

The Representation of Young Sports Heroines in Cinema: Analysis of a Regressive Portrayal of Young Sportswomen on the Screen

Authors : David Sudre

Abstract : Sport in cinema, like sport in society, has been mainly concerned with men and masculinity. Whether in the boxing ring, on the basketball playgrounds, or on the soccer fields, these films have mostly focused on the trials and tribulations of male athletes, for whom women have very generally played secondary, often devalued and devaluing roles, such as that of the loving and indispensable woman to the victorious athlete, that of the dangerous femme fatale, or that of the woman as a sexual object. For more than a century, this film genre has, on the contrary, symbolized the dominant values of patriotism, heroism and contributed at the same time to build an ideal of hegemonic masculinity. With the exception of films such as *The Grand National* (1944) and *Million Dollar Baby* (2004), the most commercially successful films tell the story of men's adventures in sports. Today, thanks in part to the struggles of the feminist movement and subsequent societal advances, we are seeing an increase in the number of women in increasingly prominent roles in sports films. Indeed, there seems to be a general shift in popular cinema toward women playing major characters in big-budget productions that have also achieved critical and commercial success. However, if, at first sight, the increase in the number of roles given to women suggests an evolution and a more positive image of them on the screen, it will be necessary to see how their representation is really characterized when they are young and occupy major roles in this type of film. In order to answer this question, we will rely on the results of research conducted on a corpus of 28 sports films in which a young woman plays the main role in the story. All of these productions are fictional (not documentary), mostly American, and distributed by major film studios. The chosen sports teen movies are among the biggest commercial successes of the genre and aim to make the maximum profit and occupy the most dominant positions within the "commercial pole" of the cinematic field. Therefore, this research will allow us, although a change has taken place in the last decades in the number of main roles granted to sportswomen, to decode the sociological subtext of these popular sports films for teenagers. The aim is to reveal how these sports films convey a conservative ideology that participates, on the one hand, in the maintenance of patriarchy and, on the other hand, in the dissemination of stereotyped, negative, and regressive images of young women athletes.

Keywords : cinema, sport, gender, youth, representations, inequality, stereotypes

Conference Title : ICGS 2022 : International Conference on Gender and Sociology

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : April 25-26, 2022