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ANALYSIS OF GENDER STEREOTYPE IN HOLLYWOOD MOVIE INDUSTRY: A STUDY OF “MULAN” AND “WOMAN KING”

BY

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Abstract

This study analyses stereotypes against women in two Hollywood movies; “Mulan” and “Woman King”. The textual analysis method was used to analyze two (2) Hollywood movies “Woman King” and “Mulan”. The Interpretative Analysis was used and the study was anchored on the theoretical assumptions of the Liberal Feminist Theory. Thus, the findings of the study show that the movies portray the desire to not yield to white outside forces and the urge to topple oppressive and stereotypical systems. The guide is sisterly love and black love. The “Woman King” specifically is one rare opportunity that sheds light on the collaboration of Africans in one of perhaps the darkest tragedies of humanity; the slave trade. Moreover, not many Hollywood historical movies look into the pre and colonial-era exploits of the black race in a positive light. “Mulan” on the other hand is an adventurous and active young woman who to the dismay of her family, brought honor to the family. As so many stereotypical natures of societies as portrayed in plenty of Hollywood movies, she was arranged to meet a matchmaker to demonstrate her fitness as a future wife; but following a few mishaps, the matchmaker deems her a disgrace to the family. It is therefore recommended that there is the need for more establishment of movies in the Hollywood industry that portray the powers of women, what they stand for, and how powerful they could be if united.

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Introduction

Stereotypes, particularly those related to gender are seen as cognitive frameworks that shape our understanding of individuals based on their social group membership (Quadflieg and Macrae, 2011). Being cognitive in nature, Koenig (2018) stated that stereotypes can affect specific social perceptions of others, such as their personality, behavior, attitudes, and appearance. For example, women are often stereotyped as communal, displaying warmth and sensitivity while men are seen as argentic, demonstrating independence and assertiveness. It has been shown that the stereotypical categorization of people into different groups is fluid and dependent on the context of comparisons (Oakes, Haslam, and Turner, 2019). However, gender classification seems to evade such fluid categorization, since it is a primary and salient feature of the perception of other people (Ito and Urland, 2013). Such immediately recognized and chronically salient categorizations contribute to the persistence of gender stereotypes.

While stereotypes’ cognitive nature encompasses the beliefs and descriptions that people hold about the members of different groups (e.g., gender), evaluations that follow these implicit or explicit attitudes could involve negative or positive reactions to members of a specific group. In the case of gender stereotypes, they are organized around the importance of the agency of men and the commonality of women. Therefore, task performance is emphasized for men, whereas social relationships are emphasized for women (Ellemers, 2018). Women who violate the prescriptive gender stereotype of being warm and kind in social relationships could potentially face backlash for acting against these prescribed gender norms. Negative evaluations of gender stereotype violations could result in discriminatory behavior.

Kelner (2015) noted that the movie industry through some of its contents has proven overtime as a major source of promoting education, consumption, entertainment, information, and others, as well as directing people on how to “behave and what to think, feel,



believe, fear and desire- and what not to". In his opinion, audience members learn, among other things, how to identify men and women, how to interact and react to members of different social groups, how to dress, how to look, how to consume, how to be popular and successful, and how to conform to the dominant systems of norms, value practices, and institutions.

Moreover, Smith (2010) noted that the nature or way in which females are presented on-screen is also problematic. Females are more likely than males to be young, thin, and shown in tight or revealing attire. This prototype illuminates the hyper-sexualization of females in film, reinforcing a culture of lookism within the industry. Gender is also associated with patterns of domesticity. When compared to men, women are more likely to be relational partners and/or caregivers.

Exposure to these trends may affect viewers in a variety of ways. Viewing imbalanced "content" may contribute to beliefs that girls'/women's stories are not as important as boys'/men's. This may have the strongest effect on children, who may learn something about gender roles from repeatedly viewing motion picture content on DVDs. Further, a steady diet of consuming skewed or stereotypical depictions of women as sexy or domesticated may facilitate the development and maintenance of attitudes, beliefs, and aspirations that are limiting. Seeing skinny and sexy women may also affect body image, especially among those viewers who compare themselves to idealized portrayals and perceive that their bodies do not live up to the quixotic standards. Or, heavy exposure to beautiful and thin females may teach and/or reinforce males' unrealistic expectations about how the opposite sex should look or act.

The movie industry especially in the US continues to present both women and men in stereotyped ways that limit our perceptions of human possibilities. Typically men are portrayed as strong, adventurous, sexually aggressive, and largely uninvolved in human relationships, and women are depicted as sex objects who are usually passive, dependent, and often incompetent and dumb. Because media pervade our lives, the ways they misrepresent genders may distort how we see ourselves and what we perceive as normal and desirable for men and women (Wood, 1994).

Also, movies of different formats, interests, and categories, provide sources for investigating different types of representations and stereotypes. For example, a study on the portrayal of women in some Hollywood movies in the US by Rodriguez (2007), shows how in their attempts to sell and generate adverts, and also penetrate the market found out that, most of these movies present women as supernatural creatures such as angels, goddesses; as aristocrats like princesses, queens; as animals such as kitten; as babies; as body parts, in the form of fingers, arms, heads, etc.

Rodriguez concluded that casual views of these movies could give the impression of aesthetics finesse, and ingenuity, but if critically viewed, these linguistic products are no more than metaphors disguised to convey and justify sexists' stand on women's role in society. Moreover, one of the central arguments of feminists on women's representation in the media seems to be the claim that the

media assists and justifies the portrayal of male domination over females, and also, promotes inequality (Gill, 2014).

Statement of Problem

Several arguments have been put forward by different schools of thought (Wood, 1994; Oliver, 2018 Behm-Morawitz and Mastro, 2018) about the unequal representation and portrayal of gender by the media. They argued that a primary way in which the media distort reality is underrepresentation of women.

There are several reasons why the idea of gender stereotypes in film is still relevant for study in communication. Oliver (2018, p. 47) states, "The fact that sex plays such a robust and recurrent role in viewers' responses to media entertainment makes it a variable worthy of further exploration". According to Behm-Morawitz and Mastro (2018, p. 131), "media consumption has a measurable influence on people's perceptions of the real world". The researcher thus intends to study different areas of gender stereotypes in Hollywood movies using the movies that are conversant to the researcher.

Moreover, the films; "Mulan" and "Woman King" hold different elements of stereotypes that keep dividing and/or attributing roles to different genders thereby reinforcing the notion of unequal representation and portrayal of gender by the media as will be studied in "Mulan" and "Woman King".

Objectives of the Study

This study analyses stereotypes against women in two Hollywood movies; "Mulan" and "Woman King". The objectives of the study are:

1. To examine the portrayal of women in "Mulan" and "Woman King" in the Hollywood Film Industry.
2. To study the stereotypical elements ascribed to women in "Mulan" and "Woman King in Hollywood Film Industry".
3. To describe the extent to which "Mulan" and "Woman King" reinforce gender stereotypes in the Hollywood Film Industry.
4. To identify the most common roles female characters play in "Mulan" and "Woman King" in the Hollywood Film Industry.

Research Questions

1. How are women portrayed in "Mulan" and "Woman King" in the Hollywood Film Industry?
2. What are the stereotypical elements ascribed to women in "Mulan" and "Woman King in the Hollywood Film Industry"?
3. To what extent do "Mulan" and "Woman King" reinforce gender stereotypes in the Hollywood Film Industry?
4. What are the most common roles female characters play in "Mulan" and "Woman King" in the Hollywood Film Industry?

Conceptual Review



Stereotypes are based on general expectations about people in certain social groups. However, not all individuals within these groups fit these expectations. For example, while men are generally taller than women on average, there are plenty of exceptions to this rule. Stereotypes often cause people to focus too much on differences between groups and overlook the variety of individuals within each group. (Murphy, 2015).

The tendency to perceive individuals as representatives of different social groups has been documented for a variety of groups in a range of contexts. Research has also revealed that the impact of such social categorization on the assignment of traits and features to members of particular groups can be quite fluid depending on the situation and the contrast with relevant comparison groups that seem most salient (Kunsey, 2018).

Despite the existence of gender-fluid individuals, society still largely views gender as a binary concept, comparing men to women and vice versa. This binary perception makes gender differences appear stark and fixed, reinforcing stereotypes and emphasizing distinctions between men and women. Thus, Casad and Timko stated that gender stereotypes are overgeneralized beliefs about the characteristics of individuals based solely on their gender, regardless of the actual diversity among members of various gender groups. The beliefs reflect perceivers' knowledge and expectations about women, men, transgender, and other gendered people. The content of stereotypes typically includes personality traits, behaviors, physical features, roles, preferences, attitudes, skills, and interests, among others. Stereotypes are relevant to the psychology of gender because they shape how people process information about gender and influence judgments made about members of various gender groups. Stereotypes serve as a schema, or lens, through which individuals view their social world.

Representation of Women

It is often believed that the mass media have their own 'realities' which may differ from the reality in society. Many feminist scholars, including Okunna (2012: p.32-33), argue that the portrayal of women in Nigerian media is unrealistic and stereotypical. Despite this, audiences often accept these portrayals as representative of women's reality. Exploring the psychological phenomenon behind this acceptance could provide insights into why these unrealistic images are widely adopted as a consensus view of women, despite their obvious inaccuracies. Mass media representations are often conceived and crafted in a manner that appears realistic, which may explain why they resonate with audiences emotionally and garner their endorsement of embedded ideologies. For example, highly fictional movies, such as entertainment films, present invented scenarios that audiences enjoy but typically do not perceive as true due to their awareness of the fiction. The portrayal of women in the media, frequently negative, can be partly attributed to the symbiotic relationship between media reality and societal reality. It's often argued that the media, through their content and structure, reflect the society they operate in. Consequently, society provides the "raw material,"

including technical know-how, human resources, and ideology, for constructing and refining media texts. These media texts contribute to the socialization process, which may have already begun through other ideological state apparatuses like religion, education, and the law. The liberal Pluralist theory for instance presents the media as cultural flora reproducing the collective debate of society. Curran (2000) notes many more perspectives explicating the media-society symbiotic relationship thus: The main tradition in cultural studies and also, in such theoretically oriented media studies, sees the media primarily as cultural products. Their principal (and indeed often only) source of evidence is the content of media.

The media in Nigeria often reflect the mythic forms, archetypes, and symbolic systems of society, according to an anthropological tradition. Idowu (1999) suggests that the human resources within the media influence content to mirror societal values. Despite criticisms of falsehood and sensationalism in Nigerian media, these issues stem from broader societal problems, including hypocrisy and corruption. Consequently, the media can't help but reflect on society's flaws. This reflection extends to the portrayal of women, which may not be entirely false but rather influenced by societal norms and biases. However, selective attention and naturalization in media gatekeeping tend to downplay the positive roles of women, indirectly perpetuating their marginalization. Despite being stereotypical, negative portrayals of women often contain elements of truth, contributing to their believability. Okunna (2012) discusses the paradox of unrealistic yet believable portrayals of women, noting that they still possess a degree of realism. Media portrayals often resonate with audiences' real-life experiences, leading to their believability. Watson (2003) highlights that people respond to media texts based on various factors such as cultural background, social status, education, profession, age, gender, race, and personal values. Similarly, Blumer & Hauser (1996) argue that the influence of motion pictures stems from the diversity of themes and patterns depicted, as well as the differing backgrounds of viewers. Audience members develop attitudes based on their life experiences, which can either make them more receptive or immune to certain media influences. Therefore, audiences are more likely to believe portrayals of women that align with their own real-life experiences. Okunna (2012, p. 35) opines that "this might well be the best strategy, if not the only one at this stage of our development in the Nigerian society to empower women through the media of communication by getting them to tell their own story from their perspective".

It may however appear non-strategic to blame the media and present them as cardinal causes of this stereotypical representation of women. Rather, it would be more appropriate to turn primordially to society which, as earlier argued, is visibly at the root of the phenomenon.

Media Representation of Women

Today, media plays a crucial role in our lives due to the widespread use of technology, facilitating communication

worldwide. However, there is a gender bias in technology usage, with women often portrayed as sex symbols (TRIMUNC, 2016). Films typically depict women and racial minorities in subordinate roles while presenting men as superior, perpetuating existing gender biases in society. This can negatively impact young people, who may accept these portrayals as reality and replicate them in their own lives. Such biases shape societal norms, highlighting the need for the media to portray women as equal partners in society (Murphy, 2015). Although women's movements in the 1960s brought about significant liberation, the media continued to reinforce male dominance and control over women's lives (Dutt, 2014).

Despite feminist progress, media culture has altered perceptions of male and female identities. Media has immense potential to influence society positively by disseminating accurate information and promoting social, moral, and ethical values (Sharma, 2012). However, women in movies are often demoralized and confined to stereotypical roles dictated by cultural norms (Neelam and Nasrene, 2018). Gallagher (2019) notes that women are often depicted in extreme roles, such as pure or promiscuous, traditional or modern. Similarly, Kunchenhoff (2019) observes that media rarely highlights women's individuality, focusing instead on their social relationships. Adnan (2020) argues that the media consistently portrays women in a negative light. Media perpetuates male dominance, portraying men as aggressive and women as submissive, perpetuating the acceptance of male supremacy (Busby and Durkin, 2020).

Representation of Women in the Hollywood Film Industry

There has been some form of discrimination in the Hollywood Film Industry especially sexual discrimination. As argued by Simonton (2014) the term "actress" itself is laden with subtle sexism, as the suffix "-ess" implies that the roles of actor and actress differ as performed by men and women. While not intentionally malicious, this small difference points to inherent discrimination in the film industry. Lauzen (2012b) noted that by differentiating and seemingly preferring, male actors from female actors, the film industry shows its discriminatory tendencies. By employing these tendencies, the film industry discourages women from entering the field and thus influences decisions to hire male workers instead of female workers. "This has led inevitably to a situation in which the films... are most often written, directed, and produced by men" (Orwin, 2012, p, 271).

This is evident by the vast amount of quantitative research conducted on employment in the film industry. In 2018, women accounted for only eight percent of directors at the helm of the top 250 grossing films in the United States, down one percent from 1998 (Lauzen, 2018b). Additionally, one in four films employed either zero women or one woman in the roles of director, writer, producer, executive producer, editor, and cinematographer. Only one percent of films employed ten or more women in those roles, compared to 74 percent of films employing ten or more men.

In addition to this lack of proportionality, "the cultural devaluation of women is reinforced by the fact that they do not receive star billing as often as men" (Lincoln and Allen, 2014). In this way, films inherently tell audiences that "men are more important, in all kinds of contexts than women".

Sutherland and Feltey (2017) perceived that this disparity shows the effect employing female filmmakers has on gender representation. However, female filmmakers tend to face far more unjust criticism than men when they are given positions. One of the most prominent of these criticisms is the idea that female filmmakers present more of a financial risk than male filmmakers. When faced with large budgets, studio executives tend to fall back on directors who have had box-office hits in the past. These directors are often male. This presents a bit of a paradox in which women are not hired for positions that require them to have previous jobs to prove their worth. In reality, films that employ at least one female director, executive producer, producer, and/or writer garner approximately the same domestic box office sales as do films with exclusively male representation in those roles.

Additionally, Lauzen (2018b) stated that all nine superhero movies released in 2018 were directed by men. This disparity present in the superhero genre alone can partially explain why films directed by women do not have budgets as large as movies directed by their male counterparts. While the sample size is small, women have succeeded at the box office when placed at the helm of big-budget superhero films. Both Wonder Woman and Captain Marvel, the only two modern superhero movies directed by women, have grossed over \$800 million, with budgets over \$120 million.

The disparity between gender representations in the director's chair also carries over to the Academy Awards. The Oscars hold a great deal of importance in the film industry. On the surface, it appears as though women are granted the same number of awards, with one Oscar for best actor and one Oscar for best actress, as an example. Yet women are rarely if ever, nominated for other awards - only one woman has won "Best Director" in the 91-year history of the Academy. Outside of "Best Actress" and "Best Actress in a Supporting Role," only 15 women earned nominations out of a total of 107 nominees in 2015 (McCarthy, 2020). This issue is compounded when considering the makeup of the Academy.

Empirical Review

Muir (1993) conducted a study on the status of women in the British media workplace. The study found that there is an appalling paucity of women working in television and film industries in Britain and this is because the men control the industry. This conclusion was drawn from earlier research conducted by the Association of Cinematograph, Television, and Other Allied Technicians (ACTT), over different periods. The first research conducted in 1975 shows that the position of women in media in Britain "has not improved since the Second World War and had an impact, deteriorated." Overall there was only 15% of them employed doing lowly paid jobs, often associated with women. The study shows that the attitude of the media, especially television drama comedy, and magazine fiction reduces women's



role and representation as irrational, superstitious, self-depreciated, and dependent. Their appearance in advertising is portrayed as no more than housewives or, in a sexually alluring background, which makes consumer goods more attractive to associations.

Dutt (2014) conducted a study on women's representation in the contemporary Hollywood film industry and discovered that Hollywood media products, particularly films, are consumed globally daily. These films play a significant role in shaping our perceptions of social, cultural, political, and economic issues. Despite women making significant progress in various aspects of life, their portrayal on-screen remains entrenched in patriarchal stereotypes and normative ideologies that do not accurately reflect reality. Hollywood's reliance on genre films perpetuates these depictions, as these films adhere to fixed formulas and conventions to tell familiar stories to large audiences. Genre theory suggests that these formulas endure due to audience preference for such films and Hollywood's pursuit of substantial profits.

Murphy (2015) conducted a study to explore the correlation between the sexual objectification of women in film and race. The research utilized content analysis to quantify the amount of provocative skin displayed by major and minor female characters in top-grossing domestic films over 20 years. The study aimed to compare these findings to discern if objectification varied between races in both quantity and context. The results revealed that supporting and minor characters were subjected to sexual objectification more frequently and intensely than leading characters. Particularly notable was the observation that in every film featuring sexual objectification, bit and background characters experienced the most significant levels of objectification. Bit characters, who may or may not have lines or interact with main characters, were often depicted in sex scenes with leading or supporting male characters, or in interactions with male characters with whom they had prior sexual relationships. Background women were predominantly objectified in scenes with large groups, such as strip clubs, pools, or dance scenes, with the objectification being accentuated through the gaze of significant male characters in the scene.

Manzoor, Rehman, and Rauf (2016) analyzed gender stereotypes in movies and found that women are often portrayed as sex objects and commodities in stereotypical roles, which perpetuates societal imbalance and ingrains negative perceptions of women. The study also revealed the underrepresentation of women and racial minorities in high-status roles compared to men. These biases in media portrayal exacerbate existing gender biases in society, leading young people to accept these portrayals as reality and replicate them in their lives. The researchers emphasize the need for the media to portray women as equal partners in society to create a more balanced and inclusive social environment.

Kinsey (2018) studied the representation of women in the top five grossing live-action movies directed by men and the top five grossing live-action movies directed by women in 2018. Based on the background quantitative data as well as a qualitative content analysis used, the study found that portrayals of women are much

more positive in movies directed by women and that female directors frame female characters much more positively. The study reveals that the depictions of women on screen are often dependent on roles behind the scenes. Female directors tend to hire more women in key roles and depict women in a more positive light than men. All five movies directed by women could also be classified as female stories, with plots directly subverting traditional male stories. While there are strong women in many of the five films directed by men, women in these movies tend to have less agency than in the movies directed by women. Films directed by women were also much more likely to feature a female protagonist and to pass the Bechdel test. Thus, male-directed films, despite their lack of gender equality on screen and behind the scenes, still receive higher budgets.

Kumar, Jasmine, Tiffany, and Cynthia (2022) analyzed more than 180,000 sentences from movie plots across the period from 1940 to 2019 to emphasize how gender stereotypes are expressed through the cultural products of society. By applying a network analysis to the word co-occurrence networks of movie plots and using a novel method of identifying story tropes, they demonstrated that gender stereotypes exist in Hollywood movies. An analysis of specific paths in the network and the words reflecting various domains show the dynamic changes in some of these stereotypical associations. The results suggest that gender stereotypes are complex and dynamic in nature. Specifically, whereas male characters appear to be associated with a diversity of themes in movies, female characters seem predominantly associated with the theme of romance. Although associations of female characters to physical beauty and marriage are declining over time, associations of female characters to sexual relationships and weddings are increasing. The result further demonstrates how the application of cognitive network science methods can enable a more nuanced investigation of gender stereotypes in textual data.

Theoretical Framework

Liberal Feminist Theory

Liberal Feminist Theory can be explained by examining the term theory first. Owens (1994) defines theory as a thought process or way of thinking about reality that becomes a model of that reality. There are at least two important ideas that come out of the definition of the term theory by Owens (1994). On a similar note, Giddens (2001, p. 692) defines liberal theory as a "feminist theory that believes gender inequality is produced by reduced access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment". From the two definitions above it can be noted that the liberal feminist theory acknowledges the existence of disparities in society that are gender-related, but the responsibility is on the individuals affected to improve their situation.

The Liberal Feminist Theory is premised on several assumptions. These premises are based on the understanding that individual ignorance has contributed to gender prejudice. To address this prejudice the affected individual has to take action. Education is therefore seen as a variable that can be used to improve the

situation. Liberal feminists are also concerned with equal rights and freedom of the individual. If there are to be reforms, such reforms have to be gradually introduced without upsetting the status quo. Liberal Feminists have moderate aims, their views do not radically challenge the existing values and as such they aim for gradual change in the political, economic, and social system (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

Gender disparities are therefore attributed to several factors. Such factors include culture and the way men and women are socialized within that culture. The other factors are closely related to the attitudes of the individual. All these can be changed through empowerment and education. In essence, liberal feminism is for gradual reforms through advocacy for equal rights for all, and laws and policies that promote equality.

Therefore, going by this theory it is understood that in almost every sector of society, there are gender issues or gender misrepresentations be it in politics, government, profession, and among others but, they do hope gradually equality in life will be ensured in the fight against inequality. Thus this theory will help the study understand whether gender stereotypes portrayed in the selected movies are attributed to culture and the way men and women are socialized within that culture and/or the attitudes of individuals.

Research Methodology

The study adopted the qualitative research method which focuses on uncovering underlying meanings and patterns of relationships within social phenomena through language-based analysis. For this study, Textual analysis was employed as the primary method of data collection. This involves a thorough examination of written, spoken, or visual messages to reveal underlying themes, messages, and symbols. This method was selected because it gives the study the ability to go beyond a mere descriptive stance and explore the hidden structures and meanings embedded in the movies selected for the study.

This approach allowed for an exploration of the intentions, motivations, and perspectives of creators, particularly in the context of Hollywood films related to women stereotypes. Purposive sampling was used to select two specific films, "Mulan" and "Woman King," as representative samples for analysis, ensuring the validity of the research while acknowledging the limitations of studying the entire population. Thematic analysis was then employed to identify and record patterns within the data, providing insights into the research question at hand.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The plot in the Movie "Woman King"

"Woman King" is set in the African Kingdom of Dahomey during the 1800s and follows the extraordinary story of the Agojie, an all-female unit of warriors who fiercely protect their kingdom with unparalleled skill and courage. The film centers on General Nanisca, portrayed by Viola Davis, as she trains the next generation of Agojie warriors to defend their way of life against formidable enemies. Inspired by true events, the plot revolves

around the tribulations faced by General Nanisca and her warriors as they navigate the complexities of their era. The kingdom is torn between participating in the slave trade, which brings prosperity but comes at a moral cost, and resisting the oppressive forces seeking to exploit their people. Amidst political intrigue and societal upheaval, the film explores themes of resilience, sacrifice, and empowerment. General Nanisca grapples with the weight of her leadership role and confronts her traumatic past while striving to protect her people and uphold their values. Central to the narrative is the relationship between Nanisca and Nawi, a defiant teenager who becomes entangled in the Agojie's struggle for freedom. As the plot unfolds, Nawi's journey intertwines with that of the Agojie, and her resilience becomes a symbol of their unwavering spirit in the face of adversity. The film builds towards a climactic confrontation as Nanisca defies orders to rescue her captured comrades and confronts their adversaries head-on. Through courage and determination, Nanisca leads her warriors to victory, cementing her legacy as a symbol of strength and leadership within the kingdom.

The Plot in "Mulan"

"Mulan" is a Disney live-action adaptation of the classic Chinese folklore "The Ballad of Mulan." The film tells the story of Mulan, a courageous young woman who disguises herself as a man to take her father's place in the Imperial Army to defend China from invasion. Set in ancient China, the plot follows Mulan, portrayed by Liu Yifei, as she embarks on a journey of self-discovery and bravery. Determined to protect her family and country, Mulan defies traditional gender roles and societal expectations to join the army in place of her ailing father. Under the guise of a male soldier named Hua Jun, Mulan undergoes rigorous training and faces numerous challenges to prove her worth as a warrior. Along the way, she forms bonds with her fellow soldiers, including Chen Honghui, portrayed by Yoson An, and earns the respect of her commanding officer, Commander Tung, portrayed by Donnie Yen. As Mulan's true identity remains hidden, she grapples with the complexities of maintaining her disguise while battling the forces of the villainous Böri Khan, portrayed by Jason Scott Lee, and the powerful witch Xianniang, portrayed by Gong Li. Through courage, determination, and the guidance of her ancestors, Mulan harnesses her inner strength to protect her homeland and embrace her destiny as a hero. The film's narrative unfolds with stunning visuals, epic battle sequences, and themes of honor, loyalty, and sacrifice. Mulan's journey is a testament to the power of resilience and the importance of staying true to oneself, even in the face of adversity. Ultimately, "Mulan" celebrates the spirit of empowerment and showcases the timeless tale of a young woman who defies expectations to become a legendary warrior and a symbol of inspiration for generations to come.

Themes in the Movies "Woman King" and "Mulan"

Woman King

There are varying themes in the movie "Woman King"; they are as follows:

The Theme of Sisterhood



The Agojie warriors are sworn sisters who risk their life and limb to protect the land. Under the leadership of the formidable General Nanisca, the elite, an all-female military regiment of King Ghezo, kept the bellicose Oyo Empire at bay. As the unbroken sisterhood trains, a new generation of fearless warriors is birthed. With their resilience and imprudence of the Oyo, and the slavers, they found a course to destroy the Oyo empire. Also, sisterhood is portrayed in the bond between Nawi and Izogie where the latter gave her life up while trying to escape with Nawi from the enemy's den.

The sheer pleasure of "The Woman King" resides in the bond shared by these black women. They are the film's love story as they commit to each other as much as they do to their grueling training. Vast compositions of Black women caring and nurturing each other proliferate "The Woman King," and the rituals and songs they share add further layers to their deep devotion.

The Theme of Slavery

The Woman King' is another documentation of the slave era and the bravery of African female soldiers. The movie correctly depicts the status of Dahomey as a nation that sold enslaved captives to European slave traders. However, a fictional embellishment to this narrative is that Nanisca confronts Ghezo about the immorality of selling Dahomey slaves to the Portuguese and suggests trading in palm oil production instead.

The movie does not attempt to deny the traumatic history of enslavement, yet overall, the story is presented as one of victory and strength. An all-female unit of warriors known as the Agojie is led by a tough female general. Together, the women evolve, overcome, and successfully protect their kingdom and young king, in a revolutionary narrative that explores the impact of European colonization up close and personally.

The Theme of Feminine Strength

The Woman King can successfully portray the Agojie, an all-female army as a symbol of feminine strength, extolling virtues like bravery, discipline, and perseverance.

The Theme of Rape and Vengeance

Rape was portrayed as a weapon of war. In conflicts both present and past, women face sexual violence from conquerors and captors. In light of this, the rape scenario of Nanisca, a woman soldier enables her to channel enough anger towards the Oyo soldiers whose soldiers and leader were her captor and rapist at some time in the past. Moreover, her strength comes from surviving the worst a soldier can face. For her, that includes rape. Like many survivors, she pushes down her painful memories. Her coping mechanism is to label emotion as weak. This gave her her hero's journey. The relationship with the recruit, Nawi, connects her to her own younger self and ultimately allows her to heal and make her revenge.

Mulan

The themes evident in the movie "Mulan" are as follows:

The Theme of Gender

"Mulan" begins with Mulan feeling out of place in her society due to her inability to conform to traditional feminine expectations.

Despite her efforts to impress the matchmaker, she fails and sings a lament about her struggle to reconcile her inner identity with societal expectations. Determined to protect her ailing father from enlisting in the army, Mulan disguises herself as a man and joins the military. Throughout her journey, Mulan must navigate the challenges of embodying a different gender role while striving to prove herself as a capable soldier. Despite the illegality of her actions, Mulan's exceptional heroism ultimately earns her acceptance and respect, showcasing a narrative of female empowerment and the unexpected benefits of defying societal norms.

The Pride of Being a Warrior

In the film, serving in the army is depicted as a source of great pride for the characters. The men summoned by the Emperor to enlist embrace the opportunity as an honor to serve their country, including Mulan's father, despite his physical limitations. As Mulan takes her father's place and enlists, she undergoes rigorous training to become a competent soldier, diligently improving her skills and eventually becoming a hero to China. Through her service in the army, Mulan not only protects her country but also brings honor to her family.

The Theme of Bravery and Courage

Part of what makes Mulan such a strong hero is that she is extremely brave and courageous. While her recklessness and bravery seem foolish in the context of her home life and at the matchmaker's, it is a boon when she is serving in the army. She often takes it upon herself to be proactive and fight for what she believes is right. Even when she sees the Huns are still alive, after she has already been banished from the army, she chooses to go to the city and warn the people that the Huns are still at large.

Throughout the film, Mulan does not back down, and it is this quality that earns respect among her peers, and eventually among her countrymen. Captain Shang is also extremely courageous, continuing to lead his troops forward to the Imperial City even after finding his father and his soldiers massacred at the encampment. Bravery and courage are seen as highly important qualities, and they are embodied by both Mulan and Shang.

The Theme of Family

Mulan does not have any particular ambitions to join the army. Rather, she does so out of love for her father, whom she feels is not physically capable of joining the army and serving again. Thus, we see that she is willing to put her own life in danger to save him, demonstrating just how much she values her family.

Additionally, at the beginning of the film, Mulan is deeply troubled by her inability to bring honor to her family. She is less concerned with her ability to impress the matchmaker than she is with her ability to reflect well on her mother, father, and grandmother. Finally, we see the importance of family in the spirits of the ancestors that Mulan's Grandma conjures after Mulan enlists in the army. They are an assembly of long-passed ancestors who discuss Mulan's fate and try to figure out how to help her.

The Theme of Identity



Mulan's journey is as much about identity as it is about duty. She is a young woman struggling to find her place in the world, and when she sees that she can help her father, she embraces the opportunity to assume a new identity. She addresses the theme of identity after Shang banishes her from the army, saying to Mushu, "Maybe I didn't go for my father. Maybe what I wanted was to prove I could do things right, so when I looked in the mirror, I'd see someone worthwhile." In this, we see that Mulan's actions arise not just from an altruistic desire to help others, but also from her confusion about where she fits in the world. She joins the army to learn more about herself and carve out a stronger sense of identity, a goal at which she ends up succeeding by the end of the film.

The Theme of Unconditional Love

When Mulan returns home, she goes to her father and tells him about the honors she has received from the emperor. Now that she is a war hero, she hopes that her father will forgive her for running away without telling him and assuming a new identity. His response is unexpected, as he tells her that the thing he is most proud of is the fact that she is his daughter and that he is relieved that she has safely returned home.

In this moment, we see that Mulan's value to her family has more to do with her existence itself and their love for her than it does with her achievements. Thus, we see that unconditional love is an important theme in the film.

Data Analysis of the Research Questions

Research Question One: How are women portrayed in "Mulan" and "Woman King" in the Hollywood Film Industry?

Looking at three round characters "Nanisca, Nzogi, and Nawi" one would be able to understand the portrayal of women in these movies. Nanisca is the central character in the film "Woman King". She is the leader and General of Agojie, the all-female unit of warriors of Dahomey. She is portrayed as powerful. Despite her ordeal of rape when she was relatively young which led to the birth of a child (Nawi) whom she threw away upon birth, she continued strong and determined to bring the cruel influence of the Oyo empire over their lands into ruins. She was saddled with the task of training the next generation of recruits and ready them for battle against an enemy determined to destroy their way of life.

Nawi on the other hand is portrayed as a strong-willed girl who was offered by her foster father to the king after refusing to marry men who would beat her. She befriends Izogie (a veteran Agojie) upon her initiation into the Agojie army. She also reveals to Nanisca that she is adopted and shows a scar on her left shoulder, shocking Nanisca thus giving a hint to Nanisca that she could be her daughter. Although she fell in love with a Portuguese slave trader; Malik she is stubborn and fearless just like her mother. These qualities later landed her in trouble where she was captured by the Oyo soldiers alongside Izogie. Izogie gave up her life while trying to escape with her. It was after a planned and careful intervention of her mother, General Nanisca, that she became free again. Izogie is portrayed as a smart and talented Agojie warrior and the closest friend to Nawi. She took Nawi in and protected her upon her initiation into the Agojie army. Her love for Nawi

translated into giving up her safety and life at the expense of the safety of Nawi, the General's supposed daughter. She is fearless and has taught the recruits on the essence of being an Agojie warrior. This shows the tenderness of a woman and a mother to a daughter. She is ready to give up her life for Nawi whom she now sees as a daughter.

In the movie "Mulan", Fa Mulan is portrayed as an awkward and confused young woman who comes into her own through the adventure on which she embarks. She is portrayed at the beginning of the movie to be clumsy and ill-suited for the more feminine expectations placed upon her, eschewing feminine graces and instead taking care of animals and enjoying life at her family's home. Her confusion about how she fits into society and the standards placed on her is part of what makes her an endearing and relatable protagonist. When she chooses to go and fight in the army in her father's place, Mulan finds herself in yet another awkward position, trying to fit in in the world of men. However, as she becomes more determined to succeed, she finds that she is a highly capable and impressive soldier, often coming up with brave and ingenious strategies for defeating the Huns. By the end of the film, she proves herself as a strong and inspiring hero to China.

Research Question Two: What are the stereotypical elements ascribed to women in "Mulan" and "Woman King in the Hollywood Film Industry"?

In "Mulan", Fa Mulan is ascribed to have characteristics like a man, she needs to be brave, physical, and powerful to meet the demands of being a soldier. However, as a woman before her disguise, she is expected to be taking care of animals and enjoying life at her family's home. Her confusion about how she fits into society and the standards placed on her is part of what makes her an endearing and relatable protagonist.

In "Woman King", it is shown the bond shared by these black women. They are the film's love story as they commit to each other as much as they do to their grueling training. Vast compositions of Black women caring and nurturing each other proliferate "The Woman King," and the rituals and songs they share add further layers to their deep devotion against other stereotypical beliefs of black hate and the portrayal of black women as having questionable characters.

Also, the Woman King' is another documentation of the slave era and the bravery of African female soldiers. The movie correctly depicts the status of Dahomey as a nation that sold enslaved captives to European slave traders. However, a fictional embellishment to this narrative is that Nanisca confronts Ghezo about the immorality of selling Dahomey slaves to the Portuguese and suggests trading in palm oil production instead.

The movie does not attempt to deny the traumatic history of enslavement, yet overall, the story is presented as one of victory and strength. An all-female unit of warriors known as the Agojie is led by a tough female general. Together, the women evolve, overcome, and successfully protect their kingdom and young king, in a revolutionary narrative that explores the impact of European colonization up close and personally.



Research Question Three: To what extent do “Mulan” and “Woman King” reinforce gender stereotypes in the Hollywood Film Industry?

The movies of course reinforce gender stereotypes. For example, in the “Woman King” Nanisca was raped multiple times by the Oyo soldiers. Although the scene was not shown, there is the hammering and portrayal of rape as a weapon of war. When it happens, women are supposed to keep quiet and manifest it into a weapon of revenge. In light of this, the rape scenario of Nanisca, a woman soldier enables her to channel enough anger towards the Oyo soldiers whose soldiers and leader were her captor and rapist at some time in the past. Moreover, her strength comes from surviving the worst a soldier can face. For her, that includes rape. Like many survivors, she pushes down her painful memories. Her coping mechanism is to label emotion as weak. This gave her her hero's journey. The relationship with the recruit, Nawi, connects her to her own younger self and ultimately allows her to heal and make her revenge.

In *Mulan*, the idea that only men can serve in the army further reinforces the weak nature of women as perceived by patriarchal societies.

Research Question Four: What are the most common roles female characters play in “Mulan” and “Woman King” in the Hollywood Film Industry?

Women are portrayed to be weak even if they wield political power. Despite Nanisca's prowess, she still answers to a king and invariably answers to a husband if she decides to have one. They are portrayed as loving and adorable soul capable of giving up their lives for their loved ones, especially their children. In *Mulan*, women and/or Fa Mulan, at the start of the film, feel out of place in her society, unable to conjure the feminine graces required of her to impress the matchmaker who is in charge of her fate. She is portrayed as clumsy and tomboyish, preferring to spend time with her animals and have fun than to study the etiquette required of her as a woman. When she fails to impress the matchmaker, *Mulan* sings a song about her identity, and her failure to live up to her feminine exterior, singing, "Who is that girl I see, staring straight back at me? When will my reflection show who I am inside?"

No sooner has *Mulan* lamented her failure as a female than she decides to enlist in the army and pretend to be a man to save her ailing father from having to enlist. Decisively, she is expected to cut off her hair and dons' armor to join which she does. Here, she must embody a completely different gender, and in the course of her charade, she has varying degrees of success. Eventually, she proves to be an exceptional soldier, impressing her superior Shang and then, China as a whole. It is illegal for her to serve as a woman, but her heroism is so incredible and impressive that no one minds that she is a woman. In *Mulan's* story, we see a narrative of female empowerment and a narrative about the unexpected benefits of not always fitting in with one's gender.

Conclusion

The movies portray the desire to not yield to white outside forces and the urge to topple oppressive and stereotypical systems. The

guide is sisterly love and black love. The “Woman King” specifically is one rare opportunity that sheds light on the collaboration of Africans in one of perhaps the darkest tragedies of humanity; the slave trade. Moreover, not many Hollywood historical movies look into the pre and colonial-era exploits of the black race in a positive light.

Mulan on the other hand is an adventurous and active young woman who to the dismay of her family, brought honor to the family. As so many stereotypical natures of societies as portrayed in plenty of Hollywood movies, she was arranged to meet a matchmaker to demonstrate her fitness as a future wife; but following a few mishaps, the matchmaker deems her a disgrace to the family. Eventually, the only man in their family and an army veteran - is conscripted into the army. She tries to dissuade him from going, but he protests that he must do his duty. Fearing for his life, she cuts her hair and takes her father's sword and armor, disguising herself as a man so that she can enlist in his stead. This action later brought honor to her family against the backdrop of the assumption that she would bring disgrace to the family.

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