Disembodied Icons: Analysing Headless Female Representations in Hollywood Thriller Posters

Mahaam Khan[1], Rizwan Akhtar[2]

Abstract

This study examines the prevalence of disembodied representations of women in Hollywood thriller posters, focusing on headless or partially obscured female figures. Using Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory and Erving Goffman's frame analysis, the research analyses the visual encoding of power, objectification, and gender in ten iconic film posters, including Suicide Squad, Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Wonder Woman, and The Wolf of Wall Street. The analysis reveals how the partial or complete erasure of women's faces in these posters functions as a strategic tool to both eroticize and objectify female characters. Semiotic elements, such as body positioning, attire, and accessories (e.g., weapons, and money), signify the duality of women as both powerful agents and passive objects of desire. Through Goffman's framework, the study underscores how these disembodied representations perpetuate stereotypes of femininity, subordination, and sexualization, while also reinforcing a hierarchical gendered power dynamic. Ultimately, the findings illuminate how Hollywood thriller posters exploit the disembodiment of female characters to negotiate their place within the broader cultural discourse on gender, agency, and visual spectacle.

Keywords: *Disembodiment, Female Representation, Hollywood Posters, Semiotics, Goffman, Objectification, Power, Sexualization, Gender Stereotypes, Media Analysis, Thriller Genre.*

Introduction

The disembodied images of visual culture, especially those that privilege the physical features of women while erasing their likenesses, have become a central focus of feminist criticism & analysis. Such representations frequently deprive women of their subjectivity and portray them instead as objects of visual consumption a trend most conspicuous in Hollywood thriller film posters. The lack of heads or faces in these representations plays a crucial role in objectifying the female body, and pictures like these are often used to promote gender roles in society. This aspect is also reflective of larger societal dynamics that value certain perspectives over others and favour objectification over agency, ultimately restricting the representation of women in media. Viewing these depersonalized forwards through a feminist lens, such representations affirm patriarchal values and sustain a culture that denies female identity and role (Walker, 2020; Pilvre, 2012).

By examining the implications of these representations, not only does the study critically interrogate ways in which women are portrayed in visual media, but it also seeks to be a part of a critical discourse on equity representational justice.

Background of the Study

The representation of women in film posters has been a subject of scholarly discussion for quite some time, with attention paid to the objectification and disembodiment of female agents. Heinrich is the first to admit that the objectification of women is a powerful instrument in visual media that is effective enough to mirror and reinforce authoritative social norms, such as patriarchy, the importance of a male view. Such depictions, feminist theorists argue, objectify women, diminishing their agency and identity (Pfister et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020). The thriller genre, especially, has a terrible track record of using these headless representations to showcase women's bodies, instead of their stories or complex personalities. These depictions tend to correspond to elements of violence and peril, reducing women to prey or objects of

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[1] PhD Scholar, Department of English Language, Literature, the University of Lahore, Email: mahaam.mk@gmail.com

[2] Department of English Language, Literature, the University of Lahore, Email: rizwan.akhtar@ell.uol.edu.pk

male lust. These representations reinforce harmful gender stereotypes and contribute to a culture that accepts violence against women as normal (Reznik & Massarani, 2019).

Furthermore, such portrayals are more than a mere reflection of wider society; they can also construct or reinforce audience ideologies surrounding gender relations and power structures within films. Research suggests these images can powerfully impact emotions in ways that colour how the audience makes sense of female characters in the narrative potentially reducing their role to simplistic characters (Woodrich, 2018). This is worsened by the under-representation of women in (important) creative roles inside the film industry, ensuring narrow and reductive female characters are the most visible on screen (Yang, 2023)

Ultimately, this study seeks to explore the discourses surrounding headless women on Hollywood thriller posters in order to better align these representations within the larger scopes and frameworks moulded by feminist media studies. In this way it adds to the synchronic discussion of gender representations in media and questions the power structures in visual culture.

Purpose of the Study

This study primarily aims to critically analyze the headless female representations in Hollywood thriller posters, to reveal how they perpetuate gender stereotypes and objectification of women. More specifically, this research aims to examine the role that decapitated or headless female bodies play in the representation of women as visual objects, thus emphasizing their lack of agency and subjectivity. Examining portrayals portraying women as headless figures only serves to support patriarchal standards and oppress female identities while reinforcing toxic gender stereotypes that reduce women to a few possible roles. It will also investigate the impact disembodied representations have on emotions as well as cultural attitudes, and ultimately how this kind of representation shapes the perception of gender and power in society. This study comes down to a need for a change in how female characters are represented in visuals; to have the portrayals cover more ground than stereotypical representations, to present a fuller picture of women and who they can be in cinema.

So, this study seeks to heighten awareness of the role of disembodied representations in visual media and to encourage a more critical engagement with the disembodied images that pervade our media landscape.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study, focusing on headless female representations in Hollywood thriller movie posters, are:

- To analyze the visual objectification of women by examining the depiction of headless female figures as a recurring motif in thriller film marketing.

- To investigate the commodification of women's bodies through fragmentation and the reinforcement of patriarchal power structures in visual media.

- To explore the dehumanization and disempowerment of female characters through the lens of the male gaze and its implications for gender representation in Hollywood thrillers.

Research Questions

To fulfill these objectives, the study poses the following research questions:

- How do Hollywood thriller posters visually objectify women by depicting headless female figures using semiotic elements such as icons, indexes, and symbols?

- How does Goffman's Gender Representation Framework reveal the power dynamics and objectification embedded in these visual portrayals?

- What are the broader socio-cultural implications of headless female representations in Hollywood thrillers in shaping gender identity, reinforcing patriarchal norms, and sustaining media objectification?

Significance of Study

This study investigates the evident connection between female objectification, by being headless women in Hollywood thriller movie posters, and its wider cultural & social significance around the world, making it a transformative study. Through the lens of representation, this research exposes the patriarchal logic implicit in visual media that upholds male desire and objectification above female subjectivity (Hirdman, 2010). It helps expand on how media constructs the narratives of gender and power relations. By examining the thriller genre, which regularly uses such headless prototypes, the study provides an important lens from which to consider how visual culture repetitively enshrines damaging ideas about female identity. This study contributes to feminist media studies by arguing against the reductionist way of thinking about Hollywood's representation of women (Amin, 2024).

The research also supports the perspective of being aware as an audience, not to consume visual culture that suggests disembodiment and objectification. This, in turn, promotes a more diverse and equitable media environment (Groth & Corijn, 2005). The study encourages a wider, more complex, and more empowering representation of women in the NT film industry, highlighting how representations limit women mostly to a narrow set of generalizations. This is crucial to resist the ever-surveillance culture of violence against women and to create characters who are complex, subjective and embody agency (Christensen-Strynø, 2016; Fauziyyah, 2024).

Overall, this research helps us explain the nexus among gender, power and visual culture. However, due to critical inspection of the process by which disembodied female representations form the product, it is hoped this work will provide a commentary for the future: a discourse on gender representation in contemporary cinema that will, with prompting, encourage the industry to deliver more equitable and empowering portrayals of women in the Hollywood thriller.

Literature Review

The representation of women in the media has been a key area of research, especially concerning gender stereotyping, objectification, and disembodiment. This dissertation discusses how these portrayals change over time as a response to changing times and feminist movements and what implications this holds for the ocular-centrist perception of women in visual culture. Throughout history women have frequently seemed to be portrayed through an objectifying lens where their worth is not based on their thoughts, opinions, or contributions to society, but simply on their looks and sexual appeal. Feminist academics have long critiqued this trend, citing that such representations reduce the female identity and reinforce negative social values (Haines et al., 2008; Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014).

Feminist Critiques of Objectification and Disembodiment

The feminist critique of objectification began in earnest over 40 years ago, with foundational work from scholars such as Susan Bordo and Laura Mulvey(1993). The feminist film theorist and writer Laura Mulvey made waves in 1975 with her PSA for women in cinema titled "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," which argued that women are presented in films as passive objects of desire, robbed of autonomy and voice. Such objectification is not only representational as the core problem but can impact women's self-assessment and lead to self-objectification as these objectified images are internalized.Share This process takes a toll on women's mental health and self-esteem, with women starting to see themselves through a narrow, male-centric lens (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014).

This theme has been extended in studies that look at how self-objectification operates across different identities, including sexual orientation, and impacts women. The research shows that many lesbians also struggle with self-objectification, but other factors may act as buffers against its negative effects (e.g., Haines et al., 2008). This indicates that objectification is inherently intersectional, functioning differently depending on the social context of that objectification and the identity of the person being objectified.

However, the inchoate nature of disembodiment transcends its visual representation; it also encapsulates the realm of psychological and emotional disembodiment. This is when any woman, particularly in media, is boiled down to their looks, creating disassociation from the body. These depictions reinforce narrow standards of beauty, contributing to damaging social norms about what women can and cannot do (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2014). This disembodied content becomes detached from particular subjects, ignoring women's lived experiences (Pirani et al., 2019), thus feminist cartography further critiques traditional media representations.

Semiotics and Cultural Representation in Media

The importance of semiotics in studying these representations has increasingly been acknowledged especially in the case of visual media like movie posters. Semiotics help decode deeper cultural and social meanings inherent in the media visual. Visual aspects like space allocation, character positioning, and visual composition in image genres like movie posters send gendered messages on women's roles, identities, and inclusion in society. Song (2023) states that movie posters are used as strong evidence of gender prejudice because when women are placed in spaces dominated by men or where men are supposed to be in authoritative or expert roles, the prejudice manifests more strongly. Such visual structures implicitly reinforce values of patriarchy by attempting to visually subset women out of larger social forms.

Peirce's semiotic framework has been used as a lens to study how visual media signifies more profound cultural and social implications. Wardhani (2023) shows how beauty influencers use semiotics to create meanings that resonate with cultural beauty norms, and Timmermans and Tavory (2020) use semiotics to explore concealed social conventions. These strategies demonstrate how visual media, like film posters, frequently contain gender biases that perpetuate conventional power structures. Further research into "beheading" the act of removing different body parts of women in visual images exemplifies yet again how digital forms of media objectify and disembody women. Such practice creates a wider cultural milieu, that continues exacerbating dehumanising gender stereotypes (Pramaskara, 2022).

Gender Stratification in Media and the Role of Visual Cues

From social media to movie promotional housing, gender stratification in media platforms creates a conducive communication environment where objectified portrayals of women are maintained. According to Song's (2023) longitudinal analysis of Hollywood movie posters over the past six decades, while a total stereotyping approach is not entirely represented in Hollywood, the gender-based aspect in movie posters is prevalent, where women are thought to be submissively subordinate or idle. Salient examples from existing semiotic studies of films like Mulan (2020) also highlight how visual elements like body posture and facial presentations can mediate gendered power relations (Annisa & Manullang, 2022). Not only do these images perpetuate patriarchal structures, but they also normalise the sexual objectification of women's bodies.

This semiotic reading helps unveil how women are rendered invisible in cinema, how visual media consolidates traditional gender roles, and how it reinforces the oppression and marginalization of women and female identity. Maharani (2023) further comments that the posture of women and how they are dressed and looked reveals deep-seated cultural and gender biases. These visual elements serve as vehicles that reinforce power structures and encourage the reification of gendered social constructs.

The Role of Goffman's Gender Representation Theory

Erving Goffman's frame on gender performance is used to further elucidate how visual representation upholds systems of patriarchy. His theory posits that dismemberment can be a "visual strategy" in the representation of women: their bodies fragmented or broken into a dismountabale object. So cinematic fragmentation is not only a formal device but also each and every time reflects the entire subjugation of women throughout the entire society where they are ruled by male powers (Shahid & Kumar, 2018).

Through this type of lens, we can examine how media depictions of women through disembodiment and objectification evident in Hollywood movie posters reinforce hegemonic patriarchal values across visual media culture. Research employing semiotic and Goffman's frameworks shows that these imageries serve to establish a particular culture of objectification and marginalisation. It is therefore fundamental to deconstruct these negative visual representations to realise a more just visual culture that embraces the idea of multidimensional and empowering representations of women.

In conclusion, the intersection of feminist critiques, semiotic analysis, and gender representation theories offers valuable insights into how visual media, particularly in the form of movie posters, continues to objectify and disembody women. From historical critiques of objectification to contemporary semiotic studies, it is evident that visual media not only reflects but actively shapes societal attitudes about gender. These portrayals reinforce harmful stereotypes, marginalize female identities, and perpetuate patriarchal systems. As this review demonstrates, the representation of headless or disembodied female figures in Hollywood thrillers exemplifies these broader patterns of gender-based objectification and disembodiment, which feminist scholars have long critiqued.

Theoretical Framework

Based on Goffman's Gender Representation Framework (1979) and Peirce's Semiotic Theory (1931), this paper investigates how Hollywood movie posters visually objectify women as headless. Through the lens of these theoretical frameworks, the research examines the role of visual media in supporting patriarchal structures by communicating gendered messages.

Goffman's Gender Representation Framework is used as tool-work because the analysis explores the objectification and subordination of women in visual media. The study also uses Goffman's important theories of dismemberment, ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal to demonstrate how headless portrayals of women perpetuate passive, submissive notions and erase any psychological involvement with the characters.

Methodology

We explore how Hollywood movie posters representations of headless female figures through qualitative semiotic objectification. The selected posters were 10 posters between 2000 and 2020, belonging to the thriller genre. This research adapts qualitative coding standards described by Krippendorff (2018) along with Peirce's Semiotic Theory (1931) and Goffman's Gender Representation Framework (1979).

A head-to-tail examination of the body fragmentation, is followed up by a discussion of the sexualization of female characters based on their posture, clothing, and angles of the camera with regard to male characters. The analysis further maps perceptible characteristics of visual engagement sprinkled throughout the thriller genre between 2000-2020. This study uses a theoretical framework that enables an in-depth analysis of how extended corpses of women in thriller posters objectify women and mirror wider societal discourses regarding power dynamics in the accepted perception of gender.

The Qualitative Analysis of Thriller Movie Posters

The phenomenological analysis of this study explores how women's bodies are depicted through the lenses of sexualization, fragmentation, and vulnerability in thriller movie posters. The analysis uses Peirce's

semiotic theory and Goffman's theory of gender representation to see how women are depicted as both objects of desire and danger through visual elements. Through iconic, indexical and symbolic sign interpretation, the research identifies how women in thriller posters are represented through fragmentation and how it creates a binary between seduction and fragility. These portrayals compound gendered power dynamics by intertwining sensuality and suspense while relegating women to parts that inspire both arousal and trepidation. "Thirsty Women: How Women Fronted Thrillers Exploit Objectification" examines the exploitative ways women are depicted in visual media and how these images reinforce male fantasies about women as seductresses and victims.

The *Kingsman: The Secret Service* poster

Based on Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's framing theory of gender representation, the analysis of The Kingsman: The Secret Service poster movie poster investigates the opposing representations of male and female figures. The masculine figure appears well-dressed, a man in a suit, a connotation of authority, power, and professionalism, while the curvature of the female form ends below her waist, turning her into an object of desire. This fragmentation emphasizes her objectification, as her body acts to emphasize the male figure's dominance. Elements of indexicality like the woman's legs draped around the man serve to underline gendered power dynamics in this relation, insinuating that the man dominates the space and the narrative. The woman's legs represent sexualization, while the man's outfit and posture represent control and dominance. Goffman's framework highlights the woman's emasculated and feelingless state, with her face and upper body covered, suggesting passivity and subservience. In conclusion, this poster serves to reinforce the patriarchal gendered roles performed by the male lounging in a power stance used to exert dominance over the female portrayed as an object of masculine eye candy, perpetuating gendered stereotypes with which action and spy films are typically associated with.

The *Cry Wolf* poster

Utilizing Peirce's semiotic framework and Goffman's analysis of gender representation, this analysis demonstrates how the female figure in the poster functions as a tension between innocence and danger and objectification and power. The fact that the woman is in a schoolgirl outfit, holding a knife, represents both purity as well as malice, generating an illusive threat in schoolgirls. Goffman's notions of objectification and sexual fragmentation are apparent, as her face and upper torso are obscured, thereby making her a sexual object and stripping her of her personality and agency. This ritualization of subordination is suggested through the focus on her legs and sexualizing her character, with her nevertheless having a weapon. The removal of her face signals psychological severance, making her even more of an object. The poster ultimately wants to combine innocence and danger; the woman seems to be a potential aggressor and a passive sex object, strengthening familiar gender roles in which women are both threats and vulnerable objects.

The *Terminator: Genisys* poster

Applying Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's framework, this analysis discusses the depiction of the female figure, presumably Sarah Connor, on a movie poster for the Terminator franchise. Featured familiar images of half-naked women holding terminator skulls which means insurgents and defiance in the great war of head and machines. The skull represents devastation and technology's destructive power, while the woman's authoritative stance and the sunset behind her represent optimism and the potential for a brighter tomorrow. Indexical analysis ascribes to the skull a relationship to death and violence, while the woman's back turned toward the viewer indicates her position as a fighter ready to protect herself. With its dual symbolism of destruction (skull) and hope (sunset), this image has perfectly recaptured the theme of survival in a world ruled by machines. Goffman's lens draws attention to this depiction as a significant exception to the prevailing tendency towards the objectification of women; in this case, the woman is portrayed as integrated and palpably muscular, not faceless and inert. The skull she holds in her pose shows strength, authority, and readiness to confront danger, subverting gender roles. Her facelessness may imply emotional detachment, but it is also emblematic of her deep involvement in the story. Simply put, the poster speaks to the themes of strength, survival, and hope, and the female character is a fighter, but far outside of the standard tropes of women as objects of adornment and sexual conquest in the media. The skull for destruction, and the sunset for hope, further highlight the eternal war of the Terminator universe.

The *Death Proof* poster

The poster from *Death Proof* prominently features a woman whose body, especially her hips and rear, is sexualized through her stance and tight clothing, reinforcing her objectification. The background elements, including a car with a skull emblem, symbolize violence and death, key themes of the film. Indexical analysis suggests that the woman's sexualized posture places her in a passive role, while the advancing car signifies imminent danger, amplifying her helplessness. The red background evokes blood and violence, emphasizing the film's danger. Using Goffman's framework, the poster fragments the woman's body, obscuring her face and upper torso to erase her agency and reduce her to a mere object of desire. This ritualization of subordination positions her as a passive target for male aggression. The absence of her face in line with licensed withdrawal further detaches her from any personal agency, solidifying her role as an object. Ultimately, the poster reflects the exploitation genre's typical portrayal of women as both sexualized and vulnerable, reinforcing gender stereotypes of women as passive victims and objects of male desire.
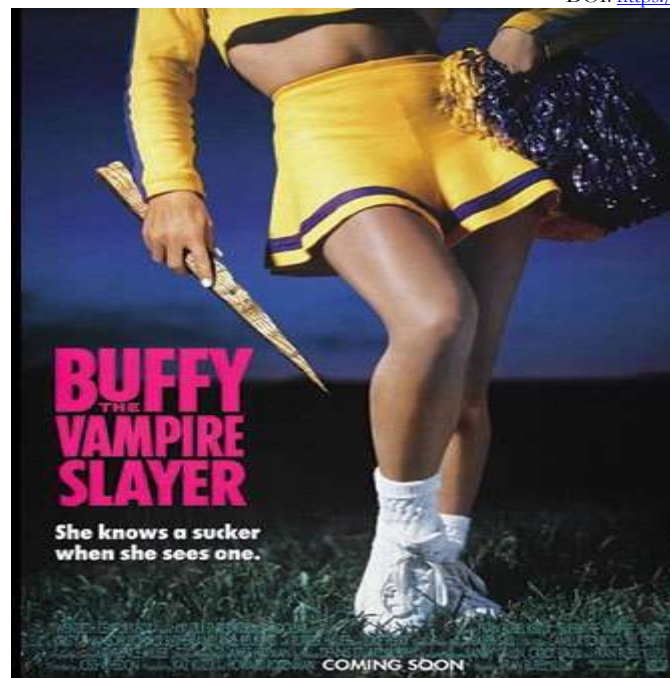

The *For Your Eyes Only* poster

The *For Your Eyes Only* poster exemplifies the contrasting gender roles often seen in James Bond films, analyzed through Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's framework. The poster features a sexualized image

of a woman, with her legs in the foreground, reduced to an object of male desire, while the male figure, symbolized by Bond with an axe, jazz notes, and weaponry, represents control, action, and masculinity. Indexically, the woman's body is eroticized and objectified through her positioning and grip on the gun, which contrasts with the power and dominance of Bond, who is placed as the central figure controlling the situation. Symbols of violence, such as weapons, explosions, and helicopters, emphasize the Bond franchise's thrill and danger while reinforcing traditional gender roles: the woman exists as a passive sex object for Bond's active heroism. Goffman's analysis shows how the woman's face is omitted, fragmenting her body and stripping her of agency, reducing her to a mere visual object in service to the male gaze. The ritualization of subordination is clear, with the woman's provocative stance reinforcing her passive, subordinate role in the background to Bond's dominance. The absence of psychological depth, through licensed withdrawal, further emphasizes her as a sex symbol without involvement in the action. The poster ultimately portrays the stereotypical gender roles in *Bond* films, where women are objectified and positioned as passive objects for male heroes, reinforcing the power dynamics, machismo, and violent themes of the franchise.

The *Wonder Woman* poster

The *For Your Eyes Only* poster exemplifies the contrasting gender roles often seen in James Bond films, analyzed through Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's framework. The poster features a sexualized image of a woman, with her legs in the foreground, reduced to an object of male desire, while the male figure, symbolized by Bond with an axe, jazz notes, and weaponry, represents control, action, and masculinity. Indexically, the woman's body is eroticized and objectified through her positioning and grip on the gun, which contrasts with the power and dominance of Bond, who is placed as the central figure controlling the situation. Symbols of violence, such as weapons, explosions, and helicopters, emphasize the Bond franchise's thrill and danger while reinforcing traditional gender roles: the woman exists as a passive sex object for Bond's active heroism. Goffman's analysis shows how the woman's face is omitted, fragmenting her body and stripping her of agency, reducing her to a mere visual object in service to the male gaze. The ritualization of subordination is clear, with the woman's provocative stance reinforcing her passive, subordinate role in the background to Bond's dominance. The absence of psychological depth, through licensed withdrawal, further emphasizes her as a sex symbol without involvement in the action. The poster ultimately portrays the stereotypical gender roles in *Bond* films, where women are objectified and positioned as passive objects for male heroes, reinforcing the power dynamics, machismo, and violent themes of the franchise.

The *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* poster

The *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* poster presents a dual representation of the main character, blending empowerment with objectification. On one hand, the cheerleader outfit symbolizes femininity, youth, and sexual appeal, while the stake represents power, danger, and Buffy's role as a vampire slayer. This juxtaposition highlights her breaking of traditional gender roles, yet the sexualization of her body, particularly her legs and the obscuring of her face, objectifies her in a way that reduces her to a sexual object. Goffman's framework reveals how the ritualization of subordination and licensed withdrawal contribute to her passive representation, undermining her strength by emphasizing her sexual appeal. Despite being depicted as a powerful, independent heroine, the poster reflects the contradiction in media where women are portrayed as both dominant and objectified, showcasing the persistent theme of sexualizing strong female characters.

The *Suicide Squad* poster

The semiotic analysis of the Suicide Squad poster with Harley Quinn employs Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's framework to contrast Harley Quinn's sexualization with her rebellious, anarchistic strength. The visual motifs of Harley's outfit, cheeky dress, fishnets, high-heeled boots and a baseball bat serve to sexualize her, but they also intimate her capacity for violence and mayhem. The bat becomes an emblem of both her aggression and strength, already potentially making her more than an object of sexual fantasy, although her body is still the most notable aspect of the image reinforcing her objectification. Goffman's framework helps explain how the dismembering of her figure, the focus on her legs and rear, and the avoidance of her face, strips her down and turns her into a character who exists as a figure for male desire. This, but also the lack of her face and the sexualization of her body, suppress her rebellious side: she becomes a visual object to be pleasured rather than a character with unique features. While her weapon suggests power, Harley's sexualization deflates her autonomy, an oppositional visual irony when considering the dynamic between power and objectification. This poster expresses the ambivalence of Harley Quinn's character at once a symbol of defiance and a product of gendered objectification in a way that is believable.

The Wolf of Wall Street poster

It is demonstrated how Peirce's semiotic theory, combined with Goffman's framework, can explore the way gender, power and materialism are represented in the design of a poster for Martin Scorcese's film The Wolf of Wall Street. In a world dictated by wealth and hedonism, the posters show a woman covered in banknotes a representation of objectification and materialism. Her half-naked state diverges from the fully dressed male character, played by Leonardo DiCaprio, who represents power and control in the film. The poster sexing up the woman, giving us her legs, and her backside, obliterating her identity and turning her into nothing more than an object of desire and Thai wealth. Following Goffman's concept of ritualization of subordination, the woman is rendered passive and vulnerable, thereby enabling the enactment of patriarchal gender structures, whilst the men dominate. This licensed withdrawal evident in the pixilation of her face also diminishes her agency. The poster also encapsulates the film's critique of hyper-capitalism, where women are nothing but sexualized objects and it's all dudes, all the way down who control everything money, women's autonomy and identity.

Official Wonder Woman film poster

The *Wonder Woman* 2017 poster

Using Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's frame analysis, the Wonder Woman (2017) poster presents the character as a powerful and heroic presence. The sword and armour highlight her strength and readiness to fight, but they also demonstrate that she is a warrior, and her posture and muscular build prove that she is a leader. The warm background sunset even hints at transformation, even in the face of her epic hero journey. Rather than presenting a fragmented or eroticized view of women that's typical in mainstream media, this poster magnifies Wonder Woman's full, unencumbered, empowered self. She is an aggressive character who takes charge and is an inversion of traditional female tropes. No licensed withdrawal included, wonder woman here in the poster form, is a full-fledged superhero, all prepared to encounter and both protective and powerful.

Ultimately, by analysing the themes of 10 film posters using Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's model, this article highlights the complex and contradictory portrayals of women in popular media. Of others that show women as more powerful beings some are; Wonder Woman, and Buffy the Vampire Slayer While others objectify and sexualize the female form such as Suicide Squad and The Wolf of Wall Street In many cases, the visual aspects of the film underline the dichotomy of women, that they can be both powerful and vulnerable at the same time, often represented by broken pieces of their bodies or a mirror play of dominance and submission. Through these differing paradigms, one thing remains constant; media both does and does not continue to struggle with the dichotomy of empowering women while still interacting with the sexualization of them into the role of sex objects, as an offering to men. But these posters that put powerful women in commanding roles also speak to some of the same media representations struggle as women, and their autonomy, are often treated as sexualized symbols. This duality highlights the difficulty of achieving true gender parity in visual media, as images that empower women across genres stand to influence the way that audiences understand female characters and their roles in the stories we tell along with the representation of women in the world at large.

Discussion of the Analysis and Findings

Through insights gained from the application of Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's frame analysis to the ten film posters, we can gain insight into the representation of female characters in contemporary

media. This study investigates the representation of women as both powerful agents of change and sex objects by examining the visual aspects, body posture, clothing and accessories of female superheroines. Here, we demonstrate how these experiences of viewing strong female role models for women can influence to empower the gender and encourage strong female characters, it has also become more connected to relationships focused on objectification which still being mainstream character across the visual media.

One of the most remarkable findings is the recurrent theme of dualism in the representation of women. Posters like these for Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Wonder Woman, and Suicide Squad offer up female characters who, on the surface, seem to break out of the confines of stereotypical gendered behaviour. These female figures, whose strength, ability and autonomy are accentuated by visual cues like armour, weapons and body language, are often depicted as heroic. Yet, beneath these performances of empowerment lies an undercurrent of sexualisation. For instance, the characterization of Buffy in a cheerleading uniform, or Harley Quinn in skintight clothing and highly sexualized body positioning, points only to a more insidious pattern in media of linking female power to desirability and sex appeal.

In stark contrast, the visual imageries in "The Wolf of Wall Street" poster suggest commodification and objectification of women through visual metaphors or associations, as the woman draped in money exemplifies the intersection of wealth, power, and the sexualized body. At the bottom, the woman becomes a mere object of desire freed of agency and any other character beyond her physical form. The fact that all of these films suggest that women are in control, that they are powerful women in their own right (indeed, that's the empowering imagery that we see painted on posters) but yet here, in watching any of these films, their entire value is ultimately expressed through their physicality, their sexual appeal, and therefore, these films operate so deeply as instantiations of the patrilineal ideology.

The other major finding of the female representation study was the impact of fragmentation and dismemberment. This is the first show curated independently by Kenyan-born, Pittsburgh-based filmmaker, writer, and cultural historian, Goffman, and her analysis of the ritualization of subordination embedded in much of the posters she examines is both straightforward and devastating: Many focus solely on dismembering the female figure — to the body part, often sexualized, but without the face. This technique does not only take away the humanity out of the character, in movies like The Suicide Squad, but it also reinforces the notion that the worth of women is found within the physical physique and not tagged to personality or competence. This splintering is in contrast to the way male characters are often depicted as whole and taking charge, owning the scene.

This understanding is further deepened by tracking indexical elements in the posters through Peircian semiotics, highlighting how strength and objectification are indeed highly rapturous. Symbols, such as weapons or a favourite body armour signifying power, clothing and body positioning serve to highlight sexualized attributes. These tunics underlie the social narrative of women in media: strong, but not that strong; complex and multilayered, yet wanting to be wanted. However, the research shows that even in films where women assume the role of central, active characters, core visual markers still bind them to traditional gender archetypes and ideals of beauty.

In addition, the difference between Wonder Woman vs other posters such as Suicide Squad is a significant factor in the discourse of female representation in the media. Wonder Woman attempts to shoot in contrast to the objectification that can be viewed in many superhero films, showing its heroine as a whole, not split or sexualized, but not all films incur such lewd and voyeuristic treatment of women as subject to the male gaze. The poster's emphasis on the armour, sword, and confident posture of Wonder Woman reflects how visuals can be used to support a female character's strength without making her the object of the male gaze.

Even as this study indicates that contemporary cinema seeks to challenge traditional gender roles, the media representation of women continues to be complex and contradictory. On the other, we have characters such as Buffy, Harley Quinn, and Wonder Woman; they represent new and, dare I say, more empowering narratives. However, the continuing sexualization of female characters, often reinforced through

objectifying visual signs and fragmentation, suggests there is still a long way to go before the patriarchal gaze that pervades women's media representation is dismantled.

Overall, the findings suggest that gendered stereotypes are consistently persisting within film posters despite women's changing representation within the media. We have more strong female characters than ever, but they are also sex symbols, which skews their characterizations and goes against the idea of different expectations. These results underscore the importance of more nuanced treatments of the representation of women in visual media, and a critical consideration of the extent to which such representations are at work in wider understandings of gender, power and sexuality.

Conclusion

Using Peirce's semiotic theory and Goffman's frame analysis, this study critically reviews the representations of female characters in ten iconic film posters and exposes an ongoing tension in the representation of women in cinematic marketing. Some posters such as Wonder Woman and Buffy the Vampire Slayer use visual signifiers like armour, swords and assertive body language to represent female characters as strong, independent figures, while others rely on traditional gender stereotypes to objectify women. In movies like Suicide Squad and The Wolf of Wall Street, women's bodies are frequently broken apart de-emphasizing or omitting their faces in favour of legs, torsos or backs. Fragmenting female characters like this reduces them to conditions of the male gaze and removes their narrative potential, making them mere objects. Commodification is also evident in The Wolf of Wall Street, where a money-shrouded woman represents both wealth and servility the type of gendered passivity which media representation should seek to challenge.

Deploying semiotic analysis, the study highlights such visual elements as weapons, clothing and body posture, which frequently straddle the boundary between empowerment and objectification, associating female power with sexual desirability. Goffman's analysis also demonstrates how rituals of subordination and dismemberment are still the preferred modes in marketing, as women assume submissive or eroticized positions even when shown in a position of power. Despite progress in female representation, the findings reinforce the continuation of patriarchal norms in visual culture. Media has made progress in representing women as autonomous and powerful, but too often, these representations stay rooted in objectification. This study serves as a reminder of the urgency of the replacement of these visual and narrative memes with others, more grounded in reality and agency, in the framing of women in the media. The approach is layered, and an integration of the analysis of how gender, power, and representation intersect may be a future project.

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