RATED M FOR MISOGYNY: REIMAGINING GENDER ASSESSMENTS FOR FILM

by

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Abstract

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The Bechdel Test is effective at raising awareness about biased gender portrayals in media, yet it has been criticized for being an inaccurate assessment of gender balance in film. Employing gender theory and political economy, this research interrogates the feasibility of creating a reliable assessment of gender in film, and explores multiple uses for such an assessment. It involves interviews with film professionals on the impact that a reliable gender assessment could have on their work and the industry, and an examination of representation research models focused on gender. The research proposes and tests an assessment of misogyny in film. It makes a preliminary contribution to the creation of a simple assessment for misogyny in mainstream movies as one step to challenge stereotyped representations of gender in media. It contributes to communications literature on industry and policy responses to biased portrayals in film.

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Introduction

G-rated films exclude nudity, excessive violence and explicit language, but often showcase a myriad of gender stereotypes. Female characters continue to be younger and more sexualized than their male co-stars (Lauzen, 2015). They occupy 28 per cent of speaking roles, and hold 20 per cent of on-screen employment (Smith, Choueiti, Prescott, & Pieper, 2013). At the 2016 Academy Awards the campaign "Ask her more" criticized Hollywood for its gender biases by encouraging reporters to ask female actors about their roles rather than their outfits (Sorren, 2016). Relatedly, female celebrities are getting involved in initiatives to challenge stereotyped depictions of women in media and advance women as filmmakers. Geena Davis has launched an organization focused on improving the representations of women in film, and Reese Witherspoon has founded both production and digital media companies with mandates to tell female-driven stories[1] (Spangler, 2016). Criticizing the slow pace of change at the 2017 Cannes Film Festival, Nicole Kidman also recently gave a speech emphasizing the importance of female directors in Hollywood, mentioning that only 4.2 per cent of the major motion pictures of 2016 were directed by women (Howell, 2017).

For all of the attention paid to gender representation issues through campaigns such as "Ask her more" and celebrity initiatives, the three-to-one ratio of male-to-female characters in films has not changed since the 1950s (Smith et al., 2013). As Hollywood dominates film audiences globally, the mainstream film content produced in the U.S. influences Canadian audiences, despite the fact that there is a robust film industry in the nation. In Canada, organizations such as Women in View (WIV), Women in Film and Television (WIFT), and Media Action have developed campaigns targeting the general public as well as financiers to raise awareness of gender stereotyping in media, and to influence the content created by Canadian filmmakers in the country.

While Hollywood is privately financed, Canada supports its film industry with public funds[2]. The film and TV industry in Canada generates $20.4 billion in gross domestic production annually, and in 2014-15 alone the sector received $1.55 billion in federal investments (Nordicity, 2013; CMPA, 2016; Coles, 2016). Canadian producers are attractive to international partners as they provide access to the nation's lucrative tax credits and financial grants, and the country is a world leader in international joint

ventures (IJV) (Tinic, 2005; Tinic, 2015). As Canada's film industry receives considerable public support, many have argued that the nation has a responsibility to better reflect the diversity of Canadian society not only on-screen, but also behind the cameras (Coles, 2016; Fraticelli, 2015), as seen in Sweden (SFI, 2017). The Government of Canada is currently overhauling the funding model for its cultural industries (Leblanc, 2016), presenting an opportunity to make policy recommendations that could shape the film industry for years to come. To-date gender equality in media has largely been targeted as an advocacy issue, yet policy-based change can lead to more lasting gains for the film industry than awareness-raising alone. One small step toward gender equality on-screen may be expanding the film rating system to include an assessment for gender. Such an expansion could generate ongoing awareness about gender stereotyping in film while encouraging filmmakers to produce more gender-balanced programming.

The Bechdel Test is a well-known assessment for gender representation in movies and has been popularized in recent years. It is a simple test that asks if a film includes at least two female characters who speak to each other about something other than a man (Bechdel, 1985). As the majority of mainstream films screened at movie theatres in Canada and the U.S. fail this test, it has been effective at generating awareness about biased portrayals of women in media. The Test is an inaccurate assessment of gender, but its popularity suggests that a more reliable tool would fulfill an important need among audiences. The present research seeks to develop a more effective gender assessment than the Bechdel Test, while theorizing whether or not it is possible to reliably assess gender within a progressive, anti-oppressive intersectional framework. It explores multiple potential applications for gender assessments with a focus on film ratings (e.g. G, PG, R), and examines the social, political, and economic factors that have informed the current rating system that encourages stereotyped content. Assessments of gender, gender stereotyping, and misogyny are explored in the context of gender theory with a focus on strategic essentialism, which suggests that tactics that reinforce essentialist binaries can be necessary when advocating for the advancement of women. A mixed-methods approach is used in the research, combining interviewing with an analysis of representation research to formulate a new tool to assess gender in film.

The first chapter provides a selective literature review of the core concepts, terms, and theories employed in the present research. Chapter two provides an overview of the methodology used as well as ethical considerations. In chapter three the work of post-structuralist gender theorists is explored to examine the theoretical and moral implications of building a tool to assess gender in media, analyzing the utility of such a tool and who it might benefit. The feminist post-structuralist theorists studied in this research pose a challenge to think beyond the gender binary to create alternatives that are not bound to hegemonic conditions. These gender scholars provide a theoretical foundation to assess whether or not policies that strive to elevate the status of women are beneficial within a patriarchal neoliberal society, or if such actions reinforce binary essentialism on a broader political scale. Assessing gender in film is interrogated as a strategic essentialist approach to gender equity advocacy. Chapter four merges gender theory with feminist political economy to investigate mainstream film representations of gender, while interrogating the history of the film rating system in Ontario and the U.S. Ontario is specifically explored because it is home to the largest film industry in Canada, and the U.S. is examined as it influences the film industry throughout Canada and globally. The impact of film ratings on content is assessed in chapter five, along with the methods by which ratings shape the gendered commodity audience. While this research is focused on gender assessments it also delves into other ways to impact change on-screen based on feedback from interviewees and, in chapter five, it explores the idea to balance gender and diversity behind the camera. This chapter also critically analyzes issues and questions that arose during interviews including the notion of the female gaze and how it can be detected. In chapter six, a new gender assessment is proposed and tested, which focuses explicitly on misogyny in film. This chapter also explores potential applications of the assessment, from film rating systems to videogame ratings and as tools for financiers. Additional recommendations are made to improve representations of gender in the film industry. Throughout this thesis, gender equity advocacy is placed alongside an interrogation of binary essentialist categories. The research explores how reliable assessments of gender in film could impact audiences and the film industry in Canada, and whether or not such tools might affect hegemonic social conditions.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework summarizes and contextualizes a collection of literature relevant to this research. It explores gender theory and political economy, and defines key terms such as cultural hegemony, post-feminism, and misogyny. The section also provides an overview of existing assessments of gender balance in film, and touches upon related considerations such as the gender divide in labour within the creative and cultural industries, the policies of financiers as they relate to gender balance, and film rating systems. The research included in this section was selected to address the research questions: is it possible to create an effective, reliable assessment of gender in film; and, if so, what criteria might such a test include? The chapter provides a selective review of relevant research.

Gender

Post-structuralist gender theorists

Gender theory has a great deal to add to the dialogue around assessing gender in film. It problematizes the categories male and female and dismantles the conflation of biological sex and gender. Before being able to assess depictions of gender in film, it is important to clarify the definition of "gender" that is being used. Binary essentialism represents the notion that the world consists of a series of dichotomous, fixed categories including male and female, gay and straight, masculine and feminine. It employs either-or thinking rather than placing traits on a continuum. Similar to stereotypes, binary essentialist categories act as shortcuts to make sense of the world, giving rise to limiting and oppressive societal structures (Griffin, 2015).

Teresa de Lauretis (1987) and Judith Butler (1988) reject the notion of gender as sexual difference, or the pervasive idea that one's anatomy dictates her or his expression of femininity or masculinity. These theorists do not deny sexual difference, but instead push past it to interrogate gender as a separate and significant aspect of one's identity. According to de Lauretis (1987), essentialism inscribes patriarchal terms within the political unconscious of dominant cultural discourses, which are reproduced even in feminism. When feminist thought incorporates the belief that sexual difference dictates gender, an assumption is already being made about the inherent qualities of men and

women, which infiltrates all interpretations, critique and analysis (de Lauretis, 1987). In cultures dominated by patriarchal ideology, the assumption that women are biologically predisposed to be feminine implies that they are deserving of their more marginal place in society including how they are represented in film, and that to suggest otherwise would be to challenge an innate, fixed bodily capacity.

de Lauretis (1987) builds on Michel Foucault's theory of sexuality and characterizes both gender and film as technologies, revealing gender to be a social construction rather than a natural state of being. de Lauretis (1987) demonstrates that gender and cinema are given significance only by their viewers, and that they are both constructed representations that are subject to destabilization. Given that conceptions of sexuality stem from cultural understandings of gender as an essentialist binary, it follows that sexuality is a product of the construction of gender, making it an equally unstable category. de Lauretis' (1987) theory thereby destabilizes heteronormative assumptions about gender and sexuality. When de Lauretis (1987) says, "the representation of gender *is* its construction," she argues that the representations of gender that are experienced in media, the judicial system, and even in higher education, are inscribed with the discourses upon which they were constructed (p. 3). Representations in social technologies including film, theory, and gender itself, continue to reproduce the terms of their constructions. For this reason, advocating for change among social technologies will never result in a panacea with regard to balancing gender relations, yet it could create reimaginings that edge closer to a more fulsome revolution.

Similarly rejecting the conflation of sexual difference and gender, Butler (1988) gestures toward Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion in *The Second Sex* that, "one is not born, but, rather, becomes a woman" (p. 520). Showing the category of women to be a social construct rather than a biological state, Butler (1988) and de Beauvoir display the material dimensions of the body as distinct from the cultural meanings that the body comes to signify. Butler (1988) also implies that the body's signification is loaded with its historical context, and that in performing one's gender a subject is reproducing historical situations and relations. Rather than taking the "gendered self to be prior to its acts," Butler (1988) draws a parallel with de Lauretis in suggesting that these acts not

only constitute the identity of the performer, but also continuously reconstruct the illusion that the identity represents (p. 520).

Butler's (1988) phenomenological interpretation suggests that the body is a cultural sign and gender identity is, "a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (p. 520). Butler (1988) asserts that gender is not a stable identity that acts proceed from, but one created through a stylized repetition of acts. If the framework for gender identity is the repetition of acts over time, Butler (1988) contends that the possibilities of transformation can be found in a different sort of enactment. She does not suggest that altering mundane, everyday acts will bring about significant change. Instead, the transformation of social relations requires a fundamental shift in hegemonic conditions rather than in the individual acts that are created by those conditions (Butler, 1988). Since individual acts cannot be separated from dominant ideology, and in fact derive from it, Butler (1988) suggests that it is not until hegemonic social conditions are transformed that true alternatives will be available. Butler (1988) also points out that the false universal category of man has come to imply humanness itself, and cautions against using the category of woman as a universal indicator of an oppressed, sub-human position, as these categories reify the gender binary and the assumption of mutually exclusive modes of being.

Rather than advocating for gender equality, Butler (1988) and de Lauretis (1987) argue that it is necessary to step outside of the patriarchal frame of reference, away from a focus on individual choice and toward ongoing disruptions of structural power at both micro and macro levels. Yet, although equality-based advocacy can reify the gender binary, achieving equal rights for men and women may be crucial to enabling a revolutionary disruption of gender relations. Butler and de Lauretis provide a theoretical foundation to assess whether or not acts that strive to elevate the status of women are beneficial within a patriarchal, neoliberal society.

Defining cultural hegemony

Kishonna Gray (2015) takes a similar position to Butler and de Lauretis with regard to essentialism and states that it is important for hegemonic social conditions to change, yet she also suggests that acts of resistance and activist-based research can serve an anti-racist feminist cause (p. 73). Gray (2015) uses Antonio Gramsci's theories of hegemony

to outline how representations of gender and race in media products serve to normalize and legitimate societal inequalities (p. 7). Gray (2015) characterizes hegemony as an ideology understood as natural, ubiquitous, and inevitable that is sustained through the consent of subordinate groups rather than through the use of physical force. Ideology operates at an unconscious level, informing and constructing everyday life (Gray, 2015). Through this process, oppressive power relations are maintained by circulating the notion that the dominant group has society's best interests at heart (Gray, 2015). Gray (2015) demonstrates that representations in cultural products that conform to hegemonic whiteness and masculinity serve to justify the oppression of marginalized groups, a topic also interrogated by cultural and race theorist bell hooks (2013). While Gray (2015) focuses her scholarship on videogames, she provides a useful framework to interrogate stereotyped representations in film and to better understand the societal forces that reproduce these constructions.

Vincent Mosco (2009) points out that hegemony is not only based in ideology, but is equally rooted in values. While ideology refers to the deliberate construction of a social reality that advances specific interests and reifies existing hierarchies of power, values are shared social norms that connect a range of people and strata (Mosco, 2009). Hegemony serves to produce a dynamic blueprint for social and cultural norms (Mosco, 2009). Mosco (2009) also demonstrates the importance of traditions in hegemony, as these are ritualistic practices that represent values and norms consistently repeated, "which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawn as cited by Mosco, 2009, p. 206). Individuation is similarly significant to hegemony in capitalism, as it transforms collective categories and identities into singular ones, serving to obscure the importance of class, race, and gender (Mosco, 2009).

Many ideas that are widely accepted in society are politically charged values, from the notion of the marketplace as the cornerstone of a productive economy, to voting as central to democracy, and journalistic objectivity as a product of two often opposing views on a topic (Mosco, 2009). Such ideas constitute a "common sense currency of everyday life, developing out of those social relationships that make up hierarchies of class, gender, race, etc.," rather than being imposed from above (Mosco, 2009, p. 207). Mosco (2009) characterizes hegemonic ideas as dynamic rather than fixed, as they

respond to shifting political and social relations to take on new forms. An example of the dynamism of hegemonic ideas is the incorporation of formerly oppositional notions such as gender equality (Mosco, 2009). While the idea of gender equality is pacifying to many who advocate for women's rights, a more revolutionary approach would be one centered around equity, which would involve acceptance of and respect for gender difference (Irigaray, 2001).

Hegemony is a means of creating the structuration of social relationships, yet it does not guarantee their reproduction (Mosco, 2009). Political economy can identify the sources of instability in dominant hegemony by assessing the gap between lived experience and what passes for common sense (Mosco, 2009). For instance, capitalism elicits consent for the idea that it produces widespread material abundance in a world that is full of poverty (Mosco, 2009). To attempt to show that the economic system is not to blame, arguments that there is simply a culture of poverty among certain people places all responsibility on the poor themselves (Mosco, 2009).

Both Gray (2015) and Mosco (2009) suggest that acts of resistance can impact hegemony. While cultural practices of opposition and resistance do not always presume an alternative hegemony, they may make it easier to do so (Gray, 2015; Mosco, 2009). Imagining democratic communication systems can lead to envisioning inclusive participation in decisions about global governance and equal access to the resources that are essential to leading a full life (Mosco, 2009). Communication plays a vital role in hegemony, as media is crucial to the "maintenance of hegemonic control as well as to resistance and the construction of counter-hegemonies" (Mosco, 2009, p. 210). Alternative hegemonies enable an envisioning of a new common sense for social life, which suggests it is feasible to imagine these possibilities and enact their realization (Mosco, 2009). Mosco (2009) and Gray (2015) both draw parallels with Butler (1988) and de Lauretis (1987) in advocating for a reimagining of social structures, yet they articulate methods of resistance that are more feasible and grounded. The present research draws from the work of Gray (2015) and Mosco (2009), and compares their perspectives to those of Butler and de Lauretis.

Post-feminism

Cultural theorist and communication scholar Rosalind Gill (2007) characterizes post-feminism as a pervasive sensibility that suggests feminism is no longer necessary since gains have already been made toward gender equality. It celebrates narrow and biased conceptions of women's empowerment as evidence that feminism is not needed (Gill, 2007). Diane Negra (2009) suggests that post-feminism is a disguised reproduction of gender stereotypes that only celebrates individual choice when it includes traditional, uncritical discourses of femininity. Post-feminism[3] is explored in the present research as a potential risk of developing a gender assessment for film that might be used on multiple platforms.

Misogyny

Misogyny and sexism are sometimes used as synonymous terms, yet research on misogyny demonstrates that, while it is related to sexism, it is distinct from it in several ways. Karla Mantilla (2015) examines misogyny on online platforms and explains that patterned misogynistic behaviours include, "domestic violence, rape, date rape, stalking, street harassment, sexual harassment in the workplace, and now gendertrolling" (p. 149). Mantilla (2015) points out that such behaviours are primarily aimed at women, are pervasive, and have a major and harmful impact on women's lives. Relatedly, Sarah Banet-Weiser and Kate M. Miltner (2016) study popular misogyny and define it as, "a basic anti-female violent expression that circulates to wide audiences on popular media platforms" (p. 172). Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) explain that the popular circulation of misogyny contributes to a political and economic culture that is inscribed with misogynistic values, which can be seen in the normalization of rape culture, validation of violent threats against women, and in reproductive rights being threatened or "formally retracted" (p. 172).

For Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016), popular misogyny is a response to popular feminism, which frequently materializes on traditional and social media platforms and is connected to a "confidence movement" that encourages women to be confident and possess high self-esteem (p. 172). According to Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) some men, mainly those who "ascribe to the tenets of toxic masculinity," perceive popular feminism as an attack on their presumed "rightful place in the social hierarchy," leading

them to endorse and reinforce misogynistic viewpoints (p. 172). Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016) suggest that the "fear of female encroachment" can be found in online movements such as Gamergate, and also historically in discourse around global recessions where some men become threatened by potential economic loss as a result of women filling male-dominated career streams (p. 172). The losses of economic recession can become "transformed into male injury, specifically caused by women" (Banet-Weiser and Miltner, 2016, p. 172).

Ngaire Donaghue (2015) discusses former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's speech on misogyny, in which Gillard accuses a colleague of blatant sexism. Donaghue (2015) explores portrayals of the speech in Australian media, and notes that Gillard's claims of misogyny were frequently dismissed as trivial and irrelevant. Donaghue (2015) explains that in an article in The Australian, an opposition MP mentioned the gravity of the word "misogyny," and pointed to the Taliban attack on Malala Yousafzai in Pakistan as an example of 'real' misogyny (p. 14). Donaghue (2015) argues that reprimanding women for complaining about misogyny or sexism by highlighting more serious forms of oppression serves to trivialize and dismiss more normalized experiences of misogyny. Donaghue (2015) demonstrates that gesturing only to the most severe instances of misogyny distracts from misogyny that exists in everyday formats, such as discrimination in the workplace. Interestingly, after Gillard's speech on the topic, the Australian English dictionary expanded its definition of misogyny from "a hatred of women," to include, "entrenched prejudice against women" (Asian News International, 2012).

In examining how gender-based violence (GBV) is linked to misogyny, Denise Buiten (2007) suggests that misogynistic behaviour can take the form of both overt and subtle actions, and that the parameters of such behaviours can be contested. Kate Manne (2016) also discusses misogyny in the context of behaviours and states that in contrast to misogyny, which is based in action, sexism is centered in ideology and often unconscious. Manne (2016) states that "misogyny upholds the social norms of patriarchies by patrolling and policing them," yet, "sexism serves to *justify* these norms largely via an ideology of supposedly natural differences between men and women with respect to their talents, interests, proclivities, and appetites" (p. 1). Manne (2016) explains that sexist individuals believe in "men's superiority over women in masculine-

coded domains," such as intellectual pursuits, commerce, sports, and politics, while also assuming that men are less suited to "feminine-coded activities, such as domestic work, emotional labor, and caring for children and other dependents" (p. 1). If sexism is rooted in belief, "misogynists may hope that sexists are right, while fearing just the opposite" (Manne, 2016, p. 1). In exploring Donald Trump's views and actions toward women Manne (2016) states, "misogyny is not best understood in psychological terms" and that one can be justified in deducing that Trump is a misogynist without knowing "his innermost thoughts, feelings, and motivations" (p. 1). Manne (2016) concludes that, "misogyny *is* what misogyny *does* to women" and should be thought of from the perspectives of its targets rather than from that of its perpetrators (p. 1). Manne (2016) also draws parallels between misogyny and racism, and states that both are "less about seeing women and non-whites as less than fully human than it is about resenting and punishing "uppity" members of these groups for not knowing their place" (Manne Comments, p. 1). She states that this is the reason that misogyny and racism have high comorbidity, and adds that its practitioners, "tend to be social dominants generally," giving the example that Trump is both a misogynist and anti-Islam (Manne Comments, 2016).

Feminist political economy

Feminism and political economy address interconnected issues and offer critical understandings of entertainment media systems. Feminism focuses on the gendered system of privilege, while political economy examines the privilege rooted in economic control (Riordan, 2002). Feminist political economy reveals the role of production, consumption and distribution in the gendering of mainstream media content (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Feminism remains at the margins of political economy scholarship, and political economic considerations are not central to most feminist media and communication scholarship (Riordan, 2004). Political economy literature also rarely considers the ways that culture and the economy are mutually reproductive, yet analyzing cultural artifacts is highly relevant to understanding the economic, social and political forces that enact upon and reconstruct media products (Griffin, 2015).

Most political economists work from a Marxist tradition giving more attention to the exploitation of workers under capitalism than to the oppression of women under

patriarchy, and assuming that class is gender neutral when it in fact has a masculine bias (Riordan, 2004). Drawing from Dallas Smythe's (1977) work on the commodity audience and Eileen Meehan's (2002) feminist expansion of his argument, the present research examines the tendency for media corporations to overlook women in constructing the ideal audience. While political economic research analyzes how the commodity audience is bought and sold, feminist political economists examine how it is also gendered.

Women, and especially women of colour, generally have less access to resources than other groups and limited control over production (Riordan, 2004). Ellen Riordan (2004) provides an entry point to understand how similar economic conditions can produce different experiences for women who are visible minorities, LGBTQ, have disabilities, and/or are low income, and to investigate the intersections of such characteristics. While media portrays stereotypes around race, gender, class, sexuality, gender-identity, age, and ability level, the present research focuses specifically on gender using an intersectional framework that acknowledges that distinct subjectivities constitute different modes of experience.

Popular culture is constructed by wider cultural practices and, in turn, informs and constructs these practices (Griffin, 2015). If women are understood within a specific cultural and temporal setting to be most realistic when portrayed as tropes such as damsels in distress, this reflects embedded cultural biases, and the reproduction of such stereotypes in media serves to legitimate these biases (Griffin, 2015). Penny Griffin (2015) provides a political economic framework to analyze the social impact of gendered representations in popular culture.

Nicholas Garnham (1990) argues that cultural artifacts must be situated within their historical contexts to reveal the interests of producers and the ways that capitalism has exercised political and ideological domination of the economy. In that spirit, this research situates the modern-day mainstream film industry within its historical context, examining the political, social and economic forces that have led to an arsenal of highly gendered film products. Given that U.S. corporations have a stronghold on mainstream entertainment media, the films that Hollywood produces not only impact the consciousness of Americans, but also of citizens around the world (McChesney, 2002). Canada's film industry has been shaped by U.S. interests to such an extent that scholar

Manjunath Pendakur (1990) has referred to the country as, "a cultural colony of the United States" (p. 29). A feminist political economic analysis of the U.S. film industry explains how capitalism and patriarchy have influenced the industry to produce content that reinforces gender stereotypes that are distributed globally. It also reveals how the film rating system has influenced the industry by developing a classification tool that maximizes corporate profits while reinforcing stereotypes. Since political economic research often ignores the gendered nature of capitalism and privileges production over consumption, this research examines production and consumption along with distribution in analyzing the context informing representations of gender in mainstream film.

The Bechdel Test and other gender assessments

In response to pervasive gender biases in mainstream film, feminist and activist communities have taken up the Bechdel Test to rate representations of gender on-screen. The Bechdel Test assesses gender balance by asking if a film includes at least two female characters who speak to each other about something other than a man (Bechdel, 1985). The Test was developed by cartoonist Alison Bechdel in 1985 in her now famous comic *Dykes to Watch Out For* to draw attention to the low and stereotyped representations of women in film. The issue is that the Bechdel Test was never meant to be used as a technical tool (Lauzen, 2014). Films with strong female protagonists such as *Gravity* (2013) fail the Test, as such a film does not fulfill any of its three requirements (Lauzen, 2014). Some highly gender-biased films pass, such as *American Hustle* (2013), yet doing so says nothing about the quality of a film's portrayals of women or whether or not a movie includes gender stereotypes (Lauzen, 2014).

Despite the fact that the Bechdel Test does not rate films accurately, it has surfaced in the film industry as a legitimate means to address gender representation in film. Eurimages[4] is an international film financier with 38 member states that allocates a portion of its funding to scripts determined to be gender balanced by using the Bechdel Test (Council of Europe, 2015). Relatedly, several independent movie theatres in Sweden rate the gender balance of films they screen using the Bechdel Test, and those that pass are given an A rating, which is publicized on promotional materials at these theatres (Koivunen, Ryberg, & Horak, 2013; A-märkt, 2015).

As the Bechdel Test has been found to set low and inaccurate standards for what constitutes equal representation of gender in film (Lauzen, 2014), other assessments have been created to fill the gap. The film database IMDb recently began assigning F-Ratings to films listed on its website. F-Ratings are assigned to films that are either written or directed by at least one woman, as well as to movies that feature "significant women on screen" (F-Rated, 2017). Films that feature all three of the criteria receive a triple F-Rating, which has been granted to only 185 of the approximately one million films listed on IMDb (F-Rated, 2017; IMDb, 2017). The F-Rating system was created in 2014 by Holly Tarquini, Executive Director of the Bath Film Festival, based in England, to support women as filmmakers and encourage more diverse stories (Mumford, 2017). While the F-Rating system has garnered considerable media attention and public interest, it too remains an inaccurate and unreliable indicator of gender balance in film. Its vague on-screen requirement for "significant women on screen" makes it difficult to assess gender representations (F-Rating, 2017). The F-Rating website acknowledges that its third and final requirement, "…is the most controversial of the F-Rating's three criteria" and goes on to state that it, "encourage[s] you [audiences, the public] to debate it with your colleagues, family and friends" (F-Rating, 2017). While some argue that it is useful for the F-Rating's final criteria to remain nebulous to better incite debate among activist communities and various publics, it leaves room for a more reliable tool that points to specific ways that women and girls are stereotyped in films. Importantly, the F-Rating highlights off-screen labour, which is known for being dominated by white, cisgender, heterosexual men, especially in technical and senior level roles (Coles, 2016; Conor, 2014; Smith, 2011). The F-Rating system's vague terms around portrayals make it an unreliable tool to objectively assess gender in film.

Media literacy activist and cultural critic Anita Sarkeesian (2012) has proposed an addendum to the Bechdel Test. She suggests that in order to pass her revised version of the test, films must show at least two women speaking to each other about something other than a man for more than 60 seconds (Sarkeesian, 2012). While this is a creative attempt to adjust the Bechdel Test, it does little to address its empirical flaws.

There are multiple additional gender assessments proposed in online activist communities. The Sexy Lamp Test states that if the female characters in a film can be

replaced with sexy lamps or other inanimate objects, the movie fails (Berrett, 2015). The DuVernay Test adapts the Bechdel Test for race and asks if a film includes at least two people of colour who speak to one another about something other than a white person (Child, 2016). The Mako Mori Test is named for a female character in the film *Pacific Rim* (2013) and was created because the movie fails the Bechdel Test despite the fact that it challenges gender stereotypes with a strong female protagonist who is also a person of colour (Romano, 2013). The Mako Mori Test asks whether or not a film includes at least one female character who gets her own narrative that is not centered around a man's story (Romano, 2013). The Mako Mori Test fills some of the gaps left by the Bechdel Test by allowing for more flexibility in the narratives of female characters, but films that include highly biased portrayals of women could still easily pass this test. The 60 Second Addendum, Mako Mori Test, Sexy Lamp Test, and DuVernay Test are all meant to address the flaws of the Bechdel Test, but since their parameters are narrow and/or vague, they are not feasible alternatives. While others have proposed different modifications, there is still no reliable version of the Bechdel Test, nor of a simple, user-friendly tool to effectively assess gender in film.

Representation research has made gains that could be applied to gender assessments. The Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GDIQ) is a software tool that automates conventional representation research by detecting the number of male and female characters on screen, and analyzing speaking roles to capture how long each character talks during the film (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2016). This automated tool brings up evocative questions when gender is problematized as a construct. That is, how might such a tool assess non-binary characters? Also, what are the cues the software uses to assess gender? It is fitting for a software system to analyze gender in binary terms, but a more effective tool would also include an assessment for characters that are gender fluid and/or do not neatly conform to gender categories. That being said, the ability to use software to identify gender – even in binary terms – would be an advancement that could help showcase biases in the representations of male and female characters. It could also pave the way for more nuanced software that accounts for gender fluidity.

Gendered labour

As a great deal of decisions about movie content are made by writers, directors, and senior producers, the labour that shapes films is an important consideration in any conversation about representation. Research on labour reveals that many on-screen biases are reflective of imbalanced and homogenous media workplaces. Women remain concentrated in entry level and administrative roles in the film and TV industry in Canada and the U.S., where work is often project-based and non-standard contracts are the norm (Coles, 2013; Coutanche, Davis, & Zboralska, 2015; Neff, 2012). The project-based nature of the film and TV industry has created precarious arrangements for workers, who are frequently contractors and experience "bulimic" patterns, alternating between working long hours for weeks or months and then struggling to find contracts (Wing Fai, Gill, & Randle, 2015; McRobbie, 2015). Contract-based work arrangements also mean that many workers are unable to adequately access employment insurance, health benefits, and parental or illness leave (Coles, 2016; McRobbie, 2015). As attainment of work is largely based on informal networks in media industries, high importance is placed on reputations and workers often avoid making complaints for fear of being blacklisted for future jobs (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Coles, 2013; Blair, 2001). While challenges related to flexible work arrangements and reputation economies affect most workers in the industry, gendered labour dynamics lead to differences in the career outcomes of men and women (O'Brien, 2014).

The creative and cultural industries (CCI) are heralded as diverse and egalitarian, yet research on pay level, employment, and seniority shows that gender-based inequalities remain a persistent feature of these sectors (Conor et al., 2015). Women are clustered in the youngest cohorts of CCI workforces, and are less likely than their male counterparts to have children (Conor et al., 2015). A UK-based study by David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker (2015) demonstrates that biased discourses accompany the gender segregation of career streams in the media industries, including stereotypes that women are more supportive and nurturing than men, better communicators, and more organized. Such research reveals that workplace sexism may be subtler than traditional definitions allow (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015). Relatedly, Vicki Mayer (2013) researches the process by which forms of work associated with female characteristics are deemed

subordinate. Mayer's (2013) findings are aligned with those of Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2015), and her study also reveals that feminized work often involves setting aside ones own emotions to make others feel more comfortable. The feminization of labour legitimates gender-based inequalities in the workforce, both within and across career streams (Mayer, 2013; Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2015).

Rosalind Gill (2014) has pointed out the lack of statistics on the number and pay of women compared to men in the CCI and suggests that this is related to a pervasive post-feminist sensibility in Western societies. Post-feminist discourse emphasizes agency, reinforcing a bias that women actively choose to work in less technical or senior roles or to leave the media industry altogether (Gill, 2014; O'Brien, 2014). A study of the TV industry in Ireland by Anne O'Brien (2014) demonstrates that when pervasive ideologies present women as proactively deciding to exit their workplaces, gendered power dynamics among media workers are obscured. The idea that women are merely "opting out" overlooks structural biases within the organizational model of media work, its tightly networked labour market, and its informal labour processes (O'Brien, 2014).

Women made up 22 per cent of writers and 17 per cent of directors of the feature-length Canadian films in 2013-14 that were funded, at least partially, by Telefilm's public funds[5] (Fraticelli, 2015). The distribution of labour is an important aspect of representation issues, as a homogenous workforce translates to narrow and frequently biased perspectives in mainstream films. A study by Stacy Smith and Marc Choueiti (2013) found that films with women as writers, directors, and/or producers include significantly more female speaking characters. Hollywood movies dominate the film theatres of Canada and worldwide[6], and influence global content creators.

Policies of financiers

Film financiers across the globe have taken varied and innovative approaches to addressing gender in film. Countries with film industries that receive significant public investments are well-positioned to target diversity issues, as they have a clear responsibility to reflect the public in both film content and the labour that informs it. The U.S. film industry is privately funded and similar arguments cannot be made about Hollywood reflecting its public.

Many financiers in Canada have begun launching initiatives to balance labour and content in the film industry. The Canada Media Fund (CMF) delivers financial support to the Canadian television and digital media industries, and is funded by the Government of Canada and the country's cable, satellite and internet protocol television distributors. Through funding and promotional initiatives, Telefilm administers the programs of the CMF. In 2016, Telefilm (2017) announced its aim to "achieve a balanced production portfolio (at all budget levels) that reflects gender parity in each of the key roles of: director, writer and producer" by 2020 (p. 1). In March 2017, the CMF announced measures to increase the amount of women in key roles on the productions it finances. The CMF's measures included a commitment to achieving gender parity in all juries that evaluate projects, and support for third-party initiatives (CMF, 2017). While Telefilm and the CMF have made progressive commitments, the exact steps they will take to achieve these goals remains unclear.

In March 2017, the National Film Board (NFB) announced a plan to reach gender parity by 2020 in key creative positions for animated, documentary and interactive works[7]. It also previously announced that half of its films would be directed by women and half of its budget would go to productions directed by women by 2019 (NFB, 2017). Relatedly, in June 2016, the CBC announced that at least half of the episodes on upcoming seasons of certain scripted series including Murdoch Mysteries and Heartland would be directed by women (Lederman, 2016).

Sweden has been a global leader with regard to balancing the labour among women and men in key creative roles of publicly funded films. Under the leadership of CEO Anna Serner, the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) made a commitment to divide production funding equally between women and men in the professional categories of director, scriptwriter, and producer (SFI, 2017). This goal was nearly reached with 49 per cent of the SFI's funds going to female professionals in these categories. Perhaps Anna Serner said it best during an interview with Indiewire when she stated, "Talking makes no difference. You have to act. Whatever you do, they will criticize, but you just have to live with that" (Kang, 2016).

Film rating systems

While the present research is focused on developing a reliable gender assessment for film and theorizing the social, economic and political implications of such a tool, it also aims to uncover avenues to apply the assessment. One potential application explored in this study is expanding the film rating system (e.g. G, PG, 14A, R) to include an assessment for gender. Film rating systems that include gender assessments could raise awareness of common biases in film within the industry and among the general public, and may prompt parents to better educate their children about gender stereotypes. Parents may also seek more gender-balanced films as a result of the assessment, and it could open the door to media literacy around representations of race, sexual orientation, age, class, gender identity, and disabilities.

In Canada, films are assigned ratings by provincial film boards (OLRC, 1992). The present research is focused on Ontario, exploring how a gender assessment could be applied to the province's film rating system, which is administered by the Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB), and overseen by the Ontario Film Authority (OFA). The OFRB's mandate is to reflect contemporary social values, and it continues to alter its policies in response to public criticism. Since Hollywood dominates the global film industry, and given that the majority of films screened in Canadian cinemas are American movies, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) that rates films in the U.S. is also examined. The rating systems of both Canada and the U.S. shape film content and reinforce gender stereotyping. As this research is examining Ontario's film rating system as a potential area for a gender assessment to be applied, it involves an examination of the OFRB, its history, how it is influenced by the MPAA, and its evolving role in a rapidly changing media landscape.

Chapter 2: Method

Overview

A mixed methods approach was relied upon in this research. The majority of the analysis was based on an examination of existing assessments for gender balance and bias in film, as well as interviews with several film professionals including directors, writers, and senior producers. All of these creative professionals had some interest in the research, and many of them noted making their own efforts to hire women and tell stories that were gender balanced.

A gender assessment was developed as part of this research, which was tested on four films using content analysis. Studies by Stacy Smith (2013) and representation research completed for the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2016) were examined to develop the model to assess gender in film. The categories typically included in Smith's research were of particular interest to determine how popular film studies assess gender portrayals. Smith's studies provided useful groundwork to determine what constitutes a balanced or biased depiction, from the number of female characters on screen to speaking roles and sexualization. In addition to analyzing representation research, interviews with several content creators, described below, were examined for recommendations that were used to inform the assessment's criteria. Policies of film financiers in Canada and internationally were also examined to analyze various approaches taken to the representation of gender in media. Gender theory and feminist political economy of communications literature ground the theoretical framework.

As the present research analyzes the film rating system as a potential area to apply gender assessments, in order to provide comparative research, the study examines and compares Ontario's film rating system with that of the U.S., which continues to influence the classification criteria used in Canada (Williamson, 2007). The histories of the Canadian and U.S. rating systems are also analyzed and compared to explain why the film rating systems have evolved to assign more restrictive ratings to sex over violence, and to endorse stereotyped depictions of gender.

The content creator interviewees were asked to provide their thoughts on gender assessments of film, and were provided examples of existing assessments including the Bechdel Test and the Mako Mori Test. They were asked questions around what a revised

gender assessment should include; whether or not it would be useful and how e.g. for media literacy purposes or for awareness raising of stereotypes in film; how it could be applied; and what impact – if any – that it may have on their work and the film industry as a whole. During these discussions some of the interviewees brought up other ideas to address gender stereotyping in films, such as creating a more equitable distribution of labour between women and men behind the cameras. The OFRB interviewee was asked to comment on the operations of the Board, to point to recent changes to criteria used to rate films, and to articulate the Board's openness to change. All of the interviewees' comments and suggestions were carefully considered alongside an analysis of representation research. A qualitative approach was employed with the interviews, and ethnography was relied upon to contextualize interviewees' comments and views in the analysis. The present research incorporates stated experiences and perspectives of interviewees while explaining how the data from these interviews correlates to research on the dynamics of the film industry. Excerpts from the interviews are used throughout the thesis, and provide ethnographic context for the researcher's own analysis.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted with seven subjects in total, including six female content creators and one male member of the Ontario Film Review Board. The content creators were lead writers, directors, and senior producers on documentaries, narrative films, and television programs in Canada. Three of the interviews with content creators were conducted in-person in private rooms within Ryerson University's Student Learning Centre, and the remaining three were conducted over Skype. Only one of the Skype interviewees requested that her camera be left off for personal reasons, which was accommodated. The seventh interviewee from the OFRB requested to receive questions over email, and he sent back responses within two weeks. While it would have been beneficial to interview members of the OFRB face-to-face, or even over Skype, the board member was not open to these options. It is likely that his answers were vetted by other board members to ensure that the OFRB was accurately represented. For the purposes of this research, his responses are considered as reflective of the board as a whole, rather than of his individual perspective. It should be noted that many of his responses echoed the OFRB's messaging found on its website and media materials.

Recruitment and Confidentiality

Interviewees were found using snowball sampling. The researcher has contacts in the film and television industry, who sent the study call-out to their professional networks. A formal letter of invitation was sent to potential interviewees who expressed interest in the study either by getting in touch with the researcher directly or by asking their mutual contact to pass along contact information. Once contacts had received the letter of invitation, they were sent a copy of the consent agreement that they were asked to sign before the interview. The agreement indicated that they consented to being interviewed for the study, and also to being audio recorded. All but one participant signed this agreement – since the OFRB interviewee responded over email, he did not sign the audio recording section on the consent form. Interview recruitment materials and questions are appended in this thesis. Before the interviews began, the interviewer informed participants of the questions they would be asked, letting them know that they were free to pass on any question, and also to stop the interview at any point and for any reason. They were also told that if they did decide to stop the interview, their data would be destroyed. The interviews were confidential. De-identified data is being kept within a locked file on the researcher's personal computer, which is also locked. Audio recordings will be destroyed within five years as per the requirements of most academic journals. Interviews were transcribed and quotes have been included throughout this thesis. None of the quotes are attributable to their sources, as identifying information has been removed. Pseudonyms have been given to each interviewee and include Alex, Joan, Angela, Jess, Eva, and June. The seventh interviewee is referred to as OFRB Participant. All content creator interviewees were female and these participants were personally and professionally interested in the topic of gender representation in media. Some of them had launched their own programs or initiatives to improve gender and diversity balance on-screen and behind the camera. They would of course benefit from policies or advocacy that urges financiers to better support female filmmakers. Several of the interview participants mentioned being equally concerned with representations of race, both on-screen and behind the camera. It should also be noted that all of these participants were white, cisgender women, which was not intentional. If this Master's thesis were not limited to seven interviews, the interview base would be expanded to

include a total of 50 interviewees including people of colour, those with disabilities, non-conforming gender identities, and people from a range of economic backgrounds. It would have also been useful to collect information on the sexualities and economic backgrounds of participants – the former as sexuality considerations are tied to gender, and the latter because it is difficult to work in the film and TV industry without considerable financial support. This research recognizes that using such a narrow scope of interviewees is not representative of the film industry as a whole, nor of the Canadian public, and can only offer a limited range of perspectives. The research focuses on gender while acknowledging that the experience of gender is shaped by distinct subjectivities. If this research were expanded, race would be a central focal point alongside gender, and race theory would be incorporated into the literature review. While disabilities were not a focus of the present research, nor did they come up during interviews, critical disability studies (CDS), "identifies how the masculinized and militarized strong and able body is both idealized and normalized," and advances methods to resist it both within educational settings and through media (Castrodale as cited by Mazepa, 2017, p. 4). Given the potential for CDS to reimagine gendered media depictions, this field could be another important area to investigate if this research were expanded in future.

Ethical Considerations

One important ethical consideration was the dynamic between the researcher and interviewees. Since interviewees knew that the researcher intended to propose recommendations to create a more reliable and nuanced gender assessment, and potentially to apply this to film ratings, it is possible that participants held back their viewpoints to be polite or agreeable. To mitigate this risk, the researcher stressed to participants that the study endeavoured to learn from a wide-range of perspectives, and that honest feedback would only strengthen the research. To make this study as useful and informative as possible, the researcher's positionality is being disclosed. As a white, cisgender woman and graduate student, the researcher recognizes that she holds a privileged position that informs her outlook of the world, and influences her day-to-day life.

Despite the limitations of this research, it aims to bridge academic and activist realms. bell hooks (2000) speaks of the liberating potential of feminism, which allows

women and men to discard harmful gender stereotypes and envision a more emancipatory world. hooks (2000) praises feminist scholars for voicing their concerns in higher education, but she criticizes the tendency to separate feminist thought from action. hooks (2000) urges feminists to put their thought into practice in everyday life and in activism. The present research seeks to build upon the strong body of progressive feminist thought that exists in academia, while also attempting to apply it to real world settings.

Theory

The study draws from Ellen Riordan's (2004) tradition of critical feminist political economy, beginning with the assumption that social structures are inherently problematic. An intersectional approach is taken to the production, distribution and consumption of media products, focusing on gender while acknowledging other forms of oppression (Riordan, 2004; Meehan & Riordan, 2002). According to Riordan (2004), within feminist theory post-structuralist assumptions often preclude political economic concerns[8] and introduce contradictions into core concepts such as gender. Yet, post-structural feminist theorists such as Judith Butler (2004) and Teresa de Lauretis (1987) have introduced progressive ways of thinking about gender that reject restrictive binaries. Riordan (2004) suggests that post-structuralist theory is highly contested territory in contemporary feminist scholarship as it problematizes popular notions of gender as a binary, yet it presents innovative ways of thinking about gender equity that could greatly benefit political economic scholarship and advocacy. The present research applies the work of feminist theorists Butler (1988) and de Lauretis (1987) to a political economic analysis to build upon and merge the strengths of both perspectives. Gayatri Spivak's conception of strategic essentialism (as cited by Morton, 2003) is also explored.

Chapter 3: Gender theory and advocacy

Essentialism: the strategy of a progressive feminist?

Butler (1988) states that there are acts done in the name of women, and those that challenge the category of women. A gender assessment that raises awareness about the gender bias in mainstream films would be an act done in the name of women. While it may draw attention to and challenge the systemic oppression experienced by women as a result of the film industry, it would do little to contest the category of women. Even an assessment that analyzed stereotyping of women, men and non-binary people in film would still endorse essentialism as it uses a categorical framework that fits people into boxes rather than breaking them down. Such categorization is problematic in a society that assumes cisgender men are superior to those in all other categories.

Gayatri Spivak has suggested that the strategic use of essentialism can advance feminist politics and causes (as cited in Butler, 1988). For Butler, the risk of strategic essentialism is that sexual difference can become a reification that preserves a binary restriction on gender and a heterosexual framework. Butler (1988) contends that when there is a first for women or when gender rights are gained, there is a reproduction of the gender binary enacted on a larger political scale. According to Stephen Morton's (2003) interpretation of Spivak's proposition, using essentialism as a short-term strategy to affirm a political identity can be effective if this identity does not get fixed as an essentialist category. Morton (2003) does not provide guidelines as to how this can be achieved. One issue with Spivak's theory is that essentialism has too deep a history to be put on when useful and easily discarded. Since cultural hegemony was founded on essentialist binaries that align with the discourses of patriarchy, colonialism, and capitalism, instances of mainstream essentialism tend to serve as reifications of these binaries and therefore of dominant ideology.

Joan Scott (1991) states that even when essentialism is strategic it still appeals to the idea that there are fixed identities, and naturalizes the ideological process of subject-construction, or the notion that gender materializes within the subject as a product of biology. Scott (1991) points to colonial and postcolonial peoples for whom the imposition of fixed categories has concealed the injustice embedded in social relations. She states that categories such as black, woman, worker, or peasant assume that the

subjects who these characteristics are attributed to are imbued with a particular set of qualities, demonstrating the reductionist nature of essentialist approaches. Scott (1991) rejects any instances of essentialism on the basis that these discount a range of experiences and leave them unquestioned. Scott (1991) also states that increasing the visibility of the experiences of oppressed or marginalized people precludes a critical analysis of the ideological system at work, thereby reproducing its terms. She argues that the histories that inform knowledge production and experience must be critically examined. Scott (1991) does not seem to be entirely rejecting Spivak's notion of strategic essentialism, but rather dismissing instances of it that involve an uninformed acceptance of the gender binary as being fixed to sex and the ideology that informs its ongoing construction. In this sense, both Scott (1991) and Butler (1988) are conceptualizing essentialism in binary terms, and overlooking the fact that alongside essentialism can also be an interrogation of its limiting categories and an acknowledgement of the history and power dynamics that inform them.

Luce Irigaray (2001) puts forth the idea that there are in fact unquestionable differences between men and women. Irigaray (2001) suggests that it is not the presence of difference between the sexes that is problematic, but the assumption that women are inferior. Patriarchy has imbued social relations with a hierarchical structure that is based on the notion that cisgender men are superior to women, and sexual difference has come to legitimate the subservient place that women hold in society. Biology can thereby justify the hierarchy between men and women as having a natural basis, which has led many feminist scholars and gender equality advocates to reject the notion of difference between men and women. Irigaray (2001) argues that the quest to obtain the exact rights that men have is misguided, as women have need for different and nuanced rights. Public policy should acknowledge women and men as different, respect that difference, and provide equitable rights (Irigaray, 2001). Shifting from attempting to achieve equity rather than equality could embed public policy with more democratic assumptions about social relations and material needs, acknowledging that differences exists and creating communities that allow all people to thrive. Such a shift would liberate women from trying to fit into a male mode of being, and would give them more control over their bodies and lives. Irigaray (2001) states that she, "favours difference, even though I

understand that equality can, and sometimes must, come first in order that the differences can be seen for what they really are" (p. 24). While an equitable society that acknowledges and respects difference is ideal, an important first step is equality-based advocacy that seeks to elevate the status of women. In a media landscape that is rife with gender stereotypes on screen and behind the cameras, equality-based strategies are crucial.

Strategic essentialism argues that it is necessary to reify the gender binary on a larger political scale even when such a move reinforces the oppressed category that "woman" has come to mean. It suggests that equality-based gains are necessary to enliven a political landscape based on equity. Spivak indicates that strategic essentialism is most effective as a context-specific strategy, and that it cannot act as a long-term political solution to end exploitation and oppression (Morton, 2003). In the context of assessments of gender in film, a strategic essentialist approach could be used to bring more attention to the fact that women are highly stereotyped in cinema, and to demonstrate resistance to the misogyny embedded in mainstream media discourses. A strategic essentialist approach would advocate for film financiers to allocate a certain portion of their funding to scripts deemed to be gender balanced, as is seen in the policies of Eurimages (Council of Europe, 2015). In terms of policy advocacy, an essentialist strategy might advocate for legislation changes to the Film Classification Act (2005) requiring the film rating system to include an assessment of gender bias and other forms of stereotyping in its classification criteria. Such changes would be acts done in the name of women serving to reify the gender binary, yet they could also create openings to challenge the category of women in a more significant way, and to interrogate its absence from much political economy discourse. Depending on its implementation, a tool to assess gender in film could involve a critical examination of gender, and challenge its essentialist binary by exposing the historical context of its construction and reproduction.

Gender equality in neoliberalism: The risk of post-feminism

One of the dangers in using strategic essentialism is that any gains made could fit too comfortably into a neoliberal framework (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Through the emergence of post-feminism, the fight for gender equality has been misconstrued in neoliberal terms that benefit capitalism and reinforce patriarchy (Gill, 2007; Harris &

Dobson, 2015). According to Gill (2007), post-feminism is a sensibility that suggests feminism is no longer necessary and that the gains women have achieved to-date constitute gender equality. It includes the assumption that there is no difference between gender and sex, and is aligned with neoliberal ideals. While Gill (2007) herself states that there is disagreement around the definition of "post-feminism," she suggests that it involves a shift where women are not objectified in an obvious way, and are instead shown as active and desiring subjects who choose to present themselves in seemingly objectified ways to suit their liberated interests (Gill, 2007). Such portrayals emphasize a hyper-feminized aesthetic, and are reproductions of gender stereotypes that are passed off as empowerment narratives (Negra, 2009). Post-feminist portrayals emphasize individual choice, yet only when an uncritical discourse of traditional femininity is also apparent (Negra, 2009).

Gill (2007) and Negra (2009) demonstrate that post-feminism positions empowerment as a feeling, which can serve to obscure the fact that it is not, in many cases, a lived reality. They make the distinction between feeling empowered to take charge of one's social, political, and economic advancement, and *being* empowered in each of these realms. Such opportunities to advance are mediated by one's subjectivity according to gender, race, sexuality, class, and the presence of any disabilities. Gill (2007) and Negra (2009) suggest that post-feminist narratives overlook structural issues and place all responsibility on the individual.

Sexualization is at the core of post-feminist frameworks. Gill (2007) explores the pressure women are under to constantly monitor themselves through their appearances, personal grooming, and sexualities. Gill (2007) notes that capitalism benefits by placing intense scrutiny on women's bodies and encouraging their material upkeep through continuous remodeling that requires ongoing consumer spending. While it can be argued that the same is true for men, Gill (2007) suggests that the pressure is intensified for women, who are expected to exercise constant discipline and self-surveillance – both of their sexualities and appearances. Convincing women to attempt attainment of neoliberalism's ideal feminine aesthetic ensures that there is no end to their consumption. The white, thin, young, hypersexualized ideal is impossible for most to achieve, and even women who embody this ideal must continually buy into its upkeep (Gill, 2007).

Binary essentialist ideology makes female bodies the holders and bearers of morality, both their own and that of men (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). The paradox of post-feminism is that although women are encouraged to be sexy in terms dictated by neoliberalism, these same terms inscribe shame for any transgressions in their performances of gender and sexuality (Ringrose & Renold, 2012). In convincing women to perform gender in forms deemed acceptable in neoliberalism, a false promise of protection and security is made when in fact women are held accountable for abuse that happens to them, regardless of the way they dress or how they behave. The extent to which women are blamed is impacted by their class, race, sexual preferences, and social standing. With consumerism embedded throughout the post-feminist discourse, and sexualization at the heart of it, in patriarchal societies female bodies are simultaneously the sites of both morality and shame (Ringrose & Renold, 2012).

According to Gill (2007), another paradox of post-feminism is that objectification is repackaged as empowerment, suggesting to women that aestheticizing themselves in hyper-feminine ways is a function of their liberation rather than a symptom of their oppression. This is not to suggest that all instances of women aestheticizing themselves in ways that are aligned with neoliberal ideology are oppressive – in fact, the predominance of girls' and women's selfies have shown that such representations can allow women to take control of their own images. Regardless of the individual circumstance, it is revealing to interrogate the ways in which women are feminized and/or sexualized, how they aestheticize themselves, and whether or not these portrayals are aligned with post-feminist discourse.

Harris and Dobson (2015) point out that choice and empowerment discourses are central to the post-feminist sensibility, whereby personal successes and failures are determined to be the result of individual choices rather than structural forces. The assumed agency of post-feminism remains complicit with neoliberal ideology that positions individuals as actors (Harris & Dobson, 2015). Neoliberalism requires its subjects to narrate their life stories as though they were the outcomes of deliberate choices, yet as Harris and Dobson (2015) demonstrate when they refer to post-feminist subjects as "suffering actors," one cannot be empowered through force of will alone (p. 146). There are powerful systemic forces that dictate opportunities and social realities,

and women are only as empowered as the societies in which they live. Post-feminist discourses use the term "empowerment" as though it were a feeling. Most societies in fact teach disempowerment of women, not simply as a feeling but a lived reality, and one that is embedded in criminal justice systems and media representations. If neoliberalism can convince women to seek the feeling of empowerment rather than to possess it as a lived reality, the systemic issues that act as barriers to justice and opportunity are overlooked.

An assessment of gender in film could easily serve to reinforce post-feminist sentiments. A post-feminist gender assessment might condemn portrayals of female sexuality that are not constructed for male pleasure, or those that do not fit within a heteronormative framework that depicts women as submissive. It could also endorse representations of women that celebrate a feeling of empowerment that is aligned with conventional ideals of femininity and Eurocentric beauty standards. Such an assessment might condone depictions of women that embody the post-feminist feminine ideal rather than celebrating representations of women as multi-dimensional, complex subjects. Interviewee Angela alluded to this risk:

> It's not about strong female characters, it's about real characters. We could be weak, we can be all these things too…very bad men get to be lead characters but the opportunity isn't the same way for women. It's the same question of, 'Oh ok we're going to cast a diverse background' but then this person is a waiter.

Interviewee June echoed Angela's sentiments when she stated, "We're not all heroes. You know, we're heroes that are flawed and broken and selfish and jealous and we still deserve to be seen, those women still deserve to be seen on camera, on screen."

A gender assessment in a neoliberal society could celebrate post-feminist subjects in mainstream films rather than challenging narrow conceptions of gender, which would run counter to a progressive feminist mandate. A gender assessment could, however, ensure that it avoids falling into the trap of only endorsing post-feminist depictions of women by creating criteria that reaches beyond a heteronormative framework, challenging the notion of gender as fixed and interrogating binary essentialist ideology. As post-feminism assumes that there is no difference between gender and sex, a gender assessment could problematize this assumption. A fully intersectional assessment would determine how

experiences of gender are also shaped by sexuality, race, and class. It would acknowledge the multitude of structural forces that create narrow conceptions of what constitutes an ideal feminine subject.

Beyond gender equality

To conceive of a way to move beyond a patriarchal frame of reference, de Lauretis (1987) uses the analogy of the space off, an idea borrowed from film theory in the pre-digital era. The space-off refers to the area of a film located at the edges of the frame that is both part of the film and separate from it (de Lauretis, 1987). The space-off cannot be seen within the screen of a film, but it is inferable from what the frame makes visible. In exploring this analogy from film theory, de Lauretis (1987) is gesturing toward a space that could offer an alternative to the commodified transgression of the dominant commonly found in pop culture. One need not look further than any number of post-feminist depictions of women and girls as empowered and autonomous to know that capitalism celebrates commodified images of gender. Simultaneously a part of the frame and separate from it, the space-off is an area where true alternatives can be imagined.

Film is a powerful medium in part because it is illusory, not simply with regard to the story shown on-screen but also in causing viewers to forget the mechanics at work behind the image. The space-off is a disruption that, if seen, would create an awareness of the illusion of the technology of film. Similarly, awareness of gender as a technology and knowledge of its social and cultural constructions would expose the hegemonic conditions that maintain it (de Lauretis, 1987). In bringing attention to dominant ideology as a construction, its power is diminished.

One cannot separate herself from gender in a cultural context. Gender is seen and felt in language, gesture, speech and style, and requires ongoing performances of narratives that fit into the categories of masculine or feminine (Butler, 1988). It is tempting to suggest that those who refuse to perform gender in terms that correspond to their biological sex are operating in the space-off, yet they are still within the screen. Even non-conforming gender identities require constant performances. If these enactments were located outside the screen then they would be given new meanings, or perhaps no meaning at all. Masculinity and femininity have only been seen through the distorted lens of patriarchy, and it is not possible to understand how gender would be different if

patriarchy did not exist. Since even individual disruptions of gender are still informed by hegemonic social conditions, one cannot break free from the confines of gender at the level of the individual (Butler, 1988).

The space-off invites conceptualizations that disrupt the notion of gender as fixed and centered within patriarchal ideology. It reveals gender as a technology that is relational, social, and performative, and allows subjects to think outside of dominant ideology while acting as a reminder that hegemonic power is still at work (de Lauretis, 1987). The way to move beyond gender stereotypes and the hegemonic distortions that inform them is to experience a reality in which gender is not fixed to an essentialist binary, but instead fluid. Such a utopia is not yet known, yet it is useful to conceptualize, as advocating for the boundaries of gender to be challenged and changed can showcase the oppression that is consistently reified by social technologies. Conceptualizing alternate hegemonies can also inspire a feasible framework for action (Mosco, 2009).

Audre Lorde suggests that when feminist thought is structured around the notion of gender as sexual difference, it is contained inside the walls of the master's house (as cited in de Lauretis, 1987, p. 2). There is no question that much gender equality advocacy is similarly constructed inside the oppressive bounds of dominant ideology, yet as Lorde has also stated, "without community there is no liberation" (as cited in Johnson, 2001, p. 6). While advocacy may reify the gender binary and the oppression of women as a category, it is a necessary reification as it mobilizes a community. In acknowledging that those who belong to the category women experience oppression and marginalization, it becomes possible to advocate for equal status between the genders in material realms including gaining access to educational and employment opportunities, reproductive rights, evening the distribution of parenting and caregiving, and equal payment for equal work. Without the achievement of basic equality, the space-off will remain illusory.

Recognition of the binary essentialism that informs hegemonic social conditions is an important aspect of gender equality advocacy. Critical analyses of the gender binary demonstrate the instability of social technologies, and enable an argument for equitable status between essentialist categories. The real challenge is to move from the place of recognition to implementation of progressive alternatives that disrupt rather than fit into neoliberal ideals. Such alternatives lay the groundwork to facilitate a broader political

enactment of the theories articulated by de Lauretis (1987) and Butler (1988). Spotlighting the existing inequalities embedded in representations of gender in film would make gains for women as a category that could edge closer to the space-off where true alternatives are possible.

The frameworks articulated by gender theorists Butler (1988) and de Lauretis (1987) are revolutionary, yet they present a major challenge to advocates attempting to improve the material lives of women. Until oppressive hegemonic social conditions cease to exist, it is not possible to create a world that is beyond the gender binary. Butler's (1988) rejection of strategic essentialism is founded, and is echoed by scholars including Scott (1991), as instances of binary essentialism serve to reify the category of gender on a larger political scale. de Lauretis' (1987) suggestion of moving outside dominant ideology to a space-off similarly suggests that any gains made toward gender equality are not meaningful enough to warrant true change. In a culture that operates with fixed essentialist binaries informed by dominant ideology, it is within a feminist community that demands equity for all women that the possibilities for true liberation exist.

In the context of assessments of gender in film, a tool that analyzes the representation of gender could be created in a way that acknowledges systemic oppression and avoids celebrating only post-feminist portrayals of empowerment. This assessment could be a part of a strategic essentialist plan that would reify the category of women while destabilizing the oppressive forces that inform its construction. Such a treatment of strategic essentialism would not be aligned with Butler (1988) and de Lauretis' (1987) ideas, yet, advocacy that interrogates the oppression embedded within binary essentialist discourses can create pathways toward enlivening their feminist theories. Although an assessment of gender in film would not be located in the space-off, it could create small ruptures in hegemonic social conditions. When compounded, such ruptures can elicit larger openings in the polished products of neoliberalism and provide at least a glimpse of what lies beyond the frame.

Chapter 4: Hollywood's gendering habit

For capitalism to sustain itself, a vast collection of commodities must be sold, and if the circuit of distribution, exchange, and consumption is disrupted, the system does not work (Griffin, 2015). The core problem of capitalism is not mass production but consumption, making it crucial for companies to be innovative with their products, offerings, and marketing or advertising strategies to ensure desirability in an evolving marketplace (Griffin, 2015). In examining processes of commodification, feminist political economic analyses uncover gendered and economic considerations and explain the patriarchal irrationality in American capitalism that assumes women are less valuable than men as human beings, labourers, and consumers (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Commodity audiences develop as they are presumed to target the most lucrative segment of consumers. In the film industry, cultural and economic considerations collide to produce movies that contain a range of stereotypes and can only be understood within historical context.

Film ratings shape content

The film industries in the U.S. and Canada have produced rating systems that serve the objectives of the institutions that own them. The U.S. rating system is owned privately, whereas the Canadian system is owned publicly. Since all Canadian provinces employ unique classification categories to rate films, the present research focuses on Ontario, which is home to the largest rating system and film industry in the country (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1992). Both the U.S. and Ontarian rating systems are guided by capitalist principles, but different economic, social and political circumstances inform their operations. While the U.S. rating system serves as a tool to commodify film, maximize profits and ensure Hollywood's hegemony of global media markets, the Canadian system attempts to protect nationalism and maintain positive relations with a large trade partner, which inadvertently supports U.S. cultural imperialism[9]. The rating system is an important aspect of a political economic analysis of mainstream film content, and one that is frequently overlooked.

The history of the Motion Picture Association of America

The first censors of American films were police and politicians in the early 1900s demanding that their professions be portrayed favourably on-screen (Horowitz, 1997). They also expressed concern that immoral film content had a negative impact on the working class immigrants who filled movie houses (Horowitz, 1997). The film industry was already under threat of government regulation, and when religious groups and Progressive Era moral crusaders campaigned against the industry the likelihood of federal regulation increased, threatening to further restrict film studios' control and reduce profits (Williamson, 2007). To mitigate this risk, in 1909 Hollywood voluntarily agreed to have its films reviewed by a citizen-led Board of Censorship before they were exhibited publicly (Horowitz, 1997).

After the First World War, film content reflected the excesses of the roaring twenties and attracted audiences with sexually provocative titles and imagery (Horowitz, 1997). Scandals plagued the industry, and some of the biggest movie stars of the day were charged with rape, murder and drug use, contributing to Hollywood's reputation as immoral and reckless (Williamson, 2007). To improve the industry's reputation, the presidents of Hollywood's major studios established the Production Code, a voluntary regulation system that prohibited nudity in film and demanded respect for marriage, home, religion and law, which temporarily won the support of social reformers (Horowitz, 1997). The Code was heavily influenced by religious officials, and was led by Will Hays, former chair of the Republican Party and an elder of the Presbyterian Church (Horowitz, 1997).

During the Great Depression, the Catholic Church encouraged followers to boycott all films deemed to offend decency and Christian morality, citing sexually explicit dialogue as one of the worst offences (Williamson, 2007). This was a move that financially devastated the already struggling film industry, and to win back the support of the Church the rating system became so restrictive that it would no longer allow films to show negative depictions of religious officials (Horowitz, 1997). It also banned films exhibiting communist sentiments (Williamson, 2007).

With the popularization of home television sets in the U.S. in the 1950s, less people were frequenting movie theatres, again translating to economic losses for film studios

(Williamson, 2007). To regain audiences, studios required a less restrictive system that would allow them to differentiate film content from broadcast television while satisfying the religious groups that held such influence over consumers (Horowitz, 1997). In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) was formed and began using the rating system to restrict audiences by age (Williamson, 2007). The MPAA (2015) is operated by six major studios including: The Walt Disney Company, Paramount Pictures, Sony Pictures, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Universal Studios, and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. The creation of the MPAA gave these studios full control over the rating system, and executives of Hollywood's largest corporations still dictate how films are rated (Williamson, 2007).

The influence of religious stakeholders

The MPAA works with powerful religious organizations to protect its economic interests, ensuring that these groups do not wage moral campaigns against Hollywood that will damage its reputation and decrease audience sizes (Williamson, 2007). In fact, the MPAA's Appeals Board includes clergymen who vote on whether or not films have been rated appropriately (McCarthy, 2006). The impact of religious and other groups continues to materialize in the harsh ratings that the MPAA assigns to depictions of empowered female sexuality, exposing its attempts to censor non-puritanical content (Williamson, 2007).

In 1999, the film *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) was released and included a scene depicting a teenage girl masturbating over her clothing (McCarthy, 2006). That same year, *American Pie* (1999) was released, which showed nudity and portrayed a teenage boy using a pie to masturbate (McCarthy, 2006). While the MPAA made the filmmakers of *But I'm a Cheerleader* (1999) cut the film's masturbation scene, the explicit *American Pie* (1999) scene was left in and packaged as a humorous coming of age clip (McCarthy, 2006). The MPAA also assigns extremely restrictive ratings to films including depictions of female sexuality that are not constructed for male pleasure.

The MPAA rates sexuality more restrictively than violence (Leone, 2002). While violence depicted in media has been found to have harmful effects on some audiences of children, there is still no consensus regarding portrayals of sex[10] (Leone, 2002). Despite this, rating systems continue to assign harsh ratings to films that depict sex and nudity,

and more lenient ratings to movies that portray violence (Leone, 2002). In the U.S., four times as many films receive NC-17, the most restrictive rating, for sex than for violence (McCarthy, 2006). The MPAA also privileges certain forms of sexuality, and assigns particularly harsh ratings to films that include sex scenes portraying women reaching orgasm (McCarthy, 2006; Griffin, 2015). The NC-17 was threatened for the film *Boys Don't Cry* (1999), not for its brutal gang rape scene, but for depicting a lengthy female orgasm; yet, *Scary Movie* (2000) received the far more innocuous R rating despite a woman being launched onto the ceiling by male ejaculation in the film (Griffin, 2015). The rating system's patriarchal hegemony over gender bias appears consistently in mainstream movies (Williamson, 2007), and even family films tend to portray girls as younger and more sexualized than their male counterparts (Lauzen, 2015).

The history of the Ontario Film Review Board

In the early 1900s, Canadian cinema was used as an informational tool by the federal government to support state goals and attract immigrants and tourists to the Canadian West (Feldman, 1996). While the U.S. and other countries developed a "story" film tradition, Canada produced mainly propaganda shorts sponsored by the government or the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) (Pendakur, 1990, p. 48). Most Canadian theatres were already owned and dominated by American studios that exclusively screened Hollywood films (Feldman, 1996). By 1930, Famous Players alone owned nearly a third of Canada's movie screens (Feldman, 1996). The Ontario Censor Board was founded in 1911 to protect Canadian nationalism and public morality (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1992). The Board initially banned films considered to reflect immoral values including depictions of seduction, infidelity, crime, cruelty to animals, arson, firearms, violence, insanity, murder and suicide (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). The rating system attempted to prevent foreign influences over Canadian audiences by banning films that showed foreign flags waving, with the exception of the British flag (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1992). Before the Second World War, the main objective of the Censor Board was to restrict propaganda films (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). Footage of riots and strikes was immediately removed from newsreels, and films that included communist propaganda were not approved (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). During WWII the OFRB's rules became so restrictive that no foreign language films

could be screened, with the exception of films from France (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1992).

Small market nations often believe they have more to gain by opening borders than by maintaining trade barriers, which is concerning in the context of the U.S.-Canada trade relationship, as American hegemony of global media can lead to the deterioration of national cultural industries while influencing societal values (McChesney, 2002; Riordan, 2004). In the early 1900s the Canadian film industry was federally owned and regulated, yet the nation gave up its chance to initiate a strong film industry in order to expand trade relations with the U.S.[11] (Feldman, 1996). From 1948 to1958, the Canadian government signed the U.S. rating system's Canadian Cooperation Project (CCP), agreeing that it would not interfere with the distribution of American feature films in Canada or provide federal support for a national feature film industry (Feldman, 1996). In exchange, Canada would receive mentions in Hollywood scripts and U.S. distribution of several Canadian shorts, while gaining the goodwill of an influential sector (Pendakur, 1990; Feldman, 1996). The Canadian Cooperation Project was largely a public relations idea, and it made no clear commitment about the number of Canadian films that would be supported, their budgets, or where they would be exhibited (Pendakur, 1990). For Hollywood, the goal of the CCP was to ensure that Canada would not follow Great Britain in imposing film import quotas or duties on rentals (Pendakur, 1990). The Canadian government claimed the CCP would help establish a film industry in Canada, when in fact it was a strategy to cover up its lack of policy initiatives to support such an industry (Pendakur, 1990). Canada believed that the profits made by opening up its borders outweighed gains it could make through expanding the national film industry, which was in its infancy (Feldman, 1996). Legislated protective measures, such as "screen quotas," are commonly found in countries that import cultural products to control and monitor the distribution of foreign films, yet such restrictions still do not exist in Canada (Pendakur, 1990, p. 39). Early policies had an adverse effect on the development of the Canadian film industry as they enabled Hollywood to gain access to Canadian audiences, and hindered the country's ability to carve out a cohesive national identity (Pendakur, 1990; Feldman, 1996). While these trade policies were enacted decades ago, they have informed the

development of the Canadian film industry and the role of rating systems across Canada (Feldman, 1996).

According to Pendakur (1990), 97 per cent of theatre screen time in Canada is filled by imported films, most of which are marketed by U.S.-based transnational media corporations (Pendakur, 1990). While there have been multiple initiatives to fund and support Canadian-made films[12], these movies "remain obscure and inaccessible to moviegoers, and their profitability is severely limited" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 29). The lack of success of Canadian films is partly due to the widespread presence and promotion of Hollywood films in the nation. Since 1974, Canada has had the, "dubious distinction of being the number one market for American feature films" (Pendakur, 1990, p. 29). With regard to the options for audiences, Pendakur (1990) notes, "the free-choice argument echoes the myth of consumer sovereignty, which masks the demand created by film-distribution companies through advertising and promotion" (p. 32). The "free-choice argument" suggests that there is free and open competition for film markets among American and Canadian film production and distribution companies, when in fact these markets have been built to favour Hollywood interests (Pendakur, 1990, p. 32).

Since Canada failed at protecting nationalism through building its own strong film industry, it attempted to use its film rating systems to guard against U.S. cultural imperialism. Reforms in the 1980s created a new mandate for classification that shifted away from censorship and led to the existing system that appoints private citizens to a board (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). The name of the rating system was changed to the Ontario Film Review Board (OFRB) in the 1980s and it was able to ban films it deemed unacceptable (Davidson, 2004). After the OFRB was criticized for censorship practices for refusing to rate certain films, film professionals began demanding an industry-run national classification board similar to the MPAA (Ontario Law Review Commission, 1992). Following an analysis of film rating systems across Canada and in the U.S., it was decided that film classification would remain under the purview of provincial governments so that industry concerns would not sway decision-making over the concerns of the community (Ontario Law Review Commission, 1992). The OFRB also restructured so that membership represented a broad cross-section of Ontario communities (Ontario Law Review Commission, 1992).

The OFRB's mandate is to reflect contemporary social values, and it continues to alter its policies in response to public feedback. In 2001 the OFRB was criticized for refusing to classify the acclaimed but sexually graphic film *Fat Girl*, among others (Davidson, 2004). In response to mounting criticism of the board for using its power aggressively and discouraging distributors from screening or selling films in Ontario, laws were enacted in the early 2000s that made it easier to distribute, sell, and show explicit films in the province (Davidson, 2004). Ontario introduced changes to legislation in 2003 that removed the OFRB's power to refuse to classify and thereby ban films from being screened in the province, other than certain forms of pornography (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1992). While the fact that the OFRB can no longer refuse to rate films protects against censorship, it also benefits U.S. imperialism as it means that no mainstream Hollywood film will be banned in Ontario, further opening up markets for U.S. domination.

The OFRB, MPAA, and content creation

The MPAA and OFRB both position themselves as organizations that provide essential services to parents, but the private versus public ownership of the two systems impacts the implementation of their classification systems. The MPAA remains shrouded in secrecy and refuses to release its classification criteria or to make the identities of its board members public (Williamson, 2007). It maintains that this is to avoid pressure from studios and others, but the board has been found to regularly meet with studio executives (McCarthy, 2006). The MPAA also only hires Los Angeles residents, despite claiming to represent parents from across the U.S. (McCarthy, 2006). In contrast, the OFRB posts biographies of its board members online, along with a detailed document outlining its classification criteria (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). Membership in the OFRB includes representation from across Ontario, and several of its board members have worked in education (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). In addition to assigning ratings, the OFRB provides warnings such as nudity, coarse language, or brutal violence (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). The MPAA (2017) posts only its ratings online accompanied by vague descriptions, and it has not released its ratings criteria. According to the OFRB participant, the number of films rated varies year to year, but in 2016 the organization classified 1,305 mainstream films, 1,752 adult sex films, and 688 trailers. Comparable

data is not available for the MPAA. When asked how films are rated the OFRB participant provided useful context:

> Films for exhibition are classified by a panel of OFRB members. The classifying panel views the film in its entirety, tracking elements related to six categories: language, violence, nudity, sexual activity, gory/grotesque images, and psychological impact. At the end of the film, members of the panel use their combined notes to complete the summary report, which is the official record of the classification panel's detailed observations. In addition to listing observed elements in the six categories, the panel will also choose a set of content advisories and decide on the film's classification.

The MPAA and OFRB both use five-level classification systems to rate films. There are two ratings that do not restrict the audience size in Ontario including G and PG, and three in the U.S. including G, PG and PG-13 (Ontario Film Authority, 2015; Motion Picture Association of America, 2015). In Ontario the ratings 14A and 18A require anyone under 14 or 18 years old, respectively, to be accompanied by an adult, which limits audience sizes (Ontario Film Authority, 2015). The MPAA's R rating is comparable to Ontario's 18A, as it requires anyone under 17 to be accompanied by an adult. The most severe ratings are NC-17 in the U.S. and R in Ontario, as these ratings do not admit anyone under 17 and 18 years old, respectively. Ratings are significant because they restrict audiences, which can make films less profitable (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999).

The MPAA's secrecy allows the organization to be inconsistent in the way that it assigns ratings, making it difficult to dispute classifications since it is unclear what constitutes an R rating as opposed to an NC-17 (Williamson, 2007). Unsurprisingly, the rating system also favours films created and distributed by the major studios the MPAA is owned by (Williamson, 2007). It assigns lenient ratings to the films it profits from, and classifies independent films using more restrictive ratings since these filmmakers are competition for the major studios (Wasko, 2011). For films owned by major studios, the MPAA provides filmmakers with detailed instructions on how to alter or cut scenes to attain a better rating and avoid the NC-17 (McCarthy, 2006). Most U.S. theatres are owned by the MPAA, and films that are classified as NC-17 or not rated at all will not be

screened at these theatres, which greatly limits audiences (Williamson, 2007). When the audience size is restricted because of a harsh rating, advertisers also become less interested since the film's distribution is limited (Williamson, 2007). Ratings directly impact a film's profits, as restrictive ratings decrease ticket sales, limit audience size, and vastly reduce advertiser interest (Williamson, 2007).

Globalization

Neoliberal values have further commodified the film industry by eliminating barriers to the commercial exploitation of media and to concentrated media ownership (McChesney, 2002). National deregulation of media in major nations followed by transnational measures such as NAFTA and the WTO have laid the foundation for the creation of a global media system dominated by corporate conglomerates (McChesney, 2002). Since the 1980s, changes in government and corporate policies fostered the organization of media conglomerates and encouraged them to integrate their operations across multiple media industries (Wasko, 2011). Media conglomerates enable a single film franchise to feed multiple markets using corporate synergy, resulting in a range of spin-off products (Wasko, 2011). Popular sequels and trilogies create a devoted fan base of consumers who purchase films' associated commodities such as merchandise, video games and music, and even attend related amusement parks (Wasko, 2011). The production and distribution of spin-off commodities associated with a film serves to increase financial gains for the copyright holder, publicizes the film, and prolongs the life of the franchise (Wasko, 2011). Films that are not rated are not released from the studio, meaning that they will not benefit from corporate synergy strategies, nor will they have access to promotional budgets, which are often double the amount of production budgets (Wasko, 2011). Hollywood films dominate global markets, and the MPAA helps to determine which films are distributed internationally (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999).

Public ownership of the Canadian rating system places political pressure on provincial rating boards to operate as consumer protection services. Given that the Government of Ontario has less to gain than Hollywood from assigning lenient or harsh ratings, it classifies films consistently in order to legitimate itself to the public that it serves. Both the MPAA and OFRB maintain that their mandates are to provide parents with information about the appropriateness of media content for children, yet a political

economic analysis reveals that this is not the main function of either system. The MPAA operates to maintain Hollywood's hegemonic position in the global film industry and to maximize profits by further commodifying film and associated products, while the OFRB provides Hollywood with access to Ontario's markets and audiences to appease an important trade partner. In the U.S., ratings essentially signify a film's potential to be commodified by studios and advertisers (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). In Ontario, the OFRB serves Canadian nationalism, previously through attempting to censor foreign influences in films, and currently by positioning itself as a reliable and transparent consumer protection measure. Similar to the MPAA, the OFRB ultimately serves the capitalist goal of maximizing Hollywood's profits, which benefits Canada by keeping the markets between the two nations open for trade.

The rating systems have greatly impacted on-screen representations of gender, sexuality and violence, and the MPAA's history of appeasing religious groups and Progressive Era advocates has left a legacy of puritanical practices that are still felt in the industry. Hollywood has adapted its content to fit stereotyped notions of gender and sexuality, and since the vast majority of films screened in Canada are produced in the U.S., this is the mainstream content that informs the consciousness of audiences in both nations.

It is important for Canada to continue to rate films publicly because many Canadian theatres are U.S.-owned, and deregulating the rating system would further expand Hollywood's hegemonic position in the Canadian film industry. While modifications could be made to the rating systems so that they would function as better media literacy tools, any changes to the existing systems could disrupt the commodification of the film industry, which would work against the capitalist goals of the MPAA and OFRB. In Canada, tampering with U.S. commodification of Canadian markets could strain trade relations, and such a risk would only be taken if it would benefit Canadian nationalism while legitimating government's role. Until the Canadian public demands an improved rating system, both the MPAA and OFRB will continue to serve the capitalist strategy to commodify film and maximize Hollywood's economic gains under the guise of a public service to the American and Canadian people.

A gendered commodity audience

Through commodification, a film's use value as entertainment is transformed into exchange value as a marketable product created to make a profit (Mosco, 2009). This process influences the types of films that get produced and shapes media content. To minimize the risk of economic loss, studios create formulaic films that have a proven track record of success with their desired audience of consumers (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). The creation and distribution of cinema in Hollywood is purely a means to acquire capital, and the industry is constantly evolving to maximize profits (Wasko, 2011). While studios pursue audiences to increase ticket sales, they also have interest in investment from the advertisers that audiences provide access to (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Major studios derive a large portion of their profits from advertisements, and theorists including Dallas Smythe (1977) and Eileen Meehan (2002) have suggested that the audience is the main commodity being sold in the film industry as it draws in advertisers. It is important for movies to attain lenient ratings from the MPAA, as ratings signify to advertisers and shareholders how widely a film will be distributed, and determine the level of access it will provide to audiences of consumers (Wasko, 2011). Since advertisers are willing to pay more for the commodity audience over others, a middle and upper class, heterosexual, cisgender, white male audience aged 18 to 34 has become the primary demographic to produce media content for (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Stereotypes found in the content produced for this demographic have become normalized, and mainstream depictions are accepted internationally as the U.S. increases its hegemony of global media markets (Wasko, 2011).

The assumption that young, high-earning male consumers are the most desirable audience encourages media corporations to develop content that has previously garnered strong financial returns from this demographic (Meehan, 2002). Action-adventure films are abundant because they have a track record of appealing to the commodity audience and are inexpensive to dub and distribute internationally (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). This profitable genre pulls in male audiences that are targeted by advertisers who pay not only for traditional ads, but also for product placements in films (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Since women are not a part of the film industry's commodity audience, they are used to draw in the heteronormative male consumers that advertisers seek, which

produces media content that contains a multitude of gender and other stereotypes (Riordan, 2002). Interviewee June echoed this problem:

> We need a wake up call and a mirror to say that we need to have better conversations for women and better characters that are not just props. Or are reflections of the male experience, or fighting for a man in a movie, but are a greater reflection of what interests them on a day-to-day basis.

Women are frequently portrayed as one-dimensional characters who do little to influence cinematic storylines (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999). Given that the patriarchal framework of entertainment media has led to content being produced for a male-centric niche audience of consumers, it is not surprising that women are often sexualized and stereotyped to draw in the commodity audience (Meehan, 2002).

Since women are not included in the commodity audience that advertisers desire, female consumers are viewed as a niche market (Meehan, 2002). It is short-sighted for film studios and advertisers to overlook the considerable spending power of female moviegoers, especially considering that women often make decisions about entertainment (Meehan, 2002). As June stated in her interview, "…women make 75 per cent of the choices of who goes to the theatres – what are we going to watch, what are we going to go see, what are the kids going to watch – women make all of these decisions." While June's analysis may be overstated, she is making the point that the media industry is structured around patriarchy to such an extent that networks and corporations often overlook opportunities to reach a lucrative and still largely untapped market. The gendered commodity audience exposes how noneconomic assumptions underlie beliefs about who should be a part of audiences, discriminating based on gender, race, social status, sexual orientation, and age (Meehan, 2002). The structure of the mainstream media industry may seem counterintuitive to capitalism since media produced for subcultures can be lucrative, but the industry is rooted in prejudice and patriarchal ideologies that oppress women and other marginalized groups (Meehan, 2002). To uproot these ideologies would undermine the interests of capitalism, which profits from disparities in wealth and social standing (Meehan & Consalvo, 1999).

Chapter 5: Gender bias in film: The problem persists

Are gender assessments necessary?

> *Do I think men should be able to tell women's stories? Of course I do. I believe in equality for all. But what I believe is, they've been doing that for a hundred years. They've been telling our stories. And so therefore we have a whole society…being brought up on a male's version of a female story. Of a female existence, of a female stereotype, of a female gender* – June, research interviewee.

Media content draws from cultural and social assumptions about "people's bodies, what people can, ought and will do and how they will behave," and can serve to reinforce and perpetuate these assumptions for viewers (Griffin, 2015, p. 69). The repetition of gendered tropes in mainstream media affects societal expectations around the behaviour of men and women. Understanding gender as constructed and mutable enables more thoughtful consideration of the ways in which cultural products represent supposed truths and social realities (Griffin, 2015).

When asked about gender representations in mainstream media content interviewee June said, "I see strong women saving the world, saving their families, saving their children, saving the planet. But I don't see them choosing to save themselves." Interviewees pointed to the narrow depictions of women and girls in film, and also to the male-centric nature of most movies. June later added, "For 125 or 117 years we've had one perspective of storytelling… So of course that defines our culture. It's how young boys growing up see women portrayed. It's how women see women portrayed." Interviewee Joan also had a comment about the impact of biased media representations:

> If you're continually being shown one small group's perspective on the world, that affects everything about how you see the world. It assigns importance, privilege and voice to something that is artificial… When you do see yourself represented in a meaningful way on a screen, in a way that is complex and three-dimensional…I think it's incredibly important to the formation of children and people to see all sorts of stories and all sorts of people in content, because then the world around them is reflected back.

Interviewee Alex spoke of the importance of filmmakers understanding their responsibilities to the public, particularly in instances where films are funded with public finances:

> There needs to be this stronger sense of responsibility, because media is a window on the world and whether it's fiction or non-fiction, anyone who's a creator is putting out stuff for public consumption. It's not like they have to censor themselves but it's this appreciation that content will be consumed by different people with different experiences. And yes you have your ideal audience…we're creating content in a world where anyone can access it. There needs to be a responsibility that you're not just creating in a vacuum. You just want to know that people creating content understand that there's a public out there. (Alex).

When asked about the importance of gender assessments interviewees had a range of responses:

> I don't think one [a reliable gender assessment] exists. Yah, I think it would be good. I think people are – a lot of it is an unconscious bias. The whole idea that women can relate to men's stories and men have a hard time relating to female stories… Extras are not even 50 per cent female. I don't know if the general public – like the wider general public – it would matter to in the rating system. Obviously there are a percentage of people who care and I'm sure it could be marketed well to parents. I would love to know [as a parent]… I can see it being really useful in the industry. (Angela).
>
> I think it [a gender assessment] would be useful because I think it would be eye-opening even for producers who have gone and already made the film and said, 'Oh I didn't think about it that way, I didn't think about the way we portrayed Jenny. My god she's an archetype or a stereotypical character.' (Eva).

The Bechdel Test cannot determine if a film, "presents crass stereotypes of women or whether it is feminist in nature" (Lindner, Lindquist, & Arnold, 2015, p. 423). It is important to create a revised, reliable assessment of gender because as the Bechdel Test's popularity grows it is being used in wider and more varied contexts, from the policies of financiers to activist-based campaigns and as the basis of academic research. June spoke about the utility of the Bechdel Test:

> So I think there's this thing with the Bechdel Test where – I think it served a purpose to remind us that women are not talking on camera. They're not talking about themselves on camera. It exposed a much bigger hypocrisy or bigger malaise of the way women were being portrayed…In some ways the F thing [Rating] is another roadmap for people who are looking for movies…women who are looking for content, or mothers who are looking for content for their daughters to watch, whatever it is….In a sea of material, it's another way to narrow the field for people to find the content and the specificity. It's a niche – it's niche marketing. However we get 'em there, that's awesome.

Interviewees were asked about various applications of a reliable gender assessment, which is discussed in Chapter 7.

Labour versus content

A major issue that came up during the interviews was the importance of balancing labour in the film industry. Multiple interviewees stated that more gender and racial diversity behind the camera would translate to more balance on the screen. In fact, some interviewees suggested that a gender assessment might be useful precisely because it could point to labour issues:

> So the Bechdel Test was a huge reminder that across the board in our culture women are not being represented in a fair and balanced way. And then you have to go to the why…That leads us to who is directing what, what are the percentages, what are the actual statistics of gender diversity in roles which are paid in created content [i.e.] who are the writers, show runners, directors, [and] network executives that are approving stories and shows, and who are the distributors who are buying shows. (June).

The case for more equitable distribution of funds between female and male filmmakers is particularly compelling when industry gender dynamics are examined. Research has shown that there is a heavy emphasis placed on reputations in the Canadian film industry, where obtaining work is largely based on informal networks (Coles, 2016; Wing Fai, Gill, & Randle, 2015; McRobbie, 2015). Interviewee June spoke to the issues around labour in the Canadian media industry with respect to small networks and the importance of reputations:

> I love Canada and I wanted to stay here and have a huge career here. But if one person who's in power somewhere doesn't like you, nobody will hire you. Nobody. There's way too many people with no experience having way too much power. And that works for women too… we've supported mediocrity and hired people again and again.

When such importance is placed on reputations and workers are only as good as their last jobs, they often avoid making complaints for fear of being blacklisted for future work (Conor, Gill, & Taylor, 2015; Coles, 2013; Blair, 2001).

Over the past two years, multiple reports of sexual harassment, assault, and discrimination at media workplaces have come to light, highlighting the pervasiveness of gender issues in the industry, as such instances of discrimination impact women at a higher incidence than men (Craig, 2016; Roumeliotis, 2015; Russell, 2016). For several decades women working in the film industry have largely been clustered into administrative and junior-level positions, or in editing and set and costume design departments (Sinclair & Wolfe, 2006; Lauzen, 2015; Coles, 2013). The gender divide is frequently felt on film sets, where sexist and racist comments and jokes are common. Given the old boys club culture of the industry, combined with the low representation of women in senior roles behind the camera, it is no wonder so many interviewees stated that a gender assessment should incorporate labour:

> I always thought that my problems in my industry were my problems, and I never really made a correlation to my gender. I just thought this is – and it is – a really hard industry. For everyone I know…I saw that I'm not in a bubble here, I am a product of society… It's so weird in a sense, it's so odd. And it really made me sad and annoyed. Mostly sad. And then annoyed and angry. Like this is ridiculous… because it [the Canadian film industry] *is* government funded. That's the most important thing is that you understand that it's not about my personal problem and my struggles, it is about what's going on in society and it's pretty pathetic… But what's really going to change things is action, is hiring, is doing. Stop talking about it and go give a marginalized person money to make their film. Fund them, you know. And then hire people who are not usually hired. (Joan).

> At the end of the day it goes back to a need to hire people of colour, different genders, because as soon as you make that effort, and it's not just hiring people you've worked with, but really doing the homework to get different people with different points of view to positions of power. So it doesn't necessarily have to be classified as feminist or female driven. (Jess).
>
> There's no obligation. And I think that is a very tricky scenario to be in, because in my experience there isn't a lot of diversity in terms of the creative people involved in shows and [at] the conception stages. So it's like, how much of people's own experiences are translated in the kind of content that they're making when there aren't a lot of writer's rooms with women in them, not a lot of directors, not a lot of series creators that are women. So I feel like with the gender thing we could be doing better and it would be nice to have some sort of rating system that made it more apparent to producers and creators that this is a priority …I think that it would be hugely beneficial but also a massive undertaking. How do you define, and also how do you implement in a way that people feel a sense of responsibility. (Alex).

Joan said, "…what will happen naturally is people will have a different way of telling that story, or a different eye filming that story." There is no question that the labour imbalance in the film industry is a problem that must be addressed to create opportunities for filmmakers who have historically been marginalized. The notion that a more equitable distribution of behind-the-scenes workers will translate to balanced content was a topic that arose during several interviews and is explored in greater detail below.

A question of gaze

The idea that a director or writer's gender directly relates to her or his ability to create meaningful representations of women and men is a "somewhat tenuous and essentialist argument that assumes that men cannot write women, and vice versa" (Griffin, 2015, p. 61). The concept of the female gaze was inspired by Carolee Schneemann's film *Fuses* (1965) and written about in Laura Mulvey's (1975) work on the male gaze[13]. For Mulvey (1975) the male gaze characterizes women as passive objects on the screen, and men as active subjects. It suggests that even as audience

members, cinema teaches both men and women to view females as objects of male pleasure (Mulvey, 1975). Discourse around the female gaze is an attempt at inverting Mulvey's original concept. It flips the male gaze on its head, and has resonated with many within and outside of academia. The female gaze was recently popularized in the Canadian film industry by American writer and director Jill Soloway, who gave an industry lecture during TIFF 2016 advocating for more content creation by women (TIFF, 2016). The idea that the female gaze is tied to labour, and is something that only female filmmakers can possess, came up multiple times during interviews. For June, the female gaze does not mean creating content about women or reflective of women's experiences, it is enough for the film to simply be directed by a woman:

> It's like [the] Canadian gaze. I don't need to make a movie where everyone's standing in a wheat field and it's Saskatchewan. I can make any movie and it's Canadian because I'm directing it. So every single choice is filtered through my Canadianism, right? It's also filtered through the nuance and my experience of being a woman in the world. I'm going to make a different choice for different reasons than if I was a guy in the same [role]. (June).
>
> You often get males writing female characters and that's fine. But then you have Kathryn Bigelow directing *Point Break* and that's like the most testosterone-fuelled movie ever and one of my favourite movies. But I can't help but think, 'Is it one of my favourite movies because it was a female director?' The nuances in the way she created those characters and shot some of those scenes really resonated with me because she was female. Who's telling the story is just so important more than ever these days. (Jess).
>
> Everybody brings a unique voice to the table…what your background is – your socio-economic background and experience as a child. The gender that you are. The race that you are, your culture – everything brings a layer to it… also every white guy doesn't direct it the same, but that is the male gaze. And the female gaze is different. (June).

While the female gaze came up multiple times, there was no consensus as to exactly what it meant or how it could be identified apart from the fact that it could only be detected in content created by women. Participants characterized it as a quality that could

be seen within films, regardless of the subject matter or gender of the main protagonists. Scholars have also theorized about a feminine aesthetic found in certain films, which does not depend on the sex or gender of the filmmaker, but on the aesthetic of the content itself (Pruska-Oldenhof, 2008). When the term "female gaze" is used to define an aesthetic tool that depicts feminine modes of filmmaking – including feminine shot compositions – it is clear that such a method is one way of retrieving the feminine voice and can be possessed by filmmakers who are women, men, and gender non-binary. While it is outside the scope of this thesis to extensively interrogate and identify how to detect the female gaze as a feminine aesthetic, this is an area where future research is needed, and it could have important implications in the creation of effective gender assessments of film.

Among interviewees, the female gaze was also spoken about as something of a zeitgeist, a wide-reaching cultural shift throughout the film industry with regard to gender:

> This is what women and I talk a lot about – when we get to the place where we're able to fail, that's when we'll know the female gaze has arrived and that we are gender neutral and diversity has been achieved. It's when we get to the place where we're all able to fail and still have a career…When a female tree falls in the forest, everybody hears. Men can fail and get up. (June).

Among interviewees the female gaze narrative spoke to the importance of a wide range of voices creating content, but it could also obscure issues around biased representations of women on screen by suggesting that labour behind the camera is enough. The idea that women writers and directors bring a female perspective to the stories they create, including narratives centered around men, also implies that all women have a particular style that can be picked out. Suggesting that the femaleness of women filmmakers is somehow detectable by audiences is limiting. It implies that gender resides within the body as an innate trait that can be traced in all that one does, validating the concerns of gender theorists Butler (1988) and de Lauretis (1987).

The risk in suggesting that labour is the only answer to on-screen gender bias is that it could push the industry toward gender parity behind the camera without making significant progress around content. Applying the commodity audience theory, content

creators reproduce stories that have previously been financially successful (Smythe, 1977). Historically, male-driven stories have had the biggest budgets and consequentially garnered the highest returns (Meehan, 2002). Given the risk averse nature of the film industry, it is especially important for underrepresented filmmakers to produce high-earning films, as they are rarely afforded the opportunity to experiment. It could be argued that these creatives are even more likely to employ formulaic content that has a proven track record of success, which would lead to more stories about and for men. The commodity audience theory would suggest that a focus on labour alone as a solution to gender biases in the industry would lead to more stories about men, by both male and female filmmakers. Representation research has disproved this argument concerning the commodity audience theory and, while it is erroneous to suggest that a detectable female gaze can identify the gender of the filmmaker, gender is in fact associated with the way stories are told.

Stacy Smith, Marc Choueiti, Elizabeth Scofield, and Katherine Pieper (2013) examined the 100 top-grossing fictional films for gender prevalence, demographic information, and hypersexualization for five years. They found that, "films with female helmers are populated with more girls/women on screen and with less female sexualization. At least one avenue to diversifying cinematic content or reducing the risk of some negative effects (i.e., objectification) may be to hire more women behind the camera," (Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Pieper, 2013, p. 1). This research does not suggest that female filmmakers have a particular style or nuanced gaze that can be detected, but it does demonstrate that placing women in leadership positions on films translates to less biased and more balanced portrayals of gender. For this reason, both labour and content must be thoughtfully considered in any discussion about improving the gender balance in film.

Chapter 6: Gender Assessments

Representation

Representation helps viewers make sense of the world and "is an active process of creating meanings" (Milestone & Meyer, 2012, as cited by Griffin, 2015, p. 67). Ronna Liggett (2012) analyzes the relationship between media's representations of women, femininity, and femaleness in society and the rate of discrimination against women's bodies (as cited by Griffin, 2015). When media perpetuate the notion that women are subservient to men, for instance by portraying women as sexual objects rather than well-rounded human beings, violence against women is legitimized (Liggett, 2012 as cited by Griffin, 2015). Such media portrayals can also harm the self-images of women by normalizing an ideal body type (Griffin, 2015). Griffin (2015) states that since popular culture's verbal and visual messages have so frequently represented women as subservient and men as dominant, when the opposite is done it stands out, "which is radical and noticeable precisely where submissiveness is coded 'feminine'" (pg. 61). That is, such a move garners attention because it subverts the common and core societal belief that women are subservient to men.

In overlooking the power that visual language might hold, and the relations of power from which it emanates, it is impossible to understand an important aspect of how people perceive the modern world and act within it. Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) suggest that visual representations of emotion hold extraordinary power over political dynamics (as cited by Griffin, 2015). "Some go so far as stressing that the real political battles today are being fought precisely within these visual and seeming imaginary fields of media representations, where 'affectively charged images' shape our understanding of political phenomena more so than the actual phenomena themselves" (Bleiker & Hutchison, 2008, as cited by Griffin, 2015, p. 62). Liggett (2012) points out that even the United Nations Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) makes a direct link between stereotypes about women and prejudice based on gender (as cited by Griffin, 2015).

The participants interviewed for this research spoke about their frustrations around biased or stereotyped representations in mainstream film, and also shared a variety of ideas on how a gender assessment should be structured:

> There's so many levels because there's the practical side of who's doing the testing, how are those testers being picked, what films are they looking at, how is the study being conducted…Is it the number of roles versus screen time? How about if [there are] a number of incredibly layered and complex female or trans [characters] who don't have as much screen time but are very nuanced, and [the film depicts a] character that you don't ordinarily see. Is that good enough or does it have to be screen time? And is it just the performers, what about the crew? The writers, directors, executive producers and the network? I guess at the end of the day the goal is to get different voices creating and on-screen because if you can see it you can believe it, but then how do you get people on screen and how do you get people to pay for it, which is the business side of everything…It just depends so much on who's doing it and how they're doing it. (Jess).

Jess had not heard of the IMDb F-Rating. She thinks it is a better assessment than the Bechdel Test in terms of acknowledging labour and representation. When told about the Mako Mori Test she thought it was also an important tool and commented on other aspects she thought important for a test to capture:

> There should be some objective criteria. If it's violent emotionally, mentally, physically. What is the shot composition? Is it primarily from the male gaze, the female gaze? There would be a way to classify that one would think… and maybe that rating [the misogyny rating] would attract a broader audience [than a "feminist" rated film would]. (Jess).
>
> We've had conversations around what 'female films' mean. Some people wanted it to be considered a female film if the director is female. And we as producers [said], 'We don't think that should be the only marker because then you have a gun for hire'…Our organization was pushing for it to be broader than just the director and to consider the writers and producers because it starts with who has control… We talked about it being protagonists but I don't think it should be that. We should [provide] the opportunity for Canada's Kathryn Bigelow to make whatever she wants, because female directors shouldn't be stuck making female movies. (Angela).

Angela also had comments about the Mako Mori Test:

> I could see that, I think that could work. But that's why it's complicated. How do you say to a film check these boxes but not these? But thinking bigger is important because yes the central character but then who is present in the coffee shop scene and what job they have, and who's in your crew? (Angela).
>
> I think representation is definitely important. We need to get over 'paint by numbers' numerical diversity, people of colour [and women] filling in certain roles [to meet] some sort of quota just to make it appear as though [they] are being represented. So I think a question is, how are we going to judge the balance of that representation? In a situation where a female character is falling into a stereotype, is that a major problem and how do you consider that with the rest of the film, because some women might actually in real life have those behaviours. I still think it's doable. Maybe it's, if the character is [stereotyped], why? What's the rationale for character X behaving this way? Is it realistic to the story world created that she would behave that way? Does she fall victim to other stereotypes of women? And if she does then maybe that would be a lower grade or score on this test. I think you have to look at it on balance. You have to look at the rest of the characters in the film on balance as well, not just characters in isolation. Look at the script on balance, the characters on balance, the flow, and the overall storyline and you see there and you judge from that. (Eva).

Eva suggests creating a running list of common stereotypes to compare representations against. She also questions the utility of such a test in other nations:

> The question is, are stereotypes culturally relative? So for example is a stereotype in one culture a stereotype in another? I think there are probably global stereotypes of women, but there might be other categories of stereotypes and unbalanced portrayals that we in North America are not cognizant of. (Eva).

Envisioning a Bechdel Test 2.0

The intention behind creating a more reliable assessment for gender in film is to encourage more inclusive media products. Other positive effects might include enhanced media literacy, increased awareness about media stereotypes, and a spotlight on labour issues. Such a tool could benefit multiple groups including parents and those aiming to avoid films that showcase narrow, stereotyped representations of gender. When asked

about the utility of an assessment for gender in film interviewee Jess expressed her support for the tool:

> Nobody is going to take the time to dissect something and really understand the disparity unless [there is] a simplified test [or a gender assessment is added to] a rating system. Absolutely to raise awareness to such a disparity – I mean it's shameful. I think the way to go along correcting it is to make it obvious that there's something glaringly wrong and make steps to address it from there.

To the frustration of those who advocate for greater and better quality portrayals of women on screen, every successful female-centered movie from *Thelma and Louise* (1991) to *Bridesmaids* (2011) is hailed as marking a turning point that is never realized (Griffin, 2015). "Every time there's a movie starring women, the media is very excited to say, 'Well, this changes everything.' That's what happened with *Thelma and Louise*…and nothing changed" (Geena Davis in Le Marquand, 2013, as cited by Griffin, 2015, p. 122). A core problem in creating a tool to assess gender balance is that it might celebrate a relatively small portion of films determined to be balanced, while obscuring the fact that the majority of mainstream films include stereotyped portrayals of women. For this reason, and given interviewees' feedback, rather than creating a test to assess whether or not a film is gender balanced, this research seeks to build an assessment to point out exactly where a film may go wrong. The Misogyny or M-Rating Test is largely objective in uncovering film content that may be misogynistic. It aims to capture the number of male, female, and non-binary characters on screen in an intersectional context, examining role types, visibility, speaking roles, sexualization, representations in employment, sexist comments or jokes, and instances of sexual harassment or sexual assault. It assesses these categories by gender and notes characters' race, disability status, sexuality, and gender-identity. The categories "male" and "female" listed in the test are meant to convey "male-presenting" and "female-presenting," respectively. Trans and non-conforming characters are classified as "non-binary."

M (Misogyny) Rating Test

If a film fails on three or more of the below measures, it receives an M-Rating.

Objective measures

1. Visibility: What is the approximate ratio of male, female, and non-binary characters throughout the film? What percentage of characters in each category are people of colour or LGBTQ? What percentage have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If the ratio of male to female and non-binary characters combined is 3:1 or higher, then the film fails on this measure.
2. Role types: What percentage of male, female, and non-binary characters are in primary (lead), secondary (supporting), or tertiary (bit part) roles? Are any of these characters people of colour or LGBTQ? Do any of them have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If the total number of male characters in primary and secondary roles is double the number of female and non-binary characters combined in these roles, then the film fails on this measure.
3. Speaking roles: What percentage of male, female, and non-binary characters speak in the film? Are any of these characters people of colour or LGBTQ? What percentage have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If the female and non-binary characters occupy less than 35 per cent of all speaking roles, then the film fails on this measure.
4. Sexualization: What percentage of male, female, and non-binary characters are shown in sexy (i.e. tight or alluring) attire; partially naked; and/or exposing some skin in the breast, midriff, or high upper thigh area? What approximate ages are these characters, and are any of them people of colour or LGBTQ? Do any of them have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If the percentage of sexualized female and non-binary characters combined is double that of male characters, the film fails on this measure.
    - If any of the sexualized female characters are younger than approximately 15 years old, then the film fails on this measure.

5. Employment: Are any of the characters seen in employment settings? If so, what percentage of male, female, and non-binary characters are shown in leadership, senior, or executive-level positions versus administrative positions? Are any of these characters people of colour or LGBTQ? Do any of them have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If the percentage of male characters in leadership positions is double that of female and non-binary characters combined, then the film fails on this measure.
6. Age: How many times is a woman above approximately 30 years old referred to as a girl? How many times is a man above approximately 30 years old referred to as a boy? How many times is a non-binary person above approximately 30 years old referred to as a girl or boy? Referring to multiple people in the same instance should be calculated as the number of relevant characters in the scene e.g. "you girls" referring to a group of five women over 30 counts as five times. Are any of these characters people of colour or LGBTQ? Do any of them have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If female or female-identifying characters are referred to as girls at least double the amount that men or male-identifying characters are referred to as boys, then the film fails on this measure.
7. Is sexual violence or sexual harassment depicted against male, female, and/or non-binary characters? How many instances? Are any of these characters people of colour or LGBTQ? Do any of them have a disability? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If sexual violence or harassment is depicted against double the amount of combined female and non-binary characters compared to male characters, or for double the instances, then the film fails on this measure.

Non-objective measures

8. Jokes and comments: How many sexist or misogynistic jokes or comments are made in the film? Such jokes or comments are detectable as they are made toward female or non-binary characters and meant to belittle those individuals on the basis of gender. An example is, "You throw ball like a girl," from *The Sandlot.* Are any of these jokes/comments directed toward people of colour, LGBTQ characters, or characters who have disabilities? Specify and show the male, female, non-binary breakdown.
    - If there are three or more sexist jokes or comments toward female and non-binary characters, then the film fails on this measure.

The sections of this test that relate to employment and sexualization were inspired by the research of Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, and Pieper (2013) who have extensively assessed gender representations in mainstream films. The M-Rating test can be adapted to be primarily focused on race, sexuality, class, age, body type, and ability-level. Such uses are encouraged and could uncover how systemic inequalities manifest in different ways within the dominant discourses of mainstream media. See the appendix for a template table to track films using the M-Rating Test.

Testing

The M-Rating was tested on four films within different genres from 2016 including *Arrival*, science fiction; *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, fantasy/adventure; *Girl on the Train,* drama/crime; and *Office Christmas Party,* comedy. All of these films are listed in the top 100 highest grossing films globally (Box Office Mojo, 2017). The assessments can be found below.

While the M-Rating was tested on four films, it would need to undergo validity testing by multiple people to determine its efficacy, with inter-coder reliability evaluations being conducted to ensure that classifications are consistent. Additional testing should be done on the four films already tested and at least six additional films including movies from Hollywood as well as those made by Canadians working in Canada. It is likely that after additional testing the M-Rating would need to be developed further and adjusted to address any gaps that a more comprehensive analysis would uncover. In addition to more extensive testing on the M-Rating, it would also be useful to

have additional people rate films using various other gender assessments to determine the inter-coder reliability of each of these tests and enable comparisons between them.

Arrival

In the film *Arrival* there are no non-binary, LGBTQ, trans, or disabled characters. The aliens in the film were not counted as characters in any of the M-Rating assessment categories. The main protagonist is a white American woman who is a linguistic anthropologist, researcher, and professor. The secondary/supporting characters in the film include a physicist, a white American man; a colonel, a black American man; a director of the CIA, a white American man; and a young girl with cancer, a white American child. The bit parts include two soldiers, white American men; two students, one Asian American young woman, and one African American young man; a diplomat/official, a Chinese man; two female and two male journalists, all white and American. No sexualization was found in the film, nor sexist jokes or comments.

Figure 1: Distribution of female, male, and non-binary characters in *Arrival* (2016).

	Female	Male	Non-binary
Primary characters	1	0	0
People of colour	0	0	0
Secondary characters	1	2	0
People of colour	0	1	0
Bit parts/tertiary characters	2	4	0
People of colour	1	2	0

In terms of visibility, the assessment analyzed primary, secondary, and bit part roles, and examined the number of male and female characters in the majority of scenes. The film was largely based in a military compound, and the vast majority of scenes included a 3:1:0 male to female to non-binary ratio. The majority of scenes included all white characters, and when there was a person of colour in the frame, the ratio was approximately 3:1 of white people to people of colour. Given that the ratio of male-to-female characters is approximately 3:1, the film fails on this measure.

The film passes on role types. 100 per cent of the lead characters were female. 75 per cent of the secondary characters were male and 25 per cent were female. Of the secondary characters, 25 per cent were men of colour. The bit parts were 70 per cent male and 30 per cent female, with 33 per cent of these roles being filled by people of colour, 22 per cent being men of colour and 11 women of colour.

The speaking criteria was particularly revealing for the film, as it just passes with 40 per cent female speaking characters, 16 per cent being women of colour; and 60 per cent male speaking characters, 33 per cent being men of colour. In total 32 per cent of speaking roles were filled by people of colour in the film.

Of characters in positions of employment, 27 per cent were female, 73 per cent male, and 18 per cent were people (all men) of colour. There are no women of colour depicted in employment. The most senior employment positions are all-male, with the top position occupied by a white man and the second-in-command position being a man of colour. The film fails on this measure.

The film passed on six measures and failed on two, meaning that it does not receive an M-Rating. The film also passes the Bechdel Test (BTML, 2016).

Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

In the film *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* there are no non-binary, LGBTQ, trans, or disabled characters. The two main protagonists in the film include a white British man, and a white American woman. The secondary/supporting characters in the film included a mind-reading wizard, a white American woman; an ex-soldier and baker, a white American man; the president of the wizarding world, a black American woman; the villain, a white American man; an abused wizard, a white American young man; a second abused wizard, a white American girl; a cult leader, a white American woman; an aspiring politician, a white American man; a powerful businessman, a white American man; the son of a powerful business man, a white American man. The bit part characters included an immigration officer, a white American man; a banker, a white American man; and a wizard/dignitary, a woman of colour. The primary roles are split 50/50 between women and men, and are all white. The secondary roles are 40 per cent female, and 25 per cent of these characters are women of colour; and 60 per cent male, with no men of colour. The secondary characters are 10 per cent people (women) of

colour. The bit parts are 33 per cent female, all women of colour; and 66 per cent male, including no men of colour. When all of these parts are considered together, the totals are 40 per cent women, 60 per cent men, and 13 per cent people of colour. These are all speaking roles, meaning that the film passes on the role measure as well as the speaking measure.

Figure 2: Distribution of female, male, and non-binary characters in *Fantastic beasts and where to find them* (2016).

	Female	Male	Non-binary
Primary characters	1	1	0
People of colour	0	0	0
Secondary characters	3	6	0
People of colour	1	0	0
Bit parts/tertiary characters	0	2	0
People of colour	1	0	0

In terms of visibility, the assessment analyzed primary, secondary, and bit part roles, and also examined the number of male and female characters in the majority of scenes. The ratio of male to female to non-binary characters is approximately 2:1:0. In the majority of frames in the film, there are more men than women and nearly all characters are white. There are also more all-male scenes than all-female scenes. All police officers depicted in the film (approximately 10 non-speaking characters) are male. The film passes on this measure.

The film shows some mild sexualization of women. In three scenes, a secondary female character has part of her breasts exposed in a low-cut dress. There is no sexualization of male characters. The film fails on this measure.

There are two sexual comments made about a white woman. There is no sexual harassment or assault depicted in the film. The film passes on both of these measures.

In terms of characters depicted in employment, there are 60 per cent men and 40 per cent women. 10 per cent of the female characters are in entry level/administrative positions, 10 per cent are women of colour occupying leadership positions, and the remaining 80 per cent – all white women – occupy mid-level positions. 30 per cent of the

male characters are in leadership positions, none of them are in entry level/administrative positions, and 70 per cent are in mid-level positions. There are no men of colour shown in employment. The film fails on this measure.

The film passes on five measures and fails on three, meaning that it receives an M-Rating. The film also passes the Bechdel Test (BTML, 2016).

The Girl on the Train

In the film *The Girl on the Train* there are no non-binary, LGBTQ, trans, or disabled characters. There is one main protagonist and narrator in the film, an alcoholic ex-wife who is a white British woman. The secondary characters include a white American male executive and ex-husband; a white female American senior executive; a white American male widow and ex-husband; a white American female nanny, mistress and former gallery director; a white American female roommate; a white American realtor and stay-at-home mother; a white American female detective; an unidentified white American male commuter and professional; and a Latino American male psychiatrist. The bit parts are all American characters including a white female (non-speaking) baby; a child (non-speaking) male street performer, a person of colour; a white male (non-speaking) detective; a female doctor who is a woman of colour; an intoxicated white female partygoer; two talkative white female commuters; two white teenage boys. When all primary, secondary, and bit part roles are considered, the gender split is 58 per cent female, 42 per cent male, and 0 per cent non-binary. 16 per cent of the characters are people of colour. Among primary characters, 100 per cent are female and white. In terms of secondary characters 44 per cent are male, and 25 per cent are men of colour; and 56 per cent are female with no women of colour. For bit parts 56 per cent are female with 20 per cent women of colour; and 44 per cent were male with 25 per cent of these characters being people of colour. The film passes on this measure as well as the speaking measure.

Figure 3: Distribution of female, male, and non-binary characters in *The girl on the train* (2016).

	Female	Male	Non-binary
Primary characters	1	0	0
People of colour	0	0	0
Secondary characters	5	3	0
People of colour	0	1	0
Bit parts/tertiary characters	4	3	0
People of colour	1	1	0

In terms of visibility, the assessment analyzed primary, secondary, and bit part roles, and also examined the number of male and female characters in the majority of scenes. The ratio of male to female to non-binary characters is approximately 1:1.5:0. In many frames in the film there are slightly more women than men. Nearly all characters in the film are white. Only three non-white characters were seen in the film, including extras. The film passes on this measure.

In terms of characters seen in employment, 56 per cent are female and 44 per cent are male. 40 per cent of the women in employment are in entry-level positions, all white, and 60 per cent are in leadership positions or occupy prestigious roles e.g. doctor or senior detective, with 33 per cent of leadership positions filled by women of colour. 75 per cent of the male characters in employment are in leadership positions, none are in entry level or administrative positions, and the remaining 25 per cent occupy mid-level positions. 25 per cent of the men shown in employment are people of colour, and they all occupy leadership roles. The film passes on this measure.

There are multiple instances of sexualization of women throughout the film. There are more than nine scenes and many more shots that portray women naked and partially naked. In three scenes a male's bare chest is portrayed. No people of colour are sexualized in the film. As the percentage of sexualized female characters is double that of males, the film fails on this measure.

Explicit sexist jokes or comments were not made. There is no sexual assault or harassment depicted. The film passes on seven measures and fails on one, meaning that it does not receive an M-Rating. The film also passes the Bechdel Test (BTML, 2016).

Office Christmas Party

There are no non-binary characters, LGBTQ characters, nor are there any characters with disabilities in the film. The main protagonist in the film is a senior executive at a technology company, a white, American man. The secondary characters include a white American male CEO; a white American female CEO; an African American male senior executive; a female American woman of colour who is a programmer; an Asian American male accountant; a white American female executive assistant; a white American female human resources manager; an American male director who is a person of colour; an African American male manager; a white American female prostitute; a white American female pimp; a white American female Uber driver; and a white American male chauffeur. The bit part characters include a white American male manager; an African American female security guard; an Asian American female administrative assistant; a second American female administrative assistant, also a woman of colour; a white American male divorce lawyer; a white American male doctor; a white Russian male bouncer; two white male (non-speaking) thugs; two African American female (non-speaking) nurses; one African American male (non-speaking) nurse; three white American (non-speaking) female nurses; and a white American (non-speaking) homeless man. When primary, secondary, and tertiary characters are considered, the gender divide is 50 per cent male, 50 per cent female, with zero non-binary characters. Of the main protagonists, 100 per cent are white American men. Of the secondary characters, 54 per cent are female with 14 per cent being women of colour; and 46 per cent are male with 66 per cent being men of colour. In terms of bit parts, 50 per cent are female with 63 per cent being women of colour; and 50 per cent are male, with 13 per cent of these characters being men of colour. The film passes on the role types measure.

Figure 4: Distribution of female, male, and non-binary characters in *Office Christmas Party* (2016).

	Female	Male	Non-binary
Primary characters	0	1	0
People of colour	0	0	0
Secondary characters	6	2	0
People of colour	1	4	0
Bit parts/tertiary characters	3	7	0
People of colour	5	1	0

In terms of visibility, the assessment analyzed primary, secondary, and bit part roles, and also examined the number of male and female characters in the majority of scenes. The ratio of male to female to non-binary characters is approximately 1:1:0. The film passes on this measure. There are more white people than people of colour throughout the film, particularly in speaking and central roles, but there were people of colour in the majority of scenes.

In terms of speaking roles, 66 per cent of the female characters speak and 33 per cent do not. Of the female characters that do not speak, 40 per cent are women of colour and 60 per cent are white women. In terms of the male characters, 73 per cent speak and 27 per cent do not. Of the male characters that do not speak, 25 per cent are men of colour and 75 per cent are white men. The film passes on this measure.

In terms of characters seen in employment, 52 per cent are female and 48 per cent are male. 72 per cent of the women are in entry-level or administrative positions, 19 per cent are in mid-level management positions, and 9 per cent are in leadership positions. There are no women of colour in leadership positions and there is an even split between white women and women of colour in the mid-level and administrative/entry-level categories. Of the male characters in employment 60 per cent are in leadership positions, and 33 per cent are men of colour; 30 per cent are in mid-level management, 66 per cent are men of colour; and 10 per cent are in entry level and administrative positions, all are men of colour. The film fails on this measure.

There were at least 30 instances of sexualization of women, and 10 instances of sexualization of men found in the film. The film fails on this measure.

There was at least one explicit sexist comment found in the film toward women[14], but not more than three. The film passes on this measure.

There were at least two instances of sexual harassment in the film toward women and none toward men.[15] The film fails on this measure.

The film passes on five measures and fails on three, meaning it receives an M-Rating. The film also passes the Bechdel Test.

Discussion and recommendations

The aim of this research is to shine a light on the pervasiveness of gender stereotypes in mundane and seemingly innocuous media portrayals. Misogynistic behaviours are expressions of patriarchy that harm women (Mantilla, 2015) and, as Donaghue (2015) points out, identifying only the most severe forms of misogyny as legitimate serves to obscure less blatant and more normalized acts. As demonstrated by Butler (1988), the analysis of everyday acts can be extraordinarily revealing – it can expose how common gestures and behaviours are loaded with a patriarchal history. Buiten (2007) has suggested that misogynistic behaviour can be found in overt and subtle actions, and Manne (2016) points out that while misogyny is found in action, sexism is often unconscious. In the context of gender stereotypes in film, it is simpler to identify actions rather than thoughts or motivations, therefore the M-Rating focuses on misogynistic rather than sexist content. Manne (2016) has suggested that "misogyny *is* what misogyny *does* to women" and it is not necessary to know one's inner thoughts or motivations to know that s/he is a misogynist (p. 1), or that s/he is behaving in misogynistic ways. Similarly, it is not necessary and nor is it possible to fully understand the motives of characters in films in order to classify content as misogynistic.

The M-Rating Test was envisioned with a goal to help democratize media content and demonstrate the imbalances that exist in mainstream films. The criteria have been developed with that goal in mind. In the M-Rating, four criteria – visibility, role types, speaking roles, and employment depictions – refer not to misogyny, but to the inequitable representation of gender in film. These criteria point to total number of male, female, and non-binary characters on-screen and how they are portrayed i.e. as speaking or non-

speaking; in primary, secondary, or tertiary roles; and, if seen in employment, the positions they occupy. The remaining criteria include sexualization, age-related quips about gender, sexual violence or harassment, and gender-based jokes or comments, and all are focused on misogynistic actions, behaviours, and speech. The M-Rating criteria do not examine the subtext of films as this was determined to be too difficult to assess without a high level of subjectivity. While the M-Rating highlights certain acts, it is not a comprehensive rating of misogyny. If expanded in the future, the M-Rating should include an assessment for domestic violence, which was found to be an important expression of misogyny by Mantilla (2015) and Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2016). Criteria on airtime, or the total time that each character spoke in the film, was initially included in the M-Rating, but after testing it was removed for being too time-consuming to be useful as part of a simple test. As-is, the test requires attentive viewing and a score-pad – for a template, please see the appendix.

While the M-Rating may seem exhaustive, it is a simple test that yields information that might allow for a more objective empirical analysis of gender bias in films than the Bechdel Test or its various iterations. As previously mentioned, additional research is necessary to assess the empirical validity of the M-Rating Test and compare it to other gender assessments. The present research acknowledges that some instances of sexism and misogyny in media are central aspects to a storyline and serve to reflect societal inequalities. It was determined that to develop an assessment that picked up on such nuance would not be possible in the form of a simple test, and would also inevitably include a layer of subjectivity. There are aspects of the M-Rating that are objective, and those that are subjective. For skeptical users, the objective measures present a minimum standard. If applied to any or all of the settings listed in the below section on applications, the M-Rating might disrupt commonly held beliefs about gender and may prompt media makers to create and distribute more balanced and less stereotyped content. The test could be particularly insightful when used alongside other assessments of gender in film.

While the M-Rating is structured so that films pass or fail criteria depending on depictions of gender, capturing the amount of people of colour, LGBTQ people, and those with disabilities highlights intersectional disparities found in media products. Yet, if a film fails on a particular measure, context is not exhaustively explored for extra

points. For instance, in *Fantastic Beasts*, the film failed on employment even though it depicted a woman of colour in a leadership position. While such a depiction stands out because it is so rare in mainstream media content, the test aims to set a more equitable bar with regard to depictions of male, female, and non-binary characters from a range of backgrounds. If this research were continued, another recommendation is for the M-Rating Test to be expanded to a scale-based system that assesses different levels of misogyny in film i.e. M1, M2, M3, M4, and M5. Such a scale would align well with the existing film rating system, and would provide more of an indication as to what viewers can expect with regard to the level of gender biases and stereotyping found in movies. Manne (2016) points out that there is high comorbidity between misogyny and racism, and further research could identify whether or not this might also extend to homophobia, transphobia, and ableism. An expansion of the M-Rating could also include assigning equal weight to gender, race, sexuality, and disability by rating each of these categories in films. Such a shift in the M-Rating would mean that intersectionality would not only be noted in the test, it would also impact the outcome of the rating.

While it is not as simple to employ as the Bechdel Test, or any of the other gender assessments listed in Chapter 1, the M-Rating Test may be more accurate and reliable. The previously mentioned Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GDIQ) is a tool that detects the number of male and female characters on screen, and analyzes speaking roles to capture how long each character talks during a film (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2016). The GDIQ could be expanded, or another software tool might be created, to provide a more comprehensive analysis of films and assess gender non-binary characters along with the race, sexuality, and disabilities of characters. Such a tool could also use the M-Rating Test, the Bechdel Test, and other non-subjective assessments to deepen its analysis of inclusion. As the M-Rating Test does require significant attention to detail, the inclusion of the test in an expanded GDIQ or similar software tool could make for a powerful and user-friendly method of analysis. Before doing so, the M-Rating would need to be more extensively tested.

When asked about assessing the level of misogyny found in films interviewees had a range of reactions:

> You know how they have violence [and other criteria in film rating systems], I think it would be really funny to have a misogyny category. I mean it would be like, suddenly…our kids can't, and women can't see any films. Immediately 89 per cent of all films would have an M-rating. And I think that's more important than the Bechdel Test. (June).
>
> There could be overt misogyny but then there could be something underneath the surface. So how deep are you going in this rating system and how deep into the subtext of these characters do you have to go? [With] overt misogyny, you can see it on the screen. It's the action, it's written into the characters' acting, it's part of the script. But the subtext? This is a problem that maybe the writers [and producers] aren't even aware of when they're putting a script together. It's something that you get from watching it, but it might not be on the page. And that's the challenge. Because sometimes despite our best efforts things come out a certain way and you never thought that it could be interpreted that way. (Eva).

Eva states that films can have different meanings for different people and cultures. Jess said, "But maybe that's a good approach is approaching it from the other side." She mentions she does not think it should be called misogyny or an M-Rating, as she believes this is too strong a word.

In addition to developing a rating for misogyny, this research is also recommending that all academic and industry research that assesses gender representation in film include the categories male, female, and non-binary, even when there are no characters that fit the latter category. Research on media is often referred to at industry conferences, fundraisers, and events, and including all three categories of male, female, and non-binary, could serve as an ongoing reminder to the industry to think of gender in more fluid terms, and may even urge filmmakers to incorporate more trans and non-binary characters into content.

Since labour came up as such a dominant theme in the interviews, another recommendation is for Canadian financiers Telefilm, the NFB, and CMF to implement policies outlining that 50 per cent of their total film funding budgets be allocated to filmmakers who identify as women. The M-Rating Test may be used as a tool for financiers to encourage filmmakers to create balanced content, but if funding

organizations are to make significant strides on this issue, an important first step is funding an equal number of men and women filmmakers. It is also important to provide additional opportunities for girls and young women to enter the field as writers and directors, positions still dominated by men, which could begin with incorporating film and digital media-focused learning into grade-school education, with a specific focus on girls and young women. Creating safe spaces for girls to experiment as filmmakers in the classroom could encourage more women to develop films as writers and directors.

The M-Rating Test has been developed in the spirit of the artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's (1988), *Homeless Vehicle Project*. In 1988 Wodiczko built a moving vessel for the homeless that acted as a place for them to sleep, find shelter, and store belongings. The vehicle was pilot tested with homeless individuals who conveyed that it was useful. Wodiczko (1988) himself has stated that his creation was ridiculous as a solution to homelessness, yet his project is unsettling in that it highlights the desperation of homelessness as a systemic issue. That such a vehicle could make the lives of the homeless even marginally more comfortable makes onlookers question the society in which the cart was envisioned. An assessment of gender stereotyping in film could be viewed from a similar standpoint. While it is not a solution to biased depictions of gender in film or society, it draws attention to the pervasiveness of gender inequality as a systemic issue, hence raising awareness. In fact, the Bechdel Test was also created by an artist, and in a similar vein.

Marina Abramovic's (2002) experimentation with her audiences also provided inspiration for this gender assessment. Abramovic's performances involve attempts to create transformative experiences, both for herself and her audiences. In *Rhythm 0*, Abramovic placed herself amidst a series of common objects on a table (Renzi, 2013). Audience members were given simple and yet vague instructions to use her as they would any of the other objects, and the gallery staff were told not to intervene (Renzi, 2013). The performance resulted in a traumatic experience for Abramovic who was stripped, cut, and eventually saved by audience members, and it provided a commentary on societal and gender relations (Renzi, 2013). The performance *Rhythm 10* engages audience members in another way, as it involves Abramovic playing a game with knives that was often played by young men as a challenge of masculinity and bravery (Renzi, 2013).

During the performance Abramovic cut her hands and bled onstage multiple times to explore pain along with her mental and physical limitations (Renzi, 2013). While the former performance actively involves the public in influencing the direction of the piece, the latter confronts audiences with an ethical and moral dilemma in terms of whether or not they should interfere if Abramovic becomes seriously injured. She causes audiences to question their own role in consumptive practices. Abramovic's work speaks to the transformative potential of art, which can be extended to gender assessments of films. While Abramovic's performances uncover universal truths about humanity and point to an inherently violent and destructive potential of human beings, assessments for gender stereotyping in media products similarly seek to uncover truths in the form of biases or hegemonic ideology. Gender assessments such as the M-Rating Test are attempts to reveal the blind spots of modern gender relations, exposing pervasive societal issues in the face of post-feminist discourse that argues the fight for gender equality is no longer necessary. Assessments that critically analyze stereotyping in media can create transformative experiences for audiences by raising awareness about biased representations even in seemingly mundane content, and prompting action among certain publics. Such tools can catalyze debate and activism.

Applications

Interviewees had a range of views on where a revised gender assessment should be employed from financiers to streaming providers, film rating systems and more. It should be noted that interviewees did not see the M-Rating Test since it was developed after interviews occurred, and were instead speculating about a hypothetical revised assessment of gender in film. Various applications are discussed below.

Financiers

When discussing the possibility of creating a gender assessment for film, several interviewees suggested that financiers should make clear financial commitments around balancing the gender and diversity of labour:

> For me that's the most important thing is to get people behind the camera, in creative key roles. We have government funding for this, and it seems like it should be relatively easy fix…Telefilm is 100 per cent funded by government money. NFB is 100 per cent funded by government money. There is absolutely no

> question in my mind, this is government money and, yes, you need to represent the population in how you allocate the funding. (Joan).
>
> If you have something where you can look at it and figure out 'We're seeing 50 per cent female stories that need 50 per cent of the money,' which I think is an important marker because I don't want 50 per cent of the directors to be women if a big portion of that is low budget. (Angela).
>
> Ultimately they [film financiers] are responsible for spending public money in a proper and defensible way. So maybe the responsibility [to balance content and labour] lies with them and this rating system could be a way to reward or subtract points based on the results. And that way, you know these movies – they can still get made, you're not violating anybody's right to free speech – maybe they just can't be made with public money anymore. (Eva).

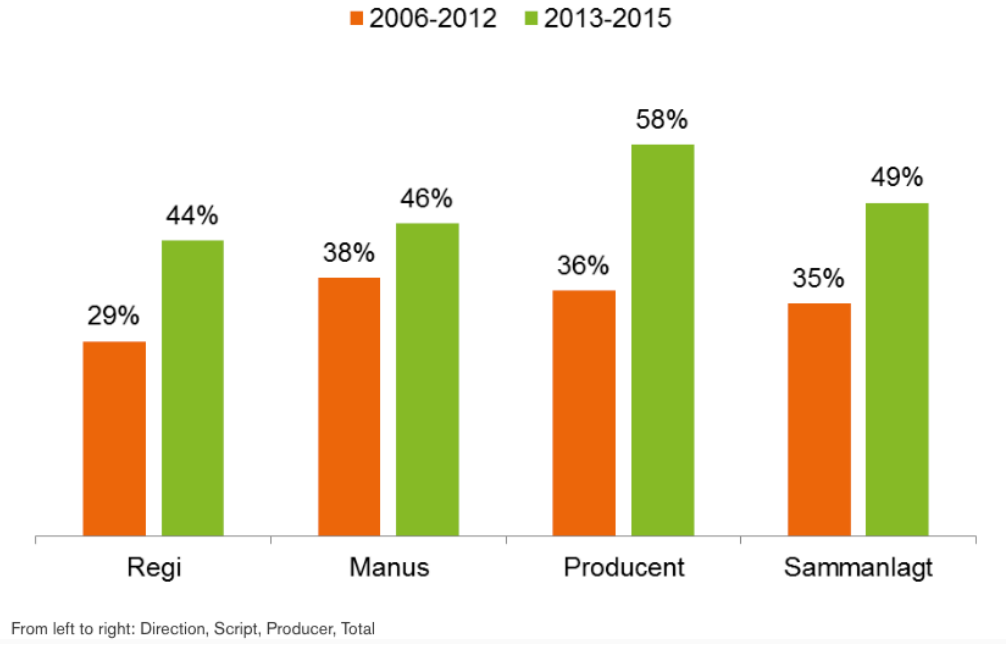
Interviewees also pointed to the problematic structure of Canadian film financiers:

> The industry there [in the U.S.] is very different. It's equally as sexist and the unconscious bias is definitely there, but it's a business. The Canadian industry is not a business. It's friends keeping friends' mortgages in flow. You'll see people over and over again on different shows, the same actors over and over. (June).

Angela also expressed concerns about those at the helm of public financing organizations and stated, "…the problem is there's four people who make decisions on what feature films get made in this country."

Joan, June, and Angela all pointed to the Swedish Film Institute (SFI) as a model that should be emulated in Canada and elsewhere. Under the leadership of CEO Anna Serner, the SFI (2017) implemented an agreement in 2013 that clarified its gender equality goals and stipulated that all production funding was to be divided equally between male and female writers, directors, and producers. At the end of 2015 this goal was nearly reached, as seen in the graph below.

Figure 5: Females funded by the Swedish Film Institute. Image from SFI, 2017.



Joan suggested that an organization such as Telefilm must have a policy for distributing funding in an equitable way because the leadership cannot be counted on:

> When you have people in power who are not like [Anna Serner] and who have not done anything about [the lack of women in film] despite that they have known about the issue intimately and have commissioned a study eight years ago…I don't have a lot of faith in the leadership at Telefilm to do the right thing… If you have people in power who are not going to do it… then you do need to be a little bit more specific. If you say, 'We have a goal and we want to reach this by this date and we will make sure that our averages look like this.' It needs to be part of policy or it won't happen.

June also mentions Sweden's work and suggests that a large part of the SFI's success derived from its leadership:

> She stated, "But you see, she [Serner] was not a bureaucrat. She was a CEO who came from a very successful business…I was talking to Canadian people about this and people said, 'Why can't we do this with Telefilm?' And I said, 'Because Telefilm is run by bureaucrats.' Anna Serner is a CEO who wants results because she comes from the private sector. In Canada the film industry is a bureaucratic institution. It's run by grants. America is run by the free market.

During the interviews, the structure of Hollywood was often compared with film industries in other countries that receive public funding. Interviewees made it clear that the solutions to gender and diversity issues in film are not the same for different countries:

> When they [the American film industry] start to make money, it will start to shift. Whereas in Canada it has to come out of ideology and quotas. But in America, it's about money. So, *Oscars So White*, now we have to do *Oscars So Male*. It's got to be this public shaming combined with business and things start to shift. (June).

Two interviewees felt that a gender assessment would be a useful tool if it could be applied to the production process while a film was still in its conception phase:

> So I can see how the checklist would be helpful at the current stage where people aren't really used to these considerations at the conception stage of a product. For something like that to be effective it would perhaps need to be a part of the entire funding [model] – the same process shows go through for tax credits and grants and funding. (Alex).

Alex recommends applying gender assessments to existing content in order to facilitate a broader discussion about eventually incorporating these tools into the production process:

> But I could see in order to make that effective…you would need to rate the content that's out there now and create a system of evaluating it, because that would highlight that there is still a lot of stereotyping that we're not conscious of. So create more awareness through rating the current content and then [implement] some sort of incentivized program at the creative stage. And make people accountable to what they committed to.

Eva also suggested applying a gender assessment in the conceptual phase:

> Especially now with CMF and Telefilm jumping on board for gender parity with various initiatives. I don't think they know yet exactly what those initiatives will look like…So maybe looking at the scripting phase and having scripts pass a test before getting further development money. And maybe this is something that producers or broadcasters can use internally [for instance] when they're developing a screenplay they [can] think about the larger contours in what they're putting together, and then think about this envisioned test. They [can] decide from

there whether or not it's a good idea to go forward with the script. I think there would probably be a lot of pushback from people who think it steps on their creative autonomy but at the same time it's 2017 and we need to be cognizant of the fact that what we see on screen matters.

Eva's suggestion has in fact been implemented by Eurimages, the international financier that allocates a portion of its budget to scripts that pass the Bechdel Test (Council of Europe, 2015).

> I think it should be at the level of funders…that way you don't get into the murky territory of creating a barrier for people's freedom of expression. Because there [are] other options. You can take your film that doesn't pass or doesn't get the high score for the public funding that you would need, and you can find private investors… it shouldn't be the place of public funders to invest money in films that represent women and people of colour poorly, inaccurately, and in a shallow way. (Eva).

Streaming providers

The utility of a gender assessment among streaming providers such as Netflix was envisioned among interviewees as a tool to help users find the content they desire. It was also noted that since over-the-top streaming services such as Netflix are not regulated, a gender assessment would likely only be used if it improved the company's offering:

> The CRTC has no control over the internet, they have no control over Netflix, they have no control over any of that. As that becomes less of an issue, it [rating content] becomes more of a marketing tool, or about how to find the stuff you want to watch. [Also] to help find content to avoid if you have children…I think we should look at it like that because that's less judgmental and more proactive. If it's like, if you're a misogynist and you want to watch a misogynist movie, here you go. Or if you want to avoid that, then here's some [content] to avoid…Or if you want to watch the film that's passed the Bechdel Test and feminist driven, that's got an F-rating, then great. And it might be F/PG or [PG]/Misogyny. Or F/NC-16. I think that's what I would like to see. That's what I feel could help, as more of a marketing tool. (June).

Netflix encourages its users to rate content. The streaming service previously used a system whereby viewers could rate content using a scale of one-to-five stars. In April 2017, the company shifted away from the star-system in favour of a simple thumbs-up, thumbs-down (Liedtke, 2017). Viewers can now indicate whether or not they are enjoying content by rating it with a yes, signaled by thumbs-up, or a no, signaled by thumbs-down. Netflix predicts the likelihood that particular subscribers will enjoy different content, indicated by a percentage score that is drawn from viewing patterns and previous ratings (Liedtke, 2017).

> Netflix operates as a business driven by algorithms. So, if there was not a demand and a desire for it, it would not fly there. So the whole paradigm of distributors saying that there isn't an audience for women's stories is bullshit. You just have to make it easy for them [audiences] to find the product…In a world of Google and search engines, how do we help people to find material that they want to watch and support? (June).

If Netflix were to expand its thumbs-up, thumbs-down rating system to solicit more granular feedback from customers, the company could further specify the kind of content users seek. For instance, if users indicate that they dislike content using a thumbs-down, they could also be given the option to explain why using a drop-down menu with a list of items. Biased gender portrayals could be one of these options, along with biased portrayals of race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, and ability. Other drop-down items might include violence, expletives, gore, and additional criteria commonly found in the classification of film rating systems. For content that users enjoyed, a similar drop-down would show options including balanced portrayals of gender, race, and other categories. Netflix's algorithms could be adjusted for users who indicate that they dislike content because it contains biased gender portrayals, and for those who indicate that their preferred content included balanced gender portrayals. The service could also employ the M-Rating Test to determine what content is considered balanced versus biased, and once a viewer indicates s/he wants to see content that is gender balanced, or non-biased, it could use the tool to funnel appropriate content to users. The M-Rating Test could even be used as a search engine optimization tag whereby content is tagged with relevant keywords to find appropriate search results.

When asked about expanding Netflix's recent thumbs up/down to be more granular interviewee Eva explained why she supported the idea:

> I get really frustrated with movies that have really shallow portrayals of women, and I don't want to watch them. So if there was a way for me to signal my dislike of those and teach the algorithm to no longer show me films that waste my time [with depictions of] female characters that are really shallow, I would appreciate that. But I think that would have to be a separate rating system than their [Netflix's] new thumbs up/thumbs down…You want more nuanced, granular information.

Interviewee Eva also stated that it would be beneficial to include a drop-down menu for gender bias or balance to accompany the thumbs-up, thumbs-down rating:

> I think that would be useful and it would help increase my overall streaming experience, because there's so much content and if I could teach that algorithm through this rating system combined with the general thumbs up/thumbs down, well then that's great. It's a matter also of people wanting to do that work. Do people care? Do they care enough to even give a thumbs up/thumbs down? And that's that interactivity, the question of who's a reader and who's a writer online. Most people are readers.

One of the benefits to expanding Netflix's ratings to incorporate a gender assessment is that it would assist those who wish to use it, and could be an innocuous and largely invisible feature for others.

There would of course be drawbacks to using a gender assessment on streaming services. Numerous market niches might create echo-chambers for users, facilitating a narrowing of content and perspectives in the media they consume. Such concerns have been raised around social media websites whereby users self-select content that appeals to them, which can translate to exposure to largely one-sided viewpoints. While creating narrower categories on streaming services may be beneficial from a consumerist standpoint interested in serving customer interests to increase profits, it would add to the arsenal of tools that facilitate content curation and encourage divisive viewpoints. Streaming services might sell the rating expansion as a media literacy tool, yet, as several interviewees pointed out, services such as Netflix are driven by a desire for high profits.

Any gains made toward promoting less biased content could be outweighed by enabling users to find and consume a narrow range of content including that which is highly stereotyped.

Film rating system

Perhaps one of the most useful applications for a gender assessment is within the film rating system as a media literacy tool for parents and caregivers to determine whether or not content is appropriate for children. Audiences of children are particularly vulnerable to stereotyped media content (Leone, 2002), and including a gender assessment in film rating systems could open the door to additional media literacy around race, sexuality, and other topics. Expanding the OFRB's mandate to include a gender assessment could also generate awareness about gender stereotyping in film and encourage filmmakers to produce more balanced content. While modifications to ratings might better serve film audiences than the existing system, such changes would likely not be welcomed by the MPAA, which is owned by major studios that benefit from its existing structure. A rating system that serves as a true media literacy tool would not be in Hollywood's best commercial interests since it could restrict the power of media corporations. A modified rating system is more plausible in Ontario and throughout Canada, where films are classified by government-owned entities such as the Ontario Film Review Board. The OFRB has a mandate to shift its policies and procedures to reflect contemporary social values:

> The OFRB classification guidelines evolve regularly based on public feedback, and issues identified by the OFRB at biannual meetings. Changes can be made to the OFRB's guidelines for classification, as long as they do not contravene the parameters of the Film Classification Act, 2005 (FCA) and other applicable legislation. A recent change is the addition of a content advisory for sexual assault, and the direction to ensure that all films with scenes of sexual assault receive that content advisory, even if other intense and potentially harmful elements are present onscreen. (OFRB Participant).

Since it must be seen to be responding to the demands of the citizens of the province, the OFRB would benefit from a more accurate rating system if it were demanded by the public it serves. Such a move could strain Canada's relationship with an important trade

partner, and the government would likely consider this only if it enhanced its image and generated support for political goals.

Multiple interviewees mentioned how out-of-date and irrelevant the film rating system has become:

> I would imagine it being a parallel system. I don't think you could say well this movie is Restricted because it's all white people...I think people could choose to use it or not…But more people trust things like Rotten Tomatoes for their content. [The film] *Get Out* was 100 per cent [on Rotten Tomatoes]. And so it was this film that people didn't really know and then that rating brought people in. It's [also] that issue especially in the U.S. where any sexual content gets a way higher rating than violence. Hunger Games is literally a movie about children killing children but [since there is no] blood it gets a PG13. It is based on a moral compass that's political, it's not really based on how people consume. There is this lack of a censor now. The rating system is so outdated. (Angela).

Other interviewees mentioned that streaming services such as Netflix are further pushing the film rating system into irrelevance, since such services disrupt traditional viewpoints around the way content is accessed.

Some interviewees expressed support for the idea to incorporate a gender assessment into film ratings:

> For parents in particular that's an important market. It definitely shapes consciousness moving forward. When you make it as easy as possible for parents to assess [media content] – anything that helps them make a better decision quicker is always good. (Jess).
>
> I've always kind of thought it [the rating system] was pretty broad in that it gives you a general idea but given the fact that parents have different ideas about how they want to raise their children, the parametres would need to be a bit more defined. Sub-categories would help. (Alex).

Alex also mentioned that the gender assessment could be a useful tool for educators to bring into the classroom:

> Ratings help but the problem is a little more deep-rooted than that, [and] the ratings would only be a superficial fix. I think if the media literacy was at a level

> where [viewers] know what's going on as opposed to sort of passively consuming content and then starting to be jerks and not necessarily being conscious of why… There's an awareness that needs to be built in and if media literacy were stronger in schools I think shows wouldn't have that kind of impact where we're like 'Why are kids being mean to each other? Is this the product of kids watching two decades of Sponge Bob?' But see I think that's the reason we're even in this situation where we're like, 'How do we even begin to deal with this?' Because we're a decade behind [with] the curriculum for media literacy. If this had [already] been a priority, there'd be less need for tests. You could have faith that people are deconstructing without even realizing, but it hasn't been prioritized. So now we almost have to do damage control and figure out how to bring the education component in a little sooner.

In support of Alex's point, Griffin (2015) notes that visual communication has become a central facet of life in the Western world through a continuous bombardment of media products, and yet it is rare for young people or adults to be explicitly taught how to read images.

Interviewee Jess also spoke to the importance of practical tools to support the public with day-to-day media literacy:

> It's an easy tool, more or less. I know it takes a structure and organizing body and then you have to come up with a classification system so there's a lot of work that needs to be done to set it up, but from the consumer point of view it's an easy thing to reference. And anything that's easy that can help people make more of a conscious decision. We see it with food when we are taught in nutrition classes to read the label. If we can get people to do the same in a media literacy context…I think that can only be a good thing. At least it would erase the argument 'Oh I didn't know.' Well that's no longer an excuse, you have to know. It's one tool in the toolbox, but that alone is not going to create the massive change we need to see.

It is possible that the OFRB would be open to gender assessments, or a tool to assess stereotypes in general. The OFRB participant stated, "The OFRB frequently sees various kinds of stereotyping in films. It is most often recorded under the observations for

bullying, slurs, or psychological elements like 'situations may cause children brief anxiety or fear.'" The OFRB participant indicated that he would like to receive a copy of the findings of this research.

Videogames

Mainstream digital media is no stranger to misogyny. In the videogame realm, social media has facilitated public conflicts among audiences of gamers and game creators. Some marginalized gamers who have spoken out about in-game stereotyping have experienced online threats (Hern, 2014). One of the most prominent examples of this was Gamergate, an online campaign described as, "a misogyny-fuelled attack on ethics in journalism" (Marcotte, 2014, p. 1). Gamergate involved online threats toward marginalized gamers who critiqued videogames on social media (Hern, 2014). As a result of the movement, several women had to temporarily leave their homes after their addresses were posted online alongside threats of violence and murder (Hern, 2014). What Gamergate revealed is that while post-feminist sentiments suggest that all battles have been won with regard to gender equality, it remains contentious and even dangerous for marginalized gamers to critique dominant representations within the games they play (Gill, 2007). There are also parallels between the marginalization experienced within games and offline by women, people of colour, lower income people, and those with non-heteronormative sexualities and/or gender-identities (Gray, 2015). Films and digital technologies are thought to be reflections of society according to theorists de Lauretis and Gray, who also suggest that media serves to create culture. Given that the misogynistic rhetoric surrounding Gamergate has been described as a foreshadowing of the alt-right movement in American politics, an assessment of gender in digital media is timely (Lees, 2016).

Popular media bloggers, such as Laura Kate Dale (2014), have proposed videogame versions of the Bechdel Test. Dale's (2014) proposed version of the test requires games to have at least two female-coded characters that are either playable or significant to the plot, and at least one instance of sustained communication between them about something other than male-coded characters. Dale's (2014) last requirement is that there must be an in-game scene that meets these criteria that players cannot avoid in order to progress within the game.

The Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) assigns ratings[16] to videogames sold in the U.S. and Canada, and its website states that it provides, "concise and objective information about the content in video games and apps [so that] consumers, especially parents, can make informed choices" (ESRB, 2016). The ESRB (2016) mimics film rating systems used in Canada and its ratings assess games for displays of violence, sexuality, drug use, profanity, and nudity (OFA, 2015; OLRC, 1992). The ESRB's (2016) rating categories are structured to suggest age-appropriate content to consumers and caretakers of children, similar to film ratings (OFA, 2015). The ESRB and the film ratings systems in Canada focus on violence and sex, yet they also assess a wide-range of content and could expand their classification criteria to document forms of social stereotyping (OFA, 2015). While the videogame industry would require its own specific gender assessment to fit the game medium, the overt sexism noted among gamers and found in game content warrants future additional research in this area.

Online database

An online community-managed database could create a platform for audiences to voice critiques about biases in media using a gender assessment. Such a database already exists for the Bechdel Test. A California-based group has created the, "Bechdel Test Movie List," a public database to rate films using the Bechdel Test (2016). This platform allows the public to interact with an artist-created tool in an online public space (BTML, 2016). To-date there are 7,113 movies listed in the database (BTML, 2016). This database could be expanded to include the M-Rating Test and other assessments, or it could merely serve as a template for a new platform that would house additional assessments.

In addition to the applications listed above, there are many more not explored in this research. Future research should assess the impact that each application might have in an intersectional context.

Conclusion

The present research explores how advocacy for more gender-balanced film content could serve an anti-oppressive feminist cause while challenging gender as a cultural construct. Theorists Teresa de Lauretis (1987) and Judith Butler (1988) provide a theoretical framework to determine whether or not acts that aim to improve the lives of women, and to elevate the status of women, are beneficial within a patriarchal, post-colonial, neoliberal society. Their ideas are revolutionary and they present challenges to activists attempting to improve material conditions of the modern world; yet, until oppressive hegemonic conditions no longer exist, it is not possible to enliven their theories, which gesture toward a world beyond gender stereotyping and binary thinking. In this sense the work of post-structuralist feminist theorists can obscure the lived realities of marginalized people. It is useful to imagine a world beyond hegemonic conditions, but it is also vital to remain grounded in political, economic and social realities to take necessary steps to dismantle inequitable constructs.

Assessing gender, sexuality, and race on-screen is not a hard science and it brings up multiple concerns around the reification of essentialist binaries. Yet, in an industry such as film, in which it is exceedingly difficult to succeed, it is imperative that strategically essentialist measures be taken to address widespread inequalities, especially for people with identities that intersect along various forms of marginalization. Steps toward equity on and off screen include financiers allocating funding to underrepresented populations, and encouraging more balanced content by revealing the pervasiveness of common stereotypes in media. These are not measures that will solve the vast biases reflected in media portrayals, but they could edge toward a more equitable entertainment media landscape.

A career as a filmmaker is difficult even for those who are wealthy and well-networked, and it is especially challenging for those who are underrepresented including women, visible minorities, people from low-income backgrounds, and those with disabilities. While labour was not the core focus of this research, it was found to be inextricably linked to biased media portrayals. Studies have demonstrated that when movies are created by female filmmakers, they include more girls and women on screen and a lower incidence of sexualization (Smith, Choueiti, Scofield, & Pieper, 2013).

Research has also shown that women face especially precarious work arrangements in tightly networked, reputation-based industries where reporting workplace harassment or abuse is considered a major career risk (Blair, 2001; Christopherson, 2008; Coles 2013; Gill, 2014; Conor, 2014; McRobbie, 2015). The present research echoed the findings of research on content and labour in the CCI, and the majority of the interviewees stated that balancing labour was just as if not more important than balancing content.

The Bechdel Test sets an extremely low bar for gender balance in mainstream cinema. The more recently created F-Rating attempts to address the flaws of the Bechdel Test by urging audiences to envision what constitutes a female-driven story, yet its subjective terms make it an unreliable indicator of gender-balance in movies. After examining existing gender assessments and interrogating attempts to assess balanced representations of women in film, it was determined that to develop a new test to uncover feminist or gender-balanced movies was too subjective an exercise to be empirically useful. Although it is an effective way to generate debate, attempting to classify a film as feminist or gender balanced as seen in the F-Rating, Mako Mori Test, and Bechdel Test can yield inaccurate and unreliable results. Rather than grappling with indicators of feminist or female-driven films, the M-Rating Test instead targets acts of misogyny found in media content. Kate Manne (2016) suggests that misogyny is action-based whereas sexism is largely unconscious. The M-Rating highlights film content that is misogynistic to begin to objectively examine gendered stereotypes commonly found in films.

The M-Rating Test has limitations and is not meant to be a comprehensive tool to assess misogyny in film. Instead, it focuses on mundane, everyday, and seemingly innocuous representations that have become so commonplace in media and society that they are often unquestioned. Butler (1988) has suggested that mundane acts are powerful precisely because they normalize rigid, prescriptive performances of gender and sexuality and require subjects to continually reproduce their binary terms. While the M-Rating Test is not a panacea for gender imbalance in mainstream movies, it might be an effective tool to assist content creators, financiers, educators, parents, and audiences in examining biased media portrayals in an intersectional manner. It may be especially useful when employed alongside the Bechdel Test, the Mako Mori Test, the Duvernay Test, and F-

Ratings. Before being used in industry or policy realms, the M-Rating Test would need to undergo validity testing by multiple users to be assessed for efficacy. The test might also be expanded to include depictions of domestic violence and stalking, which Karla Mantilla (2015) points out as patterned misogynistic behaviours.

Once the M-Rating undergoes more extensive testing and revisions, an important and feasible application for it is film ratings. The M-Rating could improve the effectiveness of film ratings, and might open the door to additional media literacy examining race, sexuality, ability level and more. The film rating system is increasingly characterized as irrelevant in an age where content is accessed online, and ratings could serve as more effective media literacy tools by outlining stereotypes in films using gender and other assessments. The M-Rating Test could also be used by financiers to assist filmmakers in creating content that depicts gender in a balanced way and reduces stereotyping.

Political economic forces give rise to the inequalities that shape gendered media content. As post-structuralist gender theorists problematize gender as a social and cultural construct, the merging of gender theory with political economy enables an exploration of broader societal implications of gender equality advocacy in media. Gender theory has exposed risks involved in equality-based advocacy such as post-feminism. While post-structuralist gender theory argues for fundamental changes to social structures, a political economic analysis enables an understanding of the material realities of inequality and of the hegemonic forces that make such changes impossible under existing conditions. Knowledge of how capitalist societies' political and economic systems operate and what sustains them allows one to identify actions that can be taken to address pervasive societal inequalities. While such actions may not be aligned with the grand narratives of resistance on the scale imagined by post-structuralist feminists, they could improve the realities of many on a micro-level, creating pathways for more macro-level change. The M-Rating Test is one small act of resistance that, when compounded with other feminist advocacy, scholarship and activism, could help build more socially, economically, and politically equitable communities.

Appendices

Appendix A: Recruitment email to potential interviewees

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is Vanessa Ciccone and I am conducting research at Ryerson University around gender representation and diversity in films screened in Canada as part of my graduate studies at Ryerson University. I'm reaching out because of your expertise/experience in the film industry/media activist space and I am wondering if you might be interested in being interviewed as part of the study. The research focuses on the film rating system (e.g. G, PG, R) in Ontario, and examines the impact ratings have on individual films and filmmakers, the industry as a whole, and audiences. The research is exploring an expansion of the rating system to account for common stereotyping, focusing specifically on gender.

The interviews I'm conducting are strictly confidential, and your name would not be revealed. Interviews will take place at Ryerson University (350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON) or via Skype for approximately one hour in February or March 2017 at a time that is convenient for you.

The goal of this research is to provide recommendations that could help educate viewers about common stereotypes in mainstream film.

If you are interested in more information about the study or would like to volunteer please contact Vanessa Ciccone at vciccone@ryerson.ca.

Vanessa Ciccone
MA Candidate, Communication and Culture Department
Ryerson University
vciccone@ryerson.ca

Appendix B: Letter of invitation to potential interviewees

Dear potential participant,

My name is Vanessa Ciccone and I am researching gender representation and diversity in films screened in Canada. I'm contacting you because of your experience in the film industry and I am wondering if you might be interested in being interviewed for a study being conducted as part of my MA research in the Communication and Culture department at Ryerson University.

In mainstream films, female characters are younger and more sexualized than their male counterparts, and have fewer and less significant speaking roles. With the popularity of gender assessments such as the Bechdel Test[1] opening up unique ways to explore media representations, this research seeks to determine whether gender balance can be formally assessed in film. The topic is being explored through an examination of film rating systems (e.g. G, PG, R) in Ontario. The research may propose an expansion of the rating system to account for common gender stereotyping, and potentially other forms of stereotyping. The goal of this research is to identify steps that can be taken to better educate viewers about common stereotypes found in mainstream film.

I would like to invite you to participate in this project by sharing your views on how the film rating system impacts your work if at all, provide feedback on a proposed expansion of the film rating system, and reflect on how changes to this system could impact your work and the film industry. You will also be asked questions around initiatives that attempt to raise awareness about stereotypes in media.

The interviews are strictly confidential, and your name would not be revealed. The interviews take place in-person at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario, in February or March, 2017 or via Skype and will last approximately one hour. The research is being supervised by Dr. Charles Davis, Associate Dean of FCAD at Ryerson University.

To participate you must be a Canadian filmmaker, preferably based in Ontario. Your participation is completely voluntary and if you choose not to participate it will not impact your relationship with myself, the professors supervising this research, or Ryerson University. The information you provide will be treated as confidential. No participants will be identified by name or organization, and statements or perspectives will not be identified with individual contributors or their organizations. The results of this research will be used in scholarly papers, at conferences, and potentially in policy-based reports. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board.

If you are interested in more information about the study, have questions, or would like to set up an interview, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Vanessa Ciccone

Appendix C: Consent agreement

[1] The Bechdel Test asks whether a film has at least two female characters who speak to one another about something other than a man.

Ryerson University
Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form so that you understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

Using Film Ratings to Combat the Effects of Gender Stereotyping

INVESTIGATORS: This research study is being conducted by Vanessa Ciccone, MA Candidate at Ryerson University as well as her supervisor Dr. Charles Davis, Associate Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Design and Senior Research Chair of Media Management at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please contact:

Vanessa Ciccone
MA Candidate, Communication and Culture
Ryerson University
vciccone@ryerson.ca

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: Movies can include messages that girls are less valuable and capable than boys, which can lower girls' career aspirations and lead to unrealistic body ideals. With the popularity of gender assessments such as the Bechdel Test[2] opening up unique ways to explore media representations, this research seeks to determine whether gender balance can be formally assessed in film. The topic is being explored through an examination of film rating systems (e.g. PG, 14A, R) as one potential avenue to apply assessments for gender balance in movies. As film ratings are used by parents and educators to determine appropriate content for children and youth, this research looks at how the rating system could be more effective. It will explore the idea of expanding film ratings to assess the representation of gender. The interviews will be conducted in-person at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario or via Skype. If you choose to participate you will be asked to provide feedback on gender assessments in film and a proposed expansion of the film rating system. The investigator will also be researching policy, media diversity, and representation. The results of the research will contribute to the researcher's MA thesis.

WHAT YOU WILL BE ASKED TO DO/WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS: If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

[2] The Bechdel Test was created by animator Alison Bechdel in a comic strip she wrote in 1985. The test asks if there are two women in a film who speak to one another about something other than a man. It has been popularized in recent years.

- You will meet the investigator for a one-on-one interview at Ryerson University (350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON) in February or March, 2017. The interview will last approximately one hour.
- Data will be collected including your age, gender and profession. This data will be kept confidential.
- Questions participants will be asked include:
    - Would an assessment of the representation of gender in film be of value?
    - Do you have any concerns around an assessment of gender in film?
    - How could such an assessment impact the work you do, if at all?
    - Does the film rating system impact your work? How?
    - Are there (other) ways you think the film rating system could/should be altered to be more inclusive?
- Findings will be made available when the research concludes in August 2017. The researcher will email you with the findings if you indicate during the interviews that you are interested.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Participation presents an opportunity to influence a research study with the goal of raising awareness about gender-based stereotyping in mainstream films. Interviewees can influence the study by providing their perspectives on and knowledge of the industry. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT: In participating in this study, the risks to you as a participant are very low. Possible risks involve:

- You may be uncomfortable with certain questions. You are free to skip answering a question, or stop your participation altogether at any time during the interview.
- There is low risk for the exposure of your identity. To mitigate against this risk, the information you provide will remain strictly confidential; no statements or viewpoints will be publicly attributed to you without your written approval; your data will be de-identified and kept in a password enforced hard-drive that is only accessible to those with express clearance.
- The main risk to you is your loss of time.

If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the study, you may stop participation either temporarily (e.g. by taking a 10 minute break), or permanently (e.g. by ending participation in the interview).

CONFIDENTIALITY: Audio from the interviews will be recorded. These records will be shared with the researcher's supervisor Dr. Charles Davis. All participation in the interviews will be confidential. Once transcribed, the audio files will be destroyed. De-identified transcriptions will be kept in a secure file until 2022 and then destroyed. Data will be stored in locked files within a locked laptop device, and kept for five years as per the requirements of academic journals. After five years, the data files will all be deleted from the investigator's laptop and from the hard drive. Any copies that were made for her

supervisor to review will be collected after the research has completed and will be broken up and safely recycled.

INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION: None.

COSTS TO PARTICIPATION: It may cost you public transit fare or other expenses to travel to and from the location of the interviews (Ryerson University). You will not be compensated for any expenses associated with travel to or from the interview location. The interviews will be approximately one hour each and participants will not be compensated for time.

COMPENSATION FOR INJURY: By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL: Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you do not have to answer. You may stop participating at any time and you will still be given the incentives and reimbursements described above for the interview you participate in. If you choose to stop participating, your data will not be included in the study – it will be automatically removed from the study and immediately destroyed. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the investigator, Vanessa Ciccone.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY: If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact:

Vanessa Ciccone
MA Candidate, Communication and Culture
Ryerson University
vciccone@ryerson.ca

Dr. Charles Davis
Associate Dean of the Faculty of Communication and Design
Ryerson University
c5davis@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board. If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042

rebchair@ryerson.ca

Using Film Ratings to Combat the Effects of Gender Stereotyping

CONFIRMATION OF AGREEMENT:

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.
You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

The interviews will be audio-recorded by the researcher. I agree to be audio-recorded during my interview, and any follow-up interview, for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

_____ _____
Signature of Participant Date

Appendix D: Questions for the Ontario Film Review Board

How films are rated

1. Can you walk me through how films are rated at the OFRB?
2. How many films are typically rated by the OFRB each year?
3. Are parents, educators, and/or community-based organizations consulted when changes are made or proposed to rating criteria?
4. What are the costs associated with rating films? Is there a set budget each year, or does it depend on the number of films rated?
5. How are film raters selected?

Effectiveness of the rating system

6. Have you heard of the Bechdel Test being used to assign "gender ratings" to films screened at independent theatres in Sweden?
    a. What do you think of incorporating an assessment for the representation of gender into the rating system?
7. To your knowledge, has the OFRB or any other rating system ever considered assessing stereotyping in film, either for gender, race, or another area?
8. If there were a well-researched, reliable tool to assess gender stereotypes in film, is it possible that the OFRB may be open to using it?

OFRB's relationship with the MPAA

9. Can you describe the OFRB's relationship with the MPAA (the U.S. rating system)?
10. Does the OFRB model its classification criteria after that of the MPAA?
11. With the rise of streaming services, might the role of rating systems such as the OFRB change?
    a. Is there a role for organizations like the OFRB to play in rating films on Netflix, for example?
12. Do you have anything else to add?
13. Would you like to receive a copy of the findings once the research is complete?

Appendix E: Questions for the film industry

How the rating system impacts work

1. Can you tell me a bit about your background as a filmmaker?
2. Does the film rating system impact your work? How?
3. Have any of your films been rated by the OFRB?
4. What do restrictive ratings mean for your films?

Assessing gender in media

5. Do you think the film rating system is useful for audiences? For parents? Could it be more useful and if so, how?
6. Have you heard of the Bechdel Test being used to assign "gender ratings" to films screened at independent theatres in Sweden? What are your thoughts on this?
7. One idea this research is exploring is expanding the film rating system to include an assessment for gender balance in films. Can you share your thoughts on this idea?
    a. How might such a change impact your work, if at all?
8. From your perspective, is it possible to reliably assess portrayals of gender in film i.e. to determine whether or not representations can be considered gender balanced? Do you think such an assessment would be subjective?
9. The research will be exploring how best to structure an assessment to rate gender in film. Do you have any thoughts on what such an assessment should look like? What would be important to include?
10. If a reliable assessment of the representation of gender in film were developed, do you think the film rating system is the right place to use it? Are there any other areas where this would be useful?
11. This research will focus specifically on gender. Do you think it's important for a tool that is developed to also be useful in the context of measuring representations of visible minorities on screen, sexuality, and ability level?
12. Do you have any concerns around a gender assessment in film? If so, please outline your concerns.
13. How should the role of rating systems change, if at all?
14. Do you have anything else to add?
15. Would you like to receive a copy of the findings once the research is complete?

Appendix F: Table template to track films using M-Rating Test

	Pass	Fail	Notes
Objective Measures			
1. Visibility			
2. Role types			
3. Speaking roles			
4. Sexualization			
5. Employment			
6. Age			
7. Sexual violence and sexual harassment			
Non-objective Measures			
8. Jokes and comments			
Total Score			

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End Notes

[1] Geena Davis founded the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media to research the impact of the gender bias and create initiatives to counter this effect; and Reese Witherspoon founded the companies Pacific Standard and Hello Sunshine to create female-driven film, television, and digital media content (Spangler, 2016).
[2] Canada's public financiers of the film industry include Telefilm, the Canadian Media Fund, and the National Film Board. Private investors also fund Canadian films.
[3] Post-feminism can also be used in the context of Lyotard's post-modernism, referring to the evolution of feminism, and it scattering into multiple versions with various meanings.
[4] Eurimages includes 38 member states with members within and outside of the European Union: Albania, Armenia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzégovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Swizterland, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Turkey.
[5] The bulk of these federally funded films (81 of 91) are live action features that accounted for $59,378,534 in production investment. Seven documentaries represent an investment of $945,000 and 3 animations came in at $3,000,000 (Fraticelli, 2015). Although this is a small sample, it's interesting to note that the gender balance is slightly better with documentaries than with fiction, particularly in terms of writing credits. These represent only the feature length documentaries and animations funded by Telefilm Canada from a single production envelope in one year, and are not a reflection of all animation and documentary produced that year (Fraticelli, 2015).
[6] There are film industries that are less culturally impacted by the U.S. cinema, such as Sweden and the Netherlands, where there is significant government funding for national film industries.
[7] In 1974 the NFB launched "Studio D," an initiative devoted to supporting female filmmakers in Canada (Vanstone, 2007). The initiative was launched during the federal leadership of Pierre Trudeau, and was cut and eventually dissolved under the leadership of Jean Chrétien in 1996.
[8] There are exceptions to this, for instance the work of Julia Kristeva including *About Chinese Women* from 1977.
[9] While a large body of literature examines the ways in which imperialism is also gendered, a process often reinforced through media products (Mazepa, 2017), due to space constraints the present research will not go into depth on this topic.
[10] Although there is a growing amount of published material on the negative effects of pornography.
[11] Although in 1939 the National Film Board was formed to further the Canadian nationalist agenda (Government of Canada, 2015), albeit with limited success.
[12] Some of the major film funding sources in Canada include the National Film Board, Telefilm, the Canadian Media Fund, and the Canadian Media Development Corporation.
[13] Mulvey did not credit Schneemann for inspiring the concept.
[14] In *Office Christmas Party* the male manager pointed to two women in sexualized clothing and stated, "Babies are going to get laid tonight."

[15] In *Office Christmas Party* a male manager makes a lewd comment about a female co-worker's cleavage. At another point a male co-worker continues to make sexual comments to a female character after she has explicitly asked him to stop.
[16] The ESRB assigns ratings for games sold at U.S. and Canadian retailers. A list of retailers can be found on the ESRB website.