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The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful: Motherhood, Occupational Prestige and the Roles of Women in Hollywood Films of the 1940s and 1950s

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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APPROVAL PAGE

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to my family
(you know who you are).

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Good, the Bad, and the Beautiful:
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Cultural stereotypes and controlling images have been embedded in U.S. cinema, especially since the end of the Second World War. Women have been disempowered and marginalized by these images. It is important to explore the existence and prevalence of these images in order to understand the impact this medium has on women's occupational choices. It is particularly important to study the cultural expectations of motherhood for women, and the influence post-World War II films has had on occupational gender role expectations A feminist content analysis of the themes present in 104 U.S. films from the years 1939 to 1959, along with 11 remade versions (1978 to 2008) of films in the sample was conducted as a means to find evidence in support of intersectional feminist theory's position in regard to female representation in film, and the extent to which this representation has changed over time. The review of the 1,150 lead characters in the 115 films was done through the use of a content review sheet which was developed by the researcher through the use of prior research and previously used review sheets in studies

using similar research designs. The analysis revealed themes and patterns, including but not limited to, the idea that careers should be secondary to romantic and marital relationships in women's lives; women appear in significantly fewer numbers than men in primary roles; women of color were portrayed characters who served white women; women are portrayed more often as mothers during the 1950s than the 1940s. In addition, non-white women are not adequately represented in the films. The films project the message that white women are secondary to men, and that women of color are secondary to white women.

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INTRODUCTION

> A career is just fine but it's no substitute for marriage…honestly, don't you think marriage is just the most important thing in the world? I mean, a woman isn't really a woman at all until she's been married and had children. Why, because she's fulfilled.
>
> -Debbie Reynolds as Julie Gills in "The Tender Trap," 1955

> This is the real mystery: why did so many American women, with the ability and education to discover and create, go back home again, to look for "something more" in housework and rearing children?
>
> -Betty Friedan, "The Feminine Mystique," 1963

In *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan talks about the New Woman of the 1930s women's magazine fiction and contrasts those with the heroines only a few decades later. In the 1930s, women were portrayed as adventurous, independent and almost always career women. These were the role models of the pre-WWII generation, women who did not forsake a profession for love, or vice-versa. In contrast, the women in the magazines of the 1960s are so domestically oriented that they seem to be unaware of the larger world beyond their kitchens. Friedan's analysis of gender in popular culture is to ask why the huge step backward in the aspirations of women? Why did women give up such lofty dreams of accomplishment to spend their days in tedious household tasks?

The pursuit of this dissertation is similar. The history of gender expectations in U.S. culture demonstrates that cultural ideals about appropriate work for men and women change in response to economic and social forces, and that there were significant changes in these roles during and after World War II (Coltrane 1998). During the war, the U.S. government found that it needed to increase its civilian labor force and sent out a call to

women to leave their homes and join the war effort in underserved factories. When they did not see a significant increase in women joining the labor force they produced a propaganda campaign encouraging women to enter previously male-dominated areas of employment to replace the men that had joined the armed forces through the Office of War Information (OWI), which produced propaganda designed to engender support for the war effort. This is historically considered part of the "conversion" of the production economy from civilian to military use. Although it was framed as a patriotic way for women to temporarily serve their country during the war, it also opened up many new occupational areas that had previously not been available to women.

The government focused its propaganda campaigns on white middle-class families whose women were not already working. It did not target the women who were already in the workforce and switched to higher paying jobs without any encouragement. Although there was a lot of diversity among women workers, women of color were absent in advertisements. The stars of the campaign were middle-class domestic housewives with no work experience who would leave when the war was over.
At first, the propaganda campaigns featured the few (mostly white) women who worked in skilled and high-paying jobs, even though they were a small percentage of women workers. Not until there was a labor shortage in 1943 were the unglamorous, underpaid, low-status jobs, such as factory labor, a part of the propaganda campaigns (Rupp 1978).

Image 1: OWI Poster from World War II[1]

Films and movies were extremely important propaganda tools used by the U.S. government. The film industry formed the Motion Picture Committee Cooperating for National Defense to distribute and show, without charge, national defense films made by the government. These films included so-called recruitment films made by the different branches of the armed services used to persuade people to enlist. It also made films such as *Women in Defense*, written by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and narrated by the movie star Katharine Hepburn, which encouraged women to work in defense factories or to join the armed services (Feldman 2000).

[1] Reprinted by permission of the Library of Congress

Although these jobs were intended to be temporary, after the war many women were reluctant to surrender their jobs, so the government instituted a new propaganda campaign, as part of the "reconversion" process from military to civilian production, which encouraged women and to return to housekeeping in order to give up their jobs to the returning men. Along with propaganda produced by the U.S. government, magazine articles and advertisements carried similar themes (Friedan 1963; Honey 1984). Rather than looking at print materials, I looked at popular U.S. films of the pre and post-WWII era and wanted to know if my impression was accurate: were there significantly fewer professional women being portrayed in movies after the war? Was there a cultural shift that clipped the wings of independent professional women and changed the dreams of young girls from that of developing their talents and potential in the professional world to that of hearth and home?

While watching classic Hollywood films of the 1940s, I was struck by main characters played by Rosalind Russell, Bette Davis and Joan Crawford, characters that were strong and capable, the professional equals of their male counterparts. When thinking about outstanding women characters of the 1950s, the actresses become younger and less worldly- such as Leslie Caron and Audrey Hepburn. The equal partnership of earlier times was apparently replaced by more father-daughter romantic parings, where the leading men stayed the same, only older, and the leading ladies were replaced by young ingénues in need of protection, and who are fulfilled by settling into family bliss.

Most feminist analyses of film are interpretive in nature, selecting the few films that best represent their theory, and most ignore industrial production practices altogether.

However, the larger economic and production components of filmmaking need to be addressed since movies become cultural artifacts that embody not only filmic content but filmic form as well. Any "analyses that ignore the industrial component of film can be misleading or, at least, incomplete" (Geoff King 2002:2). Movies do not just come from the imaginations of the creators, they are made by a group of individuals all participating in production processes that exist in larger economic structures with business standards, rules of operation and networks of affiliations that are equally as important as the socially constructed norms that help shape the representations of the characters within the film (Hesmondhalgh 2002).

Often interpretive film analyses imply that a particular film or filmic character represents a larger social reality and make generalized claims. But films are numerous and varied and each variety has its own audience; there are different genres, sub-genres, styles, and art forms all situated within a cinematic history than spans more than a century which has itself undergone tremendous technological and economic change. The interpretive film analysis, if it is good, sheds critical light on socio-cultural issues; but often the movie is used as an example to reinforce what the author already assumes about a particular social problem or cinematic representations. Because movies include enough variety, one could always find a few films to fit any perspective or interpretation. Scholarly film analyses, although often stimulating and intellectually insightful, are essentially academic movie reviews. On the other hand, the lay understanding of film, with its lack of critical examination, also makes the leap from the particular to the general. A common notion is that the new female imagery that we

see in mainstream cinema represents a strong and independent woman which can be attributed to feminist gains in America, but closer examination reveals a more complex reading and implies that this perspective is not wholly warranted.

As sociology developed as a discipline in the 19th century, the process of industrialization reflected a sharp growth in capitalism and the separation of home from work. The separation of home and family into the private sphere and the economic and political into the public sphere became a dominant model of social life based on gender. Women's participation in the domestic realm became life-defining, as did men's participation in the political economy. In spite of women's waged productive labor, as part of the 18th century ideal of "the cult of domesticity," white women's primary role became perceived culturally as that of wife and mother, while, in Marxist terms, men's position was defined by their relationship to the means of production (Sutherland and Feltey 2010). This ideal of separate spheres, with women mainly occupying the home or "domestic sphere," enjoyed renewed acceptance during the 1950s and 1960s (Coltrane 1998).

Historically, sociology has also treated the private realm of home and family as separate and apart from the public realms of work, politics, and the economy. Further, the spaces we inhabit as social actors were conceptualized as not just physically separate, but as also involving separate functions and processes in our lives. Nowhere does this become more apparent than in the very narrow construction of normative family life in the mid-20th century United States. "Bedroom communities" were built in urban areas, and workers commuted from the privatized life of family and home to the public domain

of work. Home was a place where our bodies were nourished and cared for, our emotional well-being nurtured, and we found meaning in what sociologists call primary group relationships. Leaving home, we entered the public domain of secondary group relationships, engaging in contract-based exchange relationships and the life of the larger community.

Movies reflect this division as well, and we often follow characters from one realm into the other, understanding that the shift from public to private provides a frame for interpreting the actions of people engaged in social relationships and situations. These often involve dimensions of family life and experience, including gender, race/ethnicity, and social class. In the 1950s this was evident in films that portrayed the "ideal family," consisting of a homemaker wife, breadwinner husband, and their children. These idealized images of gender roles influenced the development of public and economic policies, as well as individual choices and experiences (Coontz 1992).

Classic Hollywood films were a main source of entertainment for people in the United States in the 1940s and 1950s. These films have also been a source of entertainment for the generations that followed. Since their initial theatrical release, they have been available to subsequent audiences, through television, video and DVD sources. The films of that era reflect a culture that reinforced a traditional understanding of women's roles in society and the family. These films have, in large part reinforced traditional views of gender, marriage, and relationships that continue to persist into the twenty-first century, as well as reinforcing racial stereotypes that subordinate people of color. The racialized gendered messages they contain have given substance to the way

women and men in U.S. society view the world and family relationships. Along with other socialization agents, films, and media as a whole, reinforce the dominant hegemonic ideology that women's place is in the home, and motherhood is the ultimate career for white, middle-class women.

Popular films reveal our ideals and expectations about family life in many ways. Some films perpetuate cultural stereotypes about families and the roles that various family members play. A minority of films challenge preconceived ideas and offer alternative views of family life in contemporary society. Movies frame social reality, and they reflect ideological images of interaction, relationship, and community (Denzin 1991). Cultural ideals about families, who they are and how they are expected to act, are deeply ingrained. The Hollywood film industry has provided widely accepted views of family, reflecting the ideal, if not the real, culture.

Feminist scholars have noted that the concept of "family" as a global constant is false. Some studies have broadened our understanding of families beyond the nuclear arrangement by looking at a more diverse demographic. Regardless of family structure, little advantage has been found between types of families, indicating that the "traditional, nuclear" family is not necessarily better or healthier than any other (Acock and Demo 1994). Race and class are also a part of the family experience, and the stereotype of the heterosexual white middle class family does not represent the majority of family experiences in the U.S. (Baca Zinn 1990; Broman 1991; Coltrane 1996; Smith 1993).

Historical Context

The breadwinner/homemaker model of family was most prominent in the 1950s and has historically been referred to as the "cult of domesticity" (Kessler-Harris 1982; Ryan 1981). Functionalist theorists such as Parsons and Bales (1955) described this family arrangement in terms of the expressive, care-giving role for women, and the instrumental breadwinner role for men. In this version of family life, women stay home and care for the family, meeting the family members' emotional needs while taking responsibility for the domestic work of making a home. Men, on the other hand, are responsible for earning a living (outside of the home) and protecting their family members from the outside world. In this way, the family "functions" by meeting its basic needs through clearly defined gender roles, each partner in the marriage having specific responsibilities solely based on his/her gender. Feminists reject this perspective since it assumes biological determinism, without a rational justification of this inflexible and gendered division of family contributions.

This breadwinner/homemaker model of family life was an historical anomaly of the 1950s (Bernard 1981). During World War II, women were recruited into factory work to replace the men who had gone to war. When the United States entered the war, 12 million women (one quarter of the workforce) were already working. By the end of the war, the number was up to 18 million, with women comprising one third of the workforce. While ultimately 3 million women worked in war plants, the majority of women who worked during World War II worked in traditionally female occupations, like the service sector (Campbell 1984).

With the changes resulting from industrialization, all women except the most economically privileged, were part of the wage economy. The difference in the World War II era was that for the first time in U.S. history, women were doing men's work for men's wages. During the 1940s, wartime demand for increases in women's labor force participation and "Rosie the Riveter" imagery challenged the ideal of separate work spheres for men and women. During this time, films portrayed white women as independent and career-oriented (Coltrane 1998; Gerson 1983; Gorham 1997). During the 1950s and 1960s, however, the separate spheres ideal found renewed and unprecedented acceptance by young white women looking for an idyllic fairy tale life, fueled by images in popular culture (Friedan 1963; Levey 2001; Morantz-Sanchez 1987). Once the war ended, women lost their jobs or were moved to lower-paying positions to open the labor market for the returning soldiers. At the same time, there was a cultural emphasis on gender-specific roles within the family, specifically, that a woman's place was in the home caring for her husband and children.

Movies during that period reversed the government-produced advertising to entice women into factories when their labor was needed during the war. In the post-war period, the role of women in films centered on homemakers happily caring for their families. The decade of the 1950s has been described as a "throwback to the Victorian cult of domesticity with its polarized sex roles and almost religious reverence for home and hearth" (Skolnick 1991, p. 52) which originated in England among the upper-middle class during the late nineteenth century (Bose 1987; Coltrane 1998; Griswold 1993).

The consumer culture that developed in the post-World War II era idealized domestic life in films and on radio and television. With traditional, white middle-class nuclear families presented on television in the 1950s as the ideal model, women began marrying earlier and having more children than any group of U.S. women before them. Adding to this rise in domesticity, the sudden expansion of the American economy created a rapid growth of the suburbs with the expansion of affordable tract-housing throughout the country (England 1993). The advertised promise of domestic bliss for women was not fully realized however. Isolation in suburban homes resulted in higher than average depression levels among stay-at-home housewives during the period between 1950 and 1969 (Carson 1992; Collins and Coltrane 1995; Warren 1987). Nevertheless, many working-class women aspired to full-time homemaker status, and if middle-class mothers actively pursued careers, their values were called into question (Coltrane 1998; Rubin 1976; Warren 1987).

In many ways, U.S. suburban housewives who lived in the 1950s had a life their mothers could only dream of, free of onerous drudgery (thanks to new appliances), rampant disease, and city pollution. They seemed to have everything a post-WWII woman was supposed to want: a husband with a good job, healthy children, and a lovely home. But that was just on the surface. In reality, they were dealing with endless housework, depression, and alcoholism. They existed, for the most part, in a state of denial. When they complained, they were told that something must be wrong with them, that they needed to find a way to adjust to the "feminine role." It was seen as an individual problem, not a structural one (Friedan 1963).

Women in the U.S. no longer felt free to pursue their own dreams and desires, but compelled to put them away to serve the greater good of "the family." Essentially, suburban housewives in the 1950s lived in a cage. It may have been a lovely cage, but it was still a cage. The husband was lord and master, and even a benevolent master is still a master. The "mystique," or mystery, as Friedan describes it, was why making a perfect home had become the primary goal in the lives of a large portion of American women. Friedan examined how sex, home, work and cultural norms are used to dominate and oppress women, illustrating the incomplete emancipation of women as equal citizens leading to lower rates of college graduation, under-representation in politics and in the labor market.

During the post-World War II era (the end of the 1940s and into the 1950s), the role of white women in films were significantly changed from independent, career-seeking persons to those of domestic orientation. Professional, career-oriented women, when they did appear, were portrayed in negative terms as selfish and misguided, who have unfairly sacrificed their man and children for the empty dream of professional success. Such images of career-oriented women were found in films such as *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959), starring Lana Turner and Hope Lange's character in *The Best of Everything* (Negluesco 1959). More prominent were films that only included women in supporting roles as homemaker and the one who makes it possible for the man to be anchored and successful. Films that included these stereotypes included *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Johnson 1956), starring Jennifer Jones and *Executive Suite* (Wise 1954), starring June Allyson. This reduction in the narrative and occupational status of

white women translated to television, which was in its formulative infancy during the 1950s. A familiar formula was developed that portrayed nuclear families that included homemaker-mothers as the feminine ideal. This period embedded the ideal of the nuclear family and the wife as homemaker into U.S. culture, to the extent that the general conception is that it is a natural and ideal arrangement. This misconception continues to be emphasized by patriarchal religious and political groups (Allen and Hawkins 1999; Bartkowski and Ellison 2001; Coltrane 2001; DeMaris and Longmore 1996; Ellison and Bartkowski 2002; Smith 1993). Women also began appearing less frequently in major films, with an increase in male-dominated features (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Tuchman 1979).

These historical sources describe the era under examination as one that laid the groundwork for the continuation of these stereotypes in response to a political-economic agenda that sought to give advantage to white males while keeping women (especially white women) in the supportive position of providing unpaid household labor for them. By examining the content of popular films of the 1940s in terms of the gender roles shown, it may be possible to demonstrate that this ideal was not portrayed as the expected life choice for white middle-class women until the 1950s. I argue that this change in the filmic images of white women was intentionally designed to first encourage them to enter the workplace while there was a shortage of male labor, and then to give up those jobs in favor of men returning from World War II.

Media images provide material for members of a society to construct their identities and determine the appropriateness and limitations of roles they may assume in

relationship to their culture. Images which present specific roles as desirable or worthwhile encourage those who watch them to assume those roles, modeling them after the perceived standards presented. This study evaluates the extent to which the films from the post-war era contained ideological images, and if there is a significant change from one decade to the next to indicate that compared to the pre-war films, the later films represented women more often in supportive rather than leading social roles.

I have also endeavored to connect the labor of women behind the scenes (or the absence thereof) to the subordination of women on the screen. Feminist film criticism has focused primarily on the text, rarely connecting the history of film to the history of the industry. The Hollywood phenomenon constitutes an integral system of persons, groups, rules, films, machinery, documents, institutions, work processes, and theoretical concepts. Film practice consists of more than projected images on a screen; it also includes the economic aims of the producers, the specific division of labor, and the particular ways of conceiving and executing the job of filmmaking (Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson 1985). Gaines (2004) describes how women were once influential in the production of films during the early twentieth century, but were displaced by men in almost all fields. Sociologists Bielby and Bielby (1996) examined gender inequality in the labor market for writers of feature films that persists today, while other labor process studies have looked at similar issues of occupational bias (Burawoy 1979; Muller and Shavit 1998).

Since political economic conditions change as social norms over time, it makes sense to gauge the changes in film production through methods that allow historical

comparisons. Much has been written about the significance of women in the film industry, especially during the "Classical Hollywood" period, but not much has been done from an empirical, sociological perspective that examines these images and their relationship to gender ideology in U.S. culture. This study investigates the content of these landmark films and assesses the extent to which they emphasize the importance of home and family for white women and the social desirability for them to devote their lives to unpaid domestic labor, while delegating the roles of women of color to servitude or obscurity. In addition, I examine a subsample of recent remakes of films from this period to determine if these patterns continue to persist in contemporary narratives.

Research questions

This dissertation seeks to answer specific questions about the way women were represented in the Hollywood films from the period of 1939 to 1959, and to ascertain if significant differences could be found in the portrayal of women's status and priorities compared to men's. The first questions are focused on primary characters (those found in the top ten cast members as listed in the credits). These characters were predominantly white because of the marginalization of minority characters in the historic films. I found that more people of color occupied the primary roles in contemporary remakes of these films. For the purposes of analysis I focused on the following questions.

- Are there gender differences in whether a primary character is identified in terms of his or her marital attachment? In other words, are female characters more often identified as having a male partner, thus defining her in terms of her spouse or

boyfriend? Are male characters more likely to not be associated with a life partner?

- Is there a significant difference in the occupational prestige of female and male characters? Is this difference more prominent in post-war films than prewar ones? How does this difference compare with that found in contemporary versions of these films?
- Do female characters demonstrate concern for family members more often than male characters? More specifically, is parenting seen as a concern more often for female characters?
- Is there a significant increase in the portrayal of "mothers" as a role after World War II than before it? How does this compare with the contemporary versions of these films?
- What is the gender composition of the production crew in terms of the key decision making positions related to the film?[2]

The representation of race as well as gender is examined in this dissertation. Since the methodology being used deals with the impression the images make on the audience, race is identified in terms of the race of the character rather than the race of the actor. As a result, when an actor of one race plays a character of another, the character's race is the one being coded.[3]

[2] The ethnicity of crew members is not readily apparent using the credits as a source, thus issues of race will not be explored in this question

[3] Examples from the sample of actors who played characters of a different race include Bette Davis in *Beyond the Forest*, Judy Garland in *The Pirate* and Susan Kohner *in Imitation of Life*.

In order to examine the relative status of women of color compared to white women in the films being sampled, the following questions will also be explored:

- How often do women of color appear in the films?
- What is their comparative occupational status to other characters in general, and white women in particular?
- Do women of color increase or decrease in their appearances in films toward the end of the time period under study?
- Are women of color portrayed as mothers as often as white women are?
- Does the way in which women of color are portrayed change over time?

Extent/scope of the study

In order to answer these research questions, 100 U.S. films were chosen from the period between 1939 and 1959. This period is considered a high point in the industry, and immediately precedes the advent of television and other visual media. It is also historically a period when U.S. culture was undergoing significant shifts in gender relations and ideology as a result of the decrease of men present in U.S. employment during the war and their return thereafter. It is conjectured by this study that this was a watershed moment in gender culture for white middle class women. The tide turned from progressive attitudes encouraging white women to enter professions toward a more traditional domestic orientation for white women encouraging them to serve their husbands and children.

During the 1940s, people of color in general occupy background roles of servitude. These roles included train porters and shoe-shine boys for men, maids and

cooks for women. These roles rarely have limited or non-existent dialogue for the most part. As the wife/mother role became more prominent for white women, the woman of color disappears almost entirely from the screen.

In order to represent the prevailing cultural themes of the time, a sampling frame of 1,146 was created from feature films found in the American Film Institute's data base. In addition, 11 contemporary remakes of films in the sample were selected to address questions of historic comparison. These films were also found in the AFI catalog.

Limitations and delimitations

The major focus of this study is intentionally limited to a specific time frame and the content of films from the period that helped to shape dominant cultural ideologies concerning gender. Those films that have been considered for inclusion in this project have met commercially-based criteria that define them as "major motion pictures." This was done to ensure that the social artifacts being examined could reasonably be considered to have been watched by a significant number of viewers and thereby considered to be popular culture.

The culture under investigation is limited to the United States and this investigation deals solely with cultural and political economic concerns peculiar to that society. However, it is possible that some of the findings could also relate to similar cultures which have imported these films and viewed them under similar economic conditions.

Theoretical Perspective

Many feminists have tried to explain the shifting filmic images of women over the decades, and feminist film criticism has generally revolved around the sexual objectification of women and socially-circumscribed gendered roles of wife and mother. The feminist position regarding representations of women in film is influenced by the broader feminist discourse, as well as the writings of contemporary critical theorists in British cultural studies. These contemporary critical theorists argue that the media project hegemonic images that contribute to the support of hierarchical relations (Carragee 1990; Condit 1989; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Hall 1997; Williams 1976). Similar theoretical positions are found in feminist film criticism (Basinger 1993; Doane 1990; Douglas 1994; Dow 1996; Haskell 1973; Hollinger 1998; Rich 1998). Based on these perspectives, those in positions of power in our society are portrayed most often, and in the most positive light, in television and films.

The theoretical perspective used in this dissertation integrates intersectional feminist film criticism to explain why certain representations of men and women are found most often in films. Intersectionality theory suggests that various socially and culturally constructed categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination

(Shields 2008). Feminist intersectionality theory specifically proposes that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity (McCall 2005). Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins 2000).

This integrated approach will be supported by using a cultural indicators model developed in conjunction with George Gerbner's cultivation theory, informed by basic themes from Miller's global effects model. This approach considers the impact of race as well as gender in the way various people are represented in film. I will explain each of these latter perspectives below.

The theoretical perspective that informs this research derives from George Gerbner's theory of cultural indicators and the formation of cultural norms (Gerbner 1998). Cultivation research is in the "effects" tradition of media studies. Cultivation theorists argue that visual media has long-term effects which are small, gradual, indirect but cumulative and significant. What makes them different from traditional effects modelers is their emphasis on the effects of television and film viewing on the attitudes rather than the behavior of viewers. Cultivation indicators theorists contend that watching television and films tends to induce a general mindset, as opposed to inducing a specific behavior. Cultivation theorist George Gerbner (1998) argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture; the media maintain and promote these values within the people of the culture. Cultivation indicators research

looks at the mass media as a socializing agent having a significant influence on the attitudes, beliefs, and judgments of viewers concerning the social world.

Individuals consume culture, and use these images to form and modify their personal understanding of various social norms, specifically, in this case, those related to gender performance. In addition to the interaction between the individual and the media construct, individuals interact with each other using the media construct (film) as a point of reference. This is in keeping with a global effects model which emphasizes the impact of media products on the culture as a whole, rather than the individual (Miller, Govil, McMurria, Maxwell, and Wang 2005). This study seeks to examine how aspects of gender portrayals were constructed in films from a specific era with the intent of setting a cultural standard for its intended audience.

Definition of Terms

In this study I use a number of terms to refer to specific ideas or constructs. In order to be clear about what is meant by these terms I offer the following definitions.

Culture refers to patterns of expectations, beliefs, values, ideas, and material objects that define the accepted way of life for a society or groups.

Family is used to describe a set of interpersonal relationships between persons related by birth, marriage, or adoption, or those who have made a formal commitment to one another, who live together as one household.

Gender is defined as the socially learned behaviors and expectations associated with men and women.

Gender roles are patterns of behavior in which people behave based on cultural expectations associated with their gender.

Main characters are those found in the top ten billing positions in the cast listing in the credits for the film.

Material culture refers to the physical or technological aspects of daily social life that are specific to a society or group.

Media refers to the technology used to store and deliver entertainment, information, or data.

Motivation is the set of reasons that determines why one engages in a particular behavior or behaviors.

Non-material culture includes customs, beliefs, philosophies, governments, and patterns of communication, as well as ways of using material objects that are specific to a society or group.

Occupation describes the primary activity or task with which one occupies oneself; usually specifically the productive activity, service, trade, or craft for which one is materially compensated.

Primary characters (see main characters).

Overview of the Dissertation

This dissertation seeks to analyze a substantial sample of historically influential films for their representation of gender and race relations and their relationship to the life choices and opportunities available to U.S. women in the social structure. Guided by cultural indicators theory and feminist principles, it analyzes the content of these films.

My analysis seeks to understand the origins and political agenda behind cultural norms that signify what kinds of roles are appropriate for white women and women of color.

The remaining chapters are organized in the following way. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature, exploring the evolution of feminist film theory which has its roots in sociological principles, as well as other studies that have analyzed the content of film and television in terms of gender representation. In examining feminist theories related to film and the shortage of research done in connection to those theories, the background of the literature demonstrates the need for this project. The most prominent perspective, psychoanalytic theory, is discussed, its arguments explored as well as its shortcomings.

In Chapter 3, the design and implementation of the study is described. Content analysis is explained, as well as its use in a feminist context and its early use by Harriet Martineau. The chapter also addresses how the sample was selected by reviewing similar past studies, the researcher's role in selecting the data and how the data were gathered, as well as the tools used for analysis.

Chapter 4 reflects on the results of the analysis, much of which reveals the portrayal of white women, related to the research questions. The chapter examines the degree to which the findings support feminist theories, especially intersectional feminist theory and cultivation theory. It also explores contemporary remakes of some of the films previously examined and how they compare to their original versions in terms of gender and occupation. It was found that there is an overwhelming bias in the portrayal of white women in terms of their romantic and marital relationships to white men, and that their central identity was comprised of their marital or parental status, even when these

characters were peripheral rather than central to the story. White women were rarely portrayed as professionals or having an advanced education where career orientation is possible. For white women, conflicts between employment and family were always resolved in favor of the family. White men were not placed in a position where they were forced to make this choice. In contemporary films, we see white women engaged in careers more often, although the priority of family is still maintained. Overall, the primary occupational category for white women was "mother," while the primary category for white men was "white collar." By far the most surprising finding was the dramatic increase in white mother roles after 1950.

The historical cause of the absence of women of color in the sample, particularly black women, is discussed in Chapter 5. Results concerning women of color and their place in films are considered in light of intersectional feminist theory and issues of representation. It was found that there were considerably fewer women of color appearing in the top ten positions, with white women comprising over 94% of all female characters in these top roles during the pre-1950 period, and black women comprising only 1.6% of these characters. The highest number of main characters in a racial category other than white was Latina, while the least represented racial groups for women were Asian and Native American. African American women characters in both the pre- and post-1950 categories had occupations in the lowest category. Latina women were evenly spread across occupational status categories, and Asian women were in the highest levels as aristocracy or celebrities

In the final chapter, the implications of this research are examined, with conclusions drawn supporting the validity of theoretical arguments being tested. Comparisons are made with the findings of past research, with support being verified for feminist and critical theoretical positions. The possibilities for future research are also discussed, focusing on the direction of the genre known as “race films,” and their place in providing relatable film experience to people of color while still maintaining gender stereotypes.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

> The signifier "woman" always signifies woman: we recognize ourselves in any representation of woman, however "original," because we are always already defined by our gender…we are never just spectators who gaze at "images" of women as though they were set apart, differentiated from the "real" us. Within ads are inscribed images and subject position of "mother," "housewife," "sexually attractive woman" and so on, which as we work to understand the ad, embroiled in the process of signification that we complete.
>
> -Janice Winship, "Sexuality for Sale," 1979

> We are all experts at understanding Hollywood movies. We have to be given their presence on most cinema and television screens. Each year, more movie tickets are sold than there are people on the planet. Those audiences are mostly watching fiction conceived, made and owned by Hollywood.
>
> -Toby Miller, "Global Hollywood 2," 2005

The study of gender representation in film follows a rich tradition of work done by both feminist and media scholars. The feminist critique has generally revolved around the sexual objectification of women and socially-circumscribed gendered roles of wife and mother. Many feminists have tried to explain the shifting filmic images of women over the decades and this chapter traces their various critiques, interpretations, and analyses. The feminist position regarding representations of women in film is located within a broader feminist theory and discourse which ultimately influences them. This chapter will explore the evolution of feminist film theory which has its roots in sociological principles, as well as review other studies that have analyzed the content of film and television in terms of gender representation. This literature review will also help

shed light on how the images of today's film characters are related to feminist discourse. In conjunction with the findings of content analysis, this literature will also provide a foundation for the results found in Chapters 4 and 5. Several of the theories addressed in the present literature review will be included in the understanding of the results in order to provide a systematic and comprehensive way of understanding the various images and representations of women in contemporary U.S. cinema.

My theoretical position, while acknowledging the contributions of psychoanalytic theory, maintains an emphasis on contemporary critical theorists, particularly those found in British cultural studies. Within this field, communication theories and cultural studies research have provided evidence that the media project hegemonic images that contribute to the support of hierarchical relations (Carragee 1990; Condit 1989; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Hall 1997; Williams 1976). Similar theoretical positions are found in feminist film criticism (Basinger 1993; Doane 1990; Douglas 1994; Dow 1996; Haskell 1973; Hollinger 1998; Rich 1998). Based on these perspectives, I argue that those in positions of power in our society are portrayed most often, and in the most positive light in television and films. I will be following this tradition in this dissertation, using content analysis to examine the images of men and women from the films of the 1940s and 1950s to find evidence that supports this perspective. I will also integrate the basic themes of a global effects model with cultivation theory to explain the means in which the controlling capitalist interests of the U.S. manipulate and exploit the media in order to normalize their privileged status.

In this chapter, I will provide an overview of the history of the field of feminist film criticism and then explore the major perspectives and their relevance to this research. I will first discuss Psychoanalytic Theory because of its impact on the field, then Intersectional Feminist Theory, followed by British Cultural Studies and Media Effects models with a brief discussion of research related to Cultivation Theory and Cultural Indicators research.

Feminist Film Theory and Scholarship

Since this study is concerned with the placement and representation of women in films it is important to understand the relationship of feminist thought to film studies. The body of work referred to as feminist film theory was influenced by second wave feminism and the development of women's studies within the academy when feminist scholars began applying the new theories arising from these movements to understand film. Feminist media criticism arose from the daily, ongoing concerns of women reevaluating the culture in which they had been socialized and educated (Kaplan 1983).

Before there was an academic area of study called feminist film theory, there were female film critics responding to the images of women they saw on screen. In the late 1960s, feminist film criticism looked at film as a means of understanding a cultural logic that marginalized, subordinated, and oppressed women. These feminists critiqued the Hollywood studio system for producing movies that reified cultural norms of the good wife and mother. The Hollywood studio system controlled actresses and the often one-dimensional characters they played who were set up as social role models for women to emulate in order to fit the expectations of post-war society. Post WWII America expected

women to give up their jobs to returning GIs, go back to the kitchen, and take care of their families (Rosen 1973).

Hollywood and the culture it represented also controlled images on screen through censorship. In 1922, spurred by several recent high-profile scandals involving Hollywood celebrities, calls for some type of federal action were heard. In self-defense, motion picture producers passed a succession of moral rules or "codes" meant to guide the content of motion pictures, overseen by former postmaster Will Hays and often referred to as the "Hays Code." Although most producers followed these voluntary rules, after a few years the guidelines started to relax and by the coming of sound in the late 1920s the treatment of crime, violence, sexual infidelity, profanity and even nudity became alarming to some people.

In 1930, therefore, a new code, which came to be known as the Hollywood Production Code, was written. The industry accepted it nominally, although many movies stretched it to its limits or simply ignored it, especially in their use of sexual innuendoes, risqué costumes, and implicitly immoral characters. This prompted more public outcry. In 1934 a mechanism was set up to enforce the code. For the next thirty years, virtually every film produced or exhibited in the United States had to receive a seal of approval from the office of Joseph Breen, the head of the Production Code Administration (Black 1989).

Before the Hollywood Production Code came into full effect in 1934, women on screen played prostitutes and businesswomen, cheated on their husbands, and sometimes got away with murder (Haskell 1973; LaSalle 2000). They were tough, self-sufficient,

and unapologetically sexual. They were complex and real, and in a sense more like the women we see on-screen today. Unfortunately, general public outcry in the U.S. put pressure on the studio system to purify the images of women in the movies. As a result, female representations conformed to conservative and traditional social norms and values until the 1960s (Miller 1994).

The earliest forms of feminist media criticism used a general sociological approach, looking at the gender roles of women in various works, from fine art to entertainment, evaluating those roles in terms of "positive" and "negative" based on the ideal of an autonomous and independent woman. Later (in the 1970s), feminists saw the limitations of this approach and modified it in terms of semiology and a psychoanalytic perspective, focusing on how meaning is produced in films rather than their manifest content (Kaplan 1983).

In the early 1970s, feminist film criticism in the United States focused on the representation of women characters in particular film narratives or genres, and of specific stereotypes as a reflection of a society's view of women. Works such as Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus: Women, Movies, and the American Dream* (1973) and Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in Movies* (1973) analyzed how the women portrayed in film related to a broader historical context, the gender stereotypes that were depicted, the extent to which the women were shown as active or passive, as well as the amount of screen time given to women.

The early work on the representation of women in film by Marjorie Rosen and Molly Haskell was part of a movement to make depictions of women more realistic. The

growing female presence in the film industry was seen as a positive step toward realizing this goal, by drawing attention to feminist issues and putting forth alternative, more true-to-life views of women (Erens 1990). However, these images are still influenced by the same factors as traditional film, such as the moving camera, composition, editing, lighting, and all varieties of sound. While acknowledging the value of inserting positive representations of women in film, some critics asserted that real change would only come about from reconsidering the role of film in society, often from a semiotic point of view (Erens 1990).

During these formative years of new film criticism, critics were informed by the work of such second wave feminists as Bettie Friedan, Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, and Simone de Beauvoir with their various critiques of the oppression of gender placed on women. Two feminist film journals gained prominence during the 1970s: *Women and Film* (late known as *Camera Obscura*) and *Jump Cut*. Feminist debates were also taken up in such noteworthy journals as *Screen* and *Cahiers du Cinema*. The first two books on the subject of women in film were Marjorie Rosen's *Popcorn Venus* (1973), Molly Haskell's *From Reverence to Rape* (1973). By the mid-1970s, feminist film theory had arrived and was responding to the radically changing female imagery of the New Hollywood. The two major paradigms that have developed and dominated feminist film theory for the past two decades are psychoanalysis and British cultural studies.

Psychoanalytic Theory

One of the most prominent feminist film theoretical perspectives found in the literature uses Freudian psychoanalytic principles to examine the "gaze" of the spectator

and how it interprets the position of women on screen. These speculations were countered by Marxist-based theorists who discounted the psychological effects of media influence by examining the political economic interests that dictate film content (Gaines 1990b). Many feminist film critics have focused on a psychoanalytic concept referred to as the "male gaze" that is discussed frequently in relationship to classical Hollywood filmmaking. This concept can be traced to Christian Metz (1975) who argued that viewing film is only possible through scopophilia (pleasure from looking, related to voyeurism), originating from the male perspective. Budd Boetticher (a film director during the classical period in Hollywood), offered a compelling description of the male gaze: "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (Erens 1990: xvi).

Feminist film criticism began to take on a more theoretical tone. One of the pioneers of feminist film theory was Claire Johnston. In her 1973 essay, *Notes on Women's Cinema*, Johnston, guided by Barthes' structural theories, expanded concepts of female cinematic stereotypes to include larger structural ideological components of iconography and myths to be used as a methodological means of examining "how cinema works and how we can best interrogate and demystify the workings of ideology" (Johnston 1979:32). In these early years of feminist scholarship, theory and methods were primarily based upon the structuralism of Barthes and Saussure, the post-structuralism of Foucault and the psychoanalysis of Lacan.

This perspective contends that conventional narrative films in the ‘classical’ Hollywood tradition not only tend to focus on a male protagonist in the narrative, but also assume a male spectator. Added to this theory by Laura Mulvey's pivotal essay, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (Mulvey 1975), was the feminist claim that men and women are differentially positioned by cinema: men as subjects who drive the film's narrative forward, women as objects for masculine desire and fetishistic gazing. Mulvey assumed a general picture of cinema as a symbolic medium, using Lacanian psychoanalysis to ground her principles of gendered subjectivity, desire, and visual pleasure, a view stemming from a particular and highly contested philosophical tradition.

Mulvey’s theory contends that traditional films present men as active, controlling subjects and treat women as passive objects of desire for men in both the story and in the audience, while not allowing women to be desiring sexual subjects in their own right. Mulvey claimed that such films objectify women in relation to ‘the controlling male gaze’ (1975:33), presenting ‘woman as image’ (or ‘spectacle’) and man as ‘bearer of the look’ (1975:27). Men do the looking; women are there to be *looked at*. Per Mulvey, the cinematic codes of popular films ‘are obsessively subordinated to the neurotic needs of the male ego’ (1975:33).

Mulvey’s work has generated considerable controversy amongst film theorists. Many have questioned the alignment of passivity with femininity and activity with masculinity and its failure to account for the female spectator. E Ann Kaplan (1983) argued that the gaze could be adopted by both male and female subjects, that the male is not always the controlling subject nor is the female always the passive object. Teresa de

Lauretis (1984) argued that the female spectator does not simply adopt a masculine spectator position but is always involved with both the passive and active subject positions.

A key objection has been that Mulvey's argument in her original article was essentialist in that it tended to treat both spectatorship and maleness as homogeneous essences, the assumption being that there was only one kind of spectator (male) and one kind of masculinity (heterosexual). There is the possibility of more than just ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ spectator positions; there are also queer spectators. Steve Neale (1992) identified the gaze of mainstream cinema in the Hollywood tradition as not only male but also heterosexual. He observes a voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze directed by some male characters at other male characters within the text. A useful account of 'queer viewing' is given by Caroline Evans and Lorraine Gamman (1995).

Since Mulvey did not allow much possibility of resistance or critical spectatorship, and did not recognize variations in structure or the effect of realist cinema, her view has been both criticized and further refined. Writers (including Mulvey herself) have noted issues raised by differences among women, as well as phenomena like male masochism. Other concerns include variations in genres that function in distinctive ways, such as comedy, melodrama, and horror. Still, many writers in feminist film theory commonly assumed Mulvey's basic tenets and adopted some version of psychoanalytic theory where key issues were often seen only in terms of some refinement or qualification of psychoanalytic theory. Occasionally, Mulvey's critics have adopted more

sharply different theoretical bases such as cultural studies, identity politics, deconstruction, or the philosophy of Foucault.

Foucault (1977), who associated knowledge with power, related the 'inspecting gaze' to power rather than to gender in his discussion of surveillance. B. Ruby Rich (1990) argues that women's relationships with film is instead dialectical, consciously filtering the images and messages they receive through cinema, and reprocessing them to elicit their own meanings. The resulting "theory" in feminist film theory raises some compelling questions concerning issues such as the justification of a specifically feminist theory for adopting the patriarchal theory of psychoanalysis, since it is not supported by empirical data, and the evidence that is supplied appears to be circular in nature.

Janet Bergstrom's "Enunciation and Sexual Difference" (1988) references Sigmund Freud's ideas of bisexual responses, arguing that women are capable of identifying with male characters and men with women characters, either successively or simultaneously. Miriam Hanson, in "Pleasure, Ambivalence, Identification: Valentino and Female Spectatorship" (1991) suggested that women are also able to view male characters as erotic objects of desire. Tania Modleski argues that Hitchcock's film, *Rear Window*, is an example of the power of the male gazer and the position of the female as a prisoner of the "master's dollhouse" (Modleski 1988).

Laura Mulvey, in response to these and other criticisms revisited the topic in "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' inspired by *Duel in the Sun*" (1999). When addressing the heterosexual female spectator, she modified her stance to argue that women can take two possible roles in relation to film: a masochistic

identification with the female object of desire that is ultimately self-defeating or a transsexual identification with men as the active viewers of the text.

Claire Johnston (1979) presented the idea that women's cinema can function as "counter cinema." Through consciousness of the means of production and opposition of sexist ideologies, films made by women have the potential to posit an alternative to traditional Hollywood films. In reaction to this article, many women filmmakers have integrated "alternative forms and experimental techniques" to "encourage audiences to critique the seemingly transparent images on the screen and to question the manipulative techniques of filming and editing" (Erens 1990 :xix).

Laurie Shrage (1990) argues that concentration on film texts has led to a universalizing of psychological subjects and an overemphasis on readers'/viewers' passivity. Shrage proposes a contextual approach that recognizes considerable variation among an audience's "cinematic habits." Similarly, Flo Leibowitz (1990) utilizes a rhetorical and cognitive approach, rather than a psychoanalytic one, to discuss processes of audience identification with certain forms of melodrama, which she thinks may be a form of rational reflection. And Noël Carroll (1985) suggests that emotions are complex learned forms of behavior acquired from certain "paradigm scenarios," and that film among other sources can offer such scenarios.

Postmodern feminists question traditional notions of human identity which are based exclusively on categories of bodily integrity, race, ethnicity, class standpoint, or even gender. They suggest alternatives to a Lacanian-Althusserian theory of the self or subject, positing that identity is fractured by complex intersecting social technologies.

bell hooks and other black writers similarly point to the complicated ways in which a specifically black female identity is represented in films (Dash, Bambara, and hooks 1992). A postmodern approach to contemporary fractured identities takes filmic signifiers to be recirculated and utilized in a larger system of mass media and popular culture.

Feminist Intersectional Theory

New questions about the representation of women in films are raised in alternative theories to psychoanalytic feminist film theory because of their different accounts of the self, agency, identity, and the cultural surroundings of the subject. Feminism has emphasized traditionally female attributes in constructing alternatives to standard ethics, such as maternal ethics, the ethics of care, or lesbian ethics. These models may romanticize women, but they offer more complex accounts of the social nature of the self than Althusserian-Lacanian perspectives, since the self is essentially configured in relation to others such as mothers, children, sisters, friends, and lovers (Freeland 1998). On the other hand, work by socialist feminists or feminists in cultural studies concentrate on the linked oppressions of gender, ethnicity, race, and class. Ann Ferguson (1986) describes women's traditional unpaid forms of labor as a form of "sex-affective production" which has been exploited by men.

This type of patriarchal ideology came to predominate in the ensuing rise of neo-Marxist/feminist film criticism. In extending the concept of ideology from political beliefs to include common sense wisdoms and everyday life, Louis Althusser had argued the determining role of unconscious assumptions in the way we do things. Drawing on the theories of French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, Althusser suggested not only that

dominant ideology unconsciously infiltrates everyday life, but also controls our identities as “subjects”- our everyday sense of self at the center of our world. This argument pointed away from Marx, via Lacan to Freud and a much debated relationship between Marxism and psychoanalysis (Gledhill 1994).

Many have objected to past tendencies of feminist film theory to often be universalizing, using complex language and alienating categories which deny the range of women's experiences as active spectators enjoying films or reading them critically. Gender is not the only important factor in determining what Jane Gaines calls 'looking relations.' Race and class are also key factors (De Lauretis 1987; Gaines 1990a; Lutz and Collins 1994; Tagg 1988; Traub 1992). This is also expressed in feminist intersectional theory which drew attention not only to how images of men and women were shaped by gender ideologies but race and class ideologies as well. bell hooks has argued, for example, that mainstream feminist film criticism in no way acknowledges black female spectatorship. It does not even consider the possibility that women can construct an oppositional gaze via an understanding and awareness of the politics of race and racism (hooks 1992). Using the oppositional gaze, bell hooks encouraged black women not to accept stereotypical representations people of color in film, but rather actively critique them (2003). Ethnicity was found to be a key factor in differentiating between different groups of women viewers watching the same films that included men perpetrating violent acts toward women (Schlesinger 1992).

Intersectionality theory suggests that various socially and culturally constructed categories of discrimination interact on multiple and often simultaneous levels, contributing to systematic social inequality. Intersectionality holds that the classical models of oppression within society, such as those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, class, or disability do not act independently of one another; instead, these forms of oppression interrelate creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination (Shields 2008). Feminist intersectionality theory specifically proposes that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity (McCall 2005). Cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society. Examples of this include race, gender, class, and ethnicity (Collins 2000).

The term "intersectionality theory" was first coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) but gained prominence when sociologist Patricia Hill Collins reintroduced the idea as part of her discussion on Black feminism. This term replaced her previously coined expression "black feminist thought", "and increased the general applicability of her theory from African American women to all women" (Mann and Huffman 2005:61). Much like her predecessor Crenshaw (1991), Collins (1999 [1991]) argued that cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems of society, such as race, gender, class, and ethnicity. According to feminists of color, and many white feminists, experiences of class, gender, sexuality, etc., cannot be adequately understood unless the influences of racism and other relations

of domination and subordination are carefully considered (McCall 2005). Feminists argue that an understanding of intersectionality is a vital element to gaining political and social equality and improving our democratic system. Collins' theory is one of particular interest because it represents the sociological crossroads between modern and post-modern feminist thought.

Collins refers to the various intersections of social inequality as "the matrix of domination" (1999 [1991]). This term refers to how differences among people (sexual orientation, class, race, age, etc.) serve as oppressive measures towards females, and ultimately change the experiences of living as a woman in society. Collins and bell hooks point towards either/or thinking as an influence on this oppression and as further intensifying these differences. Specifically, Collins refers to this as the construct of dichotomous oppositional difference. This construct is characterized by its focus on differences rather than similarities. Society commonly uses dichotomies as descriptors such as black/white or male/female. Additionally, these dichotomies are directly opposed to each other and intrinsically unstable, meaning they rarely represent equal relationships. Note that in the dichotomies mentioned above, Black women typically fall into what is seen by society as the inferior halves of each of these pairs.

This representation of inferiority is observed in popular culture, and black feminist commentaries cite many examples of demeaning stereotypes of black women, some of which are found in this study. At the same time, they offer hope that a film that presents a culturally positive viewpoint can be accepted and even popular with audiences. For example, hooks (Dash, Bambara, and hooks 1992) points to Julie Dash's film

Daughters of the Dust as exemplifying a specifically black feminist gaze, telling a compelling story from black point of view. Other black writers similarly point to the complicated ways in which a specifically black female identity is represented in films. Internalization of these stereotypes leads to further the oppression faced by women (most notably Black women) in society.

More recent trends in film criticism revolve around a political-economic stance using principles of production derived from Marx. This perspective takes a more holistic look at film as a product, examining its relationship to everything from production labor to its influence on foreign markets. In terms of gender stratification, representation of the workforce behind the camera is examined as well as the ways women and marginalized groups are portrayed on camera (Gaines 1990a; Gledhill 1994; Miller et al. 2005).

British Cultural Studies

Many feminists criticized feminist film theory for being overly abstract, universalizing and non-experiential. British film theorists began integrating perspectives drawn from psychoanalysis, semiotics, and Marxism. In the 1970s and 1980s, these ideas were adopted by many within the American academic community. Analysis generally focused on "the production of meaning in a film text, the way a text constructs a viewing subject, and the ways in which the very mechanisms of cinematic production affect the representation of women and reinforce sexism" (Erens 1990:xvii).

The dominant psychoanalytic focus that influenced theoretical writings on film for several decades created a narrow framework for the analysis of subjects, pleasure, and desire, while alternative feminist accounts were not considered (Freeland 1998). The

modified approach to feminist film theory that emerged, found in journals such as *Screen* and *Camera Obscura*, includes a theoretical combination of semiotics, Althusserian Marxism, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. From this perspective, human subjects are formed through complex significatory processes, including traditional Hollywood cinema's "classic realist texts," as purveyors of bourgeois ideology.

British cultural studies built upon, responded to, and re-worked Marxist notions of class struggle, capitalist modes of production, and historical materialism. They deemphasized economic determinism and the base/superstructure divide (McGuigan 1992; Williams 2002), and focused more on dimensions of power and inequalities (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 1991). In addition to its traditional Marxist foundation, cultural studies brought in Althusser's structural Marxism and the role of ideology in the formation of culture. British cultural studies challenges notions of the blindly submissive effects of mass culture while focusing on popular culture and subcultures as a means of resistance to dominant ideology (McGuigan 1992). The British Cultural Studies approach shares some similarities to intersectionality theory in that it encompasses factors of gender, race, and class. In general, the theory focuses on the central concepts of political economy, ideology, and hegemony, and utilizes methods such as textual analysis, and audience reception

Kellner (1995) describes a three part approach to cultural studies. First, political economy and production are considered as well as the socio-economic context within which they were created. Secondly, textual analysis is used to understand media and its

particular language/codes. Thirdly, audience reception is studied to determine how audiences contribute to its meaning.

Foucault's poststructuralist notions of discourse as a power/knowledge nexus have also influenced cultural studies, as well as the post-structural psychoanalysis of Lacan. The psychoanalytic feminists took for granted a patriarchal ideological structure and a Lacanian notion of a phallic symbolic order. The psychoanalytic strain in feminist British cultural studies continued to focus upon issues of spectatorship which eventually evolved into variations of meaning-making processes, especially under the influence of Stuart Hall's (1980) model of "dominant, negotiated and oppositional" readings of popular culture.

In response to the male gaze, Jackie Stacey offers a British cultural studies perspective on spectatorship. Arguing against the gendered dualism of desire, Stacey (1991) believes that spectators bring different and more complex subjectivity to the movie viewing experience. She makes a distinction between spectators and audience, where the spectator is a passive subject, while the viewer in the audience actively produces her own meanings. Feminists in cultural studies also argue against the dominant male view that women's stories such as melodrama, romance fiction and soap operas were just fluff (Ang 1985; Gledhill 1999; Modleski 1982; Partington 1991; Radway 1984; Tasker 1991). Instead they suggest that women read and interpret female stories in different ways including resistance against male domination, recovering and reclaiming a female history, and finding their own pleasure in stories written by women for women.

The emphasis in cultural studies is often placed on identity practices, relationships between cultural objects and audiences/consumers, and active processes of meaning making. Partington suggests that, at the same time women consume images they also use them to create a masquerade, and in the meaning-making process have "negotiated and resisted the 'housewife' identity" (1991:67). The individual is not a passive subject constructed of meaning for both herself and the cultural object. In this way, she facilitates the articulation of the discourses which represent cultural subjects and cultural objects (Franklin, Lury, and Stacey 1991; Hall 1980).

The feminists in cultural studies often focus on the lived experiences of women and their interactions with popular culture, often resulting in ethnographic research. British cultural studies feminists have examined how working class women take pleasure in watching soap operas (Modleski 1982), how women can create identities by imitating styles and behaviors of movie stars (Stacey 1994a), and how popular fiction offers up bourgeois fantasies of capitalist consumption to working class women (Tincknell 1991). The research methodology of British cultural studies provides frameworks to examine not only lived experiences in an ethnographic sense, but also theoretical foundations which can be used to examine cultural representations, consumption practices, interpretations, and cultural influences on identity (Gledhill 1991; Hall 1980; Hebdige 1979; McRobbie 1993; Stacey 1994b).

Media Effects Models

The term media effects generally refers to a range of social scientific research on the influence of media images (most commonly images of violence or sexual activity)

upon the attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of audiences, usually children. Effects research comprises a diverse set of methodologies and assumptions about audience activity and policy goals, but the field is most widely known for its concern with the psychological and social impact of explicit and/or controversial material (McCarthy 2002).

The history of media effects research is extensive. After the rise of statistical methods in the social sciences in the 1920s, media effects began to develop as an area of professional research. In the US, the first major longitudinal, privately funded study of the effects of popular media on children took place. Known as the Payne Fund studies, the project was carried out during the period between 1929 and 1932. Nineteen social scientific researchers conducted in-depth interviews with, and administered a series of psychological and physiological tests to, children who habitually went to the movies, many of them inmates in reform schools and other institutional settings (McCarthy 2002).

The methodology for each of the Payne Fund studies varied based on the specific research question being addressed. A qualitative analysis of movies was used to determine the categories of movie content. Census and survey data was used to determine the actual audience attending these movies. Effects were measured using experimental design, questionnaires, case studies and personal interviews. Emotional stimulation was measured using laboratory techniques (Rodman 2007). From the theater attendance of more than fifty Ohio communities, the researchers projected the national movie attendance figures. It was found that children attended the movies more frequently than adults, and that from 1929-30, children went to the movies on an average of once a week.

The content of the movies being shown at this time (1920-1930) was derived from an analysis of 1,500 films. Ten categories of content were determined: crime, sex, love, mystery, war, children, history, travel, comedy, and social propaganda. According to Lowery and De Fleur, critics of the Payne Fund studies "pointed to their lack of control groups, problems in sampling, shortcomings in measurement, and other difficulties that placed technical limitations on their conclusions" (1995, 382). But, to the general public, the Payne Fund studies confirmed their fears of the movies' negative influences on children. Although the Payne Fund studies were conducted nearly seventy years ago, their research is still referenced today. As new technologies emerge, research based on the Payne Fund studies continue to be developed to ease (or fuel) the public's concerns with children and media effects.

The study of children who habitually went to the movies, many of them inmates in reform schools and other institutional settings, led to eleven publications. Most of which, like Herbert Blumer and Philip Hauser's (1933) *Movies, Delinquency, and Crime,* attempted to connect reported increases in juvenile crime to images of criminality in popular films (de Cordova 1990; Jowett, Jarvie, and Fuller 1996). This era also saw the emergence of the effects of broadcast communication as an area of social scientific research. In 1937, the Rockefeller foundation funded the Office of Radio Research at Princeton University, and imported Australian social scientist Paul Lazarsfeld as its director (McCarthy 2002).

Lazarsfeld advocated a 'limited effects' model. Previous models had conjectured a direct causal relationship between media and behavior, while Lazarsfeld's model

emphasized the ways in which responses to media are mediated by the experiences and cultural context of the individuals who make up the audience. Lazarsfeld also oversaw the development of techniques for effects measurement that remain standard in social science and marketing research today, including the use of focus groups (Morrison 1998).

The post-WWII arrival of television in the U.S., coinciding with the baby boom, gave rise to a renewed interest in 'domestic' media studies, specifically the effects of TV images on children. A key researcher in the early development of this field was Wilbur Schramm. His study, based on large-scale empirical surveys, conformed to the 'limited effects' model, stressing the importance of family environment on what the authors felt was an increasingly violent world of imagery on television (McCarthy 2002).

Schramm's use of the limited effects model was not, however, an indication that the essentialist theories of the direct causal relationship between media and behavior had been discarded by social scientists. In 1961, a well-known research project on children and violent behavior proposed that children who witness violent acts tend to imitate these acts. The research, known as the "Bobo doll'" studies, was conducted by Stanford behavioral psychologist Albert Bandura, who used the results to develop 'social learning theory,' later adapting this theory to a media effects model. Following his initial publication on his findings, he expanded the basic experimental scenario to include films and cartoons portraying violent acts (Bandura, Ross, and Ross 1963). Social learning theory became closely identified with media effects, and Bandura claimed that for both adults and children, television and film served as key sources for 'modeling' behaviors

(Bandura 1977). Bandura's theories of imitation and aggression have remained a strong model for both popular and academic understandings of media effects.

The direct causal relationship media effects model described above, dominant in the US and exported around the world, is typically applied without consideration of place. Miller et al. (2005) refer to it as the "domestic effects" model, or DEM. The limitation of this type of psychologically based theory is that it assumes a universal impact on viewers on an individual (micro) level while ignoring the influence media may have on a cultural (macro) level.

Miller et al. contrast these "psy-complex" theories with theories developed to address the impact of imported texts on indigenous cultures, referring to them as global effects models (GEM). The primary purpose of these models and their research is to assess the impact Western cultural imports had on various Third-World nations, and the extent to which they undermined and even supplanted the native culture and its media outlets (Miller et al. 2005).

I propose that the same principles of cultural influence can be applied to the influence of media products on the cultural norms of the country of origin. They seem especially relevant to a stratified society that has a capitalistic stake in imparting the dominant ideology on those whom it subordinates in order to maintain the status quo. It is from this perspective that I will integrate the basic themes of global effects models with cultivation theory to explain the means in which the controlling capitalist interests of the U.S. manipulate and exploit the media in order to normalize their privileged status and reinforce the gender and racial status quo.

Cultivation Theory

In addition to the explanation of why films contain particular content it is also key to media researchers to discover how to gather data on this content. In a variation on the media effects theories, George Gerbner saw the visual medium of television as an influence on viewer conceptions of reality. This ties in with the general theory of social constructionism, where members of a society create and recreate reality based on their understanding of cultural symbolism and needs. Gerbner's position is that messages inherent in television programming influence the way viewers construct reality, primarily in terms of norms and values (Gerbner 1998).

Gerbner differentiates his framework from previous "effects" models. He maintains that there is a symbolic environment that produces an interaction between the medium and its audience. It is also important to note that Gerbner attributes an agenda to the design of the messages being produced through the medium, that "(i)nstitutional needs and objectives influence the creation and distribution of mass-produced messages which create, fit into, exploit, and sustain the needs, values, and ideologies of mass publics" (Gerbner 1998:180). Further, although studies have shown that media can have an influence over attitudes and behaviors, belief structures and practices of daily life can also influence viewing.

As discussed in the section on media effects models, researchers for many decades have explored ways to measure the impact of film and television content on audiences. Cultivation analysis was developed by George Gerbner and Larry Gross of the University of Pennsylvania in the 1960s and 1970s to examine the role of television on

Americans. Cultivation theory derived from several large-scale projects concerned with the effects of television programming (particularly violent programming) on the attitudes and behaviors of the American public. Gerbner and his colleagues took a large role in the research projects, which included the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence in 1967 and 1968 and the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee on Television and Social Behavior in 1972 (Miller 2005).

Gerbner argues that the mass media cultivate attitudes and values which are already present in a culture: the media maintain and propagate these values amongst members of a culture, thus binding it together. Gerbner argues that the over-representation of violence on television constitutes a symbolic message about law and order rather than a simple cause of more aggressive behavior by viewers (as Bandura argued). Larry Gross (1976) considered that "television is a cultural arm of the established industrial order and as such serves primarily to maintain, stabilize and reinforce rather than to alter, threaten or weaken conventional beliefs and behaviors."

Cultivation analysis typically involves the correlation of data from content analysis with survey data from audience research. Content analysis by cultivation theorists seeks to characterize 'the TV world.' In 1968, Gerbner conducted a survey to demonstrate the effects of media viewing on attitudes. He placed television viewers into three categories: light viewers (less than 2 hours a day), medium viewers (2–4 hours a day), and heavy viewers (more than 4 hours a day). He found that heavy viewers held beliefs and opinions similar to those portrayed on television rather than the real world, which demonstrates the compound effect of media influence. Gerbner reported evidence

for 'resonance' - a 'double dose' effect which may boost cultivation. This is held to occur when the viewer's everyday life experiences are congruent with those depicted in the television world (Gerbner 1969).

An advantage of this theory is that it is applicable to a wide range of texts and to a wide range of audience members. Some studies have also considered other mass media from this perspective, and have dealt with topics such as gender roles, age groups, ethnic groups, and political attitudes (Dominick and Rauch 1972). If these representations are biased toward a specific group of social, gender, or class stereotypes, it is logical to assume that these biases play a role in the perpetuation of discriminatory stereotypes in terms of race, class, and gender in our society. Some scholars argue that capitalism, patriarchy, and white dominance are reproduced in and through characters, both fictional and nonfictional (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Hall 1997; Meyers 1997).

Communication theories and cultural studies research have provided evidence that the media overwhelmingly project hegemonic images that contribute to the support of hierarchical relations (Carragee 1990; Condit 1989; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Grossberg, Wartella, and Whitney 1998; Wartella and Whitney 1983). Similar theoretical positions are found in feminist film criticism (Basinger 1993; Doane 1990; Douglas 1994; Dow 1996; Haskell 1973; Hollinger 1998; Rich 1998). Based on these conclusions, it can be argued that those in positions of power in our society are portrayed most often, and in the most positive light in television and films. The findings from this content analysis of the images of men and women across racial groups from the films of the 1940s and 1950s are consistent with this perspective.

Summaries of previous investigations

There have been many studies using similar methods since film and television became an integral part of U.S. culture. Beginning with the Payne studies and through feminist analysis of representation in recent years, this section focuses on the main features and results of this research. From 1929-1932, a series of 13 research studies financially supported by The Payne Fund, a private foundation, was performed to examine movies and their effects on children. Each study fell into one of three main categories of research: film content, audience composition, and effects on children (Rodman 2007).

Since my project is primarily concerned with the consistency of film portrayals across a 20-year period, it is important to review studies that utilize manifest content analysis. Overall, past research suggests that women and minorities are underrepresented in the media when compared to the population, and that, when present in films, they are shown in stereotypical roles (Carson, Dittmar, and Welsch 1995; Clarke 1969; Douglas 1994; Elasmar, Hasegawa, and Brain 1999; Graves 1996; Lichter, Lichter, Rothman, and Amundosn 1987; Rich 1998; Seggar, Hafen, and Hannenen-Gladden 1981; Signorelli and Bacue 1999; Smythe 1954; Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). A previous review of films released from the 1940s to the 1980s found that sixty-four percent of main characters and 72 percent of supporting characters were male (Bazzini, McIntosh, Smith, Cook, and Harris 1997). Most of these studies were conducted within the field of communications and are intended to be descriptive more than explanatory. For the most part, they lack a theoretical basis or explanation.

My choice of methodology is content analysis, which has been used over the years to study social artifacts by many disciplines, including media and mass communications. Within the social sciences, the most frequent use of content analysis is in examining social artifacts such as documents and other printed texts, where the researcher counts the frequency of a recurring word or image. The word or image is seen as a signifier representing a concept the researcher is interested in. The frequency of the signifier is an indication of how prominent the concept is within the context of the material. Past research has included content analysis of advertisements for gendered images and what they tell us about how gender is idealized in our culture (Bhargava 1988; Curry and O'Brien 2006; Friedan 1963; Goffman 1979; Millard and Grant 2006; Ongkrutraksa 2002; Saunders and Stead 1986; Williams 1989).

Lasswell (1941), for example, used it in a large-scale study of political symbols in French, German, British, Russian, and U.S. press editorials and policy speeches. In 1969, Gerbner and his colleagues began to chart the content of prime-time and weekend children's television programming, and noted that 2,105 programs, 6,055 major characters, and 19,116 minor characters had been analyzed by 1984 (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli 1986). Gerbner and his colleagues (1969) developed “cultural indicators” by analyzing one week of television each year for almost two decades. They used this data to create “violence profiles” for networks, track trends, and observe how various groups (women, children, the elderly, etc.) were portrayed on U.S. television (Gerbner and Gross 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Signorelli, and Morgan 1980). In 1969, Gerbner and his colleagues began to chart the content of prime-time and weekend

children's television programming, and noted that 2,105 programs, 6,055 major characters, and 19,116 minor characters had been analyzed by 1984 (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorelli 1986).

Although content analysis has been used to evaluate trends in television commercials and programming along gender and racial lines, it has rarely been used to evaluate film. As a result, a comprehensive methodology has not been developed. Those few that are available on film do not address theoretical issues or discuss the relationship of the data to feminist theory. They also tend to focus on small samples of specific genres rather than random samples across all types of films (Austin 2002; Eschholz, Bufkin, and Long 2002; Gans 1964).

Visual media studies have commonly used images for content analysis. Within television programming, stereotypes of various ethnic and racial groups have been examined, as well as representations of women, especially in connection to occupations and body image. In a 1974 study (McNeil 1974) of the major commercial television networks, using content analysis found that male characters outnumbered female characters in drama programs by a factor of 18 to 1. Another interesting finding from that study was the frequency with which male characters had indeterminate marital status (46%) compared to female characters (at 11%), and that men were less often shown to be parents compared to women. This indicates the persistence of identifying female characters in terms of their family relationships, while men are represented as autonomous, and their relationship status is incidental to their identity.

In another study, Kalisch, Kalisch, et al. (1982) performed a content analysis of 191 films where nurses were primary characters in order to determine the relationship between nursing as an occupation and the film industry's tendency to portray nurses as sex objects. They found that 73% of the female nurse characters were sexually objectified. However, in stories where the professional aspects of nursing were emphasized, this was not the case. Bufkin and Eschholz studies on violence against women in film (2000; 2001) used content analysis to evaluate 50 top-grossing films to measure the prevalence and nature of sex and rape depictions, finding that that the movies presented a patriarchal vision of sex and rape where the perpetrator is most often lower class and in some way mentally or physically deformed.

Negative portrayals of women in specific genres have also been examined using content analysis (Berenstein 1995). For example, Caputi and Sagel's (2004) study explored the villainization of women of color in horror and science fiction films positing that the "exotic" characterization of minority women derives from racist assumptions about their inferior nature.

Summary

In general, the literature review on feminist film theory provides an orientation for evaluating the characteristics and behaviors of female characters by identifying them with specific occupational gender roles, which include norms and values addressed in the research questions. The findings of the content analysis are used in combination with existing census data to evaluate how closely the film industry represented the population of its time.

Although my theoretical position acknowledges the contributions of psychoanalytic theory, its focus is more in keeping with contemporary critical theorists, particularly those found in British cultural studies. Communication theories and cultural studies research have provided evidence that the media project hegemonic images that contribute to the support of hierarchical relations (Carragee 1990; Condit 1989; Gerbner and Gross 1976; Hall 1997; Williams 1976). Similar theoretical positions are found in feminist film criticism which highlights how films project images that reinforce traditional gender roles and male supremacy (Basinger 1993; Doane 1990; Douglas 1994; Dow 1996; Haskell 1973; Hollinger 1998; Rich 1998). Primarily, feminist intersectional theory is used as a basis for understanding the power differences and social statuses of the representations under study and their influence on cultural stereotypes and personal identities. Gender stereotypes are of particular concern, and the impact of gender as a status in controlling images is impacted by other statuses, such as race and class. Mainstream Hollywood films were produced from a white dominant perspective, and the images of white women were very different from those of women of color. Black women in particular were portrayed as subservient to white women, and inferior in intellect and content with their secondary status. White women were portrayed as competent business women, loving wives and mothers, or glamorous sex objects. As problematic as some of these images of white women are, there are a different set of concerns about the images of black women and their inability to see themselves reflected on screen in these films.

Based on these perspectives, it can be argued that those in positions of power in our society are portrayed most often, and in the most positive light in television and

films. I also integrate the basic themes of a global effects model with cultivation theory to explain the means in which the controlling capitalist interests of the U.S. manipulate and exploit the media in order to normalize their privileged status.

Although content analysis has been used to evaluate trends in television commercials and programming along gender and racial lines, it has less often been used to evaluate film. Those few studies on film that are available do not adequately address theoretical issues or discuss the relationship of the findings to feminist theory. As a result, there is a lack of empirical data related to these issues which my study is intended to address, with the result being the addition of significant findings regarding the development of racial and gender stereotypes in terms of occupations. It is also the goal of this research to develop a more efficient and comprehensive methodology for the analysis of film using content analysis.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

When it came time to choose a topic for my dissertation research project, I found myself with an idea for the substantive content but unsure of how to methodologically fulfill my goals. I researched the method of content analysis while specifically focusing on how I would use it for my project and considered some of the complexities and individual research options within content analysis. While this chapter will address the methodological framework for this project, I will begin by briefly addressing the notion of "representative character" that my research is based upon. Once this issue has been clarified, the use of content analysis as my selected method of data collection and analysis can be addressed as it pertains to the specific intent of my project.

My conception of "representative character" is derived primarily from the work of S. Paige Baty (1995). Drawing upon Donna Haraway's (1991) theory of the hybrid subject and Roland Barthes' (1972) analysis of "Myth Today," Baty states, that, "a representative character is one through whom to approach the political cultural condition of our time. Remembered as product or story or some hybrid of the two, the representative character operates as a site on which American political culture is written and exchanged" (pgs. 10-11).

In order to understand how, and the scope to which the characters in the films sampled can serve as representatives, I will also analyze U.S. Census Data to examine how the frequency of certain images and roles relate to their actual frequency in the population. As I will be employing various content analysis techniques, I will now turn to

a general discussion of content analysis and the ways in which I intend on using this method.

Content Analysis

To begin, what exactly is content analysis? A standard textbook definition is as follows:

> Content analysis is a technique for examining information, or content, in written or symbolic material... In content analysis, a researcher first identifies a body of material to analyze... and then creates a system for recording specific aspects of it. The system might include counting how often certain words or themes occur. Finally, the researcher records what was found in the material. He or she often measures information in the content as numbers... Content analysis is used for exploratory and explanatory research but is most often used in descriptive research (Neuman 1997:31).

In other words, content analysis is the systematic study of various forms of communication and usually aims at description rather than explanation (Babbie 1998; Krippendorff 2004). While this standard definition of content analysis is a sufficient starting place, as stated earlier, I will be conducting a *feminist* content analysis using both a multitude of data sources *and* analysis techniques. This requires a much more complex look at the premise of content analysis including its particular advantages. Moreover, what will make my content analysis "feminist" in nature?

While standard textbooks claim that content analysis has existed as a method of social investigation for the last decade, in the 1830s Harriet Martineau already understood and utilized the power of studying "things" (Reinharz and Davidman 1992). To begin with, why study "things" as I plan on doing? Furthermore, how am I going to connect the "things" I choose to analyze to the larger social-cultural-political context?

The methodological choice of content analysis is the appropriate method considering my research goals since cultural artifacts embody, reflect and mediate the views of the society from which they emerge. In other words, the themes exist within the artifacts independent of, and prior to, the research process. Through a careful process of selection and analysis, I will *extract* those already present themes. Put differently, "The cultural products of any given society at any given time reverberate with the themes of that society and that era" (Rose Weitz, as quoted by Reinharz, 1992, p.145).

Feminist Content Analysis

The research design utilized in this study, feminist content analysis, has been described as "discourse analysis, rhetoric analysis, and deconstruction" (Reinharz and Kulick 2007:258). The discourses (cultural artifacts) "and the meanings embedded in them reflect and transmit a wide range of norms and values regarding gender, sexuality, and social relations" (p. 258). Finally, according to Reinharz and Kulick, "given the wide expanse of easily accessible or produced information, and the ubiquitous, yet diverse, messages about gender and sexuality, feminist scholarship in the area of content analysis is imperative" (p. 258).

In this content analysis I examined a set of objects, commonly referred to as cultural artifacts. Reinharz (1992) states that feminist researchers "use cultural artifacts to study individual women or groups of women, the relation between women and men, relations among women, the intersection of race, gender, class, and age identities, and the institutions, persons, and ideas that have shaped women's lives" (p.155). Reinharz also emphasizes that, cultural artifacts, "are the products of individual activity, social organization, technology, and cultural patterns" (p. 147). There are two distinctive characteristics to cultural artifacts that make them beneficial for research purposes. First of all, "they possess a naturalistic, 'found' quality because they are not created for the purpose of the study. Second, they are noninteractive, i.e., they do not require asking questions of respondents or observing people's behavior" (p. 147). In essence, they are not impacted or affected by the process of being studied as people typically are.

Assumptions and Rationale for Design

In studying the images of the career choices of women as they are depicted in film, the research design of content analysis naturally presented itself. For the purposes of this study, the cultural artifacts are the films reviewed. I deconstructed the films in order to conduct a qualitative content analysis of the cultural ideas presented in the films and the resulting relational consequences of the women's career choices. Images that women have viewed repeatedly have become a part of the cultural norms that have shaped their beliefs as reflected by social learning theory (Bandura 1977). The design of content analysis allowed me to identify themes that emerged and

through a critical examination, the messages being portrayed and received were determined through the use of the content review sheet described in the data collection section. It is my hope that bringing attention to the limiting portrayals of women in film will help subsequent audiences to become enlightened witnesses.

Cultural Artifacts

The cultural artifacts of this research study are a list of 100 films and the main characters portrayed in film. In determining the method of film selection for this research, a review of the literature was conducted of studies which incorporated a selection of films as part of their methodology. One methodology involved the random selection of top grossing films from a specific time period. Eschholz and Bufkin (2001) examined the issue of crime in the movies, by selecting the top 50 grossing films from the year 1996.

Bell, Berger, Cassady and Townsend (2005), reviewed the portrayals of food practice and exercise behavior in popular film, by selecting the top 10 grossing films from the time period of 1991-2000. Additionally, using the initial criteria of top grossing films, Smith et al. (1999), examined the "beauty-and-goodness stereotype in film" (p. 69). In this study, the researchers began with a list of approximately 1,000 films, which were the top 20 grossing films from a time period of 1940 to 1989. The film list went through a randomization process narrowing down the 1,000 films to 100 films. An additional methodology constraint included that at least 20 films from each decade remained on the list. Also, Hazan, Lipton, and Glantz (1994) examined the use of tobacco in popular films, by employing the methodology of randomly selecting two films from the top grossing films from each year for the time period of 1960 through 1990.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, I am the main source of interpretation of the data collected in the study. As a result, my biases and belief system inevitably impact the results of the study. As a woman, my beliefs, values and biases that have developed as a member of this population are relevant. Furthermore, my perspective emphasizes the importance of the cultural artifact of film and how it can and does impact society, and this influences the study. Indeed, I believe in the power of media and popular culture to shape the social norms, values, attitudes and beliefs in both positive and negative ways. Also, having experienced the difficulties of deciding on a career path several times in my life, I have experienced first-hand the influence that controlling images of women in popular culture have on the occupational choices we make and what we consider appropriate and inappropriate for our gender.

Indeed, the choices that I have made in my life have been shaped by the impact of media. I grew up believing that the most I could accomplish in my life was to find a husband and have a family, that going to college and having a career were not options for me. This has influenced me in many ways, such as putting myself in a box as to what I could or could not accomplish based on my failure to meet those expectations. Successful women, as I saw them defined as I grew up, were attached to a successful male. Women defined themselves by their beauty and their relationships with men, not by their careers or their intelligence. This left me feeling as if caught in a void in that I could not find myself through my marriage and therefore did not know how to define myself. I fell into defining myself through my intelligence but did not find any security in this definition,

especially not when viewed through the lens of society. It has only been in recent years, through my exposure to various strong female role models who are redefining those societal expectations and roles that I have begun to become comfortable with my own definition of success in relation to career and life. An awareness of the impact that society, and in particular media, had on my own development would have benefitted me greatly in this process. Due to the impact of the visual medium of film, and of the content analysis, the reactions and process of my observation also played an important role in the analysis of the films.

Data Collection Procedures

In order to analyze the content in the cultural artifact of film and to obtain the necessary information to answer the primary research question, as well as sub-questions, a content review sheet was developed, a copy of which was attached as Appendix B to this study. The content review sheet was developed to encompass certain factors, which was determined from the literature to be relevant to this study. A content review sheet entry was completed for each of the first ten characters listed for the film, while a separate sheet was used to gather data about the films as a whole.

Using a quota sampling method, I randomly selected twenty films in five specific genres, producing a sample of 100 films. These films represent 10% of those released from January 1, 1939 to December 31, 1959, were selected from the American Film Institute catalog of feature films. This time period was established based on existing literature which identifies this time period as encompassing the effects of World War II on gender roles and representation (Coltrane 1998; Friedan 1963; Morantz-Sanchez

1987). The sampling frame was constructed from films from the period grossing a minimum of $500,000, determined by Box Office Statistics (1997). This frame included 1,195 films. The purpose of this form of sampling was to ensure that all genres were represented equally, since genre may have an impact on the proportion of women or men in the film.

Genres were obtained from the American Film Institute (AFI) catalog, and then grouped into categories. To draw the sample, the sampling frame was divided into these five major genre categories: 1) action/adventure; 2) comedy/musical; 3) drama/mystery; 4) melodrama; and 5) romance. From each of these five categories, 10 films were selected from each decade being studied (1939-1949; 1950-1960). The films were randomly assigned case numbers and distributed between the two coders. To analyze changes in the media depictions of women, 12 films in the sample that had contemporary remakes were selected (see Appendix B-2). Their contemporary versions were then analyzed to determine if there were changes in the way gender was portrayed in the narrative and context of the contemporary films.

Data collection was conducted by me and one other coder. The sample was divided into two equal parts, with one coder reviewing the even numbered films and the other coder the odd numbered films. Before official coding began, a pilot test was conducted to ensure agreement for intercoder reliability. As a result of issues that arose during the pilot study, changes were made to the codebook and instructions in order to achieve the desired results. A separate sample of 20 films was created for intercoder

reliability and to test the format and procedures of the coding process. The sub-sample consists of one movie for each year of the sample period.

Unit of Analysis and Coding System

The units of analysis for this study are character and film. Each film was coded using two separate code sheets, one for each unit of analysis. This coding system was developed from a pilot study done the previous year. The attributes being coded for each character included: 1) billing order; 2) sex; 3) race; 4) marital status; 5) sexual orientation; and 6) occupation. In addition, the character was coded in terms of 7) attitude toward occupation; 8) if s/he wore stylish clothing; 9) if s/he lived in a luxurious environment; 10) the presence of staff or servants; 11) if the character had primary responsibility of a minor child; 12) if the character made references to parenting or marriage; 13) if the character expressed the opinion that parenting and marriage were of primary importance in life; 14) if the character's actions were motivated by concern for a child; 15) if the character's actions were motivated by concern for family members and; 16) if the character exhibited pride in his/her home and/or family.

An indicator of an actor's status in the film industry is his/her placement in the billing order of the credits that appear, either at the beginning or the end of the film. In most cases, billing order represents prestige and prominence in the film industry. The more status an actor has in the industry, the higher the billing. One exception to this rule is when the actors are listed either alphabetically or in order of appearance. However, only one film in the sample listed the actors alphabetically, *Stagedoor Canteen* (Borzage 1943), and one film listed them in the order of their appearance, *Harvey* (Koster 1950).

These practices were more common in later films. The other exception is when a featured actor appears alone on a special screen, giving their appearance increased emphasis. This happened either when a noted actor played a small but significant role (usually accompanied by the phrase "featuring" or "special guest star"), or when the studio was promoting a new actor (where it would say "and introducing"). None of the films in the sample featured noted established actors in this way, and only 6 included a special "introducing" credit. It is debatable whether this introductory credit was an indication of prestige since it let the audience know that the actor was making their film debut.

The sex of the character was defined as *female, male, or androgynous/ambiguous*, based on overt references made during the film. Race categories included *white, black, Latina, Asian, other, ambiguous or mixed*. Race was determined by the narrative, indicating how the audience was intended to perceive the character. Age categories reflect the level of autonomy of the character and are determined by family dependence. Thus, the categories were *juvenile, adult dependent living at home, in college, adult dependent, and senior*. If the film represented society, I would assume that it would have an equal number of men and women in the cast. However, the domination of one gender over the other in a film signifies the relative importance of each- the dominant gender reflects the balance of power in society, and the privilege, power and prestige it would exercise. The numerical domination of one gender over the other on the production staff could signify that the film is being made using a "male gaze," or from a man's point of view. This is especially critical when presenting stories about women; if men are telling the story, it could signify a distorted viewpoint toward their position for their benefit.

Marital status was determined by the narrative. Only direct references to marital or non-marital states were coded, otherwise the character's marital status was coded undetermined. Those marital states that were referenced on film included *single, married, divorced, and widowed.* There were also no assumptions made concerning sexual orientation. Characters were coded as heterosexual only if they stated or exhibited sexual attraction in a member of the same sex, were or had been married, or had children. Homosexuality was determined by romantic/sexual interest or declared relationship with a member of the same sex. More commonly, characters were coded as "undetermined," when no specific romantic or sexual partnership was apparent for the character. There were no instances where there was an indication of bisexuality in the films sampled, so this category was not included for this study. Since we are dealing with a set of standards different from today, these conditions indicated the filmmakers' intention concerning the sexuality of the character at that point in time.

Films were also coded in terms of how many male and female cast members appeared in the top ten billing positions; how many women and men appeared in the top ten production positions; if any women of color appeared in the film; if they did appear, were they sympathetic, antagonistic, or neutral to the main characters; was there a wedding in the film, and how did it rate on a scale of 1-5 in terms of formality and elaborateness; male children present; female children present; was a child the main character; female dancers present; male dancers present; women used as set decoration, where they are in elaborate costumes but not actively engaged in the narrative. An example of "set decoration" would be in the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (Hawks

1953), the "Diamonds are a Girl's Best Friend" number. In this scene, there are women dressed in costumes and arranged to look like candelabra and other decorative objects. This would also apply to movies such as the *Ziegfeld Girl* (Leonard and Berkeley 1941) where women simply stood on or walked down staircases without performing or interacting with the characters.

The objectification of women is demonstrated in the frequent use of all female dancers, as well as the occasional use of women as part of the set decoration. Dancing became feminized as talent became less the focus and exposure of the female body became more so. Women were often presented as the accessories of men, and this is further demonstrated by their excessive adornment as show girls and models in male dominated narratives.

The presence or absence of women of color in films tests the question of symbolic annihilation. When present, determining the nature of their role helps to expose whether and which stereotypes supporting racial subordination are supported or challenged. The most common roles for women of color are positions of servitude, such as maids, nannies and cooks (hooks 1992).

Heteronormativity and Relationship Status

The coding of marital status indicates the importance of the identity of women in relationship to men. In terms of the narrative, it seems to be important to indicate that a female character is the wife or mother of another, usually male, person. This attachment is not always part of the narrative, or even relevant to it. On the other hand, many male characters do not have their romantic, marital, or family relationships mentioned. The

social fact that women are seen in light of who they are attached to- father, husband, son- is indicative of their status as property of those whom they serve in that capacity. The reverse is not true of men. Although the primary characters often express this relational status regardless of gender, the disparity of this disclosure among secondary characters reveals this dependence of highlighting the subordination of women in U.S. society.

An index was constructed for each character to determine the degree to which the care of family took precedence in their motivation. The attributes used to construct this index were 1) positive attitude toward occupation; 2) if the character had primary responsibility of a minor child; 3) if the character made references to parenting or marriage; 4) if the character expressed the opinion that parenting or marriage were of primary importance in life; 5) if the character's actions were motivated by concern for a child; 6) if the character's actions were motivated by concern for family members; and 7) if the character exhibited pride in his/her home and/or family. The higher the character scored on this index, the greater the commitment to family as opposed to career.

The presence of children in films highlighted their increasing importance to society, and re-oriented the relationship center of the narrative from the couple to the family. If the child was a female she also represented the child-like nature of the position of women in a society where they would be "taken care of" and supported by male family members.

Conversely, an index was constructed to determine the desirability of a character's lifestyle and social status. The attributes used to construct this index included 1) positive attitude toward occupation; 2) if s/he wore stylish clothing; 3) if s/he lived in a

luxurious environment; 4) the presence of staff or servants. Characters listed as unemployed or dependent were excluded from this analysis.

The level of formality of weddings, when present, indicated the extent to which filmmakers were interested in attracting audiences to the concept of elaborate weddings. It is theorized that women were the primary target, since weddings evolve from equal participation of both partners in the event of the bride being the sole center of attention and benefit of this event.

Weddings were scored on a scale of 0 to 5 as follows:

0 – no wedding occurs in the film;

1 – the wedding is simple and spontaneous (as in an elopement or civil ceremony); no special arrangements are made;

2 – the wedding is planned but simple, taking place in a home or garden with only a few in attendance;

3- the wedding includes friends and relatives, and there is a moderately small party afterward;

4- the wedding is elaborate; there is an abundance of decoration, an elaborate wedding gown, and there is a prolonged scene of the bride being walked down the aisle;

5- the wedding is a massive event, excessively elaborate, such as the union of heads of state or other VIPs.

Occupational Status

The occupational status scores used are taken from "The Socioeconomic Approach to Status Measurement" by Charles B. Nam and Mary G. Powers. These

occupational status scores reflect the prestige of various occupations during that period of time in the U.S. derived from the *U.S. Census of Population, 1960, Socioeconomic Status, Final Report*, and incorporating SES status codes for both sexes from the 1970 census (Nam and Powers 1983). The Nam-Powers scale was chosen because it 1) more closely reflected the values of the time period in question than more contemporary measures, and 2) factored in gender when calculating occupational prestige. Where the exact occupation was not listed, a comparable listing was found and used. This list appears in the appendix, with scores ranging from 0 to 100, low to high. By comparing occupational status codes of characters we can identify where the filmmakers situated them within their fictional environment, reflecting their perceived norms at the time the film was produced.

Data analysis

To get a clear picture of the data, the first analyses performed were descriptive. This provided information of the proportions of attributes being observed among the characters and the films. Frequency distributions were produced in order to have a picture of the single variable sample characteristics, and Census information was also gathered for comparison purposes. Characteristics that were extracted were gender, race, marital status and occupation for the three periods involved. Bivariate crosstabs were performed comparing gender categories with marital status and sexual orientation, with the complete sample as well as by decade. Chi-square statistics were calculated to test for a significant difference between men and women as well as between decades. A graph was produced

to observe the linear progression of the descriptive variables by year to determine the slope of this trend.

Pearson's Chi-square was used to compare the indexes against gender categories. Once again, I tested the sample as a whole and the decades separately. A graph was generated to illustrate the chronological slope of this trend as well. Gender and occupational prestige were also compared using this statistical method. This test accounts for the differences in the outcomes by variable attribute and determines the likelihood that this difference was the result of chance or true correlation.

In order to check for consistency in the notations of the 2 coders (one person in addition to myself), ten films were coded simultaneously and the results checked for conformity. In addition, portions of twenty films coded by the research assistant were also coded by the primary investigator and the results compared. In the event of discrepancies, a conference was conducted to clarify the interpretation of indicators found in the text. Ultimately, as noted below, the primary investigator found consistency in the coding and reliability was achieved.

Cochran's statistical reliability test was performed on the indices. This test assesses the degree to which the elements of the index reflect similar data in order to assure they are measuring the same concept. A high score on this test (preferably .7 or above) is considered acceptable. The scores on the indexes for FAMILY PRIMARY and OCCUPATION PRIMARY were .79 and .91, respectively.

Summary

In general, the original data gathered in the content analysis is used to create a demographic profile of the characters in the films from the periods under study. This demographic profile is then compared to the characteristics of the U.S. population based on the existing secondary sources derived from the U.S. Census Bureau office of statistics.

All of the data and information obtained in the research are drawn upon to create a comprehensive analysis of the evolutionary trends and varieties of gender roles of women in U.S. films and their reflection and representation of dominant social and gendered norms. The research first addresses the roles of white women in films, and then compares those representations to their contemporary counterparts, as well as to women of color.

The following chapter consists of the analysis of the data and a discussion of how the results address the research questions pertaining to white women. Among the areas discussed are the proportion of men to women, findings on the representation of various occupational roles, and the degree to which women are identified in terms of their relationships. This discussion includes issues of heteronormativity and the degree of attachment to the family that women characters possess. These findings increase our understanding of the dynamics of Hollywood that have changed and shaped gender roles and expectations in U.S. society.

CHAPTER 4

THE DOMINANCE OF MALE CHARACTERS AND THE PROMINENCE OF MOTHERHOOD AS AN OCCUPATION FOR WOMEN

Previous studies have indicated that women and minorities are underrepresented in the media when compared to the population, and that, when present in films, they are shown in stereotypical roles (Carson, Dittmar, and Welsch 1995; Clarke 1969; Douglas 1994; Elasmar, Hasegawa, and Brain 1999; Graves 1996; Lichter, Lichter, Rothman, and Amundosn 1987; Rich 1998; Seggar, Hafen, and Hannenen-Gladden 1981; Signorelli and Bacue 1999; Smythe 1954; Vande Berg and Streckfuss 1992). One study found that 64% of main characters and 72% of supporting characters were male (Bazzini et al. 1997). In a 1974 study of the major commercial television networks, using content analysis found that male characters outnumbered female characters in drama programs by a factor of 18 to 1. Another interesting finding from that study was the frequency with which male characters had indeterminate marital status (46%) compared to female characters (at 11%), and that men were less often shown to be parents compared to women (McNeil 1974). This indicates the persistence of identifying female characters in terms of their family relationships, while men are represented as autonomous, and their relationship status is incidental to their identity. Negative portrayals of women in specific genres have also been examined (Berenstein 1995). Another example is Caputi and Sagel's (2004) study which explored the villainization of women of color in horror and science fiction films, positing that the "exotic" characterization of minority women derives from racist assumptions about their inferior nature.

The findings of this study show a remarkable consistency with previous findings. To begin with, it was found that male characters numerically dominate the films throughout all time periods being considered in this sample. Men were also found to be presented most often as independent rather than relationship-oriented, with higher occupational status, and more often as the star of the film. In proportions alone, men made up two-thirds of the characters sampled, and are the lead (first billed) character in more than 60% of the films. Women are identified more often with husbands and family than in any other capacity, with a marked increase in the portrayal of mothers in the post-1950 era. This is in contrast to U.S. Census statistics at the time, which show almost equal proportions of men and women in the population (slightly more women, actually).

The implications of these results by and large support the expected findings concerning the research questions. In responding to the overall question of whether women are secondary in portrayal as well as practice in the film industry, both past and present, the response seems to be an unqualified "yes." Specifically, a discussion of the findings found to answer the research questions as follows.

Gender. I first examine the extent to which men versus women are portrayed in the films and whether men or women were over-represented among the characters compared to their actual share of the U.S. population. Specifically, the first research question asked**:** ***Are there gender differences in whether a primary character is identified in terms of his or her marital attachment? In other words, are female characters more often identified as having a male partner, thus defining her in terms of her spouse? Are male characters more likely to not be associated with a life partner?***

In response, I would first like to review the data on the population of the country during the same time period for comparison. According the U.S. Census Statistical Abstracts for the years 1900-1960, women's proportion of the population has increased slightly over time. Men's percentage of the population declined from a high of 51.5% in 1910 to a low of 48.2% in 1960 (after World War II), while the female portion rose from the low of 48.9 in 1900 to a high of 51.7% in 1960. At the time period under investigation (1939-1959), the actual female population was slightly higher than the male population (U.S. Department of Commerce 1975). In the films of this era however, men made up almost 2/3 of the characters. As indicated in Table 1.a., less than 36% of the characters in the sample were women, while almost 64.1% were men. This finding is consistent with the argument that popular culture tends to reinforce the higher status of men in society and a male-centered perspective. When the pre- and post-1950 periods are considered separately, the percentage of main characters that were men rose slightly over time, from 62.8% in the pre-1950 films, to 66.1% in the post-1950 films. This occurred even as the actual percentage of women in the population was rising to its peak (U.S. Department of Commerce 1975).

Table 1.a. Gender Frequency in Main Characters

gender	# of characters	% of total
female	429	35.9
male	766	64.1
TOTAL	1195	100

Top billing. In addition to women being a minority of the characters being portrayed on film, the status of the actors was also significant in terms of gender. Out of

the 120 leading characters listed (those who had first billing), only 46 were women (just over 1/3), while 74 (2/3) were men. Although this represents 10% of both genders, the number of leading women is lower than their male counterparts since the overall percentage of women in the films is lower to begin with. When the pre- and post-1950 periods separately, the percentage of male main characters rose slightly over time, from 62.8% in the pre-1950 films, to 66.1% in the post-1950 films. This occurred even as the actual percentage of women in the population was rising to its peak of 51.7% in 1960 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1975). In the contemporary remakes of the films (dating from 1978 to 2008), we see a small increase in the presence of female main characters, with women making up 40% of the characters. In all three time periods, men made up the majority of the characters portrayed.

Table 1.b. Gender Distribution of Main Characters by Time Period

time period	female	male
1939-1949	37.20%	62.80%
1950-1959	33.90%	66.10%
remakes	40.00%	60.00%

Heteronormative indicators.

Marital status. In addition to the number of women represented in the films, there are also issues of status and social position to be considered. The absence of indicators of men's marital status is one of the most significant aspects of the findings. Although the U.S. Census reports similar proportions of men and women being married in 1960, there is a difference in the film representation of married men as opposed to married women in the sample. To control for age, the sample was limited to those in the "adult independent"

category and above. From these cases, nearly twice as many women as men were identified as married, with 32.2% of the female characters overall coded as married, while only 17.8% of men were coded as such. Contrary to expectations, the highest percentage of women coded as currently married (35.8%) occurs in the pre-WWII films, while the proportions are lower in the post-WWII films and the remakes (29.2% and 25%, respectively). Notably, the proportion of widows is double in the post-1950 films at 9.5% compared to pre-1950 films at only 5%. This increase in representation of women losing their husbands is reflective of the post-war era and its preoccupation with female widows who lost their husbands during the war. Divorced characters were rare, but appeared more frequently in the pre-WWII films. A small percentage of both men and women were portrayed as divorced, with 2.5% of female characters and 2.0% of male characters coded as divorced in the 1940s films, and 0.6% of women and 0.8% of men coded as such in the 1950s films.

The most significant finding in terms of heteronormativity involved the "undetermined" category. While the highest marital category for women was single, the highest category for men was "undetermined," the designation for those characters where there is no indication of marital status. The finding that the majority of adult male characters in the sample are not defined in terms of romantic or familial relationships, while the majority of adult female characters are defined by their relationships, supports theoretical claims of patriarchy, heteronormativity, and "the marriage ethic," or the cultural expectation that women should be married or romantically attached to men, while men are defined independently of their romantic and family relationships. It is

expected of women that they marry, and that their full worth is not realized until they marry and have children. This cultural expectation is much stronger for women than for men (Coltrane 2001).

As illustrated in Table 2.a, the highest marital status for women characters overall was single, with married second by a small margin. It is also notable that men were portrayed as widowed much less frequently than women (2.9% as opposed to 7.4%), and if we combine widowed with married the combined proportion for women would exceed that of the single category. Men were also portrayed as single more often than married (26.3% and 17.8%, respectively), but the most significant finding was in the "undetermined" category. The marital status of male characters was not indicated in over half the cases (51.5%), where this indicator was missing for only 21.3% of the female characters. According to the U.S. Census for 1950, for the majority of both men and women was married (67.5% and 65.8%, respectively)[4]. Although the figures for married and single were similar for both men and women, there was a difference in the percentage that had never married: 26.4% for men and 20.00% for women.

During the two decades being considered (1939-1959), there were a higher percentage of female widows than male widowers in the U.S. population. In 1940, 4.3% of men were widowed men. In 1950, the proportion remains about the same for men (4.0%), but increases for women (12.1%). It can be assumed that the recent war increased the percentage of widows during this period. In 1960, there were fewer widowed men than previously (3.3%) as well as widowed women (11.1%). These U.S. Census Bureau

[4] The U.S. Census Bureau includes persons over the age of 14 in marital statistics until 1960, when the age was increased to 16 years old.

statistics are actually higher than those represented in the films studied, although the films also show an increase in widowed characters in the 1950s. The genres that presented the highest number of widows were melodrama and romantic comedy.

Table 2.a Marital Status of Main Characters by Gender

gender	female #	%	male #	%
single	135	36.9	189	26.3
married	118	32.2	128	17.8
divorced	8	2.2	10	1.4
widowed	27	7.4	21	2.9
undetermined	78	21.6	370	51.5
TOTAL	366	100	718	100

These percentages for marital status among film characters are relatively consistent over the various time periods, although the proportion of married women characters is highest in the pre-1950 period. Throughout the periods, including the contemporary films, marital status indicators are absent in approximately half the male characters (see Table 2.b.).

Table 2.b Marital Status of Characters by Gender and Time Period

Time Period	1939-1949		1950-1959		Remakes	
gender	**female %**	**male %**	**female%**	**male%**	**female%**	**male%**
single	**32.70**	22.80	**41.70**	29.10	**33.30**	27.40
married	35.80	17.10	29.20	17.60	30.80	22.60
divorced	2.50	2.00	0.60	0.80	7.70	1.60
widowed	5.00	4.00	9.50	2.50	7.70	0.00
undetermined	23.90	**54.00**	19.00	**50.00**	20.50	**48.40**
Pearson Correlation for gender and marital status = 106.387(**)						
** significant at the 0.01 level						

In addition to the crosstab percentages that indicate these findings, a Chi-Square test was conducted to determine the probability of the correlation between these two variables. The Chi-Square test estimates the probability that the association between variables is a result of random chance or sampling error by comparing the actual or observed distribution of responses we would expect if there were absolutely no association between the two variables (Babbie, Halley, and Zaino 2000). In this instance, the p-value (0.000) was less than .01, indicating the association between gender and marital status is statistically significant. Although significant at every level, the Pearson Chi-Square values varied by period, with the highest significance level found in the period between 1949 and 1959.

Sexual Orientation. The sexual preference of the characters was significant for the same reasons as marital status. Although there was a category for same-sex orientation, it was not expected that any of the characters in the historical period could be unequivocally coded as such. What was important was whether or not a character demonstrated, through behavior or marital status, whether s/he was or had been involved in a specific sexual relationship, regardless of the orientation. The results from this analysis (See Table 3) were that women indicated a romantic relationship as part of their character's story-line much more frequently (76%) than did men (47.4%) overall. The highest account of heterosexually oriented women characters appears in the post-WWII films (81.5%), as does the highest account of heterosexually oriented men characters (51.6%). The highest account of women who do not specify a sexual relationship occurs in the pre-WWII films (28.5%). The results for the remakes are consistent with results for

the pre-WWII films. The only openly gay or lesbian character that appears in any of the films is Jada Pinckett in the remake of *The Women* (2008), conforming to the principle of defining women according to their relationships, since she has a partner in the film.

Table 3. Sexual Orientation by Time Period

Time Period	1939-1949		1950-1959		remakes	
	women	**men**	**women**	**men**	**women**	**men**
heterosexual	**71.50%**	43.00%	**81.50%**	51.60%	**70.80%**	44.40%
homosexual	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.10%	0.00%
undetermined	28.50%	**57.00%**	18.50%	**48.40%**	27.10%	**55.60%**
Pearson's Chi-Square for gender and sexual orientation = 94.906(**) ***significant at .01*						

In order to verify the significance of the proportions shown on the crosstabs table, a Chi- square test was performed. The results indicate a high correlation between the variables of sex and sexual orientation, supporting the conclusion that women are significantly more likely to be identified in terms of their sexual orientation than men, and this relationship was statistically significant at the .01 level.

The third highest ranked category for women in both historic periods was "dependent," a category that indicated that the character (usually a juvenile) was neither employed outside the home nor had any specific responsibilities in the home. It is important to consider "dependency" as an occupation since I am attempting to understand and explain the relationship of gender to economics and interpersonal power. To not have an occupation (and dependence is a non-occupation) is to not be a part of the political-economic structure. While dependent was one of the lowest categories for men, the overall proportion of women that were shown as dependent on family members for

support was 15.6%, while the post-1950 figure (16.7%) was significantly higher than the pre-1950 figure (14.4%). For men, characters portrayed as economically dependent, usually juveniles or college students, was one of the lowest categories, at 3.3% overall, with little fluctuation between periods.

The rise of the supportive wife and mother

There is a significant and dramatic increase in the number of women portraying mothers in films following WWII. This trend peaks in 1956, and levels off toward the end of the decade. Contemporary films contain a significant number of mother roles, although they are comparable to pre-1950 figure. This persistence in the portrayal of mothers in films supports the notion that mothering continues to be a major factor in female identities and cultural expectations. It is important to note that the category of wife/husband as a full-time occupation (without children) appears only once, in the post-1950 era.

During that time, 1.7% of characters (all women) portrayed full-time wives in the sample. In contrast, women only appeared in criminal occupations during the pre-1950 era, and in similar proportion (1.8%). This assignation was higher for men, at 5.13% overall, although it did decline after 1950. Women did not appear in any of the films in three categories, athlete, law-enforcement and politics, while men were absent in both the full-time parent and spouse roles. The increase in the portrayal of housewives, especially in a period when more women were entering the workforce, is a strong indication of the cultural ideology present during this period. Namely, that women belonged in the home,

and that their primary function was to support their husbands, both emotionally and with domestic labor.

Not only were women were less frequently portrayed as having paid jobs or careers, they were more often portrayed as homemakers. Between 1939 and 1949, only 15.2% of central female characters were shown to be full-time homemakers, while 20.7% were portrayed in this role in the period between 1950 and 1959. This degree of increase in women staying at home to care for their families rather than working is not reflected in the Census Bureau statistics.

Although the occupational prestige scores did not produce any clear relationship between gender and the relative occupational status of the characters, a breakdown of the proportions of types of occupations men and women portrayed did have much to say. There is a difference in the types of jobs women portrayed, both in comparison to men and over the various time periods.

The jobs women performed in the films fell primarily into two categories: white collar or homemaker. However, there is a difference between the white collar jobs of women characters and those of men, just as there is in the workplace. White collar in this instance refers to office work, and does not necessarily mean the employee is the boss or has a position of authority. In this regard there is a division of labor, in that white collar women, for the most part, work for men in a support capacity. The significance of the profuse representation of women as lower wage earners in jobs with little or no professional future is the message conveyed as to the appropriateness of gendered labor. Characters that are happy with this economically disadvantaged position reinforce the

notion that this is the right and proper place for them. The glaring lack of women in professional jobs, as lawyers, doctors or company executives gives the impression that these jobs are not appropriate for women. In other words, women should be serving others in typically feminine roles of cooking, cleaning, or selling consumer items, but just until they get married. The remedy offered for this situation, where women are biding their time making a living, is that "Mr. Right" a.k.a. "Prince Charming," will come and rescue these women, fulfilling their dreams of a romantic "happily ever after."

While there was an increase in the actual labor force participation rates for women between 1940 and 1960, an opposite trend was found among the central female characters in my film sample. Comparing the two decades under study, we find that there is a decrease in the labor force participation among central female characters, dropping by 4.4% from era 1 (1939-1949) to era 2 (1950-1959). During the earlier period (1939-1949), 53.3% of main female characters were shown as employed, while only 48.7% had employment outside the home in the later period (1950-1959). Notably, these figures are higher than those reported by the U.S. Census Bureau (see Table 4).

Gender differences in occupational prestige. There is a difference in the occupational status of men and women characters in the films. Men were rarely portrayed as dependent on other family members (even as youths), and white men appear in professional (white collar) roles more often than other types of occupations (see Table 4.a.). When this proportion is compared to data from the U.S. Census Bureau we find that more men (45.25% in 1950, 43.35% in 1960) at the time were employed in blue collar

jobs, and that a higher percentage of women (50.38% in 1940, 54.57% in 1950) in the workforce were employed in white collar jobs (see Table 4.b.).

Table 4.a.Workforce Distribution by Gender - U.S. Census

	1950		**1960**	
	men	women	men	women
Total*	n=43,594	n=17,515	n=47,457	n=22,228
white collar	31.08%	50.38%	34.97%	54.57%
blue collar	45.25%	20.60%	43.35%	16.36%
service	6.16%	21.98%	6.15%	24.43%
farm	14.21%	6.92%	10.32%	4.49%
military	3.30%	0.13%	5.21%	0.14%

*in thousands; percentages represent the proportion within gender

Table 4.b. Workforce Distribution by Gender – Film Characters

Film Character Data				
	1939-1949		**1950-1959**	
	men	women	men	women
Total	**n=205**	**n=71**	**n=290**	**n=59**
white collar	57.56%	47.89%	58.28%	67.80%
blue collar	6.83%	0.00%	5.86%	5.08%
service	15.12%	26.76%	11.03%	23.73%
farm	5.85%	11.27%	7.24%	3.39%
military	14.63%	14.08%	17.59%	0.00%
*percentages represent the proportion within gender				

White women were portrayed most often as homemakers (22.54% of female characters), and when they do have employment it is in office settings as support staff, referred to categorically by the U.S. Census as "white collar" professions. This compares

with U.S. Census Bureau reports that indicate more than half of adult women (over the age of 16) listing their occupation as homemaker (58.47% in 1950, 55.92% in 1960). Of those that worked outside the home, almost half (47.89%) listed jobs in the "white collar" category in 1950, and two-thirds (67.80%) listed jobs in this category in 1960. For the 1950-1960 time period, films showed just over half of female workers in white collar jobs, under-representing the population by almost 13%.

Although it was found that a large percentage of female film characters worked in white collar office settings this does not mean that they had higher status positions than the men in these settings. Women were rarely portrayed as professionals or having an advanced education or authority over others, especially men. Although the general occupational category has more prestige than other categories, there is still gender stratification and hierarchy within these categories.

Time period differences in occupational prestige. For women characters, service professions were displaced by homemaker roles after 1950. Notably, the increase in these roles on film is not reflected in the population statistics that do not show a comparable increase in homemakers during this period. In contemporary films, we see women engaged in careers more often, although the priority of family is still maintained. At the same time, male characters in the remakes show a stronger inclination toward parenting and prioritizing family than in the films from previous eras. ***Question 3: Is there a significant increase in the portrayal of "mothers" as a role after World War II? How does this compare with the contemporary versions of these films?*** There is a definite trend found in the sample that indicated an increase in the number of women portraying

mothers in films after the end of World War II (1946), peaking in 1955 (see Figure 1). This coincides with observations that the nuclear family and domestic life became a central focus of media during this period, specifically in women's magazines and newspaper sections, television programming and films (Coltrane 1998; Coontz 1992; Friedan 1963; Hays 1996; Morantz-Sanchez 1987). This also supports the theoretical assumption that women were being encouraged to assume the role of mother and homemaker, and to give up their aspirations of careers and other professional opportunities.

It is notable that the lowest incidence of these roles occurs in 1941, when the U.S. officially entered World War II with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and begins to climb in 1946, after the war ends and the soldiers begin returning home. During the period after World War II, women were encouraged to give up the jobs they had taken to support the war effort in favor of the returning veterans. Although some women were relieved to return to the home, some had discovered that they enjoyed working and the economic freedom it provided them (Walsh 1984).

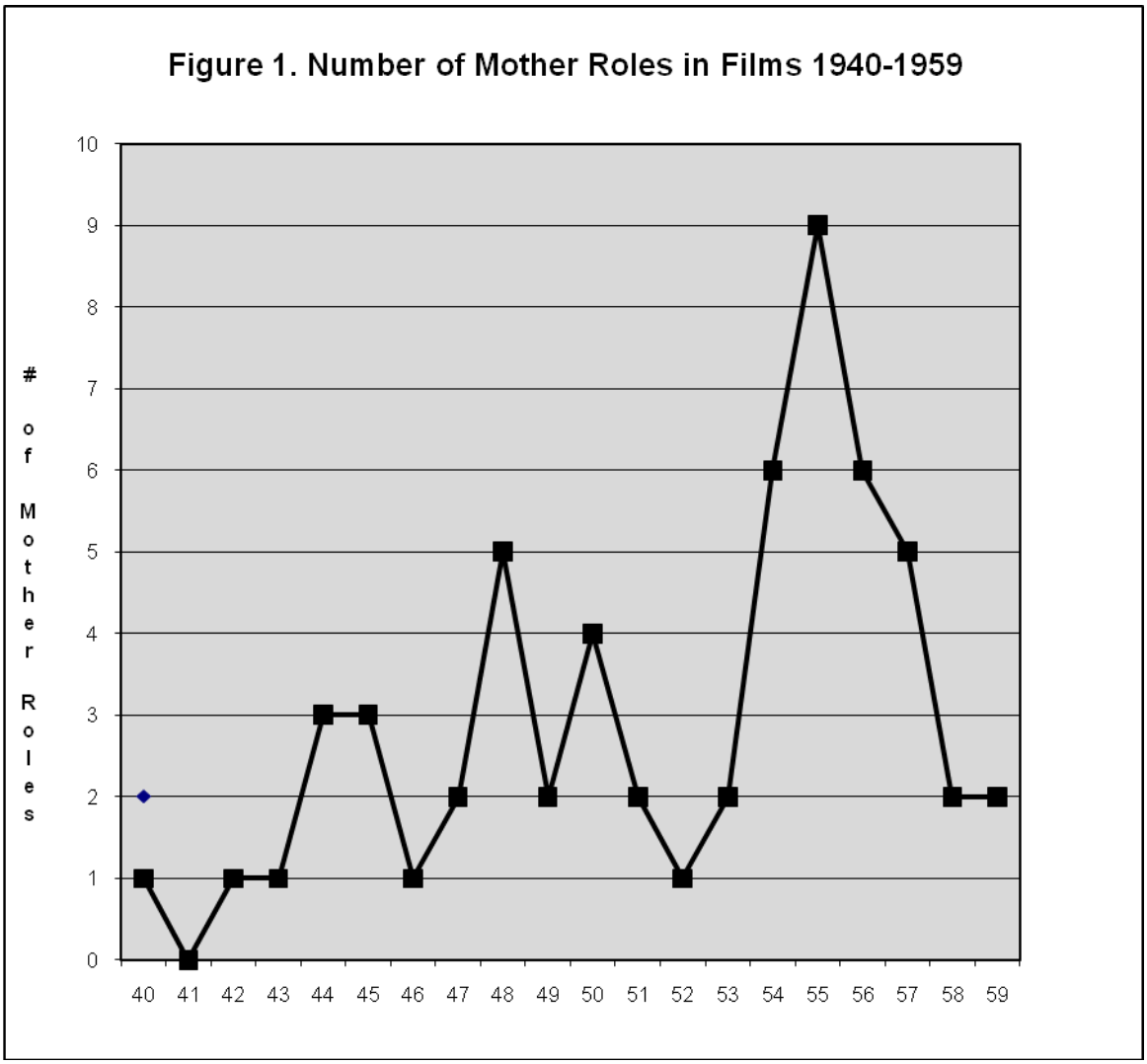
Figure 1. Number of Mother Roles in Films 1940-1959
# of Mother Roles
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59

The Family Index

The frequency table comparing index scores for references to family indicate that women characters were more likely than male characters to make multiple references to family (including marriage and parenting). I recoded the index in terms of "low" (0-1 references), indicating a lack of identity for the character with marriage and parenting, and "high" (2 or more references), indicating strong association for the character with marriage and parenting. I found that 32.2% of women characters were found in the high category, while only 13.8% of men characters were in this frequency (see Table 5.a.).

Table 5.a. Frequency of Family References by Gender

gender	women (n=429)	men (n=766)
low (%)	67.80	85.6**
high (%)	32.20	14.40
** significant at the 0.01 level		

To assess the strength of this relationship between gender and family focus, a Chi square was used. Overall, gender did appear to influence the outcome of this variable, with a p-value of less than 0.01. When a comparison was done over time periods, there is a relationship between gender and references to family in only the earliest (pre-1950) era ($p<0.01$).

When the time periods were compared, there was an interesting change in family references after 1950. As shown in Table 5.b, although women were consistently found more often in the "high" category, there was an overall decrease in the references about

family in the post-1950 films. The proportion of women characters with high references to family decreased from 35.2% in the pre-1950 era to 29.2% in the films following 1950.The focus on women and the family returns to a higher proportion in the remakes, where we find 33.3% of women in the high category, while a low of 8.1% of men characters are in the high category in the remakes, notably the lowest figure of the three time periods.

Table 5.b. Family Index Scores by Gender and Time Period

Time Period	1939-1949		1950-1959		remakes	
gender	**female %**	**male %**	**female %2**	**male %3**	**female %3**	**male %4**
low	64.80	86.2**	70.80	85.20	66.70	91.90
high	35.20	13.80	29.20	14.80	33.30	8.10
Pearson Correlation for gender and sexual orientation = -.136(**)						
** significant at the 0.01 level						

The observed proportions for the family index within gender categories were verified as being statistically significant in the pre-1950 era through Chi square analysis, where $p<0.01$. There does appear to be a correlation between the two variables in the other eras, although not at a level that would be considered statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

The Child Index

The frequency table comparing index scores for references to children indicate that women characters were more likely than men characters to make multiple references to children. Since the range of frequencies for the Child Index was four, and the median was 2, it was determine d that the variable be recoded to clarify which cases fell into the

"low" range, and which cases fell into the "high" range. To accomplish this, the index was re-coded in terms of "low" (0-1 references) and "high" (2 or more references). Compared to male characters, three times as many women characters were found in the high category (see Table 6.a.)

Table 6.a. Child Index Scores by Gender

gender	women (n=429)	men (n=766)
low (%)	73.20	90.6**
high (%)	26.80	9.40
** significant at the 0.01 level		

To assess the relationship between gender and family focus, Chi square was used to test the relationship between the variable CHILD and gender. Overall, the relationship between variables was statistically significant (see Table 6.b.). Just as with the FAMILY index, when the time periods were compared, there was an interesting change in references to children after 1950. As shown in Table 6.b, although women were consistently found more often in the "high" category, there was an overall decrease in the references about family in the post-1950 films. The proportion of women characters referencing children decreased from one-third in the pre-1950 era to one-quarter in the films following 1950. At the same time, the proportion of men in the high category also decreased after 1950 by almost half. The focus of women on children remains consistent in the remakes, where we find more than a quarter of women in the high category, while less than 10% of men characters are found in the high category in the remakes, similar to the proportion in the post-1950 films. Note that this index is only an indication of the

presence of children in the dialogue of the characters. The decrease in the figures may be a result of the presence of children being taken for granted, or an indication of the emphasis on the marital roles of the characters as opposed to their parenting roles, in both the 1950s films as well as the remakes.

Table 6.b. Comparing Child Index Frequencies by Time Period

Time Period	1939-1949		1950-1959		remakes	
gender	**women (n=157)**	**men (n=298)**	**women (n=358)**	**men (n=524)**	**women (n=39)**	**men (n=62)**
low (%)	67.50	87.2**	74.70	92.5**	71.80	91.9**
high (%)	32.50	12.80	25.30	7.50	28.20	8.10

Women characters score higher overall on the family and child index scales than did their male counterparts, although the increase failed to have statistical significance in all categories. What was noteworthy in this analysis was the overall finding that characters in general were anywhere from two three times more expressive of family and parenting in the post-1950 era than the pre-1950 era. The number of characters that did not express any interest in family or parenting issues was highest in the pre-1950 films. This was demonstrated in the films when characters (always female) are forced to make decisions concerning their ambitions and their families.

One of the most important issues being examined in this study concerns social expectations based on gender, and how those expectations limit life choices. It has been proposed that white women are expected to put family first, before their own desires, dreams and expectations, and that this expectation was accentuated by the culture of the

1950s (Friedan 1963). For women in the films sampled, conflicts between employment and family were usually resolved in favor of the family. Male characters were never placed in the position of having to choose career over family. Those women who were shown working fell into 3 categories: 1) the single woman supporting herself until she finds a husband; 2) the war-widow supporting the family until her husband returns (or she finds a new husband); and 3) the career-minded woman who puts ambition above having a family, but sees the light by the end of the film.

Question 4: Do female characters demonstrate concern for family members more often than male characters? More specifically, is parenting seen as a concern more often for female characters? In the results, women characters were significantly more associated with family and children in comparison to men. Family was referenced by both genders, and although gender was significant as a correlate only in the pre-1950 films, there was still a significant association in the other periods, as indicated by Chi square tests. The lower margin in these decades could indicate that men were also more family focused during these periods, since the measures do not specify levels of care but simply references.

The indicators are stronger in terms of gender and the child index, signifying that, through all periods, women are more frequently portrayed as being concerned with and making reference to children. This is consistent with literature that proposes that U.S. culture idealizes motherhood, placing the emphasis on the caring aspect as desirable while ignoring the economic and political disadvantages (Collins and Coltrane 1995; Hays 1996).

Those who produce the finished media product, in this case a film, constitute the primary agents whose decisions will affect the content of the film. Whether or not male crew members are willing to create policies that reduce gender stereotypes, we can nonetheless assume that where there are more women involved in the decision-making process there is more likely to be more sensitivity to how women and men are depicted in the film. The crew members being examined in the sample are those who, to some degree, control the stories and images that appear on screen. They can also reject offensive content and work to create a more acceptable product. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect that the greater the proportion of a film's crew is female, the less stereotyped its gender depictions would be (Chafetz, Jon, and Larosa 1993). ***Question 5: What is the composition of the production crew in terms of the key decision making positions related to the film?*** The scarcity of women in filmmaking is even more dramatic behind the camera. Less than 10% of the crew on the films sampled was comprised of women. Even when listed in the top 10 positions, they were most often in wardrobe or make-up assignments, with only a few listed as writers. This trend in the male domination of the film industry has been discussed at length in feminist film literature, especially since women were very much a part of the production process in the early days of film (Gaines 2004).

Within the top 10 production positions, none of the films had more than 5 women on the crew. Out of the 1,220 crew members sampled, only 76 (6.2%) were women. More than a third (39.4%) of these were concentrated in the remakes, although even in this category only 1 film, *Father of the Bride (*Shyer 1991*),* had an equal number of men and

women on the crew. During the historic periods, there were never more than 2 women on the crew, many of these being in the lowest surveyed positions. Two-thirds of the films (66%) had no female crew members in the top ten positions.

Women had little to do with the production and editorial decisions of films from the historic periods under investigation. Fewer than 10% of the production crew were women, and those that were credited occupied positions that did not directly impact the narrative of the films in meaningful ways. With the exception of one screenwriter, they were in wardrobe, make-up and hair styling. Although these may have artistically contributed to the films, they did not have much of an impact in the way characters were portrayed, or who was chosen to portray them. This inequity had not been corrected in the remakes, where only 23% of crew members sampled were women, and only one film had an equal number of men and women in the crew.

Race. As expected, for the sample as a whole, the cast members were overwhelmingly white, (92.1%), with all other racial categories making up the balance (Table 7.a.). This finding was more prominent in the historical sample, with only a slight difference between the pre-WWII films (94.1% white) and the post-WWII films (92.8% white). The contemporary remakes showed only a slight improvement in racial representation, with 81.3% white cast members. This is slightly higher than the general population characteristics. Census data indicates that whites were slightly over-represented in these films compared to the racial composition of the U.S. population. In 1940, whites made up 89.8% of the population and they made up 89.5% of the population in 1950.

Table 7.a. Frequency of Race for Main Characters

race	# of characters	% of total
White	1091	91.4
Asian	33	2.8
Af. American	25	2.1
Latino/a	22	1.8
Pac. Islander	6	0.5
Native American	6	0.5
other	8	0.7
mixed	2	0.2
unknown	1	0.1
TOTAL	1194	100

Asians were also over-represented in these films given their share of the U.S. population. Characters identified as Asian comprised 2.8% of the on-screen population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Asians actually comprised only 0.2% of the U.S. population. However, many of the Asian characters depicted were living in another country, especially Japan. Japanese villains were more likely to be present in the films of that era. This is apparent when looking at the categories by time period.

Other racial groups were under-represented in these films given their share of the U.S. population at the time. The third largest racial group represented in the sample was African-American, with 2.1% of the total. This category shows a significant difference between the historic period films and the remakes, with the pre-WWII films (1.6%) and the post-WWII films (1%) being considerably lower than the proportion in the remakes (14.6%). In contrast, the U.S. Census reports that the population consisted of 9.7% African Americans in 1940 (pre-WWII), and 10% in 1950 (post-WWII). The most recent

census data (1990) reports 12% African Americans. Thus, only in the remakes was the percentage of characters that were African-American close to their actual percentage of the U.S. population. In the 1940s and 1950s period, African-Americans were grossly under-represented given their share of the U.S. population.

Latina/o characters made up 1.9% of the total for the two historic time periods; they represented 2.7% of pre-WWII film characters and 1.5% of post-WWII film characters. Latina/o characters were thus slightly over-represented given that they made up 1.4% of the U.S. population in 1940 (figures on this category after WWII are not available). However, there were no Latino/a characters in the contemporary films, although 1990 census data reports indicate that they composed 8.8% of the population. About 2.3% of the characters were other racial groups, including Native Americans, middle-eastern, and historic peoples.[5]

[5] The historic peoples in the sample included Romans from the first century A.D. in the film *Quo Vadis*, and Mongolians from the 12th century A.D. in *The Conqueror*.

Table 7.b. Frequency of Main Characters' Race by Time Period

time period	1939-1949		1950-1959		remakes	
race	**# of characters**	**% of total**	**# of characters**	**% of total**	**# of characters**	**% of total**
White	463	92.80	532	92.50	96	80.00
Asian	12	2.80	12	2.10	9	7.50
Af. American	4	2.10	6	1.00	15	12.50
Latino/a	14	1.80	8	1.40	0	0.00
Pac. Islander	3	0.50	3	0.50	0	0.00
Native American	2	0.50	4	0.70	0	0.00
other	0	0.70	8	1.40	0	0.00
mixed	0	0.20	2	0.30	0	0.00
unknown	1	0.10	0	0.00	0	0.00
TOTAL	499	100.00	575	100.00	120	100.00

The findings of this chapter have been important in helping to establish the cultural images of women in this period in popular films in the 1940s and 1950s. Women characters were portrayed as wives and mothers more often in the 1950s, replacing the low-wage service worker roles that were more common in the 1940s. Women characters in the remakes also showed a more prevalent interest in family and children than their male counterparts; women characters were often defined in terms of their family and romantic relationships while this is not the case for male characters.

It was important to determine that there were such a disproportionate number of men compared to women in the films, and that women were more often in supporting roles while men were more often the lead characters. It was not surprising the absence of

women in production roles that would have an impact on the content and casting of the films, and the types of attributes the characters possessed. Without women in positions of influence it is difficult to expect women characters to enjoy an equal amount of prestige in the films (Chafetz, Jon, and Larosa 1993).

It was found that there is an overwhelming bias in favor of portraying white women in terms of their romantic and marital relationships to white men, and that their central identity was comprised of their marital or parental status, even when these characters were peripheral rather than central to the story. This finding is consistent with McNeil's study (1974) of the major commercial television networks, which found that 46% of male characters had indeterminate marital status compared to 11% of female characters (at 11%).

Overall, the portrayal of women as homemakers was an accurate reflection of the lives of only half of U.S. women of the time, and most of those were white women. However, women had become an increasingly large portion of the workforce throughout the twentieth century, and this influx of female labor in all professions is not accurately reflected in the films. To the contrary, portrayals of decreasing numbers of women in employment reflects an ideology of the woman as homemaker that belied the reality of many women who were disillusioned with marriage, their roles as homemakers and their need to be employed for economic reasons. Although women were taking on more responsibility and authority in the workplace, as well as making strides in academia, science and the military, these trends not represented in the films. The greatest disadvantage of the emphasis on homemaking and the denial of women in professions

portrayed on film is the misrepresentation of the goals, dreams and achievements of women, especially in terms of role models for young girls.

More than 90% of the women depicted in these films were white. For women of color, these films did not represent their history or their experience. Rather than being homemakers, women of color were expected to care for the families of white women in the 1940s, while having no acceptable role in the 1950s. An entire genre of films (called "race films") was created to be marketed to the African American community, since they were excluded as real individuals with real lives from the mainstream cinema. These films will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

MOMMY VS. MAMMY: THE WHITE PRIVILEGE OF MOTHERHOOD

The subject of African-Americans in motion pictures, along with the many controversial interpretations of the roles these actors played on screen, provides a particularly interesting area of discussion. In comparing the proportion of film characters in racial categories to the total population reported in census data, I found that the most significant difference was in regard to African Americans, who were the most underrepresented group portrayed in these films, compared to their actual share of the U.S. population. This discrepancy is indicative of the racial divisions in U.S. society at the time, and the racial discrimination under which blacks lived then. In this chapter I investigate the cinematic segregation between blacks and whites on film.

As far back as the silent films era, African-Americans have been featured in motion pictures playing roles as actors and creating a specific image of blacks. The messages or themes of these movies have over the years presented a mixture of images of black Americans based upon what was thought to please white audiences. Unfortunately, many of those films show black characters in negative stereotypical roles with which most actually existing African-Americans would never truly identify. Non-white people were portrayed in ways that fit into the dominant ideology of mainstream white culture. When it came to the portrayal of African Americans, the characters were stereotypes that represented blacks as being happy to serve and content with their lives. They were also portrayed during this era as completely non-sexual, which is a contrast to other eras when

they were hypersexualized (Anderson 1997; Dunn 2008; Jones 1993). Since many of our American icons and heroes have come from our motion picture stars, we need to understand what this narrow view presented and how it relates to the images of women on screen.

Race Movies

In the earliest days of film, audiences were captivated by the images and stories that were told (Miller et al. 2005). However, not all people who went to the movies saw themselves reflected in a positive way on the screen. One particular film, *Birth of a Nation* (Griffith 1915), presented a particularly harsh view of racist ideology, glorifying the Klu Klux Klan and vilifying the black man. Although this caused an outcry from the African American community, Hollywood films would continue to portray black Americans in negative or inferior ways (Diawara 1993b). Mainstream Hollywood was not interested in making movies with realistic, fully developed African-American characters since they saw them as "risky" undertakings; therefore the major roles available to black actors were those of maids, walk-ons, butlers, servants, or comics (Stam and Spence 1985). In response to this, black independent film makers began producing their own genre of films specifically for the black audience.

The race movie or race film was a film genre which existed in the United States roughly between 1915 and 1950. It provided films produced for an all-black audience, featuring black casts. In all, approximately five hundred race films were produced. Of these, fewer than one hundred remain (Moon 1997). Because race films were produced outside the Hollywood studio system, they have been largely forgotten by mainstream

film historians. In their day, race films were very popular among African American theatergoers, presumably because they featured black main characters, having full and complete lives, where mainstream films, made for the predominantly white audience, did not (Diawara 1993aa; 1993cb; Moon 1997).

During the same period, black actors sought work in mainstream Hollywood films, but only received roles dealing with light comedy, music, or dance, or in roles that reproduced dominant racist stereotypes of blacks. Therefore we see actors like Spencer Williams, who was later known as the Andy in the TV version of Amos 'n' Andy, doing this type of work in Hollywood films. At the same time, he was the star, director, screenwriter, and producer of multiple race films, including *The Blood of Jesus* (1941), *Son of Ingagi* (1940), *Marching on!* (1943), and *Of One Blood* (1944). We also have Stepin Fetchit getting star billing as an African-American actor in a series of mainstream films as the slow-talking, lazy-like plantation Negro in *Hearts in Dixie* (Sloane 1929). The Hollywood film, *Hallelujah* (Vidor 1929), conveyed multiple themes of black stereotypes exhibited in song, dance, blues, spirituals, and frivolity, making star billing with Nina Mae McKinney, a light-skinned African-American woman as a standard bearer for future black female lead roles, while a similar Hollywood film, *On with the Show* (Crosland 1929), featured Ethel Waters (Moon 1997).

While black performers were being showcased in light Hollywood musicals, black actors were finding work in the independently produced race films. These included Lorenzo Tucker, who was given the name of the Black Valentino, appearing in *The Black King* (Pollard 1932), as well as *Wages of Sin* (1929), *Daughter of the Congo* (1930), and

Temptation (1935), independently produced race films by Oscar Micheaux (Moon 1997; Murphy 1929).

From 1929 thru 1939, we see America experiencing two major events: The Great Depression of 1929, when America's stock market crashed, causing massive layoffs; and the start of World War II in 1939 and lasting until 1945. These two events saw "race movies" being made concurrently with mainstream Hollywood films. Race movies were low-budgeted films that mostly aimed at black audiences in segregated movie-houses of the South and where large city black populations dwelled in the North (Klotman 1993; Moon 1997).

The Integration Period (1949-1969)

The motion picture industry was slow to change their approach in presenting African-Americans in fully developed roles depicting social or civil conditions in an integrated context. Many of these roles required scenes showing African-Americans in positions of authority or relating to white Americans on an equal basis. This Integration Period therefore brought together African-American actors with scenes alongside white actors in roles showing both players dealing with racial conflict and resolution (Wallace 1993). Between 1946 and 1949, attendance at the local movie theaters began to sag, presumably due to more home TV watching. Visual entertainment was shifting toward TV shows; therefore new ideas in the motion picture industry became important to its survival. Some of these new endeavors started with the following motion pictures.

Home of the Brave (Robson), starring James Edwards, Steve Brodie, Lloyd Bridges, and Frank Lovejoy, came out in 1949. The film dealt with the controversy of

dealing with racism and bigotry and the black soldier of World War II and a plot that ended with a healing process and was a box office success (Wallace 1993). Two other movies of 1949, *Lost Boun*daries (Werker), starring Canada Lee, William Greaves, Beatrice Pearson, James Hilton, and Mel Ferrer, and later *Pinky* (Kazan*)*, starring Jeanne Crain (as Pinky), Ethel Waters, William Lundigan, Nina Mae McKinney, and Frederick O'Neal dealt with the controversial issue of race and color. These two movies broke ground, for, as in the earlier version of *Imitation of Life* (Stahl 1934), they dealt with light-skinned Blacks "passing for white." The implications and privilege of a Black crossing the line and working and socializing with whites were the "must see" movies at the box office in 1949. These films were on the cutting the edge in terms of placing black and white actors in dramatic roles depicting situations centered around the black plight and the issue of color on the big screen (Butler 1987).

1950 saw Hollywood presenting the story of a black middle class family for the first time. *In No Way Out* (Mankiewicz), Sidney Poitier is seen as the successful Dr. Luther Brooks, MD. The cast included young Ossie Davis, Richard Widmark, Linda Darnell, Stephen McNally, and Frederick O'Neal (Moon 1997). 1953 put Dorothy Dandridge in the spotlight in the role as a school teacher in the movie, *Bright Road* (Mayer*),* albeit in an almost all black cast, with Harry Belafonte was the school principal. In 1955, Sidney Poitier played the tough high school kid, Gregory Miller, in *Blackboard Jungle* (Brooks), with Glenn Ford as his sympathetic white teacher. Sidney Poitier went on to establish himself as one of the best actors coming out of Hollywood. Harry Belafonte, Mel Ferrer, and Inger Stevens starred in *The World, The Flesh and the Devil*

(MacDougall) in 1959; *Odds Against Tomorrow* (Wise), also in 1959, starred Harry Belafonte with Robert Ryan, Shelley Winters, Cicely Tyson, and Carmen DeLavallade.

The findings on women of color. The commentaries on the representations of Black Americans in Hollywood films such as the ones in my sample are supported by the findings of my study. In reviewing the category of African American characters, where only the top 10 characters from the films were included in the sample, out of the 1000 characters from my 1940s and 1950s films, only 10 are black. All of these characters, both men and women are portrayed as either servants or slaves. Only three movies, *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming 1940), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Brooks 1958), and *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959), have more than one black character in the top 10, and these are not shown in terms of a married or romantically involved couple. One of the problems related to the portrayal of African Americans in Hollywood films of this era, was that black characters, when present, were de-sexualized and not shown in relationships, other than the mother/mammy role.

Statistically, when it came to the main characters, there were considerably fewer women of color compared to white women appearing in the top ten positions. From the content analysis I found that, as a group, women of color appeared in about one- third of the films during the historic period (31.4% in pre-1950, 35.1% of the post-1950) with that number reversing to almost 2/3 (61.5%) in the contemporary films. The analysis included all women of color from every category other than white, regardless of the type of role they played. In the pre-1950 films, only 1.6% of these characters were black women. The highest number of main characters in a racial category other than white was

Latinas at 2.7%. The least represented racial groups for women were Asian (1.1%) and Native American (.5%). White women made up 94.1% of all female characters in these top roles during the pre-1950 period.

Compared to the statistics of the period from 1939-1949, there were more women of color (non-white) found in the top 10 billing in the post-1950 era. The distribution within racial categories is significantly different as well during the 1950s. Although Native Americans increased in visibility as a whole, doubling in numbers in the 1950s, all of the 1950s Native American characters listed in the top 10 were men. There was only one female Native American in the top 10 billing for the entire sample, and that was the housekeeper in *Beyond the Forest* (Vidor 1949). There were many Westerns produced in the 1950s, but Native American women were kept in the background, if they appeared at all. The male Native Americans were warriors (in a 'cowboy and Indian' motif) or Indian scouts working for the U.S. Calvary.

Asian women remained constant at 1%, African American and Latina women decreased (.6% and 1.2%, respectively). Concerning occupational prestige, the most compelling finding was that all African American women characters in both the pre and post-1950 categories had occupations in the lowest category of status. Latina women were evenly spread across occupational categories, The African American female roles from 1939 to 1959 were all slaves such as in *Gone with the Wind*, 1939), housekeepers as in *Holiday Inn* (Sandrich 1942), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (Brooks 1958) and *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959) or cooks: *Tammy and the Bachelor* (Pevney 1957). Latinas were portrayed as slaves in *Quo Vadis* (LeRoy 1951), blue collar workers in *Without*

Reservations, (LeRoy 1946), a housewife in *Beyond the Forest* (Vidor 1949), business owners in *A Place in the Sun* (Stevens 1951), and a wealthy heiress in *Road to Rio* (McLeod 1947).

Asian women were portrayed in the highest occupational levels, portraying entertainers in *Sayonara* (Logan 1957), princesses and queens in *Anna and the King of Siam* (Cromwell 1946). Only 36.2% of white women were found in the low and very low occupational prestige categories for the pre-1950 time period, and no women of color were represented as housewives in any era. During the post-1950 era, all women of color were concentrated in the lowest occupational categories, with only one Latina (Bette Davis playing Rosa Moline in *Beyond the Forest*) and one Asian woman (Miyoshi Umecki as Katsumi in *Sayonara*) portrayed as housewives. The rest of the housewives were white.

Despite the prevalence of white mothers on screen, and the significant increase in the portrayal of mothers in the 1950s, very few of the women of color portrayed were identified as mothers, and none were portrayed as full-time mothers. Women of color (and men of color) have not been portrayed as having access to their own family and expressions of affection toward each other. These roles are regularly afforded to whites (Coltrane and Messineo 2000). Neither of the two non-white housewives had children. The Latina housewife character played by Bette Davis in *Beyond the Forest* is a kind of anti-mother who gets pregnant by her lover, lets her husband believe it is his baby in order to keep him after she is rejected by her lover, and then intentionally miscarries when her husband, a doctor, refuses to give her an abortion. The film begins by

describing Rosa as "evil," utterly selfish and socially ambitious. Her affair with a man wealthier than her husband is portrayed as an attempt to "better" herself socially. This characterization is in contrast to other stereotypical Latina portrayals of women who are submissive or naïve.

The other non-white housewife is played by Japanese actress Myoshi Umeki in the film *Sayonara* (Logan 1957), who is so devoted to her husband of only a few months that she commits suicide with him rather than be parted, despite the fact that she is pregnant. The character of Katsumi is the stereotypical Asian wife, naïve, devoted and submissive to her husband (who is an American soldier in this film) to the extreme. The two black women who are portrayed as mothers only depict their parenthood very briefly. Instead, they are more frequently portrayed in their full time jobs as domestic servants for white women in *Since You Went Away* (Cromwell 1944), and *Imitation of Life* (Sirk 1959).

The representation of black women changes somewhat over time, but not necessarily for the better. The character of the maid Annie in the 1959 version of *Imitation of Life* may have a bit more dignity than the original Delilah in the 1934 version, but she has less occupational prestige and plays a much smaller part in the newer version. In the original version, Delilah is a housekeeper who has a special pancake recipe that the white woman she works for decides to market. Delilah becomes co-owner of first a restaurant selling the pancakes and then a food manufacturing company that sells the mix. Delilah is out front in the restaurant, showcasing her cooking abilities through a large plate glass window overlooking a busy boardwalk. Delilah's image is

used on the restaurant sign, and then the product packaging, similarly to Aunt Jemima. While the women live in back of the restaurant they share an apartment, apparently on an equal basis. The problem with the film is that it portrays Delilah as not wanting material things of her own, or public success in the "American Dream" tradition, but only to serve and care for the white woman and her child. Her speech and manner are an exaggerated characterization of the slow, uneducated slave who needs to serve the white employer to survive. This characterization is what is most offensive to Black Film Historians, although mainstream white audiences did not seem to object. To the contrary, it is conjectured that this meekness on Delilah's part was necessary to make her success palatable to white audiences (Thaggert 1998).

Although the 1959 Annie does not embody the same "step and fetchit" persona of her earlier counterpart, she seems to have very little sympathy for her own daughter. Meanwhile, she is portrayed as doting on the little white girl in her care. In earlier films that included a black maid such as *Father of the Bride* (Minnelli 1950), and *Since You Went Away* (Cromwell 1944), priority was placed on the needs of the white family for whom the maid worked. If the maid's or housekeeper's family was mentioned at all (as in *Since You Went Away*), the housekeeper would dismiss her own family's needs even if the white family could not pay her. This reflected and reinforced the racist conception that white children were superior and were entitled to more care and attention than black children (Stam and Spence 1985).

Imitation of Life: A case study in the representation of black mothers in film.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, African Americans as a whole were not represented in significant numbers in the films, and there was a distinct difference in the way they were portrayed compared to other women of color. While women of other non-white racial groups were, for the most part, shown embedded in other, non-U.S. cultures, black women were shown exclusively as U.S. citizens of lesser privilege and in subservient positions to whites. All of the black women in the films sampled, with the exception of the remake of *The Women* (English 2008), were servants to white families. This fact makes their occupation representation relevant to the perceptions of gender in U.S. culture.

An interesting example of the overall lack of change in social attitudes toward black women can be found by comparing the 1934 original and the 1959 remake of the film *Imitation of Life*. Although the remake can be found in the sample for this study, the original film predates the study by a few years. It does, however, illustrate the dramatic difference between the pre and post WWII positions regarding women, work, and race. Although both films center on two women, one white and one black, that form a partnership for survival, the relationship that results is very different.

The 1934 film portrays the white woman as treating her black business partner with dignity and respect, as though she were more concerned with the black woman's interest than the black woman was. The deference that the black woman shows to the white woman seems to be generated from the black woman's perceptions of what is

proper more than from what the white woman expects. The white woman seems genuinely surprised at the black woman's self-sacrifice.

In contrast, the 1959 film portrays the white woman as always treating the black woman as a servant, allowing her to care for her and her white child as a matter of course, In this context, the deference appears to be a part of the cultural context, as much a class issue as one of race. In spite of the appearance that both women are in similar financial condition (although the black woman is homeless to begin with), there is an unstated acceptance that the black woman is of lesser status than the white woman, as indicated by the white woman's attitude toward the black woman.

In the original version of the film, Louise Beavers as Delilah received 5th billing, while Fredi Washington as Peola was 6th**.** In the 1934 version, Fredi Washington was a light-skinned African American actress, while the same character was played by Latina actress Susan Kohner in the 1959 version. Although the way the character of Delilah was presented in the 1934 version is offensive to us today, the appearance of the black character in this film was a step toward better representation of blacks in mainstream films. The creators of this film seem to be expressing dissatisfaction with racial inequity in U.S. society in the often idealized fictional society they construct in this story (Kaplan 1992).

The character of Delilah in the 1934 version of Imitation of Life was familiar to Louise Beavers who made a career out of playing the "mammy" role where she was the domestic servant of white families. The studio encouraged her to keep her weight up to fit the image of this role. She was criticized by some black activists for taking these roles,

but her response was “Better to play a maid for $5,000 a day than to be a maid for $5 a day” (Clayton 2008). Although these roles were demeaning in many respects, they are still noteworthy because they allowed African Americans to be recognized as part of the social landscape. The “mammy” role was safe, non-sexual, and humble. The character was portrayed as having no personal life apart from the white family she served. Film makers presumed, probably rightly so, that most white viewers did not want to see any other type of black character (Wintz 2004).

The 1934 film is essentially about two working women, one white and one black, who both have small daughters. The white mother is a widow, who has taken over her husband’s job of selling maple syrup and has a “day nursery” where she can take her child, while the black mother works as a housekeeper who must keep her daughter with her where she works since childcare is not available to her. Segregation is alluded to at times, although not specifically discussed. These mothers form a kind of partnership, and bond in their desire to provide for their children (Clayton 2008).

The white mother indicates early on that her husband died, and that she is carrying on his business of selling maple syrup. At the center of the film is the issue of light-skinned blacks “passing” for white. Delilah, who has very dark skin, has a light skinned daughter. This is explained by her saying that Peola’s father was a “very, very light skinned colored man.” She makes a point to explain that the father was not white, which would have been unacceptable to many in the audience. Interracial marriage was not well tolerated and still illegal in most states at this time.

In spite of its drawbacks, this story is an exploration of whether or not blacks and whites could mix socially. Although never on the same social level, even in the early part of the story, they do form a life-long friendship and bond. That this bond is established and based on motherhood is reflective of the culture of value-based living that was prevalent during the depression and after World War II. The need to work for survival provides the motivation for these mothers' employment in the 1934 version, while personal ambition and a desire for fame are the motivations in the later version (Heung 1987).

It is interesting that Delilah never wears a uniform in the film, although other domestics living in the house do. This symbolizes her special relationship with Bea, as closer to her equal and friend than a servant, while elevating her status as household manager above the rest of the household staff. At the same time, there are many signifiers of the relative positions of each. One is the black woman rubbing the feet of the white woman. This happens twice during the film, once in the beginning and again after they have achieved wealth. They are involved in a "girl talk" situation, and if they had taken turns rubbing each other's feet it would have been equitable. That was not an acceptable act during that time- a black woman could perform a humble service for a white person, but never the other way around.

Another symbol of the difference in their status is that Delilah and Peola have their living quarters downstairs, below the main floor, while Bea lives upstairs. Living downstairs provides Delilah with the ability to manage the household staff while indicating her status as the white lady's employee. Her lack of a uniform and her position

as domestic manager put her in a position just below that of the housewife of the 1940s and 1950s (Kaplan 1992).

It is actually the black woman's talent for cooking that provides the basis for both women's financial success in the 1934 film. This type of contribution from the black woman character is completely absent in the 1959 film. In the latter film, it is the white woman's acting ability and ambition that results in the "rags to riches" plot line. One of the most unrealistic aspects of Delilah's portrayal in the 1934 film is her reluctance to profit at all from her labors, and her expression of wanting to stay and take care of the white woman rather than having a home and things of her own. The character's reluctance to take money for her recipe and work was an invention used to justify the way she is exploited, perpetuating the myth that blacks wanted to be protected and feared freedom and independence (Heung 1987; Thaggert 1998).

Although Delilah's life is completely overshadowed by Bea's in the 1934 film, there is some representation of the black woman having a life of her own, especially an emotional life. However, her emotions are strictly for her daughter. While the white woman has a romance and considers marriage, as does her adult daughter, the black women are kept asexual throughout the film. Delilah in particular is portrayed as an innocent, simple, one-dimensional subservient character. Black characters in mainstream films were there strictly in relation to the white people they served. They could not have a love life or even share a kiss on screen. Although her love for her daughter is expressed throughout the film, there is a lack of sensitivity for what the daughter is going through.

Underlining the implausible notion that blacks feel that whites are superior to them, even when it comes to being a proper parent, is dramatically illustrated in a scene from the 1934 version, where Delilah tells her emotionally distraught daughter to call her "mammy," and not to call her "mother." Her desire not to be called "mother" by her own daughter is unrealistic and belies the understanding that a mother would have for a child. Since Delilah was married to a light-skinned man, one would expect her to have had a better understanding of the struggle with racism that Peola was dealing with.

In the 1959 remake, the white woman is again a widow with a small daughter, but has ambitions to be a Broadway star. She is beautiful and glamorous, supporting herself as a model while waiting for her big break. Homeless, the black woman convinces the white woman to take her in as a servant, providing child care and housework in exchange for room and board. This arrangement mirrors the unequal coupling of breadwinner/housewife of other films of the era, reinforcing the principle that such domestic support is necessary, and that the lower status person should be expected to perform it.

Issues of race surface in both films as the light-skinned daughter of the black woman successfully passes as white in a society that privileges race above all else. However, the remake focuses on the issue at the individual level, making it more about jealousy of the affection the black servant lavishes on the little white girl, while ignoring her own daughter. There is also a profound message about the conflict between career and motherhood in the remake not found in the original. The black woman, who is portrayed as an ever self-sacrificing saint, puts the white woman's home and family

above all else, while the white woman selfishly pursues fame and fortune at the expense of her child and the man she loves. The morality tale is complete by the end of the remake when the Broadway star realizes the emptiness of her success and gives up her career to be with her man again- a parable that is repeated in several other films of the period.

The results I have found indicate that characters of color, especially black women are still not part of the basic population of most films. There is still tokenism, as in the remake of *The Women* (English 2008). However, black women as lead characters continue to be relegated for the most part to the contemporary version of "race films." An example of these films is *The Preacher's Wife* (Marshall 1996) an all-black remake (by a white female director) of *The Bishop's Wife* (Koster 1947). As in most race films, the characters operate in an all-black environment, isolated and excluded in a community that appears to be self-sufficient, denying the actual economic ties that existed between blacks and whites.

My findings are in keeping with the theoretical arguments regarding black women's role in films presented by black feminists such as bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins. As they have claimed, the black woman is usually an invisible part of the scenery, or when interacting with other characters, of a lower or servile status (hooks 1992). Not only are their characters relegated by social structure to this degraded position, as was the case in society, they are also made to appear happy and content in this role as a way of comforting the predominantly white audiences that were the main consumers of these films. This gross misrepresentation of the true feelings of people of

color to their degraded status has been seen as the most offensive aspect of these films, since it justifies and perpetuates the lie of discriminatory practices, economic inequalities, and racist attitudes.

A limitation of my study is that my conclusions are based on a small sample of 11 contemporary remakes of some of the films in the original sample, covering all the genres represented. This sample may not be sufficient to generalize to contemporary films as a whole. The focus of my analysis on women of color centered on the portrayal of African American female characters rather than other non-white characters. In addition to the cultural relevance of women in this category, there was also the consideration of the extensive literature on the portrayal of black female characters rather than other women of color. Black female characters also played important roles in the depiction of white families' home life in the pre-war period as nannies and domestic servants.

For further research, I would like to see these issues of separate race films analyzed to compare the difference in the way women of color are portrayed in films targeted to blacks as an audience as opposed to how they are represented in mainstream, predominantly white films. Since race films were produced by and for a black audience it would be useful to compare gender relations in those films to those found in mainstream Hollywood films, as well as comparing the representation of women (and men) and their attitudes toward their occupations and social position to those in mainstream Hollywood films. Although I was aware of the race film genre before starting this project, my exposure to the literature surrounding it has provided me with a new interest and direction for my research.

I would also like to look at the range of films made about Native American women, comparing films that included them in the sample such as *Sitting Bull* (Salkow 1954) and other Westerns to more contemporary (and supposedly more sensitive) films such as *Dances with Wolves* (Costner 1990). While there may be more respect for these communities as a whole in the way they are represented in film, it would be worthwhile to compare the treatment of women in these settings to evaluate whether their status truly represents the values of the tribes being represented. I would also like to explore films that include Asian women and Latinas in a U.S. cultural context, especially in terms of the racial stereotypes that persist and reinforce racism in contemporary media entertainment.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Consistent with contemporary critical theory, British cultural studies, and feminist film criticism, my results provide evidence that the media projects hegemonic images that contribute to the support of hierarchical relations (Basinger 1993; Doane 1990; Douglas 1994; Dow 1996; Haskell 1973; Hollinger 1998; Rich 1998). The findings presented in the previous chapters support the argument that those in positions of power in our society are portrayed most often, and in the most positive light in television and films. I have brought to light patterns that indicate this by using content analysis to examine the images of men and women from the films of the 1940s and 1950s. In addition, the basic principles of a global effects model with cultivation theory explain the means in which the controlling capitalist interests of the U.S., which are dominated by white men, manipulate and exploit the media in order to normalize their privileged status (Carragee 1990; Condit 1989; Gerbner and Gross 1976). Specifically, this has been done by producing films from a male point of view, focusing on the male gaze, and presenting a worldview that sees white men more visible and worthy of life chances.

The goal of this research has been to examine hegemonic ideals of white women, how women have been portrayed in Classic Hollywood films of the 1940s and 1950s, and why they matter sociologically. It was found that over 91% of the sampled characters were white, and subsequently the findings apply primarily to representations of white women. We see the contemporary white housewife represented in films and on television

and intuitively understand that she is a derivative of more traditional representations of white female characters. Academics and feminists have weighed in on her significance, in terms of race as well as gender. For women of color, especially African American women, the white housewife is another example of U.S. culture excluding their experience as fellow citizens of this society. As much as Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* resonated with white suburban housewives struggling with a lost sense of identity, it did not address the issues faced by working-class women, many of them black or Latina, who did not find a sense of elevated identity or personal satisfaction in their employment. For many decades, as this research shows, black women in particular were represented on film as servants living only to please their white employers.

This research started by looking at the political-economic context of women in the workforce during and after the Second World War, and was therefore content driven. A feminist cultural studies approach was the starting point since the representation of women, particularly white and black women, in popular culture is the main focus of the research. The original emphasis on the popularity of white women in domestic settings was due to depictions like Grace Kelly standing behind her man in *High Noon* (Zinneman 1952), June Allyson's loyal wife character in *Executive Suite* (Wise 1954) and Jennifer Jones in *The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit* (Johnson 1956). These appear in high contrast to the strong, independent professional white women of the previous decade such as Rosalind Russell in such films as *His Girl Friday* (Hawks 1940) and Joan Crawford in *Mildred Pierce* (Curtiz 1945). In comparing the films from the pre-World War II era to those that came after, we see a trend of vilifying white women who seek a career over

family in such post-war films as *Imitation of Life* (1959) and *The Best of Everything* (Negluesco 1959).

Summary of Research Findings

The research questions being considered for this project yielded mixed results. The first set of questions dealt with whether there are gender differences in terms of the white characters' marital attachments. In other words, are white female characters more often identified as having a male partner, thus defining her in terms of her spouse? Are white male characters more likely to not be associated with a life partner? It was found that there is an overwhelming bias in the portrayal of white women in terms of their romantic and marital relationships to white men, and that their central identity was comprised of their marital or parental status, even when these characters were peripheral rather than central to the story.

Although this proved to be true in all eras under study, there was a shift between the pre- and post-World War II films. During the pre-WWII era (1939-1949), white women were portrayed more often as romantically involved with a man rather than actually married to one. In some cases, these women still lived at home and were under the authority of their fathers while awaiting marriage, but in many cases they were independent working women enjoying a relatively equitable relationship with a male partner. Although the occupations were generally of lower status to men's positions, women were shown to be economically independent and sometimes even in positions of authority over men. Marriage might be discussed or even accomplished before the end of the film, but it was rarely the focus of the relationship. In the post-WWII films (1950-

1959), white female characters were most often already wives (or widows) and mothers when the story began. There is rarely a clue of life before marriage or outside the family. Rather than an equal partner in the relationship they are cast in supporting roles for the main (white male) character.

The second research question had to do with whether there was a significant difference in the occupational prestige of white female and male characters, and if this difference was more prominent in post-war films. There was a marked difference in the occupational status of white men and women characters in the films. Men were rarely portrayed as dependent on other family members, and appear most often in professional roles. In contrast, women were portrayed most often as homemakers, and when they do have employment it is usually in low-wage support or service jobs that have little or no possibility of advancement, such as waitresses or personal secretaries. White women were rarely portrayed as professionals or having an advanced education where career orientation is possible. For white women, conflicts between employment and family were always resolved in favor of the family. White men were not placed in a position where they were forced to make this choice.

For white women characters, most roles that included employment were replaced by homemaker roles after 1950. In contemporary films, we see white women engaged in careers more often, although the priority of family is still maintained. At the same time, white men in the remade films show a stronger inclination toward parenting and prioritizing family than in previous eras. Overall, the primary occupational category for white women was “mother,” while the primary category for white men was “white

collar." Although by era, pink collar occupations slightly surpassed housewife as occupation during the pre-1950 era, the white collar occupational category for men was consistently the highest over both periods

The third question being explored was the degree to which white female characters demonstrate concern for family members compared to their male counterparts, specifically in regard to parenting. It was found that white female characters were more likely than white male characters to make multiple references to family (including marriage and parenting).

When the time periods were compared, there was an interesting change in family references after 1950. Although white women were consistently found to reference marriage and family more often than white men, there was an overall decrease in the references about family in the post-1950 films. This could be a result of the tendency of the characters to be at a more advanced life stage in these post-WWII films, where marriage and children already exist rather than being anticipated and therefore taken for granted. The focus on white women and the family returns to a higher proportion in the remakes, while white male characters in the remakes have notably the lowest figure of the three time periods.

By far the most surprising finding was the dramatic increase in white mother roles after 1950. It was expected that there would be an increase in the portrayal of domestic life for white women, but this influx of images demonstrating marital bliss was more than what was anticipated. The other startling finding was the continuation of the low representation of women in the production end of filmmaking, providing an explanation

for the male-dominated narratives and the continuing objectification of women as accessories to men in either a sexual or service capacity.

It was also expected that there would be more overt references to white parenting and children along with the representation of white family life and parenting in the post-1950 films. However, it is believed that the subtext of the film provides the positive message concerning the importance of the white mother in the home. Coupled with the negative images of white career women found during the same period the desirability of home life for women is clearly represented.

The fourth research question asked if there would be a significant increase in the portrayal of white "mothers" as a role after World War II, and how this era compared with the contemporary versions of these films. There is a dramatic increase in the number of white women portraying mothers in films following WWII. This trend peaks in 1956, and levels off toward the end of the decade. Contemporary films contain a significant number of mother roles, although they are comparable to pre-1950 numbers. Out of the three eras being considered, the occupational category of wife/husband as a full-time occupation (without children) appears only once, in the post-1950 era. During that time, only white women were portrayed as full-time homemakers in the sample.

The fifth research question examined the gender composition of the production crew in terms of the key decision making positions related to the film. The results show that women had little to do with the production and editorial decisions of films from the historic periods under investigation. Less than 10% of the production crew was women, and those that were credited occupied positions that did not directly impact the narrative

of the films in meaningful ways. With the exception of one screenwriter, they were in wardrobe, make-up and hair styling. Although these may have artistically contributed to the films, they did not have an impact in the way characters were portrayed, or who was chosen to portray them. This inequity had been improved but not completely corrected in the remakes, where only 23% of crew members sampled were women, and only one film (*The Women*) had an equal number of men and women in the crew.

The Implications of Race and Gender Relations

Another topic under examination had to do with issues of race. The first question in this area was how often women of color appeared in the films. I found that, as a group, women of color appeared in about one-third of the films during the historic periods with that number reversing to almost two-thirds in the contemporary films. This can be explained by the increased acceptance of inter-racial social relationships and the strides that anti-discrimination and feminist activists have made in the intervening decades.

When it came to the leading roles, there were considerably fewer women of color appearing in the top ten positions, with white women comprising over 94% of all female characters in these top roles during the pre-1950 period, and black women comprising only 1.6% of these characters. The highest number of main characters in a racial category other than white was Latina, while the least represented racial groups for women were Asian and Native American. In the post-1950 era, more women of color occupied these top roles, but in other racial categories. While Native American women increased slightly, and Asian women remained constant, African American and Latina women

characters decreased. The 1950s were a time of politically charged race relations, and filmmakers were reluctant to continue to show stereotypes that were offensive to black audiences while at the same time unprepared to commit to embracing black actors in traditionally white roles in fear of offending white audiences. There were few actors of color who were accepted by white audiences, such as Sidney Poitier and Dorothy Dandridge, who blazed a trail for future advances in this field. In the meantime, African Americans found less and less work in mainstream Hollywood films.

The second question in this area concerned occupational prestige, where the most compelling finding was that all African American women characters in both the pre- and post-1950 categories had occupations in the lowest category. Latina women were evenly spread across occupational status categories, and Asian women were in the highest levels as aristocracy or celebrities in other countries such as Siam (Thailand) *in Anna and the King of Siam* (Cromwell 1946) and Japan in *Sayonara* (Logan 1957). Only a little over a third of white women characters were found in the low and very low occupational prestige categories for the pre-1950 time period, while fewer than 20% were housewives, and the rest appeared in the higher prestige positions. No African American women were represented as housewives in any era. During the post-1950 era, all women of color were concentrated in the lowest occupational categories, with only one Latina and one Native American portrayed as housewives (the remainder of the housewives was white). Despite the prevalence of white mothers on screen, and the significant increase in the portrayal of white mothers in the 1950s, very few of the women of color portrayed were indicated as having children, and none were portrayed as full-time mothers. Neither of the two non-

white housewives had children and the two black women who are portrayed as mothers are only parents incidentally and have jobs working as maids for white women. This contrasts to the actual occupational status of women of color. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics for 1939 to 1959 show that the majority (58.4%) of "non-white" women were also housewives between 1950 and 1960.

The most significant change in the representation of women of color was found in the film "The Preacher's Wife," from 1996. In this film, which is a modern variation on the "race" film, an African American woman is a wife and mother on a full-time basis. However, as the wife of a minister she also has significant responsibilities in connection to the church, including the supervision of the choir. The other African American woman portrayed was in the 2008 version of "The Women," where Jada Pinckett is not only a professional author rather than a housewife, she is also the only lesbian in the sample.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Research

This research has taken an empirical approach to film studies in order to identify and describe patterns of representation of women in film, especially the representation of white and black women. It has also taken a critical approach by examining the structural economic and materialist orientations that affect these representations. Both the empirical and material orientations used in this research are missing from most feminist film analyses. The findings of this research provide empirical evidence of continued gender and racial stereotyping and reveal continuing influences that undermine gender and racial equality (Coltrane and Messineo 2000).

However, this research examines only specific time periods, and therefore is unable to make claims about changes that have occurred subsequent to those periods. It is also focused largely on white and black female characters, and its scope is limited in regard to the portrayal of men, especially men of color which may or may not affect the behaviors of the female characters in the stories themselves.

Suggestions for Further Research

The conclusions found in this somewhat exploratory study leave many avenues of research left to be explored. The portrayal of women in the volatile period of second wave feminism (1960-1980) could provide a link to the somewhat modified white housewife role found in current films and television programming. Also of interest is the area of advertising, and how housewives, especially white housewives, continue to be targeted as consumers of household goods, with current television ads still promoting the home as the principle territory of women, especially white women.

Also of interest is the portrayal of women of color, and how the "race films" of the past have been reborn in current popular culture with "family" films such as those starring Eddie Murphy, including *Doctor Doolittle* (Thomas 1998), *The Nutty Professor* (Shadyac 1996), and *Daddy Day Care* (Carr 2003) and those directed by Tyler Perry such as *Diary of a Mad Black Woman* (2002a), *Madea's Family Reunion* (2002b), and *Why Did I Get Married?*(2007). Since these films are seen by a broad audience rather than simply marketed to the black community it would be interesting to assess the impression both categories of films have on mainstream audiences through the use of surveys as done in previous cultural indicator studies.

Another genre of interest concerning the representation of black women would be the "blaxploitation" films of the 1970s. The aggressive and sexualized women depicted in these films stood in marked contrast to the meek "mammies" and servants of past decades, while still showing a negative portrait of black womanhood in terms of character and morality. Some of the films of interest from this period would include *Shaft* (Parks 1971), *Cleopatra Jones* (Starrett 1973), *Car Wash* (Michael 1976) and *Blacula* (Crain 1972).

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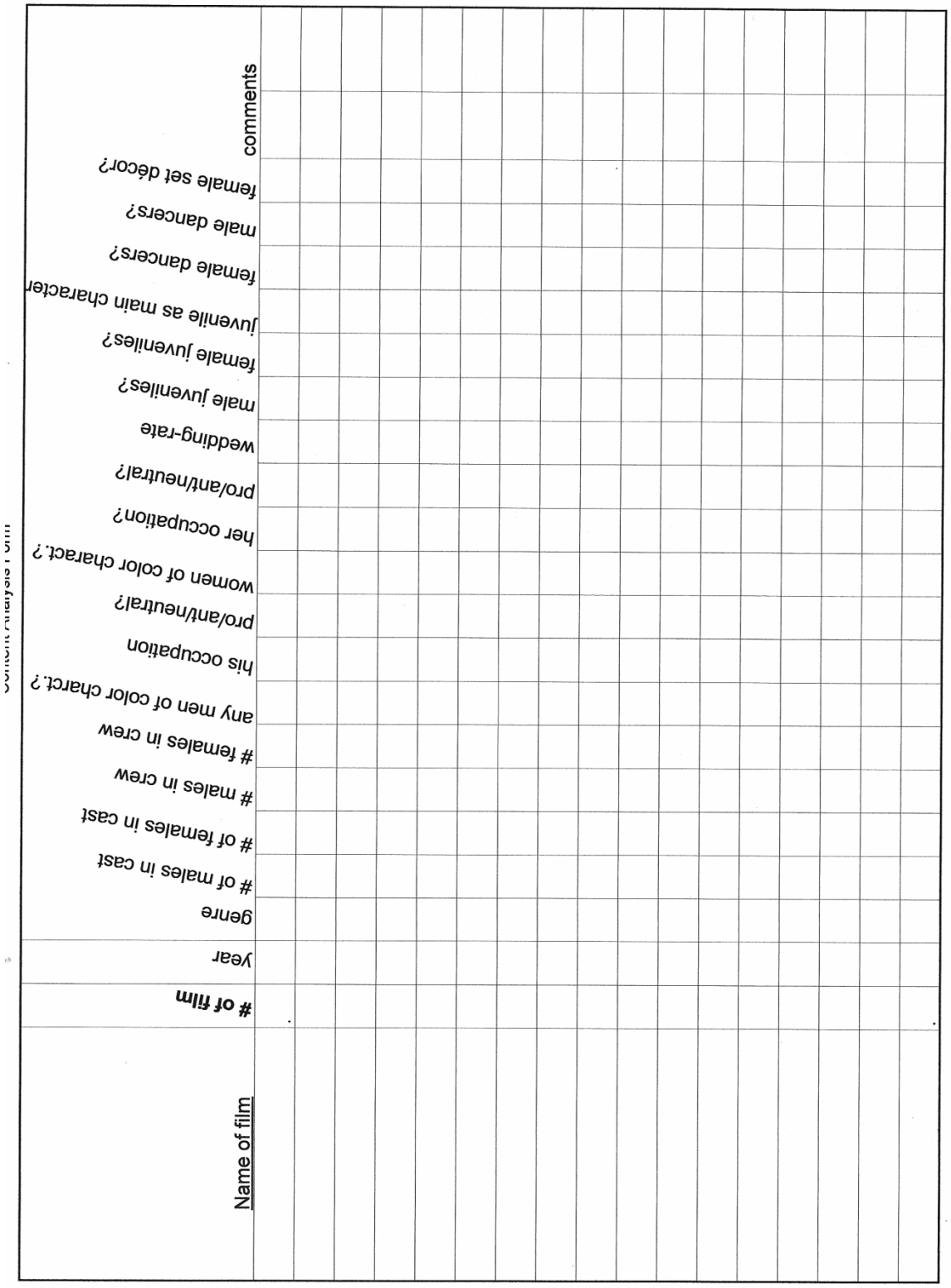
APPENDIX A-1 CONTENT REVIEW SHEET-CHARACTERS

character#	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
Film#										
Year										
Genre										
Billing										
Sex										
Race										
Age										
Marital Status										
Orientation										
Att./Occupation										
clothing										
luxury										
staff/servants										
primary care of children										
references to parenting										
view parenting as #1										
motivated by care for child.										
motivated by care for family										
pride in home/family										
Occupation code										
job:										

APPENDIX A-2 CONTENT REVIEW SHEET-FILM



APPENDIX A-3 CODEBOOK

1. Film number: from master list; ex: 001, 002, 003, etc.
2. Year: 39=1939, 40=1940, 41=1941, etc.
3. Genre: 1=action/adventure, 2=comedy/musical, 3=drama/mystery, 4=melodrama, 5=romance/romantic comedy
4. Billing order: 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 06, 07, 08, 09, 10
5. Sex of character: 0=none, 1=female, 2=male, 3=androgynous/ambiguous
6. Race: 1=white, 2=black, 3=Latino/a, 4=Asian, 5=other minority, 6=ambiguous, 7=mixed
7. Age: 1=juvenile, 2=adult dependent living at home, 3=collegiate, 4=adult independent, 5=senior
8. Marital Status: 1=single, 2=married, 3=divorced, 4=widowed, 5=undetermined
9. sexual orientation: 1=heterosexual, 2=homosexual, 3=undetermined
10. Occupation: fill in primary occupation of character
11. Attitude toward occupation: 0=negative, 1=neutral, 2=positive
12. Stylish clothing?: (does the character appear in stylish/expensive clothing) 0=no, 1=yes
13. luxury environment?: (does the character appear living in a luxury environment) 0=no, 1=yes
14. staff or servants?: (does the character have a personal staff or servants) 0=no, 1=yes
15. primary responsibility for minor children? (does the character have the primary responsibility of children in the story) 0=no, 1=yes
16. References to parenting?: (what type of references, if any, does the character make concerning parenting) 0=negative, 1=no/neutral, 2=positive
17. Character express view of parenting as primary role?: 0=no, 1=yes
18. Character's behaviors motivated by concern for children?: 0=no, 1=yes
19. Character's behaviors motivated by concern other family members?: 0=no, 1=yes
20. Does the character express pride in relation to home/family maintenance?: 0=no, 1=yes

APPENDIX B-1 LIST OF FILMS IN MAIN SAMPLE

African Queen, The	1951	Mildred Pierce	1945
All About Eve	1950	Moby Dick	1956
All that Heaven Allows	1955	Monsiour Verdoux	1947
Angel and the Badman	1947	Mr. Skeffington	1944
Annie Get Your Gun	1950	Naked Spur, The	1953
Auntie Mame	1958	Ninotchka	1939
Bad Seed, The	1956	North by Northwest	1959
Band Wagon, The	1953	Now Voyager	1942
Beachhead	1954	On the Town	1949
Bells of St. Mary's, The	1945	Only Angels have Wings	1940
Best Years of Our Lives, The	1946	Ox-Bow Incident, The	1943
Beyond the Forest	1949	Paleface, The	1948
Big Sleep, The	1946	Peyton Place	1957
Bishop's Wife, The	1948	Picnic	1956
Born Yesterday	1950	Pillow Talk	1959
Brigadoon	1954	Pirate, The	1948
Cat on a Hot Tin Roof	1958	Place in the Sun, A	1954
Cat People	1942	Quo Vadis	1951
Clock, The	1945	Random Harvest	1945
Conqueror, The	1956	Rear Window	1954
Crimson Pirate, The	1952	Rebel Without a Cause	1955
Dark Victory	1939	Red Shoes, The	1948
Destry Rides Again	1939	Road To Rio	1947
Double Indemnity	1944	Roman Holiday	1953
Egyptian, The	1954	Royal Wedding	1951
For Me and My Gal	1942	Sargeant York	1941
Fort Apache	1948	Sayonara	1957
Friendly Persuasion	1956	Sea Hawk, The	1940
From Here to Eternity	1953	Seven Brides for Seven Brothers	1954
Funny Face	1957	Seven Year Itch, The	1955
Gentleman Prefer Blonds	1953	Shane	1953
Ghost and Mrs. Muir, The	1945	Sitting Bull	1954
Gone with the Wind	1939	South Pacific	1958
Grapes of Wrath, The	1940	Spellbound	1945
Greatest Show on Earth	1952	Stage Door Canteen	1943
Green Dolphin Street	1947	Stagecoach	1946
Gunga Din	1939	Star is Born, A	1954
Harvey	1950	Story of Vernon and Irene Castle	1939
High and the Mighty, The	1954	Suddenly	1954
High Noon	1952	Summer Place, A	1959
His Girl Friday	1940	Sunset Blvd.	1950
Holiday Inn	1942	Tammy and the Bachelor	1957
I was a Male War bride	1949	That Forsythe Woman	1949
Imitation of Life	1957	Three Coins in the Fountain	1954
Jesse James	1939	To Each His Own	1946
Last Time I Saw Paris, The	1954	Tree Grows in Brooklyn, A	1945
Lost Weekend, The	1945	Vera Cruz	1954
Love Affair	1939	Winchester '73	1950
Love is a Many Splendored Thing	1955	Wings over the Pacific	1943
Magnificent Obsession	1954	Without Reservations	1946
Meet Me in St. Louis	1944	Wuthering Heights	1939

APPENDIX B-2 HISTORIC COMPARISON SAMPLE

Film	Year
3:10 to Yuma	1957
3:10 to Yuma	2007
A Star is Born	1954
A Star is Born	1976
An Affair to Remember	1957
Love Affair	1994
Anna and the King	1999
Anna and the King of Siam	1946
Jesse James	1939
Assas. Of Jesse James	2007
Born Yesterday	1950
Born Yesterday	1993
Cat People	1942
Cat People	1982
Cheaper by the Dozen	1950
Cheaper by the Dozen	2003
Father of the Bride	1951
Father of the Bride	1991
Heaven Can Wait	1978
Here Comes Mr. Jordan	1948
The Bishops Wife	1948
The Preacher's Wife	1996
The Women	1939
The Women	2008