The study of the gender representation and sexualization of female in the movie industry ---- Using the James Bond series movies as an example

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Abstract: Along with the development of Hollywood film industry, there has been a dynamic shift of female image. In the series of James Bond (007) films, one of most representative movies, female image is its significant and plays essential roles in storylines and contents. Female image began with subordinate and sexual representation in the 1960s, and gradually becomes smarter and stronger. The gender representation of female has been modified and improved through time, but they are still "sexy" due to ingrained impact of male gaze. This paper aims at studying the change of gender representation in Hollywood film industy through analysing the James Bond series film.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research paper is to develop a relatively thorough and comprehensive examination about the gender representation in the media industry through using the James Bond series movies as a case study to explore the changes and current situation of the sexual objectification and portrayal of female over time. In my view, as a series of movies which is highly characterized by its heroic and masculine factors, the images of Bond's girls in James Bond movie can be helpful to study how the bilateral influence between the media industry and audiences affects the change of sexualization of female. Using relevant scholarly articles, discourse analysis of movies and the small-scale interview with 4 people who have watched the past James Bond movies and the latest one for the comparison and opinions of the gender representation as the further audience research, I will explore the change and characteristics of the portray of female in the Hollywood movie industry and its influence. I argue that although under the influence of feminist movement and improvement of women's social position, there are increasingly prominent female images of their role and status in the James Bond movies, but they are still represented and sexualized for the needs of "male gaze" to a large extent.

2. Significance and Background

The sexualisation and pornography of men and women have been increasingly popular among mass media, such as in the covers of magazines, films and music videos. Hence, this phenomenon has caused a contentious debate among more and more media scholars to examine its significant cultural meaning insight (McRobbie 2004; Gill 2013).

Gender representation in the media industry has always been a major factor in the feminist media theory. when men and women are equally exposed and drop their underwear around their ankles, people always think women are raped or dirty and men are somehow confident (Bodro 1999). For ages, women are conceptualized as the subordinate, domestic and weak, who are dependent on men and are frequently related to sexual objects.

Some post-feminism scholars illustrated different opinion that women have been shifted from sexual objects to sexual subjects, which indicates that women are more active and are sometimes self-sexualize themselves (Bordo 1999; Gill 2003; 2009), which is reflected in the change in James Bond movies.

Compared with the James Bond movies in the 1970s, the latest one has obvious decrease of sexual objectification and pornography of women, instead of merely flirting and seducing men, they become agents and leaders and can be responsible for important tasks and help Bond. However, female agents are less capable than male and still need to be naked to attract attention. It indicates that with the growing of feminism, females are more intellectual and competent, but there is still notable unequal position between men and women and the "male gaze" of female are still obvious on screen. From my view, the rise of the position and capability of women actually represents that the increasing of "male gaze".

Some of the characters that were originally played by men, or could be played by men, were replaced by female, such as flight attendants, machine gunmen, gatekeepers and academics, who were all wearing naked and presented as seductive to create one after another of sexual partner or temptation for Bond and also for audiences. Women's view on marriage, love and self-awareness are deformed in the movies, which is inevitably have negative social impact on the construction of gender, especially for female. Media industry needs to reform more profoundly to break the traditional "male gaze" and the sexual objectification of female in order to subtly affect women' self-awareness and public view of female in the reality.

3. Literature Review

In order to construct a general understanding of gender representation, sexualisation of female and male gaze, this paper will demonstrate relevant literature reviews about these key aspects to illustrate how gender representations in Hollywood films have been reflected the patriarchal ideology to media industry and contemporary western society.

There have been many scholars who study the sexualisation in media representation, among which the first and fundamental study was Erving Goffman's Gender Advertisements, which tried to explore how masculinity and femininity are constructed in mass media and summarized those men and woman were frequently presented as the dominant and subordinate relationship (1979). When women are dressed naked or partly naked on the screen or present performance arts, like the belly dance, they will be directly connected with "eroticism and sexual objectification", which are considered as the direct consequence of the "male gaze" of female and are further demonstrated in the political, economic and cultural era (Burnettes 2011).

There has been remarkable development of feminism, women are no longer being manipulated to distract men, instead, they become intelligent and capable, such as the M, as the boss of MI6. There is no denying that sexualisation of men and women have increased over time, due to people's emphasis on physical appearance and the change in the culture. Still, there is a disequilibrium between men and women being sexualized, which is harmful to people's expectations of equal sexual position and women's self-consciousness. It is still a common phenomenon to utilise the sexualisation of women to attract attention and gain more interests in media industry, like the Hollywood blockbuster movies. Accordingly, the popularity of this propaganda strategy is due to the fact that the representation of unequal position between male and female is a decisive power in cinemas and is served for the satisfactory of male audiences, which is originated by traditional patriarchal ideologies (Mulvey 1999). The "male gaze" is also a determined factor for the sexualisation of female in the media industry. In the society that is characterized by gender imparity, the excitement from glimpsing clearly distinguishes male and female. Men are bystanders, connoisseurs and commentators, who are active and hegemony, while women are being watched, appreciated and commented by men and the Bond's girls' sexy image offers the "visual guarantee of the maleness" of the movies (Funnell 2011, p. 199). "Male gaze" described that male and female are in the relationship of looking and being looked, which implies the active versus passive and dominant and subordinate between men and women.

4. Methodology

To explore the gender representation in the media industry from the angle of what is its the current situation, how has it changed over time and how has it influenced on the public, especially the female audiences, I will combine the discourse analysis, critical literature review and the interviews as methodologies for this paper. The reason of adopting critical literature review is because it is essential to develop the recognition of the significance of my own "research objects, research methods and theoretical paradigm" with the existing literature (Stokes 2013, p. 67).

With discourse analysis, I can further uncover the ideologies which influence how we behave and think. And interview offers a more practical and direct audiences' respond, which I can refer back to my literature and analysis and also can help me develop the coding of patterns from my findings.

Furthermore, the series of James Bond movies from the 1960s to 2015 will also be presented as a case study in discussion to explore how gender representation have been developed over the years in Western movies. Meanwhile, the juxtapositions of the ideological meanings and literature of James Bond (Funnell & Dodds 2015; Burgess 2015; Racioppi & Tremonte 2014; Funnell 2011; Dodds 2014) offer a clear explanation of the ideological content of the media message (Stokes 2012, p. 120). Additionally, comments and interviews from the writers, directors, actors, actresses and fans will also be demonstrated for the study of gender representation and female sexualisation in relations to the audiences, which can provide diverse interpretations, which reinforce the literature (Stokes 2012, p. 130-131). And the small-scale interview of 4 people, who have watched both the past and the latest version of James Bond movies, may give a representative opinion of the comparison and change of gender representation in films from audiences' perspective.

5. Finding Analyse and Argument

My interviewees are from Australia, Japan and China. From their responses, they all considered the James Bond movies and the gender representation of Bond's girls are closely interconnected with the feminism and heavily influenced by the social change of gender relationship. As one of Chinese interviewees said, the reason why the James Bond character is charming and eternal cannot be separated from the beautiful and sexy Bond's girls, on one hand, the American culture tends to equal female to sex, on the other hand, the social change and progress make people growingly open and tolerant. And the film as a significant social tool to reflect and embed American culture, will naturally signify the relationship between female and male. Like in the *Skyfall* (2012), Bond's body image was presented in the title sequence, while Bond's girls' body images were used as the subject of the title sequence titles in the past movies, like in the *Goldeneye* (1995). The Japanese respondent also agreed that there is apparent change of female's function over time, in the 1960s, the women around James Bond were only displays on the screen and offered Bond the opportunity to be hero to save them and solve problems, like in the *Goldfinger* (1964), Pussy was described as an intelligent and skilful agent for the villain, but fell in love with Bond and betrayed her boss to help Bond accomplish his mission. In the *Octopussy* (1983), the movie was named by the female character and she thought that Kara in the *The Living Daylights* (1987), was the first female assassin who actually shows close combat ability.

Accordingly, the *Skyfall* (2012) movie was considered as the most explicit one that stress on Bond's body and his resilience instead of female body (Dodds 2014). As mentioned by my respondents, from the *Dr. No* (1962), Uzhu Anders presented her image as sexy lady wearing swimsuit, the angel face and the devil's body had become the overall impression and setting of the representation of Bond girls and also created the traditions that Bond always goes with beauty. Additionally, Miss Taro is conceptualized as the "Dragon lady" and vilified to challenge Bond's mission, which defines Asian women solely as femininity to stress on male hero (Funnell 2011). Bond girls has gradually become the synonymous of beautiful and sexy, but in the early 007 series movies, their gender representation was also highly limited by these images. In the early works of the 007 series movies, the idea of male superiority was obvious and the gender representation presented

female as subordinate and sexual partners of Bond. The gender stereotype that based from "role-bound activities" and "the characteristics favored by these roles become stereotypic of each sex and facilitate its typical activities" limited the function of female character (Diekman & Eagly 2000, p. 1172). In some circumstances, they were even the physical shield for Bond. Such as the dancing girls in *Goldfinger* (1964), who was used to resist sticks and in the *The Spy who loved me* (1977), Bond used female body to shield himself from shooting. With the development of feminism and social change, Bond girls began played more important role in the movies, though they still maintain the pretty face and sexy body image, their gender representation are more diversified and independent.

Another important point they mentioned is that despite of the change and progress the movies have represented, however, the female characters are still sexualized on screen. My Australian interviewee illustrated that women image in the 007 series movies have been greatly improved, but he can feel the traditional influence of gender relationship and "male gaze" are still deep-rooted, which cannot be ignored and the sexy female image is a typical example. As mentioned before, the naked or sexualized female characters directly provide the visual guarantee for the masculinity of Bond and satisfy the need of "male gaze" (Funnell 2011). During the interview, all my four interviewees expressed their strong impression of the nude image of female in the movies, which frequently appeared from the title sequence to the end of the movie, even in the latest *Spectre* (2015), Léa Seydoux as a knowledgeable doctor and Monica Bellucci as the wife of a powerful assassin, they still have to be presented naked. In several interviews with Daniel Craig, the actor of James Bond, he also commented that even in the latest *Spectre* (2015), his character is definitely sexist (HuffPost 2015; Furness 2015). With the Mulvey's theory, it can be argued that the naked or partly-naked female body is served as an appetizer to a satisfy male audience in order to arouse their attention with the film (Planka 2011). There is no denying that the gender representation of female has been significantly improved with the social progress, but the current situation is still harmful for women.

In the worldwide, for commercial interests and attention, the portrayal of the female in the top ranking and the most popular movies is frequently put more emphasis on their appearance and body, female is much less playing the protagonists than male and there is a serious sexual objectification of female in the media industry by using their partly-naked or naked image (Hatton & Trautner 2011). Statistics show that it is almost no difference of how 13 to 20-year-old women in showing their "sexy" and how 21 to 29 years old women "sexy" on the screen (Smith et al. 2012).

All my respondents agreed that no matter how interesting their story are or how amazing they fight and act, female characters are always being portrayed to serve as a foil to male. I asked my interviewees use one word to summarise the characteristic of the gender representation of Bond girls, and they used "naked", "love" and "sex", which indicates that their gender representation never really gets rid of the "male gaze". Sunshine, beach, sexy girls in Bikini, party and backless costumes are all frequent scenes in the 007 series movies and actresses sometimes baffling to wear bikini to complete the fight scenes. My Chinese respondent brought out that she thinks possible that with the improvement of female' role and position in the movies, the "male gaze" of female also increases and more obvious.

Generally speaking, my interviewees thought that the transition and improvement of gender representation of female in the James Bond series of films represents the victory of feminist to a certain extent. At the same time, this change also helps the 007 series movies become more appropriate for audiences' aesthetic. Therefore, the shift of gender representation can be regarded as a mutual-beneficial consequence for the feminism and the movies. Reijnders conducted a more in-depth interview with 23 fans of James Bond series movies, he thought that audiences tend to recognise themselves with the same manhood like Bond and that the gender representation in movies can shape audiences' self-image recognition (2010). Therefore, For the future and expectation of this series, my respondents think there is still space for improvement and the films should present a more equal relationship between female and male characters to have a more positive social impact.

6. Self-reflexive

I am particularly interested in this topic because I am born and raised in China, which is a more conservative country, compared with western countries. We have many traditional virtues, among which it requires that women have to be obedient to their father before married and obedient to their husband and son in marriage. Therefore, in past Chinese movies, gender representation was abnormal, female was presented as wife and mother, and their blind obedient, loyalty and sacrifice for family were commended that women should all follow these rules. With the introduction of Hollywood movies, the gender representation began to change to be more positive and equal. And the James Bond series movies, as a typical Hollywood action movie, it is heavily influenced by the social movement and feminism ideology. Chinese filmmakers and audiences began to reflect on why China cannot make the movies like that, and the mechanical setting of gender representation in films. Women began to appear in action movie and began to pursue freedom and equality.

7. Conclusion

Since the 20th century, there is a growing of female theme among the United States Oscar-winning films, which I think is the reflection on the social attention to women and is also an epitome of the gradual enhancement of female social status and feminism. Movies represent the social reality and public expectation for the future. Through the development of movie industry, the gender representation of female has experienced the changes of tradition, dependent, homing, independent, radical and pluralism. Overall, the evolution of these female images is in line with the progress and trend of feminist thought, whether it is on screen or reality, women are on the track of fighting for freedom and equality. However, although there has been a change in the movie industry, the current situation of gender representation on screen is still biased and tend to sexualise female characters to satisfy "male gaze", which hence still needs to be improved. A large proportion of the most popular movies is the action movie and this category is very preferred by the investors and entertainment companies as it is high-input, high-payback and easier to build up reputations. Moreover, for stakeholders, movies are produced for the commercial interest and the advertising influence, which requires the attraction of audiences' attention to buy tickets and to become heated topics in the social media platforms. To fulfil these aims, the gender representation and sexualisation are frequently utilised as a gimmicky method to satisfy viewers, especially the male viewers' expectation. Notwithstanding, producers encoded the primordial and traditional cultural and social views of women into images, which can be decoded and absorbed by consumers and cultivate their conceptualization of disparity position between men and women.

8. Impact

I think the findings of this paper can have a particular impact on feminist scholars and audiences by illustrating the change and current situation of the gender representation of female on screen.

The sexualisation of men and women have been both increased over time, due to people's emphasis on physical appearance and the change in the culture. Still, there is an asymmetry between men and women being sexualized, which is harmful to people's expectations of equal sexual position and women's self-consciousness. Meanwhile, the noticeable increase and unequal position of sexual objectification of men and women may result in different feelings of sexual consciousness and self-esteem and have worse outcome for female (Baggett 2012). Additionally, the rapid growth of sexualisation of women in the media representation may also impact teenagers, especially adolescent girls. As being exposed in various of sexual media content, young girls easily take those ideal and perfect female body images as normative and have more dissatisfaction of their bodies, which can lead to the mental health issue and eating disorders (Ingrao 2014).

This paper can have an inspirational impact on the audiences about gender equality and the gender education on female audiences in particular. With the media convergence, it is a paradigm shift from "passive media spectatorship" to the "participatory culture" for the public (Jenkins 2006, p. 4).

9. Limitation

An obvious area for improvement in this research is the data that collected from the films. Due to the time limit, I cannot thoroughly go through all the 65 movies of James Bond series and I only choose around 10 classical films to compare. Also, it would be better if I can draw on more directors', actors' comments for those movies as well as fans' comments from social media to support the discourse analysis as a juxtaposition opinion. Furthermore, I think it would be better if I can find more interviewees to construct a more comprehensive patterns through their answers. Also, the race issue is also highly related to the gender representation in the James Bond movie, which can be expand to study in my future research.

10. Future

In the 2016 Oscar reward, the *Hidden Figure*, which used three black females as leading actors and presented them as the heroines who enabled the NASA space project, was nominated as the best movie and had received great reputation. I think it indicates the increasing demand for the respect and equal treatment between women and men, which is directly reflected on movie industry with the improvement of gender representation on screen. The James Bond series movies, as a typical Hollywood heroic films, the change of gender representation of Bond's girls also signified the progress of feminism. Movie industry, as a significant and influential segment of global communication, should break the limitation of "the male gaze" by presenting different gender, race and religion equally, and thus have a positive impact on audiences.

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