

# **BOND...(THE HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY OF) JAMES BOND**

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## **Abstract**

The mythology of James Bond is a pop culture phenomenon that is comparable to other such phenomena as Star Wars and Lord of the Rings, collectively creating a diverse selection of genres and archetypes. What most separates James Bond from the other two, perhaps, is its distinctly (hyper) masculine nature. A more controversial element of this mythology, however, is the equally popular “Bond girls.”

From less-than-subtle names such as Chew Mee and Pussy Galore, to Bond actually being violent to these girls in earlier films, to instances such as the masseuse Dink having to leave Bond and Felix Leiter because the latter two had to have “man’s talk”, the barrage of criticism of the patriarchal leanings of the James Bond series is understandable. A critical reading of the Ian Fleming brainchild, as translated and adapted in five films from the franchise, its more popular medium, will be the framework for this journal article. The theories of feminism (and its various schools of thought) and commodification (in view of its five main elements) will be used as supplements to the main methodology to be used in the study, i.e., multimodal critical discourse analysis. Visual and linguistic cues will be prioritized in the analysis, but other such semiotic cues of significance will be included, as seen fit by the authors.

Ultimately, the study will attempt to point out that a change in the tone, a mellowing down of the patriarchy, so to speak, of the more contemporary James Bond films is not necessarily the once hypermasculine anthology adapting a feminist stance, striving for equality of the sexes, in terms of portrayal on film. Rather, it will be the aim of the study to conclude whether it is societal pressure (specifically of a society trying to embrace diversity) or the emergence of a new model of hegemonic masculinity influencing the said change in tone of the James Bond films.

**Keywords:** James Bond, patriarchy, hypermasculinity, feminism, commodification, hegemonic masculinity

## Introduction

From its first filmic iteration with an ensemble of barely-established actors to the review provided by *The New York Times* interpreted by Beale (2012) as “a cute, entertaining trifle” (p. 42), the *James Bond* series had gone leaps and bounds.

“The formula was simple,” says film critic and author Irv Slifkin of *moviefanfare.com*. “A good-looking guy who was lethal yet likable, gorgeous women, nasty villains, nifty gadgets, nice locations, and cool music – all presented in first class fashion with a dollop of violence and sex and, in some cases, politics.” (Beale, 2012, p. 42)

It had gone on to produce 23 blockbusters, and spawn a mythology comparable to a select few in the labyrinthine shelves and meticulous, unpredictable audience behavior characteristic of popular culture.

“Bond tapped into a full range of male fantasies and desires that were simultaneously being exploited by popular media and international advertising at the height of post-war consumerism,” adds Christoph Lindner, the editor of *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*. (Beale, 2012, p. 42)

As the reviews cited by Beale (2012) imply, there is a plethora of research possibilities that the series can offer. Of most interest to the authors, however, are the gorgeous women (popularly known as Bond Girls) and political aspects of the tried, tested, and winning formula of the James Bond series. Beale (2012) argued that “if you were female, well, you might not have liked the casual sexism of the Bond series, but there was always Sean Connery, about as studly as they come, to satisfy your fantasies” (p. 42). The character of James Bond and his many portrayals were also commended for being “good at what he does” and being “an openly heterosexual male, unashamed of his own manhood” (Beale, 2012, p. 44). Garland (2009) also noted that

Bond exemplifies a genuine enjoyment of sex that extends beyond mere manipulation and allows him to extract information from women, to establish an alibi, to convince women to help him, to help women move to the side of good, and to enrage the villain. (p. 180)

It is a safe assumption, then, that the women in the *James Bond* series, “function” in terms of Bond, that their existence is dependent upon what the situation demands of Bond. That is the concept of objectification – an unequal treatment of women, in this case, portrayal of media and just a few notches above literal props.

Beale (2012) also quoted Yefeth in saying that “[t]he films have always reflected the times in which they were made”. From an unabashed man’s man (to reverse the slang term “girl’s girl”), Beale (2012) noted that Bond “has become more emotionally open” (p. 44). The authors note that it is possible that Beale had been careful not to use “has become more feminine” in the

conclusion about the evolution of Bond's character. Arnett (2009) is in agreement, saying that "[p]opular media and industry reporting often claim films like *Casino Royale* (Martin Campbell, 2006), *Batman Begins* (Christopher Nolan, 2005), *The Incredible Hulk* (Louis Leterrier, 2008), and *Superman Returns* (Bryan Singer, 2006) "reboot" their franchises" (p. 1). Arnett (2009), however, also noted that it was not an overhaul; rather, "a transformation of the franchise that acknowledges previous iterations while claiming its own autonomy" (p. 2). Funnell (2009) even said that Daniel Craig's performance as the latest Bond read as a "Bond – Bond Girl Hybrid" (p. 456). She (2009) added, however, that that is "notable in the presentation of Craig's Bond as youthful, spectacular, and feminized relative to the gaze through the passive positioning of his exposed muscular body in scenes where he is disengaged from physical activity" (p. 456), sounding the objectification alarm yet again, and also reads to the authors as the only way to be feminine in the Bond films is to be objectified.

To say that feminism has penetrated mainstream consciousness is not controversial, but to say that it is the prevailing discourse – that of equality – in mainstream media, is.

Funnell (2009) also noted that

The evolution of the Bond film has not been a linear progression. Centered on the casting and characterization of the title character, the direction and tone of the film series strongly depends on maintaining a balance between continuity (i.e., retaining the Bond film's generic identity) and change (i.e., offering variety in each film to make it appealing to its loyal fan base).

The authors share the observation that the noted changes – in tone, for instance – are apparent. One of the main questions in the study, however, is if the treatment of the "Bond girls" had changed as well. Are they still objectified, and in what ways? What were the notable changes in character treatment that went with the change of tones per Bond film?

While the study used filmic analysis as a principal methodology, it will only be part-film critique; the *James Bond* films included in the study will be analyzed within the theoretical frameworks of hegemonic masculinity and objectification. A supporting methodology to be used in the study is feminist analysis.

Tseng (2013) said that "the characters' faces, expressions, actions, and all kinds of behaviours function as the main resources for the viewer to construct predictions and inferences about characters' traits and entire narrative structures are substantially mediated by characters" (p. 587). Filmic analysis is "developed building on research results from studies of both film and linguistics" (Tseng, 2013, p. 588), because Tseng (2013) asserted that not only is the visual important in the analysis of a film, but also the linguistic. The latter will allow for a multilayered analysis, covering as well the "narrative inferences and expectations" (Tseng, 2013, p. 588) of the viewer. Further, an inclusion of linguistics in film analysis "can most effectively strengthen multi-levelled analyses proposed in film studies" (Tseng, 2013, p. 588) and "can systematically

uncover the collaborative effect of visual, verbal and audio cues in the viewers' narrative comprehension" (Tseng, 2013, p. 588). Tseng (2013) also asserted that through a linguistic analysis

...filmic meaning, just as is the case with linguistic meaning, can be seen as constructed through a complex process of realization across strata: namely, concrete filmic devices at the bottom-level are deployed to realize discourse strategies; different kinds of discourse strategies are in turn manipulated to realize certain genres or styles; and, finally, film genres and styles then realize social and ideological meanings.

Tseng (2013) also prescribed deviating from psychoanalytic film theories, proposing instead "a more fine-grained framework to analyse characters in a film and the relationship between the characters and viewer" (p. 589) by Smith, "sympathy" (p. 589). Smith's framework of sympathy has "three main descriptive levels: *Recognition, Alignment and Allegiance*" (p. 589).

Recognition "addresses mechanisms cueing viewers to recognize characters' identities throughout a film" (Tseng, 2013, p. 589). Alignment "goes beyond formal and textual strategies that cue viewers' perception" (Tseng, 2013, p. 588) and is "mediated by a range of film narration techniques such as actions, spatio-temporal paths and subjective access to characters" (Tseng, 2013, p. 589). The final main descriptive level, allegiance, "is mediated by several factors such as information gathered through alignment, character actions and behavior, etc." (Tseng, 2013, p. 589).

Feminist analysis was chosen as the other primary methodology for the study because, as Hekman (1997) asserted, "[t]he nature of their oppression is not obvious to all women; it is only through feminist analysis that a feminist standpoint can be articulated" (p. 346). This is supported by Syzmanski, Moffitt, and Carr (2011), saying that self-objectification, where women, having internalized her sexual purpose to men, actively partake in prioritizing her appearance-based attributes rather than her competence-based attributes. Applerouth (2012) also said that "because they must continually accommodate themselves to the dominant group in order to gain acceptance in a world that is not theirs, members of oppressed or minority groups become alienated from their "true" selves" (p. 563).

## **Objectification**

Papadaki (2014) said objectification "can be roughly defined as the seeing and/or treating a person, usually a woman, *as an object*". She also cited the proponent of objectification theory, Martha Nussbaum as identifying the seven aspects of objectification:

1. *instrumentality*: the treatment of a person as a tool for the objectifier's purposes;
2. *denial of autonomy*: the treatment of a person as lacking in autonomy and self-

determination;

3. *inertness*: the treatment of a person as lacking in agency, and perhaps also on activity;

4. *fungibility*: the treatment of a person as interchangeable with other objects;

5. *violability*: the treatment of a person as lacking in boundary-integrity;

6. *ownership*: the treatment of a person as something that is owned by another (can be bought or sold)

7. *denial of subjectivity*: the treatment of a person as something whose experiences and feelings (if any) need not be taken into account

The study will also take into consideration Rae Langton's addition of three more elements of objectification:

8. *reduction to body*: the treatment of a person as identified with their body; or body parts;

9. *reduction to appearance*: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses

10. *silencing*: the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak. (Papadaki, 2014)

Szymanski, Moffitt, and Carr (2011) said that objectification theory "postulates that many women are sexually objectified and treated as an object to be valued for its use by others" (p. 8). feministfrequency (2014) then defined sexual objectification (SO) as

the practice of treating or representing a human being as a thing or mere instrument to be used for another's sexual purposes. Sexually objectified women are valued primarily for their bodies, or body parts, which are presented as existing for the pleasure and gratification of others.

feministfrequency (2014) also argued that sexual objectification assigns roles to the male-female binary – males as sexual subjects and females as sexual objects. Despite the latter's analysis being specific to video games, the notion that "women predominantly exist as passive objects of heterosexual male desire" (feministfrequency, 2014) could very well be applied to other media that portray female characters. Further, Szymanski, Moffitt, and Carr (2011) cited a study by APA and reported that

...depictions of women in the media including commercials, prime-time television programs, movies, music lyrics and videos, magazines, advertising,

sports media, video games, and Internet sites revealed that women more often than men are depicted in sexualizing and objectified manners (e.g., wearing revealing and provocative clothing, portrayed in ways that emphasize their body parts and sexual readiness, serving as decorative objects). In addition, women portrayed in the media are frequently the target of men's sexist comments (e.g., use of deprecating words to describe women), sexual remarks (e.g., comments about women's body parts), and behaviors (e.g., ogling, leering, catcalling, harassment). (p. 10)

## **Hegemonic Masculinity**

Applerouth (2012) cited Connell in defining hegemonic masculinity as “a pattern of practices that allows men's dominance over women to continue” (p. 588). He also said that “Connell maintains that there are many kinds of masculinities but always there is one which is hegemonic to the rest and marginalize the others in a gender system” (p. 588). For instance, Renaissance men highly favored intellectual and artistic sensibilities, starkly different from the sensibilities of today that made prominent slang terms such as “bro” and “douchebag” to signify the emergence of young, renegade-type males pervading youth culture today.

This does not mean that hegemonic masculinity is either monolithic or static, but rather, that is the kind of masculinity which is in a superior level. No matter what, each culture will prefer one kind of masculinity over the others. (Applerouth, 2012, p. 588)

Applerouth (2012) said that “Connell's conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity has the central advantage of locating male dominance not solely to the micro-level and the inter-personal dynamics of the family, but to the macro-level and public sphere” (p. 588). This would be especially helpful to the study as not only are the realm of film and the settings in which the *James Bond* films take place in the public sphere, but also because it is axiomatic that a powerful mass medium such as film is capable of furthering the status quo, perpetuating the hegemony, as it is of criticizing it. Applerouth (2012) also used Dorothy Smith's definition of bifurcation of consciousness, that is, “a separation or split between the world as you actually experience it and the dominant view to which you must adapt (e.g. a masculine point of view)” (p. 562), which the authors believe could explain how the marginalized sectors in general process their position in view of the dominant classes.

Another important concept propositioned by Connell is the patriarchal dividend, “to refer both to the honor and prestige and the more material dividends men accrue under patriarchy, the point being that this dividend is not uniformly distributed among men, but is, nevertheless, universally distributed among them” (Applerouth, 2012, p. 589).

Arnett (2009) said that the most recent iteration of James Bond, as portrayed by Daniel Craig in *Casino Royale*, is keeping with the changing times. This is not only seen in how “[t]he producers mixed Bond within a corporate context that understood the modern superhero franchise” (p. 2),

but, analyzed in depth, in how it perpetuates the new hegemonic masculinity – that of being a superhero. The damsel in distress of today need not be disrespected or demeaned in order to be drawn to the bad boy of decades past, or wooed in the most overly romantic fashion possible in the era of Shakespearean adaptations, but to be saved. Of the three general phases of hegemonic masculinity, it should be noted that the male has undergone “character development”, but the female has not. The woman of today may be given an anti-hero characterization, a high-paying job, or even a superhero costume of her own, but she will always need saving in one way or another – from her “moral failings”, from her singlehood because of too much immersion in the public sphere, or from her mistakes as a beginner running with the (all-male) big dogs of popular culture canon, respectively.

### **Five Films in a 50-Year Franchise**

For the present study, five films were selected at random: *Dr No* (1962), *Diamonds are Forever* (1971), *For Your Eyes Only* (1981), *Goldeneye* (1995), and *Skyfall* (2012). It was serendipitous that the random sampling resulted in the selection of the first and the last film in the franchise as at the writing of the present study.

This serendipity is important, as *Dr No* and *Skyfall* illustrate the film franchise coming back full circle, as it were. In the former film, M, the MI6 head from whom James Bond takes his orders, was male. In the latter film, M was played by Judi Dench; however, this film happened to be Dench’s last outing, as her character was killed off. At the end of the film, James Bond can be found reporting to M in the person of Gareth Mallory, played by Ralph Fiennes. This appears to run counter to the “feminization” described by Funnell (2009).

It cannot be denied that every Bond film follows a formula, that of a superspy who extracts information by means ranging from the diplomatic to the traumatic, gambles and manages to win at a rate significantly better than blind chance, uses gadgets supplied by a scientifically advanced division of the MI6 headquarters led by the Quartermaster (better known as Q), and engages in flirtations with women, whether they are on his side or against it.

We made it a point to mention the flirtation last in this formula, as there is but one real Bond girl: Eve Moneypenny. It is interesting to note that in *Skyfall*, she is depicted as a competent field agent. Her failure though comes in inadvertently shooting Bond in a futile attempt to retrieve a hard drive containing the details of agents embedded in terrorist organizations worldwide. Throughout the course of the film, Bond ribs Moneypenny over that fateful gunshot, even commenting that he felt relieved upon knowing that she chose to be assigned in office administration. In the other films selected for this study, Bond and Moneypenny exchange flirtations, ranging from the latter’s entreaties for a diamond ring to the former giving souvenirs.

The following table gives details as to the women in the Bond films included in this study:

*Table 1*

<i>Film</i>	<i>Bond Girl</i>
<i>Dr No</i>	Honey Ryder
<i>Diamonds are Forever</i>	Tiffany Case / Plenty O'Toole
<i>For Your Eyes Only</i>	Melina Havelock / Bibi Dahl
<i>Goldeneye</i>	Natalya Simonova / Xenia Onatopp
<i>Skyfall</i>	Severine

Save for *Skyfall*, it can be seen that Bond Girls are objectified by their names. “Honey” is a term of endearment that in present times may receive a sharp retort but was something that may have been tolerated some five decades ago. Plenty O’ Toole is a not-so-subtle reference to the buxom features of the woman who offers to throw dice for James Bond in one of his forays in the casino. Bibi Dahl is an all-too-obvious homonym for “baby doll.” The same attempt at homonym is made with Xenia Onatopp sounding suspiciously like “seen you on the top,” something that may suggest a position taken during copulation. *Skyfall* can be interpreted as an exception in the franchise, in that Judi Dench’s M can arguably be considered a consistent and constant Bond Girl in the same manner as Moneypenny is. Severine (played by Berenice Marlohe), the “on-paper” Bond Girl, plays a short part and ends up being killed in roughly the middle of the movie.

Particularly interesting is how objectification masks as contextualization. *Dr No*’s Honey Ryder is a woman picking up shells in a clandestine island wearing a two-piece swimsuit. However, she claims to have had no need for formal schooling, insofar as her late father gave her an encyclopedia set from which she obtained her knowledge. She even goes as far as to tell James Bond that she probably knows more than he does. Tiffany Case appears to possess the characteristics of a strong woman, e.g., shrewd and self-assured, until she botches Bond’s plans to switch the tape that controls a satellite that has been re-appropriated as a weapon.

*For Your Eyes Only*’s Melina Havelock is a skilled archer bent on seeking retribution for the death of her parents, a strong woman if ever there was one. It bears noting that in the closing moments of the film, she joins Bond in an implied nude moonlight swim. Bibi Dahl, on the other hand, is a skater who also happens to be the protégé of the film’s antagonist. She distinguishes herself, as it were, by making overt sexual advances at James Bond and explicitly stating that her patron is mistaken in his belief that she is a virgin.

*Goldeneye*’s Natalya Simonova and Xenia Onatopp represent the film’s protagonist and antagonist, respectively. While the protagonist is portrayed as a resourceful and sensitive woman, the antagonist is depicted as taking pleasure in sadomasochistic sexual practices and is seen repeatedly exhibiting orgasmic moans and sighs immediately after killing off her enemies.

Severine from *Skyfall* is established to have been forced into prostitution from a young age, as evidence by a tattoo on her wrist that suggests “ownership” by a human trafficking gang. James Bond interprets, whether correctly or incorrectly, her bravado as fear, when he infers that the men who surround her are not there to protect her but rather to watch her.

In summary, it can be seen that the Bond Girls serve many purposes; among these many purposes, the edification of women does not belong. From the provision of comic relief to illustrating psychiatric issues, and from the creation of “eye candy” to the depiction of a closeted intellectual with an interest in conchology, they are versatile to the franchise’s masculine hegemony. There was a glimmer of hope with a female M for a fifth or so of the franchise’s 50 years, but it appears to be back to the usual practice now.

As had been mentioned earlier in the study (in Beale, 2012), there is a wide assortment of directions for future study. We suggest a census of the entire population of Bond films in an effort to track the evolution, assuming there is one, in its treatment of women. A study of the villainesses in other Bond films may also be helpful, taking into account May Day from *A View to a Kill* and Rosa Klebb in *From Russia With Love* as among the examples.

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