. While the main character is tragically killed by another US military veteran, it does not diminish the level of violence this soldier engaged against civilians in Afghanistan, nor the violence against intimate partners.

Focus - This film centers around a seasoned con man

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(Will Smith) and a young wannabe con artist (Margot Robbie). The film reflects gender norms for both the main male and female characters. The film is part crime, part romantic comedy, but fails to offer up any challenges to dominant gender norms.



Bridge of Spies - This film is a period piece, set during the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The main character, played by Tom Hanks, is a lawyer recruited to help negotiate a US prisoner from Russia in exchange for a Soviet spy. Based loosely on historical events, the film reflects the dominant gender norms of the day. The only significant female character is the wife of the main character and her role reflects the stereotype of women in the 1960s.

Straight Outta Compton - This film is about the band NWA. The band members all demonstrate dominant male stereotypes with a hyper-masculine posture throughout the film. However, the context is that the band is faced with hyper-masculine violence from the state, in the form of both cops and legal pressure. In addition, the band members are seen in several scenes with women who portray nothing more than sex objects.

Everest - This film is based on a true story of a team of people who attempted to climb Mt. Everest in 1996. The film is mostly a male cast, with a few women playing spouses left at home and a few other women who played the role of nurse in the base camp and camp communications personnel. There are several of those who were part of the 1996 climb that were tragically killed. In terms of gender dynamics there were numerous displays of male bravado and tensions between several of the male characters who were trying to outdo or impress others.

Max - This film is primarily centered around a dog named Max, who is a military dog working in Afghanistan. His human companion, a soldier, is killed in Afghanistan, in part because of the screw up of a fellow soldier. The family of the man killed in Afghanistan takes in the dog, with the primary responsibility falling to the younger brother. Max and the younger brother become good friends and then Max is confronted by the fellow soldier who lives in the same town. This army veteran lies about what happened, but it all comes back to haunt him and in the end Max helps the family bring closure to the dead soldier. The gender dynamics are hyper-masculine, with soldiers, a tough father and corrupt men. The only females in the film are the boys mom and a girlfriend, both of whom play stereotypical gender roles.

The Boy Next Door - Jennifer Lopez plays the lead character in this thriller. Lopez ends up having a brief affair with a much younger next door neighbor, who ends up stalking her and terrorizing her family. The neighbor does everything he can to infiltrate her family and then attempts to blackmail Lopez. In the end, the neighbor kills her friend and attempts to kill her husband and son. Lopez is able to fight him off in the end and save her family. This film is filled with trigger warnings around stalking, abuse and rape. The male characters are mostly stereotypical men with some elements of loyalty from the husband and son. Lopez' character does not do enough to go beyond the victim narrative and the film is rather limited in dealing with a stalking/rape issue, even though the director could have made a much stronger statement about the realities of sexual assault and rape.

War Room - This film is a Christian drama about an African American family that is losing its way. The wife befriends an old African American woman who suggests that she develop a prayer strategy to save her family. While the film demonstrates a certain level of loyalty in gender dynamics, along with empathy and humility, War Room ultimately presents a narrative where wives should be submissive to husbands, regardless of the abuse or deceit that is going on. This narrative is not surprising considering the heavy religious overtones, but it does contribute

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to the normalization of male dominance in relationships.

McFarland USA - This is a sports film about a football coach who was fired and then decides to start a cross country team, because he sees potential in some of the students. All the of the student runners are Latino and by the end of the film they win the state championship by beating the more experienced cross country programs. While the film is inspirational and does center around the Latino students, the gender dynamics reflect the dominant narrative. The men/boys are not very emotional and depict stereotypical qualities. The women in the film only play small roles as wives, daughters and girlfriends.



The Longest Ride - This movie is about a relationship between a young man and a young woman. Then man is in the rodeo and the woman is in a sorority. On their first date they meet a man (Alan Alda) who is in a car crash and they help him to the hospital. He develops a friendship with the young woman and he shares with her stories and letters from the love of his life. The relationship between the young couple continues, but then he gets injured at the rodeo. Their future is in question, when the older man donates paintings that his wife collected to the young woman. The paintings end up being worth millions and her dream comes true to open a gallery of her own. The relationship of both couples are very genuine and caring. However, these relationships follow the dominant narrative about male/female relations and in no way challenge the stereotypical roles of men and women.

The Gift - A couple (played by Rebecca Hall and Jason Bateman) move into a new house and shortly afterwards run into an old friend of Bateman's, played by Joel Edgerton. The past of Bateman's character catches up to him when his old friend begins to stalk him and his wife because of what Bateman had done to him in high school. Bateman's character engages in lies and deceit, particularly with his wife, which complicates matters and challenges their marriage. Gender roles are very stereotypical, with the men constantly posturing and engaging in threatening behavior, while the main female character is seen as vulnerable and naive. The dominant gender norms permeate this thriller.



The Imitation Game - Professor Alan Turing (Benedict Cumberbatch) goes to work for the British government in order to figure out a German coding machine that could help them win the war. Turing works with a team, which also includes a woman, played by Keira Knightley. Knightley's character challenges the dominant gender norms by being assertive, confident and working within a "man's" world. However, the larger challenge to gender norms is with Turing's character, who also is found out to be gay. He is not an out gay man, but British intelligence and law enforcement find out and seek to discredit him, despite the fact that he cracked the German code machine. The film does a great deal to challenge gender norms, with a strong feminist challenge in the person of Joan to a gender non-conforming character in Alan.

Into the Woods - This film is a modern twist on the Brothers Grimm fairy tales in a musical format that follows the classic tales of Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, and Rapunzel-all tied together by an original story involving a baker and his wife, their wish to begin a family and their interaction

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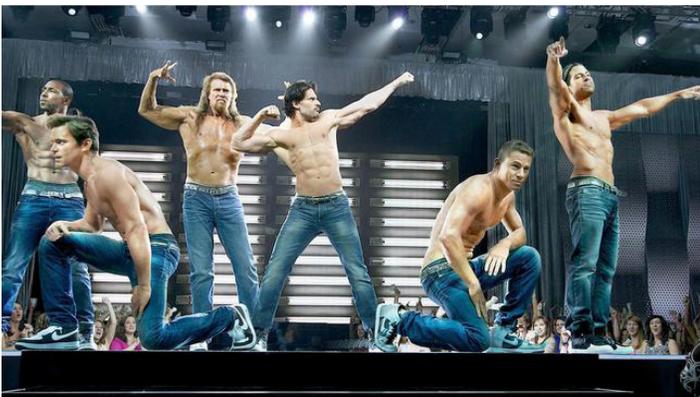
with the witch who has put a curse on them. The gender dynamics are very normative, since they follow classic fairy tale characters.

Fifty Shades of Grey - This film features a wealthy billionaire and how he seduces a young woman to enter his world of sexual control. To some this film might seem like two consenting adults, but in terms of gender equity, what this film does is promote the male dominant narrative, that men are in charge and control and that women are available for them to consume. The film is very predatory and normalizes the notion that women "want to be taken by men."



The Age of Adaline - After miraculously remaining 29 years old for almost eight decades, Adaline Bowman (Blake Lively) has lived a solitary existence, never allowing herself to get close to anyone who might reveal her secret. But a chance encounter with charismatic philanthropist Ellis Jones (Michiel Huisman) reignites her passion for life and romance. When a weekend with his parents (Harrison Ford and Kathy Baker) threatens to uncover the truth, Adaline makes a decision that will change her life forever. This romantic drama stays within the dominant gender narratives, with men winning over "the woman." The film also perpetuates beauty norms with women, since the main character is the stereotypical "beautiful" woman. What would such a film be like if the female character was not played by a woman of the stereotypical body image?

Magic Mike XXL - This sequel to the 2012 film *Magic Mike* is a continuation with the group of male performers, who take a roadtrip to Florida for one last performance. While this movie does not present a traditional male role, in the sense of an occupation, it does present traditional male roles, since it is male-centric and does not deviate from the power-over dynamics that come with the male dominant narrative. Women are nothing more than spectators in this film.



CHILDREN'S

The majority of the children's films that were the highest grossing of those that were produced in 2015 have male lead characters who are rescuing the people in need or saving the day.

Paddington, Minions, The Peanuts Movie, Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip, and the SpongeBob Movie: Sponge Out of Water bring about some of the more familiar male characters in the world of children's media. Each story features a male character who is finding their way, reaffirming family values, and doing nothing to challenge gender norms. The same is true of the live-action version of Cinderella. It is the same traditional story of Cinderella losing her mother and father, being harassed by her step-family, and finding love and rescue from the prince.

The film Home offered a bit of gender equity, having both male and female lead characters. However, as Oh, the main male character, ends up helping and protecting Tip, the main female character and eventually he saves the day. Though he gives the credit to Tip for their plan, the film still ends with a party that celebrates him and his success with saving the earth.

Hotel Transylvania was reviewed in our 2012 response. The second film reaffirms much of what we said about the first one, though this time the couple has a child. While they live in a world of monster and goblins, the couple has a normal human child with white skin and red hair. Though he does turn out to be a vampire, there is certainly a missed opportunity to create an environment that welcomes him regardless of a difference. Furthermore, with the traditional father/mother and grandparent role, gender stereotypes are truly reaffirmed.



The Good Dinosaur offers nothing new or different in the realm of gender norms defiance. However, we see two male main characters in this children's film which only reiterates the longstanding bias towards male children and dinosaurs. The same could be said for Cinderella being geared towards little girls, though there are more male characters in that film. A dinosaur film that featured young girls as lead characters would be more desirable to promote gender equity.

Inside Out is a great film for teaching young children how to cope with growing up and their growing emotions. Even though the main character is female, the film offers a wide variety of male and female characters. An unfortunate theme in the film however is how two of the main emotions (characters) are represented. The main emotion, "Joy" is a little pixie female who is long and lean and always trying to make the mood more upbeat. Sadness' character is a shorter, more rotund female who is inadvertently trying to compromise Joy and being down the mood. It is an unfortunate way to represent the relationship between body shape/image and mood to young children.



Pan is a remake of the classic children's fairytale, Peter Pan. The film is fun and the images are pretty, but they do not challenge any of the gender stereotypes put forth by the original 1953 story. Though the movie focuses on Pan's origin story, he is still the main savior and protector. Though he is saved by the mermaid (female), the film has a male focus and focuses on the relationship between Hook and Pan, and the female maternal relationship between Pan and his mother.

CONCLUSION

Statistically, there was some minor improvement in the number of lead female characters in the 2015 film study compared to the 2012 film study.

- Despite the increased female lead representation in the 2015 study, there are several films with lead female characters that do not challenge the dominant gender narratives - Sisters, Hot Pursuit, Cinderella, Fifty Shades of Grey, The War Room and The Age of Adaline.
- There were several films with lead female characters that challenged the male-dominant narrative, such as Star Wars: The Force Awakens, The Hunger Games: Mockingjay - Part 2, The Divergent Series: Insurgent, Avengers: Age of Ultron and Sicario. However, even in many of these films, which are disproportionately action oriented or fantasy based, the female lead characters are juxtaposed with dominant male lead characters.
- There were several films where women's bodies are hyper-sexualized and objectified, such as Get Hard, Fifty Shades of Grey, The Boy Next Door, Straight Outta Compton, The Wedding Ringer, Hot Pursuit, Vacation, Ted 2 and Sisters.
- Films with male lead characters rarely challenge the male dominant narrative and present a cookie cutter version of masculinity, such as Avengers: Age of Ultron, Creed, San Andreas, Black Mass, Pixels, Sniper, Bridge of Spies, Sicario, The Night Before, Jurassic World, The Kingsman, Taken 3, The Gift, Ted 2, The Maze Runner, Southpaw, The Man from U.N.C.L.E., Spectre, Mission Impossible 6, The Gift, Max, Furious 7, The Night Before and the Wedding Ringer.
- There were films where men are presented as caring, sensitive and empathetic towards others, such as in Selma, The Imitation Game, The Martian, The Intern, McFarland USA and Star Wars: The Force Awakens.
- As was the case in the previous film study, children's films and animated films do challenge some gender norms provide more space to explore human in a less stereotypical fashion, with films such as Inside Out and Home.

Considering the power of images and messages in Hollywood films, it is safe to conclude that male dominance continues to be the norm and that gender stereotypes continue to limit the kind of representation that is possible in film. There is not a simple cause and effect of media representation and what happens in the real world, but media representation does normalize the reality of male dominance that continues to be pervasive in the United States. The gender representation in the 2015 films that were part of this study, also minimizes the real world struggles such as an end to sexual assault, pay equity and the thousands of women and men who are challenging rape culture, sexism and the masculine-centric institutions that make up society.