



# Gender Exchange: Causes and Reflections

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**Abstract.** In some films, gender exchange occurs; that is, the deeds of one gender are represented in the film as the deeds of the other gender. With the development of film art and the rise of feminism, people are increasingly concerned about the relationship between feminism and film, but the phenomenon of gender exchange has not been given enough attention and academic research. Based on feminist perspectives and film theory, this paper will explore the negative aspects of gender exchange in film and television (one is to let male actors perform the good deeds of women, and the other is to let actresses perform the bad behaviors of men). This study analyzed the reasons for this phenomenon. Through the research, it can be found that this phenomenon is mostly due to stereotypes, social expectations and other factors, and this study will discuss how to fight this phenomenon from both sociological and cinematic perspectives by eliminating stereotypes and encouraging more feminist directors to enter the film industry.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Film Studies, Stereotypes, Social Expectations.

## 1 Introduction

The traditional concepts of patriarchy and phallogentrism that have persisted throughout the history of the world have resulted in the stereotyping of male and female gender roles and the homogenization of the social values by which men and women are judged in society. Influenced by traditional concepts and attitudes towards gender roles, as far as the division of labor between men and women is concerned, after men and women get married and have children, men generally tend to work to earn money, while women typically choose to return to their families[1]. Women are not born; they are made. No physical, psychological, or economic destiny can define the image that women have in the internal society, and it is civilization as a whole that has devised this intermediary between the male and the powerless, known as the female. Gender is a self-perceived concept that people develop later in life under the influence of their social nature[2]. It is the social expectations and stereotypes of women that make women passively become women who conform to the expectations of people, especially men.

Research on gender and cinema has received more and more attention. Most scholars have focused on whether the film's themes express feminism, whether the direc-

tor's creative style conforms to certain feminist features, and the relationship between one of the most important elements of the film, the characters, and feminism. In the performance of movie art, some directors will transplant the outstanding events of women to male characters to perform or transfer the negative behaviors of men to women to constitute a form of artistic expression. In the past, there has been insufficient attention and academic research on this phenomenon in film studies and feminist studies.

This phenomenon of real character archetypes changing gender is not uncommon in film and television, but given the current lack of scholarly explanations despite a certain amount of social attention, so based on the feminist perspective, this paper will use feminism and film theory to categorize and explore two exchange phenomena, that is, the transplantation of women's outstanding deeds to male characters and the grafting of men's negative behaviors to female characters. Take four films as examples, namely, *The Magnificent She*, *Heroes in Harm's Way*, *The Flowers of War*, and *My People My Homeland*. This paper will analyze the essential causes of the phenomenon of "gender exchange" in the language of film and television and explain how to fight against the behavior of "gender exchange" in such an environment, as well as how to make cinema become a tool for feminist struggle and occurrence.

## 2 Key Definitions

There is no exact definition of the phenomenon of gender exchange, but through observation and summary of film and television works, it usually refers to the representative or outstanding deeds done by one gender in real life, which are performed by actors of the other gender in film and television works. The phenomenon of gender-swapping itself is neutral, but this paper mostly refers to the negative aspects. The following two examples are given: firstly, the outstanding deeds of women are performed by male actors, and secondly, the negative deeds of men are performed by actresses.

Cinema is a product of the human psychology of seeking a realistic reproduction of reality, a psychological factor that determines the reality of the screen image, the perfection of film technology, and the development of the art of cinema, that is, the reproduction of a "complete and perfect visualization of the external world in sound, color, and three-dimensionality"[3]. In the final analysis, cinema is a reflection of consciousness, and it is probably due to the misconceptions, constraints, and assumptions about women at the level of consciousness that the phenomenon of 'gender exchange' occurs.

## 3 The Outstanding Deeds of Women Performed by Actors

In the traditional concept and the public's impression, femininity seems to be stereotyped as a gentle, submissive, and passive character, and those women who have finally achieved success in some fields and realized their self-worth through their own hard work and tenacious struggle are generally titled as "iron lady"[4]. The word

"iron" reflects the stereotypical image of women and expresses society's expectation of women as good wives and mothers. In most people's concepts and realizations, in order to achieve a certain level of success women have to sacrifice a lot of stereotypical feminine traits, such as meekness and dependence, and turn to fight and breakthrough and struggle like men. Female archetypes are forced to become male characters and are shown in films and television as women whose outstanding deeds are performed by men.

The character of Father Bell in *The Flowers Of War* is based on the American woman missionary Minnie Vautrin, whose diary was also the inspiration for this film. As the Nanjing Normal University Giling College, where Minnie Vautrin was working at the time, was a refugee center specializing in sheltering women refugees, during the Nanjing Massacre by the invading Japanese army, it became an important target for the Japanese army to practice sexual violence. As the person in charge of the refugee center, Minnie Vautrin's diary, her file, is the most convincing evidence to expose the sexual atrocities committed by the invading Japanese army. However, these excellent stories are turned into men's doings in the movie with little or no change. Actor Fan Wei in *My People My Homeland* plays a teacher in the countryside, based on Fang Pinger, a rural teacher in Hangzhou who has been teaching in the mountains for nearly 40 years.

The prerequisite for success seems to be being a male, and this can be reflected in name-calling. There are always some people who want to show respect to Zhang Guimei and Fang Ping'er by calling them "Xiansheng", but in the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, none of the six meanings of the word "Xiansheng" denotes a woman. As Mr. Zhou Youguang once said, "To call a woman "Xiansheng" is to show respect, but to call a woman "lady" is to show disrespect. This clearly indicates a subconscious preference for men over women. Instead of trying to show respect, it is disrespectful[5]. " In movie and television productions, the real work done by outstanding women is turned into men's work, and women's titles are turned into men's titles so as to expand the sense of identity and influence.

This phenomenon is a representation of gender stereotypes, and the change of the archetype of the outstanding woman to a male role is a result of the different social expectations of the two genders in society. In a patriarchal view, a woman's excellence is related to whether she conforms to men's expectations of women, that is, whether she conforms to a woman's status as a good wife and mother and whether she obeys men's guidance. Edith Lazaros Honig asserts that "Victorian women in adult fiction were submissive and repressed or, if independent and assertive, mad and bad" [6]. To this day, this idea is still recognized by some men. In a patriarchal society, it is difficult for men to accept that women have too much social influence, which leads directors and writers to change women's excellent deeds to men's to gain more resonance in film and television. When entering a gender-mixed target group as men and women in social life, the social group's expectations of men are higher than those of women, which, to some extent, reduces women's self-confidence, motivation, prestige, and power in group interaction. If a woman appears who wants to go against the tide, both genders within the social group will oppose her and be prejudiced against it. Thus, in this case, the pattern of gender expectations is stabilized and consolidated[1].

Because of this, the phenomenon of changing the gender of a character has not been resisted, but more films and television productions use this method to portray characters.

#### **4 The Negative Deeds of Men Performed by Actress**

Changing the gender of a character is not only one performance; some movies and television productions will have female characters perform bad behaviors that are meant for males.

The prototype of "The Magnificent She" is the father's alcoholism and domestic violence, but the plot is changed to the mother's alcoholism and domestic violence, which is completely out of touch with the reality of rural life. The movie does not address the phenomenon of high alcoholism among rural men, abandons the real case of the father's alcoholism and domestic violence, and does not present the significance of Principal Zhang's help in educating the alcoholic father to correct his behavior, but creates out of thin air the image of an alcoholic rural mother who is a domestic violence victim. The fact is that, regarding gender differences in the incidence of marital violence, the study supports the view of the majority of scholars in the academic world that the rate of marital violence against women is significantly higher than that against men and that the proportion of women in the survey who were regularly beaten, insulted and ignored by their spouses was more than twice as high as that of the male sample[7]. Furthermore, the drinking rate of adults in China is 30.5 percent, of which 53.8% are men and 12.2% are women. Among the current drinkers, the rates of excessive drinking are 14.0% and 1.1% for men and women, respectively, and the rates of daily drinking are 25.7% and 10.9%, respectively[8]. This shows that the rate of alcohol consumption among men is also much higher than that of women. This change in gender roles distorts the situation for women and increases gender antagonism and stereotyping.

In *Heroes in Harm's Way*, The little girl who ripped off the nurse's mask, causing her to pass away with an infection, was based on a little boy with epilepsy. Changing someone else's seizure causes a mistake to people's ignorance and capriciousness, causing chaos and vilifying innocent patients. The person who asked the nurse to clean up the toilet was also changed from a male in the prototype to an aunt. Chizuko Ueno thinks there is a big misunderstanding. People write about women, not real women, but women in their eyes, women in their fantasies[9]. The change of gender in these films and television productions reflects society's different attitudes towards men and women and the value standards for judging men and women. As a drama adapted from a true story, exchanging bad deeds of men for actresses to perform is, in the final analysis, a manifestation of social "misogyny", which is the use of male-female gender oppositions and stereotypes to create contradictory conflicts that are detached from reality." misogyny" expresses itself in men as "contempt for women", an inexplicable denial of society's image of women and an intrinsic distrust of and discrimination against them.

## 5 Reflection and Suggestion

The degree of women's respect and the degree of women's liberation is one of the important standards of a society's civilization. Similarly, what kind of women's characters are created and what kind of women's characters are accepted by society is also one of the important standards for the level of development of a society's film culture and civilization[10].

There is a high necessity to fight against the phenomenon of changing the gender of the characters and to make the movie a tool for feminist struggles and happenings. It is encouraging to see that a part of the people have already realized the phenomenon of gender exchange at present, and the network has gradually paid attention to the issue of gender exchange. The network is an excellent communication platform; more people can use the network to speak out, so more people pay attention to this phenomenon and pay attention to feminist movies.

Like the dark box, the film machine is not ideologically neutral; it recreates a particular ideological predisposition[11]. To change this, women are too small a part of the movie market. It is important to enter the film industry more often to promote feminist ideas and change the status quo in the awareness field of cinema. With the rise of feminism, women are no longer just acting as companions to the male protagonist or weak protectors but showing their unique personalities, a trend that reflects society's re-examination of the value of women. More realistic and diversified images of women and diverse female narratives should be allowed to appear on the screen. Through these diversified narratives and the resulting wide-ranging influence, the value, status, and rights of women in society will be better noticed and recognized.

The important step in eliminating this phenomenon is to get rid of the social roots of misogyny, which begins with the emancipation of the female awakening. To get rid of stereotypes, it is not the case that powerful things are attributed to men while submissive and supportive behaviors are attributed to women. According to Simone de Beauvoir, all these restrictions cannot completely imprison a woman, and although a woman is constructed by the social system, she is not controlled by the social system at the same time. Women should be called upon to break out of the cage to which they belong and to pursue equal power, value creation, and self-realization, which is not only the intrinsic desire of women but also the demand of men and social development[4]. Women have to use their own words to create a women's culture that breaks down the thousands of years of a man-centered social system and creates a society where man and nature are in harmony and where there is equality, peace, and no hierarchy among people[12].

Hopefully, one day, a woman may be able to live with her "strength" instead of her "weakness", not to run away from herself, but to find herself, not to abandon herself, but to affirm herself[2].

## 6 Conclusion

In the films *The Flowers Of War* and *My People My Homeland*, the creators of the films and television put real, outstanding deeds done by women into the hands of male actors. In the film *The Magnificent She* and the TV series *Heroes in Harm's Way*, the creators of the film and television show bad behavior done by men to be acted out by actresses. This is a negative form of gender reassignment and is the way gender exchange occurs in most films.

The analysis of feminism and film theory attributes two main reasons for this phenomenon. One is stereotyping. Women's success seems to be predicated on being a man, and women are subordinate to men's success. It is difficult for men to believe in women's independent success and for society to show trust and respect for women's independent success. The second is social expectations. Due to the social roots of patriarchy and phallogentrism, as well as the influence of "misogyny", it is difficult for society to create expectations about women's abilities, and the gaze from men defines women as "others" and "objects", only expecting women to act as "objects". The male gaze defines women as "the other" and "the object" and expects them to serve only as support for men's success.

More and more attention is being paid to the phenomenon of gender exchange, and it is very necessary to make use of excellent media platforms to bring this issue to wider attention. The film and television industry cannot be occupied by men. All the market people must encourage women to enter the film and television industry, promote feminist ideas, and restore the real female characters. In the new era, feminist theories are flourishing, and although there are negative voices, more women are beginning to awaken themselves, defend their power, and pursue equality.

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