



Portrayal of Women in Netflix Movie “Greta”: A Content Analysis

Maham Zafar¹, Dr. Deeba Shahwar^{2*} & Amna Fazail³

¹BS Scholar, Department of Mass Communication, The Women University, Multan, Pakistan,

Email: Khaanmaaha23@gmail.com

²Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, The Women University, Multan, Pakistan,

Email: deeba.6378@wum.edu.pk

³Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, The Women University, Multan, Pakistan,

Email: Amna.fazail@wum.edu.pk

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: January 02, 2025
Revised: February 03, 2025
Accepted: February 06, 2025
Available Online: February 08, 2025

Keywords:

Netflix, women portrayal, content analysis, social norms

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Deeba Shahwar

Email:

deeba.6378@wum.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Film Dramas & motion pictures are Consider as a powerful medium of mass media. Similarly, Netflix is promoting our social norms and values, but at the same time they are affecting our moral Values & violating ethical guidelines. The current research attempts to analyze the movie, Greta. Content Analysis method was used for data collection with the help of Purposive sampling techniques. The findings of the research suggest that the Netflix movie Greta are showing more unethical content & violating ethical guidelines. The results prove that most of the Female characters are violating moral guidelines in Netflix film Greta. These visual elements create a powerful and remarkable experience for the viewers, deepening their connection with the characters.



Introduction

Netflix has completely changed the way we watch movies and television shows. In the past, cable TV, public broadcasting, and direct satellite transmission were the main sources of TV content for Americans (Uri, 2006). But now, Netflix has made it possible for us to binge-watch some of our favorite shows at any time and place.

When it comes to explore the description of women in Netflix, it's necessary to analyze how women are represented in various shows and the impact it has on viewers. You can look at

different aspects like the diversity of female characters (it's great to see so many representations that reflect the actual world).

Netflix has been making progress in showcasing women from diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. The narrative roles that women play in Netflix series are becoming more and more progressive and dynamic, reflecting their individuality and empowerment. It's extremely encouraging to watch women in command and breaking down barriers in the world of Netflix shows.

Feminism in film has evolved into a revolutionary movement aimed at breaking down stereotypes, challenging usual gender roles, and empowering women on and off screen. As the feminist movement in film grows, it gives women an opportunity and enables them to take back control of their stories, reshaping the industry for coming generations.

Greta was produced in 2018; a psychological thriller film directed by Neil Jordan and written by Ray Wright and Jordan. With Isabelle Huppert, Chloë Grace Moretz, Maika Monroe, Colm Feore, and Stephen Rea among its cast members, the movie expresses the story of a young female who befriends a lonely widow, and develops an unsettling obsession with her.

"Greta" had its international début at the Toronto "International Film Festival" on September 6, 2018. Focus Features released it in theaters across the United States on March 1, 2019. Despite receiving a mixed response from reviewers, the movie has made over \$18 million globally.

Research Background

In western civilizations, media consumption has grown significantly with the development of mass communication and technology (Cheliotis, 2010). Criminal disputes and the criminal justice system are subjects that the media often covers because they draw sizable audiences. Numerous media outlets, including news, entertainment, and digital platforms cover these subjects.

Yet, it's crucial to understand that these representations can occasionally make it difficult to distinguish between what is and is not genuine, as the background research for the Netflix movie "Greta" indicates. They could contain many errors and distortions and not always fairly represent the facts. This can create a gap between viewers and people who work in the criminal justice system, making it difficult to understand and empathize with their experiences. Thus, it is necessary to examine how the media presents legal disputes and the penal system critically in order to gain a more balanced perspective.

Sadly, violence against women is frequently portrayed in the media, making it a crucial subject for criminologists to research. Studies indicate that while watching violent media does not directly lead to people committing crimes, it can affect how people feel about violence against women, how they see the repercussions, and even make them more aggressive. For example, research has shown that violent films use strategies such as action, timing, and sound to capture the audience's attention and create an impression. It is important to recognize the ways in which media messages influence our attitudes and actions, particularly with delicate subjects (Rule & Ferguson, 1986).

However, it's important to understand that these representations can occasionally shield the distinction between reality and fiction. They could contain many errors and distortions and not always fairly represent the facts. It may become more difficult to comprehend and feel empathy for persons who are genuinely involved in the criminal justice system as a result of this gulf between viewers and individuals. Therefore, it's important to look critically at and pursue a more balanced

perspective when examining media portrayals of criminalized conflicts and the criminal justice system.

Rational of the Study

Recognizing the value of diversity and representation is the foundation for the reasoning for how women are portrayed in Netflix seasons. Netflix hopes to mirror reality and provide a platform for marginalized perspectives by featuring diverse female characters. This facilitates the telling of stories with greater authenticity and gives women the chance to see themselves portrayed on TV. Moreover, it contributes to the challenge of established conventions and preconceptions regarding gender roles.

The way women are portrayed in Netflix seasons is an intentional attempt to encourage viewers, advance equality, and give women more power. It's a start in the right direction to build a media environment that is more varied and inclusive. Gaining a broader awareness of how women are portrayed in mainstream media allows us to examine the narratives, stereotypes, and messages that are repeated in movies like "Greta" on Netflix.

Research of this kind contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics, society norms, and the possible influence of the media on our attitudes and views on women. It enables us to assess how women are portrayed critically and promotes debates about gender equality and the value of diverse and strong female roles. The examination of women's representation in movies can ultimately help create a culture of media that is fair and inclusive.

Significance of the Study

The importance of women's representation in Netflix seasons cannot be emphasized. It has a significant impact on forming cultural perceptions and changing traditional gender roles. Netflix's portrayal of strong, diverse female characters encourages inclusivity and diversity. In addition to giving women's tales a voice, this portrayal encourages and motivates viewers, especially young girls to have faith in their own abilities. It eliminates stereotypes and promotes a more equitable and inclusive society.

These representations have an influence that goes beyond amusement since they support debates about gender equality and societal changes. The beneficial effects that these representations have on people and communities are astounding. Several perspectives can be applied to the Netflix film "Greta." We can investigate topics such as power dynamics, obsession, and the depiction of female autonomy by evaluating Greta's and other female characters. The movie explores character psychology, emphasizing the intricacies of female relationships and the effects of manipulation.

"Greta" poses concern on vulnerability, trust, and the limits of interpersonal relationships through this investigation. Through examining how women are portrayed in movies, we can learn more about gender dynamics, society standards, and the representation of female characters in psychological thrillers.

Problem Statement

Even if the way women are portrayed in Netflix seasons has greatly improved, there are still certain problems that need to be fixed. One issue is the persistence of some clichés or stereotypes, including one-dimensional female characters. Even with the advancements, more varied and nuanced images of women are still required.

Moreover, there may be a lack of representation for women from underrepresented populations, such as women of color, LGBTQ+ women, or women with disabilities. To make sure that all women's stories are acknowledged and appreciated, it is critical that Netflix and other media outlets keep striving for more inclusive and genuine representations of women.

Objectives of the Study

There are several objectives behind how women are portrayed on Netflix. Here are five objectives that can be considered when analyzing the portrayal of women in the Netflix film "Greta":

1. To examine the roles, traits and agency of women as they are portrayed in film.
2. To analyze how "Greta's depiction of women may either support or contradict established gender norms and power structures.
3. To investigate the growth, depth and complexity of female characters in movie to learn more about how they are developed.
4. To examine how Greta's representation of women affects the movie's theme and central idea.

Literature Review

People have easy access to a variety of images related to crime since these media domains are ingrained in daily life. To be more precise, the media can create and recreate gender (O'Brien, 2009), and they can do so by portraying women who are imprisoned. A common motif identified in study is the prevalence of gendered imagery in the few cases where crime and justice media focus on detained women. These images are also present in media depictions of women throughout social institutions (Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Connell, 1987).

Before 1990, there were few LGBT characters on television (Wyatt, 2008). This is a visual representation of "symbolic annihilation." George Gerbner originally used the term "symbolic annihilation" in 1972 to describe the under representation of minority groups in the media. While focusing mostly on the women's interactions with one another and with prison officials—including unscrupulous warden Natalie "Fig" Figueroa (Alysia Reiner).

"A total of 21 of the 100 top films of 2014 featured a female lead or roughly equal co lead" (Smith et al, 2015) and "fewer than one out of three (28%) of the speaking characters (both real and animated) are female" (Smith 2008). "When they are portrayed in film, women can be stereotyped into characters that are treated 'as adornment, enticement, or with inclination to romance as the main or exclusive personality trait or motivator'" (Smith, 2008). A woman's marital status will be known to an audience more than a man's and a woman is more likely to have goals related to her personal life than a man, whereas a man is more likely to have goals related to work or even crime (Lauzen, 2016a).

"In 2015, women comprised 19% of all directors, writers, producers, executive producers, editors, and cinematographers working on the top 250 domestic grossing films" (Lauzen, 2016b). Dr Stacy Smith's research study (2015) for the USC Annenberg's Media, Diversity & Social Change Initiative on 700 films from 2007 to 2014 (excluding 2011) examined films every year over a seven-year stretch of time trying to note differences between years. "The rule seems to be that a woman may be strong and successful if and only if she also exemplifies traditional stereotypes of

femininity, subservience, passivity, beauty, and an identity linked to one or more men” (Wood, 1994, p.7).

The female character is passive and powerless: she is the object of desire for the male character(s). In this respect, cinema has perfected a visual machinery suitable for male desire” (Smelik, 1999, p. 491). Smith et al (2015) conducted the study by choosing content analysis research technique to study the films in 2014 highlighting that the female characters were likely to be portrayed as sexy and characterized as far more expected to be naked. “If a female character calls her sister on the phone and has a totally tangential conversation about spaghetti, the movie passes the test” (McKinney, 2015). “In a larger sample of 1,794 movies released from 1970 to 2013, we found that only half had at least one scene in which women talked to each other about something other than a man” 18(Hickey, 2014). “This assumption is up for debate; we found that films that pass the Bechdel Test tend to do better dollar for dollar than those that don’t – even internationally” (Hickey, 2014).

The media activities permit individuals to have instant access to numerous categories of crime-related pictures. More particular to this study, media has power to grasp the aptitude and to create the gender images (O’Brien, 2009), including through representations of enslaved women. In the few examples where caged women are the emphasis of crime and justice media, a noticeable theme accepted in research is the occurrence of gendered images, which are also found in media illustrations of women across social institutions (Milestone & Meyer, 2012; Connell, 1987).

There were a few demonstrations of LGBT characters on screen before 1990 (Wyatt, 2008). This is a case of “symbolic annihilation.” The concept of “symbolic annihilation” was first coined by George Gerbner (1972) to explain the dearth of exemplification of marginal groups within the media.

While, commonly concentrated on the women’s interactions with each other and with penal officials i.e. from corrupt warden Natalie “Fig” Figueroa (Alysia Reiner). Women portrayal in Netflix season *Orange is the new black* includes “often portray the institutions as dysfunctional and ferocious. Almost every prison movie includes a violent rape scene, and correctional officers are portrayed as sadistic, uncaring, or incompetent” (Trammell 19). As stated by Stuart Hall, exemplification is “one of the central practices which produce culture and a key ‘moment’ in what has been called the ‘circuit of culture’” (Stuart Hall, 2003).

Women portrayal according to Stuart Hall wherein he criticizes the tactic of (Saussure) who discussed that we only identify what ‘black’ means as we know that it is contrary to ‘white’ (Hall 234). This means that ‘black’ on its own doesn’t has the meaning, but the connotation is in the “difference” from ‘white’. Pozner (2010) emphasized that women are customarily painted through media role as being unpleasant and cruel, unkind, devious, resentful, self-doubting, and, at times, even spiteful. Researchers have demonstrated the ways women’s friendships, as a perspective for leisureliness, can be used by women to handle with negative or distressing life events and consecutively, can be an essential framework for support (Hutchinson, Yarnal, Staffordson, & Ker Stetter, 2008; Hutchinson, 2013; Kleiber, Hutchinson, & Williams, 2002; Glover & Parry, 2008).

In a strongly rooted study of hetero-normative considerations of womankind, wherein, women are reinvigorated to position men as the epicenter their lives, predominantly the hetero-sexual relationships for women are conventionally observed as the most considerable type of connection in a woman’s life (Taylor, 2012). During a remembrance service for the books that were devastated as a consequence of a bad bed bug outbreak at the prison. At the instance, Poussey

reads out names of authors that women put forward that should be privileged (e.g., Swift, Lethem, Kellerman), thus indicating her knowledge of literature and demonstration of her intellect. This illustration brings restiveness to the routine challenges and social suppression transgender people face, predominantly in a prison context (Leavy & Trier-Bieniek, 2014).

Combines the extended practice of sexualized metaphors in the women in prison genre with the widespread accomplishments of woman-centred television series such as *Sex and the City* (1998-2002), which Kohan contributed to, and Kohan's own *Weeds* (2005-2012), which had already explored white middle-class femininity gone astray. Parry and Penny Light (2013) discussed how women's consumption of media, containing sexually observable content (e.g., pornography and erotica) apart of their liberty, can be used by women to undermine gendered ideologies. Portrayals of women's experiences in the criminal justice arrangement (Bryant, 2016; Haimson, 2017). The characters in the show are multi-dimensional, with their own unique backstories and personal journeys, allowing for a more conclusive and authentic representation of women

Theoretical Framework

Scholars that study how women are portrayed in Netflix seasons frequently use a variety of theoretical frameworks to assess and comprehend the dynamics at work. Analyzing gender norms, stereotypes, and representation are common components of the theoretical analysis of how women are portrayed in movies. Let's take a closer look at the theoretical frameworks of how women are portrayed in movies like "Greta." The following are some popular frameworks that are often utilized:

Feminist cinema theory is one popular framework that is frequently used. This theory examines and critiques the representations of women in media, particularly movies. Feminist cinema theory investigates female characters' roles and agency, their objectification or equalization, and the broader power dynamics between male and female characters. It also examines how women's viewpoints and experiences are presented, determining if they uphold or perpetuate gender stereotypes.

In the case of "Greta," providing a full examination of its theoretical framework is difficult without prior understanding of the film. Nonetheless, you can investigate how women are portrayed in the movie, the relationships between the female characters, and how it either challenges or upholds gender stereotypes by applying feminist cinema theory.

Examine how their personalities, goals, and agency are portrayed. Do they have nuanced, multifaceted portrayals, or do they fit into preconceived notions?

Analyzing the power dynamics between male and female characters is another crucial component. Are women shown as equal partners or are they subjected to discrimination or oppression because of their gender? Think about whether the movie upholds or questions conventional gender norms and expectations.

Remember that using specific scenes from the movie to support your analysis will help to validate your findings. You can comprehend the portrayal of women in "Greta" and its implications better by looking at these elements through the lens of feminist film theory in its theoretical framework.

Research Questions

RQ1: How are Female power and the ability shown in the movie "Greta"?

RQ2: How strongly does “Greta” challenge or uphold existing standards of behavior on every woman?

RQ3: What causes and key traits belong to the female characters in “Greta”?

RQ4: In which manners does “Greta” explore loneliness and how it affects the lives of those who watch it?

Research Hypothesis

When it comes to hypotheses regarding how women are portrayed in Netflix seasons, researchers frequently develop specific claims or predictions based on their observations and research questions. Some theories that scholars may investigate include the following ones:

H1: It is more likely to say that Greta’s portrayal of women supports existing gender norms as well as social standards related to women’s roles and behavior.

H2: It is more likely to say that “Greta” addresses issues of female empowerment and unity while highlighting the value of female relationships.

H3: The way women are portrayed in the movie shows how weak and mistreated they are in society, which contributes to the overall theme of female suffering.

H4: It is more likely to say that the film violates standards of gender by presenting us with complex, self-aware female characters who challenge expectations.

These theories offer various perspectives for analyzing how women are portrayed in "Greta" and can direct future investigation and study.

Methodology

In the movie “Greta,” the methodology used in the portrayal of women on Netflix involves a detailed approach to storytelling and character development. The filmmakers carefully craft the narratives of the female characters, taking into account their backgrounds, motivations, and personal journeys. They strive to create multidimensional and relatable women who go beyond stereotypes and clichés. One aspect of the methodology is the use of strong character arcs. The female characters in “Greta” undergo significant growth and transformation throughout the film. Their stories are not limited to one-dimensional roles, but rather explore the complexities and challenges they face in their lives. Another aspect is the emphasis on authentic representation. The filmmakers aim to present women in a realistic and relatable manner, reflecting the diversity of experiences and perspectives. This includes addressing issues such as gender inequality, societal pressures, and personal struggles.

The filmmakers also pay attention to the dialogue and interactions of the female characters. They strive to create meaningful and impactful conversations that highlight their strengths, intelligence, and agency. This allows the characters to drive the narrative and make important decisions that shape the story. Furthermore, the cinematography and visual storytelling techniques contribute to the portrayal of women in “Greta.” The filmmakers use lighting, framing, and camera angles to enhance the emotional depth and presence of the female characters. This visual language adds another layer of depth to their portrayal.

Overall, the methodology used in “Greta” focuses on creating well-rounded, authentic, and relatable female characters through careful storytelling, character development, and visual techniques. This approach aims to challenge stereotypes and provide a more nuanced and inclusive representation of women on screen.

Sampling

The study investigates of 21st century Movie Greta on Netflix presentation for having an insight on its various unethical issues through Discourse analysis. The analysis is conducted on selected sample of one film of Netflix through random sampling. In this research the ethical violation of media ethics is the unit of analysis.

Findings and Conclusions

RQ1 states that “How are Female power and the ability shown in the movie “Greta”?”

H1 is formulated in the light of RQ1 which states that:

H1: It is more likely to say that Greta’s portrayal of women supports existing gender norms as well as social standards related to women’s roles and behavior.

The results showed how a female strong and capable woman can be. She’s determined, resourceful, and knows how to take control of situations.

RQ2. How strongly does “Greta” challenge or uphold existing standards of behavior on every woman?

H2 is formulated in the light of RQ1 which states that:

H2: It is more likely to say that “Greta” addresses issues of female empowerment and unity while highlighting the value of female relationships.

The results shown that Greta goes against the usual expectations for how women should act. She shows that women can be powerful and take charge.

RQ3 What causes and key traits belong to the female characters in “Greta”?

H3 is formulated in the light of RQ1 which states that:

H3: The way women are portrayed in the movie shows how weak and mistreated they are in society, which contributes to the overall theme of female suffering.

The results shown that Greta is portrayed as determined and clever, driven by a desire for control and vengeance.

RQ4: In which manners does “Greta” explore loneliness and how it affects the lives of those who watch it?

H4 is formulated in the light of RQ1 which states that:

H4: It is more likely to say that the film violates standards of gender by presenting us with complex, self-aware female characters who challenge expectations.

The results shown that Greta's need for interaction and loneliness lead her to act in an obsessive, psychological aspects of loneliness and where people will go to satisfy their emotional demands.

Future Research Directions

The future researchers can analyze more Netflix.

Future researchers can analyze more than one film in Netflix.

Future researchers can study Netflix films except Netflix series by using this frame work.

Suggestions for Media

Media should promote true picture of Netflix which is rare.

Media should avoid Unethical content which violate the ethical guidelines of our society.

References

1. "Greta". Toronto International Film Festival. Retrieved 21 August 2018
2. "Cannes: Isabelle Huppert, Chloe Grace Moretz to Star in Thriller 'The Widow' (Exclusive)". The Hollywood Reporter. 5 May 2017. Retrieved 30 March 2018
3. Fleming, Mike Jr. (1 August 2017). "Maika Monroe Set For Neil Jordan's 'The Widow'". Deadline Hollywood. Retrieved 30 March 2018
4. McNary, Dave (13 September 2017). "Film News Roundup: 30WEST Buys 'Beast'; 'Stephen Rea, Colm Feore Join Chloe Grace Moretz Thriller". Variety. Retrieved 30 March 2018
5. Abbatescianni, Davide (22 November 2017). "Greta filming in Manhattan". Cineuropa. Retrieved 9 December 2018
6. Neil Jordan's 'The Widow' with Chloe Grace Moretz receives Irish Film Board funding". Screen Daily. Retrieved 24 March 2018.
7. Vlessing, Etan (21 August 2018). "Toronto: Natalie Portman's 'Vox Lux,' Chloe Grace Moretz's 'Greta' Join Festival Lineup". The Hollywood Reporter. Retrieved 21 August 2018.
8. Fleming, Mike Jr. (8 September 2018). "Focus Features Closes \$6 Million Deal For Neil Jordan Thriller 'Greta.' Toronto". Deadline Hollywood. Retrieved 8 September 2018
9. Hipes, Patrick (7 December 2018). "Focus Features Sets Chloë Grace Moretz-Isabelle Huppert Pic 'Greta's Release Date". Deadline Hollywood. Retrieved 7 December 2018.
10. "Greta". Rotten Tomatoes. Fandango Media. Retrieved 23 May 2023
11. "Greta". Metacritic. Fandom, Inc. Retrieved 23 May 2023.
12. Fuster, Jeremy (26 February 2019). "'Will 'A Madea Family Funeral' Bury Tyler Perry's Franchise at the Box Office?'. TheWrap. Retrieved 27 February 2019
13. Greta". Box Office Mojo. IMDb. Retrieved 23 May 2023. Edit this at Wikidata
14. Ahmed, Sara. The Cultural Politics of Emotion. 2nd ed., Edinburgh University Press, 2014, KUPDF, 1 Aug. 2020.
15. Crawford, Bridget J., et al. "Feminist Judging Matters: How Feminist Theory and Methods Affect the Process of Judgment." University of Baltimore Law Review, vol. 47, no. 2, 2017, pp. 167–198. EBSCOhost,
16. Duramy, Benedetta Faedi. "#MeToo and the Pursuit of Women's International Human Rights." University of San Francisco Law Review, vol. 54, no. 2, Jan. 2020, pp. 215–267.

17. Edwards, Haley Sweetland. "How Christine Blasey Ford's Testimony Changed America." *Time*, Time, 4 Oct. 2018, time.com/5415027/christine-blasey-ford-testimony/. 10 May. 2020.
18. Frankel, Valerie Estelle. "Cripples, Bastards, Broken Things...and Villainesses: Game of Thrones' Final Season." *Coreopsis: A Journal of Myth & Theater*, vol. 7, no. 2, Sept. 2019, pp. 1–22.
19. Jones, David. "Special Section: The Malign Transference: Dealing with the Unbearable in the Internal World of the Murderer." *Group Analysis*, 39(1), 51–58.
20. Matthews, Sally. "Reflections on the Appropriate Use of Unjustly Conferred Privilege." *Theoria: A Journal of Social & Political Theory*, vol. 60, no. 135, June 2013, p. 23.
21. Meyer, Doug. "'She Acts out in Inappropriate Ways:' Students' Evaluations of Violent Women in Film." *Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, Mar. 2009, pp. 63–73.
22. Bielby, D. D., & Bielby, W. T. (1996). *Women and men in film: Gender inequality among writers in a culture industry*. *Gender & Society*
23. Bonos, L. (2017) Analysis | Not everyone with a #MeToo is posting their story. Here's why some are refraining. *The Washington Post*.
24. Carlsen, A. (2018) #MeToo Brought Down 201 Powerful Men. Nearly Half of Their Replacements are Women. Retrieved.
25. Chuck, E. (2017) #MeToo: Alyssa Milano promotes hashtag that becomes anti-harassment rallying cry. *NBC News*. Cruikshank, M. (2003). *Learning to be old: Gender, culture, and aging*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield
26. Dean, D. (2008). No human resource is an island: Gendered, racialized access to work as a performer. *Gender, Work & Organization*.
27. De Pater, I. E., Judge, T. A., Scott, B. A., (2014) Age, Gender, and Compensation: A Study of Hollywood Movie Stars. *Journal of Management Inquiry*
28. Dutt, R. (2013) *Behind the curtain: women's representations in contemporary Hollywood*. Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science
29. D'Zurilla, C. (2017) In saying #MeToo, Alyssa Milano pushes awareness campaign about sexual assault and harassment. *Los Angeles Times*.
30. Edwards, S. Z., Dockterman, E., Sweetland, H. (2018). *TIME Person of the Year 2018: The Silence Breakers*. *Time*.