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## Uncovering the Women in Ocean's Eight: Understanding the Trends of the Women's Movement with the Portrayals of Women in Film

Elyssa Michelle Day

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UNCOVERING THE WOMEN IN *OCEAN'S EIGHT*: UNDERSTANDING THE TRENDS OF  
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT WITH THE PORTRAYALS OF WOMEN IN FILM

By

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
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## Abstract

This study seeks for a better understanding of the correlations between major milestones in the women's movement and how that is reflected onto the silver screen. With the rise of sexual assault allegations against prominent figures in Hollywood, and the growth of the #MeToo movement, we in turn are beginning to see an influx of films being released, and older films being rebooted, with an all-female led cast. One of those all-female film reboots is *Ocean's Eight*, a film coming from a male-dominated trilogy and genre. Because of this correlation, the question of whether the narratives within *Ocean's Eight* reinforce gendered stereotypes that have been engraved over time? Is the film just a marketing ploy for Hollywood to gain back a positive reputation with female audiences and profit from the popularized "female empowerment" topic? Are there double standards placed on female leads in *Ocean's Eight* versus their male counterparts in *Ocean's Eleven*? Also, are the women in *Ocean's Eight* being sexually objectified the way women usually are in heist films? A textual analysis was conducted on the narratives, characteristic traits, the portrayals of same sex friendships and costume design from *Ocean's Eight* in comparison to *Ocean's Eleven*. What was found from the analysis was that *Ocean's Eight* broke some stereotypes and eliminated sexual objectification in the characteristic traits and costume design, but still reinforced stereotypes and objectification through the narrative and the portrayals of same sex friendships.

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To my parents, Brian and Norma Day, thank you. Those two words will never fully express how appreciative I am for your endless love and support throughout this entire process. Dad, thank you for always being there for me whenever I needed someone to vent to when things became too overwhelming. Mom, thank you for always believing in me and bringing me back up every time I put myself down, you are amazing. I owe all my success to the both of you. Thank you both for sticking by my side through the ups and downs, I love you.

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## Introduction

Female empowerment is a phrase that has become a staple in mainstream media as of late. This concept is something the women's movement has been working towards for decades but has newly resurfaced in 2017. Female empowerment has emerged in the wake of the recent sexual assault allegations against many public figures, most notably our current president, Donald Trump, and film producer Harvey Weinstein. After countless women began to speak up about sexual abuse brought on by the man who "helped define popular culture", Weinstein, in late 2017, the hashtag #MeToo began to spread globally (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). As more famous actresses began telling their stories about their experiences as young doe-eyed females in the film industry during the early 1990s to 2000s, the #MeToo movement gained momentum and cultural centrality. It was reported in late 2017 that Hollywood film producer Harvey Weinstein was "confronted with allegations including sexual harassment and unwanted physical contact," by young, up incoming, actresses (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). Many of the actresses who have spoken up were rising stars back in the mid-90s to early 2000s. In response to these public figures telling their sexual assault stories the hashtag, #MeToo and the *Times Up* movements have spread globally thanks to social media. Over "the past few years, as #MeToo and Time's Up pick up momentum," it has sparked a conversation about the possible (metaphorical) fourth wave of feminism beginning to form (Grady, 2018). In tune with the shift in feminist priorities, the rise of female leads in film genres such as action, crime, mystery and heist- genre --for decades predominately dominated by males--have become more apparent over the last few years. In conjunction with the rise of sexual assaults in Hollywood and the women's movement.

This connection between the influx of women in films and feminists regaining acknowledgement in the media has led to this present study on two of the popular *Ocean's* film

franchise. The original *Ocean's* movies are male dominated due to its placement in the heist genre. Less than a year after the release of the sexual assault allegation within Hollywood, an all-female reboot, *Ocean's Eight* (2018), was released and caused uproar in the media, with feminists, and the American population. With this female reboot and mixed emotions surrounding it due to the #MeToo movement, four questions have arisen. One is whether the narratives of *Ocean's Eight* reinforce gendered stereotypes that have been engraved over time. Another question, due to the release date of *Ocean's Eight* being so close to the rise of the #MeToo movement and Harvey Weinstein allegations, is whether this all-female reboot of an all-male film franchise, in a male dominated genre, is just a marketing ploy for Hollywood to gain back a positive reputation with female audiences and profit off of the popularized "female empowerment" topic. There is also a question of whether there are there double standards placed on female leads in *Ocean's Eight* versus their male counterparts in *Ocean's Eleven* (2001)? Also, films are notorious for sexually objectifying women, especially when the actress plays a supporting role or the love interest, so are the women in *Ocean's Eight* being sexually objectified the way women are in heist films? Feminism is currently at its most progressive state, and this leads to the hypothesis that this increase of female dominated films like *Ocean's Eight* has provided a less sexually objectified, non-stereotyped, and more progressive portrayal of women. This in turn can lead to a positive change in the way society interprets feminism and women in everyday life.

The implications of this will help to better understand the power of communication between the media and society. Media is a powerful transmitter of messages that heavily influences an audience into interpreting and establishing a concrete meaning towards various topics, like gender. This same type of powerful transmission occurs from society onto the media

in terms of what is popularized among a group of people in relation to politics and pop culture. It is said that “most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in pop culture,” and part of pop culture involves films (Hollows & Moseley, 2007, p. 2). By looking at the cycle of communication in this study, we can understand why certain beliefs are set in place among a mass group of people, and how the media can either reinforce, reconstruct or introduce concepts and meanings. This study will provide insight as to whether changes in society are reflected synonymously in media, and if the all –female characters in *Ocean’s Eight* are portrayed in a progressive way in conjunction with the current state of the women’s movement. Research is scarce in the subject of the recent rise of predominately female led casts in films and film reboots since this phenomenon has begun to take form around 2017 and is continuing to increase now in 2019. Therefore, the research conducted in this paper will expand on what has already been found in relation to the women’s movement, feminism, portrayals of women in film, and to have a better understanding on the sudden rise of women dominating the box office. A brief historical analysis will lay out the kind of relationship the media has had in relation to major milestones in the women’s movement, and how the movement has helped to shape female characters in popular films beginning in the sixties to present day. The historical analysis will be followed by summaries of *Ocean’s 11* (1960), *Ocean’s Eleven* (2001), and *Ocean’s Eight* (2018) in order to have a better understanding of where this film franchise originated, and why these films are the perfect texts to help answer the questions at hand. Following, there will be a section on theories that pertain to the subjects of communication, gender, and feminism in film. Lastly, the methodology of a textual analysis will be explained, and the way in which the research for this study was conducted. So, let’s go back in time to the sixties, a decade where major changes

were happening for America in terms of politics, economics, women's organizations, and the media.

## Literature Review

Approaching the women's movement through a historical context can help establish the correlation with what is being portrayed on screen versus what is happening politically and socially during specific time periods. The sixties were a time of major change for America. At the start of the decade, it was one of the top countries in the globe economically and became a consumer driven country known for the slogan "sex, drugs and rock and roll". The sixties were a time in which women began to take a conscious stand against unfair and unequal treatment in relation to sex. With the rise in consumerism and advertising started in the fifties, this led to the rise in domestic housewives wanting to get into the work force. Due to this increase of women in the labor force, they began to take notice and speak out against injustices like "unrealistic restrictions on hours or weight-lifting kept women out of higher paying jobs and limited their promotions" (Evans, 1997, p. 257). Already taking notice of the unequal opportunities, plus the widespread popularity of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, women joined forces and created a variety of different groups to fight for causes and social issues related to women's rights. The first half of the sixties revolved around the concept of the "trapped housewife" as referred to by many news outlets like the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Harper's Bazaar* (Evans, 1997, p. 257). This "trapped housewife" was what Friedan's book touched on, it was the outdated concept of the domesticated housewife/ mother as being a woman's only source of fulfillment and expectation in life. In retaliation, women began to rally in groups realizing the power and potential for change a sisterhood could do for women's rights. The NOW organization (National Organization for Women), which allowed women to learn skills in politics and leadership, was a group that demanded and fought for change on behalf of women all over the country. In 1964, "congress passed the Civil Rights Act, including Title VII" which

prohibited discrimination in the workplace “not only on the basis of race, color, religion, and national origin, but also of sex.” (Rosen, 2000, p. 18). Not only did the rise in sisterhood organizations help to bring feminist issues to the forefront in politics but other social movements such as the Civil Rights movement and the sixties counterculture helped as well. The fight for change on the perceptions of women were not only shown in society and politics, but also in film. Audrey Hepburn, the lead actress of the now iconic films like *Breakfast at Tiffany's* (1961) and *My Fair Lady* (1964), played roles that defied female stereotypes in film and challenged the audience's perceptions of what it meant to be female during this time. Hepburn played Holly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. She had no children, dated many men casually and exuded a sense of confidence through promiscuity. Other films like *Love with the Proper Stranger* (1963) exhibited real life “taboos” for the sixties like having a child out of wedlock and women having one-night stands. During a time when the birth control pill was being introduced to women the film, *Rosemary's Baby* (1968), showed scenes of non-consensual sex, rape, and rape within a marriage, which were topics that began to appear in the feminist rhetoric going into the new decade of the seventies. In the book, *Feminism in Popular Culture*, researchers Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley explained how the period between the sixties and seventies “zeros in on its failures to address love and sexuality, especially heterosexuality, in ways to which many women could relate,” as well as the lack of including women of all classes and races, and its “refusal to examine its own stakes in the power structure” (2007, p. 59- 60).

Moving on from the decade of the bored housewife, we enter a decade that showed a decrease in marriages and an increase in divorce from previous years. There was a “portion of women (about one in six)” that chose to not get married, and a “divorce rate which doubled” from the sixties to seventies (Evans, 1997, p. 302). This led to more women entering the work

force than in the past, and allowing them to gain a sense of independence and confidence in taking care of themselves. Films during this time also began to show this same type of confident and independent working woman. *Foxy Brown* (1974) is one of those films displaying one of America's first female heroines. The character of Foxy takes on the job of being a prostitute in order to get close, and gain revenge, on the man who killed her boyfriend. She is an African American woman who refused to play the victim, stood up for herself, and proved you do not need to be a man in order to exude power. Another film that showed an independent working woman on screen was *Norma Rae* (1979). She not only was a single mother but also fought for unionization in the workplace for herself and her coworkers. On the other side of a working single mother came films that showed marriage and motherhood as restricting to a woman's independence. In the film *Girlfriends* (1978) best friends take different paths in their lives. Anne decides to get married with her longtime boyfriend and has a child, while Susan pursues her dream of becoming a photographer and dating whomever she wants. Ultimately Anne becomes jealous of Susan's freedom and independence and decides to abort what would be her second child. Abortion began to come to the forefront of female politics in the seventies with the Roe v. Wade case in 1973. Another social issue that began to arise was homosexuality, particularly lesbianism. These issues were beginning to be heard thanks to more women beginning to take office like Bella Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Franklin, and Patricia Roberts Harris to name a few. In terms of progression, women were finally beginning to take control over their lives leading to a more positive attitude among women. But this also allowed for negative connotations to form within society. In turn women, especially those openly considering themselves as feminists, began to gain negative connotations attached to their sex. Andi Zeisler, the author of *Feminism and Pop Culture: Seal Studies*, discussed the role of feminism in pop

culture and states that feminists in the seventies “had gotten roundly tarred as being antisex, antiporn, antiheterosexual, and just generally prudish” (2008, p. 132).

With Ronald Regan as president during the eighties there was a reversal in feminist advancements. Under the Regan administration there were cuts in government funding and removal of feminist organizations. The Republican administration tried their best to re-instill stereotypes in society through news media who “assured younger women that feminism was over and done with,” which helped to control “the perceptions of the vast majority of young people, both male and female” (Evans, 1997, p. 315). Even with the administration against their movement, women still made strides. In 1983, Sally K. Ride became the first female astronaut to go to space, and in the same year Sandra Day O’Conner became the first female Supreme Court justice. Women began taking roles in higher, more prestigious, careers and were seen as the competition for men in the work force. With the influx in women taking on more important roles in corporate settings, films displaying women working long hours, having low wages and dealing with sexual harassment in the workplace were appearing on screen. Zeisler states that “working women on both the big and small screens,” during the decade of the eighties were “being scorned, humiliated, and punished for the dual sins of being ambitious and female” (2008, p. 90). One of the more popular films of the decade is *9 to 5* (1980) starring Dolly Parton and Jane Fonda revolving around a group of women who kidnap their boss due to his sexual nature, unfair work place rules, and gender-biased attitude. The women begin to run the office the way they saw fit, like providing equal pay for equal work, promotions based on quality of work not gender, and even making childcare services available. Another film, *Working Girl* (1988), tells the story of Tess, a college educated woman who gets her pitch stolen by a female coworker. Through perseverance she ends up proving the pitch was her original idea and ends up receiving

the promotion of becoming a junior executive, the position that was originally Tess's coworkers position. Despite the backlash towards the women's movement due to defunding and shutting down of feminist's organizations, there were still strides made by women taking on higher job titles in politics, science, and education. Towards the end of the decade there was a shift that began to occur showing a more sexually free woman thanks to influence of pop culture figures like Madonna and Janet Jackson. Zeisler named the movie, *Fatal Attraction*, as the turning point of women in film from the eighties to nineties. She said "working women on both the big and the small screens spent the 1980s being scorned, humiliated, and punished for the dual sins of being ambitious and female," and that *Fatal Attraction* was one of the first films to show, "a lurid cautionary tale pitting the independent, working woman against the traditional housewife" (2008).

Moving from a politically Republican decade into a Democratic one in 1993, the women's movement took a stance on sexual liberation. In the mid-nineties "young feminists labeling themselves the 'Third Wave'" were an "emerging generation...assertive, multicultural, and unabashedly sexy." (Evans, 2003, p. 215). A new type of adventurously independent, but sexualized archetype coincidentally began to emerge in film. Coming out in 1990, there was the film *Pretty Woman* starring Julia Roberts that showed a relationship between a prostitute and a wealthy businessman. The character of Vivian showed an independent yet sexualized female character in film. Other females in film began to follow this more sexually objectified character like *Cruel Intentions*, *Ghost*, and *Basic Instinct* to name a few. The women's movement during this time was trying to break away from the negative connotations given to them in the decades prior and wanted to incorporate a more inclusive sexual agenda into their fight for equality and

breaking gendered stereotypes. With the pendulum swinging from one extreme, anti-sex, to another, overly sexualized, this led to a backlash towards feminists once again.

It was during the early 2000s that films begin to portray women in an even more sexualized light. Hollows and Moseley stated, “rather than coming to consciousness through involvement in feminist movements, most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in pop culture” (2007, p. 2). Movies such as *Resident Evil*, *Grindhouse Double Feature*, the *Alien* trilogy, *Catwoman*, *Aeon Flux*, *Ultraviolet*, *Elektra*, *Charlie’s Angels*, *Kill Bill*, *Tomb Raider*, and many more seemed to be dishing out the same kind of female heroine character. She is what I like to call the “kick-ass bombshell”. To define the term, the “kick-ass bombshell” is a type of common character that began to appear in action films during the mid-nineties through the early 2000s as more female leads began to take part in action/ crime films. The “kick-ass bombshell” is first and foremost beautiful, and uses her good looks to get what she wants. Not only is she beautiful but she exudes sex appeal through her skintight, and revealing, outfits she wears as a form of armor. This character type was one of the first that attempted to portray women in film as strong and independent, which are characteristics mainly associated with masculinity. The decade of the 2000s displayed a more objectified and over-sexualized woman in pop culture embraced by society and praised by feminists. Interestingly enough, a small women’s organization known as the *Me Too* movement was just starting. The *Me Too* movement was first established in 2006 “to help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing” (Burke, 2018). Tarana Burke, the founder of *Me Too* explains how her movement started off as a small organization that remained unrecognized by the country until about a decade later. The rise of women in America who wanted to deconstruct the negative

connotations associated with feminism, regain their bodies, and take back their sexualities began to overshadow smaller organizations like *Me Too*. Unlike the past, where women's organizations were crucial in making changes within politics and society, the pendulum had in turn swung too far to the other side at the end of the decade, and many scholars have since discussed the effects the objectified and over sexualized female in pop culture has had on the current decade from 2010 to the present.

There have been studies analyzing the exploitation of female sexuality in pop culture in recent years. In the books *Super Bitches and Action Babes*, and *Beyond Bombshells*, authors Rikke Schubart and Jeffery A. Brown (2015) begin to analyze certain trends and common themes with females in film from the 2000s to 2015. Schubart and Brown relate the male gaze and its visual pleasure to scenes in movies showing sexual violence, such as torture, rape, and fighting. They analyze how these acts of violence work in relation to the representation of female empowerment. In Schubart's chapter, *High Trash Heroines*, she focuses on the sexualization of the female leads in the movies *Tomb Raider*, *Kill Bill*, and *Charlies Angels*. As for Brown, he focuses on the sexualization of the torture and rape scenes found within the movie, *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*. For males, the participation in violent acts "demonstrates strength and resilience" (Brown, 2015, p. 27). The issue that comes about with women being involved in violence on screen is that it "risks erotizing the victimized female body," which is the opposite of what occurs when a male is involved in violence (Brown, 2015, p. 30). Even Quentin Tarantino, director of the *Kill Bill* films, said of his female lead and female supporting role that "watching Uma fight Vivica A. Fox's character, that's hot," and that "there's just a naughty aspect to seeing women fight" (Schubart, 2007, p. 290). This further enhances the male gaze and masochistic pleasure – these terms will be further discussed in the literature on feminist film theories – and

why feminist today critique films from the early 2000s. From Brown's analysis, there is a common prototype of the female leads casted in action films that has developed and encouraged the male gaze and visual pleasure. These female leads tend to be young, in shape, Caucasian, "and marketed as of primarily (though not necessarily wholly) heterosexual orientation" (Brown, 2015, p. 36).

On top of the violence portrayed in film, there is a lack of character depth within the films narrative "along with social consciousness, politics and morale," which only left female bodies on screen, and according to Schubart "the body is the most important thing in the high trash heroines cinema" (2007, p. 298). A point Schubart made within her analysis is that along with the lack of complex narratives and the female body being the mere focus of women in action films, there is also a relation to empowerment. She states the portrayal of these female leads "is related to an unspecified and politicized empowerment of women" (Schubart, 2007, p. 291). These three points are, according to Schubart, what make up female-led action films.

As for where the women's movement stands currently, a different kind of feminist has emerged, one that seeks justice on the issues of sexual harassment. Thanks to social media and the use of a hashtag, the #MeToo movement has now grown to include a broader range of survivors than in their previous statement, which now includes "young people, queer, trans, and disabled folks, Black women and girls, and all communities of color" (Burke, 2018). Another addition to this growth of feminism has been the *Times Up* movement. Founded January 1, 2018, the movement "was started by a group of over 300 women in Hollywood, with high-profile leaders," like actresses Reese Witherspoon and Natalie Portman, as well as producers, directors and writers like Shonda Rimes (Langone, 2018). After countless women in Hollywood began speaking out against Weinstein's abuse and threats, *Times Up* wanted to address "the systemic

inequality and injustice in the workplace that have kept underrepresented groups from reaching their full potential,” and work towards improving “ laws, employment agreements, and corporate policies” (Times UP, 2018). Because these famous actresses used their voice and platform to speak up about their sexual abuse stories, and with the power of social media, there has been a change occurring in the progression of feminism and how Hollywood is starting to portray females in film.

With these new revelations of sexual assault allegations against one of Hollywood’s most “respected” film producers, I began to think back on popular films with female leads during the time period of the early 2000s and comparing it to current female leads in film. Film genres like action adventure, crime, mystery and spy have recently given lead roles to women after being dominated by men for decades. Among those genres that have since expanded is the heist film, or caper. First shown in America in the 1940s, the heist film was created out of a combination of the bandit and gangster genres. Throughout the history of the heist film, it is “often male-centered, if not male obsessed,” but this was especially true from the forties until the sixties (Sloniowski & Leach, 2017, p. 83). Heist films involve the main characters to be criminals, immoral, smart, witty and charming, which were all qualities associated with men, not women. This is why heist films never had actresses participate, until the sixties. The roles women played in these kinds of films were scarce but served “an important role in defining not only femininity but also masculinity, especially in relation to perceptions of American manhood in crisis” (Sloniowski & Leach, 2017, p. 83 & 84).

One of the more popular films during the early 1960s was *Ocean’s 11* starring the musical legends of *The Rat Pack*. The film, from the location of Las Vegas to the casting of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, Peter Lawford, and Joey Bishop to the robbing of casinos is a perfect

example of the enforcement of masculinity and femininity for the decade. Coming off the “breadwinning family man” stereotype of the fifties, we enter into a new sexually machismo man in the sixty’s thanks in large part to *Playboy* magazine. The men of *Ocean’s 11* exuded that bachelor lifestyle, and the women in the film served as the object for sexual pleasure. By the end of the decade heist films became “criminal adventure symbolically conflated sex and stealing,” allowing male audiences to “escape from all those feminine dangers associated with their supposed emasculation in postwar life” (Sloniowski & Leach, 2017, p. 93). In the seventies and eighties, the genre faded out of popularity for a while until its revival in the nineties thanks to Quentin Tarantino’s film *Reservoir Dogs*. Nine years later *Ocean’s 11* was remade and becomes a successful trilogy franchise in the continuing years. Gaylyn Studlar, director of the film and video studies program at the University of Michigan, states that despite evolution of heist films over the years they still “continue to reproduce Hollywood’s traditional ordering of the distinctions between the genders,” making the women sexual sidekicks “securing the meaning of manliness through an inherited model” (Sloniowski & Leach, 2017, p. 93). She further explained that women are needed in these films in order to diminish the thought of homosexuality among the males.

Given the historical analysis, there seems to be a correlation between the influence of the women’s movement and the kinds of female characters portrayed in films during each time period. With that in mind, it will be interesting to compare this current state of feminism in America-- centered on sexual assault, harassment, race, sexuality and equal work for equal pay-- with how current films are portraying women in relation to female empowerment. Given the male dominated history of heist film, this genre would make a perfect study to analyze the current portrayals of women within it. In 2018, the popularized all male cast of the *Ocean’s*

franchise was given a new look and number. *Ocean's Eight* is the first female-centered heist film for the *Ocean's* franchise and has since sparked up conversation among film critics, female audiences and the media, making it a good text to analyze in comparison to the original *Ocean's Eleven*.

The shift in feminists' viewpoints, and representation of females in film, has helped to conjure up four questions:

RQ1: Do the narratives within *Ocean's Eight* reinforce gendered stereotypes that have been engraved over time?

RQ2: Is *Ocean's Eight* just a marketing ploy for Hollywood to gain back a positive reputation with female audiences and profit off the popularized "female empowerment" topic.

RQ3: Are there double standards placed on female leads in *Ocean's Eight* versus their male counterparts in *Ocean's Eleven*?

RQ4: Are the women in *Ocean's Eight* being sexually objectified the way women are in heist films?

### Summary of the Ocean's Films

In order to determine this potential change, the 2018 film *Ocean's Eight* will be the text used for this study. The reason this movie was chosen is because of the film franchise it is a part of. The *Ocean's* movie franchise first began in 1960 with the release of *Ocean's 11*. This film contained a star-studded cast with the leads being played by the Rat Pack, which included Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis Jr. The plot of the film centers on the character Danny

Ocean, played by Sinatra, and his fellow “World War II compatriots,” as they plan to pull off the biggest robbery in Las Vegas (IMDB, 2019). There are only 4 females to 18 males within the main cast. It wasn’t until 2001 that a remake of the 1960s film came out, using the same title just spelled out, *Ocean’s Eleven*. The plot of the 2001 version also centered on the character of Danny Ocean and his ten other con artist friends attempting to steal from three, instead of the previous five, Las Vegas casinos. The main cast consisted of 55 males and 5 females (IMDB, 2019). Some of the stars in the main cast are George Clooney, playing Danny Ocean, as well as Bernie Mac, Brad Pitt, Matt Damon and Julia Roberts. Continuing with the success of the first film, Warner Bros. decided to release a sequel in 2004 called *Ocean’s Twelve*. Clooney comes back, along with the other actors previously mentioned, as well as some new ones like Catherine Zeta- Jones, and this time the twelve members attempt to “pull off three major European heists” (IMDB, 2019). Among the main cast, ten are women, which is an increase to the previous films. Rounding out the all-male film franchise is *Ocean’s Thirteen*, which came out in 2007. This plot, although still involving a casino heist as in the first movies, is mainly fueled by revenge when Ocean finds out that one of the members “builds a hotel with another casino owner,” and gets “cut out of the deal” (IMDB, 2019). Al Pacino is added to the cast playing the antagonist of the film. Of the main cast, only five are women.

Now, fast forward eleven years to 2018, in the wake of sexual assault allegations against major players in the Hollywood film industry and the rapid rise of the #MeToo movement. Warner Bros Production Company decided to reboot the *Ocean’s* film franchise. The result was the release of *Ocean’s Eight*, featuring women as the eight main characters. The plot of this movie also deals with the concept of stealing, except this time it centers on Danny Ocean’s sister Debbie Ocean, played by Sandra Bullock. Other actresses in this film include Cate Blanchett,

Anne Hathaway, Helena Bonham Carter, Mindy Kaling, Rihanna, Awkwafina and Sarah Paulson. In total 58 women are featured in the main cast of this film, and the screenplay was co-written by a woman, Olivia Milch (IMDB, 2019). The other films did not have any female influence when it came to the production team.

One important note to make is that the *Ocean's* films, traditionally, have been centered on a theme of a close friendship off screen. As mentioned, the original *Ocean's 11* (1960) starred the Rat Pack, who were all buddies in real life, before, during and after the film's production. The plot of the film itself also revolves around the fact that they are best buds. Same thing goes for *Ocean's Eleven* (2001). The leads, George Clooney, Brad Pitt and Matt Damon were all very good friends on and off screen, even before the making of the film. As for *Ocean's Eight*, the women in this film had no previous bond of friendship, which is non-traditional of the film franchise.

This all-female reboot of a classic all-male movie raises questions as to what the film industry's motives were. Back in 2016, the reboot of the popular eighty's movie *Ghostbusters* had a predominantly female cast, despite the first two movies and T.V. show having a male majority cast. Sadly, the 2016 release of the female reboot of *Ghostbusters* received backlash from online trolls who opposed the classic film due to the cast. The film was released one year before the sexual assault allegations rocked Hollywood, and in 2018 the release of *Ocean's Eight* proved a more positive acceptance among movie goers. During its opening weekend, *Ocean's Eight* generated \$41.5million, which turned out to be higher than the opening weekend revenue for *Ocean's Eleven* (38.1m), *Twelve* (39.2m) and *Thirteen* (36.1m) (Pulver, 2018). According to the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the 2018 report stated that 51 percent of moviegoers were women, which can explain why 70 percent of those who attended the film's

opening weekend were female (McClintock, 2019). This positive turn out, as opposed to previously failed all female films like *Ghostbusters*, could all just be a coincidence or it could have something to do with society's temperature with the sexual misconduct allegations and rise of the women's movement in the air. By analyzing *Ocean's Eight* and comparing it to *Ocean's Eleven*, it will allow for the potential changes to be seen. First some theoretical concepts that pertain to the topics of cultivation, communication, gender, and feminism in film need to be laid out and related back to the overall analysis of the *Ocean's* films. The following section goes through some theories that pertain to the way the analysis of the films will be approached.

## Theories

To guide this analysis, I will employ cultivation theory and a new kind of communication theory in order to explain the ways in which people create meaning to their lives through media, and the inner workings of the types of relationships formed between media, society and social movements. A third theory comes from a sociology standpoint and is known as doing gender. This theory explains the influence a person's surroundings, culture and upbringing have on how they apply meaning to gender, and how they distinguish male versus female onto others. Continuing, there are four different feminist film theories that are explained, given the nature of the study at hand with analyzing feminism and films. The male gaze theory looks at the ways in which three distinct looks further enhance the over-sexualization and objectification of women in film. Female spectatorship theory dives into how female audiences perceive the objectified and sexualized female characters in films. The last one, also revolving around the female spectator, is a study focused on interviews from women, who were young adults in the fifties, and the ways in which popular actresses and films during that time influenced societal views of women. Each

one of these theories helps to educate on the important topics that this study seeks to better understand. Of them all, there are three theories that proved especially relevant to this research—omnidirectional diachronic process of communication, doing gender theory, and the male gaze.

To better understand the power that films can have on society, the ways in which society interprets these films, and how that can transpire into social movements it is useful to look at the type of cultivation and communication theories that can further explain these relationships. George Gerbner's cultivation theory states "that 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" (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 1). Gerbner separates the theory into three form of analysis, where the third is the analysis of cultivation. Cultivation analysis entails looking at the relationships formed by "institutional processes, message systems, and the public assumptions, images, and policies that they cultivate" (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 3). It is a way to determine the portrayals of everyday life in media, like race, gender, work force, etc., over an extended timeframe. A study analyzing the effects of over consumption of television found that it was not the "heavy viewing" that influences people's perceptions of "values, norms, and stereotypes," rather it is the repetition of these that enforces them as normative within society (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010, p. 7 & 8). When it comes to gendered stereotypes, when men and women are held to different standards, it is usually in a hierarchical form where women are seen as the other, inferior to men. It is said that "when multiple programs across the broadcast and cable spectrum repeat these gendered roles," they then provide a sense of "truth and credibility" (Lauzen, Dozier, Horan, 2008, p. 3). By looking at communication theory, there is a better understanding as to how audiences receive and process messages in order to create meaning. This meaning can be reinforced by the media, and cultivation theory shows how

powerful the media can be at influencing society's perceptions. When films continue to portray gendered stereotypes, it reinforces the roles of women and men to the audience, which in turn reinforces the interpretive process of meanings. Now although cultivation theory explains the type of reinforcement behavior that occurs within an audience, it is more associated with television show viewing, not necessarily films. There is an argument made that films are not watched as repeatedly as a television show, therefore cultivation theory can only supplement this research to a certain extent. A theory that does go deeper into the ways in which films, society and social movement relationships work is omnidirectional diachronic process. This theory incorporates the formation of meaning through transmitters the way in which cultivation theory explains, but omnidirectional diachronic process takes into consideration the ways in which multiples transmitters send and receive information in order to place meaning over time.

For this research, an omnidirectional diachronic process of meaning will be used to breakdown how people process meanings within films. The theory of omnidirectional diachronic process of meaning states "that a communication process is not a sequence of events," it is instead "a continuous and simultaneous interaction of a larger number of variables that are moving, changing and affecting each other" (Van Ruler, 2018, p. 5). By breaking the term up into two parts, we can begin to see what is meant by this communication theory. Starting with omnidirectional, which in this case involves the different interpretations each individual has while processing the message in order to form meaning to something, the interaction of the senders and receivers leaves messages up for interpretation in which the receivers thus become constructivists. This constructivism that occurs allows for people to "interpret the world, construct meaningful understandings of it, and act in the world on the basis of their interpretation" (Van Ruler, 2018, p. 5). As for diachronic, which means advancing through the

progression of time, it is the way in which one process and develops meaning over time. This term focuses “on the communication process as constantly moving forward,” while still incorporating “the past, which forms the present and the future” (Van Ruler, 2018, p. 6). Films fit into this omnidirectional diachronic process of meaning by sending out a message to an audience. When films continuously portray gender stereotypes on screen, it leads audiences to interpret the meaning of what it means to be male and female within a society. These gendered stereotypes have been reinforced for many years, not just in film but in mass media. So, when audiences use the diachronic process to look at the past, in order to form their own meaning of what is being communicated in the present, the reinforcement solidifies the perception of what is being shown on screen. This theory of communication has close ties with cultivation theory in reinforcing these gendered stereotypes. In terms of this study, this process of communication helps to understand the relationship between the media, in this case the *Ocean's* films, and the audience's perceptions of the ways in which the actors are portrayed. It also helps to explain how stereotypes can be reinforced through media, and how certain stereotypes have been placed onto women in society due to their representation in media. This knowledge will be useful when analyzing the narratives and characteristic traits of the characters in the *Ocean's* films.

## Gender Theory

In order to have a better understanding of the kind of power and influence the media has on society, and vice versa, there must first be a clear understanding of how gender roles have been established in westernized culture. The theory known as “Doing Gender” lays down a foundation for the reasoning behind the construction of meaning for the term “gender”. It explains some background as to how gender stereotypes are constructed and reconstructed

through the communication process of transmitters and receivers. Candace West and Don Zimmerman developed a concept “that participants in interaction organize their various and manifold activities to reflect or express gender,” and in turn recognize those activities in others around them in order to determine their gender (2002, p. 4). In other words, the exchanges of information from a person’s surroundings --whether it be from other social groups they are a part of, the media or other sources of information-- influence and apply meaning to what it means to be male or female. West and Zimmerman believe that “gender is not a set of traits, nor a variable, nor a role, but the product of social doings,” and that the concept of “gender itself is constituted through interaction” (2002, p. 6). This product is the constant portrayal of what is considered to be male and female. It allows for a person to make assumptions and categorize others around them into their supposed gender in relation to what they have been exposed to. The media plays a large role in influencing societal viewpoints. Regarding this study, films portraying male and female characters in the same way over decades and decades leads to gendered stereotypes. These portrayals are absorbed by the audience and interpreted in the brain to place certain gender characteristics onto others, reinforcing stereotypes into the real world. West and Zimmerman also credit “Social movements such as feminism,” for having the power to “provide the ideology and impetus to question existing arrangements,” as well as a large group of supporters to make changes to old ideologies (2002, p. 22).

## Feminist Film Theories

A prominent feminist film theory is “the male gaze”. The term was first coined in 1975 by feminist film critic Laura Mulvey in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey associated her theory with scopophilia, voyeurism, and narcissism. It is important to

establish the meaning of these three terms in relation to the male gaze in order to have a better understanding of how others have analyzed the portrayal of women in film. According to Mulvey, she defines scopophilia as arising “from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight” (1975, p. 5). When watching a woman in film, the camera tends to highlight her features “inducing voyeuristic or fetishistic mechanisms to circumvent her threat,” to not only her male costar but also the spectator (Mulvey, 1975, p. 12). It is through this voyeurism displayed on screen that leads the spectator into an active form of scopophilia and allows for said spectator to identify themselves with the image shown, which is where narcissism comes into play. Within the male gaze there are three different looks in which it can be approached, “that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion” (Mulvey, 1975, p. 12). These three looks will be the approaches used during the analysis of *Ocean’s Eight* in order to spot any potential progression over time with women in film. Recently, the talk of a female gaze has been spoken of among the film community as more females begin to take the roles of directors, producers, and writers of contemporary films. Although, Mulvey states that her theory, despite being called the “male” gaze, is not meant to favor one gender over another.

The next theory stems from the subject of the female spectator. Since the potential research method-- explained later in this paper-- will be conducted through my interpretations, it is important to have some background on theories relating to the female spectator. The female spectator theory can also help to further understand Mulvey’s third look, that of the spectator, through a feminist lens. *Cinema and Spectatorship* is the first book to ever analyze the role of a spectator in relation to contemporary film and it defines spectatorship as “not only the act of

watching a film, but also the ways one takes pleasure in the experience” (Mayne, 1993, p. 1). The author of this book, Judith Mayne, goes on to explain the cinema’s power and how it is more than just a form of entertainment. She makes an argument that films have a deeper meaning, “one that embodied deep-seated myths and ideologies central to the functioning of modern, Western industrialized countries” (Mayne, 1993, p. 20). Keeping the definition of spectatorship, and the strong influence of the cinema in mind, there is a relationship between the two that can be incorporated in the film and masquerade theory. Inspired by Mulvey, Mary Ann Doane, a professor of film and media specializing in feminist film theory, brought forth her views on how female spectatorship is in too close of relation to the object of the gaze portrayed on screen. Because of this, the female spectator is left to choose between “the masochism of over-identification or the narcissism entailed in becoming one’s own object of desire,” and is therefore forced to masculinize their gaze (Doane, 1982, p. 14). Overall, Doane claimed that “womanliness is a mask which can be worn or removed,” as a female spectator (1982, p. 8). This masquerade employed by the female spectator is what occurs when films are produced by men. Although these theories will not be directly applied to the analytical portion of the *Ocean’s* films, they are still included to give background to how female audiences interpret films. This particular study of having to watch *Ocean’s Eleven* and *Ocean’s Eight* was conducted by a woman, myself, and includes commentary from other women who saw *Ocean’s 8*. For this reason, it is important to understand how female audiences interpret characters and overall film narratives, especially from a feminist perspective.

Adding onto the theory of female spectatorship, Jackie Stacey conducted a study in the 90s in order to combine her thoughts on the female spectator theory and history. As a feminist film theorist, Stacey noticed a lack of history taken into consideration for the influence of how

audiences perceive and make sense of films. The study consisted of interviewing older women and asking them questions about their perceptions of films during the 1940s and 1950s, when they were in their late teens and early twenties. Stacey wanted to understand what type of influence prominent female actress during the 40s and 50s had on the female spectators during a time when women were expected to be submissive and domesticated for men. Actresses like Doris Day, Joan Crawford and Katharine Hepburn were just some of the main stars that were said to have challenged societal gender norms in films. Ultimately, the results showed that “Hollywood stars can thus be seen as offering more than simple role models of sexual attractiveness,” they also offered “female spectator’s a source of fantasy of a more powerful and confident self” (Stacey, 1994, p. 158). According to Stacey, this led to a conclusion that “feminist film criticism needs to develop a theorization of how identities are fixed through particular social and historical discourses and the representational practice, outside, as well as inside, the cinema” (Stacey, 1994, pg. 31 & 32). The incorporation of history and where society stands during a specific point in time can have a correlation to how audiences ingest the messages sent through films. This is the reason why this study contained a brief historical analysis at the beginning of the literature review. The correlation between films and women’s movement was laid out, and can provide a better understanding of how society perceives women in film amid the #MeToo movement and the sexual assault allegations in Hollywood.

## Method

In order to determine the feminist portrayals in *Ocean’s Eight*, if any, it is best to conduct a textual analysis. Textual analysis allows for the dissection of a text in order to have a better understanding of the world. It allows for researchers to “make an educated guess at some of the

most likely interpretations that might be made of that text,” and how that text can be a reflection of what is happening within society and one’s culture (McKee, 2003, p. 2). Because the analysis is dependent on the researchers own interpretations, viewpoints will vary depending on the location and cultural practices of the society the researcher is trying to better understand. For the purpose of this study, it will be focused on an Americanized viewpoint of what it means to be a feminist in the current women’s movement and whether there are progressive portrayals of this in the media, specifically in film. Coming from a media studies perspective, “many writers seek to measure texts against reality,” and the qualitative measurement of textual analysis is best suited for this purpose (McKee, 2003, p. 13). By incorporating some theories previously mentioned, and taking inspiration from other researches who have used textual analysis to dissect media texts, it will serve as an outline for how the research on *Ocean’s Eight* will be conducted.

The way the textual analysis was approached was through Grounded Theory. This theory is separated into three categories, the first of those being “the relationships between data and the categories into which they are coded” (Lindlof & Taylor, 201, p. 250). From that relationship, categories begin to form through a process known as the constant-comparative method. This method allows for “codes, categories, and category definitions,” to change as the researcher continues to analyze the text at hand (Lindlof & Taylor, p. 250). When analyzing the two *Ocean’s* films, this process was followed, and the films were each watched once for an initial viewing. One day was dedicated to *Ocean’s Eleven* and the following day was dedicated to watching *Ocean’s Eight*. During this initial viewing of the films, notes were taken of certain aspects that stood out in relation to females, and female empowerment. After looking over the first notes of each film, there were four similar findings between both films. There was notation of the film’s narratives, characteristic traits, the portrayals of the “best friend” relationship, and

the wardrobe. With these themes that emerged, I continued to watch the movies multiple times, dedicating each viewing to one of the themes. For instance, one day was spent watching *Ocean's Eleven* and taking notes strictly related to the narrative of the film; this included key factors like what was being stolen, dialogue that helped support the narrative, and observations of masculinity and femininity. The following day, the same steps were repeated but for *Ocean's Eight*. This process continued for the remaining three categories, and each category was investigated three times before making a conclusion of the findings. The reasoning behind waiting a day in between watching each film is because there was a need for a clear slate for the findings in one film to not influence the other. Allowing the mind to reset in a 24-hour period made for a more accurate coding. Under Grounded Theory, one of the coding systems is an open coding that allows for the researcher to take notes on the text and allows them to group this data into specific categories that help to form larger meanings about the text, unrestricted. This form of coding allowed for the findings in each category to speak for themselves and reveal the overall answers to the questions asked at hand. From these specific findings, through the constant-comparative method of grounded theory, not only were answers found but the kinds of theories to support the findings began to take form.

The analyzation process and its findings fit into Mulvey's male gaze theory. As previously mentioned, this feminist film theory emphasizes three main "looks" that occur within film. Those looks are that of the director, the looks exchanged between the actors on screen, and the look of the spectator. The categories used to compare and contrast *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Eight* were analyzed through the lens of these three looks. First of these looks deals with the look of the director, which was analyzed in the categories of the narratives/ dialogue. An analysis of the overall narrative is investigated in order to determine if the storyline fits into the

stereotypical one that most actresses get booked to play, or if it presents a more contemporary feminist narrative. The second look is the looks given between the actors on screen, which was analyzed when studying the portrayals of the “best friend” relationship. Lastly is the look of the spectator, which in this case is the researcher and their interpretations of what is being shown on screen. This was done when analyzing the characteristic traits and the characters individual wardrobes.

Part of the analysis will consist of the characters themselves, and will be studied through the binary opposition model. Researcher, Arthur Asa Berger states that “we must look for important relationships (other than that of signifier and signified) found in texts that help us understand cultural phenomena” (Burns & Thompson, 1989, p. 90). He further explains how one of the most important relationships is that of binary oppositions, and this type of relationship can help researchers to understand the ways in which the human mind forms meanings. In his textual analysis of the popular television show *Cheers*, Berger looked at oppositions between the characters. He calls this the “battle of the sexes”, and distinguishes them by height, hair color, personality traits, careers, etc. In a similar fashion, the same will be done for the characters of *Ocean’s Eight* with those of *Ocean’s Eleven*. An interesting way to approach this would be to compare the female characters to those of the male characters from the first *Ocean’s* film. A closer look at their physical characteristics—like the clothing worn – and their characteristic traits – like being compassionate, loyal, responsible – will be placed into the gender category that is more closely associated to the trait. Same goes for the narrative and the relationship portrayal in order to determine if *Ocean’s Eight* displays a more stereotypical film about women or if there are aspects that break the mold of traditional roles and narratives given to actresses in Hollywood.

Taking into consideration what is occurring with the women's movement, and its close connection to the sexual assault allegations in Hollywood leading to the rise of the #MeToo movement, a historical analysis was another methodology conducted to help supplement the research in this paper. The purpose of the historical analysis at the beginning of the literature review was to layout a timeline in order to see the correlation between milestones within the women's movement and how that transpired onto films. As previously stated, Stacey (date) noticed a lack of social and historical aspects placed into feminist film research. With the current state of Hollywood, and the backlash brought on by the misconduct of actors, producers, directors, etc. there is something to be investigated when it comes to the portrayal of women in film. This is especially true in *Ocean's Eight*, which historically is a movie franchise that began with an all-male cast. It will be good to look into what kind of influence, if any, the #MeToo movement and the stories of sexual misconduct have had on the way women in film are portrayed, or if this all female reboot is just a marketing ploy by Hollywood to gain profit off of a trending topic.

The portion that follows lays out the results that appeared during the textual analysis of *Ocean's Eleven* and *Ocean's Eight*. Starting with the narratives of each film, there is a comparison of what kind of item is being robbed, the main motives behind the robbery, and the overall setting of where the film takes place. The next section that was analyzed dives into the characteristic traits of the main characters. For *Ocean's Eleven* those characters would be Danny Ocean and his sidekick/ best friend Rusty, and for *Ocean's Eight* it would be Deb Ocean and her sidekick/ best friend Lou. Danny and Deb's characteristic traits are explained and categorized into whether those distinguished traits fall into a more masculine or feminine side. The same was done for Rusty and Lou, and from this analysis a new section became apparent, the way in which

same-sex friendships are portrayed in film. This leads into the next section that is analyzed, which looks at the ways in which same-sex friendships are portrayed between two males, Danny and Rusty, versus that of two females like Deb and Lou. In the last section analyzed, it looks at the costume design of each one of the films, and looks for signs of sexual objectification as well as gender stereotypes/ gender bending through the types of clothing worn. The following portion displays the results found within each one of the four sections analyzed.

## Results

### The Narratives

Taking a deeper look at the storylines, we can see differences and the similarities in the way the heist is pulled off in both films. For *Ocean's Eleven*, the main desires in the film are obtaining a copious amount of money and winning back the girl that got away. The main setting of this film is in the "City of Sin", Las Vegas, a perfect back drop for the eleven bachelors to play, risk, and win big. The brains of the operation is Danny Ocean, who gathers a group of men, specializing in different backgrounds, in order to pull off one of the most elaborate robberies in history. With the help of his best bud and right-hand man Rusty, Danny and Rusty are able to find nine more men with skills in conning, hacking, electrical wiring, vehicle handling, wiretapping, and gymnastics in order to steal a large amount of money from three casinos on the strip. These three casinos are the Bellagio, Mirage and MGM. The success of the plan would win the eleven men \$160 million dollars, giving them each roughly a \$14 million profit.

There was just one slight detail that Danny failed to mention about the plan. Although the men knew the plan was to rob the three Las Vegas casinos owned by hotel tycoon Terry Benedict, the reasoning behind choosing only Terry's hotels did not get unveiled until about halfway through the film. Once Rusty found out that Tess, Ocean's ex-wife, was not only the curator for Terry's hotels but also his girlfriend, Rusty was able to put two and two together and realized this was more than just pulling off a successful heist. "Tell me this is not about her or I walk off the job," is what Rusty said to Danny during the confrontation scene of the film (*Ocean's Eleven*, 45:32, 2001). Danny knew better than to tell the team his real motivation behind the plan, and goes against the cliché rule among guys of "*bros before...*". A group of men would never risk potential jail time and their freedom for a woman, let alone a woman who was

not theirs for the taking. What they would risk their lives for is money and lots of it. In true conman fashion Danny did exactly that, he conned his way into making his buddies think that this was all about everyone getting a piece of the victory in the end. Instead, it was more of a selfish act for Ocean to win back his wife and take away the two most valuable parts of Terry's life, his casinos and his girl.

In this aspect, we can see how Danny plans to take back his dominance he lost when he was sent to jail and when he lost his wife. He even makes a statement after Rusty confronts him, "Remember when we first got into this business? We said we'd play like we had nothing to lose," and goes on to imply how he lost Tess, and that regaining what he lost is his main reasoning for the heist (*Ocean's Eleven*, 45:52, 2001). Out of the eleven men, Danny is the only one who spends the entire film trying to regain what was previously lost, the love of his life. Although it seems like this kind of narrative sounds more like a romance film than a heist, Tess was not there to represent romance, she was there as object. The character of Tess served as more of a prize, like the money, than a loved human. She did not have an in-depth storyline nor a growth as most important characters tend to possess. Tess helped to solidify the masculinity throughout the film. The opening scene to the film is Ocean sitting down getting questioned by parole officers on how he plans to rebuild his life if he were to be released. His charm gets him released from prison and he regains his freedom. The only things left to regain is monetary stability and the love of his life. It is the stereotypical trifecta in a man's perfect world; freedom, money, and women.

As for *Ocean's Eight*, this is a narrative driven by revenge and disguised through shiny jewels. Still revolving around the heist theme, *Ocean's Eight* has a different object of desire, diamonds. After all, "diamonds are a girl's best friend," and it seems fitting for an all-female cast

to steal diamonds, at least fitting in the stereotypical sense. This film's narrative follows the meticulous plan to steal a Cartier necklace worth \$150 million. Debbie (Deb) Ocean, Danny Ocean's sister, is the main character in this film. She, like her brother, is a con artist and has the same opening scene in an orange jumpsuit smooth talking her way into convincing the parole officers to be released. Deb states that she "fell for the wrong person. It was a mistake," and that upon her release she just wants to get a normal job and live a normal life free of the legacy her family has left (*Ocean's Eight*, 1:20, 2018).

Upon release Deb meets up with Lou, who seems to be her best friend, the way Rusty is to Danny. Between the two, they rally up six other women, some old friends some new, and together successfully pull off the plan of stealing jewels. The main setting of this film takes place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York during one of pop culture's most famous events that happens on the first Monday in May, the Met Gala. Another significant aspect of this film's narrative, aside from women stealing shiny rocks, is that it highlights a contemporary event known for its A-list celebrity guest list and high fashion. This falls under the stereotypical woman's interests, diamonds and fashion.

Some background on the annual Met Gala is it began in 1946 and is a fundraiser gala described by Andre Leon Talley, a contributing editor for *Vogue*, as "celebrating the Costume Institute's magnificent new exhibition," with a different theme every year (Ward, 2019). Over the years it has gained media attention due to the extravagant wardrobe creation, and the array of well-known celebrities and high-end fashion designers contributing to the event. It does seem like a fitting pop cultural event to base a woman's film around. The combination of an all-female cast, millions of dollars' worth of diamonds, designer gowns, and a star-studded event are all the ingredients needed to make the recipe for a blockbuster hit among female audiences. Because of

central focus on popular designers, celebrities and events, film critics argue that this is just “an advertisement for these elite brands than the grrrl-powered lark it sometimes tries to be” (Lucca, 2018).

In similar fashion to Danny holding out on his true reasoning behind the development of the casino heist, Deb also held out a secret of her own. It is not until the ladies need to find a date for their celebrity pack mule, that Deb’s secret begins to unravel. See, in order to get the Cartier necklace from out the vault it has been sealed in for many years, they need to place it on the neck of a celebrity attending the Met Gala, Daphne Kluger. The missing piece to the puzzle was finding Daphne a date to the gala, and Deb happened to recommend art dealer Claude Becker. Shortly after Daphne and Claude hit it off at a pre-gala dinner, Tammy asks Deb how she ever fell for this guy. Deb then explained the backstory behind her meeting Claude, and how they worked together to hustle art buyers into paying more for a piece, which is ultimately how Deb got scammed by Claude. Deb goes on to explain how Claude framed her for the crime, which landed her in jail. After the flashback of how Deb got put in jail, the following scene is Lou confronting Deb about Claude’s involvement in the heist. In the same way Rusty confronted Danny, Lou states “you better tell me this is not what I think this is” (*Ocean’s Eight*, 55:31, 2018). Lou, like Rusty, also threatens to walk away from the plan if it has anything to do with seeking revenge on Claude. According to Lou “you do not run a job within in a job,” but for Deb it was about evening out the playing field and conning a conman (*Ocean’s Eight*, 55:45, 2018). Once the rest of the women involved in the heist find out about this, they are not upset the way the men in *Ocean’s Eleven* were when they found out about Tess. Instead, once the heist is complete and Deb and Lou explain how they planted a piece of the necklace in Claude’s

apartment in order to frame him for the jewelry heist, the women laugh and congratulate Deb on the success of screwing over Claude in the same way Claude did to her.

Although the films appear similar and include some of the same elements, their differences are what informs us about our evaluation of the films. Three aspects of the film's that stand out are what is being heisted, the main characters own personal motive for the heist, and the main setting of where the heist occurs. For similarities, both film's center around an object of desire but what is different is that the men are stealing money and the women are stealing jewels. Another similarity is that the main characters in each film, Danny and Deb Ocean, each have their own personal motive for going through with the heists. The difference is that Danny is motivated by love and Deb is motivated by revenge. As for the settings, the all-male cast gets to play around in the city of sin and the all-female cast get to play dress up in the big apple. Given these similarities and differences, there is evidence that the framework for *Ocean's Eight* is modeled after that of *Ocean's Eleven* but is tailored to the specified gender when it comes to the details of the storyline. When seeking to answer if this film really portrayed a more progressive female in film or if it was a marketing ploy to jump on the #MeToo movement and regain the trust of female audiences. Given the fact that the overall narrative of *Ocean's Eight* is the exact replica of *Ocean's Eleven*, it is clear to see that there is nothing riveting or new in the female version. Film critics have even questioned "whether, in the age of #MeToo, there is something truly remarkable or groundbreaking in a gender-flipped remake," given the lack of diversity and character development within the movie (Leah, 2018). Another aspect that displays this film being more of a profit than a progression is the reinforcement of gendered stereotypes. The jewels being at the center of the heist, the setting being the Met Gala, the high fashion, the celebrities and well-known fashion designers are just stereotypically associated with what

women are interested in. Film's like these, marketed as a revolutionized concept, feeding off the popularity of the women's movement is exactly how gendered stereotypes are reinforced in the media. The reinforcement through details in the narrative of *Ocean's Eight* can be better understood by Van Ruler's (2018) theory of Omnidirectional Diachronic Process. The transmitter in this case is *Ocean's Eight*, and the receivers are the audience members. If the film is centered on fashion, celebrities and diamonds then it continues to reinforce the stereotype that these things are what appeal to women, and in turn the audience members associate those three things to femininity, continuing the communication cycle. Female audiences watch *Ocean's Eight* with the expectation of it showing female empowerment, and instead are basically watching *Ocean's Eleven* with female faces. One film critic claims, "the film feels less thorough, less nourishing, as if it doesn't trust its audience to contend with something more complicated," continuing the stigma that female audiences cannot follow along or enjoy a more complex film (Lawson, 2018). The cycle of stereotyping female audiences is still occurring in Hollywood as a marketing ploy for the purpose of profit.

#### Characteristic traits

When looking at the characters of Danny and Deb Ocean, their qualities seem to merge into one another. This could be because they are siblings and these characteristic traits are passed down through family genes. Or, this is a way to showcase a female lead in a blockbuster film as being able to hold qualities more typically associated to males. Another important portion of this analysis to note is the way in which they establish their relationships with those of the same gender to the audience. Just like a Robin to Batman, Rusty and Lou play important supporting roles to Danny and Deb throughout each of the films. The way the "bromance" is portrayed

throughout *Ocean's Eleven* versus the “girl-friend” relationship in *Ocean's Eight* is different despite each character sharing the same traits.

Let's begin with Danny and Deb, and the distinct characteristic traits they embody. The most obvious notion that can be made is that they are both brilliant. They would have to be in order to think of such elaborate heists and get away with it. Throughout both films, Danny and Deb display how meticulous and patient they have been while in prison and once released. It took Danny serving four out of the five years in prison to conjure up the biggest money heist in Las Vegas history. As for Deb, “five years, eight months, and 12 days” is how long it took her to generate the flawless plan of both heisting jewels and framing the man who put her in prison (*Ocean's Eight*, 45:54, 2018). Other similar traits they embody are being determined and focused. Despite receiving opposition at first from other characters in the films, they still went through with it and did not stop till they got what they wanted. When Danny first approached Reuben about his plan, Reuben firmly stated “you're out of your goddamn minds” (*Ocean's Eleven*, 14:37, 2001). The same character of Reuben shows up in *Ocean's Eight* when he approaches Deb and warns her not to go through with the plan, implying that Danny would not want her to follow through with the heist. He states that “just knowing the job will work is satisfaction enough” (*Ocean's Eight*, 8:43, 2018). Lou also has hesitation and concerns when Deb first explains the plan regarding the ability to pull the heist off.

After the opposition of those closest to them, the audience begins to see the persuasiveness embodied by both Danny and Deb. The entire first half of each film is spent on selecting the other people who are going to help make these elaborate plans work. Some of them have hesitations at first to the plan like Rusty, Reuben, Saul, Lou, and Tammy. Yet Danny and Deb manage to persuade a group of people into stealing money/ jewels through bribery of a large

sum of money for each individual. Along with their persuasiveness, the siblings are also selfish. What makes them selfish is their own individual agenda. For Danny, that agenda is taking down “the guy who’s screwing,” his ex-wife, Tess, and potentially winning her heart back. As for Deb, her agenda is driven by vengeance. She knew the profit would entice the rest of the women to want to take part in the plot. Sure, the cut was appealing for Deb but what really drove her to go through with her plan was the potential to con the man who conned her, her ex-boyfriend Claude.

The rest of the team members, as well as the audience, do not realize their selfishness until right before the plan goes into action, which shows how secretive and persuasive Danny and Deb can really be, even to those who are said to have closer relations like Rusty and Lou. Danny and Deb ultimately had the most to lose, but also had the most to gain. The siblings are con artists by trade, and they show it through their sly and sneaky selfish ways of going about the plan. They are also greedy in a sense. Not just because of the large sums of money they each obtain at the end, but the fact that they added in an extra layer to the plan for their own personal gain shows their greed. It is not enough to be the first group of men to successfully heist Las Vegas casinos, and it is not enough to just steal the Cartier necklace at the Met Gala. Danny had to steal from not one but three casinos, the three casinos owned by Terry, the man dating his ex-wife. To finish off the win he must also steal the girl. Same thing goes for Deb, stealing one necklace is not enough, instead she had to steal an entire collection of Victorian jewels, and gain revenge on Claude.

Now, aside from the ways in which Danny and Deb’s characters are the same, they also have a few differences. One trait attributed to Danny is that he is a charmer. He can charm his way into getting what he wants and having others turn a blind eye to his corruptness. Of course, a film centered on a well-dressed, good looking, older man would be a charmer, and is a quality a

conman would have. One trait a conman is not known to have is being a romantic. Danny does have a soft spot in his heart, at least when it comes to Tess. Unlike most men in caper films, especially one with a male dominated cast, the man never lets a woman distract him when it comes down to it. Usually, the woman is merely there as a relief for the male protagonist and a visual object for the audience. In *Ocean's Eleven*, Danny smooth talks his way back into his ex-wife's life and confesses his true feelings about her. One specific scene in the film showcases Danny's romantic side when he sits down face to face the Tess for the first time since getting released from prison. He lets Tess know that he specifically went to Vegas for her and proclaims that "I want to get on with my life and I want you with me," which shows Danny's more emotional side (*Ocean's Eleven*, 50:18, 2001). Letting emotions get in the way is usually something that occurs to female characters in film, not males. On the contrary, Deb does not seem to have any sort of romantic side, but she does let her own personal emotions conflict throughout the film. Her emotion of vengeance is the driving factor for the heist. She is also cold and detached throughout the film, which is the opposite of Danny. Deb tends to be straightforward and emotionless. She never cries or shows remorse for anything, and these attributes are stereotypically associated with a male character. Deb's character embodies traits typical of a man and is a good example of a progressive female character in film, at least when it comes to the distinguished characteristic traits. This more progressive portrayal helps to deconstruct the typical traits associated to one gender versus another, as explained in the *Doing Gender Theory* by West and Zimmerman (2002). If future films with female dominated characters embody more traits associated with males, it allows the possibility for gender traits to be revised and deconstructed for future generations. It is rare when women get to play a lead role in caper films, and actually get away with the heist. The fact that the character of Deb contains

the same characteristic traits as her male counterpart and brother, Danny, shows a different archetype of a female lead than previously shown in caper films. She is not the supporting actress, she is not the object of the male gaze, she is not there for comedic relief, Deb is there to take on the male role when males are absent, and the analysis of the characters traits shows this.

Two other character's that play supporting roles in the *Ocean's* franchise are Rusty and Lou. Like Robin to Batman, Harry to Ron and even Donkey to Shrek, Rusty and Lou play the right-hand man (woman) for the leading actors. When analyzing the character traits of the two sidekicks, it is clear that they are the exact same kind of person. They both embody being that loyal, dependable and reliable best friend. Rusty is the one who picks up Danny from jail at the end of the film, and he is also the one Danny goes to for any immediate support. He is even the first person Danny tells about the casino heist and the first person to join the squad of eleven. This same character type is portrayed in *Ocean's Eight* through the character of Lou. Much like in *Ocean's Eleven*, Lou is the first person Deb tells her plan to and the first person to join the team. Deb, upon being released from prison, picks Lou as the first person she is in contact with, and she is the only other person besides Deb to be in on the heist of the crowned jewels, not just the Cartier necklace. There is a reason why Danny and Deb continue to trust Rusty and Lou throughout the entire film. They serve the purpose of reeling in the siblings when they get too far into their heads with the plan. Despite Lou being a female, she is pretty much the mirrored image of the male character of Rusty when it comes to their characteristic traits. In addition to their previously mentioned qualities, they are also confident and protective over Danny and Deb. These sidekicks are the ones that help to come up with the potential candidates to go through with the plan. Rusty and Lou both become concerned when they figure out that the heists involve the siblings past significant others. The main purpose of signifying the characteristic traits of

Rusty and Lou are to show how similar they are as characters in the narratives. Once the comparison is made, it is easier to understand the following section discussing the relationships between themselves and the leads, and the implications that come with it.

### The Portrayals of Same-Sex Friendships

As was pointed out in the last section. Rusty and Lou are basically the same kind of character exhibiting the same qualities and having their sex be the only difference between the two. Keeping this in mind, it is interesting to see how the relationship between Danny and Rusty are portrayed versus that of Deb and Lou. In *Ocean's Eleven*, Danny and Rusty display your typical “*bromance*” throughout the film. *Bromance*, a convergence of the word’s “brother” and “romance”, is a term used when two men who are best friends have a bond as close as being blood related (Uclanewsroom, 2009). It is a “brotherly” type of love but a love that never crosses the lines of sexual attraction. This is the kind of relationship Danny and Rusty have together, and it never crosses that sexual line. At no point throughout the film is there any hint towards a past or present sexualized connection, and the characters manage to maintain their masculinized charm while still sipping on their double shots of whiskey neat’s. This is quite different from the ways in which Deb and Lou’s relationship is portrayed in *Ocean's Eight*.

There are moments between Deb and Lou in which both characters say nothing but glance at each other and smile. The looks exchanged between the two go back to Mulvey’s second gaze, those between the actors on screen. Casual glances at one another, with the occasional slightly cracked smile insinuate a sexual tension between the women, glances that do not appear between Danny and Rusty. There are also certain dialogues that insinuate something

more than just a “girl-friend” relationship. In the scene where Lou picks up Deb from the cemetery, Deb begins to go explain her plan for the heist and asks if Lou opened a credit line when she asked, to which Lou tells her no. The following is exchanged between the two:

*Lou: Don't do that.*

*Deb: Do what?*

*Lou: (SIGHING) That would be my “I've just been in jail for five years, “and my partner lets me down” face.*

*Deb: Hey, I'm not your partner. Yet.*

*(Ocean's Eight, 9:46, 2018)*

This is followed by one of those silent moments where they share a friendly glance and smile. As Deb continues to explain the plan in more detail, towards the end she basically lets Lou know that she wants Lou to be by her side through the heist stating:

*Deb: And you were there with me, every step of the way.*

*Lou: Oh, honey, is this a proposal? Baby, I don't have a diamond yet.*

*(Ocean's Eight, 14:58, 2018)*

The two dialogue examples shown here seem to insinuate a more romantic relationship between the two women, more than just a typical best friend relationship associated with the female sex. More evidence towards the middle of the film continues to imply that Deb and Lou may be lovers. When Tammy asks Deb how she could have ever been romantically involved with an egotistical man like Claude, Deb starts off her story by saying “Lou and I were going through a rough patch” (*Ocean's Eight, 52:23, 2018*). This further adds to the assumptions made by audience members that Lou and Deb are more than just best friends. They may have been in a romantic relationship in the past, and may still have unresolved feelings. When questioned if the

characters of Deb and Lou had previously dated Sandra Bullock said “No, there hadn’t, but doesn’t mean they can’t be,” (Armitage, 2018). Despite that fact from Bullock, the vision of the director, the look between the actors, and the dialogue states otherwise. This further enhances the objectification of women on screen. The combination of gazes between the director’s purposefully staged scenes, and the visual exchanges between the two women provide the audience with enough to assume a homosexual relationship. Media outlets with headlines acknowledging the relationship further help solidify audience member’s assumptions. Articles like those from *Vanity Fair* (Ocean’s 8: The Agony and Ecstasy of All That Unresolved Sexual Tension), *Autostraddle* (“Ocean’s 8” Review: Women Doing Crimes And (Probably) Each Other), and *Vulture* (Ocean’s 8 is a Lesbian Movie). Commenters on the articles also show the audiences perceptions to the relationship like Jabel stating “men LOVE lesbians” on the *Vulture* article, and Diana from the *Autostraddle* article taking notice of the rainbow sticker on Lou’s laptop “A fucking rainbow sticker, they knew exactly what they were doing”(Jung & Upadhyaya ,2018). Another comment from the *Autostraddle* article came from Jes who states that the gay tones displayed throughout the film were hard to not see “any time anyone was on screen,” and when “making eye contact with anyone else” (Upadhyaya, 2018).

Films rarely display the friendships of two males as more than just being friends, unless the film is LGBTQ based. Friendships between bros are always kept as just merely a brotherhood whereas friendships with two females is over sexualized. An insider at *Vulture*, under the username PA90857, commented “why is it whenever two or more women get together they have to be lesbians?,” and how the double standard is not placed on male stating “I don't hear anybody crying ‘homo’ every time a man in EVERY MOVIE EVER MADE, gets close to another man.” (Jung, 2018). This fits into the male gaze fantasy of objectifying the females in the film. Even

when you eliminate the male, at least most of them, the representation of an all-female cast is still sexually objectified but in a more hidden, underlying, fashion. Most of the time the sexual objectification of women in film comes from their clothing, or the exposure of certain body parts, and even characteristic traits. In the case of *Ocean's Eight*, although there is less of a noticeable objectification on the surface, there is still an occurrence of it through the exchanges of looks between Deb and Lou as well as the dialogue said. It is just done in a more subtle way, probably because it is an all-female leading cast during a time in history when female empowerment was being talked about more than ever in mainstream media.

#### Costume Design

Given the fact that historically, the women's movement tend to give influence to film and vice versa, the hypothesis was that *Ocean's Eight* would not sexually objectify the women through clothing. With a more empowered female coming to light with the #MeToo movement and *Ocean's Eight* being released during this time, there is evidence that this film will break the oversexualized wardrobe of the characters. Coming from the 2000s, a time where women began to take back their bodies and sexuality, films began to show a more sexualized female character as explained earlier from Schubart and Brown's (2007, 2015) analysis. This is because stereotypically, women tend to be more overly sexualized in the media and one of the main ways in which this is done is through the outfits worn. Knowing that most of these female leads in action, crime and heist films tend to be dressed in tighter, revealing clothing, it was important to see if either one of these films displayed a difference to their stereotype, or if they once again reinforce it.

For *Ocean's Eleven*, the costume designs were predictable. With the film taking place in Las Vegas surrounding around a heist pulled off by eleven friends, it is not surprising that each of the men are very put together. Danny and Rusty are always in suits, or a button down and slacks. Danny is initially released from prison in a tuxedo and at the end of the film he is also released wearing a tuxedo. Rusty is never seen sporting anything other than a button down, sometimes a tie, and dress pants. Even the other men involved in the heist like Frank, Linus, Yen, Basher, Livingston and the Malloy twins, when not in their uniforms for their undercover jobs, they are in button downs and slacks. Another one of the eleven men, Reuben, is a hotel tycoon and also dresses in tailored, and at times over the top, suits. Lastly, Saul can be seen in sweater vests, slacks and a bucket hat. When Saul is playing his role of Limun Zerga he is seen getting tailored in a silk suit in preparation for the night of the heist. At the end of the film, the ten men, minus Danny who got escorted off the premises of the hotel in a police car, can be seen admiring the Bellagio fountains. They each get an up-close shot where it shows each one of their personal satisfactions with the outcome of the heist. Each man is dressed to the nines.

Most men in these types of films, and films in similar genres, have been sporting the clean-cut suit and tie look since films first began. The most notable character that set this stereotype is James Bond from its first debut in in 1962. Since the success of the Bond films, and many similarly replicated films, this character archetype has maintained a similar look over the years. Men like Bond, Ethan Hunt (*Mission Impossible*), Jason Bourne (*Bourne* films), and John Wick are just a few of the men in film who have reinforced this kind of stereotype in genres like crime, mystery, action adventure, spy and heist. The character archetype is well built, clean cut, a charmer with good looks, and a good sense of style who usually complete their mission and fight crime in a suit. The men of *Ocean's Eleven* fit into this character archetype, especially the two

main leads, Danny and Rusty, who are never really seen wearing anything but a suit or tux in the entire film. Keeping this in mind, the same analysis was done for the women of *Ocean's Eight*.

Given the location and object of the heist being the Met Gala and diamonds, it is safe to assume that this film would have a fashionable costume design for each character. This turned out to be somewhat true. Unlike *Ocean's Eleven*, the women of *Ocean's Eight* had a bit more versatility in the types of clothing they wore. Beginning with Deb, aside from the opening scene of her in an orange prison jumpsuit, she is first seen exiting the prison in a mini fitting black dress with a black coat and Christian Louboutin stilettos. Her wardrobe for the remainder of the film consists of a few more fitted mid-length dresses, some nice dress pants paired with flowy blouses, and a mixture between boots and heels. As for Lou, this character was styled in an androgynous way. Lou is always seen in pant suits, jumpsuits, fitted blazers, leather jackets, band tees, jeans, and even sported loose fitting ties on a few occasions. She has a very rebellious, edgy, rocker-type style that has a more masculine feel to it than some of the other women in the film. Lou's character was not the only one with a masculinized wardrobe in the film, Nine Ball and Constance were also displayed in a tomboyish manner in opposition to the rest. Nine Ball, who helps the team hack into the Met Museum's security cameras, wears baggy clothing like oversized sweatshirts, ripped jeans, large jackets, black boots and a Rastafarian hat. Same sort of style goes for Constance, a master pick-pocketer who helps the team swipe the Cartier necklace of the neck of their mule Daphne. She is seen wearing construction boots, jeans, layered shirts with oversized jackets, and always sporting a beanie, a very stereotypical style of a skater. On the other end of the spectrum is the character of Daphne, the celebrity actress who is being used as the way to get the Cartier necklace out of the vault and onto her neck. Daphne plays the stereotyped role of the pretentious, self-centered, over emotional and bratty Hollywood actress.

Her wardrobe consists of designer gowns and dresses, always wearing heels with hair and makeup perfectly done always. The remaining three characters, Tammy, Amita and Rose land somewhere in the middle of the spectrum of not being overly feminized but not crossing too far into an androgynous area. These women wear a variety of everything from work appropriate dresses, skirts and blouses, to tailored pants and jackets paired with heeled boots and sometimes high heels. Tammy, Amita and Rose have a similar wardrobe to Deb throughout the entire film. Now, as previously mentioned earlier in this section, the men of *Ocean's Eleven* are each shown at the end of the film dressed to the nines knowing they have gotten away with stealing copious amounts of money. Same goes for the women of *Ocean's Eight*. Once the necklace has been disassembled into smaller pieces and distributed among each of the women, they each have their small moments in front of the camera where they are dressed in designer gowns, fitting right in with the rest of the guests at the Met Gala, all with a radiating glow knowing they have just successfully gotten away with the heist.

On one side, the attire used in *Ocean's Eight* is more versatile and uniquely tailored to each character's individual style unlike that of *Ocean's Eleven*. The wardrobe was not over sexualized in *Ocean's Eight* like other women in these kinds of films have been in the past. Usually women in these kinds of films wear form fitting outfits, and some female leads that come to mind that have paved the way for women in similar genres are the *Charlie's Angels*. Originally a 70s television show that evolved into film, they used clothing to evoke sex appeal thus objectifying women on screen. Characters like Lara Croft, Jinx (*Die Another Day*), Lorraine (*Atomic Blonde*), Evelyn (*Salt*), and Jane (*Mr. and Mrs. Smith*), along with the reoccurring character of the "Bond Girl" playing love interests in other action adventure/crime films, there has been a priming overtime of what it means to be a woman in these kinds of films. Adding in

the more masculinized character of Lou is a character archetype that is still rare in films today, and helped *Ocean's Eight* break molds for future female leads in this genre. In a way, *Ocean's Eight* broke those assumptions and managed to allow the narrative and dialogue to not be overshadowed by the female body. In other ways though, the film still reinforced certain character archetypes through clothing. This is mainly seen in the characters of Nine Ball and Constance. Nine Ball is the only African American in the group of eight women, and in her opening scene the audience sees her smoking weed and wearing a Rastafarian hat on top of her dreads. This further reinforces the stereotype that many African American actors and actresses have tried to break over the years in media. Same goes for Constance who was given the stereotypical skater boy role. Although this does not go into racial issues, it does bring down the potential credibility that *Ocean's Eight* serves as an example of female progression in film genres dominated by men. Ultimately, the wardrobe in *Ocean's Eleven* is another replication of the stereotypical man in the heist genre, and other genres like it. When it comes to *Ocean's Eight*, the clothing does not reinforce sexual objectification of the women on screen, but it does slightly reinforce the stereotypical archetype of some of the characters in the film.

## Discussion

Now that an analysis of the narrative, characteristic traits, portrayals of same-sex friendships, and wardrobe have been explained, there can be an evaluation of the research questions at hand. Historically, there is a correlation between societal viewpoints and what is being displayed on the silver screen. It is not a coincidence that since the rising number of sexual assault allegations in Hollywood there has also been a rise in female dominated films from 2018 to present day. Originally, this led to a hypothesis that the societal atmosphere of female empowerment in turn would lead to a more empowered female character in film, especially in genres typically reserved for males. The text at hand, *Ocean's Eight*, served as the perfect text of study due to its female-led cast, being from a subgenre of action films (heist), being from a genre who's leads are reserved for males, and it being a women's reboot of a popular male led franchise. Given this, plus the synonymous trends historically between the women's movement and films, it led me to believe *Ocean's Eight* could be marked as a film free from gendered stereotypes, free from double standards and free from sexual objectification, but instead the findings proved otherwise.

The first question was whether the narrative of *Ocean's Eight* reinforced gendered stereotypes that have been engraved over time. After taking a closer look at the narrative of *Ocean's Eight*, and comparing it to its male counterpart, there are still subtle ways in which women are being gender stereotyped. Coming out with an all-female reboot of a legendary all-male casted film does not necessarily mean it is progressive. Changing the narrative to include typical feminine traits like diamonds, fashion and celebrities shows that the writers, producers and director wanted to make a simple replica targeted towards female audiences. Recalling from the literature review, this reaffirms two of the three elements that make up an action film, as

stated by Schubart (2003). Now, since heist films are a subgenre of action films, *Ocean's Eight* falls under both genres. Two of the three elements that make up these female-led action films is “that the plot and content are irrelevant,” and “the portrayal of the female hero is related to an unspecified and politicized empowerment of women” (Schubart, 2003, p. 291). *Ocean's Eight* fits directly into those two elements. The narrative was geared towards diamonds, fashion, and celebrities, which are components that make for a successful chick-flick. There was nothing complex about the storyline, in fact it was pretty much a replication of *Ocean's Eleven*.

One of the other questions asked was if this female-led reboot was just a marketing ploy for Hollywood to gain back a positive reputation with female audiences, and profit from the popularized “female empowerment” topic. Ultimately yes, Hollywood just used the buzz and hype around the #MeToo movement and female empowerment as a marketing ploy to bring more females, who had a bad perception of Hollywood due to the media’s coverage on sexual assault allegations, to buy tickets. This reaffirms Schubart’s (2003) other element of having the lead, or in this case leads, bring a sense of empowerment to the film. See, from the analysis of the characteristic traits, it seemed as though *Ocean's Eight* was breaking gendered stereotypes and allowing for a stronger female character to shine through. Deb embodied a lot of positive qualities much like her brother, and these qualities are categorized as being on a more masculinized scale. Same thing occurred for Lou, who possessed the same qualities as Rusty, also on a more masculinized scale. These masculine traits helped to portray more powerful females on screen but was ultimately used to mask the truth of the overall gendered stereotyped, and non-complex, narrative. From the stats, the marketing ploy worked given that 70 percent of attendees were female, and 51 percent of ticket buyers were female (McClintock, 2019). Critics

and commenters noticed the lack of character development and lack of complexity involved in the narrative further affirming Schubart's (2003) elements.

There was also a question of whether any sort of sexual objectification was placed upon the women in *Ocean's Eight*. A common area in which objectification occurs is through the focus of the woman's body, which is usually accentuated and exposed with the types of clothing worn. From Schubart's three elements that make a female-led action film, one of them is over sexualizing "the female hero and her body," which is something *Ocean's Eight* did not participate in (2003, p.291). When studying the wardrobe for the film, *Ocean's Eight* did not sexually objectify the cast. In fact, the characters of Lou, Nine Ball and Constance embodied a more androgynous style, not commonly found among female characters in film. This was a different turn out when compared to other female characters in similar genres like heists. Skintight/ revealing clothing was absent from this film, and shows a step in the right direction for future films to come. These findings also defied three of the four parts to Brown's (2015) prototyped female action star. Recalling back, the common parts of the female action star "is 'young' ..., slim..., white and marketed as of primarily (though not necessarily wholly) heterosexual orientation" (Brown, 2015, p. 36). The three parts that defied Brown's (2015) analysis were the age, body type and ethnicity. The leading cast ranged in age from 30 (Awkwafina) to 55 (Sandra Bullock). There are also different ethnicities represented through the cast like Indian, Chinese, and African American. Body types of these women also ranged from petite to fit to curvaceous. The other part of Brown's (2015) prototyped action female lead was the ambiguity of being heterosexual, which was reaffirmed in *Ocean's Eight*. After analyzing the ways in which friendships of the same sex are portrayed, what was revealed was that a double standard was placed on *Ocean's Eight* when it came to the friendship between Deb and Lou as

opposed to the one between Danny and Rusty. This happened to answer the question of whether there were double standards placed on female leads in *Ocean's Eight* versus their male counterparts in *Ocean's Eleven*. There in fact was a double standard placed with the insinuation of Deb and Lou being potential lovers both in the past and present. This insinuated lesbianism confirms Brown's (2015) element of heterosexual ambiguity. The male gaze was also very much present in *Ocean's Eight* by sexualizing the relationship between two women as more than just friends through, "that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event,... and that of the characters at each other" (Mulvey, 1975, p. 12). The film is an example of how Mulvey's (1975) take on visual pleasure can work far beyond the body. It works subtly through the scenes shot, and the looks exchanged between one actor to another. This objectification was also acknowledged by media outlets, commentators and even Bullock herself.

When analyzing the characteristic traits and costume design, there were some positive findings. From previous research, as explained in the literature review, the main ways in which the woman on screen are sexually objectified and gender stereotyped is through characteristic traits and physical characteristics like body parts and clothing. Yet, when I analyzed the characteristic traits and costume design of *Ocean's Eight* this proved to be false. Where I did find subtle objectification and gendered stereotypes was through the portrayals of same sex friendships and narratives. This led me to the conclusion that the traditional ways in which women in films have been stereotyped and sexually objectified are no longer being represented in the same ways as in the past. *Ocean's 8*, instead of the predication of it breaking molds for women in film instead reinforced it to the audience through non-traditional aspects. In terms of where Van Ruler's (2018) omnidirectional diachronic process of communication fits into all this, the film itself acts as one of many transmitters to be received by the audience members, who in

turn can use this film as a source to place into their own categorization of what it means to be male and female. This process of applying meaning to gender, and distinguishing what is masculine and what is feminine, is where West and Zimmerman's (2002) Doing Gender theory comes into play. The look of the spectator, from Mulvey's (1975) Male Gaze theory, was used during the analysis of the four categories since I acted as the spectator. Other ways in which the look of the spectator was used was through the comments from viewers and film critics of the film who noticed the lacking narrative, and the sexual tension between the characters of Deb and Lou. The other two looks, those of the director and the looks between the actors on screen, were used to understand the way Deb and Lou's friendship was sexualized.

From my research, there seems to be small, and very subtle steps towards deconstructing stereotypes, and reconstructing gender. Although most of the findings prove reinforcement of negative connotations placed on women in film, there were some positives found throughout the research. Leading me to believe that there is a possibility to make changes to gendered stereotypes. This is where further research will be beneficial. More and more reboots and female dominated casts are beginning to appear not only in film but in television. Films like *Captain Marvel*, *Dark Phoenix*, *Hustlers*, and even film reboots like *Tomb Raider* and *Charlies Angeles* all showcase what seems to be a more progressive female. Further research on films like those listed, and those that are yet to come, will serve as markers through history in order to notice the potential changes of the portrayals of women in film.

## Conclusion

As noted, the women's movement has evolved throughout history, and each decade seemed to have its own unique agenda. With the times changing there came changes in societal standards regarding gender and changing perceptions towards feminists and the overall concept of feminism. A combination of all these changes further influenced changes within the media, not just with news outlets but also an expansion into literature, T.V. and film. Beginning with a historical analysis of the women's movement, and the kinds of female characters emerging in film during specific decades, helped to date the points in time that a cultural shift was occurring. The cultural shifts between organizations, societal perceptions, and the media is better understood through an omnidirectional diachronic process of communication, in which the workings of a multitude of transmitters pour out information to receivers, who in turn take that information in order to apply meaning to things around them. This process of communication allows for the information and application of meaning to change and evolve throughout time, allowing for potential progression. The power that films and social movements, like the women's movement, have are topics that need to be studied in order to better understand the way in which society applies meaning to gender, and how these powerful entities can either change or reinforce gendered stereotypes. In the wake of sexual assault allegation against one of Hollywood's most notorious film producers, there came another shift within feminism and the women's movement. One with an agenda centered on the #MeToo movement and regaining a sense of female empowerment. Along with that came more films with female dominated casts, not just on screen but also behind the scenes in production. Historically, whenever a major shift occurs within society, films tend to follow it with providing a glorified representation of it on the silver screen. Therefore, it is important to look at these female dominated films emerging in

order to establish whether the representation is accurate. The research conducted in this study served to answer questions that came about from this cultural phenomenon with the hopes of having a better understanding of the sort of influence major movements and films can have on each other, and the ways in which audiences interpret and relay back the messages into their everyday lives. *Oceans' Eleven* and *Ocean's Eight* were the texts chosen to analyze due to the latter being released shortly after the sexual assault allegations in 2018, the main cast being all female, and it being a reboot of a popularized all-male film. In studying these texts, what was being looked for was the narratives, characteristic traits, the portrayals of same sex friendships, and costume design. Each category was compared and contrasted between the all-male *Ocean's Eleven* to the all- female *Ocean's Eight*.

A series of questions were sought out to uncover. Some of those being whether the narrative within *Ocean's Eight* reinforce gendered stereotypes that have been engraved over time, and whether this film is just a marketing ploy for Hollywood to gain back a positive reputation with female audiences and profit from the popularized "female empowerment" topic. Ultimately what was discovered is that the more progressive traits embodied by the female characters in *Ocean's Eight* overshadowed the overall narrative, which as far as the narrative goes, was in fact reinforcing gendered stereotypes. Although the leads, Deb and Lou, possessed the same characteristic traits as their male counterparts, the objective of the heist and the setting was very much feminized. Considering the opening weekend statistics with over 50% of movie goers and ticket buyers being female and Jeff Goldstein, president of Warner Bros. studios, stating "The target audience, females, are just so underserved," leads me to believe this was just a marketing ploy to sell more tickets and overshadow the negativity surrounding Hollywood

(McClintock, 2018). *Ocean's Eight* ended up making more money opening weekend than the other three *Ocean's* films further solidifying the marketing ploy.

Another issue with women in films is that they are typically sexually objectified, especially when starring in genres dominated by men like action, crime, mystery and heist. So, given this rise in female empowerment through the women's movement, has this influenced less sexually objectified female characters in *Ocean's Eight*? When analyzing the wardrobe for the characters in *Ocean's Eight*, what was found was that skintight and revealing clothing were not worn by the women. Instead a more modest and covered up appearance was used leading to a less sexually objectified female in that sense. Now, when looking at the portrayals of friendships with the same sex, a more sexual relationship was portrayed for the two leading women and not the leading men, which places a double standard within the films, answering the fourth question at hand.

Though some of the findings were positive, like the more masculine traits possessed by the female characters and their professional and modest costume design, the stronger parts that make a film like the narrative and character relationships are lacking complexity and reinforce conventional female qualities. This does not mean that a change cannot occur. Further research on other films currently out, or out at a future date, centering on an all-female cast can be used to continue to track potential changes. *Ocean's Eight* displayed a very slight progressive change regarding the portrayals of women in film, and this gives hope for future films to change the kinds of roles given to women.

## Limitations

As in any research, there are some limitations within this current study that needs to be addressed. One of those being the texts used for analysis. These are just two films out of millions that have been created throughout time. The findings coming out of the two films do not represent all heist films or film reboots, or female led film. Other films from the past, present and future can be used for further research and uncover other possibilities that could support or go against what has been stated in this study. More research related to this topic using different films would bring more knowledge to the concepts discussed.

Another limitation is the time period of the release of these films. This study focuses on a film released in 2001 being compared to one released in 2018. At the time of this publication it is 2019, and there has since been an evolution in the feminist movement, the political climate related to sexual assault and harassment, as well as the kinds of films being made by women. Therefore, further research is important to build on the current findings found within this paper and previous ones.

One note to add is that this research was conducted through my personal analysis of the film. These findings are subjective and were evaluated through a feminist lens, based off feminist film theories, conducted by a female viewer. All these factors influence the way in which each category was analyzed and interpreted. Every movie goer interprets a film differently due to their own personal upbringing, beliefs, cultural influences and place of living. The results found in this paper are based off the researchers own interpretations in relation to the information relayed in the literature review.

The final limitation of this study is that it was conducted based off westernized viewpoints from a westernized film. America is where the *Ocean's* franchise was set, produced and released. Other films produced in other countries will display a different kind of female character in their films. This research was based solely on the representation of women in an American film in comparison to another American film. The historical analysis follows American history and cultural changes within the country. Films in other countries may or may not display the same outcome as what is occurring in said country's societal or political state.

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