The portrayal of Women and Gender Roles in Films

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Abstract— This paper is about the The portrayal of Women and Gender Roles in Films. This study sheds light on how particular themes in movies can be interpreted, and how these movies influence how people view themselves in terms of their gender. It also suggests how people behave in light with their gender.

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Introduction

Media plays a big role of influencing the people's daily lives this is because it influences how people view the world in general. Mass media is an agent of socialization and from this role; it has been attacked by an array of criticism from different portions of the society. There is a wide range of media among them television shows, movies, the radio, newspapers, advertisements and many more. In these many forms of media, there are images of men and women. These images are depicted in different ways and with different characteristics and having different meanings. Social psychologists suggest that these images often alter the way people perceive the social realities. Manatu, (2003) argues that these images can therefore play a very crucial role in stimulating anti-social behaviors such as violence, crime and delinquency among others. To people such as the critical feminists, mass media is seen as an agent of male chauvinism. This systematically depicts a male dominated socio-cultural, political and economic order. These depictions come about from the continuous reinforcement of the negative gender role stereotype of women. Research has been made on a variety of movies in order to analyze the gender representation in movies. This study will analyze the forms and patterns of portrayal of women and their gender roles in Nollywood movies and in Hollywood movies. In Nollywood, two movies, Ije and Mr. and Mrs. Both acted in 2012 will be analyzed. Sex in the City 1 and 2 will also be analyzed. The results obtained will help shed light on how" the man" and" the woman" are perceived. The findings from the chosen movies revealed that women were perceived as the weaker sex and, consequently, as sex objects suggesting that women are stereotyped in the various films and movies.

Literature Review

An extensive research has been done to cover many different forms of media. Aside from television, radio, cartoons, music and games, new forms of media are being introduced through the Internet. Information from prime-time television is the most commonly analyzed data in research. A wide range of methods has been used to analyze this data with the common methods being discourse analysis and quantitative content analysis (Bazzini et al., 2007). At times, political messages and ideologies are passed in films and movies which may be seen to represent the ideas of the opposition at the time.

Lauzen & Dozier (2005) suggest that the way some characters are depicted in a show can represent their political and social views at that point. For instance, the feminist's movement against patriarchic oppression of women, or the black rights movements towards giving black people the same rights as the white people is political. The movie *Pretty Woman* is viewed differently by different audiences for instance; the black feminists see it as spectators in terms of the different genres of gender, race and class among other genres. *Pretty*

Woman can be said to have a Disney plot since it describes the life of Vivian, an attractive young woman who lived in the streets but she ends up marrying Edward, a handsome and rich man, who turns her into a classy and descent lady. Vivian is the heroine of the movie but she is portrayed as being a street hooker and belonging to a lower class. She is turned into a proper lady by a man who belongs to the upper class. This portrays women as weak and dependent on men for survival.

This research about feminity and feminism will focus on the television show *Sex and the City* based on the book with the same name (Akass & McCabe, 2004; Arthurs 2003; Southard, 2008). In this show, the characters have certain characteristic whereby the main characters are mainly white females who are well educated and economically dependent suggesting that this show was written during a post-feministic era. Arguments have been made for and against this statement by scholars who argue that the concept of feminism is dynamic and ever changing and that there are different ways of looking at it as per the context of television shows. Feminity can be seen to represent the behavioral expectations of women. It can also encompass women's sexual attractiveness to men (Bazzini et al., 2007).

Theoretical Approaches to Gender Paradigm

Social constructivism is an ontological viewpoint harboring the basic idea that the world has a social foundation suggesting that the world is socially constructed. This is about the social order on how people perceive the world and how they distinguish between right and wrong (Good, 2008). It is crucial to note that gender roles have been constructed interestingly in the set movies.

Language is the main medium through which humans interact since it creates meaning. According to Hall, language is neither the property of the sender nor the receiver of meanings. When shared language produces meaning and this is when representation takes place. Another approach to gender paradigm is the discursive approach. This particular approach was influenced by Michael Faoulcault and it spins around the production of knowledge and meaning (Lind & Brzuzy, 2008)

Discussions of Findings

The results of these findings will be discussed in line with the objectives of the study. Women in the African films fit into old frames in which they are portrayed as sex objects and objects to fulfill the desires of men. They are also seen as domestic servants and wicked mother-in-laws who always stir trouble for others. The few working class women are the subordinates in big companies and the young ladies have been portrayed as promiscuous (Jamieson & Romer, 2008). They are seen to be weak when they resort to use their sexual appeal to get material gains and possessions from men. In these movies, women

are the cause of misery to their homes and even get blamed for the deaths of their husbands.

For instance, Susan Abah, the main female character in Mr.and Mrs., is a domestic servant throughout the movie as she is seen in the kitchen cooking or just doing household chores. Susan was sexually abused as she suffered marital rape from her husband. Another female character, Linda, who works for Susan's friend, is being sexually abused by Linda's husband. Anyawu, the lead female character in Ije, is also suffering the same fate. She is being sexually abused, first by her husband and then by his allies and associates. Anyawu's sister, Chioma, also suffered sexual abuse from a lawyer, who happened to be defending Anyawu in the murder trial.

Analysis

Men and women perform different roles and at times these roles do not hold true for all individuals. However, a majority of people live in accordance with these roles. Society assigns classes of social roles to both male and female individuals, in the same manner that society views the different sexes. These gender roles can be a hindrance to both men and women as they can limit the capabilities of what males and females can do. Gender roles can actually enslave individuals as they can force them to be what others want them to be.

Through social tyranny, the society will suppress the choices of males and females pushing them into certain behavioral modes, personality characteristics and occupational roles as approved by the society. Men will, therefore, have an opportunity to develop their talents (Busby, 2005) while women will be denied such an opportunity. For instance, Indian films depict women as housekeepers who need to bear enough heirs for the family. They also show that women should not have career but the men are portrayed as being able and learned who enjoy white collar jobs. This will in turn discourage women from schooling and formal education thus limiting their career choices to those careers which do not require too much time outside the family home.

Conclusion

Gender representation in media influences how people perceive gender issues since some specific gender roles uplift and strengthen the images of men. These movies clearly show the gender power structure where men are depicted as the stronger sex. Although some women in movies are portrayed as being strong and independent, they cannot dispute the evident gender power structure. For instance, Carrie, who enjoys a good economic status from her writing career, agrees to get married even if she doesn't need it, in addition she does away with her dream wedding thus getting married in a small city hall wedding just for the sake of someone. When she cheats, she is given a big black diamond ring just to remind her that she is married. Even though Carrie comes out as being strong and independent, she is still seen as being dependent on a man at the same time. A variety of scenes portray her as being submissive. This supports the gender ideology that women have to be submissive and dependent on men.

As mentioned in the introduction, this paper adds to the literature on how genders are represented in media. Specifically it looked at gender representations in African and Hollywood movies. It is interesting to note that there is less gender equality when it comes to gender representation in movies. It would, therefore, be in order if this research concluded that these gender stereotypes affect the way the normal people view life. Movies showcase a lot of themes, gender is among

the greatest and most popular genre and it should be approached with caution.

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