

Building meaning through language: equality in movie reviews
covering movies in the superhero genre

Bachelor's thesis

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Miesten ja naisten eriarvoisuus on ajankohtainen puheenaie, josta jokaisella on omat näkemyksensä. Eriarvoisuus näkyy muun muassa kielessä, jota tietoisesti tai tiedostamatta käytetään. Kieli, jota käytämme, rakentaa maailmankuvaamme ja näin ollen myös tasa- tai epätasa-arvo näkyy vahvasti siinä, miten miehistä ja naisista puhutaan ja kirjoitetaan.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee supersankarielokuvien lehtiartikkelien kautta mahdollisia eriarvoisuuksia mies- ja naisnäyttelijöistä puhuttaessa. Tutkielmassa hyödynnetään kriittisen diskurssianalyysin (CDA) mukaan kielen rakenteita ja sanavalintoja, joissa on mahdollista nähdä yksittäisten ihmisten sekä yhteiskunnan asenteita ja ideoita. Vaikka naispuolisia supersankareita on sarjakuvissa näkynyt paljonkin, Hollywood on keskittynyt vahvasti miespuolisiin hahmoihin. Vaatimukset tasa-arvosta saivat kuitenkin pienen voiton vuonna 2017: oman elokuvan naispuoliselle supersankarihahmolle. Tämän takia on mielenkiintoista tarkastella, kuinka tästä hahmosta ja tämän näyttelijästä puhutaan verrattaessa miespuolisiin hahmoihin. Tutkielmassa tarkastellaan Wonder Woman (2017), The Dark Knight Rises (2012) ja Man of Steel (2013) -elokuvien arvosteluja. Arvostelut kerättiin viidestä eri englanninkielisestä broadsheet-sanomalehdestä ja tabloidista.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa tuli esille nyky-yhteiskunnassa edelleen esiintyviä eriarvoisuuksia miesten ja naisten välillä: Naishahmoa kommentoitaessa keskittyminen oli vahvasti ulkonäössä ja naiset yhdistettiin paljon useammin heidän miespuoliseen vastanäyttelijäänsä, kun taas miespääosat esitettiin omana hahmonaan, ilman yhdistämistä naishahmoon. Selviä eroja löytyi myös broadsheet-sanomalehtien ja tabloidien välillä. Tabloidien kirjoitustyylillä oli kriittisempää ja voimakkaampaa, kuin broadsheet-lehtien. Tabloidityylille ominaista on myös skandaalimaisuus, joka tuli ilmi sanavalinnoista.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Inequality between men and women has been an issue that has affected society for centuries. Now, in the 21st century, feminism has come to a new age and there is a new public discourse about the issues both men and women face as a consequence of the ideals and attitudes in the past. Bringing attention to these topics in the traditional as well as in social media is a sign of change starting to happen. Sexualization is recognized and discussed more in the media and is being researched more. For example, a study on sexualization of male and female scientists in the British media found that both sexes were objectified, however there were differences in the way it was done depending on the gender (Attenborough 2011).

The present study investigates movie reviews based on three different movies from the superhero genre: Wonder Woman (2017), The Dark Knight Rises (2012) and Man of Steel (2013). The Dark Knight Rises is one of the Batman movies from Christopher Nolan's Dark Knight trilogy and Man of Steel is a retelling of Superman's origins. The movie reviews were collected from three broadsheet newspapers (The New York Times, The Guardian, The Washington Post) and two tabloids (Daily Mail, Daily Mirror). The main question of this study is how the lead actors and actresses or the characters of the movies are reviewed and described and if there are any gendered differences. Supporting actors and actresses and their characters are also taken into consideration in how and how much they are written about since this can show signs of discrimination.

The present study analyzes the chosen movie reviews by using critical discourse analysis (CDA) to point out potential societal problems emerging from the word choices and language used in the reviews. The reason for using CDA instead of discourse analysis is that CDA investigates the societal questions involved and opens the discussion of whether the possible differences between genders arise from deliberate choices from the writers or if the choices are ideals that are rooted deep within our society. Theoretical background on gender and media is taken into consideration when discussing the findings.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis

In order to understand critical discourse analysis, it is important to understand the term ‘discourse’ and discourse analysis. In the English Oxford dictionary the term ‘discourse’ is defined as a formal discussion in spoken or written form as well as a connected series of utterances in text or in conversation. The Oxford dictionary defines discourse analysis as a method of analyzing the structure of texts considering both linguistic content and sociolinguistic context. Furthermore, Locke (2004) explains the two types of discourse that discourse analysis applies: 1) discourse as an abstract noun meaning language use as a social practice. 2) Discourse as a countable noun denoting “practice not just of representing the world, but of signifying the world, constituting and constructing the world in meaning” (Locke 2004: 13-14). Additionally, Locke emphasizes that meanings are socially constructed via language use, hence noticing and analyzing the differences in the words used about men and women can uncover connotations e.g. in societal power and traditional roles.

According to Wodak and Meyer (2001), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) views language as a social practice and takes interest in the relation between language and power. They illustrate how language and social power are entwined: language indexes, expresses, challenges and is involved with power. They add that CDA does not regard language as powerful on its own but gaining power through powerful people that use it or have the means to change it. Hence, CDA and critical linguistics often choose the perspective of those who suffer and analyze the use of language of those in power. Wodak and Meyer (2001: 9) define the ‘critical’ part of CDA as having distance to the data. In the present study, the people who have the power are regarded as the press, or the writers of the articles analyzed: the writer can control the language used in the articles and can create meanings through it.

2.2 Media and gender

One of the most important theoretical frameworks for the present study is what kind of research has been done on gender and the media. Ross (2012: 5) states that most feminist media scholars research women’s media representation, reasoning that content is what establishes the media’s relationship with its audience. Content communicates facts, ideas, values and meanings. She

goes on to say that most research on women's media representation is concerned with stereotypes of women that have pervaded the imagery of popular culture for decades. This kind of research is conducted mainly using a qualitative approach. Textual and framing analysis, semiotics, ethnography and social critique are a few of the most common methodologies (Ross 2012: 5). According to Kellner (2011 cited in Ross 2012), these approaches enable scholars to show how the media articulates dominant values, political ideologies and social developments and novelties of the era.

A considerable number of women and media research has focused on the problem of women's absence in news and in lead roles in movies, Gallagher (1981 cited in Ross 2012) saying: "perhaps the most important image is, in fact, a "non-image": it is the absence of women in the media output which becomes most striking once it has been highlighted". Moreover, the women who do get visibility in the media are often connected to powerful male figures, for example their fathers or husbands (Ross 2012: 8). The press has preferred female celebrities connected to powerful male figures as the focus for stories and Lang (1978 cited in Ross 2012) notes that for women to become newsworthy in the 1970s, they had to have "mothered, married, or been sired by a man of achievement".

Gauntlett (2002: 247-248) examined how traditional portrayals of men and women in the early 20th century media began to shift in the late 20th and early 21st century: gender roles in television during the 90's and into the new century had become increasingly equal and non-stereotyped – within some limits – although most lead actors were still male. A new era of 'girl power' and women in more roles in TV and film were introduced and representations of gender began to be more complex and less stereotyped. The media's importance and power in representing stereotypes and what are socially acceptable ways of being is brought up by Carter and Steiner (2004). They indicate that media texts do not mirror or reflect reality; however, they construct hegemonic definitions of what should be accepted as reality. The change in the traditional portrayals of men and women in the 20th century implies that the media has advanced from the ideals of working man and housewife, however, there are still existing stereotypes about men and women and they still are not portrayed as equals. Having said that, the evidence of the shift in the past century provides hope of more equal representations of women and men in the future.

Attenborough (2011) conducted a study where he examined how male and female scientists were sexualized in British newspaper media. The study aimed to foreground the diverse practices that tend to come under the heading 'sexualization'. He brought up the thought of "we're all objectified now"

and aimed to prove that while men are objectified in the modern society as well as women, the ways of sexualization differ between the sexes. To do so, he performed critical discourse analysis on newspaper articles that profile both a male and a female celebrity scientist. Attenborough examined the referential and fragmentation strategies, transitivity choices and focalization on display used in the articles.

Attenborough (2011: 673-674) found that indeed both the male and female scientists were subjected to different processes of sexualization. The differences were in the details used to describe and talk about the two scientists. The female scientist was depicted as a sexy body first and a scientist second. Portraying her as a giggling, tight clothes wearing blonde who happens to be smart means that she was defined by her body, not her skills. The male scientist was also depicted as attractive, however the sexiness and objectification focused more on his hair and face rather than his body. Another difference found was that the female scientist was portrayed as an active seducer and the male scientist as an innocent victim of lustful female desire. Attenborough (2011: 674) concludes that his findings support the suggestion that sexualization is no longer limited to women's bodies, however he also remarks that this does not mean equality.

2.3 Differences in language between broadsheet newspapers and tabloids

There are clear differences in the language used in broadsheet newspapers and tabloids. Conboy (2010) offers an outlook on the language and the differences in it between the two types of newspapers. While the language in broadsheet newspapers is very formal, tabloids in comparison use a more informal and content-rich vocabulary in their articles and headlines. Attention-grabbing words such as "romance", "sex" and "scandal" are used more often and in big, bold, print. Friedrich (1959 cited in Schaffer 1995) describes tabloid language as the art of exaggerating without actually lying. Tabloid language is about the way tabloids have created a strong readership and a culture of deep political skepticism, celebrity news and sexualization, mainly targeted for working-class readers (Conboy, 2010). Tabloid language is wired to contemporary trends and other forms of popular culture e.g. television and film.

The absence of women in the media mentioned above ties well to another point Conboy touches on. It is that content in newspapers is mainly targeted for men, as Conboy (2010: 148) refers to Greenslade (2003) saying: "up to the postwar era there was very little directly targeted to a female audience".

Tuchman (1978 cited in Conboy 2010) also says that this has not changed and that women are “symbolically annihilated” in the quality press. However, journalism is forever changing and the challenges with modern technology and the internet can also bring development of feminine styles of writing in consumer-oriented news (Van Zoonen 1998, cited in Conboy 2010). With the background theory on the differences between broadsheets and tabloids, the hypothesis of the present study is that the movie reviews published in tabloids will contain more sexualization and stronger, as in more dramatic and attention seeking, language.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Research aim and questions

The overall aim of the study is to see if modern day broadsheets and tabloids rely on gendered stereotypes in their writing about male and female actors, and if men and women are sexualized and how. The first research question seeks to give an answer to this. The second question is about the main characters' sidekicks, who are of the opposite sex of the main character. This question is brought up because it can reveal issues in the society, e.g. the fact that most news and media are targeted towards men (Conboy 2010) and that women in the media are rarely written about alone and are almost always linked to men (Ross 2012). The third question is about the differences between broadsheets and tabloids. It is interesting to compare the language of the more traditional newspapers that have a more neutral tone and use a standard language to the tabloid-style language and tone. Conboy (2010) says that tabloids speak the language of the people, and if tabloids show more issues with e.g. sexualization, is that what people want to read and is that how they think, or if that is how they are taught to think.

Research questions:

1. Are male and female actors in the superhero movie genre reviewed and written about differently?
2. How much are the supporting characters of the opposite sex written about in the reviews?
3. Are there differences in reviews between broadsheets and tabloids?
4. If there are differences between genders and in the different types of newspapers, how does the language differ?

3.2 Data and methods

The movies and their reviews chosen to be compared to *Wonder Woman* (2017) are *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and *Man of Steel* (2013). These movies were chosen because they include a female sidekick or partner for both Batman and Superman (Catwoman and Lois Lane). *Wonder Woman* has a male partner, Steve Trevor and one of the research questions focuses on the amount that these supporting characters are written about. All of the chosen movies are based on the DC Comics and the DC extended universe. This is because the competing company and universe, Marvel, has yet to create a successful, big budget superhero movie with a female lead.

The material for the present study is collected from broadsheets The New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian and tabloids Daily Mail and Daily Mirror. One review per movie is chosen from each of the newspapers. The selection of the newspapers and tabloids was arbitrary, and the only qualification was that they all had to have movie reviews written about all of the movies. The reason for choosing newspapers rather than selecting reviews from e.g. social media platforms offers the chance to analyze reviews written by professional journalists or movie critics and not by anyone on the internet. It is important to note here that pictures appearing in the reviews are not taken into consideration in the analysis, however the possible captions of the pictures are. Additionally, the gender of the writers of the reviews is taken into consideration and discussed when necessary.

The method of analysis is critical discourse analysis; thus, the present study will focus on word choices, sentence structures and other grammatical features. On top of that, with CDA it is possible to investigate the societal questions, such as gender equality, involved. The theoretical background on gender and the media as well as newspaper and tabloid language will aid in the discussion of the analysis.

4 RESULTS

This chapter will go through each of the movie reviews, aiming to answer the research questions and detail the differences they might have compared to one another. The *Wonder Woman* reviews are discussed individually and *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Man of Steel* reviews are combined, because the amount of data from the latter reviews was smaller and quite similar to each other.

4.1 Wonder Woman reviews

The following paragraphs examine movie reviews written about *Wonder Woman*. Using CDA, the focus will be on grammatical features that reveal possible attitudes and inequalities writers of the reviews might have.

4.1.1 The New York Times

The New York Times review, called “Review: *Wonder Woman* is a blockbuster that lets itself have fun”, written by Anthony Oliver Scott (2017) has a neutral tone that does not bring feminism to the foreground. The review starts by shortly discussing the “Dark Knight” era of DC movies and introduces the main character of *Wonder Woman*, also known as Diana Prince and played by Gal Gadot, director Patty Jenkins and script writer Allan Heinberg. *Wonder Woman* is compared to many male-led movies such as *Batman*, *Superman* and even *Spiderman* in this review, but it is not compared to any other female superhero characters, however the reason for that might be the lack of them. *Wonder Woman* as a character is compared to a Disney princess, but one could argue that it is a justified comparison, since she technically is a princess and also free spirited and rebellious as are many of the Disney princesses. However, the word ‘princess’ has many connotations and not all of them are positive. While ‘princess’ can be a reference of a woman of power and dignity, it can also be used to put women (or men) down with sayings such as “oh don’t be such a princess” suggesting that princesses are spoiled brats. In this review Scott most likely does not use the reference in this way, however distinguishing a female superhero as a princess while male superheroes are not compared to princes or kings can be seen as problematic.

Scott does not comment on *Wonder Woman*’s or the actress Gal Gadot’s looks, however describes her sidekick and romantic interest Steve Trevor, who is played by Chris Pine, as “a blue-eyed flyboy who is the living embodiment of the phrase ‘not all men’” and “Mr. Pine, who has Paul Newman’s seductive blue eyes and a hint of Clark Gable’s raffish charm”. These phrases indicate that Pine’s

role in the movie is that of a seducer, and the relationship and chemistry of the on-screen couple is emphasized in the review as well. Interestingly, as a man Scott only comments on the looks of the male character and focuses on the relationship of the main characters.

4.1.2 The Guardian

The Guardian's review of Wonder Woman, written by Wendy Ide (2017) and titled "Wonder Woman review – a gloriously badass breath of fresh air" has a different kind of tone to the New York Post review as it has more of a feminist point of view. This could be because Ide herself is a woman and might feel more empowered because of the movie than a male reviewer like Scott. The feminist tone can already be seen in the first paragraph of the review:

"As magnificent as you are, you are still no match for me," says General Ludendorff [...] he's a pudgy middle-aged man who has recently snorted something that makes him feel invincible; she's an Amazon warrior princess who has just punched her way through the roof of a watchtower to tackle him. But let's face it, it wouldn't be the first time a man has underestimated the potential of a better-qualified woman"

Ide also brings up the lack of female-led superhero movies and comments on how empowering it is to see a hero like Wonder Woman. Even though the review has a more feminist tone, Ide brings up Wonder Woman's and Gadot's looks up more than Scott (2017) did in the NY Times review. However, Ide, being a woman, describes Gal Gadot quite similarly to how Scott, a man, described Chris Pine. The reason for this might be that they are more comfortable describing the actors of the same sex. The first example of describing Wonder Woman could be controversial if it was written by a man:

"She is such a glorious badass, one who wears her femininity with the same pride and poise that she wears her armour-plated bra."

It is interesting why Ide thought it was necessary to mention Wonder Woman's bra. Could it be a source for empowerment, a woman celebrating another woman's sexiness, or a way to sexualize her. The second example is not as sexualized, but relies more on the character's looks than her abilities:

"Her [Wonder Woman] secret weapon is not the bullet-repelling jewellery; not her swordplay; not her ability to fire shockwaves from her wrists. It's not even her luxuriant, swooshing hair. It is her empathy. Although now I mention it, the hair *is* pretty impressive."

Like Scott (2017), Ide discusses the on-screen chemistry and "lip smacking, flirtatious fun" between Gadot and Pine. Chris Pine is described as "dashing" but not much more is mentioned about him. Ide's review and her descriptions of the characters brings up a question of whether or not it is acceptable for a woman to sexualize a woman. The intent behind the examples shown above is unknown to the reader, hence they can make their own judgements from them. While most readers

might not look into the phrases, the words and their underlying meanings, the emphasis on the character's looks instead of her abilities is an issue that can and will go unnoticed.

4.1.3 The Washington Post

The review "Wonder Woman saves the day, in more ways than one", written by another woman, Ann Hornaday (2017) has a more neutral tone to it than The Guardian's review and resembles the style of The NY Times review more. Hornaday, like Ide (2017), comments on the lack of female hero's movies, saying that women have "long expected to internalize myths of exaggerated male potency as their own". Hornaday describes Gal Gadot in a way that does not objectify her, but brings out her femininity as her strength:

"Gadot acquits herself with distinction, expressing power not merely as a display of cool moves and physical derring-do, but quiet focus and almost nonchalant self-possession."

Like Scott (2017) Hornaday plays with the idea of a princess, but does it in a way that shows the traditional fairytales are changing:

"She's [Gadot] soulful and utterly credible, even when she comes out bracelets blazing, effortlessly scaling a tower that might have imprisoned a princess like her in another story, at least until the right hero came along."

Hornaday also focuses a lot on the relationship and chemistry between Wonder Woman and Steve Trevor, actors Gadot and Pine. The description of Steve Trevor does not focus on his looks, but his sense of humor and his role in the movie as the "mamsel in distress". Interesting here is that Steve Trevor's character is portrayed as the helpless one, which traditionally has been the role of the female character. Although Trevor is saved by Wonder Woman a few times in the movie, he does heroic actions of his own as well and is not just a helpless character. The "mamsel in distress", a wordplay from the phrase *damsel* in distress, is used to portray the male character as something lesser than the female character, the hero of this movie. Audiences are not used to seeing a strong female character and a weaker male character, hence Hornaday might have believed that portraying the two characters in these reversed traditional roles could help readers understand the characters better.

4.1.4 Daily Mail

The previous reviews were all from broadsheets and here Daily Mail's review is the first of two tabloid reviews. The different style of the tabloid can be clearly seen from the attention-grabbing title of Jan Moir's (2017) review "a superhero movie with a female in charge? Wonders never cease! Jan Moir on the female-friendly comic book blockbuster". Moir starts off with a "Ka-Pow" and leads

readers in with a description of Wonder Woman that is clearly more sexualizing and appearance-centered than any of the previous reviews discussed:

“Ka-pow! She made her first appearance in a DC comic 76 years ago, then she twirled around in star-spangled hot-pants during a 1970s television series. However, it has taken until now for this she-crusader to finally star in her own film. Wonder Woman opens this week, with Israeli actress Gal Gadot starring as a rebooted Diana Prince, the warrior who battles evil forces armed only with her god-killer sword, her magic metal cuffs and some really great lipstick shades. This Diana is long of thigh and short of skirt, as tradition demands, while under her swelling C-cup breastplate, there lurks a heart formed of goodness and gold – for Wonder Woman 2017-style is still a girl who knows where her duty lies.”

Surprisingly after that, the review takes on a more feminist tone, even though one could interpret some of it as sarcasm:

“So is the new Wonder Woman the ultra superheroine feminists have been waiting and longing for? Actually, she is pretty darned marvellous. Gadot’s Diana looks like a young Angelina Jolie who has grown strong on pasta and cream and knows how to twirl her Lasso of Truth – yes, she’s still got it, in more ways than one. Diana is not just strong and kickass, she is also kind, warm and not prepared to accept the death of civilians and soldiers as collateral damage – like the pesky men do. She is also no slouch in the combat department. There are bone-splintering scenes when Wonder Woman smashes men to bits, absolutely pulverising them to man-rubble in that comic book.”

Staying true to the tabloid style, Moir appeals to the working class, male readers that tabloids were designed for by sexualizing Wonder Woman and commenting on feminism. As a woman, Moir might feel like she has the right to discuss Wonder Woman’s C-cups and men-smashing feminism, however the comments that she is making would not be made about male superheroes and that is the inequality that can be seen from all of these reviews.

The character of Steve Trevor is mentioned briefly, described as a handsome spy, an all-American, square-jawed hero. Trevor’s role as the secondary character is compared to Lois Lane of the Superman franchise, like the previous reviews referring to his role as the “mangel in distress”:

“He is the secondary Lois character, forever at her [Wonder Woman] mercy, smitten by her charm, running at her heels.”

4.1.5 Daily Mirror

The Daily Mirror’s review, written by Chris Hunneysett (2017) is titled “Wonder Woman review: a fantastic old fashioned adventure with action and romance on a huge scale”. The review starts off similarly to the Daily Mail review, with the first sentence being “Strong, smart, sexy and downright super, this is the superhero blockbuster of the summer you need to see”. The plot of the movie is discussed more in this review than in the previous one, but the characters are discussed as well with a weirdly positive, yet mocking tone in some of the descriptions. Here are some examples:

“Steve Trevor is the first man Diana has ever seen and as he's played by Chris Pine, she's not too disappointed.”

“the actor [Pine] demonstrates his rare gift for romantic comedy, while being frequently saved by Diana.”

“It's hard to argue with the character who says 'I am both frightened and aroused' when he first sees the supermodel superhero fight in a bar.”

In this review, like in all the others, Chris Pine's role as the one to be saved is emphasized. Again, it is as if all the reviews are trying to make it clear to the reader that Pine is playing the role of the woman in this movie.

4.2 The Dark Knight Rises and Man of Steel reviews

The analysis of the reviews written about Batman-movie *The Dark Knight Rises* (2012) and Superman film *Man of Steel* (2013) are discussed together, because the reviews mainly focused on the plot of the two movies and there was not much data about the looks and descriptions of the characters. This is a result on its own: these reviews clearly focused more on the movie itself rather than the *Wonder Woman* reviews. Similarly, to the *Wonder Woman* reviews, CDA was used to analyze the following reviews, mainly focusing on word choices and the underlying societal issues rising from the grammatical features.

4.2.1 The New York Times

Both reviews of *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Man of Steel* were written by Manohla Dargis (2012 and 2013) and mainly focus on the plot and the directors and their visions in the movies.

In the review of *The Dark Knight Rises*, titled “A Rejected Superhero Ends Up At Ground Zero”, there is little to no description on how Batman, played by Christian Bale, or Catwoman, played by Anne Hathaway, or any other characters look, except for the villain of the movie, Bane:

“A swaggering, overmuscled brute with a scar running down his back like a zipper and headgear that obscures his face and turns his cultivated voice into a strangled wheeze”

In the *Man of Steel* review, called “Part Man, Part God, All Hunk” Dargis describes Superman, played by Henry Cavill two times:

“The British actor Henry Cavill — so ripped that he's nearly shredded.”

“Mr. Cavill, a pretty man whose body has been inflated to Bluto-esque proportions”

Dargis' descriptions of Superman and Henry Cavill in the review and in its title are very concentrated on his body and the actor is sexualized in a way that was not seen in the *Wonder Woman* reviews. Dargis might be expressing her admiration of the actor or the character, who traditionally is a very

masculine and physically strong character. Additionally, Dargis compares the character of Superman, also known as Clark Kent, to a few other well-known male characters: Jesus, Moses and Hercules, the comparisons rising from the characters creation and history.

The supporting female characters often linked to the main characters of Batman and Superman are Catwoman and Lois Lane (Amy Adams). Both are romantically involved (as is Wonder Woman with Steve Trevor) even though Batman and Catwoman's relationship is a bit more complicated than the other two. Catwoman is mentioned in The Dark Knight Rises review once, but the relationship or the character/actresses looks are not described:

“A quieter cat-and-bat duet between Bruce and a burglar, Selina Kyle (Anne Hathaway).”

Lois Lane is mentioned a couple of times in the Man of Steel review, but her character/actress is not described much either:

“That emotional guidepost Amy Adams”

“It's one that he struggles with in his fights with an alien foe, General Zod (Mr. Shannon), and in his attraction to Lois Lane (Ms. Adams).”

Comparisons are drawn between the two characters and movies; Man of Steel is compared to the Dark Knight Rises and the whole Batman trilogy because Man of Steel came out a year after the Batman movie. Both of the characters of Batman and Superman are also very well-known, and each have a long history of movies, TV shows and most importantly, comic books, hence they are bound to be compared to one another.

4.2.2 The Guardian

The Guardian's “The Dark Knight Rises – review” by Philip French (2012) discusses the history of the Batman franchise a lot and focuses on the movie's director and the plot. There is not a lot of describing the characters by their looks, however the villain, Bane, gets a brief description of his looks in this review as well as the NY Times one, which is more than Batman or Superman get:

“Bane (Tom Hardy), a muscular menace wearing a half-mask containing a voice box and an analgesic device that eases his constant pain.”

Batman's character is described by his troubled past and experiences, not by his looks or even achievements. Many of the supporting characters are mentioned in the review, but very briefly and focusing on Catwoman, this is all she gets:

“The new female leads, Marion Cotillard (rich philanthropist) and Anne Hathaway (Catwoman in all but name), have little to get their claws into.”

“The Man of Steel – review” written by Peter Bradshaw (2013) in the Guardian resembles some of the Wonder Woman reviews more and describes Superman actor Henry Cavill's looks:

“His gym-built, digitally assisted pecs, abs and thighs, Britain's Henry Cavill has a thin, intriguingly pale and sensitive face, with a buttock-cleft on his nose, like George Osborne, a nose that will surely make him very identifiable up close in the Planet newsroom, chunky glasses or no chunky glasses.”

Bradshaw comments both on Cavill's body and face, almost mischievously saying how his body was digitally assisted and how he has a “buttock-cleft” nose. The tone of this description is different to Dargis' (2013) admiring portrayal. Lois Lane also gets a paragraph of her own in the review, however the tone is quite negative and focuses on the character's personality, not on her looks:

“Lois Lane is a pretty supercilious star journalist, on the trail of the Man of Steel ever since rumours of his adolescent feats of strength started to leak out, and prone to temper tantrums with her editor, Perry White, played by Laurence Fishburne. "I'm a Pulitzer prize-winning reporter!" she yelps. "Then act like it!" booms Perry. That, of course, is what Amy Adams thinks she's doing, but her role is sketchily conceived in this fanboy creation.”

Lois Lane is also mentioned briefly before this, Bradshaw writing about the shortcoming in the romantic chemistry between Cavill and Adams.

4.2.3 The Washington Post

The Dark Knight Rises review written by Jen Chaney (2012) is very different to any of the reviews analyzed in the study and is more of an instant reaction, composed of a list of some of the initial thoughts and impressions of the movie after first watching it. First point of the list is Catwoman's ears, not her looks or the personality of the character, but a comment on the artistic choices of the movie:

“Remember when everyone freaked out online about Anne Hathaway's Catwoman ears? [...] A) The ears could not be more minor in the wide spectrum — and with its 165-minute running time, it is a very wide spectrum— of this film. B) I thought the ears — which are really goggles that resemble cat ears in what is practically the only blatant Catwoman reference in the movie — are pretty cool.

The movie's villain, Bane, is mentioned in this review as well, but Chaney only writes about his ability to speak clear enough through the voice-box to be understandable. Bruce Wayne's connection to Catwoman is also discussed, Chaney expresses her frustration of the lack of chemistry and connection between the two characters, saying that the development of the relationship does not feel natural. Christian Bale's appearance is admired but not discussed in detail:

“I expected to feel certain things while seeing “The Dark Knight Rises”: Awe; An attraction to Christian Bale”

The Washington Post's "Man of Steel: Henry Cavill stars as Superman in this bombastic reboot" review written by Ann Hornaday (2013) is more appearance-centered than Dargis' (2013) review but more positive than Bradshaw's (2013) review. Here are examples of how Henry Cavill is described:

"Newly minted superstar Henry Cavill makes a well-built, handsomely credible Superman in 'Man of Steel'"
 "The maddeningly impassive Cavill — who was so delicious in the TV series 'The Tudors'"

Chaney mentions Lois Lane briefly when she criticizes the lack of chemistry between her and Superman.

4.2.4 Daily Mail

Both the Dark Knight Rises and Man of Steel reviews were written by Chris Tookey (2012 & 2013). They share similarities in style and tone, but there are also a few differences. In the Batman review, titled "First Review: The Dark Knight Rises might be spectacular to look at... But it's humourless and too long" Tookey focuses on the political tone of the movie and the stylistic choices of the director, but does not describe any of the characters' appearance in the movie. Christian Bale is only mentioned when discussing his acting skills. Interestingly, Catwoman is only mentioned in a caption of a photo, introducing Anne Hathaway as the Catwoman.

In the Superman review, titled "Man of Steel review: Steel yourself for a very noisy Superman" Tookey expresses his disappointment in the movie very clearly, but describes the looks of the characters more than he did in the Dark Knight Rises review. Talking about Henry Cavill he writes:

"Clark Kent, alias Superman (played with maximum handsomeness, a fetching dimple and absolutely no sense of humour by virtually unknown Brit Henry Cavill)"

Tookey criticizes Cavill's acting even more later on in the review and does not let Amy Adams off easily either, simply calling her "pretty" and mocking the actors' chemistry on screen.

4.2.5 Daily Mirror

The two movies were again reviewed by the same writer, David Edwards (2012 & 2013) and neither of the movie reviews discuss the characters or the actors' looks. In "Holy review Batman! The Dark Knight Rises is bleak, black and brilliant"-review Christian Bale as Batman is not described at all. Other features of the movie discussed include the political similarities/references and the villain of the movie, Bane. Catwoman is mentioned very briefly, portrayed to be a temptress:

"Also tempting Batman out of his cave is Anne Hathaway's arch thief Selina Kyle, better known as Catwoman."

Comparing Edwards' Man of steel review, titled "Man of Steel is never boring, but Zack Snyder's Superman reboot flies without ever really soaring" to the Daily Mail review, Edwards is not as harsh on the Man of Steel as Tookey (2013) is. Similarly to the Batman review, Edwards does not give attention to the appearances of the characters, but comments on the other elements of the movie. Superman and Lois Lane's relationship is mentioned briefly:

"a burgeoning relationship with Daily Planet reporter Lois Lane (Amy Adams)".

All in all, the Batman and Superman movie reviews did not have a lot to say about their characters. Batman was not described whatsoever, while Superman was sexualized and portrayed as a ripped body. The female characters of the movies were mentioned, however very briefly.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While most of the *Wonder Woman* movie reviews acknowledge the fact that there have not been enough female-led superhero movies and celebrate the fact that this movie has “girl power” and feminist tones, most of the reviewers focused primarily on the looks of Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman as well as Chris Pine as Steve Trevor. The Batman and Superman reviews on the other hand focused more on the plot, directors and past Batman and Superman movies.

Ross (2012: 8) brought up how women are more often connected to male figures if they are given visibility e.g. in the news or TV roles. This study supports Ross’s argument since it was evident in the findings that the main supporting male character in the *Wonder Woman* reviews was given more focus than any of the supporting female characters in the Batman and Superman reviews. Looking at the reviews of *The Dark Knight Rises* and *Man of Steel* movies, their supporting female actresses are mentioned in all of them, but very briefly. In comparison, the *Wonder Woman* reviews focused more on the supporting male character and his actor as well as the relationship and chemistry between him and Wonder Woman. In addition, Conboy (2010: 148) brings up the fact that most newspapers and articles are still mainly targeted for male readers. This is also a deciding factor in how actors and characters are written about and described.

The results of the present study show commonalities as well as differences to Attenborough’s (2011) study. His study investigated similar themes by using CDA on newspaper articles profiling a male and a female celebrity scientist. His findings show that both scientists were sexualized but he could also differentiate the ways the male and female scientists were sexualized or objectified. The findings of the present study correspond with Attenborough’s findings: Superman (Henry Cavill) is described using words such as *ripped*, *gym-built* and *well-built*, all referring to him being strong and masculine. This is very different to how Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) is described with words such as *feminine*, *poise*, *luxuriant hair*, *long thighs* and *short skirt*. Her makeup and bra size are also discussed in more than one of the reviews. Additionally, most of the reviews also praised the femininity and charismatic screen presence of the actress. Interestingly, Batman (Christian Bale) is not sexualized at all, or even described by the writers in any of the reviews. In his study, Attenborough (2011) found that the male scientist’s sexiness and objectification focused mainly on his face and hair rather than his body, while the female scientist’s body was the main focus. He also found that the male scientist was portrayed as an innocent victim of lustful female desire and the female scientist was more of an active seducer. Here the findings of the present study differ. Firstly, the objectification of Henry Cavill as Superman

did not only focus on his face and hair, it focused more on his body. Secondly, Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman was not portrayed as a seducer, rather her onscreen partner Chris Pine was in the active role of a seducer, comparing his “seductive blue eyes” to Paul Newman’s and his charm to Clark Gable’s. Interestingly he is also referred to as the “mangel in distress” indicating that he is the one to be saved this time, when usually and stereotypically that would be the role of a female character. The reversed roles of Gadot as the hero and Pine as the one to be saved could be a reason for the opposite findings compared to Attenborough’s (2011) study.

The movie reviews were chosen from The New York Times, The Guardian and The Washington Post, which are broadsheet newspapers and the Daily Mail and the Daily Mirror that are tabloids. The difference in tone and word choices in the movie reviews are very visible, especially when it comes to the reviews of *Wonder Woman*. All of the tabloid reviews did have a different tone to them than the broadsheet reviews, that had more neutral standpoints and tones. The tabloid writers were more sarcastic and brutally honest, also visualizing more. Some of the more universal differences that can also be seen from these reviews are that tabloids have shorter paragraphs and that broadsheets use more “intellectual” or “fancy” words, such as ‘lugubrious’, ‘ambivalent’ and ‘filigree’. The tabloid language was easier and simpler, as Conboy (2010) said, more appealing to the working-class readers. The newspaper reviews were also considerably longer than the tabloid reviews.

The tone in the *Wonder Woman* movie reviews changed between newspapers and tabloids considerably. While all of the reviews described Gal Gadot’s looks as well as her co-star Chris Pine’s, the style of the descriptions changed. In the broadsheets the style of describing their looks was more sophisticated, using words like ‘glamorous’, ‘princess’ and ‘charm’. Conboy (2010:134) says that tabloids have created a culture of celebrity news and sexualization, which is visible in the present study as well. In the tabloid reviews the focus was more on sexiness. However, sexiness of the characters and objectification was also visible in the broadsheet newspapers reviews. The dramatic and attention-grabbing style of tabloids can easily be seen in the headlines of the articles, Schaffer (1995) saying that tabloids write and stylize their headlines to grab the attention of the reader.

The goal of this study was to point out the potential societal problems that emerge from the language that the reviews use and start or keep going the discussion of equality. The study was successful in that it found differences in the way that male and female actors were treated in the reviews, however the sample size was quite small. It was challenging to find similar studies, hence there was not much to compare the findings to. It was not for the lack of feminist studies, but it was challenging to find

similar studies done with CDA on the topic. This gives reason to carry out more studies like this one. Especially with the ongoing scandals of sexual abuse and male dominance in Hollywood there should be more studies done on the subject. Further studies would keep the discussion going and maybe one day men and women, celebrities or not, will be treated with respect instead of treating them as objects.

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