

# Exploring the Effect of a Film Director's Gender on Female Film Representation

Natalie Song<sup>1</sup>, Daniel Olivo<sup>1#</sup> and Jonathan Lancaster<sup>2#</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Bergen County Technical High School – Teterboro

<sup>2</sup>Bergen County Academies

#Advisor

## ABSTRACT

Many studies have established the prevalence of the underrepresentation and stereotypical representation of female characters in film and its negative implications on viewers. However, other literature suggests that these issues can be ameliorated with the presence of female filmmakers. For instance, studies have compared male and female directors in their representation of female characters in high-grossing films and found stronger representation in female-directed films. However, no study has directly compared male and female directors in the context of independent film. Thus, this study looks to answer “How Do Male And Female Directors Compare In Their Portrayals of Females in Independent Films From 2021?” using the Bechdel Test and a directed content analysis of female stereotypes/non-stereotypes to compare female representation within three male-directed films and three female-directed films. It finds that while female-directed films are less likely to underrepresent, stereotype, and monolithically represent females, the difference is not substantial. Moreover, female and male directors portrayed their female characters in very similar ways.

## Literature Review

### 1.1 Weak Representation in Film

#### 1.1.1 *Underrepresentation in Film*

Several research studies reveal that females are frequently underrepresented on screen. A study on gender oppression in the top-grossing 2007 films found that only 29.9% of the onscreen speaking characters were female (Choueiti and Smith, 2010). Since then, a study on gender representation in the top-grossing films of 2021 found that females made up only 34% of speaking characters (Lauzen, 2021). Thus, although the percentage of female characters has seemingly increased over the years, females have been and still are underrepresented in films.

#### 1.1.2 *Stereotypical Representation*

A substantial body of research demonstrates that females are displayed in traditional/limited stereotypical ways, such as relationship-oriented, submissive, incompetent, the primary caregivers, sex objects, and or victims. For instance, word embedding studies of movie scripts revealed significant connections between words suggesting that females were primarily focused on romantic relationships (Xu, 2019). In terms of characteristics, another study on female representation from the 1900s to the 2010s found that women tended to be portrayed as submissive in romance genres (Yang, 2020). Similarly, other studies have argued that females are typically portrayed as incompetent, the primary caregivers, sex objects, and victims (Wood, 2013). These depictions of females in films suggest that females fail to

think for themselves and instead exist to be used or abused by those around them. Thus, females are often defined by stereotypes depicting weak, dependent, vulnerable women, and given a narrow range of roles.

## 1.2 Implications of the Problem

Multiple studies have found that weak female representation can negatively affect its viewers and their perceptions of females. For instance, research by Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana E. Mastro has demonstrated that after viewers were shown females being displayed as aggressive on screen, they reported unfavorable attitudes towards female friendships and women in general (2008). Moreover, according to the Social Learning Theory, behaviors are learned by the observations of others, so the constant portrayal of weak female on-screen representation may convince other females to act in accordance with these stereotypes, thereby perpetuating sexism within society (Sharma, 2021). Thus, stereotypical female representation can negatively affect the perception of females towards viewers in general, and the behavior of females in particular.

## 1.3 Market Viability

Some argue that studios believe that movies with female leads are not extremely profitable. This is demonstrated in interviews with industry professionals and experts in the film industry. According to Cathy Schulman, an Oscar-winning producer, the rights to distribute films are more likely to be sold at a higher price when popular male actors are attached (Hickey, 2014). This belief is consistent with the sentiments of Krista Smith, the editor of *Vanity Fair*, who argues that the majority of female actresses don't garner large amounts of sales around the world (Hickey, 2014). These common assumptions could potentially explain the under-presence of female characters, and specifically, female lead characters as studios have less incentive to create films with female characters if they are not making enough money. Furthermore, this may be limiting the number of movies with strong female representation.

However, though understandable, due to the association between high-grossing films and films that fail the Bechdel test, the belief that strong female representation makes less money lacks sufficient evidence. A study by Andrew Linder found that the majority of high-grossing films are not focused on women, with 64.4% of the analyzed films failing the Bechdel Test (2015). This suggests that films with stronger female representation may have less ability to make money, as they are not typically high-grossing films. However, these associations become less apparent when other factors (like varying budgets) are counted for. Linder also finds that in two films with similar budgets, those with female leads made roughly the same amount of money as those with male leads (2015). Thus, the presence of a female lead doesn't necessarily result in lower profits. In fact, a study on the impact of the Bechdel test on the box office rating found that movies that passed the Bechdel test had significantly higher international box office earnings than movies that did not (Valentowitsch, 2022). Thus, research suggests that female representation is poor not because movies with strong female representation make less money, but because of other reasons like the budget.

## 1.4 Importance of Female-Film Directors

Another perspective holds that female representation is poor because of the lack of female film directors in the industry. According to Karniouchina, only 4.95% of 2,386 motion pictures released in the U.S. between 1994 and 2016 were female-directed (2022), which is reportedly unfortunate as female directors can better relate to women in lead actor roles due to their lived experiences as female (Karniouchina, 18). Similarly, Kaplan argues that when females direct, they tell their stories from the perspective of someone who has had connections to the patriarchy (1991). Karniouchina's and Kaplan's work suggests that female directors could add complex, stronger perspectives to female film representation.

Their work is substantiated by studies comparing films with female direction with films with male direction and finding less female underrepresentation and stereotypical representation in female-directed films.

In a study analyzing the relationship between female directors and female representation in high-grossing films from 2018, Ian Kunsey found that female-directed movies had a much higher percentage of female characters than male-directed movies and were more likely to pass the Bechdel test (2019). Kunsey's results appear to be consistent with the results of another study on female film representation in 2021, in which films with one female director/writer were much more likely to have females as protagonists than films with only a male director/writer (Lauzen, 2022). Kunsey's and Lauzen's work together suggests female directors can potentially increase the representation of female characters: protagonists and roles in general. This suggests female directors could potentially help ameliorate the issues of female underrepresentation discussed above.

In addition to underrepresentation, other research demonstrates female directors can help female stereotypical representation as well. Hankin argued female directors were more likely to dispel dominant representations of female identity (2017), suggesting female directors may be more likely to avoid displaying the dominant representation of females as incompetent, the primary caregivers, sex objects, and victims (Wood, 2013). Additionally, in female-directed films, females had more agency and were more likely to dispel traditional stereotypes about women (Kunsey, 2019). By indicating that females in female-directed films challenge dominant female representation and have more agency, these studies show female directors and strong female representation are associated. This suggests the absence of female directors in the film industry could be a potential reason behind the large presence of weak female representation on screen.

## 1.5 Independent Film

However, none of these studies were on purely independent films (films made outside of a film studio system or produced by independent companies (Lauzen, 2022)), which can be very different from the high-grossing films Kunsey and Choueiti/Smith focused on. Several researchers have noted independent films differ in terms of budget and purpose, which can impact the films' content. In a study analyzing interviews with independent filmmakers, Sherry Ortner found independent films typically have lower budgets, and primarily focus on creating art, unlike profit-focused Hollywood films (2012). Thus, Independent films may present female characters differently due to reduced emphasis on profits and concerns about their potential to generate less revenue (Hickey, 2014).

## 1.6 Present Study

Past research has demonstrated the issue of female underrepresentation and stereotypical representation in film. Additionally, research has demonstrated female directors can potentially alleviate this problem. However, no research has measured whether this potential solution is present in independent films, which is very different from typical Hollywood movies measured in the existing research. Thus, this study intends to fill the gap of knowledge by using the Bechdel test and a directed content analysis to examine "How do female and male directors compare in their portrayal of women in independent films in 2021?"

## Method

### Criteria

In order to find independent films for the study, the 2021 lineups of 7 film festivals: New Directors/New Films, New York Film Festival, Sundance Film Festival, SXSW Film Festival, Telluride Film Festival, Toronto International Film Festival, and Tribeca Film Festival were used. These festivals were examined because they are the qualifying film

festivals for the Film Independent Spirit Awards, an awards body exclusively for independent films/television, which is relevant to my study of independent film (Film Independent Spirit Awards, 2021). Similarly, as independent films are typically lower budget (Ortner, 2012), the Film Independent Spirit Award's qualification that a movie had to be 22.5 million budget or less was followed (Film Independent Spirit Awards, 2021). Film festivals, by showcasing new types of narratives that promote the idea of "arts for art's sake", align closely with the focus of independent films to create art as a form of global art cinema (De Valck, 2014; Ortner, 2012). However, some of these film festivals displayed non-independent films, so films still had to be produced outside of the film studio system or produced by an independent production company to qualify (Lauzen, 2022). The film also had to be feature-length films, female-led, and made available through virtual commercial streaming for viewing purposes. Films had to be female-led because it would be unfair to compare the female representation of female-led movies to that of male-led movies, given women are not the primary focus of the latter. Additionally, films could not be co-directed by a male and female, so the differences in representation could be attributed to a specific gendered director.

Once all of these criteria were met, the eligible independent films were placed into either the female-directed film list or the male-directed film list depending on the gender of its director. Each list was then placed into a random list generator, and then the first 3 movies of each list were chosen. The first 3 chosen male-directed were *The Starling (2021)*, *Vortex (2021)*, *Poser (2021)*. The first 5 female-directed were *Mayday (2021)*, *Bergman Island (2021)*, *Knocking (2021)*.

## Bechdel Test

In order to code for underrepresentation, the Bechdel Test was used. The Bechdel test has 3 criteria: 1) A movie needs to have at least 2 speaking characters; 2) They need to be named and speak to one another; 3) Their conversation needs to be about something other than a man. The test was used because movies that failed the Bechdel test are more likely to have fewer females in general (Agarwal, 2015), so they allow for comparison between the underrepresentation of females in female-directed films and that in male-directed films.

## Directed Content Analysis

### *Stereotypical Representation*

However, beyond determining the presence of female characters, the Bechdel test is highly limited. It fails to measure what exactly women talk about or how they talk about it (O'Meara, 2016). Thus, it fails to consider how females are represented, and therefore if the representation is stereotypical or not.

To address this, this study used directed content analysis to code for female stereotypes in film. A directed was used over a conventional content analysis as conventional coding may include extraneous codes that don't reveal if female stereotypes are present. Stereotypes and non-stereotypes were used to find to what extent females are represented stereotypically and non-stereotypically. To determine my codes of stereotypical/nonstereotypical representation, Brooke S. O'Neil's study on the portrayal of females in movie trailers (2016) was used. The study was modeled after content analysis studies on gender characteristics, specifically Gilpatric's peer-reviewed study on stereotypically masculine and feminine traits in film. For all of Gilpatric's codes used in the study, please see the appendix.

### *Counting the Duration of Codes*

This study used the codes provided in the charts to code for stereotypical representation. Specifically, the duration of time spent on a female stereotype for each film was measured. This was measured using the time stamp on my streaming service, and it was rounded to the nearest second. An example of this would be a female watching others move their own furniture and thus being represented as passive in *Mayday (2021)* for 10 seconds. This number would then be added to the total time spent on the passive stereotype and stereotypes in general in all male-directed films as *Mayday* was male-directed. This total time spent on stereotypes would then be divided by the run time of the film

(time from first to last image on screen) to see how much of a movie was spent showing female stereotypical representation. This same process was repeated for non-stereotypical representation. The time from the first to last image on the screen excluding the solely black page dedicated to credits was used in order to avoid inflating the amount of time spent on neither stereotypes nor stereotypes, giving a better indication of how prevalent the stereotypes/non-stereotypes were in the context of the film. This proportion would then be compared to the total stereotype seconds in female-directed films.

However, it should be noted that scenes without any female characters or any characters present were considered to be a part of the runtime, which may have still inflated the amount of time spent on neither stereotypes/non-stereotypes and made the percentage of stereotypes/non-stereotypes smaller. However, these scenes were included as the director determines almost every frame displayed in their film, so their decision to not show female characters represented in a certain way or at all represented still demonstrated their choice of female representation. This, however, was not necessarily the case for the start/end credits, as directors are required to display those, so those were not counted in the duration of the code.

To code, the females had to be clearly visible in the scene. So scenes of characters talking over the phone weren't included, and far-away shots making it difficult to identify characters weren't measured. To qualify as a stereotype, the women must directly perform the actions/dialogue associated with the stereotype. For instance, a female fixing her makeup could be marked as "focused on appearance", but someone else commenting that she always fixes her makeup would not be considered a stereotype.

## Limitations of Method

### *Sample*

Only examining 6 films could lead to less representative results of how female directors or male directors really represent female characters. A larger sample size might have considered outliers, and given a more representative conclusion on female representation.

### *Coding*

Because this study only analyzes females in the frame who speak/conduct actions, this study does not consider how other characters view female characters. This could limit the number and variety of stereotypical/non-stereotypical traits found in the film's representation of the female character. For instance, if another character called a female character ambitious because she wants to become the president of the United States, the female still would not be coded as ambitious in the scene. This could limit the thoroughness of my analysis of how female characters compare in male and female-directed films.

## Results

### Bechdel Test

The Bechdel Test, using the simple pass or fail system, was used to assess the underrepresentation of female characters. The test only focused on female-female conversations. For the purpose of time, only the first female-female conversation that passed the Bechdel test (if it did) was included in the results.

### *Female-Directed Films*

The first female-directed film analyzed, *Bergman Island* had 5 named speaking women: Chris, Ase, Hedda, Berit, and Wilma. Because there were at least 2 named speaking women, this film passed the first criteria of the Bechdel Test. Furthermore, Chris and Ase conversed about the house Chris would be staying at during her trip. So, this film had a

female-to-female conversation between two named speaking women about something other than a man, passing both the second and third criteria of the Bechdel Test. Thus, *Bergman Island* passed the Bechdel Test.

The second female-directed film analyzed, *Mayday* also had 5 named speaking women: Ana, Marsha, Bea, Gert, and June. Thus, because there were at least 2 named speaking women, this film passed the first criteria of the Bechdel Test. The first female-female conversation was between Ana and Marsha regarding whether or not Ana could help Marsha feel better before her wedding. As this film had a female-female conversation between two named speaking women about something other than a man, it passed the Bechdel test.

The final female-directed film analyzed was *Knocking*. This film had 2 named speaking women Molly Aronson and Judith. Thus, it met the minimum of 2 named speaking women, passing the first criteria of the Bechdel Test. Furthermore, Molly and Judith spoke to one another about going swimming, fulfilling the second criterion of having these two named-speaking women share dialogue, and the third criterion of having this conversation be about something other than a man. So, *Knocking* passed the Bechdel Test.

### *Male-Directed Films*

The first male-directed film analyzed was *Poser*. *Poser* had 2 named, speaking female characters, Bobbi and Lennon. Thus, the film met the minimum number of named female-speaking characters to pass the first criteria of the Bechdel test. Furthermore, Lennon and Bobbi spoke to each other about Bobbi's music and Lennon's podcast. So, two named female speaking characters had a conversation about something other than a man in the film, passing the second and third criteria of the Bechdel test. So, *Poser* passed the Bechdel Test.

The second male-directed film analyzed was *The Starling*. *The Starling* had 6 female named speaking characters: Lily, Mrs. Oberhoffer, Velma, Regina, Fawn, and Sherri. So, the film had at least two named-speaking female characters, passing the first criteria. A female-to-female conversation was identified between Velma and Regina, who talked to one another about the importance of being honest. Thus, because the two named females had a conversation and spoke to one another about something other than a man, it passed the second and third criteria of the Bechdel test. So, *The Starling* passed the Bechdel Test.

The final male-directed film was *Vortex*. Although *Vortex* had multiple speaking female characters, none of them were named. For instance, the main character of the film was never referred to by name, only "my love", and "mom" a pronoun such as she/her, or something else. Thus, because it does not meet the minimum of 2 female-named speaking characters, it failed the first criteria of the Bechdel test. Additionally, although another female character spoke to the main female character about something other than a man, they were unnamed and thus can not meet the second or third criteria of the Bechdel Test. So, this film failed the Bechdel Test.

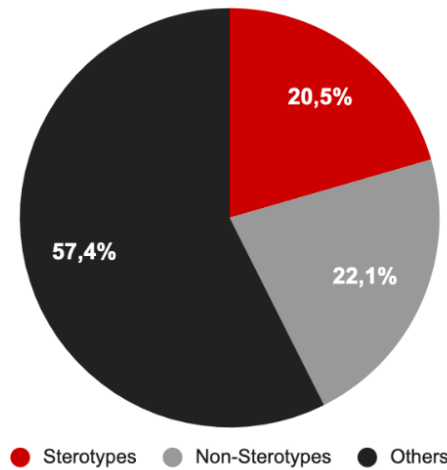
The Bechdel test reveals female characters were less underrepresented in female-directed films compared to male-directed films, but only slightly.

### Stereotypical Representation

A directed content analysis was then used to analyze the stereotypical representation of females in male-directed films compared to the representation in female-directed films.

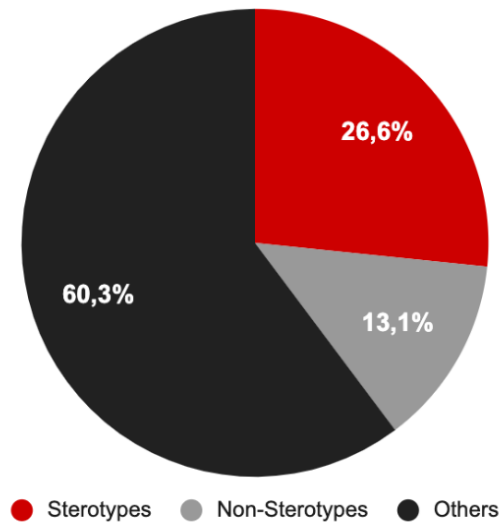
*Overall Time Spent on Stereotypical and NonStereotypical Representation*

**Proportion of Time Spent on Stereotypical and NonSterotypical Female Representation in Female-Directed Films**



**Figure 1:** *Female Directed Films Stereotypical Representation*

**Proportion of Time Spent on Stereotypical and NonSterotypical Female Representation in Male-Directed Films**



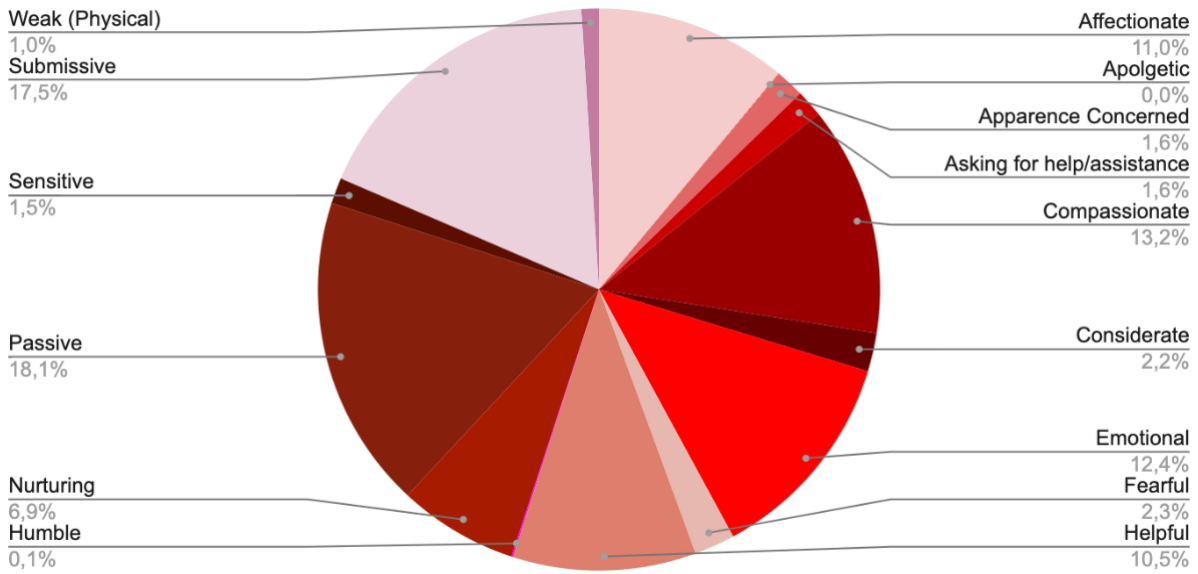
**Figure 2:** *Male Directed Films Stereotypical Representation*

These results revealed male directors had a higher portion of their films dedicated to female stereotypes than female directors did, as stereotypes consisted of 26.6% of their films while stereotypes only consisted of 20.5% of the female directors’ films. Furthermore, female directors had a higher portion of female non-stereotypical representation in their films than male directors did, with non-stereotypes consisting of 22.1% of their films compared to the 13.1%

proportion in male-directed films. These results suggest female directors were less likely to display females in stereotypical ways and more likely to display females in non-stereotypical ways, but not substantially so.

*Specific Top Stereotypes Founded in Female/Male directed films*

**Proportion of Female Stereotypes Found in Female Directed Film**

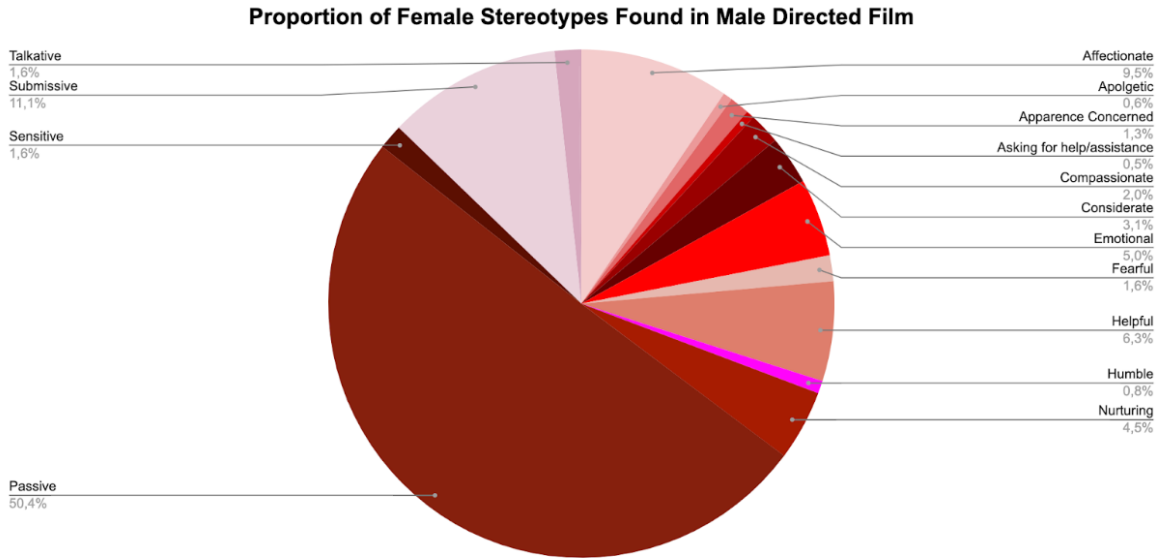


\*There were no talkative codes found for female-directed films.

The top 5 most frequent stereotypes found in female-directed films were **passive** (18.1%), **submissive** (17.5%), **compassionate** (13.2%), **emotional** (12.4%), and **affectionate** (11.0%)

**Figure 3:** *Female Directed Films Specific Stereotypical Distribution*





\* The stereotype of “Weak” was recorded but only 7 seconds were found, so its small percentage could not be seen on the graph.

The top 5 most frequent stereotypes found in male-directed films were **passive** (50.4%), **submissive** (11.1%), **affectionate** (9.5%), **helpful** (6.3%), and **emotional** (5.0%).

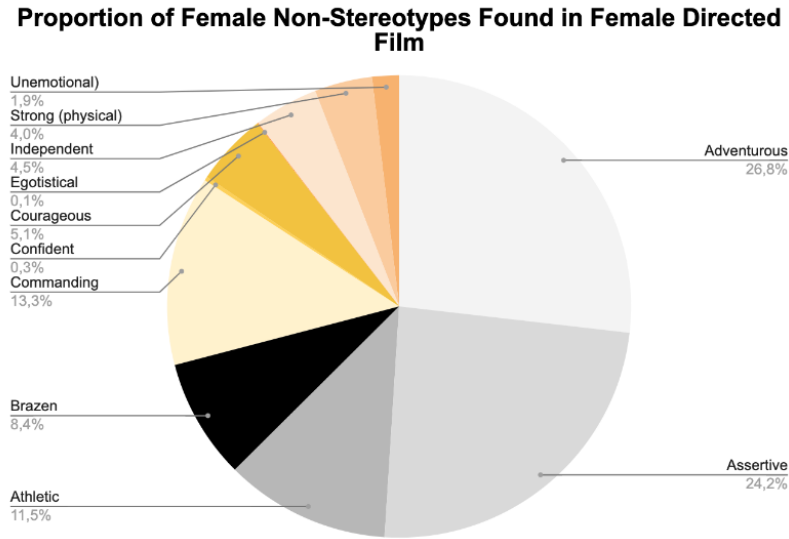
**Figure 4:** *Male Directed Films Specific Stereotypical Distribution*

When comparing the specific top 5 stereotypes in male-directed films and female-directed films, passive, submissive, emotional, and affectionate were common in both. This means females, regardless of the director’s gender, were consistently inactive, obedient/compliant towards another’s authority, illustrating excess emotion, and displaying tender/warm regards to others. This suggests female directors and male directors represented female characters in similar, stereotypical ways. However, male-directed films and female-directed films differed heavily in that a clear majority of the stereotypes in male-directed were dedicated to the specific stereotype of passive while no specific stereotype dominated the majority of stereotypes in female-directed films.

When comparing the top 5 non-stereotypes in male-directed films and female-directed films, assertive, commanding, and brazen were common in both. This means females were consistently insisting upon or declaring a right or claim, acting as authoritative figures, and exhibiting signs of bold, brash behavior. However, though female directors and male directors were similar in their non-stereotypical representation of female characters, male directors still had a smaller portion of non-stereotypical representation in general (Table 2).

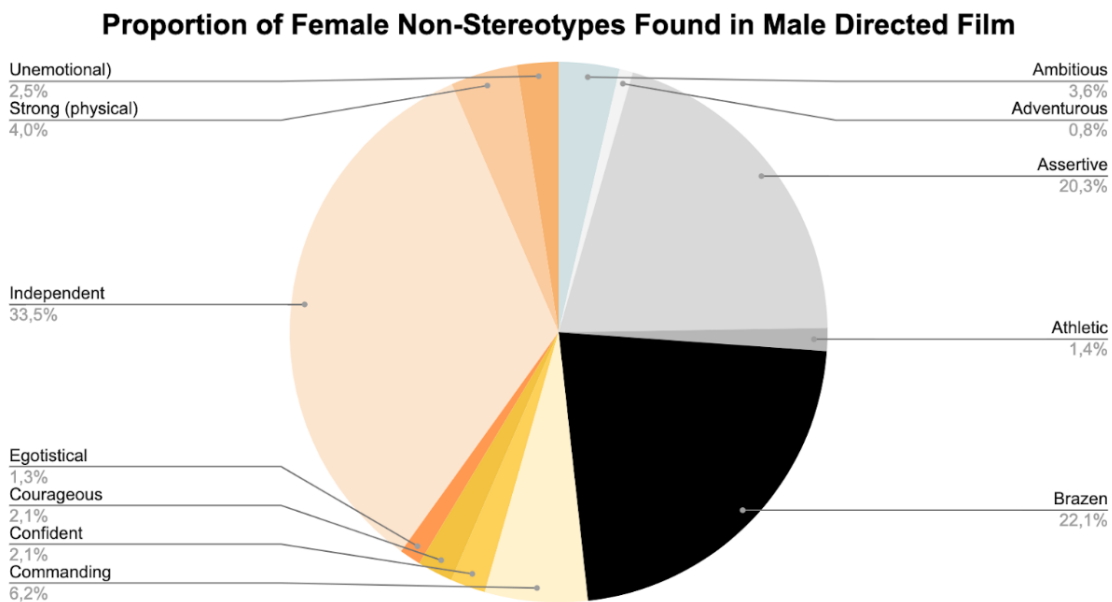
Overall, in both the top 5 stereotypes and non-stereotypes, female directors and male directors shared at least 3/5 of the top stereotypes/non-stereotypes in their films. This suggests that female directors and male directors are similar in their representation of female characters from a content standpoint. However, male directors were less varied in their stereotypical representation of females, and they had a smaller portion of their films dedicated to non-female stereotypical representation overall.

*Specific Top Non-Stereotypes Founded in Female/Male directed films*



\*There were no ambitious, boasting/bragging, or competitive codes found in female-directed films. The top 5 most frequent non-stereotypes found in female-directed films were **adventurous** (26.8%), **assertive** (24.2%), **commanding** (13.3%), **athletic** (11.5%), and **brazen** (8.4%).

**Figure 5:** *Female Directed Films Specific Non-Stereotypical Distribution*



\*No boasting/bragging codes were found in male-directed films. The top 5 most frequent non-stereotypes found in male-directed films were **independent** (33.5%), **brazen** (22.1%), **assertive** (20.3%), **commanding** (6.2%), and **strong** (4.0%).

**Figure 6:** *Male-Directed Films Specific Non-Stereotypical Distribution*

## Discussion

This study aimed to answer the question “How do male and female directors compare in their portrayal of females in independent films from 2021?” This study answered this question by using the Bechdel test to code for female underrepresentation and a directed content analysis to code for the female stereotypical representation.

The first portion of this study used the Bechdel test to assess the portrayal of women in 6 independent films from 2021. It was found that male directors were more likely to underrepresent female characters, but only slightly as 3/3 of female-directed films passed the Bechdel test while 2/3 of male-directed films passed. The Bechdel test results were consistent with Kunsey’s study, which found that 2 more female-directed films passed the Bechdel test than male-directed films in 2018 high-grossing films (1). This research demonstrates that regardless of genre, female-directed film, as a whole, was associated with slightly higher rates of female representation, but not substantially so.

The second portion of this study used a directed content analysis to examine how female and male directors compared their stereotypical representation of women. It found that female directors were less likely to perpetuate female stereotypes in the film as they had a lower percentage of their films dedicated to stereotypes (Female:20.5%, Male: 26.6%) and a larger percentage of their films dedicated to non-stereotypes (F: 22.1%, Male:13.1%). This supports Kunsey’s study as females in female-directed films was also less likely to be portrayed stereotypically, as they had more agency and were more likely to dispel traditional stereotypes about women (2019). This also suggests that female directors may be able to represent women less stereotypically due to their own experiences living as a female (Karniouchina, 2022).

However, male directors and female directors were still fairly similar in their female representation as they shared 4/5 of their respective top stereotypes (passive, submissive, emotional, and affectionate) and 3/5 of their respective top non-stereotypes (assertive, commanding, and brazen). For instance, in the female-directed film *Knocking*, the character is seen just watching others move her furniture for her (passive), leaving when others tell her to (submissive), crying (emotional), and kissing others (affectionate). While, in the male-directed film *Poser*, the character just sits at a club watching others (passive), sticking out her tongue when commanded to (submissive), crying (emotional), and kissing others (affectionate). Thus, these females, regardless of the director's gender, were represented in very similar, stereotypical ways. This pattern was similarly displayed for non-stereotypes too. For instance, in the female-directed film *Mayday*, female characters exhibit wanting to what is coming (assertive), commanding others to shoot a gun when she tells them to (commanding), and shooting multiple gunshots into the air for fun (brazen). While in *The Starling*, the female character insists that she must leave work for her family nights (assertive), commands that someone else grab her a towel (commanding), and tells others “she doesn’t give a shit” when others tell her she doesn’t have the right to visit (brazen). These similarities in representation, regardless of the gender of the director, question Karniouchina’s argument that female directors will represent females differently due to their own experience being female (2022), and it doesn’t support the theory that female directors usually challenge dominant representations of female identity in their storytelling (Hankin, 2007), as their portrayal of females appears to be very similar to the dominant representations shown by male directors.

Despite these findings, female characters in male-directed films were found to be more monolithic. Not one stereotype dominated female-directed films, while the stereotype of passive dominated male-directed films (comprising 50.4% of the stereotypes in male-directed films). For instance, the female character in the female-directed film *Bergman Island* is seen holding hands (affectionate), asking other people how they feel (considerate), offering to lend other people items (helpful), and following instructions for mass periods of time (submissive), the character in the male-directed film *Vortex* spends the majority of the duration simply sitting and staring, inactive, and therefore passive for the majority of the time. And while this trait didn’t necessarily dominate all male-directed films, it was ultimately the most frequent stereotype overall. This suggests even when female directors stereotypically represented females, these females were still more complex than the passive females in male-directed films.

## Limitations

This study's conclusions were heavily reliant on the codes from the directed content analysis. Although the films were watched at least 2 times each to maximize the potential for accuracy, the coding process was performed by one person. This limited the accuracy of the results as certain scenes/actions could be identified as several stereotypes, so the code's assignment was partially dependent on the person coding. However, peers were consulted when codes could've been assigned to multiple categories to gain consensus on the category of code.

The stereotype of passive may also be inflated in male-directed films. In the male-directed film, *Vortex*, the lead female character is constantly sitting with a blank stare on her face. So those scenes were marked as passive, which increased the total time spent on female stereotypes in male-directed films. But it is unclear if the character was behaving this way because of her dementia or because of the director's decisions/views on how females should be represented. Moreover, it would be difficult to determine if a female director would have represented the character the same way due to the character's dementia. Furthermore, the gender of the director cannot solely explain the differences in representation. Writers, cinematographers, editors, and other filmmakers may have contributed to these differences as well.

## Conclusion and Future Directions

This study compared the portrayal of female characters in male-directed and female-directed films by solely analyzing females' actions and dialogue. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of this female representation, future studies can look at how females are referred to by other characters as well. This will add to the present study as many stereotypes and prejudice against women can be revealed in how others speak about them. Furthermore, instead of solely focusing on female characters, future studies can examine male characters as well in female and male-directed films. This will allow the exact discrepancies between the representation of male characters and female characters in male-directed and female-directed films to see how stereotypical/non-stereotypical females are portrayed in comparison to male characters, and if the gender of the director affects this. Poor female representation can influence the way in which others view females (Behm- Morawitz and Mastro, 2008) and affect the behavior of females themselves, as they may be more likely to imitate these negative representations they see on screen (Sharma et. al 2021). This, in turn, perpetuates gender stereotypes in society. Research on how female directors and male directors compare in their portrayal of females can test if female directors can ameliorate negative female representation in film and indirectly alleviate gender stereotypes in society. This present study illustrates that in independent films, female-directed films portray females in better, more complex ways than male-directed films, but not by a substantial difference. Ultimately, the film industry can consider employing more female directors to potentially improve the on-screen representation of females, but more work would need to be done as the results indicate that female directors are not associated with drastic improvements in female representation.

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## Appendix

**Table 1:** *Female Stereotypes*

Code	Definition	Examples
<b>Affectionate</b>	Tender, warm regard toward another person, object or animal (England et al., 2011). Saying “I love you,” or physically displaying attachment through an embrace or kiss	Lies on the beach and kisses the woman
<b>Apologetic</b>	Expression and/or excuse for a fault, insult, etc. (O’Neil, 2016)	“I’m sorry”
<b>Appearance Concerned</b>	“Adjusting physical appearance for the purpose of making it look better or to draw attention to it” (England et al., 2011, p. 559).	Applies eyeliner in the mirror
<b>Asking for Help/Assistance:</b>	Asking for guidance or help with something. [O’Neil, 2016]	"Yeah, but I can’t. So can you help me?"
<b>Compassionate</b>	Feelings of concern or sympathy for others. [O’Neil, 2016]	"I do not condone the slaughter of poor, innocent creatures."
<b>Considerate</b>	Respectful of others, their situations, feelings, and commitments. [O’Neil, 2016]	"Do you mind if I interview you for my podcast?"
<b>Emotional</b>	Illustrating excessive emotions/feelings, positive or negative. [O’Neil, 2016]	Cries and yells
<b>Fearful</b>	Frightened, anxious, scared, skittish [O’Neil, 2016]	Lets out a startled scream when she sees someone else
<b>Helpful</b>	Offering assistance to another. [O’Neil, 2016]	Runs to go help the woman who jumped off the window

Code	Definition	Examples
<b>Humble</b>	modest, respectful, and unassuming. [O’Neil, 2016]	"I don't really perform, though.I just have notebooks filled with lyrics"
<b>Nurturing</b>	Motherly, caretaking, comforting another, gentle, kind. [O’Neil, 2016]	Pets and gently buries dead bird.
<b>Passive</b>	Being influenced or inactive, not participating or influenced to action through other means such as another person. [O’Neil, 2016]	She watches as they move her furniture
<b>Sensitive</b>	Perceptive awareness/knowledgeability toward issues and emotions (England et al., 2011)	"I mean, that's what inspires people, being real."
<b>Submissive</b>	Obedient, compliant, surrender to authority or of another [O’Neil, 2016].	Man tells her to come back, and she agrees.
<b>Talkative</b>	Verbally communicating in an excessive manner; chatty, gossipy. [O’Neil, 2016]	"I've been going to more shows....finding new sounds ...that was the first performance art piece I've ever seen"
<b>Weak (physically)</b>	Frail, lacking body strength. [O’Neil, 2016]	Pushed/tied by a man on the bed.

**Table 2:** *Female Non-Stereotypes*

Code	Definition	Examples
<b>Ambitious</b>	Desire to achieve a goal. [O’Neil, 2016]	"For this podcast, I hope to investigate these artists, and research them"
<b>Adventurous</b>	Exploring and searching for something new and/or unknown [O’Neil, 2016]	"I think the appeal for me is... creating the space or environment for something completely new"

Code	Definition	Examples
<b>Assertive</b>	Insistence upon a right or claim, the action of declaring or positively stating...a strong, direct assertion of a position or idea” (England et al., 2011).	"you know I know you stole that song...What, you think you're just gonna keep lying about it?...Like you're just gonna pretend like you wrote all those songs”
<b>Athletic</b>	Actions which require physical abilities in order to accomplish, such as running or swimming [O’Neil, 2016].	Female bikes.
<b>Boasting/Bragging:</b>	Excessive pride and exaggeration of oneself or of an object. [O’Neil, 2016]	I’m so much better than you, it’s unreal!
<b>Brazen:</b>	Bold, shameless, brash [O’Neil, 2016]	Just goes through the door unasked, and rummages through his belongings.
<b>Commanding</b>	Intimidating or imposing, authoritative, a leader. [O’Neil, 2016]	[slams against the door with a knife] "Open...the door”
<b>Competitive</b>	Desire to compete against others to succeed at a goal [O’Neil, 2016]	“I want to beat her and win”
<b>Confident</b>	Self-assured in own abilities [O’Neil, 2016]	"I feel confident. I have stuff to say. ... I feel really sure of myself.”
<b>Courageous</b>	Brave, daring, no fear [O’Neil, 2016]	Stands alone in the middle of the train tracks in pitch black.
<b>Egotistical</b>	Conceited, vain, selfish [O’Neil, 2016]	Amy insists on wearing white to the bride’s wedding
<b>Independent</b>	autonomy; not controlled by others or not following the authority of another; not dependent or reliant on others [O’Neil, 2016]	Luggs all her luggage by herself through a tunnel and uphill towards her hotel
<b>Strong</b>	exerting power/toughness physically onto or towards another or an object (England et al., 2011).	Raises knife to his throat and bangs it against the door.



Code	Definition	Examples
<b>Unemotional</b>	Repression of emotion, indifference to pleasure or pain...unemotional in response to something that may seem to warrant an emotional response, such as death” . [O’Neil, 2016]	[A picture of molly and another woman kissing appears] Indifferent look appears on Molly's face.