Title
Challenging Stereotypes that Confine Women in Film and Television

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A capstone project submitted for
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University Honors
University of California, Riverside

APPROVED

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Abstract

Acknowledgments

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Summary

Prior to this research project, I was firmly in the camp that the gender of a character was irrelevant to story as long as the actors playing those characters were playing it with truth and authenticity. The fact that so many men take on these complex characters while women are primarily given one-dimensional roles of the wife, mother, and daughter in various films and television shows is unjustified. Initially, my argument was that we were all essentially human and that there are just some universal experiences that we all go through, such as loss, heartbreak, and love. So why was it that we confined women to these stereotypes when men could be and do just about anything? I had the wonderful opportunity through the Chancellor's Research Fellowship and UCR Honors Program to investigate this notion further and to get to the core of this issue.

During the summer of 2017, I was funded to create two versions of one short film – where we switched the genders of the characters from one film to the next – and took them into focus groups in the Spring of 2018 to see how students at UCR would react to the role reversal. When we told the actors what the project revolved around, they were very intrigued by the concept but knew that there were to be some challenges to come from it. One thing that I learned very quickly during filming was that it was nearly impossible to recreate the film, shot for shot, and have two different actors play one character exactly the same way. So when I was going through the edits of the film, I knew there were some differences in each version. I didn't know how it would affect the focus group participants, but I stayed open-minded to the process and decided that this was going to be an experience for everyone, including myself.

It was extremely fascinating to hear the different perspectives and points of view of all of the participants. The participants identified with different characters and not all for the same

reasons. For example, one participant, Gloria, found that she didn't believe the female version of one character because she knew that if she were in that character's shoes, she wouldn't do the same thing she did. A good portion of the participants found the reversed gender version to be less intriguing, but another participant, Ashley, found the female version of the originally male character to be very endearing. She felt that having that character as the voice of reason was very empowering, whereas others viewed it as stereotypical. These observations made me realize something very important: each person has his or her own experiences and viewpoints that affect how he or she perceive the world, and the same applied to my actors as well. When I was on set with my actors, I realized that they had difficulties trying to play the characters exactly like one another because they were all different people with different truths. It was impossible to have them act exactly the same way while also giving an honest performance.

One of my participants, Serrina, said that she sincerely empathized with the female version of the villain because she couldn't imagine the hardship she had to go through during her career to mold her to be so aggressive and thick skinned. That was a pretty popular notion that affected a lot of the participants. Through this process, I began to understand that things like gender, race, and ethnicity played a huge part in how we perceived people presented to us in the media and everyday life. As many stated in the sessions, it is undeniably true that societal norms are engraved into our minds, but it is our choice as creators and consumers whether we let it influence us in a negative or positive way. The actors in my films allowed their personal beliefs, emotions, and authentic personalities shine through the character that they were portraying, and people were able to see those nuances. That is why I believe that it is so important for people to trust in the process and believe that things like gender can add sub textural layers to a story that has the potential to make a character more intriguing and empathetic.

Link to Google Drive of Chrystal Kim's Capstone:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1wbPCrlOpaKxlQeQ_4Bf5S5_ITIYvplqp/view?usp=sharing