University Honors Theses
University Honors College

5-23-2019

Testing the Bechdel Test

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Abstract

This paper examines the Bechdel Test and its accuracy in measuring the progressiveness of films. The Bechdel Test is a set of parameters that are used to measure a film's representation of women; for a film to pass the Bechdel Test, two named women must talk to each other about something other than a man. In the United States, 40% of films still fail this test. The representation of women in film, especially teenage girls, creates a negative stereotype; it shows that they are aggressive and only care about their male love interests. The experiment in this paper compares two different movie scenes, one passing the test and one not, to measure whether perceived progressiveness, acceptability, portrayal of sex in media, sex roles, and which sex wrote the movie differ in either of the scenes. The scenes come from two different teen romance movies, both Netflix Originals. The paper critiques the Bechdel Test and the creation of new tests to show the disparity of gender in movies.

Testing the Bechdel Test

In the 21st century, women are running for president, gaining more spots in congress, and advancing in society; however, in film and television, women are still portrayed in stereotypical and discriminatory ways. The Bechdel Test critiques a movie or television series' portrayal of women. To pass the Bechdel Test, two female characters who have names must have a conversation with each other about something other than a man. According to the *Washington Post,* many films and TV shows fail the Bechdel Test (Rosenberg, 2015). This test attempts to acknowledge the disparity between female and male characters in media. According to the *Daily Edge*, even *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, with a running screen time of more than ten hours and several main female characters, fails to present a scenario not dedicated to a male character (Woods, 2018).

In 1985, an American cartoonist named Alison Bechdel noticed that on TV, men had a wide variety of conversations, while women's conversation focused mostly on men. Inspired by this inequality, she drafted a measure to expose media gender bias: The Bechdel Test. The test emerged from Bechdel's 1985 comic "The Rule," which showed two women going to a movie and one of them discussing the parameters for the Bechdel Test (Rosenberg, 2015). The purpose of this study is to critically examine the Bechdel Test as a standard for the portrayal of female characters in media.

Feminism

The feminist movement advocates for women's rights, while simultaneously addressing flaws that discriminate and oppress women around the world. Feminist advocate bell hooks wrote, "Feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. The

problem is sexism. And that clarity helps us remember that all of us, female and male, have been socialized from birth on to accept sexist thought and action" (2000, p. viii).

Each wave of the feminist movement has evolved to represent the social movements of that time. The first wave of feminism began in the 1920s with the women's suffrage movement, which helped the second wave take off to, "establish ground that was created during the earlier movement" (Hunsberger, 2017, p. 17). The idea of civil rights movements became clear to the women who were fighting for feminism (Mendes, 2011; Hunsberger, 2017). Even though the first wave began nearly 100 years ago, many of the same goals are still sought in current feminism such as domestic violence justice, equal pay, and greater job opportunities (Mendes, 2011).

The second wave began in the late 1960s because even though women had the right to vote, the inequality of genders was still evident; the first wave ended after women gained the right to vote, but the second wave sustained which, "helped the women in the 1960s develop new ideas while staying connected to the established ground that was created during the earlier movement" (Hunsberger, 2017, p. 16). The most recent and third wave represents the social climate of today, with the newest generation of feminists demanding the end to perceived social injustices, from sexual assault to the lack of women in power (hooks, 2000). The term "post-feminism" relates to the third wave movement, with people arguing that the work of the feminist movement is complete, and any future endeavors are useless because feminism has already been achieved.

Portrayal and Representation of Women in Media

The way women are portrayed in film often perpetuates a negative image; "stereotype threat research indicates that if women see themselves as continually represented in less than

favorable ways in the media, then their own ability to achieve…goals towards success is undermined" (Ezzedeen, 2013, p. 250). In many teen films which highlight a female lead or female lead groups, the girls are often shown as aggressive, capable of stabbing their own friends in the back for the sake of a male love interests (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). The focus of teenage girls as aggressive social elites trying to climb the social ladder is not an uncommon portrayal of women in teen films; "research indicates that this characterization may not be representative of the true nature of female friendships. Some studies suggest that social aggression is equally common among males, and that females sometimes engage in physical aggression" (Behm-Morawitz et. al., 2008, p. 133). By failing to recognize this trend, teen movies rely on the stereotype that teenage girls are "mean girls," indicating that they are the more socially aggressive gender and less likely to support other women in their quest for a male love interest.

Research by Professor Ezzedeen (2013) states that "most women on television are Caucasian, young, thin, and portrayed in traditional roles that suggest female inferiority" (p. 248). Women in media are often still portrayed as inferior beings, reporting to or being overpowered by men, playing into the stereotype that women are typically under the dictatorship of a man. In addition, female characters are designed with a greater sexual appeal and are more sexually objectified than their male counterparts (Ezzedeen, 2013). Furthermore, this trend only represents women in front of the camera and not women who work behind the scenes. According to the San Diego State University's Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film, only 16% of women are directors or producers (Ezzedeen, 2013).

According to *The New York Times,* there is a software that analyzes scripts of movies to see if the script is "equitable for men and women" (Ryzik, 2018, sec. 2). This software is meant

to collect data on female interactions, their roles, and how involved they are in the plot of a film. After analyzing 10 Oscar-winning movies from 2018, the software revealed that only one of the movies passed the Bechdel Test (Ryzik, 2018). The Geena Davis Inclusion Quotient (GD-IQ) is another software that analyzes movies to see how many women are present, how many women talk, what genre the movie is, etc. After analyzing more than 200 movies, GD-IQ found that only 17% of the highest grossing movies in 2015 had a female lead, and most of the female leads were comedic women (Geena Davis Institution, n.d.). In contrast, male characters had double the amount of screen time and spoke more than female characters. In movies with female leads, the male characters spoke almost the same as the female leads, but with movies containing male leads, the female characters spoke less than the male lead (Geena Davis Institution, n.d.).

Cultivation Theory

A common pattern is that the portrayal of women in movies leads to the acceptance that these portrayals are reflective of how women act and look in reality. Cultivation theory examines how watching television influences how viewers see the everyday world; "those who spend more time watching television are more likely to perceive the real world in ways that reflect the most common and recurrent messages of the world of fictional television" (Morgan & Sannahan, 2010, p. 337). Cultivation theory works through people watching television, and then having warped ideas about reality based on what they watched. George Gerbner (1960), a professor of communication, explained that cultivation theory worked through institution, messages, and publics (Morgan et. al., 2010). The mass institution is what develops the message that goes to the public. The institution can shape the kind of message it wants the public to understand and sends that message through television. Gerbner focused on mass communication and the evolution of television, and how its continual evolution began to more heavily influence the lives of the

people who watched it. Gerbner also focused on how communication works with its interaction through messages, and how these messages could be relayed through television, which transferred into cultivation theory: people believing reality through the lens of television. By viewing certain stereotypes through television, it could potentially affect how people see the world and their way of acting in the social world (Morgan et. al., 2010).

The idea that society can be influenced by media is explored in a study done by Custers and Van den Bulck (2003). By exploiting sexual violence, sexual crimes, and the trauma of the victims of these sexual crimes, the study argues that this representation of violence against women makes them fear violence from men and emboldens an urge for men to be violent toward women. "The principal proposition of cultivation theory is that over time the worldview of heavy television viewers starts to resemble the picture of the world presented by television" (Custers et al., 2013, p. 99). Therefore, the representation that the world is violent against women perpetuates that real-world view to the audience who is exposed to this violence.

The common scene of two females interacting with each other and only talking about a man may cultivate the idea that this conversation type is normal; this may perpetuate an image to viewers that these are normal interactions between women. Coupled with the stereotypical portrayal of teenage girls, this could cause a dangerous misperception of girls and women (Behm-Morawitz et. al., 2008). Movies that do not pass the Bechdel Test may give people a warped idea of female/female interactions in real life. This kind of representation can cultivate a negative attitude toward women. In teen films, when the socialite females argue, backstab, and display socially aggressive behaviors, it is cultivating a certain attitude toward young girls. This could also influence young girls and give them an idea of who they are supposed to be, if that is how they are represented on television and film.

It is argued that individuals adopt gender characteristics in part by monitoring the rewards and consequences associated with others' behavior. Thus, representation of female characters in the media would be expected to play a role in viewers' perceptions regarding gender identity, which may ultimately influence attitudes and beliefs about appropriate gender roles (Behm-Morawitz et. al., 2008, p. 132).

Bechdel Test

Although the Bechdel Test was meant to be a stepping-stone for feminism within media, it has been lackluster in its abilities. For example, feminism promotes women's equality to men, which the Bechdel Test does address as it recognizes that male characters in media often talk about broader topics than female characters do. However, in much of Hollywood, female characters regularly only talk about men, which is why the test was invented in the first place (Smith, 2017).

Many other scholars and writers have acknowledged that the Bechdel Test does not fully investigate all the inequalities in movies and media (Hickey, Koeze, Dottle, & Wezerek, 2017; O'Meara, 2016; Rosenberg, 2015; Woods, 2018). Decades later, numerous movies still do not pass the test, which does not bode well for the advancement of feminism in the media. With the media constantly growing, the fact that movies still do not pass the Bechdel Test suggests that feminism is still fighting for equal representation of women in film. A research team at Duke University analyzed 1,794 films that were released between 1970 and 2013. Their data showed that about 60% of films pass the Bechdel Test, a steep rise from the 20% that passed between 1970 and 1974 (Smith, 2017). However, the Duke team also acknowledges that the Bechdel Test does little to analyze the depth of characters represented. For instance, the 2013 film *American Hustle* (2013) passed the Bechdel Test due to a short scene where two female characters talk about nail polish. Even though this is a low standard for female characters in media, 40% of American-made movies have still failed to pass the Bechdel Test since 2017 (Smith, 2017).

Encouraging movies to pass the test could potentially help more women become lead characters or help women break into director or producer roles in Hollywood. This idea was mentioned in *FiveThirtyEight,* a website that focuses on analysis and statistics; when asking the women of Hollywood what the next Bechdel Test should be, many indicated representation behind the camera or addressing the discrimination women of color face in media (Hickey et al., 2017). By holding Hollywood accountable for its blatant sexism and discrimination, more tests and regulations are being discussed: "is there a black woman in the film? Did the main woman end up dead? Was the supporting cast at least fifty percent women?" (Hickey et al., 2017, sec. 1). By not just accepting the Bechdel Test as the final test of how women are portrayed by Hollywood, scholars and skeptics are able to broaden the expectations of Hollywood when it comes to women of color: "in certain ways, The Bechdel Test is more likely to conceal than reveal. Crucially, it disregards which kinds of women are granted dialogue, thus ignoring the silencing of women of colour, women of certain ages, and those for whom English is not a first language" (O'Meara, 2016, p. 1121).

To examine how audiences may perceive scenes that do or do not pass the Bechdel Test, I propose the following research questions:

> **RQ1**: Compared to the scene from *Kissing Booth* which does not pass the Bechdel Test, how does the scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* fair on progressiveness?

> **RQ2**: Compared to the scene from *Kissing Booth* which does not pass the Bechdel Test, how does the scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* fair on acceptability?

> **RQ3**: Compared to the scene from *Kissing Booth* which does not pass the Bechdel Test, how does the scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* fair on portrayal of sex in media?

RQ4: Compared to the scene from *Kissing Booth* which does not pass the Bechdel Test,

how does the scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* fair on sexism?

RQ5: Compared to the scene from *Kissing Booth* which does not pass the Bechdel Test,

how does the scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* fair on how likely it was written by a

male or female?

Methods

Participants

The methods used in this experiment seek to examine the effectiveness of the Bechdel

Test. By showing two different scenes from two different movies, and without telling the

participants about the Bechdel Test prior to the survey, the experiment seeks to examine whether

a scene that does pass the Bechdel Test is progressive in its representation of women. By using

two scenes and randomly assigning who sees what scene, one scene passing the test and one not,

the experiment seeks to recognize how individuals interpret the scenes on a scale of sexism and

of progressiveness.

In this experiment, there were a total of 50 Portland State University (PSU) participants.

All were undergraduate students in PSU communication classes. The survey was posted on the

participant's D2L homepage in their respective communication course. These participants were

compensated with extra credit in the communication classes where the survey was distributed.

Students that chose not to participate in the survey but still desired extra credit were given an

alternative assignment to gain the extra credit. The participants had 12 days to complete the

survey for extra credit.

Of the 50 participants who took the survey, 34 participants completed the survey in full.

Of these 34 participants, 14 identified as male, 18 identified as female, and 2 identified as other

or queer. The mean age of the participants was 23 years old ($SD =7.8$). The race of the

participants included 52% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic/Latinx, 2% African American, and 4% Asian

and other.

Procedure

Before completing the online survey, participants were shown one of the two scenes from

two different movies, randomized by Qualtrics. Participants were not informed of the Bechdel

Test prior to taking and completing the survey. After the participants watched their randomly

selected scene, all participants were given the same questions regarding the movie scenes.

The first scene was from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* (2018), which passed the Bechdel

Test. Twenty-three participants watched this scene. In this scene, the protagonist, Sierra, was in

the bedroom of the most popular girl in school, Veronica, trying to help her study. Veronica's

mom bursts into her room, followed by her younger sisters who are dressed in pageant gear. The

two sisters began running and screaming in the room, jumping on Veronica's bed, hollering and

making a fuss. The mom starts screaming at the sisters, asking if they smudged their eyeliner

while Veronica hits her sisters with pillows, yelling at them to get off the bed. Sierra looked at

the scene uncomfortably. Veronica asks her sisters to stop screaming while the mom begins to

count to three. The sisters continue to scream and Veronica yells at them to get off. Before the

mom counted to three, the young girls got off the bed, and the mom asked if their tassels were in

knots. After the sisters left, the mom looked at Veronica and told her that she can no longer skip

cheerleading practice because if she did, she would get fat and no longer be able to fit in her

outfit. The mom exited the room and Veronica slammed the door. The mom yelled through the

door asking if Veronica slammed the door, to which Veronica yells back that she did. This scene

passed the Bechdel Test, however, it portrayed the social elite female as less than interested in

school work because the school "nerd" was helping her study; in addition, the only reason the less popular protagonist was helping the more popular girl study is because the popular girl wanted to appear smart for the popular boy in school, which relays the stereotype that females cannot get along in film because they are after a love interest (Behm-Morawitz et. al., 2008).

The second scene was from *Kissing Booth* (2018) and did not pass the Bechdel Test. Twenty-seven participants watched this scene. In this scene, the protagonist, Elle, is approached by the most popular girl in school, Mia, in the school cafeteria. Every character in this scene is a teenage girl. Mia encourages Elle to sit at their table. Elle then asks Mia if she has a crush on her best friend. Mia's face appears disgusted at the thought of liking someone with such low social stature. However, Mia says he is cute and initiates a joke at which all four girls at the table laugh. The second popular girl asks Elle about her fundraiser event, the kissing booth, and Elle says in response that her best friend's big brother, the most attractive and popular boy in school, likes one of the three popular girls. Elle states that if the girl the popular boy likes is working at the booth, then he will go to the booth to kiss the popular girl. All the girls squeal in excitement. Then, Mia says that they will all work the booth and that Elle is now one of them (a member of the popular girl group). Elle says thanks and Mia tells her to call them all bitches.

The survey did not move to the next question until a minute had passed to ensure the participants watched the scene. After participants watched their selected scene, the participants could move on to the question part of the Qualtrics survey. The first question on the survey asks if the participants were able to see and hear the video. To remain consistent in the experiment and to avoid confusion or discrepancies, constant variables were used to determine the two movie scenes utilized in this experiment. Both movies were released in the same year (2018) and are both Netflix originals; both scenes are about a minute in length; and the screenplays for both

movies were written by women. Both are in the genre of drama and teen romance, and both

movies feature a white, teen, female protagonist and a white, teen, male love interest. In both

scenes, there are five people total and at least one of the people in the scene is a popular white

girl; in each scene there is the protagonist, outcast white female; and both scenes involve women

yelling at each other.

Measures

  Progressiveness. Progressiveness was measured with a bipolar-type scale used from

Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008). This scale looked at the kinds of attitudes viewers had toward

the portrayal of women in advertisements. Participants indicated on a 7-point bipolar scale the

measurement of what adjective describes the scene they watched with the following adjectives:

Pleasing to Irritating. An additional duo of adjectives were added to the scale to further relate to

the movie scene: Feminist to Anti-Feminist and Progressive to Traditional. This scale was

aggregated, using the three items ranged in the scale with each item containing two adjectives,

and one item was reverse coded to match the higher numbers indicated: the higher the number,

the less progressive the attitude. On average, participants rated a mean score of $M = 4.9$ (SD

$=1.1$, Cronbach's alpha $= .735$).

  Acceptability. Acceptability was measured with the same bipolar-type scale from

Zimmerman and Dahlberg (2008), continuing to look at the attitudes women had towards the

portrayal of women in advertisements. The adjectives for the acceptability scale ranged on a 7-

point bipolar scale as follows: Ethical to Unethical, Acceptable to me and my family to

Unacceptable to me and my family, and Morally right to Morally wrong. This scale was

aggregated, using the three items ranged in the scale with each item containing two adjectives.

On average, participants rated a mean score of $M = 4.6$ ($SD = 1.1$, Cronbach's alpha $= .703$).

Portrayal of sex in media. The next scale looks at attitudes toward the portrayal of sex in media (Zimmerman et al., 2008, p. 75). The participants of this survey were asked whether they agree or disagree with statements relating to sex in media. Participants indicated their level of agreement with the following statements: "In my opinion, there is too much sex on television programs," "There is too much degradation of women and men as sex objects in media today," and "In general, I like the use of sex in media," on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly agree* and 7 = *strongly disagree.* On average participants rated a mean score of $M = 1.2$ on the three question scale ($SD = 3.5$, Cronbach's alpha = .734).

Sex roles. Burt (1980) studied *sex role stereotyping:* "familial, work, or social roles" (1980, p. 218). This scale asks the participants whether they agree or disagree with statements relating to sex role stereotypes on a 7-point Likert scale where 1 = *strongly agree* and 7 = *strongly disagree.* Participants indicated their level of agreement with the following statements: "A man should fight when the woman he's with is insulted by another man," "It is acceptable for the woman to pay for the date," "A woman should be a virgin when she marries," "There is something wrong with a woman who doesn't want to marry and raise a family," "A wife should never contradict her husband in public," "It is better for a woman to use her feminine charm to get what she wants rather than ask for it outright," "It is acceptable for a woman to have a career, but marriage and family should come first," "It looks worse for a woman to be drunk than for a man to be drunk," and "There is nothing wrong with a woman going to a bar alone." Two of these items were reverse coded prior to aggregation. On average, participants rated a mean score of $M = 5.5$ ($SD = 11.3$, Cronbach's alpha = .842).

Sex that wrote the movie. Participants were asked which sex they thought the movie was written by, giving three options: male, female, or other.

Demographics. The final questions are based off demographics (Burt, 1980) asking for the participant's birth year, gender, and race.

Analysis

The results were determined using SPSS Statistics software version for Windows to use *t*-tests and find out the p-value. If the alpha *p* - value is $p < .05$, then the results were significant.

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Results

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RQ1 compares the *Kissing Booth* scene that does not pass the Bechdel Test to a scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser*, which does pass the Bechdel Test, on a scale of progressiveness. RQ1 seeks to see if a movie that passes the Bechdel Test is more progressive than a movie that does not pass. The findings show that there was no statistically significant difference in progressiveness between the scene that did pass the Bechdel Test and the scene that did not pass the test (*Sierra: M = 5.3, SD = 1.7; Kissing Booth: M = 4.6, SD = 1.0*) with $t(33) = 1.78$, $p =$ .085. RQ2 compares the *Kissing Booth* scene that does not pass the Bechdel Test to a scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser*, which does pass the Bechdel Test, on a scale of acceptability. There was also no significance difference in acceptability in either movie scene (*Sierra: M = 4.7, SD =* 1.3; *Kissing Booth: M = 4.5, SD = 0.8*) with $t(33) = 0.51$, $p = .61$. There was no significant difference for progressiveness and acceptability between both movie scenes.

RQ3 compares the *Kissing Booth* scene that does not pass the Bechdel Test to a scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser*, which does pass the Bechdel Test, on a scale of sexism, using sex and sex roles as the variables to scale RQ3 and RQ4. The findings show that there was no significant perception of sexism between the scene that passed the test and the scene that did not pass the test when using sex (*Sierra: M = 3.1, SD = 0.9; Kissing Booth: M = 3.9, SD = 1.4*) and sex roles (*Sierra: M = 5.7, SD = 1.2; Kissing Booth: M = 5.4, SD = 1.3*). Sex showed no

significance with $t(33) = -.169$, $p = .86$. Sex roles also showed no significance with $t(32) = 0.7$, $p = 4.9$. There was no significant difference for sex and sex roles between both movie scenes.

RQ5 compares the *Kissing Booth* scene that does not pass the Bechdel Test to a scene from *Sierra Burgess is a Loser*, which does pass the Bechdel Test, on a scale of how likely it was written by a male or female. Of the 34 participants that completed the survey in full, 11 (64.7%) believed that the movie that passed the Bechdel Test (*Sierra)* was written by a female, while 6 (35.3%) believed the film was written by a male. With the other set of participants that watched the scene that did not pass the Bechdel Test (*Kissing Booth)*, 6 (33.3%) believed the movie was written by a female, while 11 (61.1%) believed the movie was written by a male and 1 participant (2.9%) believed the movie was written by 'other' (χ^2 (2) = 3.9, $p = .14$). There was no significant difference between what sex participants believed wrote which movie.

Discussion

The current experiment investigated the Bechdel Test, examining the notion that if a movie scene passed the Bechdel Test, it was perceived as more progressive and less sexist than a movie scene that did not pass the Bechdel Test. This experiment showed participants two different movie scenes (one passing the test and one not) and asked the same questions. Based on the results, there was no significant difference in perception of sexism or progressiveness between the two movie scenes. Since the Bechdel Test is supposed to help critique how women appear in movies, one can consider the suggestion that there may not be a difference between a movie that does pass the test and a movie that does not pass the test.

Results also imply that more methods showing progressiveness in media need to be employed in Hollywood. As mentioned above, many other factors go into a film being more progressive or feminist, such as women working behind the scenes or women of color portraying

main characters (Ezzedeen, 2013; Hickey et al., 2017). Other minorities, such as folk on the

gender spectrum, differently abled folk, or people of color need to be more included in film and

media; further studies are needed to analyze these types of representation.

In addition to including more minorities in Hollywood, intersectional feminism could be

employed into the numerous standards for Hollywood to abide by. The idea of intersectionality

"describes that people belong to many different groups at the same time, and have

competing…interests…To understand any person's experiences, we have to take into account all

of their group memberships…This is the way forward in thinking about changing people's lives

for the better" (Craven, 2018). Intersectionality shows that people can belong to many different

groups, and that these groups all come with their pros and cons, but in order to understand

someone and their experiences, we must understand all the groups they belong to.

The Bechdel Test also only measures what women say to each other; it does not measure

what their occupations are, what they are wearing, their overall character in the movie, or any

other defining factor of that character. In order for there to be empowerment of gender, tests need

to move beyond the surface of female characters (their conversations) and look further into the

character to showcase many different kinds of female representation.

With the results showing no significance, cultivation theory could prove correct in

making people ignorant of the stereotypical ways women are portrayed in film. If people see this

representation in a film and do not see a difference even with the Bechdel Test, they are likely to

not see the issue of this representation of women in real life. The movie that passes the Bechdel

Test conjures up relatively the same attitude as the movie that does not pass. The only main

difference was that more participants thought *Kissing Booth* was written by a man and more

participants thought *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* was written by a woman. Since more participants

thought the scene that did not pass the Bechdel Test was written by a man, this could imply that

the scene that did not pass was more sexist; however, since the difference was not statistically

significant, further studies are needed to confirm that scenes that do not pass the Bechdel Test

are viewed as more sexist.

Limitations

A limitation that occurred during this research included a small sample size. The total

number of participants to complete the survey in full was 34, when a population of at least 50-60

minimum should have answered to achieve power for statistical significance. This was due to the

nature of the promotion of the survey—many students are too busy to take a survey; therefore,

this results in a decline of participants. The population was also limited to a specific community

within PSU, which would also limit the diversity and generalizability of the data.

Another limitation included a duplicate question in the survey. Under the scale of sex

roles, the last statement, "There is nothing wrong with a woman going to a bar alone," was

repeated twice, which was brought to the researchers' attention when participants responded in

the comment section of the survey.

Some other inconsistencies may lie within the movie clips chosen. Consistent variables

were needed in order to have a solid foundation for the experiment; however, some variables

differed within the two movie clips: the race of the people in the scene; the setting of the scene;

the conversation in the scene; and the age of the people in the scene. These kinds of variables

could influence how participants felt about the scene and having consistent variables throughout

both movie scenes would have resulted in more consistent results. The movies selected for this

study were in the same genre of teen drama/romance on the same streaming site. By selecting

movie scenes from the same genre, variables remain consistent; however, teen drama/romance

may not represent all films when it comes to the portrayal of women in movies and the accuracy

of the Bechdel Test. In addition, since these movies came from Netflix, that also excludes other

movies from other networks and streaming sites; due to this limitation, not all films were

represented in this study.

Future Research

The next steps for this research would be looking at other questions mentioned by other

scholars and seeing how many movies pass other simple tests: is there a woman of color in the

movie? Were there at least 50% women behind the scenes and was the supporting cast at least

50% women? These other questions bring to light the importance of equal representation of not

only women in media, but many other minorities. Coding movies that star a female character

with other parameters, besides the simplicity of the Bechdel Test, would help researchers learn

what else is missing in Hollywood's representation of minorities in media. When looking at the

Academy Award winning movies and doing research on how many award-winning movies in the

last decade have had a lead female character, or a person of color, or a person on the gender

spectrum, one could determine the disparity between minority leads and male leads. This

research would not only hold Hollywood accountable for being more inclusive but would bring

to light current disparities in the media.

Conclusion

The Bechdel Test is the starting point for holding film and TV accountable for their

representation of women in media. According to the results, a scene that passed the test held no

significance over a scene that did not pass the test, suggesting that a scene that passes the test

does not make it more progressive or feminist than a scene that does not. For the Bechdel Test,

this means that it should have more requirements for a movie to pass, which in turn would give

female characters more depth. More tests like the Bechdel Test should be brought to light so that

not only Hollywood and the media are aware, but the people watching these films and TV shows

as well. By making the underrepresentation of women and girls evident, it will help further

advance feminism in the media, even more so than a test as simple as the Bechdel Test.

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