

THE RUGGED ACTION HERO AND HIS SEXY LOVE INTEREST:
GENDER IN POPULAR MOVIE POSTERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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As a social institution, the media exert a profound influence on people's lives and shape the way people conceive gender. Although a great deal of research exists analyzing gender in the media, the area of gendered portrayals of characters in movie posters remains largely unexplored. This study uses systematic and illustrative analysis of movie posters to examine this previously ignored topic. Furthermore, it seeks to situate these portrayals within larger societal trends by making connections between the themes that emerge from this sample and the media's status as a social institution, mainstream gender roles, conservative definitions of masculinity and femininity, and the role of media in everyday life. The posters present a traditional interpretation of masculinity and femininity. Male characters appear as a rugged hero or an emasculated buffoon while female characters adopt a wider range of roles. The characters were sexualized at approximately equal rates, but the meaning and impact of the sexualization differs between genders. When applied to the film industry, hegemonic gender theory argues that male and female characters are depicted according to normative societal standards. This theory helps explain the dichotomy of the male action hero and his still-

powerful-but-slightly-weaker love interest as well as the dichotomy between the action hero and the nonconformist.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A great deal of research has been conducted concerning portrayals of gender in the media, but no sociological research exists analyzing gendered portrayals of characters in popular movie posters. Movie posters are not only displayed in theaters; in today's digital age posters appear on a variety of popular websites like Facebook, Myspace, and Yahoo!, on websites dedicated to film information and reviews like Rotten Tomatoes, Fandango, Slashfilm, and the Internet Movie Database, as well as in advertisements on a seemingly-infinite number of non-movie related websites. People can access these posters from their computers, netbooks, smartphones, and other Internet-capable devices.

Current research demonstrates that differences exist in the ways male and female characters are portrayed in media ranging from children's books to advertisements and from television shows to magazine spreads (Bazzini et al. 1997; Evans and Davies 2000; Furia and Bielby 2009; Glascock 2001; Mastro 2004; Neuendorf et al. 2007; Signorielli 1989; Signorielli and Bacue 1999; Tanner 2003). These and other media sources shape the way people conceive gender. As a social institution, the media in their myriad forms exert a profound influence on people's lives (Baudrillard 1983; Marger 1996; Silverblatt 2004). According to cultural hegemonic gender theory, the media portray men and women in ways that follow culturally normative standards of behavior (Connell 2005). In the same way the media aid in the standardization of language, they also facilitate socialization into traditionally acceptable gender roles (Davis 1997). Movie posters are no exception. This project adopts a critical theoretical perspective and uses systematic illustrative analysis of movie posters to explore the previously ignored topic of gendered portrayals of characters in movie posters and seeks to determine what messages these portrayals send to consumers. The goal of this analysis is to first

document existing trends in the portrayal of men and women in popular media, paying special attention to the source material of the movie posters: male and female characters in visual media. Second, this project seeks to analyze the differences and similarities in the ways male and female characters are portrayed in the movie posters. Finally and most significantly, this thesis seeks to go beyond description and, as Walters (1995) encourages, situate these portrayals within larger social trends by making connection between themes that emerge from the sample of posters and the media's status as a social institution, mainstream gender roles, conservative definitions of masculinity and femininity, and the role of media in everyday life.

CHAPTER 2

FRAMING MEDIA IN SOCIETY

2.1 The Culture Industry

Movies and radio need no longer pretend to be art. The truth that they are just business is made into an ideology in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce. They call themselves industries; and when their directors' incomes are published, any doubt about the social utility of the finished product is removed.
(Horkheimer and Adorno 1972 [1995]:120)

Horkheimer and Adorno's conception of the culture industry is even more true today than when they authored it more than a half century ago. The summer blockbuster movie lineups from recent years are packed with remakes, sequels, and movie tie-ins for comics, books, and video games. While more-original movies like *Avatar* can be box-office successes, even out earning their more-derivative peers, these untested concepts present a larger financial risk to the studio. These films require a large, up-front investment that the studios are not guaranteed to recoup in theater ticket, merchandise, and DVD revenue. The popularity of more original concepts with key audience demographics has not been established, and they do not have the built-in fan base of a movie featuring a well-known character with the name recognition of James Bond, Batman, or Harry Potter. Much of the artistry has been removed from the making of these films in an effort by studios to attract the widest audience possible, offend as few people as possible, and to take as few risks as possible.

This profit-driven business model produced the culture industry and has resulted in a small array of plots, characters, and styles that are deemed acceptable for inclusion in mass media. Horkheimer and Adorno describe how "the specific content of the entertainment itself is derived from [rigidly invariable types] and only appears to change. The details are interchangeable" (1972 [1995]: 120). When watching a mainstream movie, within a few minutes

the audience can easily identify the hero and the villain, who will triumph and who will be punished. We can also determine the roles and relative importance of the male and female characters and what role they will play in the film.

One tactic used by movie studios to draw large audiences is to use star power and name recognition to market their movies. Hollywood's leading men and women are household names and represent a type of branding; many people would understand and could identify the subject of the phrase 'a George Clooney movie' or 'Angelina Jolie's latest film'. Films starring foreign actors or new personalities have one fewer marketing technique for advertisers to take advantage of while films starring big-name actors can bring a built-in audience to the theater. Some actors are known for specific types of roles in specific genres of film. For example, a movie starring Will Ferrell brings to mind a comedy, Samuel L. Jackson is famous for his tough-guy persona, and Katherine Heigl specializes in romantic comedies. The culture industry thrives on conforming to the audience's expectations. I can expect this type casting to be reflected in the movie posters; big-name actors often contribute to the financial success of a film, so I can expect actors to appear multiple times in my sample, possibly displaying similar characteristics in each poster and contributing to gender role trends in the sample of posters.

On the rare occasion that a movie breaks these norms, steps are taken to soften the shock of the nonconformity: it will be labeled 'original,' 'groundbreaking,' or 'surprising' to prepare the audience for a deviation from the formulaic. But movies that fit this category, like *Inception*, *The Prestige*, or *Burn After Reading*, still conform to the standard plot formulas and character archetypes. So while a movie may have a few unconventional qualities, the culture industry will make sure the film is ordinary in enough other aspects to avoid alienating the audience. In the case of *Inception*, big-name stars fill the main roles and the heroes are readily distinguishable from their adversaries to help add familiarity to the convoluted plot. This same tactic is used when films break with traditional gender roles for non-comedic reasons, with examples ranging from two male cow herders who engage in a sexual relationship in *Brokeback*

Mountain and an a college professor reminiscing about his six-year relationship with another man in *A Single Man*, to Cate Blanchet starring as Bob Dylan in *I'm Not There* and Glenn Close starring as a woman who impersonates a man to find employment in *Albert Nobbs*.

In the same way that movies are standardized by the culture industry, the material and media used to market the films should follow a similar narrow set of rules. Going into this analysis, I can expect to be able to easily identify any good or bad characters that appear in the poster. The heroes, villains, and supporting characters should be characterized, dressed, and posed in similar ways in order to facilitate a reading of the poster by a diverse audience. Characters from both genders should display these trends depending upon their role in the film, although differences may exist between male and female. For this reason I can also expect the gender roles within the posters to conform to traditional models or to well-known stereotypes: the male provider, the female love interest, the inept but loving husband or father, the young woman looking for love. Each of these archetypes exists as a part of the mythos of modern American culture and, as such, would be easily recognized and accepted by audience members as realistic, good, and right.

2.2 The Media as a Cultural Institution

Although Karl Marx focused largely on economics and, to a lesser extent, politics in his writings, his most famous quote deals, on the surface, with religion: "religion is the opium of the masses" (Marx 1976 [1843]). Marx originally used this quote to argue that the bourgeoisie, or the powerful upper class, which controlled the means of production, used religion as a tool to maintain control of, exploit, and satiate their workers. He believed religion served the beneficial purpose of allowing the proletariat to deal with bleak economic realities. This crutch in itself is not bad, but Marx argued that the insidious nature of religion emerged when considering that the state and the bourgeoisie exert substantial influence over religion.

When Marx argued religion was the people and the state's soma of choice, religion played a more prominent role in social life than it does in present-day America. Today it would

be more accurate to say “*the media* are the opium of the people.” Scholars argue the media have infiltrated people’s lives to such a degree that they deserve to be considered one of the more influential social institutions in modern society (Marger 1996; Silverblatt 2004). Some take this position a step further, arguing that media are the primary and dominant form of socialization, as it is a standardized and ubiquitous form of culture (Kellner 1995).

Although Marx did not predict the deluge of media that saturate society today, Neo-Marxist scholars have theorized how Marx might react to today’s media-saturated society. One particularly relevant quote from Marx concerns the relationship between the means of material production and the means of intellectual production: “The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (Marx and Engels 1965:61). The primary consumers of the media do not control the means of production (Bennette 1982). Instead, the media transmit the ideologies of the bourgeoisie which the proletariat adopts, enabling the media owners to perpetuate the existing class relationships and inequalities. Examples of these transmitted ideologies range from the equation of happiness with material goods to the idea of the Standard North American Family consisting of a white, middle-class, heterosexual couple with children (Smith 1993).

Silverblatt (2004) argues the media differ from traditional social institutions because they were not intended to serve as a social institution, but as a means of generating profit for a private corporation. Instead of providing content designed to help people become productive and conforming members of society, television, movies, advertisements, and other forms of media seek to sell products by transmitting the desired messages of advertisers or the media owners embedded within content that people want to see. The socializing effect of the media’s uniform message is secondary to the goal of profit. One other major difference between the media and traditional social institutions is the media fail to provide a means of controlling deviant behavior and may even hamper the control mechanisms of other social institutions

since the theme of a world without consequences recurs in many films, books, advertisements, and other pieces of media (Silverblatt 2004). Examples of media that condone or even praise deviant behavior range from the vigilante justice offered by superheroes in *The Dark Knight* and *Iron Man* to the unrealistically affluent lifestyle of 'middle-class' characters in *Sex and the City*. Indeed, Levy (2006) is one of commentators who notes women are frequently sexualized in media, with examples ranging from female Olympians posing nude and nearly-nude in special issues of *Playboy* to the Victoria's Secret Fashion Show. Similarly, Farrell (2008) argues media negatively affect men and boys by portraying them as useless or stupid.

In her analysis of the messages sent by movies to women about their career choices and the role of a career in a woman's life, Hylmo (2006) argues films socialize their female audience to view education as unimportant, devalue their ability to work and seek the support of men. The movies send a mixed message of promoting the individuality of women and girls but within a patriarchal system. Similarly, these media socialize men and boys to distance themselves from women and disassociate themselves from any feminine or non-heterosexual urges they may feel, for fear of suffering the scorn of their peers (Valenti 2007). Valenti notes that this conception of masculinity falls in line with the perspective of doing gender, the idea that interpersonal interaction reinforces gender stereotypes (West and Zimmerman 1987), since men and boys conform to gender roles when, for example, an arachnophobe sublimates his desire to scream when he sees a spider to better conform to society's expectation that he act bravely and kill the bug.

Although profit is the primary goal of the media industry, as a social institution, the media inform people's perception of what constitutes normal. Producers of media engage in a process known as framing where they "encourage particular ways of thinking by selecting out and highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality" (Adams and Coltrane 2007:506-507). While framing is a conscious process that takes place primarily in creating content for news media, the heterogeneity of content in other forms of media produces a similar effect. An

example of the effects of these processes can be seen in Pyke's (2000) study of the first-generation children of Korean immigrants. The now-adult children refer to television families when describing the ideal family; the participants compare their own parents and households to this ideal, assume their friends families conform to the television model, and base their definitions of the normal family on the fiction they internalize. However, this seemingly linear relationship of influence between media consumers and producers is complicated with the additional consideration of the impact of an intermediate party: advertisers.

2.3 Advertisements and the Selling of Culture

Advertising has existed in some form since people began producing surplus goods and engaging in specialized labor, but the impetus of the modern advertising industry can be traced back to the early 1900s when the assembly line forever changed the face of production. Pioneered by Henry Ford, this single innovation allowed Ford to mass produce automobiles for a fraction of the cost of and at a much faster rate than his competition. Industries across the country and around the world adopted this practice. The increased efficiency and decreased cost resulted in an influx of product which did not always coincide with an increase in demand. Demand needed to be created to maximize profit, and advertising held the key to balancing this equation.

The advertising industry in the United States is a multi-billion dollar-a-year business. According to a Kantar Media report (2011), advertisers spent \$131.1 billion to transmit their commercials, radio spots, and Internet pop-ups to homes across America. This represents an increase of 6.5 percent from the previous fiscal year. The top-five broadcast networks, CBS, Fox, ABS, NBC, and CW brought in a combined \$21.7 billion in ad revenue for the 2010 fiscal year (Szalai 2011). This represents an increase of 5.3 percent from 2009's total of \$20.6 billion (Steinberg 2011). The second largest advertising market after television is the Internet (Bond 2011). It is also worth noting how quickly online ad revenues are increasing. In 2000, online ads in the United States market brought in only \$8 billion. Advertisers spent an estimate \$26

billion for online advertising in the United States market alone in 2010. This represents an increase of 15 percent from 2009 to 2010.

In order to attract a large and diverse audience, advertisements incorporate widely-held stereotypes into their content (Baumann 2007). Semiotic analysis, or the analysis of symbols and the ways they are transmitted and interpreted, can aid in understanding modern advertising techniques (Cohen-Eliya and Hammer 2004). Goffman (1979) describes advertisements as ritualized displays that portray idealized versions of social life. Advertisements do more than serve as a means of conveying information about a product from a manufacturer, distributor, or seller to potential customers. More crucial to the success of an advertising campaign is that it “alter[s] attitudes regarding appropriate lifestyles and emphasize product consumption as an essential element of happiness and success. Advertisements try to promote a materialistic value system, under which personal happiness and success are defined as high consumption and the possession of as many products as possible” (Cohen-Eliya and Hammer 2004:168).

Advertisements rely heavily on visual imagery (Cohen-Eliya and Hammer 2004; Coltrane and Messineo 2000). One feature of visual imagery advertisers use to their advantage is that visual imagery encourages free association, or mental leaps from concept to concept without logic or conscious effort or even awareness (Coltrane and Messineo 2000).

In her groundbreaking analysis, Williamson (1978) details the use of association to create a particular connection between a product and an unrelated positive feeling. In one advertisement a bottle of Chanel perfume was displayed alongside a famous French movie star. Williamson (1978) demonstrates that this image created the association of the perfume with elegance, class, refinement, and other similar feelings. The most interesting aspect of this analysis comes when observing that the Chanel perfume is not naturally associated with these concepts of elegance and class. Neither does the ad explicitly state that the perfume brings elegance to the wearer. All of these associations are created by the consumers of the advertisement. The associations sell the product, not more concrete information like

descriptions of the perfume's scent or how much it costs. Using direct, logical, or rational arguments is not the most effective strategy for accomplishing this goal; attempts at persuasion though these tactics can be more easily dismissed or resisted (Cohen-Eliya and Hammer 2004). Instead, advertisers use the common cultural language of the audience's unconscious to encourage people to purchase their products

The interaction between consumers and media is a complex process: "media images provide a diffuse confirmation of one's world view, promote acceptance of current social arrangements, and reassure people that things are the way they ought to be.... media images become incorporated into cognitive schema and heuristics, and are called up during processes of identity formation, self-evaluation, attribution, and social comparison" (Coltrane and Messineo 2000:364-65). The incorporation of gender stereotypes into advertisements increases the frequency that consumers encounter these stereotypes.

In addition to the idea that repetition of a concept increases recall of that same concept, the theory of the recency effect comes into play. The recency effect states that the more recently a person has come into contact with a piece of information, the more influence that piece of information will have (Myers 2008). Although the recency effect does not hold true in all situations, its effects are powerful enough to warrant consideration when examining the transmission of gender ideologies through media, especially a form that relies on repetition as heavily as do advertisements like movie posters. The more frequently or recently an idea, concept, or word has been encountered, the more likely an individual is to use that piece of information in future decision-making tasks (Taylor and Fiske 1978). Cohen-Eliya and Hammer (2004) go so far as to describe the frequent repetition of various advertisements "a sort of brainwashing that attempts to transmit messages subconsciously to the viewers, with the by-product being that the stereotypical meanings are also transmitted to the viewers" (166). The authors argue that stereotypes conveyed in advertisements are more problematic than overt declarations of stereotypes.

Another common method used by advertisers to market particular products to specific segments of the population, a tactic known as market segmentation (Coltrane and Messineo 2000). Advertisers assume that groups from different races, genders, and classes have different desires and respond to different methods of presenting a product or service. The use of this tactic in advertisements results in products holding certain associations depending upon what type of “lifestyle” the product is marketed toward (Coltrane and Messineo 2000:367). Most movies are marketed toward men with the assumption that women will also want to see the film, so I can expect the posters to contain characters that men would identify with or situations that they would find funny. A small number of movies are marketed toward almost an exclusively female audience with the assumption that not many men will view the film. Within this sample, I can expect the posters for these films to differ in style and rely less on the action hero/comedy dichotomy.

Mendelberg (2001) suggests that information or visual stimuli that fail to conform to commonly accepted stereotypes results in a person paying more attention to the information or stimulus. While increased attention may initially seem to fall in line with the goals of the advertisers, this is not the case. Increased attention decreases priming (Mendelberg 2001). Priming is the unconscious process of activating particular associations within memory (Meyers 2008). Essentially priming is the goal of advertisements.

Advertisements also have the effect of mediating the consumer’s experience with a product. Baudrillard (1983) describes how consumers no longer consume commodities, they consume the simulation of the commodities presented in advertisements. Advertisements frame a product, a film in the case of this study, in such a way that causes the viewer to internalize the advertisement’s claims about the film. Characters positioned toward the front or the center of a poster or who are larger are important. They will play a central role in the films so we should pay close attention to them. Smaller characters or characters who are further from the center of a poster are less important, so they will play a less central role in the movie.

If a character is framed as a hero in the poster and accompanying advertisements, we go into a film thinking of her as such. If a character is portrayed as a villain, we go into the film thinking of him as such. If a character is not featured in a poster or advertising campaign, we go into the film thinking of her as minimally important to the plot and secondary to the characters who were featured.

So the gendered portrayal of characters in movie posters has implications beyond the trends in the posters themselves. The posters in part determine how the audience will experience a film. A poster displaying a female lead that is equal to her male costar will result in the audience attributing more importance to that character when viewing the film. Conversely, a poster for the same film that displays the female lead as a secondary character who stands behind the action hero or dresses her in provocative attire can result in the audience dismissing her and focusing on her male costar when viewing the film.

CHAPTER 3

GENDER IN MEDIA

3.1 Masculinity in Media

A majority of action films seek to equate heroic masculinity with grandeur by creating situations in which the hero may demonstrate his honor, skill, integrity, and rugged individualism by challenging characters and institutions preventing him from exercising his autonomy (Sparks 1996). In her analysis of *Fight Club*, Ta (2006) argues that men's violent behavior in the film serves as an escape from the emasculating effects of a feminized culture. Modern society limits men's expression of individuality and physical prowess because it favors the traditionally feminine qualities which promote capitalism. This theme of fighting against societal corruption has led to increased emphasis on unrealistically sculpted male physiques so as to differentiate the hero from the corporate corruption he seeks to overcome (Abele 2002). Sparks (1996) argues the ambiguity surrounding the notion of masculinity and the idea of masculinity as a "self-conscious performance" resulted in an increasingly vigorous assertion of masculine heroic characteristics in recent decades (355). Heroic identity is frequently constructed through the use of an alter-ego, the substitution of the hero's profession for his individual identity, and the creation of enhanced masculinity through the use of superpowers or other devices (Abele 2002).

The term double-protagonist film describes a genre stemming from the buddy film, western, and noir genres which breaks from the traditional portrayal of the lone, stoic male hero in favor of two male leads portrayed by actors of equal acclaim (Greven 2009). The two heroes represent complementary halves of a whole persona as they alternately share and fight for dominance within the film. In the structure of the double-protagonist film the dominant male lead represents the narcissistic half while the other lead represents the masochistic half as he

idolizes and challenges the other's dominance. Greven argues the masochistic half's adoration of the dominant lead introduces a homoerotic element to the male-male relationship. Similarly, in many films centering on a male protagonist, women are viewed as obstacles hindering the male protagonist(s) heroic expression or male-male bonding (Sparks 1996; Abele 2002; Ta 2006; Greven 2009). Homoeroticism is inherent in this exclusion of women and in hero's extreme individualism, self-love, male-male identification (Abele 2002), and male-male bonding (Greven 2009).

Stanley (2006) provides an analysis of a film based on a post-patriarchal conception of masculinity where men have lost their dominant role in intimate and familial relationships (Stanley 2006). The film, *Punch-Drunk Love*, opens with the male protagonist suffering at the mercy of supporting female characters enacting traditionally male and female roles and ends with a relationship between the male protagonist and a female supporting actor where traditional gender roles are less strictly enforced. The caveat must be made that *Punch-Drunk Love* further departs from the trends discussed above because it is a comedy and not an action film; the inversions and subversions of traditional gender roles serve as points of humor within the film.

3.2 Femininity in Media

Women of all ages are underrepresented in films and television (Signorielli 1989; Bazzini et al. 1997; Glascock 2001; Mastro 2004; Neuendorf et al. 2007). Female characters are characterized less positively than their male counterparts (Bazzini et al. 1997; Gerbner and Signorielli 1982; Signorielli and Bacue 1999; Tanner 2003). Female characters are also, on average, younger, less likely to have a known occupation, more likely to have a defined marital or parental status, more likely to hold a less prestigious and lower-paying job, and more likely to dress provocatively than male characters (Glascock 2001). When juxtaposed to the agency and individualism of male protagonists this combination of traits in female characters highlights the idea that the source of a woman's power lies in her beauty (Glascock 2001; Mastro 2004;

Lauzen and Dozier 2005). The evolution of 'Bond girls' provides a unique insight into the portrayal of female characters across time; although recent female Bond characters are more likely to be sexually active, wear a less feminine hairstyle, play a major role in the film, and to be injured, the series continues to promote a stereotypical construction of gender based on male desires (Neuendorf et al. 2007).

Women are more likely to be painted as a victim than they are to injure another character, though they are still injured less frequently than male characters (Signorielli 2003). Female characters are also less physical and verbally aggressive in dramas and action pieces and less physically aggressive but more verbally aggressive in comedies (Glascock 2001). They are less likely to give orders and to be a boss. Similarly, in many films centering on a male protagonist, women are viewed as obstacles hindering the male protagonist(s) heroic expression or male-male bonding (Sparks 1996; Abele 2002; Ta 2006; Greven 2009).

Women are also used to emphasize the masculinity of male characters (Furia and Bielby 2009). Films frequently depict situations beyond what the normal individual experiences. Sometimes an individual's only exposure to a setting, phenomenon, or event may be through movies. One example is the military, an institution which all people know exists, but which few people understand the inner workings. The portrayal of the military in films and television is frequently the only exposure an individual has to military life, including gender norms and opportunities for women (Furia and Bielby 2009). One analysis of military films showed that, despite the essential role women have served in the military throughout history and the fact that women do engage in armed conflict, depictions of military life tend to exclude women entirely, relegate them to unimportant roles, relegate them to traditionally-feminine roles like nurse or secretary, depict them as failing at their roles as a soldier, or depict them as failing at their feminine obligations because of their role as a soldier; only a rare few women are able to balance their femininity with their identity as a soldier (Furia and Bielby 2009).

3.3. Gender in the Production of Media

Hegemonic gender theory and hegemonic masculinity are helpful when considering the differences in the way male and female characters are portrayed in media. Hegemonic masculinity stems from Gramsci's (1971) cultural hegemony. Cultural hegemony describes a society dominated by one social class that legitimates its position by manipulating the beliefs, values, and worldview of that society, so that the dominant class's ideology is accepted as correct and beneficial to all groups of the population. Connell (2005) defines hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (77). Connell goes on to argue that hegemonic masculinity is most successful when male-dominant values are present in both institutional practice and in cultural products. One of the ways the dominant masculine ideology is reinforced is by differentiating the masculine from the non-masculine by espousing anti-feminine and heterosexist ideology: women are excluded from the dominant social group because they are not male and non-homosexuals are excluded because they fail to fully actualize the dominant version of masculinity. Men who exhibit a form of subordinate masculinity, who fail to live up to the dominant masculine ideal, still hold a position of power within society by virtue of being male, but their failure to live up to the ideal results in consequences in the form of bullying, teasing, harassment, or violence.

The most acceptable form of femininity within hegemonic masculinity is emphasized femininity, in which women accept their subordinate position and act in such a way as to accommodate the interests and desires of men (Connell 1987). Because women do not hold a place of power within society, they are held to a looser standard of acceptable behavior than are men (Connell 2005). According to hegemonic gender theory, the sample of movie posters will portray dominant masculine traits in a positive light. We can expect male characters to be portrayed as more dominant and powerful than female characters. Furthermore, we can expect

female characters to be presented in ways that are appealing to their male costars and the male audience members.

Although there is a lack of research concerning the portrayal of male and female characters in movie posters, these posters should mirror the already-studied trends since they are derived from the films. However, the potential for differences exists; the posters represent only a small fraction of content included in films and the distilled version will likely differ from the original. This study uses systematic analysis to determine the extent to which the portrayals of men and women in movie posters correspond to the already-observed trends in films. These posters are used by advertisers to encourage potential customers to spend money on a movie. Therefore the posters portray a version of gender relations, masculinity, and femininity that advertisers believe the audience will not merely find palatable, but one that will resonate with them. One they will agree with. One that mirrors their perception of reality. As the posters for the top-grossing films from 2001 to 2011, this sample contains depictions of gender that fit these criteria.

CHAPTER 4

WHY MOVIE POSTERS?

4.1 A Brief History of Movie Posters

Movie posters have existed since the days of silent films (Rhodes 2007). Originally they were derived from the advertisements for films that ran in print publications. These early movie posters advertised not specific films, but that a location was showing films. It was not until the early 1900s that posters for individual films began to be produced in a wide scale. The production of these posters differed from today's studio-driven model in that they were most often produced by companies not affiliated with the studio producing the film.

Although the studios did not always produce the posters, they did call for the standardization of the types and sizes of advertisements that were used (Poole 2003). One of the most common types of posters, one which remains popular today, is known as the one sheet. These posters typically featured the studio's logo, the film's title, and the plot of the film as represented by the leading male character sometimes accompanied by the leading female character. The design of movie posters went through a variety of changes: in the 1920s the film's plot was dropped in favor of incorporating the portrait and name of the film's stars and in the 1960s posters featured more sex and violence as social norms began to relax.

4.2 Movie Posters Today

In today's digital age studios have an increasing array of media options for advertising their films, from viral marketing campaigns incorporating web-based and real-world alternate reality games to promotion through social media like Twitter and Facebook. Despite these innovations, movie posters and other single-image advertisements remain a relevant part of movie marketing campaigns. The infrastructure for displaying the posters already exists in the form of the low-tech light boxes found at movie theaters, on college campuses, and in bus stops

(Jordan 2011). Although some locations are experimenting with and adopting moving-image advertising techniques that require digital screens, posters are not in danger of being replaced due to the large amount of capital necessary to fully replace, power, and maintain the equipment used to display movie posters.

Movie posters are also changing in small ways to keep up with and take advantages of advances in technology. In recent years decreasing costs have made 3D films a financially sound option for studios. Some of the advertising campaigns for these films incorporate movie posters with 3D imagery (Jordan 2011). These posters not only promote the 3D version of their source film, but are also seen as new, high-tech, and innovative by consumers.

With growing popularity of smart phones that have the ability to scan images, movie posters are beginning to incorporate quick response codes, also known as QR codes. These codes are most often displayed as a series of black squares in a randomized pattern on a white background. QR codes can be scanned by a smart phone or other compatible device and will take the user to web content related to the film. This technique of linking the movie poster and newer digital content helps to keep the movie poster relevant.

Movie posters also have several advantages over their more-high-tech counterparts. Because the movie poster consists of a single image, it can be created early in the production process of a film. A specific type of movie poster known as a teaser poster can be released before filming has begun, the script has been written, or actors have been cast to generate interest in a particular film among potential viewers. This ease of production allows movie studios to start promoting their film with images well in advance of its release.

Social media has also helped to increase the number of people with access to movie posters and the frequency with which movie posters are viewed. For this project, I found all of the movie posters in my sample online. I could access them as many times as I wanted, whenever I wanted. My viewing of them was not confined to chance encounters at movie theaters or on streets. With the Internet, anyone who wants to see a movie poster, can access

it with an Internet-capable device. They can also share them with their friends by posting them on Facebook and sending links in emails.

A great deal of research has been conducted looking at the differences in the way male and female characters are portrayed in a variety of media, however no sociological literature exists looking at these differences in movie posters. Movie posters are advertisements for films, and, as such, should share many of the same characteristics as their source material. However, the potential for differences exists for several reasons. First, the posters have only a single image to tell their story while the film they advertise contains much more material and can tell a story over the course of 90 to 120 minutes. The posters must be much more selective in the material they contain while the films can afford to take chances and experiment. If a film contains a bad scene, that scene can be overlooked when the film as a whole is considered. If a poster takes a chance with an innovative presentation technique which turns out to be unpopular with key audience demographics, the studio producing the film could lose millions of dollars in revenue.

4.3 The Sample

Posters for the top 30 movies, as measured by gross box office profit according to Box Office Mojo, a website that provides information about box-office sales, for the years 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, and 2011 (n=150) were examined. Because multiple posters exist for some movies and all of the movies analyzed did not have a poster for their main image on the Box Office Mojo website, the movie posters used in this analysis were obtained from Rotten Tomatoes, a film review website. Although this sample is likely not representative of the entire population of movie posters, it remains relevant because these movies earned the most money while showing in theaters and were the most widely consumed. Therefore, this sample provides an accurate representation of the construction of gender within the promotional posters of the most popular movies.

These posters were analyzed for their content alone—as much as possible, they were divorced from their source material, the movies they advertise. I have not seen or read about a majority of the films that the posters in this sample advertise. The information about character names and actors was obtained from the film listings at the Internet Movie Database, a website that contains information related to movies, television shows, and the people involved in the film and television industry.

4.4 Poster Demographics

Of the 142 movie posters analyzed, 52% were action/drama, 28% were comedy, and 20% were animated.¹ As is demonstrated in the literature, men outnumbered women in the movie posters (Signorielli 1989; Bazzini et al. 1997; Glascock 2001; Mastro 2004; Neuendorf et al. 2007); the posters contained 366 male characters (75%) and 124 female characters (25%) with an average of 2.58 male characters and .87 female characters appearing in each poster. Also, as discussed by Greven (2009), female characters were frequently absent from posters as 53% (75 posters) of the sample contained no women. The converse was not true as and only 6% (8 posters) contained no male characters, with a majority (134) containing more than one male character.

¹ Eight of the original 150 posters were dropped from the sample because they did not contain characters, they did not contain gendered characters, or the poster did not provide a clear view of the characters.

CHAPTER 5
AGENCY ENHANCERS

5.1 What is Agency

Sartre (1941) defines agency in terms of good faith and bad faith. Good faith is the state of a person who accepts their status as an individual and succeeds in enacting their freedom. Good faith is differentiated from bad faith, or when a person attributes her situation to social structure. For the purposes of this study, agency is defined as the ability of an individual to act freely. In movies, characters are presented with obstacles which they must attempt to overcome, and much of a film's plot revolves around a character exerting agency to overcome the obstacles. We can recall Sparks' (1996) definition of an action film as creating situations where the hero has the opportunity to demonstrate his honor, skill, integrity, and individualism by challenging characters and institutions that prevent him from exercising his autonomy. Most of the movie posters in this sample provide at least a small hint as to what the film's plot will entail: what skills or tools a character has at his disposal, what challenges he may face. During analysis, special attention was given to two items: agency enhancers—anything that increases the power of a character and that increases a character's ability to act freely—and agency detractors—anything which decreases the power of a character and that decreases a character's ability to act freely.

5.2 Props

Props are one method used to increase a character's agency. Certain types of props, specifically weapons like guns, swords, and whips, increase the character's agency by augmenting their natural abilities. Examples include guns and knives from four characters in *The Expendables*, guns from both characters in the *Wanted* poster, a sword from Jack Sparrow, played by Johnny Depp, in *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End*, and a whip from the title

character in *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Other props held by characters do not necessarily give the characters an advantage, like the cheese held by Remy the rat in *Ratatouille* or the fish held by the title character in *Rango*. The purpose of these props ranges from creating a setting or suggesting an idea, as is accomplished by the purse held by Carrie, played by Sarah Jessica Parker, in *Sex and the City*, to serving as a form of humor, as is accomplished by the doughnut held by Homer in *The Simpsons Movie*. These non-weapon props still function as agency indicators because they show the character interacting with his environment.

Eighty seven male characters used a prop in 58 of the 142 posters with male characters (43% of posters and 24% of male characters).² Fourteen female characters used a prop in 14 posters, and when this number is controlled so as not to include posters without female characters this represents 21% of the posters and 11% of the female characters. Posters advertising animated and action/drama films were more likely to include male characters using a prop than female characters, and posters for comedies were about equally likely to contain a character of either gender. The greatest discrepancy in prop usage came from the sample of posters from animated films with 52% of the posters containing male characters using props and only 7% containing female characters using props. The groups of characters that used props at the greatest rate were male characters in posters for action and drama films (41% of male characters). Female characters in posters for animated films used props at the lowest rate (4% of female characters). The rest of the groups used props at approximately equal rates (between 11% and 16%). The larger percentage of male characters using props in posters for action/drama films and the large proportion of action/drama films containing male characters using props falls in line with the stated purpose of the action/drama film: to demonstrate the integrity and rugged individualism of the male action hero. The identities of characters in

² The term prop has the potential to include a wide variety of items pictured with a character in the poster. In this analysis, only props held by a character were counted as being used by the character. Items displayed around the character or worn by the character were considered in separate categories of agency enhancers.

posters based on animated films or comedies rely less on their agency, hence the lower percentage of props. It is interesting, however, that such a low percentage of female characters in posters from animated films use props. This suggests that their characters require the least amount of agency.

5.3 Artificial Enhancement

A second method of enhancing agency involves exaggerating a character's power and ability to act freely through artificial or unnatural means. Artificial enhancement refers mainly to superheroes who use technology and science to increase their strength and augment their natural abilities and to non-human characters who possess super-human abilities. Several themes were identified that fall into the category of artificial enhancement. Some characters in the posters possessed super-human powers: the title character in *The Incredible Hulk* and The Invisible Woman, played by Jessica Alba, in *Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer*. Both male and female characters are depicted as superheroes, although female superheroes are depicted at a lower rate. Another theme is having access to magical powers: both Harry and Hermione along with other characters in the *Harry Potter and the Half Blood Prince* poster use wands that indicate their magical abilities. Again, this trait is exhibited by both male and female characters. Finally, some characters displayed non-human features that set them apart from their human peers: Spock in *Star Trek* and Neytiri in *Avatar*.

Male characters display one other agency enhancers related to artificial enhancement that were not displayed by female characters. Some of the male characters donned suits that highlight their muscular bodies. Examples include Bruce Wayne in *The Dark Knight* and Hal Jordan in *Green Lantern*. Similar suits worn by female super heroes and characters only serve to show off their lithe bodies; none of the female characters in this sample appeared to have muscular bodies that could be shown off by a suit in the same way that the male characters' bodies are emphasized.

These artificial enhancements take the agency of these characters to a level beyond what is achievable by their human counterparts within the posters. It is a level of power unattainable by the viewers of the poster. This superhuman agency along with other agency enhancers primes the audience to think of the characters as powerful when they see them in the film.

5.4 Pose

Pose is another technique used in the posters to increase the agency of characters. Male characters were more likely to be actively doing something in the posters than female characters. The most frequent action for male characters was walking or running, especially while carrying a weapon (Robert Neville in *I Am Legend*, James Bond in *Quantum of Solace*, and Jason Bourne in *The Bourne Ultimatum*). The most frequent action for female characters was walking in a group (Jane Carter in *Mission: Impossible: Ghost Protocol*). For female characters this suggestion of movement as achieved by the pose—lifting her foot up in the air and drawing the arm back as if it is swaying while she is walking. More variety was used to achieve this feeling of movement for male characters. In a few posters, the area around the character is blurred to suggest motion so fast the camera is not capable of capturing a crisp image (Jason Bourne in *The Bourne Ultimatum*). The male characters also posed in ways that suggested they were in the process of moving or about to move such as crouching in *Spiderman 3*, hanging from a cliff in *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, aiming a weapon in *Robin Hood*, and jumping off walls in *Inception*.

The pose of a character can also be used to suggest impending violence. This is most frequently done with male characters. In *Quantum of Solace*, James Bond is set against a grey sky backdrop (see Figure 5.1). He is walking on rocks and dirt over the top of a hill, his steps agitate the ground so there is dust around his feet. His leg is slightly bent to suggest forward movement. He is holding a gun with his right hand; his elbow is bent and the gun extends from the bottom of that elbow to about a foot above his head. This pose suggests that he is

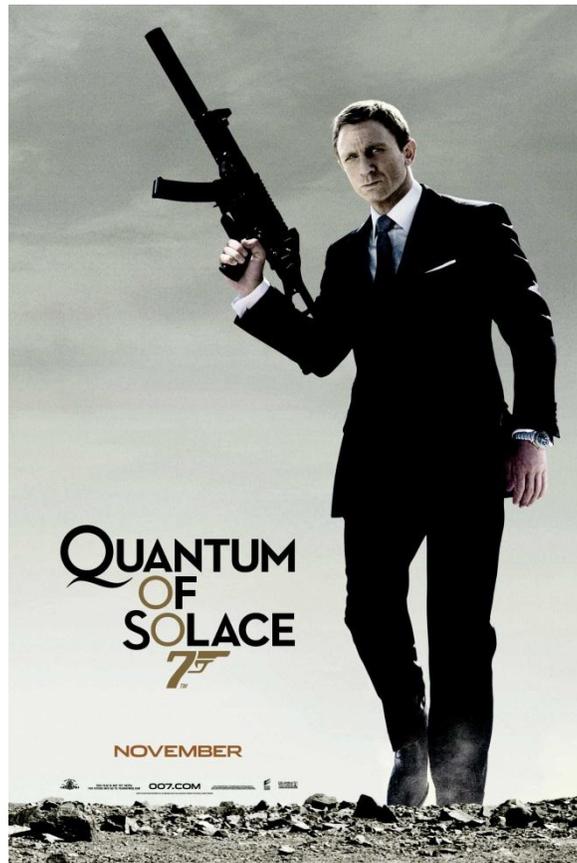


Figure 5.1: *Quantum of Solace*

preparing to aim his weapon as he nears his target. In this and other posters, the pose of the character is used to suggest that he is about to engage in some form of violence.

Confidence and determination can also be conveyed in a character's pose. Again this is most frequently seen in the male characters. A prime example is Lieutenant Aldo Raine, played by Brad Pitt, in *Inglourious Basterds* (see Figure 5.2). Raine is the only character in the poster and he exudes agency and confidence. He knows that he can achieve anything that he sets his mind to. The backdrop to the poster is a bland, distressed grey concrete wall. Raine's uniform is not particularly impressive. This feeling of agency comes from Raine's pose and facial expression: his head is slightly tilted, to the left and back just a few degrees; his torso is straight and his shoulders are held back; his hands are rested on his hips; his mouth has a

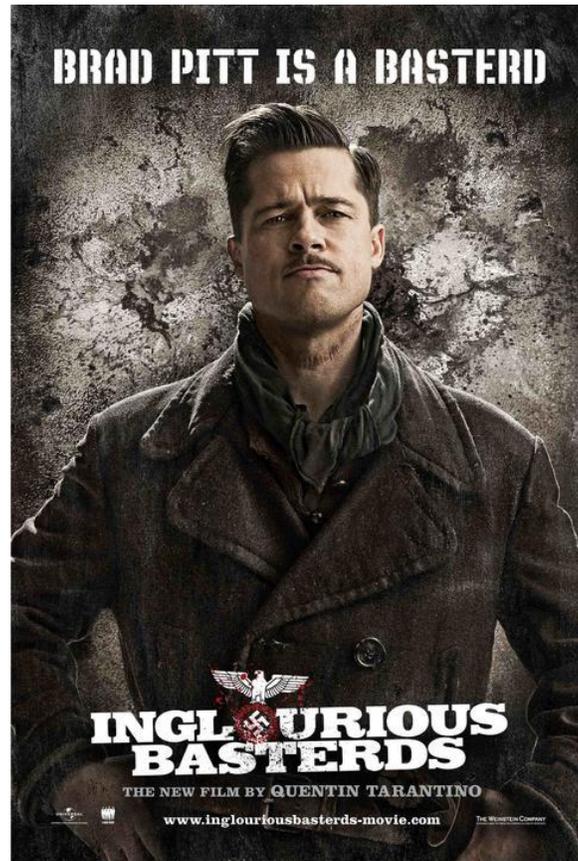


Figure 5.2: *Inglourious Basterds*

smirk; and his brows are slightly furrowed. This combination of posing achieves a look of confidence without any assistance from other agency enhancers.

5.5 Position and Arrangement

The positioning and arrangement of characters relative to other characters can also enhance a character's agency. The sample of action movie posters can be roughly divided into the two categories of posters focusing on a lone male or containing a group of characters. Forty seven percent of the action/drama posters contained a single male character. This highlights the idea that men are socialized to be independent and that violence remains an acceptable solution to problems they encounter. For posters with more than one character, prime locations within the poster indicate a character's status relative to other characters. Within a group,



Figure 5.3: *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 2*

characters closer to the center of the poster have more status than those closer to the periphery. Characters who are higher, who appear larger (either through their absolute size or through digital alteration and positioning), or who are positioned toward the front of a group possess more agency via their position than characters who are lower, appear smaller, or are positioned toward the back of a group.

5.6 Wardrobe and Makeup

Characters were also depicted with injuries, appeared dirty, or had ripped clothing. Only one female character exhibited these characteristics: Hermione in *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows, Part 2* (see Figure 5.3). In the *Harry Potter* poster, Hermione, along with her male companions Harry and Ron, appear disheveled—their clothes are wrinkled, ripped, and

covered in stains, their hair is messy and matted, and they have smudges and cuts on their faces. This agency enhancer indicates action outside of the time depicted in the poster. At an earlier point, the characters encountered some form of adversary with a measure of success, either triumphing outright or at least living to fight another day. Other examples of ripped and torn clothing include John McClane in *Live Free or Die Hard* and Peter Highman, played by Robert Downey Jr., in *Due Date*.

The character's clothes can also suggest confidence and ability. In addition to obvious example of wardrobe choices that increase a character's sense of agency, some of which were already covered under the category of artificial enhancements (i.e., the superhero costumes seen in *Iron Man*), clothes can suggest a specific type of background for a character. The torn white t-shirt worn by John McClane in *Live Free or Die Hard* suggests someone who works hard and has real-world experience. The shirt shows off his broad chest, and he has scars on his arms, neck, and face. Combined with his facial expression and pose, the wardrobe gives the impression that McClane has a variety of abilities to call upon in a time of crisis, that he not only has the brute strength to triumph over any foe that crosses his path, but the cunning and experience to use his abilities to his best advantage

Wardrobe can also work in a different direction. At the opposite end of the sartorial spectrum lies Arthur, played by Joseph Gordon-Levitt, in *Inception* (see Figure 5.4). His suit lends him an air of mystique in the fashion of a secret agent. The suit fits him well enough to indicate that it has been tailored; he is paid well enough and his job is prestigious enough that he does not buy his clothes off the rack. He has taken off his outer jacket so that we can see only his dress pants, dress shoes, waistcoat, tie, and the arms of his button-down shirt. The removal of his jacket indicates that he is expending effort at his current task. What he is doing right now is not something that he finds easy, but he was not so surprised by the situation that he did not have time to prepare for it by removing his more-restrictive outer layer, unlike his adversaries whose clothes are looser fitting and who still wear their outer suit jackets. Despite

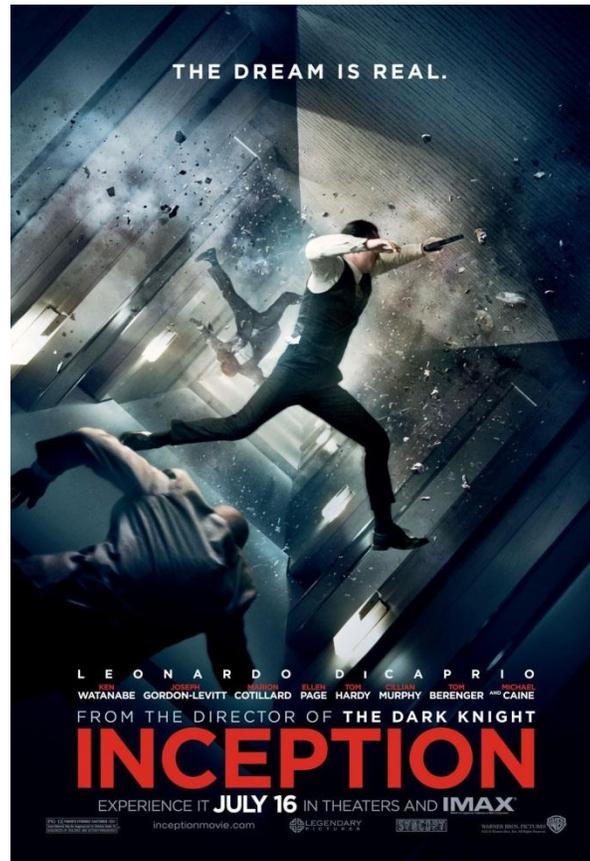


Figure 5.4: *Inception*

his aerial acrobatics, his clothes remain unwrinkled and in place, again in contrast to his opponents whose clothes are not draped as nicely or neatly.

5.7 Facial Expression

The use of facial expressions as an agency enhancer differs for male and female characters. In the action and drama posters, the male characters display a very limited array of emotions; they all express some variation of determination. There is a little variety in the way that the characters display this determination. In *Clash of the Titans*, Perseus' face is contorted in anger. His face is tilted upward and he is screaming as he thrusts Medusa's severed head into the air. In *The King's Speech*, the only part of King George VI that we see is a profile view of his nose and mouth. His lips are held lightly, but firmly together in a quiet, stoic

determination. In *Sherlock Holmes*, the title character is facing almost straight ahead, with his head tilted down slightly to suggest height as if the audience is looking up at him. His eyes are staring at the audience and his lips are tilted in a half smirk. He looks like he possesses an incredible amount of confidence. The smirk combined with the confident head tilt and direct eye contact make Homes seem intelligent; his quick wit and keen intellect are more responsible for getting him out of tight situations than his physical prowess, as indicated by his hand being hidden in his pockets.

Each of these three men wears a very different facial expression on his, but they are all variations on single theme of determination. Perseus, King George VI, and Sherlock Holmes each have a different challenge that they must face and they will conquer it with their own particular skill set. Their facial expressions reflect their unique situations. But we must return to their determination and their confidence. All of the male characters in the posters for action and drama films display some variation of this theme of determination and confidence. Other emotions are sometimes included like stoicism, protectiveness, excitement, or anger. But within this sample, they are secondary to the determination and confidence. Men are socialized to control their emotions and only openly display emotions which contribute to their perceived strength. This limited range of emotions presented by the male characters in the movie posters reinforces this message.

In contrast to the uniform front provided by the male characters, female characters exhibit a much wider variety of facial expression within the action/drama genre. These include determination from Hermione in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows Part 1*, contentment from Bella Swan in *Twilight*, fear from Mikaela Banes in *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*, mystery from Neytiri in *Avatar*, desperation from Latika in *Slumdog Millionaire*, and poise from Nina Sayers in *Black Swan*. None of these characters lose a significant amount of agency because they express emotions other than determination or confidence. This echoes Evans and Davies's (2000) argument that men are presented with a more narrow range of acceptable

behaviors by media and popular culture than are women. Men are socialized to control their emotions and only present emotions which contribute to their perceived strength. This limited range of emotions presented by the male characters in the movie posters reinforces this message.

5.8 The Importance of Agency Enhancers in Movie Posters

Movie posters present a single image of a film. The poster designers have only this one image to create a depiction of a character that will evoke a desired feeling in their audience. The inclusion of props like weapons, the depiction of superhuman powers and abilities, the suggestion of movement or action, and choices of wardrobe and makeup increase the power of a character and serve the same purpose of conveying the agency of a character by showing that he can and has manipulated his surrounding environment, that she has abilities beyond that of an ordinary character whether it be strength, intelligence, superpowers, or technology, that they are able to act freely. In the still medium of the movie poster, these are some of the few ways to show characters interacting with the surrounding set and to demonstrate their ability to overcome obstacles.

Within this study, agency enhancers allow for comparisons between the relative power and freedom of male and female characters. As the sections focusing on individual agency enhancers demonstrated, male characters use agency enhancers at a higher rate than female characters. Also, agency enhancers work differently for male and female characters. Again, returning to Sparks' (1996) definition, action films revolve around the agency of the protagonist, and this protagonist is most frequently male. By extension, a primary purpose of the posters advertising films is to convey the agency of the characters, who are most frequently male. As is the case with gender roles (Evans and Davies 2000; Connell 2005), female characters in the posters inhabit a less rigidly defined space. They can be strong and adopt the role of the action hero, but, with few exceptions, they must be weaker than their male counterparts. However, the



Figure 5.5: *Iron Man 2*

agency of these female characters is also mitigated by their status as women: in addition to being powerful, they must also appear feminine if they want to fit with traditional gender roles. As is the case with emphasized femininity, the female characters in these films must also appeal to male desire.

The *Iron Man 2* poster provides a case in which agency enhancers are used differently depending on the character's gender; here the male and female characters take advantage of some of the same agency enhancers, but differ on others (see Figure 5.5). Both male and female characters have strong facial expressions, take advantage of science and technology to augment their abilities, and wear clothing that emphasizes their power. However, they the male and female characters have very different poses. The male characters each face the audiences

mostly head-on; they may tilt to one side, but we can call their stance forward. The female characters, however, are positioned so we see their profile. This side view has two effects which mitigate the agency of these female characters. First, the profile view presents a less strong pose than a more forward-facing pose. Second, the profile view emphasizes their curves and other features that encourages the audience to view the characters as attractive instead of powerful, a distinction which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter on the sexualization of characters. The difference in the presentation of male and female characters in the *Iron Man 2* poster is typical in that it takes steps to present the female characters as weaker and appealing to men. Male and female characters may use the same agency enhancers, but the agency enhancers do not have the same effect and the characters do not have the same amount of agency and freedom within the posters.

In this sample of posers, male and female characters take advantage of many of the same types of agency enhancers, but they are used to differing effect. The male characters use agency enhancers simply to increase their power within the posters and to demonstrate their ability to overcome obstacles they may face. As an advertisement, this translates to promising the audience that these male characters are capable, rugged, and heroic, that they have the ability to fight and they will do so in a spectacular fashion within the film. This is the promise that these agency enhancers make to consumers of these posters. Female characters also make this promise, but with the caveat that they will maintain their subordinate position to their male costars while appearing interesting and desirable to men in the audience. They use many of the same agency enhancers, but they use them at a lower rate than male characters and/or the impact of their agency is lessened when they conform to the expectations of emphasized femininity. When female characters take on the role of the action hero, they are stepping into a traditionally male role. This temporary and partial adoption of the male role is acceptable, but the female characters are almost always prevented from fully actualizing the role of the action hero because of the demands on their appearance. While female characters are allowed to

adopt a wider variety of roles within the posters, they are still held accountable at the end for their appearance.

CHAPTER 6

SEXUALIZATION WITHIN THE POSTERS

6.1 Female Characters and Sexualization

Emphasized femininity requires that women appeal to the interests and desires of men (Connell 1987). One way the female characters in this sample of movie posters appear desirable is through sexualization. Based on reading and research, I went into this section of the project expecting to focus primarily on the sexualization of female characters because there is comparatively little discourse on the sexualization of men in media. An unexpected result of this study, however, is that male and female characters were sexualized at approximately equal rates. Further examination reveals that differences exist in the methods used to sexualize the characters, the reasons the characters were sexualized, and what effects the sexualization has on the perception of the character.

The most frequent method of sexualizing female characters was through their clothing. Examples include clothing that is tight as worn by Pepper Potts played by Gwyneth Paltrow in *Iron Man*, low cut as worn by Katherine played by Jennifer Aniston in *Just Go With It*, and show off their legs as worn by Carrie Bradshaw played by Sarah Jessica Parker in *Sex and the City*. Female characters were also sexualized by their poses. Probably the best example is Margaret Tate played by Sandra Bullock in *The Proposal*. She stands so that her posture emphasizes her body and suggestively leans against her male costar.

The sexualization of female characters is a more frequently discussed and researched concept. A common reason for sexualizing female characters in movie posters is to draw in male audience members with the promise to deliver more scantily clad women on the big

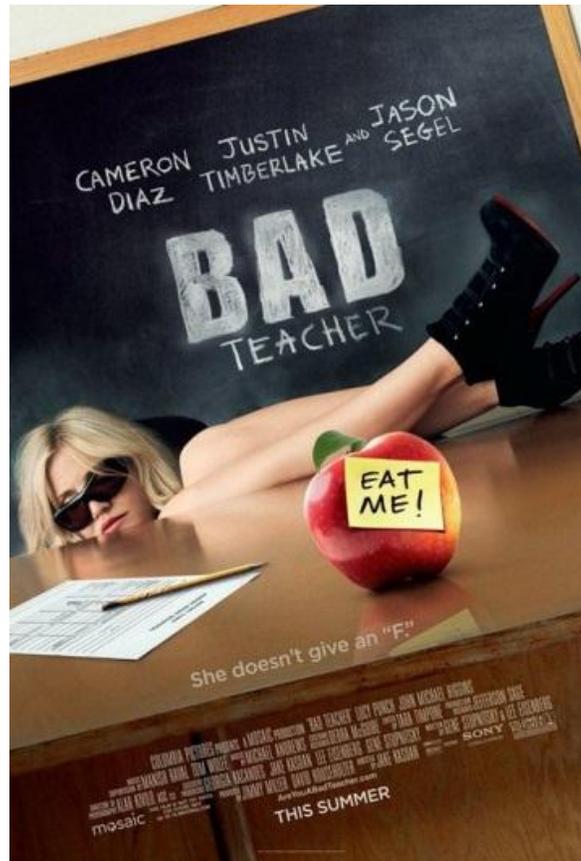


Figure 6.1: *Bad Teacher*

screen. There were only a couple of instances where the sexualization of female characters was used for a comedic purpose. In each of these instances, the source of humor is the character's failure to live up to female beauty ideals. In the poster for *Bad Teacher*, Elizabeth Halsey played by Cameron Diaz poses slouching lazily in her chair with her feet up on her desk (see Figure 6.1). She is wearing high-heeled boots and sunglasses. However, she falls short of attaining the female beauty ideal with her unkempt hair, crooked sunglasses, and lazy facial expression. In the other two examples of this phenomenon, female characters create humor by failing to meet beauty standards because of unattractive clothing or a body type which deviates from the Hollywood ideal.

In the majority of instances, however, the female character is successful in meeting beauty standards and is sexualized. The effect of this sexualization only increases the agency and status of a character in one instance, Margaret Tate in *The Proposal* (see Figure 5.5). Her agency is increased because she is being sexually aggressive and forward in her pose while her male costar is backing against the side of the poster in an effort to get away. Her enthusiasm and determination paired with her costar's reluctance boost her status.

A majority of the time, however, the sexualization either does not impact or decreases the agency or status of female characters. The result lies in how the audience views the character. If the female character is viewed as an object and her other features are disregarded, then her status and agency are decreased. If the audience views the character primarily as a woman who just happens to be attractive and wearing revealing clothing or posing in a suggestive manner, then the female character's agency and status is not necessarily impacted by the sexualization. Furthermore, using Baudrillard's (1983) concepts of simulation and positioning, the sexualization of the female characters primes the audience to view the character in that light when they watch the film.

6.2 Male Characters and Sexualization

6.2.1 Sexualization as Agency

While male and female characters were sexualized at an approximately equal rate, they were sexualized using different techniques, for different reasons, and to different effects. The sexualization of male characters falls into two categories—sexualization as a source of agency and sexualization as a source of comedy, the latter of which will be discussed in Chapter 7. In the posters advertising action and drama films male characters were sexualized when they either bared skin that drew attention to their toned physique (Perseus in *Clash of the Titans*) or wore skintight costumes that accentuated their muscled physiques (Peter Parker in *Spider-Man 3* and Hal Jordan in *Green Lantern*). Sparks (1996) notes masculinity has become exaggerated in recent decades and this has resulted in a trend of displaying men's bodies in a way formerly

reserved for women. Interestingly, this sits in contrast to modern social norms which encourage women to dress more overtly sexually than men.

The sexualization of male and female characters is the result of similar circumstances—tight clothing or bare skin. But the reason for including the tight clothing and bare skin is different depending on the gender of the character. As discussed, female characters are dressed in revealing attire to draw attention to their breasts, hips, or another area of their body. This is done in an effort to draw more men to see the film. Sexualization is the desired result of the clothing. In contrast, male characters are dressed this way to draw attention to their muscular arms, chiseled abs, and toned chests. This is done to emphasize the strength of the male characters. While the sexualization of these male characters is probably in line with the advertisers' goals of increasing the character's appeal, it is not the primary aim. Hal Jordan, and Perseus are dressed in these clothes in order to emphasize their masculinity, to further illustrate their physical abilities, and to enhance their agency, not to encourage the audience to objectify them.

For the male characters in action and drama films, sexualization comes from being an action hero. Sexualization never detracts from their agency; instead, it is a product of their agency.

6.2.2 Maintaining Heteronormativity

Interestingly, despite several of the movies falling into the category of buddy film or double-protagonist film only three action and drama posters contain exactly two male characters. The *Pirates of the Caribbean: At World's End* poster only features Jack Sparrow, played by Johnny Depp, despite Will Turner's equally important role in the film and his status as the love interest of the leading lady; the *Star Trek* poster includes a minor female character and the looming eyes of the film's villain to break up the Kirk-Spock duo; and the *Dark Knight* poster includes only Bruce Wayne, played by Christian Bale, despite Harvey Dent's role as the competing, masochistic half of the leading pair of male characters. Greven (2009) notes the

presence of homoerotic undertones in double-protagonist films as well as the broader genre of buddy films and the lengths to which Hollywood goes to make sure the male-male bonding does not stray from the boundaries of acceptable heterosexual male behavior. A heteronormative construction of gender is necessitate by hegemonic masculinity remains standard for many segments of the population and film producers take care not to lose these audience members by introducing homosexual themes into movies unless they serve a comedic purpose or unless the film seeks to challenge traditional notions of gender.

The use of sexualization in the posters falls in line with the function of hegemonic masculinity within society. Male characters are not sexualized, but they are positioned in ways that make them powerful, and it is this power that makes them desirable. All of the male characters in the action and drama, regardless of whether or not they bared skin, are desirable in a similar way. It is the confidence and strength of the male characters in the posters that gives them sex appeal, their physical features are only a small part of the equation. On the other hand, female characters are sexualized because of the way they look. Sometimes their sexualization distracts from demonstrating their agency because, for women, sex appeal and power are two different characteristics. While men are sexy because they are powerful, women are sexy because they have nice bodies and a sultry facial expression. This falls in line with hegemonic masculinity: the features of dominant masculinity are valorized, and women position themselves to be attractive to men.

CHAPTER 7

CREATING HUMOR IN POSTERS

7.1 Male Characters and Comedy

Most of the posters for non-action/drama films are intended to be read as humorous, and much of this humor comes from the male characters in the posters breaking from what is acceptable within hegemonic masculinity as displayed by the male action hero. The characters from the comedies and animated films who fail to fully embody the hegemonic masculine ideal are relegated to the status of the comedy buffoon. The humor in these posters makes fun of the individual, ridiculing him for his personal failure at living up to the hegemonic masculine ideal, instead of commenting on situations or relying on more subtle comedy techniques like understatement. The one exception is satire: a few of the posters for comedies satirize the rugged hero ideal found in the posters for action and drama films. Although these male characters may be providing commentary on the unattainability of the status held by the icons of dominant masculinity in the action films, they are still meant to be laughed at for failing to achieve the ideal, themselves.

7.1.1 Sexualization and Crossing Gender Boundaries as a Source of Humor

While the action and drama films go to great lengths to avoid questioning the heterosexuality of the male characters, testing these boundaries serves as a source of humor in many of the comedies. The male characters in the comedy films invite laughter from the audience when they wear gender-inappropriate clothing, work in non-traditionally masculine occupations, and engage in behaviors or chores that are more frequently left to women.

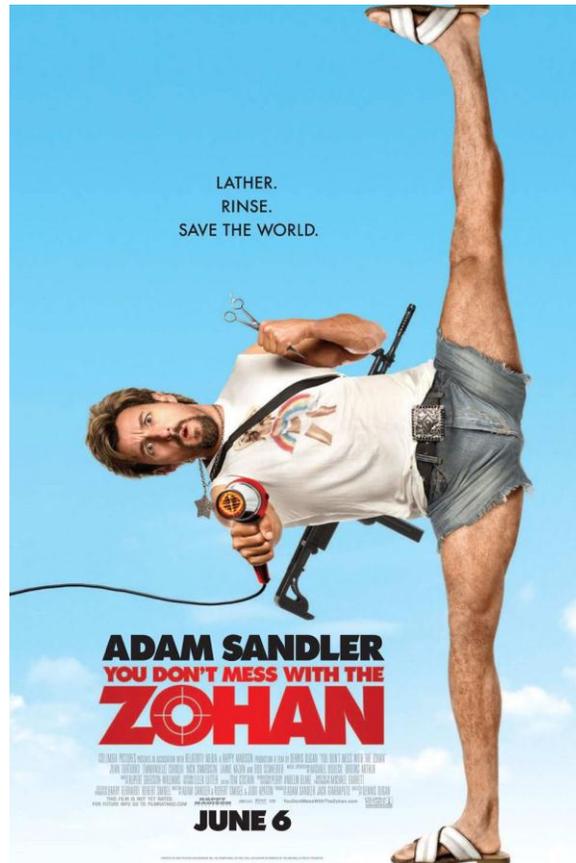


Figure 7.1: *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*

In the poster for *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, Zohan, played by Adam Sandler, wears short, tight shorts that frame his crotch (see Figure 7.1). They are held up by a belt with a large and flashy silver-plated buckle. He is wearing a tight, white t-shirt with the sleeves cut off. A woman in a white bikini is drawn on the front of the shirt and a rainbow falls across her chest. He is wearing a silver chain necklace with a star medallion. His hair is kept neatly and is styled with lots of volume. He brandishes a pair of hair styling scissors and a hair dryer with the heat element glowing red. He also has a large submachine gun strapped to his back. He is posed doing a vertical split, with his sandaled feet at the top and bottom of the poster. The clothing Zohan wears, the props he uses, and the pose he strikes are not stereotypically masculine.

The poster was created with the intent of making the audience laughing at his too-tight shorts, rainbow shirt, and hairdressing paraphernalia. These features of the poster are funny specifically because Zohan is a man. They would not be as comical if the character was a woman. Instead the woman would be seen as sexy because her shorts frame her crotch and her shirt features another scantily clad woman. This test of reimagining the character as the opposite gender demonstrates that the humor in this poster comes from the male character crossing gender boundaries. The situation would not be as absurd with a female hairdresser, doing a vertical split, dressed in revealing clothing.

Another trend of provoking humor in the posters that uses gender nonconformity is male characters working in professions that are traditionally occupied by women. In the poster for *Blades of Glory*, Chazz Michael Michaels and Jimmy MacElroy, played by Will Ferrell and Jon Heder respectively, are figure skaters (see Figure 7.2). They are dressed in figure skater costumes, Chazz wearing orange flames with yellow glitter outlines and Jimmy dressed as a peacock, his hand raised above his head as the head. From their pose we can tell that they have just finished a routine, the judges in the background along with the flags at the top of the poster suggest that this is set at a fairly important competition. Their facial expression show that they feel that they have just accomplished a great feat, they are very serious, slightly tired, and feel a sense of smug satisfaction. In essence, they take themselves very seriously.

The audience, however, is not meant to admire these two characters. The characters' facial expressions are exaggerated and their costumes are a few steps below the artistry normally exhibited by professional figure skaters. These incongruences give the audience permission to laugh at the situation presented in the poster, an important consideration for people who would not be comfortable laughing at a more serious depiction of this scenario.

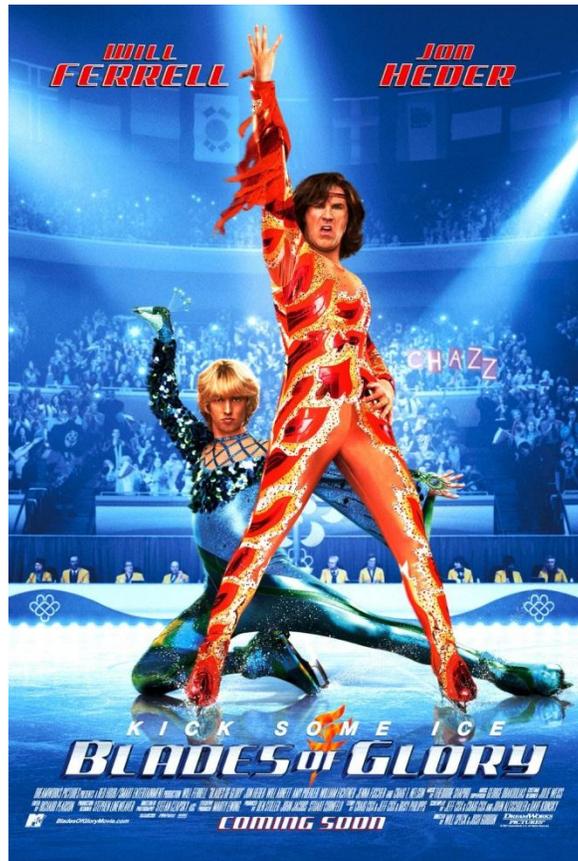


Figure 7.2: *Blades of Glory*

7.1.2 Facial Expression

While the male characters in the posters advertising action and drama films wore a uniform facial expression that suggested determination and confidence, the facial expressions of the characters in the posters for comedies were more varied. A source of humor in many of the posters advertising comedies was displaying male characters in situations where they either wore facial expressions with exaggerated emotions or inappropriate emotions. In the less-serious animated films and comedies male characters tend to appear scared, confused, extremely happy, or inappropriately determined. Examples of fear include all of the male characters in *Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa* and *Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs*, the title character in *Ratatouille*, and the male characters in *Toy Story 3*, and examples of confusion

include all of the male characters in *The Hangover*. Exaggerated determination can be seen by both characters in *Blades of Glory* and *The Other Guys* as well as by the male leads in *Mall Cop* and *Get Smart*. Only six posters out of the sample of 142 include male characters who display an emotion other than stoic determination in a situation where they are not intended to be a source of humor. Example from this set include the robot WALL-E who looks sad, the male characters in *It's Complicated* who appear happy, and the boy in *How to Train Your Dragon* who appears excited and intrigued.

This uniformity of facial expression within the posters from the action and drama genres combined with the context of the more varied facial expressions in the comedy genre sends a clear message about the expectations for male characters. In order to be taken seriously, the male characters must refrain from showing anything less than full confidence in their abilities to succeed at whatever task they are faced with.

7.1.3 Caricature of the Action Hero

Another tool for expressing humor in the movie posters is styling characters in posters advertising comedies according to the action-hero ideal. This method of producing humor is particularly interesting because it relies on the conventions of another group of movie posters, those advertising action films, in order to achieve maximum effect. In *The Other Guys*, Allen Gamble, played by Will Ferrell, and Terry Hoitz, played by Mark Wahlberg, are dressed in suits reminiscent of James Bond, jumping through the air about to kick an opponent, aiming two guns each, and sporting looks of determination on their faces (see Figure 7.3). All of these elements mirror what one would expect from an action poster. However, one character's pants are too short, showing his sock and his calf and he sports glasses and an awkward hairstyle. Both characters' facial expressions are slightly exaggerated to prevent them from being interpreted seriously; Gambel's is too intense and Hoitz's raised eyebrow makes him appear incongruous. Also, while the focus of most action posters is on the character's face, a moving body part, or a weapon, the focus in *The Other Guys* is on the characters' crotches which occupy the center of

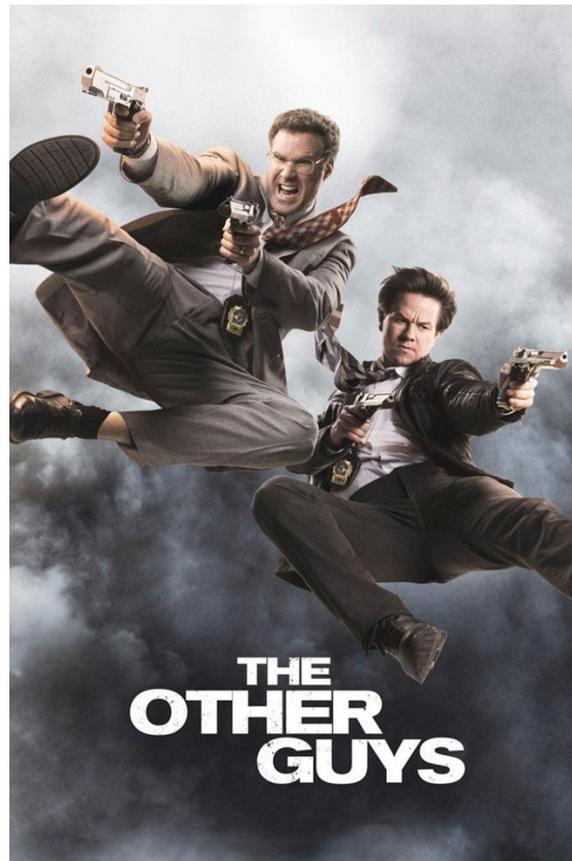


Figure 7.3: *The Other Guys*

the poster and are emphasized by the characters' parted legs. All of these minor failings from the characters in *The Other Guys* result in them falling short of the action-hero ideal and, instead, becoming caricatures of the Hollywood standard.

Each of these three trends serves as an example of what a man should not be, do, or wear if he wants to be taken seriously. When considered with the masculine ideal portrayed in the action posters, both groups send the messages that men have a narrow range of acceptable behaviors. The posters create a dichotomy of masculinity. On one hand, we have the action hero. He is a lone, stoic man, who is determined and can overcome any obstacle set in his path. If a man does not fall into this category, he is relegated to the status of the comedy

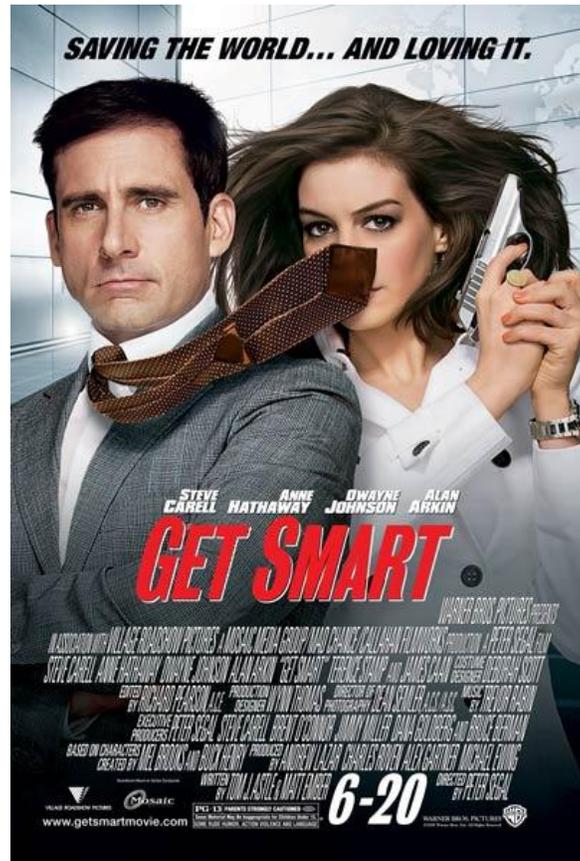


Figure 7.4: *Get Smart*

buffoon who violates social norms, looks confused, and has an inflated sense of self importance.

7.2 Female Characters and Comedy

While the male characters add humor to the posters in a variety of ways, the female characters do so to a much smaller degree and have a more limited range of options at their disposal. Most of the humor on the part of female characters is situational in nature and is only funny when paired with the action of their male costar. One example comes from the poster for *Get Smart* (see Figure 7.4). Maxwell Smart, played by Steve Carell, and Agent 99, played by Anne Hathaway, are shown waist up in the center of the poster. Smart is wearing a suit jacket, white button-down shirt, and tie. Agent 99 is wearing a white button-down, professional-looking

coat. Her hair is blowing out around her face, her gaze is straight, and she is holding a gun with both hands, pointing it above her head. Smart also has a serious look on his face, but, as discussed earlier, it is slightly exaggerated so as to give the audience permission to laugh and to increase the humor in the situation. The majority of the humor in the poster comes from Smart's tie—it has blown up and the tip falls across Agent 99's nose and mouth. Smart is funny, not Agent 99.

A similar situation plays out in the poster for *The Proposal*. As discussed earlier, Margaret Tate leans up against Andrew Paxton as she holds a ring in a red box. This poster is funny because Paxton is extremely reluctant; he is backing away from Tate, up against one side of the poster, his hands are pressed flat against the wall at his sides, and he has a look of dread on his face. Tate simply provides the motivation for his humorous reaction.

Only two comedy posters do not contain male characters: *Bridesmaids* and *Bad Teacher*. In *Bridesmaids* six women are standing against a brick wall (see Figure 7.5). Four are wearing identical pink dresses, one is wearing a wedding dress, and one is wearing a less revealing version of the pink dresses. Two of the women in the pink dresses pose in sexually suggestive ways, one bending over slightly and the other showing her cleavage, and the other two women in pink dresses have poses that could also be read as sexually suggestive. Most of them look exasperated with the situation. The humor in this poster comes from the incongruity between the situation depicted of the bridal party and the romanticized mythos of the bridal party: the women are not having fun, they don't look perfect, and they are not in a particularly nice location.

Within this sample of posters, the only time female characters provide the main source of humor is when they are not paired with male characters. In all of the instances that male and female characters appear together, the humor either solely comes from the male character, or the male character's contribution to the humor trumps his female costar's contribution.

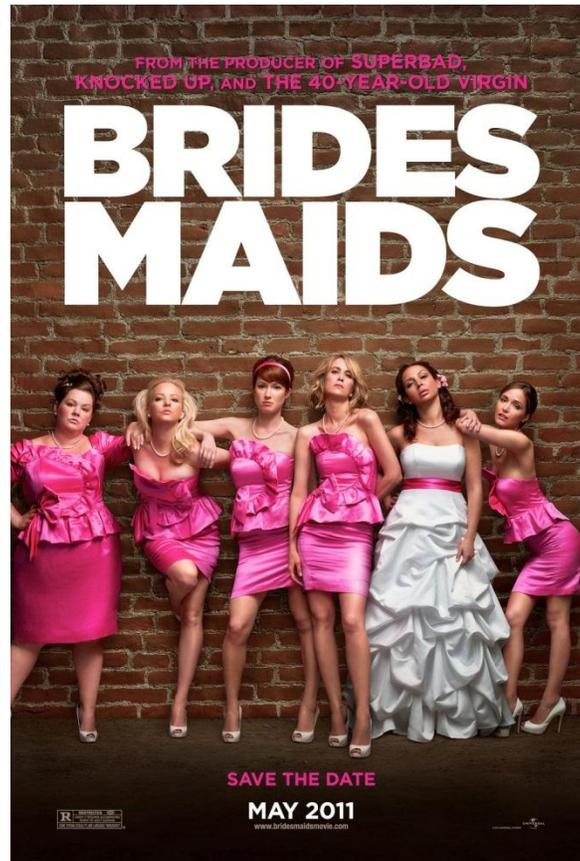


Figure 7.5: *Bridesmaids*

One important distinction between the humor displayed by the male and female characters is that the female characters tend to be funny in situations or because of the actions of characters around them. In contrast, the male characters are funny because of characteristics that they possess and their inability to conform to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (2005) mentions that one way that society encourages men to conform to the dominant version of masculinity is through teasing and harassment. The male characters in the comedy posters serve as examples of what men can expect if they fail to find a way to enact dominant masculinity.

Interestingly, the female characters are given much more leeway with regard to acceptable behaviors. While the male characters are most frequently funny because of

characteristics they possess, the female characters are most often funny because of the situations they are experiencing. The audience is supposed to laugh *with* the female characters and laugh *at* the male characters. Because women do not hold a privileged place in society, a hegemonic femininity does not exist and women are held to a looser standard of permissible roles (Evans and Davies 2000; Connell 2005). The use of female characters to create comedy in the posters falls in line with the concept of emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). The only times that we laugh at female characters are when they deviate from the tenant of presenting themselves in a way that makes them desirable to men, when they fail to achieve conventional beauty standards. This is the only time that the audience is encouraged to laugh at the female characters while being admonished to take care not to transgress for fear of similar ridicule.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The analysis suggests the movie posters present a very traditional interpretation of masculinity and femininity that conform to Connell's (2005) definition of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity (1987). Within the sample of posters, and analysis of the male and female characters' use of agency enhancers, sexualization, and creation of humor allows us to determine the relative power of the characters and to see how the characters conform to real-world gender expectations.

Firstly and most basically, male characters outnumber female characters by a ratio of three to one. The fundamental composition of the posters is biased toward male characters. One aspect of selling the films is allowing the audience to identify with the main characters. In a February 2, 2012 interview with National Public Radio, Meryl Streep discussed how male audience members relate to the characters she plays:

When I made *The Devil Wears Prada*, it was the first time in my life that a man came up and said, "I know how you felt. I have a job like that." First time....It took [me until] *The Devil Wears Prada* to play someone tough, who had to make the hard decisions, who was running an organization, [where] a certain type of man [was able] to empathize and feel a story through her. That's the first time anyone has ever said that they felt that way. (NPR 2012)

The premise of Connell's (2005) construction of hegemonic masculinity is that men, especially men who abide by the dominant masculinity, inhabit a dominant position. Within society, women can identify with male characters much more easily than men can identify with female characters. Women inhabit a devalued state in mainstream society. So, women can aspire to

emulate the male action heroes they see on the screen. But, for men to identify with female characters, they would have to imagine themselves in a position of lower status than they inherently possess as men. It is for this reason that only one action poster features a lone female character, and that only two posters give more agency to and place more emphasis on a female character than her male costar. The gender disparity within the posters also makes sense in terms of Connell's theories: women appeal to the interests of men by being interested in male characters. The creation of films for an almost exclusively female audience (i.e., the *Twilight* and *Sex and the City* franchises) is a relatively recent phenomenon. In the past, women-oriented films were not treated as major films that carried the potential to compete with the action blockbuster genre. 'Chick-flicks' were treated as smaller endeavors and efforts were made to include content that men would find appealing.

Secondly, even when controlled for the smaller percentage of female characters within this sample, female characters are much less likely to display agency enhancers than their male counterparts. Furthermore, with very few exceptions, strong female characters lessen the impact of their agency in order to conform to the expectations of emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). A female character may wear superhero costumes and carry weapons, but the power conveyed by these items is mitigated by her provocative pose, the tight cut of her suit, or, at the very least, by assuming a secondary position so as not to encroach on the prime position within the poster reserved for the leading man.

With regard to male characters, the use of agency enhancers aids in crafting the Hollywood ideal of the rugged male action hero. He is impossibly strong, well-muscled, and well-armed. He is attractively dressed, although his clothing may show the signs of past conflict. This singular image of the rugged action hero is interesting when considered within the framework of Gramsci's (1971) cultural hegemony and Connell's (2005) hegemonic masculinity. As described by Sparks (1996), a central tenant of the action film is that the hero demonstrates his power and agency by overcoming characters and institutions that obstruct his path to glory.

Initially, this theme of fighting against institutions or seeking out vigilante justice and the amount of violence entailed in these journeys seems to run against the ultimate goal of hegemonic masculinity and cultural hegemony: supporting a capitalist patriarchy. Every male character in an action or drama film possesses an incredible amount of agency and many wield deadly weapons. Violence and individual agency are not conducive to a stable society. However, these movie posters are advertisements for escapist entertainment which ultimately leaves audience members pacified. Media are the “opium of the people” (Marx 1976 [1843]). The act of watching the rugged action heroes of these films demonstrate their agency by overthrowing, ignoring, and evading the structural oppressors within the fictional world pacifies the audience and prevents the audience from rebelling against the oppressive structures within their own lives.

Next, although male and female characters are sexualized at approximately equal rates within the sample of posters, the difference in the ways they are sexualized and differences in how the sexualization impacts the perception of the character reinforce the tenants of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 2005) and emphasized femininity (Connell 1987). Male characters are sexualized as a result of possessing agency. Power is masculine, and the agency of the male characters makes them desirable. Conversely, female characters are sexualized at expense to their agency. Power is not feminine, and the agency of the female characters makes them less desirable because they do not conform to gender hierarchy mandated by hegemonic masculinity. The provocative poses, skin tight clothing, and seductive gazes of the female characters within this sample take away from their agency and help them conform to the mandates of emphasized femininity. Only one female character fails to conform to conventional beauty standards for a non-comedic purpose. Only one female character wears makeup that is less than immaculate. Conventional beauty standards are upheld rigidly within this sample of female characters.

Finally, the construction of humor demonstrates that, for the most part, the male characters are held to a more ridged standard of gender-appropriate behavior than female characters (Evans and Davies 2000; Connell 2005), and further reinforces the secondary position of female characters within the posters. A primary source of humor comes from male characters failing to uphold the macho, heterosexist ideals of hegemonic masculinity. The ideal man as portrayed in the posters is heroic and capable. He possesses the honor, skill, integrity, and rugged individualism necessary to overcome every obstacle in his path to glory without the aid of a sidekick or female companion. Characters deviating from this standard by adopting non-traditional gender roles, taking themselves too seriously, or displaying 'non-manly' emotions are relegated to the status of the buffoon who wears inappropriate clothing and looks confused. Again, this harkens to the consequence of bullying and ridicule for inappropriate behavior noted by Connell (2005). Within the posters, men are either 'real' men or they are caricatures of men.

While the male characters are frequently laughed at because they fail to conform to traditional gender roles and the tenants of hegemonic masculinity, female characters contribute much less humor to the posters. When they are included in comedy posters with another male character, they serve a supportive role in the comedy. The lack of humor from female characters points to one benefit female characters do enjoy within the sample of posters: they have looser standards of behavior and are rarely the subject of ridicule. We can trace this back to Connell's (1995) hegemonic masculinity. Men, by virtue of being men and inhabiting the dominant position in society, undergo more intense scrutiny and gender-role policing. But the concept of hegemonic femininity does not exist because the structural superiority of men and domination of women in society leaves little room for women to dominate other women based on gender role enactment. Instead, women have a wider range of acceptable behaviors. The only stipulation is that they do not threaten the superiority of men and that they present themselves in a way men find appealing (Connell 1987).

In many ways the movie posters depict a more conservative notion of gender roles than that portrayed in their source material. The posters contain fewer female characters than do television shows or movies. Interestingly, male characters often display the full gambit of emotions in many films. They laugh, cry, erupt in fits of rage, experience grief, etc., but only a small spectrum of these emotions makes it into the posters. James Bond, the epitome of the ultra-masculine man, breaks down and cries in *Casino Royale*; Wolverine breaks down in tears at the beginning of *X-Men Origins*; and Harry Potter weeps uncontrollably at the end of two *Harry Potter* films. Yet this vulnerability does not make it into the posters: James Bond carries a gun half the size of his body, Wolverine stares downward at the audience with his metal claws extended in front of his face, and Harry Potter stands determinedly with his wand.

Media in their myriad forms are perhaps even better situated to serve as a socializing agent than most other social institutions because of their pervasive nature in the modern world. With the advent of near-instantaneous transmission of information, radio and later television and the Internet allow for nearly the entire population to access the same popular entertainment. Family, education, economy, religion, government, and other social institutions cannot be standardized to the same degree that media producers take for granted; the element of interpretation inherent in social institutions that rely on transmission via the human intermediaries who work for that institution is not present in media. Everyone sees the same national ad campaigns for Doritos and Bud Light during the Super Bowl, watches the same version of *Black Swan* and *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* when they go to the movie theater or rent the movie at home, and listens to the same recordings of Adele and Justin Bieber's newest hits. With other social institutions, however, teachers have different interpretations about state and national mandates detailing the approved methods for instructing their pupils in a given subject, religious leaders have an alternate understanding of certain passages in a holy text, and politicians possess views that do not always align precisely with their party's official stance.

Furthermore, media have become “the opium of the people” (Marx 1976 [1843]). Media are fun. Because people willingly, even eagerly, consume vast amounts of media, media have become a powerful socializing force. Furthermore, many forms of media rely on repetition, either of a single piece or of more general themes, advertisements serving as a prime example. Male and female characters are portrayed in much the same way throughout this sample of movie posters, meaning that consumers are inundated with a handful of character archetypes when they view promotional material for movies.

The movie posters are simulations of the movies they advertise, to use Baudrillard’s term (1983). Most of the time, a person does not simply walk into a movie theater or purchase a film without knowing something about the movie they are about to view. A person will have watched previews for the film in commercial breaks while watching television, seen ads on the sides of websites, in magazines, and on blogs, and seen single-image art on billboards and movie posters. The presentation of a film’s characters, plot, and tone in a poster primes a person to interpret the film in a certain way and creates a sense of the film within a person’s mind. We go into a movie with certain expectations about what we are going to see: we have a general idea of what the plot is, what actors made the film and what characters they play, and what the tone of the movie will be. In fact, a non-uncommon complaint is that a marketing campaign for a film misrepresented the movie in some way so that the expectations it created were not met, that the movie was not as exciting as anticipated, that the tone was more somber or the humor more crude. These expectations are formed by the promotional material.

When analyzing the content of these posters, it is important to consider who crafts the messages they communicate, essentially who controls the means of production of these top-grossing films and their accompanying advertisements. The vast majority of media organizations are owned by seven parent companies (Arsenault and Castells 2008). These conglomerations are deeply embedded within a capitalist system supported by traditional gender roles. When applied to the film industry, hegemonic gender theory would argue that

male and female characters are depicted according to normative societal standards (Connell 2005). This helps to explain the strict dichotomy of male action heroes and their still-powerful-but-slightly-weaker love interests as well as the dichotomy between the stoic action hero and the nonconformist buffoon.

Movie posters are part of the culture industry described by Horkheimer and Adorno. Although movie posters by definition have always been advertisements, early movie posters incorporate more artistry and style, some of them could be considered works of art in their own right (Poole and Poole 2007). This is no longer the case. As expected, the movie posters in this sample tend to adhere to fairly rigid standards. The posters contain characters, the film's title, and sometimes the names of actors. While some of the posters are visually stimulating, none of them would be considered a work of art; they do not break, challenge, or redefine any artistic boundaries. As Horkheimer and Adorno said, "the specific content...only appears to change. The details are interchangeable" (1972 [1995]: 120). As described in the previous chapters, a great many trends exist within this sample because advertisers want to sell movies. The now-standard format of actors, title, and names presents a clear and easily interpreted message, making the audience's decision as easy as possible. As discussed in Chapter 2, people in the movie industry have incentive in the form of profits to conform to audience expectations. Originality is not rewarded because it has a greater potential alienate an audience demographic, resulting in decreased ticket and DVD sales. This means that, as advertisements, movie posters even more than their source material must conform to the widely accepted gender roles.

APPENDIX A

POSTER CODING GUIDE

1. Gender composition
 - A. Single character
 - i) Male
 - ii) Female
 - B. Pair of characters
 - i) Male/Female
 - ii) Male/Male
 - iii) Female/Female
 - C. Group of characters
 - i) Male/Female
 - ii) Males
 - iii) Females
2. Film genre
 - A. Action/Drama
 - B. Comedy
 - C. Animated
3. Props
 - A. Type
 - B. Number
 - C. Character using the prop
 - D. Intended effect
 - i) Serious
 - ii) Comedic
4. Posing
 - A. Relative position
 - i) Center/off center

- ii) In front of/behind
 - B. Stance
 - i) Strong/weak
 - ii) Suggest action/stillness
 - C. Interaction
 - i) Interacting with environment
 - ii) Posing
- 5. Sexualization
 - A. Revealing clothing
 - B. Provocative position
- 6. Facial expression
 - A. Serious
 - B. Comedic
 - C. Emotions conveyed
- 7. Indicators of violence
 - A. Visible injuries
 - B. Weapons
 - C. Dirty skin or clothes
 - D. Torn or ripped clothing
- 8. Reasons for disqualification from sample
 - A. Absence of characters with determinable gender
 - B. Characters are too small to analyze
 - C. No characters in poster

*Any trends noted during the analysis of the posters will be noted and taken into consideration as a potential new category for analysis.

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