The male gaze and how it can discriminate

The stimulus for Video Essay 1 surrounds the concept of the “Male Gaze”. This was first introduced by film theorist, Laura Mulvey, in her essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (Mulvey, 1975). The male gaze applies to visual content where women are objectified and are filmed from the perspective of a heterosexual man. Within the essay, Mulvey draws heavily upon Jacques Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of the Mirror Stage which is linked to discovery and identification of the self (Lacan, 1966). Within the Mirror Stage, the Gaze is a crucial element where infants first recognise their own reflection in the mirror. She also references Sigmund Freud’s theory of Scopophilia, the pleasure of looking, to understand why female objectification is present. Mulvey then applies these concepts to cinema and shows how it fulfils male voyeurism.

When applied to modern cinema, the Male Gaze can also discriminate against women in different ways. American Civil Rights Advocate, Kimberlé Crenshaw, defines intersectionality as a type of discrimination. Her definition of intersectionality is that social identities intersect and overlap which can create discrimination towards people who identify themselves as having multiple marginalised identities. She explains that discrimination is more complex and cannot be only addressed within each social category (Crenshaw, 2014). This would further draw upon Mulvey’s theory of the Male Gaze and also highlight that this can affect Black women who would experience this discrimination differently from white women.

Discrimination, displayed in an intersectional way, is evident throughout Tyler Perry’s films. Tyler Perry, as a director, has been recognised for creating controversial films. Tyler Perry is an American Actor, filmmaker and playwright, his films have cumulatively grossed over $660 million.

There is a pattern within Tyler Perry’s films where Black women are constantly portrayed in a negative stereotypical manner throughout. The movies chosen are ‘ Diary of a Mad Black Woman’, ‘ Madea's Family Reunion’ and ‘ Why Did I Get Married Too?’. Throughout these films the message is conveyed to be that black women are weak, crazy, unappreciated and are victims of emotional and physical abuse by their black partners. These are stereotypes that are being reinforced that are already existing stereotypes within the black culture.

Using Tyler Perry’s films is very beneficial as it allows the researcher to explore the deeper meaning behind these stereotypes and can explore the theories and questions which arise. Something common throughout the films is that they are led by the female narration which coincides with portraiture methodology. ‘ Voice is the lens through which the portraitist sees and documents reality’ (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis 1997). The films are read through the victim which is the main character, being a black woman's narration which then allows us as a reader to enhance that connection to reality. The common theme in Tyler Perry’s film is anger among black women which is later revealed as to why. There are constant emotions which include fear, sadness, abuse, pain and anger, which we later discover is due to Tyler Perry’s own perception of Black women from his childhood.

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