IT’S A FANBOY’S WORLD:
HOW CINEPHILE BLOGS PERPETUATE A SEXIST HOLLYWOOD

A Thesis
Presented to
The Honors Tutorial College
Ohio University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for Graduation
from the Honors Tutorial College
with the degree of
Bachelor of Fine Arts in Film

by
Jillian Kathleen Jacobs
August 2010
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

List of Tables...................................................................................................................2

List of Figures..................................................................................................................3

Chapter 1: Introduction.................................................................................................4

Chapter 2: The Blogs.....................................................................................................9

Chapter 3: The Hollywood Working Climate for Women.................................31

Chapter 4: The Hollywood Climate for Female Audiences.........................38

Chapter 5: Gendered Online Sexual Harassment.............................................50

Chapter 6: Conclusion...............................................................................................62
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Females Mentioned as Writer, Director, Producer in One Week...........36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fangirl Magazine Home Page</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slash Film Home Page</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Showing Home Page</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Knowles, Creator of AICN</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Munn, Co-Host of Attack of the Show!</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia Munn, Screen Capture, Attack of the Show!</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ain’t It Cool News Home Page</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marilyn Monroe, “Here Come the Marilyn Monroe Biopics!”</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristen Wiig, “Kristen Wiig Options Dark Comic Novel Clown Girl”</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Photos, “Welcome to the Rileys”</td>
<td>56-57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On February 1st, 2010, Peter Sciretta, creator of the popular movie news blog Slash Film, published a blog post with this headline: “Question of the Day: Why Are There So Few Female Filmmakers?” The accompanying post highlights director Kathryn Bigelow’s critical success for 2009’s The Hurt Locker, but offers no real committed opinions as to why the majority of high profile directors are male. Sciretta posits, “It has often been blamed on a chauvinist culture, or the fact that a lack of female filmmakers means fewer role models and mentors…would/can [sic] a Best Director win by Bigelow change anything?” An attempt at insightful, if not misguided, discussion, Sciretta’s post implies that most women simply have no desire to direct film but an Oscar win by the first female director will change their minds, resulting in a surge of female filmmakers. The first response on the comment thread, by reader “Doobie Brother,” quips that obviously, this lack exists because women’s brains are smaller than men’s. When reader “AngryBroomstick,” whose link to her website confirms she is female, challenges his joke, asking to speak seriously about the topic of sexism, fellow commenter “damnitall” had this to say:

“HOLY. [sic] Someone set AngryBroomstick off. A joke is a joke. Don’t like it, move to the next post for a more serious discussion. And yeah, sexism? Really? A post asking why less women are in a certain field and the default answer is sexism. Blame it on the men! They’re holding the women back! If you are going to get angry at someone else for not being serious the least you could do is follow up with an educated response rather than just blurting something out.”

For the purpose of clarity, Merriam-Webster defines sexism as “prejudice or discrimination based on sex” as well as “behavior, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.” By smugly dismissing sexism altogether, “damnitall” perpetuates that stereotype, claiming sexism as simply a cover for female
laziness. This response demonstrates the ease with which sexism is trivialized on the Internet, a feat made easier by the lack of face-to-face communication. First, “damnitall” defends “Doobie Brother’s” comment as a harmless joke and condemns “AngryBroomstick” for not accepting it as such. Second, he rejects the idea that sexism plays any role in the apparent lack of female filmmakers in Hollywood, calling it a “default answer.” “Damnitall’s” unwillingness to discuss the topic or even consider it reveals his ignorance and entitlement, which is made more apparent by his claim that “AngryBroomstick” jumped to a conclusion about sexism as opposed to making “an educated response.” Another reader, “Name,” claims that it is “[AngryBroomstick’s] type of attitude that causes this phenomenon [few female filmmakers]. Stop crying sexism and go out and DO [sic]”. “Name” succeeds in blaming “AngryBroomstick” and other women for this lack, implying that the reason there are so few female filmmakers is because women do not try, they just complain. The attack on “AngryBroomstick” continues and includes other readers joining to gang up on the one obvious female for asking to discuss sexism in the industry. They claim that sexism is not the problem, when many of them refuse to even entertain the idea.

Sciretta’s intention for asking this question appears to be wholly genuine and thoughtful, but the discussion it spawned hardly warrants either epithet. Instead, his blog became host to online gender harassment and ignorant points of view regarding sexism. Furthermore, he allowed these comments to remain in cyberspace undisputed. Upon further examination, these kinds of comment threads are a frequent occurrence on SlashFilm, or /Film, ostensibly because of the freedom found with anonymity online. But these attitudes stem from a larger systemic problem and not just the blog itself. The sexist
culture of professional fan or cinephile blogs like Slash Film strongly reflects the same sexist climate of the Hollywood film industry, which can be found behind and in front of the camera, as well as in the audience. First, the overwhelming majority of blog posts published contain no mentions of a female in the role of director, writer, executive producer, producer, editor, or cinematographer. This occurs not because these sites choose to ignore females in key behind-the-scenes roles but because of the staggeringly low numbers of women who fill these roles in Hollywood. However, the result is a noticeable lack of creative and powerful female presence, building an illusion for readers that women are not and should not be associated with filmmaking. Second, the bloggers assume that because they place an emphasis on covering genre films that their readership is mostly male, excluding female film fans from the discourse of any genre but the ‘chick flick.’ By doing so, these blogs buy into Hollywood’s notion that women are a niche audience with little interest outside of romance and family, and are not a part of the wider film audience. Third, these blogs are continuously host to sexually explicit comments that objectify women on their discussion threads. Allowing this to happen on their site without thought or consequence demonstrates how Hollywood’s own objectification of women on screen has become a societal norm to be tolerated.

For the purpose of this study, three professional cinephile blogs will be inspected for instances of sexism as a result of the attitudes encouraged and cultivated by the Hollywood film industry. For a blog to be considered professional, it must meet three criteria. First, the blog must employ a writing staff to prove it is not just intended for personal use but also to reach a wider audience. Second, a major news source must endorse the blog for its credibility. Third, the Hollywood film industry must recognize
the blog and its writers as influential members of the press. The blogs chosen for this study include Peter Sciretta’s *Slash Film*, Alex Billington’s *First Showing*, and Harry Knowles’ *Ain’t It Cool News*. Along with fitting all three criteria, these blogs share one glaring similarity: they are run by fanboys.

In recent years, the term ‘fanboy’ has been widely accepted into the everyday vernacular of pop culture. In 2008, the demographic was immortalized in a film about a group of *Star Wars* geeks appropriately titled *Fanboys*. Merriam-Webster.com recognizes fanboy as “a boy who is an enthusiastic devotee (as of comics or movies).” A vague definition, but there is no doubt that this type of male exists. Type the word “fangirl” into the search bar of Merriam-Webster.com and you won’t find a definition. Your spelling will be questioned and suggested words like “finger,” and “funeral” will be listed for your convenience. Surely girls and women are capable of being enthusiastic devotees of comics or movies as well, yet the term remains gender specific. In Rebecca Winters Keegan’s 2007 article for *Time Magazine* titled “Boys Who Like Toys,” a fanboy is defined as “the typically geeky 16-34 year old male (though there are some fangirls) whose slavish devotion to a pop-culture subject, like a comic-book character or a video game, drives him to blog, podcast, chat, share YouTube videos, go to comic book conventions and, once in a while, see a movie on the subject of his obsession. And he’s having his way with Hollywood.” Winters Keegan concedes the existence of “some fangirls,” implying that the number remains meager compared to that of the fanboys.

In regards to the three founders of the aforementioned blogs, their obsession focuses on a certain type of cinema. While these men are strong proponents of independent film, many of the projects they choose to blog about are high profile
Hollywood genre films. The term ‘genre films’ typically encompasses any horror, comic book, western, action, or science fiction films, which easily lend themselves to becoming franchises in which sequels and prequels are churned out for a profit. The Spiderman trilogy and the Saw franchise are successful examples. Correspondingly, the majority of popular movies today have one thing in common: they are derivative of a source material, many of which are comic books and graphic novels, often the objects of fanboy fixation. The business logic of Hollywood in the last decade suggests that if a property already has a rabid fan base, or even a limited one, an audience for a film version exists. In a year when six of the top ten grossing films are either part of a franchise, a remake, or based on a highly recognizable literary property, Keegan’s claim that fanboys are “having [their] way with Hollywood,” suggests that the demographic is at least partially responsible for these seemingly relentless trends in the film industry and consequentially the exclusion of female fans, because quite often they make up the audience for the source material.

Of the top 20 grossing comic-book adaptations of all time, 15 were released between 2000 and 2010 (Box Office Mojo, Comic Book Adaptation). Given the correlation between the Hollywood trends of the last decade and fanboy tastes, the question of where females fit into the equation of popular American cinema must arise. I pose the issue from an inherently biased point of view as a female film student and avid fan of Hollywood cinema. I do not, however, hope to discredit professional fanboy blogs and their place in current popular culture. I am admittedly a fan of many of the types of films these blogs promote, despite the notion that only men are interested in genre films. It is because of my support of these blogs that I began to feel excluded from the discourse encouraged by Internet culture. Instead of open, constructive communication, the
anonymity of these forums encourages sexist, homophobic, and violent thoughts that otherwise would be deemed inappropriate and offensive, to be shared and revered by others. I began to notice that it was hard to find posts about films for or by women, but that if I wanted to see lustful pictures of actresses or read sexually graphic comments from other blog readers, I would only have to look as far as the home page. The few films discussed on these blogs that actually feature a female protagonist are often ridiculed. I have now come to understand that solely because of my gender, I am forced to choose between tolerating blatant sexism and omitting my perspective from discussions about my passion. Neither of which, I accept as equitable options. In blogs, the Internet invites communication between Hollywood and its audience, yet the most prominent cinephile blogs deter women from having a role in the online discourse of cinema, upholding the sexual imbalance of male over female.

**CHAPTER 2: THE BLOGS**

Blogs, short for weblogs, initially became popular in the form of online diaries around 1999 (Blood, “Weblogs: A History and Perspective”). Anyone with an Internet connection and the necessary technical skills possessed the ability to write entries about the topic of their choice and post them on a personal site, to be read by anyone. For their “Internet and American Life Project,” The Pew Research Center reveals that since 2006 blogging has significantly declined “in popularity among both teens and young adults” in their study “Social Media and Young Adults.” But while personal blogging may be falling behind social networking sites in popularity among teens and young adults, professional blogs represent a new form of journalism, and a popular source for news.
According to the same study, “about two-thirds (62%) of internet-using teens consume online news about current events and politics.” This generation of teens is also the first to grow up in a time when the Internet is not a luxury but a necessity and a resource. In another study titled “Understanding the Participatory News Consumer,” Pew Research Center reveals that, “the internet [sic] is now the third most-popular news platform, behind local and national television news and ahead of national print newspapers, local print newspapers and radio” among American news consumers. The ever-improving speed and accessibility of the Internet has no doubt contributed to the wired revolution that encourages American society to grow more and more connected to technology.

While the Internet is a resource for news and politics, it is also a tool of leisure. From online shopping to online dating, Internet users are exposed to a multitude of websites promoting any interest of their choice, often in a participatory manner where they are invited to comment on articles or express approval of a certain viewpoint with the push of a button. The professional blog can be likened to an online magazine or newspaper that often reports on items related to one or two main topics and is easily found through a Google search. Given the popularity of cinema, the number of sites devoted to film is endless. In Reinventing Cinema: Movies in the Age of Media Convergence, Chuck Tryon categorizes film blogs into four types: gossip blogs, promotional blogs, meta-industry blogs, and fan or cinephile blogs. The latter category is a blog “in which groups of mostly amateur writers discuss, analyze, and review films, often with a specific focus on one genre, era, or style of filmmaking” (138). The blogs chosen for this study fall into this category but carry the distinction of professional status as determined by the three criteria, which emphasizes the amount of exposure they
receive and therefore the potential influence that they hold. The main focus of these blogs is on reviewing films, sharing upcoming film news whether verified or rumor, and generating excitement for projects in all stages of production. The combination of the three chosen sites is a sufficient representation of the professional cinephile blogs that are recognized by fanboys as well as individuals working in the Hollywood film industry.

The advent of relevant, up to date blogs caused forward thinking minds to wonder about the future of criticism and consumerism, especially within media. In his article, “RIP The Consumer, 1900-1999,” Internet writer Clay Shirky posited that, “in the age of the Internet, no one is a consumer anymore because everyone is a media outlet.” In the case of film news and criticism, the consumer has transformed into the participatory film blogger. Participatory, meaning that blog posts and reader comments are encouraged to be opinionated, creating a discourse of voices who ultimately are the most devout audiences of popular cinema. Richard Gold, a creative executive at Fox Searchlight Pictures, opines that while many industry insiders rely on the trades for their film news, “the [cinephile] blogs are good for taking the temperature as to the buzz certain films are getting with the fanboys.” While fanboys may not exactly be dictating which films get made, their feedback in the form of online discourse acts as a way for Hollywood to test the anticipation for their projects. In an unprecedented strategy, many major studios have taken to courting the more famous fanboys, like Sciretta, Billington, and Knowles, by placing them on their list for press screenings in exchange for reviews of their films published online. Writers, directors, and producers also recognize the value of having fanboys on their side. “These alpha fans are enjoying an unprecedented era of influence, through blogs, podcasts, and movie-news sites that have become trusted sources or movie
information for millions of filmgoers... ‘They’re the new tastemakers,’ says Avi Arad, a producer behind this summer’s Spider-Man 3 and Fantastic Four: Rise of the Silver Surfer. ‘Hard-core fans represent a small piece of the viewing public, but they influence geek culture, journalists, Wall Street. You don’t want them to trash your project.’ If these fans embrace a project, as they did 300 and Heroes, they can kick-start a hit” (Winters Keegan). By playing ball with the most obsessive fanboys, Hollywood power players create celebrities out of these men and bolster the notion that their opinions matter more than all others.

While all of the fanboy sites claim no allegiance to studios for granting them cool extras, some speculate an unethical quid pro quo is in play, like longtime film journalist Anne Thompson. Thompson, who in recent years chose to adapt to the trend of Internet columns with blogs on both The Hollywood Reporter and Variety before setting up her own blog on IndieWire titled Thompson on Hollywood, calls out this new wave of pseudo-journalists in her article “Full Disclosure: Bloggers Break Rules.”

“Remember back when people worried about aint-it-cool news [sic] and the way Harry Knowles flouted all the rules of journalism? Well, welcome to the new world. These issues came back this week with the revelation that the FTC wants bloggers to reveal who pays for them to review products.”

This mandate by the Federal Trade Commission was announced in October 2009 and aims to “regulate blogging for the first time, requiring writers on the Web to clearly disclose any freebies or payments they get from companies for reviewing their products” (Yao, “FTC: Bloggers”). The effort to ensure public disclosure of any conflict of interest a blogger may have became a hot-button topic among film bloggers, who are often given items and access from studios in order to review a film. Their reactions to being regulated reflected contempt and confusion. A tweet from fanboy site Film School Rejects mused,
“I just think that if you do it long enough, you’re eventually going to step into some murky ethical waters at some point” (“Full Disclosure”). Thompson, who considers herself a “journalist/blogger hybrid” paints a profile of the so-called “new media critic:”

“Get paid small sums by the story- or live off share of ads on your blog or site. Report on set visits (paid by studio). Post early photos, poster art, clips and trailers (supplied by studio). Attend junkets for access to filmmakers and stars (paid by studio). Attend film festivals for access (sometimes paid by junketing studio or festival).”

In contrast with the new rules of new media, Thompson argues that it was once considered unethical to attend junkets or even interview the people involved in the film up for review. But these bloggers do not know that because “most of them aren’t trained as journalists in the first place. They are film fans, thrilled to be sharing their passion with their readers...will their need for studio access have an impact on what online media outlets will cover and write? Absolutely” (“Full Disclosure”). Whether fanboy bloggers give positive reviews in exchange for special treatment or not, they are maintaining a working relationship with those high up in the Hollywood power structure. And, as Thompson pointed out, since these bloggers are essentially just obsessive fans, giving them access to film sets and press junkets is the way to make them giddy with excitement. Thompson herself cannot be used as an example of a female counterpoint to fanboy bloggers because of her background as an educated journalist. As her blog explains, “Anne Thompson does more than just break news; she provides an insider’s clear-eyed analysis of a business that defines culture at home and abroad.” Thompson tends to cover similar stories to those published in Variety and The Hollywood Reporter, also known as the trades. She details major deals being struck among media conglomerates including financial information as well as casting and production news.
She is a far cry from being just an avid fan, and for that reason does her work the old fashioned way.

The same care and attention given to male bloggers is not taken with female audiences, who, because they are not represented in the fanboy demographic, are disregarded and simply not part of the dialogue. Granted, there are no professional fangirl sites with the same status and resources as the fanboy blogs. The site that comes closest to the approach of the professional cinéphile blogs is Fangirl Magazine, which claims to be “all geek all the time… with a woman’s touch.” Unlike the chosen fanboy blogs, this site covers movies, television, music, and fiction. The site was founded by fangirl Jessica Dwyer, who “started up Fangirl Magazine to celebrate the female fans of the world and the things that they love. It’s not just the Fanboys out there, and the gals should have a chance to be heard” (“Meet the Fangirls”). Until July 2010, Fangirl Magazine was written through the blog generator, Live Journal, which is free and available to anyone, giving it an amateur appearance. Now, however, with the arrival of a fangirl webmaster, the site has its own domain name and is making a determined effort to be as informative and timely as its fanboy counterparts. Unfortunately, the site only has two major blogging contributors, including the webmaster, resulting in inconsistent postings that could happen multiple times a day or sometimes not at all. As evident from the post topics, these bloggers are still removed from the film industry unlike fanboy bloggers who regularly attend press screenings and interview filmmakers and actors. The site also rarely receives comments and employs no outside advertising, indicating the readership may be slim. However when “fangirl” is typed into a Google search, Fangirl Magazine is the fifth item listed. This site’s current unpopularity could be due to the fact that no one
knows it exists, which would prove that no one, especially Hollywood, is searching for “fangirls” online. Perhaps a lack of Internet savvy and initial connections to the industry is enough to block even the most obsessive female fans from joining the ranks of professional fanboys. But their apparent absence from the demographic of coveted fans begs the question, has Hollywood stopped trying to represent or even satisfy women?

Figure 1. Fangirl Magazine Home Page, Monday, July 26th, 2010

Slash Film

“I started blogging about film because our love for the medium. And I became a blogger instead of a ‘journalist’ for the sole reason that I could mark out my fanboy passions, and help promote some of the projects and people that interest me. The idea was/is that there are probably others who have my same cinematic sensibilities. That said, we’ve been really lucky to interview some of the artists, actors, and directors we really admire and respect…. (Sciretta, Slash Film, “Fanboy Moments”).

Created in the summer of 2005, Slash Film has quickly become one of the must-read movie blogs on the Internet. After a slow going first year, the site shifted its focus from celebrity gossip news to “the geek/genre centric side of the movie universe….The
idea was/is [sic] that /Film [sic] would be a blog with a personal point of view on the cutting edge of breaking news” (Slash Film, “The History of Slash Film’’). In his definition, Sciretta lumps “geek” and “genre” into the same category, clearly stating his intended audience. In the “About” page of Slash Film, the section titled “Respect!” details the many areas of the industry in which Slash Film has gained credibility: “We’re on the junket list for most of the major movie studios, regularly attend advance press screenings and visit movie sets.” All of these examples illustrate how blogging changed these men from passive, though obsessive, consumers of pop film, to active participants. Aside from having the know-how to found a professional blog, Peter Sciretta has no credentials to write about or review films but his own “geek” love of cinema and for that, Hollywood embraces him. “Total Film Magazine named /Film [sic] founder/editor/writer [sic] Peter Sciretta one of Film’s Most Influential People of 2009,” a list that includes Steven Spielberg and powerhouse studio executive Harvey Weinstein (“Respect!”).

Along with such accolades, Slash Film’s endorsement has been used as a selling point in film marketing. “/Film [sic] has been quoted in the Hostel: Part II worldwide marketing campaign (including the television spots, newspaper advertisements, and even the film’s official website). We’ve also been quoted on the theatrical movie poster for Fido, television and newspaper ads for Ninja Assassin, and the official website and international DVD for Miramax’ Eagle vs. Shark. /Film’s [sic] Mel Valentin was quoted in the official trailer for Choke” (“Respect!”). When a quotation is used on a movie poster or theatrical trailer, the point is to prove the quality of the film by citing the critics. Now, by quoting bloggers, marketing teams give weight to the opinions of people who
essentially just enjoy film more than the average person. The resulting message states that fanboy approval is just as important as educated journalists.

In terms of visuals, Slash Film’s clean and simple layout focuses all the attention on the content of the blog posts. At the very top of the page is an often-changing movie advertisement. Below this are buttons for “News”, “Reviews,” “Trailers,” “Calendar,” “/Filmcast,” and “Cool Stuff.” There are banners underneath this advertisement displaying the biggest accolades Slash Film has received, including being named one of the 2009 Top 25 Best Blogs of the Year by Time Magazine. The newest blog entry, or post, is featured below these ads with earlier posts following underneath to easily scroll through. Each post includes a photo somehow relating to the content of the post. The main color palette is grey and blue with the advertisements and accompanying pictures adding color:

![Image](image-url)  
*Figure 2. Slash Film Home Page, May 9th, 2010.*
An e-mail address is available for Sciretta and the blogging staff, but only one blogger of the eight males employed in the position, replied to an e-mail I sent requesting an interview about the site. After agreeing to assist my research, I was unable to make contact with him again and received no answers to my questions, which all focused on how the site is run and how they came to blog about movies. There are no female bloggers associated with this site.

**First Showing**

“There are people who make movies and there are those who see them. First Showing is bringing these two together in a profound new approach that will change the way you experience movies. We provide the latest movie news, movie trailers, movie reviews, interviews, opinions, hype and buzz, and everything else related to the cinematic experience straight from Hollywood and beyond” (First Showing, “About Us”).

This blog was created in 2006 by “Owner/Executive Editor” Alex Billington (“About Us”). According to the site, they were the subject of an article published by NBC and ABC networks titled “Site Offers More Film News, Less Gossip” and were named Editor’s Choice for Best Entertainment Blog in 2008’s Performancing Blog Awards. Another movie news site, First Showing’s purpose as presented in their mission statement comes closest to the idea of creating a participant out of a consumer and farthest from outright promoting fanboy-specific tastes. The slogan of this blog appears to be “Connecting Hollywood with its Audience” and is explained in the “About Us” section of the site:

“First Showing is both a web-based destination providing complete media coverage of mainstream and independent movies, the latest articles on the movie going experience and the connection between Hollywood and the audience; and also a location-based organization that strives to make the experience at movie theaters much more exciting, enjoyable, and interactive than ever before. First Showing is at its heart a
creative collaboration of individuals who are above all dedicated and passionate towards movies and the incomparable theatrical experience.”

The above suggests that by constant connection between Hollywood and audience, the movie going experience can be somehow enhanced for those truly passionate about movies. No gender specificity is implied here, but the simple fact that none of the eight staff bloggers for this site are female, inherently creates an all male perspective on movies and movie going. However no real mentions of fanboys or genre focus are present.

Laid out similarly to Slash Film, the top and sides of First Showing’s Home page presents movie advertisements followed by the most recent posts underneath. Next to a button for “Home,” links include “Release Schedule,” “Theater Events,” “Trailers,” “Reviews,” “Forum,” “Movie News,” “Podcasts,” “About Us,” and “Contact.” To specialize the popular items and create easy access, the home page includes links to the “Latest Trailers,” “Latest Interviews,” and “Upcoming Releases.” In accordance with their all-inclusive mission statement, the layout of the site is neutral and straightforward, using red, black, and grey as its three main colors. Like Slash Film, every post includes a photo underneath the headline indicating the topic of the post:
First Showing includes staff profiles for each blogger that lists their e-mail address, twitter name, their 10 favorite movies, and favorite directors, actors and actresses. None of the listed favorite directors are female. I was able to make contact with founder Alex Billington about a potential interview, but after sending my questions received no word back.

Ain’t It Cool News

“These days, Hollywood calls with increasing regularity to wheedle, cajole, trade gossip, and solicit my advice on projects or notes on scripts. Screenwriters adopt me to champion their work. The power elite put me on speed-dial. And basically, everyone who ever considered me a nuisance now treats me like their new best friend. Business as usual? You bet it is. Fun? You have no idea. Can I believe any of it for a second? Of course not” (Knowles, Ain’t It Cool? Hollywood’s Redheaded Stepchild Speaks Out, 14).

The oldest of cinephile movie blogs is 14-year-old Ain’t It Cool News. Started in 1996 by self-proclaimed geek Harry Knowles, Ain’t It Cool was ahead of its time, using the Internet for communication and leisure before many knew how. Even more anomalous than the website is Knowles himself. Raised by movie enthusiast parents in Austin, Texas, Knowles grew up watching B movies, reading comic books, and doing
little else. Finding refuge in these mediums instead of sports or other physical activities, Knowles was never a fit person, but after a debilitating accident he became morbidly obese. Bedridden, Knowles found he could still communicate with others about his passion for cinema with the help of a new tool: the Internet. According to his autobiography, Knowles has seen “10,000 titles, give or take- or a movie everyday for twenty-seven years” (17). A need to share thoughts and ideas with like minded fans, Knowles started Ain’t It Cool, naming it after a line of dialogue spoken by John Travolta in the 1996 action film Broken Arrow. This is one blog that does not denounce its geek status. Since its inception in 1996, Ain’t It Cool has paved the way for all other cinephile blogs and made Knowles famous for his impossible devotion to cinema. Rebel director Quentin Tarantino, who also began his career as simply a rabid fan of cinema, explains that Knowles is a different kind of critic, for he “writes about film the way a war correspondent writes about war on the front lines. But the front lines isn’t [sic] Hollywood, nor is it academia either. The front lines are the film geeks standing in line to get into the movie” (Ain’t It Cool?, “Foreword”). Solely through his own devotion and will power, Knowles’ opinion slowly began to gain credibility in the film world despite the fact that his reviews are incredibly personal and subjective. Even with a staff of 13 writers, there is a special section of Ain’t It Cool that solely features Knowles’ reviews of recent films.

Though Knowles was considered cutting edge for adopting Internet trends early and using them to create something no one had seen before, his opinions and reviews remain elementary and rooted in his own context of film. Most of his reviews include some kind of personal anecdote about the conditions in which he saw the film in
question, as if that should have some kind of significance to the quality of the film. Some of his reviews cross the line from quirky to utterly bizarre, employing far-reaching metaphors and shock factor language so much that the term “review” no longer fits. Take his review of the newest addition to *The Twilight Saga*, *Eclipse*, for example:

“I figured I’d get this done with before starting the DVD column for the night. I just got back from seeing ECLIPSE at a local Press screening. I really do wonder what seeing these press screenings would’ve been like had they not allowed the squealing throngs of Twigirls in…The problem is, as they bubble over with nervous anticipatory giggles- it becomes incredibly hard to take the film seriously at all…and it seems that the story itself kind of gave in on it’s [sic] own yummy teenage anxiousness…

I’m sorry, the Edward, Bella, Jacob tent scene?

Ok- so how many folks here have ever been in a love triangle relationship? I’ve unfortunately been in a couple of those. They are almost without exception the most deceptive and jealous-ridden situations ever. AND [sic]- if I ever found myself in that tent in a blowing cold mountain top on what could very well have been the last night of my life? And if I were a Teenage Girl… [sic] I’d totally be all about that doggy & [sic] diamond double dickling! And there wasn’t a girl in my theater tonight that wasn’t wondering if the diamond sprinkled vampire skin would me more like the pyrex dildo or the cyberskin one? And the team Jacob girls with the German Shepard…mhhmmm, you know it. The funny thing is- Every actor in that tent is thinking that too. And I kinda think that Jacob would be into it, because he does say, “Bella you are capable of loving more than one person.” So, I’m pretty damn sure that Jacob almost wants to be the puppy on the floor nestled at the foot of the bed, just waiting to play. This film is about sex.

The father knows it is either happening or is close to happening. He’s kinda [sic] freaking out, because he doesn’t know how to act about it, because he looks at Robert Pattinson’s Edward and he can’t imagine the teenage girl in him fucking that. Her mother knows. We all fucking know they’re all about fucking each other. Edward has this Victorian hang up about no sex before marriage, it is driving Bella’s hormones into overdrive. It is the only reason this fucking triangle is going on. Bella is putting out fuck me pheromones like a bitch in heat- and Jacob’s doggy sensitive nose can not [sic] stay out of her crack. He might be “talking” about her “heartbeat stopping,” but what he really wants is that hymen. HE KNOWS IT [sic]! That’s why he’s leg humping her at every single chance. And you can’t really hate him like that other guy, because he’s a puppy. He can’t help it. Just look at those pert always hard boy nipples? They’re just so amazingly in focus. They’re just asking to be nuzzled at the very least.

That there are actual scenes of Edward driving Bella out in the middle of nowhere, just to hand off to Jacob? Several Times.

When has this actually happened?

This movie is just so “out” as to what it is, that there is absolutely no way I couldn’t fucking kinda love it. This movie is such a thigh squeezer that guys…if you’re just moderately passibly [sic] cute after 3 beers, you might want to go just to try and hook up.
This is absolutely better than WOLVERINE [sic] was…a bit gayer, but ya know…there’s some cool fucking action, way cuter girls…well, way cuter guys, too if that like makes you questionable curious or not, might be up to your on threshold for thinking about wonder what it’d be like…[sic] You know, they’re just so goddamn pretty. Your girlfriend will probably definitely be thinking about a 3 way with you and one of these guys on screen. I’m not just talking about Jacob or Edward. Your girl might have a thing for Jasper, or that Moose looking mutherfucker [sic]. There’s totally a Hyper Riverdale kinda vibe, mixed with some of the silliness of that whole NEW MUTANTS [sic] thing was. You know. Teenager superheroes? That’s this, but there’s just two types…The Furry ones or the Glam ones.

I can giggle through out [sic] this fucking thing. Because…I can go home, tell my wife I’d totally do “______” [sic] with you…and I’ll get laid tonight. Seriously, that’s the kind of fucking date you have tonight. You’ll go, you’ll check out that psychic chick, wonder about those two joints and bedding Bella tonight. And you’ll totally bring up doing one of those two…or maybe that redhead, with your girl too. And SHE WILL [sic] be into it too. Yeah, that’s right. I’m a man and I’m using this shit. BECAUSE IT WORKS [sic]! And I’m not too shy to say it. Because you know this shit works too!

The future of your dick is on the line here. GO and it will be yours. This is better than the single’s bar because there’s not 9 sticks per _____ [sic]. You could arrive at a bar with this. And teenagers, you go with your girl…this might be a good night for you too. You know, you don’t have to tell your guy friends you saw it. I’m doing that for ya. So that next time hanging out, that…“Yeah, I’ve had sex” gleam will be showing.

For a guy—that’s what this movie can be. For a girl, this film is deeply meaningful in a once in a lifetime kind of way. Use that. Seriously.”

This offensive and poorly written review is by a man who supposedly has screenwriters and directors clamoring for his advice on their films. Not even typical elements of film reviews, like crediting the writer, director, and actors by name, or details of the plot synopsis are evident. Instead, Knowles speaks of brief scenes that, unless one has seen the film, cannot be placed in context by the reader and therefore make no sense. Calling the film a metaphor for sex gives him free reign to use as many explicit words as he can, surprisingly without the bolstering of in-depth story analysis. By the end, in an act of daring machismo, Knowles nobly dishes sexual advice to his readers as if he is a regular Casanova just doing his part for mankind. His insistence that taking a date to see this film will result in so much sexual satisfaction that one’s friends can even tell, reeks of a sophomoric need to show off in the locker room. However, he fails to see how his
encouragement of duping women into having sex after this film is both lecherous and dangerous. So much for responsible journalism, as Anne Thompson may complain.

In comparison, Knowles reviews comic book film *Iron Man 2* with more coherence and obvious interest in the project. His treatment of male versus female characters demonstrates what is becoming the Hollywood standard of women to be seen and not heard, especially in comic book films:

“...For the first time, we really get a glimpse at the self-destructive Tony Stark-not the Demon in the Bottle storyline we all cherish, but something equally strong. Tony is addicted to being IRON MAN- the rush and the thrill of being in that armor and knowing there’s nothing on the planet that can even come close. He’s cocky, but he has a secret that is killing him, literally. The palladium he uses to help power that awesome bit of tech in his chest is slowly, but surely poisoning his system and will result in his death. In addition- the various mods [sic] he’s done to the IRON MAN armor is eating through the palladium batteries in an increasingly quickening pace.

He’s been working on trying to come up with another power source, but he’s continually thwarted.

Meanwhile- all at the same time we’re introduced to Mickey Rourke’s Ivan Vanko aka Whiplash. He’s the son of a brilliant physicist that worked with Tony’s father in designing the large version of what’s in Tony’s chest. Ivan’s father has raised Mickey with a hatred for the Stark family, which he blames for the ruin of his life- he’s become a ruined drunken shell of the man he should have been. The genius that worked in the shadow of the figurehead- at least, that’s how Ivan sees it.

Once he sees Iron Man in action- he begins to work on his own miniaturization and being brilliant- he gets it up and running and creates the Whiplash outfit to take out Tony.

All at the same time- we’re also introduced to Sam Rockwell’s Justin Hammer- who is kinda like a Michael Dell to Tony Stark’s Steve Jobs. He struggles to project an image that is to Tony, second nature. Justin rather desperately wants to be Tony Stark- he wants Tony’s genius, his women, his fame and adulation. But he’s just not quite that good. He can’t quite crack the magic 8% of Tony’s brain that gives him a decade’s edge on everyone else.

The scenes with Tony and Justin are classic. The dialogue is so sharp, so incredibly well delivered between Rockwell and Downey- that I really do think that it can’t get better. And yet it does. Garry Shandling’s Senator Stern is just an incredible ass. And he plays is effortlessly. His last scene of the film is particularly awesome. He’s somebody that looks at the IRON MAN tech and gets wet just thinking about an army of IRON MEN serving the interests of the United States. Frankly, the thought kinda scares the shit out of me...while also thinking that’d be cool...

That’s where Don Cheadle’s Lt. Col. James ‘Rhodey’ Rhodes comes in. He’s Tony’s best friend, but even he realizes that this is too much power for good, to be
squandered upon someone that just isn’t a responsible adult, much less the sort of Hero that he has been trained to be. I love that.

Then there’s Scarlett Johansson’s Natalie Rushman/Natasha Romanoff/Black Widow—She comes into this as a preternaturally fucking goddess that steps in to fill Pepper Potts [sic] shoes as Tony’s assistant— as Pepper get appointed to fill Tony’s position as head of STARK INTERNATIONAL...

So much of IRON MAN 2 is just effortlessly better than what came before, but the stuff that I loved at a level I wasn’t really prepared to - was the scenes focusing on Tony Stark’s father, Howard Stark played perfectly by MAD MEN’s John Slattery. These scenes are not flashbacks, but 16 mm footage of his Father- that he turns to as he’s trying to solve the terminal problem facing him. I absolutely feel that these glimpses at Tony’s father show us the beginning of the demon in the bottle that might come up later with Tony. Slattery’s role is tiny, but he puts so much honest soul into the character that it informs and textures everything.

You can see the asshole in Howard Stark that created the monster that created Mickey’s Ivan Vanko. You can also see how Tony didn’t have a strong male role model [sic], due to his Dad being obsessed with work that led to him being the superpowered [sic] BOY that Tony is.

I love that Gwyneth Paltrow’s Pepper Potts is overwhelmed by everything that Tony’s putting on her plate. I love how Sam Jackson’s Nick Fury grows colder on Tony-to drive Tony to do what Tony needs to do. I continue to love Paul Bettany’s voice as Jarvis. Clark Gregg becomes even more fascinating as Agent Coulson.

AND MOST OF ALL…I FUCKING LOVE THE ACTION of the film. I love that this is full on Marvel Science Fiction. The entire last act just fucking rocks balls! I was concerned as I watched the Monaco sequence, that this would not be topped for the rest of the film. It is awesome. If you’ve been watching the TV spots- you see a bit of the actual Whiplash vs. IRON MAN in Monaco sequence – but frankly, once IRON MAN shows up…your ass was already blown away by Happy Hogan versus Whiplash. No Shit! I’m telling you- AWESOMERY! [sic] Sure- there’s a bit of Lucille Ball to Paltrow’s Pepper Potts in the car- but I love that. She’s freaking out. Fuck, given what’s going on, I bet most of us would be freaking the fuck out. There’s a crazy ass bastard with lightning whips just cutting through steel and concrete and it is scary and visceral as all hell.

And…it isn’t the best sequence of the film…The only problem with IRON MAN 2 is this. It really does throw a challenge to Kenneth Branagh on THOR, to Joe Johnston on CAPTAIN AMERICA and Joss Whedon on THE AVENGERS. IRON MAN 2 is in the tradition of the great 2nd films in the series we love the second films from. You know the titles. This will be like those experiences…where you were scared that it was going to be watered down, you were worried that there was going to be too much to juggle, when you were terrified it was just going to pander to kids. No. IRON MAN 2 is made for us—all of us.

Now- I have a challenge for all of you. There’s a moment in this film- that is a shot from behind of Gwyneth and Scarlett walking up some stairs. Scarlett is in a black dress. Try to see if you can even see Gwyneth in the shot. I know she was there- but all I could stare at was Scarlett’s pendulum swinging back and forth up those stairs- and I was
done hypnotized. I bet you will too. And btw… [sic] When she goes full Black Widow…you’ll geek out pretty hard. I promise. She’s perfect.”

The length of Knowles’ Iron Man 2 review more than doubles that of his The Twilight Saga: Eclipse review and no doubt takes the former more seriously despite its status as a summer blockbuster comic book movie. Both films are based on another property, employ bankable actors, and cater to a specific audience. Yet Knowles fails to see that the only thing that could make one better than the other is a matter of personal preference, not necessarily quality. His predilection is clear, for by the time he writes, “this film is made for us - all of us,” one might believe he is reviewing the most critically acclaimed film of the decade instead of a comic book sequel. What truly sets Knowles and other fanboy reviewers apart from film journalists and critics is their ability to say that they “fucking love” something and not elaborate, as if that is all the convincing one might need. If these new tastemakers can be so easily pleased with action strung together by weak story points, it is no wonder recent Hollywood films lack originality. As far as females are concerned in this genre, it never seems to matter what comes out of their mouths, but only the way they look. Despite her lauded intelligence, Pepper Potts is unable to handle the stress of being the head of a major company and continues to be a sidelined romantic interest. Any redeeming qualities of Scarlett Johansson’s Natalie are erased by intentionally attention-grabbing costume choices so as to remind audience members that she exists for their pleasure and the pleasure of male characters. Knowles’ “challenge,” which would have no place in a professional film review, only furthers Johansson’s objectification on screen.

Recalling Knowles’ debilitating obesity, his decision to turn his reviews into a sexual metaphor and continually sexualize actresses, becomes of greater interest. Married
since 2007, Knowles’ size no doubt played a role in his rise to fame. His image is wholly
unforgettable as he usually sports long red hair accompanied by a long red beard and
until a major surgery in 2008, used an electric wheelchair as a means of mobility. A
figure that cannot be missed, Knowles won his way into the hearts of movie buffs
everywhere.

Figure 4. Harry Knowles, Ain’t It Cool News, May 19, 2008

It is of some curiosity how Hollywood and the rest of the world would have embraced a
similarly built female film junkie. As evidence of the Hollywood double standard, the
most famous female “geek” is Attack of the Show co-host Olivia Munn:
Figure 5. Olivia Munn, Co-Host of Attack of the Show!

Attack of the Show, on the G4 network, reviews new technology, including videogames and film, while commenting on popular culture with skits and spoofs. In the tradition of male targeted programs like The Man Show, Attack of the Show is shameless in its sexualizing of Munn, the token ‘hot geek,’ who eagerly plays into her role. Had Munn not been so pleasing to look at, it is highly probable that she would be nowhere near as coveted as she is. Because of Munn’s unquestionable attractiveness, she cannot be seen as just a fellow fan, an equal in knowledge and passion. Instead, she represents the untouchable for fanboys: a beautiful woman whose obsessions accurately reflect their own. Similarly, by indulging fanboy fantasies by dressing up in the pictured Princess Leia bondage outfit, or jumping into a giant pie dressed in a sexy French maid costume,
Munn detracts from her own wit, intelligence, and true fangirl credibility. It is important to note that while Knowles created his fame online, where his words attracted attention, Munn’s fame depends on her being seen. In defense of Munn and her willingness to openly share her sexuality, she is doing so in a society that values looks over intelligence, especially in women. So while she should be able to portray herself as a sexual being without having to compromise her image as smart and witty, our perceptions, born out of Hollywood standards, will not allow her that. Although, suggestively eating a hot dog dangling from the ceiling as a television stunt does not help:

*Figure 6. Olivia Munn, Screen Capture from *Attack of the Show!*"
While it is the oldest of the three cinephile blogs up for discussion, *Ain’t It Cool* looks the most archaic in terms of layout and style. The home page is an amalgamation of headlines that a reader must click on before being relocated to the content. The headlines often employ an overuse of capital letters and exclamation points as if to illustrate how cool the news really is. Each staff blogger writes under a pseudonym accompanied by a cartoon icon of their alter ego, much like that of a superhero:

*Figure 7. Ain’t It Cool News Home Page, Friday, June 25, 2010*

The site lists e-mail contacts for the 13 members of the international blogging staff, though I only chose to e-mail Knowles for an interview. After multiple inquiries, I received no word back.
CHAPTER 3: THE HOLLYWOOD WORKING CLIMATE FOR WOMEN

Kathryn Bigelow’s Oscar win earlier this year may lead many to believe that the working climate for women in Hollywood is improving. It seems simple enough to assume, like Peter Sciretta, that a high profile female director like Bigelow could inspire a new fleet of female filmmakers. However, no evidence suggests that this fleet does not already exist and has just not been given the chance by Hollywood yet. The unfortunate reality of the current gender dynamic in behind the scenes employment is that women are a minority. According to “The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top 250 Films of 2009,” a study by Dr. Martha Lauzen Ph.D., “in 2009, women comprised 16% of all directors, executive producers, producers, writers, cinematographers, and editors working on the top 250 domestic grossing films. This represents a decline of 3 percentage points from 2001 and is even with 2008 figures.” Even more staggering is that “women accounted for 7% of directors in 2009, a decrease of 2 percentage points from 2008.” Before the 2010 Academy Awards ceremony, the average moviegoer may have had a hard time calling to mind the name of a single female film director, and some of them may still struggle. But history was made at the 82nd annual awards ceremony when 58-year-old Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to take home the statue for Best Director, winning for her explosive war drama, The Hurt Locker, which also took home the award for Best Picture. Most recognized for action films of the 1990’s, Bigelow sank into obscurity, directing only an episode of television and a short film following the box office let down, K-19: The Widowmaker in 2002, not making another feature film until The Hurt Locker, which was independently financed. While the Academy Awards are often dismissed as a high profile popularity contest, the
attention brought to Bigelow’s Oscar had the power to remind America’s audiences that women direct films too, and adeptly at that. Unfortunately, her win prompted a multitude of backlash as well, disregarding her triumph as merely a politically correct novelty.

Unlike previous wins by male directors, the reasons for Bigelow’s victory were put under the microscope of bloggers and journalists everywhere, producing multiple popular theories as to why at this point in history, a woman was in the position to receive Hollywood’s highest honor. Because she is a woman, the motivations for awarding her achievement are questioned. Christopher Roy Correa, a blogger at True/Slant, “an original content news network,” pointed out that “by the night of the Academy Awards, The Hurt Locker had grossed less than $13 million domestically, the lowest ever for a best picture Oscar winner,” implying that Bigelow and her film were held to lower standards than all previous nominees, due to the distinguishing factor of her gender, which most likely garnered her the win. And on the fanboy front, Peter Sciretta, while live-blogging the awards ceremony, had this to say about Bigelow’s achievement: “As expected, Bigelow won…but did she deserve it or did the Academy want to make history with the first woman as Best Director? And for the record, I think Bigelow deserved the nomination, but Cameron’s direction on Avatar was far more involved, far superior” (“2010 Academy Awards Winners”). Sciretta of course refers to James Cameron, whose 3D epic Avatar became the highest grossing film of all time in January of 2010, and who happens to be Bigelow’s ex-husband. On The Hurt Locker concurrently winning Best Picture, Sciretta muses that “in 20 years we’ll look back and wonder how Avatar didn’t win either Best Picture or Best Director….I’m not saying Avatar is an incredible film and no…I’m not comparing Avatar to Citizen Kane, I’m only saying that Avatar will have
much greater significance in years to come over Hurt Locker.” *Avatar*, a derivative story of futuristic colonization, though dazzling in its 3D technology, was continuously called out by critics for its poorly written script and thin storyline, both products of Cameron’s pen.

So much publicity surrounds Bigelow’s Oscar win that even females have to question the nature of *The Hurt Locker* compared to the three films directed by previous female Best Director nominees: Lina Wertmuller, Jane Campion, and Sofia Coppola for 1975’s *Seven Beauties*, 1993’s *The Piano*, and 2003’s *Lost in Translation* respectively. Upon examination of these three films, it becomes obvious that they all have certain qualities in common that Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker* simply does not. Campion and Coppola’s nominated films both center on a female protagonist and explore issues of sexuality, loneliness, and traditional gender roles. Though *Seven Beauties* features a male protagonist, the film does not lack female perspective. In stark contrast to her predecessors, Bigelow’s *The Hurt Locker* is an action-based war drama that boasts a completely male cast, save a little seen, one-dimensional army wife. The film delves into the relationships of men in wartime and the disconnect that exists between their lives at war and at home. *The Hurt Locker* is not an undeserving film by any means, but its hyper masculine content and action set pieces suggest that women will start being rewarded for their filmmaking efforts as long as they do not make films for or about women. In her article “Kathryn Bigelow: Feminist Pioneer or tough guy in drag?” for the online arts and culture magazine *Salon*, Martha P. Nochimson goes as far as to call Bigelow “The Transvestite of Directors.” In Nochimson’s opinion, Bigelow is simply “masquerading as the baddest boy on the block to win the respect of an industry still so hobbled by gender-
specific tunnel vision that it has trouble admiring anything but filmmaking soaked in a reduced notion of masculinity.” Blaming Bigelow for playing along with Hollywood’s masculine myopia does not concede the fact that while many female directors are pigeonholed into the fluff arena of romantic comedy, Bigelow successfully branched out into the realm of action and drama, proving that these genres cannot be relegated to a strictly male world.

Her success cannot be attributed to strong studio support. Bigelow and her producers raised money for the film’s meager budget independent from any studios. Where Hollywood fully trusts male directors with female centric material, it seems they do not put the same faith in female directors working in traditionally masculine genres such as horror, action, and comic book adaptations, as Bigelow is the first female to be highly recognized for such. Ultimately, it is the hope of all female directors, including Bigelow, to eventually not have to identify as a female a director, but simply a director: “I’d love to just think of myself as a filmmaker, and I wait for the day when the modifier can be a moot point.” (Johanson, “The Week in Women, March 12 2010”). Based on the amount of backlash she received for winning Best Director, it is clear that day has yet to come.

Another illusion exists that a large number of women hold power in other roles, especially as executive producers, producers, or heads of major studios and production companies. New York Times writer Nancy Hass lauded the industry for its progressive employment of women in high power jobs in her 2005 article “Hollywood’s New Old Girls’ Network.” Hass cited the four major film studios that employed women as either President or Chairman as proof that women are really running the show:
“Though men still figure most prominently in the corporate echelons of the media companies that own the studios, and talent agencies like William Morris and Creative Artists Agency are still male dominated, these women, who over the years have fought and fostered one another as part of a loose sisterhood, have finally buried the notion that Hollywood is a man’s world.”

Now five years later, only one of those women remains in the position she held in 2005: Amy Pascal, Chairman of Sony. Not only did the female studio empire not last, but also placing women at the top of a male dominated company does not necessarily make Hollywood projects more female friendly. New York Times film critic Manohla Dargis points out that, “in the 1990s Ms. Pascal made movies like ‘Little Women’ and ‘A League of Their Own.’ In recent years, however, Sony has become a boy’s club for superheroes like Spider-Man and funnymen like Adam Sandler and Judd Apatow” (Women in the Seats but Not Behind the Camera). However, Pascal runs a capital-intensive business, and producing movies that will make money remains the goal. Dargis thoughtfully adds, “the vogue for comics and superheroes has generally forced women to sigh and squeal on the sidelines [in films].”

In order to test for a lack of female presence behind the scenes as reflected on the chosen cinephile blogs, I inspected every post published on Slash Film and First Showing between Tuesday, May 4th, 2010 and Monday, May 10th, 2010 for the mention by name of a woman in the role of writer, director, or producer. Cinematographers, editors, and executive producers are not typically the subjects of blog posts on these sites and therefore they were not a part of the test. Of the 98 posts published on Slash Film during this period of time, only six mention a female in the role of writer, director, or producer on a project being discussed, coming to about 6.1% of posts. Of the 66 posts on First Showing during this time, 11 posts mentioned a woman in the role of writer, director, or
producer in the featured project, or about 17% of posts. In an effort to vary the content of the sample of posts, I evaluated published stories on Ain’t It Cool between Saturday, May 29th, 2010 and Friday, June 4th, 2010. Of the total 41 posts, three, or about 7% mentioned a woman in the role of writer, director, or producer.

Table 1. Weekly Sample of Posts Mentioning Female as Writer, Director, or Producer
Keeping in mind that these posts were published in the time span of a week, this means that some days do not even include a post with a woman in one of these positions. Average numbers of posts a day fall between 6 and 14. On Slash Film, three of the seven days were void of female representation in key behind the scenes positions, as was one of the seven days on First Showing, and five of the seven on Ain’t It Cool. The low percentages of posts that mention a female as writer, director, or producer is accurate with current numbers, but creates the idea that filmmaking is a strictly male field, which can be ingrained in the minds of the average reader causing decreased sensitivity to female voices and stories. If a reader is used to approaching filmmaking from a male perspective and a female filmmaker receives attention on the blog, it is easy enough for him to decide he simply cannot relate and skip the post, or add a derisive comment, his identity protected. Readers even claim aversions to critically acclaimed films with female protagonists or female writers and directors, claiming they just cannot relate. If women had more of a presence in Hollywood and subsequently on these blogs, perhaps more men would be open to giving female centric films a watch, but because they are so few, they are easily disregarded by male readers of these blogs. However, since the beginning of cinema, the prominent male presence in front of and behind the camera has ensured that female audiences are unable to escape the male perspective. Female directors’ status as minorities on these blogs raises doubts about their ability as filmmakers: if they are talented, why aren’t more of them making films? But as demonstrated in the Slash Film thread with “AngryBroomstick,” the answer cannot possibly be sexism in the industry.
CHAPTER 4: THE HOLLYWOOD CLIMATE FOR FEMALE AUDIENCES

On the other side of the screen, female audiences are not faring any better. In 2007, reports that Warner Brothers “studio’s president of productions, Jeff Robinov, had vowed [the studio] would no longer make movies with female leads” followed box office failures The Invasion, starring Nicole Kidman, and The Brave One, starring Jodie Foster (Dargis, “Is There a Real Woman in This Multiplex?”). Certain that female protagonists are not the problem, Manohla Dargis laments that “it is hard to believe that anyone in a position of Hollywood power would be so stupid as to actually say what many in that town think: Women can’t direct. Women can’t open movies. Women are a niche” (“Is There a Real Woman in This Multiplex?”). But when so little movies employ strong female presence behind and in front of the camera, Hollywood forces women into their role as a niche audience. Instead of acknowledging the conditions under which female audiences do flock to the theater and catering to them, Hollywood would rather blame poor box office performance on the gender of the protagonist than promote higher quality films by and about women. In order to better understand the misguided projections of women at the movies, Dr. Martha Lauzen, Ph. D, conducted “Women @ the Box Office: A Study of the Top 100 Worldwide Grossing Films.” Here, she asks two questions: “How do films with at least one woman working in a key behind-the-scenes role fare at the box office when compared to those employing only men in the same roles, and how do films featuring female protagonists fare at the box office when compared to those featuring males.” In response to the question of female filmmakers, Lauzen found that “overall, when women and men filmmakers have similar budgets for their films, the resulting box
office grosses are also similar.” The key word here is “when,” implying an already existing imbalance in budget size between male and female directors.

In the case of female vs. male protagonists, “when the size of the budget is held constant, films with female protagonists or prominent females in an ensemble cast earn similar box office grosses (domestic, international, opening weekend) and DVD sales as films with male protagonists. Because films featuring male protagonists have larger budgets, they earn larger box office grosses.” However, “as the number of films featuring female protagonists only was too low to permit statistical comparisons with films featuring male protagonists, the study combined films featuring female protagonists and at least one major female character as part of an ensemble cast.” Lauzen’s study reveals that in the event that women are featured at the center of a film, they receive significantly lower budgets and open on slightly fewer screens than films with a male protagonist, putting them at a disadvantage at the box office. This creates the illusion that because films with women involved on and off screen don’t perform as well as those with men when the budgets are not held constant, that the obvious audience, women, are not as avid moviegoers as men. However if given equal budgets to bolster areas like marketing, these female centric films would have a better chance of having box office success. Not only are there an incredibly low number of women working in key behind the scenes roles, but also as Lauzen’s study shows, women are severely underrepresented as clearly identifiable protagonists of popular films.

As a means of testing female presence in movies, cartoonist Alison Bechdel featured the “Mo Movie Measure,” a litmus test developed by friend Liz Wallace, in her 1985 comic, Dykes to Watch Out For. In order for a movie to pass the test, it must fulfill
three criteria: “(1) it has to have at least two women in it, who (2) talk to each other, about (3) something besides a man.” Another stipulation that goes hand in hand with the first criteria is that these female characters must have names. The test does not determine whether a film has feminist viewpoints, or the quality of a film, but solely seeks to comment on the level of female presence. The online Bechdel Movie List shows to what extent a given movie passes the test. Of the 95 films of 2009 reviewed for the three criteria, 57, or 60% failed to fulfill all three criteria, a list which includes James Cameron’s *Avatar*, Judd Apatow’s *Funny People*, Pixar’s *Up*, and Kathryn Bigelow’s Oscar winner, *The Hurt Locker*. All four of these films fail the test because either, they only have one named female character, or two named females only talk to each other about a man. The singular main female character in each of these films serves as a romantic counterpart to the film’s male protagonist. A major lack of multiple female characters whose lives do not revolve around the male characters places women in the domain of romantic characters and genres. Because they are represented in that fashion, it is assumed that female audiences are only interested in seeing female characters as the romantic, though they are rarely given any other option. An umbrella term has been coined to describe any film that caters to this notion, furthering the stereotype of female moviegoers.

The ‘chick flick’ or romantic comedy is most recognizable as anything marketed to female audiences. Out of the top 43 grossing films of 2009, only ten boasted a female protagonist and of these ten films, seven of them fall into the category of romantic comedy or drama (Box Office Mojo, 2009 Domestic Gross). Considering the ratio of films featuring a female protagonist to those with a male protagonist, it is easy to see how
films for women can be so callously categorized while there is no simplified genre connected to male audiences. Furthermore, ‘chick flicks’ of today are increasingly formulaic, diminishing the quality of films geared toward women. Manhola Dargis says that “the success of Baby Mama indicates- just as the summer hit The Devil Wears Prada suggested two years ago- that if given something decent that speaks to their lives and lets them leave the theater without feeling slimed, women will turn out” (“Is There a Real Women in This Multiplex?”). The Devil Wears Prada is a prime example of what a chick flick that does not undermine women feels like. With a strong cast of females including Meryl Streep, Anne Hathaway, and Emily Blunt, this film about a wide-eyed journalist who falls into the world of fashion as an underling assistant, remained at the box office for 24 weeks straight. A veritable surprise hit, the film grossed over $300 million worldwide on a meager $35 million production budget and earned Streep an Oscar nomination (Box Office Mojo, “The Devil Wears Prada”). Though there is a romantic storyline, the prominent focus of the film is Andie’s struggle to not compromise herself for her job, until she does and ultimately learns her lesson. Marriage is not the conclusion Andie comes to, but a more modest, dignified place of work where she can do what she set out to do: write. Unfortunately, smart, redeeming chick flicks like this are rare. Many of the recent Hollywood releases aimed at women strive to please the lowest common denominator and often succeed, likely due to the shortage of films in general that give women optimal screen time. The top ten grossing romantic comedies of 2009 include The Ugly Truth and He’s Just Not That Into You, both of which demonstrate severely shallow and unflattering depictions of females in romantic relationships.
What once may have been a genre with heart has become a breeding ground for unrealistic stock female and male characters. Take for example the films of actress Katherine Heigl: Knocked Up, 27 Dresses, and The Ugly Truth, respectively. Heigl plays an uptight, neurotic workaholic in all three of these films, only to find that a man, as rude or immature as he may be, is the answer to all of her problems. Aside from a different hairstyle, her three one-note characters can be easily interchanged between each film. Even Heigl herself is aware of the negative portrayals of women that these films present.

In a 2008 interview with Vanity Fair, Heigl revealed that Knocked Up, in her opinion “is a little sexist. It paints the women as shrews, as humorless and uptight, and it paints the men as lovable, goofy, fun-loving guys. It exaggerated the characters and I had a hard time with it, on some days. I’m playing such a bitch; why is she being such a killjoy? Why is this how you’re portraying women? Ninety-eight percent of the time it was an amazing experience, but it was hard for me to love the movie” (Bennetts, “Heigl’s Anatomy”). If Heigl is aware of this discrepancy between male and female characters, others must be as well, however these character types remain the norm in mainstream romantic comedy. The increase in women choosing careers over family, the fruit of struggle by the Women’s Liberation movement, has unfortunately bore a new character stereotype: female as uptight workaholic who at the end of the day realizes she craves domesticity with a man. Out of this has come the new comedy duo of neurotic workaholic female, and goofy, carefree slacker male, which allows him all the fun while she frets about letting go. Feminist writers have certainly noticed the similarities in all the characters Heigl has portrayed on the big screen. Kelsey Wallace at Bitch Magazine notes that Heigl’s follow up to Knocked Up, 27 Dresses, “reinforced every stereotype in the
straight-cis-rom-com [sic] book: women are obsessed with marriage, women who focus on their careers can never be happy, younger sisters and best friends always have hinges on their heels, men who are rude usually turn out to be soulmate [sic] material, a perfect wedding equals a perfect marriage…” (“Katherine Heigl’s Film Career”). Heigl can only be held partially to blame for perpetuating these stereotypes on screen, for these trends are running rampant in Hollywood romantic comedies that do not include her.

2009 saw Oscar nominated actresses Anne Hathaway and Kate Hudson as best friends turned enemies when their weddings interfere with each other in Bride Wars. The message sent by that film states that no matter how smart and successful a woman is, she will still fall apart if the details of her wedding are not perfect. The best selling book of romance advice for women, He’s Just Not That Into You, was adapted for the big screen in 2008 and starred Oscar winning actress Jennifer Connelly, Golden Globe winning Scarlett Johansson, and American sweethearts Jennifer Aniston and Drew Barrymore. The film, a veritable disaster of an ensemble story, follows suit with the notion that women are either marriage obsessed robots, home-wrecking femme fatales, or bumbling fools with low self esteem despite any personal or career success. The film’s protagonist, Gigi, played by the talented Ginnifer Goodwin, spends the entire two hours and twelve minutes wondering what she is doing wrong until a selfish, womanizing bartender, played by Justin Long, kindly informs her that, as the film’s preview trailer states, “If he’s not calling you…If he’s not marrying you…If he’s not sleeping with you…He may just not be into you.” Instead of Gigi coming to terms with herself rather than adapting to another person for acceptance, she realizes that Long’s character, despite his lechery, is the one to make her whole. In her review of the film for The New York Times, Manohla Dargis
laments, “It’s a grotesque representation of female desire, one that the appealing Ms. Goodwin can’t save from caricature. It says something about the romantic comedies coming out of Hollywood that the character Ms. Goodwin plays on the HBO series ‘Big Love,’ the youngest wife in a polygamous Mormon marriage, is treated with far more dignity than Gigi” (“Young Women Forever Stuck at Square One in the Dating Game”). Certainly romantic comedy is not the only genre of film that women are able to enjoy, but it is the only identifiable genre shamelessly promoted to women and usually guarantees a majority of female characters. Drawn by the hope of seeing a film they can relate to, women turn out to these movies, consequently reinforcing Hollywood’s notion that flat stereotypes are what women like to see. Perhaps some women do. But for those who leave the theater “feeling slimed,” demanding that Hollywood raise the bar is just a start.

To the fanboy community, chick flicks do not even merit discussion, except when that discussion includes ridicule. The cinephile blogs, with the exception of First Showing, outwardly promote fanboy takes on genre films. First Showing claims no fanboy allegiance but subtly illustrates one anyway with an all male staff. However, the more versatility in projects they cover, the more traffic they receive. But the result of giving any chick flick attention on a fanboy site is smug opposition from the bloggers and blind hatred aimed at women in general from the readers. Take for example the Spring 2010 release of Sex and the City 2. Based on the HBO series of the same name, the first Sex and the City movie was a box office success, ensuring the production of a sequel. The series focuses on four successful middle-aged women in New York City, all with their own views on life, love, and relationships. Not exactly the fodder that would have fanboys clamoring to see it opening night, yet all three sites published reviews of the
film. In his review, Ain’t It Cool’s Massawyrm, or C. Robert Cargill, opens by saying “if there is anything that can be said about SEX AND THE CITY 2, it is that it is not nearly as unspeakably awful as the first one…this version of SATC didn’t make me crave so badly to put a bullet through the back of my own skull just to make it all stop” (“Massawyrm says SEX AND THE CITY 2 might be why the terrorists hate us”). From this, one can gather that before even seeing the film, Massawyrm decided he was not going to like it, granting the film no chance at redemption. And yet, not wanting to miss out on the popularity that is Sex and the City, he spends the rest of the review trashing the film while simultaneously pretending to be objective. In his defense, Sex and the City started out as a clever, original television series that wrapped female audiences up in four exciting lives in the big city, all the while dissecting issues of love, life, and empowerment. But by the show’s sixth and final season and the first big screen adaptation, the characters had become caricatures in a materialistic world of excess. But the series has staying power and its fans remain loyal to the characters they bonded with over break-ups and career obstacles. However when Massawyrm dared to review such an obviously female movie, readers were incensed. “Rubiks Doob” asks, “Massawyrm- are you a homo or a girl? Then WTF [sic] are you doing writing this review. This is not a movie for you. And your droneing on about how you ‘don’t get it’ just makes you sound like a complete dumbass. Do you expect say a Playmate to give a great in-depth review of the changes to the Star Wars special edition trilogy? Then why waste your time reviewing something you have no idea what you’re talking about???”

According to “Rubiks Doob,” a Star Wars fan discussing Sex and the City is the equivalent to a Playboy Playmate discussing Star Wars. Because apparently the fan base for Sex and the City is made up of nothing but Playboy Playmates who are unable to be a fan of anything else. And because no straight man would ever see a movie about four
middle-aged women, Massawyrm is either a homosexual or a female, both of which carry a negative connotation. Many of the over 200 comments in the ensuing thread reflect this machismo, homophobic attitude, inciting them to not only attack the film, but attack each other as though proving their manliness over one another. Going even further than “Rubiks Doob,” “Lone Fox” sees enjoying the series as an offense punishable by death:

“Bleecchhhhhhhhh. Dying of AIDS would be a fitting, yet far too lenient end for all involved with either making or watching this. Gives me the same gag reflex felt every time I saw a woman on the tube reading Bridget Jones. Woo, I just experienced unparalleled woman hatred. Must avoid Twilight…”

With this logic, any woman who freely enjoys a novel or movie with female characters deserves to die a long and painful death. “Lone Fox” does not bother to offer any argument against the film or book, but simply condemns those who exercise their right to leisure even if they subtly express it by simply reading in public. Whether claiming the Aids bit as a joke or not, the statement is full of hate and superiority. Other readers like “alienindisguise” rationalize that because the film is aimed toward women, then all women are fans, and consequently act like the characters they love to watch:

“Old skanky whores. These types of movies represent everything I hate about women. Their shallowness, their stupidity and their constant whoring. What a pathetic species to be enthralled by name brand shoes and purses. Most american [sic] women are morons so this piece of shit should be right up their alley. I could never pay to watch wax faced, talentless [sic] bitches do anything.”

Instead of justifiably complaining about the materialistic excess the film promotes in a level headed manner, “alienindisguise” decides to make hateful sweeping generalizations about the entirety of womankind. To say that 51% of the population are “morons” with tendencies toward “shallowness…stupidity…and constant whoring” is not only ignorant,
but reeks of bitterness and rejection. Unfortunately this is not the only blatantly woman-hating comment on the thread. The majority of posts attack either Massawyrm, other readers, women in general, or the actresses involved. The Internet has become so unguarded that alarmingly violent and hate filled words find refuge in these public domains and are seen as inconsequential to real personal attitudes. However these comments come from the minds of thousands of readers and therefore are very real indeed. Despite the aversion to a *Sex and the City* review showing up on their site, the fanboy readers did not hesitate to comment over and over on the thread, making the post invariably popular, and indicating to the bloggers they should keep discussing such projects because of the immense rage and rebuttal they inspire in their readers. For professional blogs, there is no such thing as too much feedback.

Examples of other movies that provoke a large number of reader comments are superhero comic book movies like *Iron Man* and *The Dark Knight*. Both were wildly successful at the box office when they premiered in May and July of 2008, respectively. Taking the top two grossing slots of 2008, these are films that are set in a world that allows for fantasy, feature popular, recognizable male superheroes, damsel in distress female characters, and action set pieces that will only be topped by their imminent sequels. But another notable box office franchise in the same year has the strict distinction of being a fantasy aimed at women: *The Twilight Saga*, based on the best-selling young adult novel series by Stephenie Meyer. The series consists of four installments: *Twilight*, *New Moon*, *Eclipse*, and *Breaking Dawn*. A tale of vampires and werewolves, the series is told from the point of view of pensive teenager Bella Swann. New to her high school in Forks, Washington, Bella cultivates a mysterious connection to
a beautiful vampire named Edward. When Edward is forced to leave Bella for her own protection, warm-hearted werewolf Jacob steps in to fill his shoes, creating a high stakes love triangle.

As of 2010, movie adaptations of the first three novels in the series have been released, creating a Beatlemania-type effect on female fans of all ages. In the space of a year, the franchise went from being the number seven top grossing film of the year to the number four with its New Moon follow-up. The fan base of both the films and the books is undeniable and has made stars out of the leading actors, Kristen Stewart, Robert Pattinson, and Taylor Lautner. Simply based on the intended demographic of the material, the cinephile blogs claim to have no interest in the franchise, yet continue to cover updates and review the films. Instead of approaching The Twilight Saga as they would with any other fantasy adaptation, the blogs only seem to write about the franchise so that they may point out everything wrong with it, giving readers the chance to as well. The bloggers make no attempt to mask their indifference to the content and disdain for the rabid fans of the series and by continually tearing it down, they succeed in proving that anything female is inherently inferior.

In a way that reveals the bloggers as nothing but glorified super-fans, they complain and condemn Twilight and its fans instead of simply ignoring the films altogether. On July 10, 2009, Peter Sciretta tries to grumble without grumbling in his post, “Will Twilight Ruin This Year’s Comic-Con?” Comic-Con is the single most attended comic book convention held in San Diego, California every summer since 1970. Originally intended for comic book fans, the convention, especially in the more recent viral years of media, has become known for its panels featuring television shows and film
franchises with large fan followings. It receives media coverage from bloggers on all three sites and has become the premiere event to showcase new footage of a highly anticipated project. In this post, Sciretta explains his position on *The Twilight Saga*:

“I’m not a *Twilight* hater. We wrote about the first film a few times, and received a ton of extra traffic as a result. But I learned quickly that it just wasn’t my cup of tea. Not only that, but it isn’t something most /Film readers are interested in. That’s why we generally don’t cover the *Twilight* films (aside from some trailers or page 2 items). Unlike others, I don’t feel threatened by the books, films, or insane fandom. Why should I? Twighlighters can do their own thing, and it really doesn’t affect me at all…except for when it does. And the one time it might is at a place called Comic-Con.”

When “Twilight” is entered in the search bar of *Slash Film*, 15 pages of results show up, revealing hundreds of published posts on the site discussing one aspect of *The Twilight Saga* or another despite the “lack of interest” on the part of *Slash Film* readers. Sciretta goes on to explain that at the previous year’s Comic-Con, hardcore *Twilight* fans camped out for hours, taking up seats in earlier panels in order to secure seating for *Twilight*, inadvertently locking other fans out of their desired panels. Sciretta voices his concern on behalf of the “4,000-6,000 people that will likely be shut out of these awesome Hall H presentations in order for Twilighters to save their seats for the Summit panel.” He expressly admits that he is not “complaining for [himself]” as he “might be able to get into Hall H through industry connections or what-not.” For a convention that draws over 100,000 people every year, certainly space and numbers are issues. Sciretta’s fanboy rant essentially suggests that, were these girls fans of a more worthy franchise, he wouldn’t mind them taking up room at the already wall-to-wall populated Comic-Con.

Much like the dissention toward *Sex and the City 2*, by publishing frequent updates about *The Twilight Saga*, bloggers are simply fueling the fire of hate because it gets them more online traffic, not because they particularly care how the films turn out.
They make the conscious decision to dislike these films based on the wild contingent of 
female fans the franchise created. But as obsessive fans in their own right, these bloggers 
and readers do not recognize the hypocrisy of their point of view.

CHAPTER 5: GENDERED ONLINE SEXUAL HARASSMENT

When looking at the genres of film that cinephile blogs cover, it can be 
determined from the posts that not only are they mostly written and directed by men, but 
also they mostly feature a male protagonist and a majority male supporting cast, with the 
exception of a small few here and there. As demonstrated by “The Mo Movie Measure,” 
a striking number of films coming out of Hollywood do not even contain more than one 
major female character. Furthermore, this female character usually serves as the resident 
love interest for the film’s male protagonist, arguably robbing her of an identity 
independent of the male characters. The famed 1989 article by Laura Mulvey, Visual 
Pleasure and Narrative Cinema uses a psychoanalytic approach to deconstructing female 
placement in mainstream film. Mulvey validates her strategy, saying that, “it is helpful to 
understand what the cinema has been, how its magic has worked in the past, while 
attempting a theory and a practice which will challenge this cinema of the past. 
Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriate here as a political weapon, demonstrating the 
way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form” (833). In this way, 
Mulvey concedes the existence of an unconscious structuring that has existed since the 
beginning of cinema. Born in a patriarchal society, revolutionized by men, mainstream 
film created an inequality on the part of male and female representation whether it was 
intentional or not. Mulvey begins by explaining the power cinema has over the spectator:
“[It] offers a number of possible pleasures. One is scopophilia. There are circumstances in which looking itself is a source of pleasure, just as, in the reverse formation, there is pleasure in being looked at…At this point [Freud] associated scopophilia with taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze” (835).

Put into terms of audience spectatorship, these “other people” are the characters in the film, who exist in a “hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy [sic].” Furthermore, “the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer” (Mulvey, 835-836). Simply due to the conditions of the dark cinema and the seemingly separate world of those on screen, audience members subconsciously find pleasure in living out deep-seated invention through the actions of the characters. But another type of pleasurable look exists for the cinematic audience which, “developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one [look] implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification with and recognition of his life. The first is a function of the sexual instincts, the second of the ego libido”(837). Now, the audience finds pleasure both in looking at the characters as objects, and also identifying with their screen alter ego, which determined by gender, creates a telling dichotomy of representation of males and females:

“In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy [sic] on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (837).”
Because of the traditionally active role of male characters in cinema, the token female love interests are left to be the object of both the audience’s controlling gaze and the lustful gaze of the male protagonist, which is ultimately assumed by male viewers projecting themselves onto the male protagonist, however she herself contains no other meaning. Mulvey quotes film director Budd Boetticher who theorizes that, “what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance” (837). Once she falls in love with him, or inspires what she is meant to, she loses her exhibitionist sexuality and “her eroticism is subjected to the male star alone. By means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too” (840). Today, this is evident in a vast majority of Hollywood films, particularly superhero films, where there is no attempt to hide the purpose the woman fulfills. Nary a hair out of place and always impeccably dressed, these female characters are visually stunning and emotionally dependent on male attention, from both other characters and audience members. Taking into account that this effect has been around since the birth of cinema, and the tremendous influence that cinema has over our perceptions of our own lives it has become unconsciously acceptable for the male gaze to find its way into our reality.

In the world of Internet anonymity, objectification of the female form roams freely but this time takes on a more direct, interactive audience. Instead of simply seeing the woman as an object in a theater, the Internet encourages comment on the female
body, which once it is said, most often remains in cyberspace as a part of the discourse. In the world of cinephile blogs, where so much of the content screams masculine fantasy, women are often subjected to online sexual harassment, whether direct or indirect. The most prominent type of harassment that occurs on Slash Film, First Showing, and Ain’t It Cool, is sexually graphic objectification of actresses in the comments of readers. Though unsettling, it makes sense that this type of harassment takes place on blogs that focus on comic book films and major franchise blockbusters because most female characters in those films are written as eye candy with a weak spot for the male hero. Her beauty and sexuality is open to judgment by the males who will ultimately project themselves onto the male protagonist. This attitude easily carries over into all types of films when they are covered on the same site. On May 13th, 2010, Ain’t It Cool blogger Beaks reported on two competing Marilyn Monroe biopics, posting a tasteful photo of Monroe in a white one-piece bathing suit:

![Figure 8. Marilyn Monroe, “Here Come the Competing Marilyn Monroe Biopics!”](image)

*Figure 8. Marilyn Monroe, “Here Come the Competing Marilyn Monroe Biopics!”*
The majority of reader comments focused on Monroe’s body type and hypothesized which actress could successfully portray the icon. In response to the photo at the top of the post, reader “Stuntcock Mike” offered, “Mmmmm, loook [sic] at that little triangle of cunt…[sic] the doorway to earthly delights you and I can only dream of. Ask Joe Dimaggio, he softened that quim with his fleshbat for many a moon.” After the mention of curvy actress Christina Hendricks, another commenter, “Bathman,” had this to say: “I would take Christina Hendricks over my lap and make her read bible passages while I gently run a wire hanger over her but [sic] and thinhs [sic] and then when she’s just at climax I will make her close her eyes and tellme [sic] that i’m [sic] an adult while I masturbate [sic] behind her.” Consistent typos and misspellings emphasize the intelligence level encouraged by these online threads. “Stuntcock Mike” comes back for one more humble suggestion: “What about Amanda Seyfried? She makes cocks so hard you could crowbar your trunk open with it.” All of these comments are in response to new film projects yet the only conversation that arises is both sexually graphic and degrading. While these comments are targeted at high profile actresses who most likely will never see them, they serve as a deterrent for other women who may seek to participate in the discussion. Allowing these comments to remain on a site sets a precedent that objectifying women is common and acceptable, despite not being anything intelligent to offer the discourse.

In some instances, this kind of authority over female beauty and sexuality is applied to females in other roles than just actress. In a post detailing plans for a new project by writer and comedian Kristen Wiig on Slash Film, Russ Fischer includes a playful photo of Wiig channeling a little girl:
Figure 9. Kristen Wiig, Slash Film

Of all the photos of Wiig on the Internet, Fischer chose this image where Wiig’s mouth is obscured by a gum bubble disabling her from speech. Her posture and crossed arms invoke the notion that she is a young girl and not a fully matured woman. Reader “Justin Jump” says, “Sure, movie, whatever. That picture of Wiig makes me want to lock her in my backyard for 18 years.” With this one comment, Justin Jump strips Wiig of her credibility as a writer and comedian and renders her an object for his personal use. Furthermore, he makes light of sexual slavery, a staggering form of abuse that has been exposed as a major issue all over the world. Had Fischer chosen a tasteful headshot of Wiig, plenty of which are available on the Internet from a Google search, reader comments may have been more directed to her writing and comedic talent as opposed to the picture itself. Most of the following comments at least mention Wiig as a writer or comedian, but then also lay judgment on her looks. Unfortunately, the positive comments
about her talent and intelligence are overshadowed by the focus on her sex appeal, which keeps her from being taken seriously.

Other times, sexist remarks are encouraged by the bloggers themselves. In December 2009, Owner and Executive Editor of FirstShowing, Alex Billington, titled a post “First Look: Slutty Kristen Stewart in Welcome to the Rileys [sic].” The accompanying blog post says that, “according to reports from earlier this year, Stewart went completely nude in stripper scenes, but that doesn’t exactly mean we’ll get to see much. The film is about a couple who comes across a young stripper that oddly seems to comfort them as they’re still grieving over the death of their own daughter.” Billington posts four set photos from the film that depict a more rough, made up version of Stewart than has been seen before:

**First Look: Slutty Kristen Stewart in Welcome to the Rileys**

December 3, 2009
Source: RopeofSilicon
by Alex Billington
Referring to Stewart herself as “slutty” and mentioning the potential for nudity in this film before even detailing what the film is about opened up the floodgates for readers to share in their excitement. Reader “Trent 533”: “Well, this article and the accompanying pictures are gonna [sic] help me rub a nice one out tonight…[sic] I can’t wait to see her nude, she’s got the sexiest little body, all natural and tight.” “Ronan”: “I’ve wanted Kristen ever since into the wild [sic], I can’t believe she’s going nude in this. Christmas came early this year, now let’s hope a pocket size bottle of lotion and some Kleenex come in the stocking for theater viewing.” And “David”: “Love her… [sic] this is going to be a wet dream come true…[sic] i [sic] think I’m gonna [sic] be hornier
than Rpattz the first time he tasted her cherry pie (you know he has) ... [sic] seeing Kstews [sic] tits is going to be my undoing.” With “Rpattz,” “David” refers to actor Robert Pattinson, who Stewart has been linked to romantically. About 33 comments into the thread, one reader, “Jen,” calls attention to Billington’s unnecessary title: “Stewart is not ‘slutty,’ nor is her character. Being a stripper does not make you a slut (in fact I believe it just generally means you are in need of money and short on options). I hope you will be titling an article on the next 007 film about slutty Daniel Craig. God knows James Bond actually does get around. Why, Mr. Billington, is it so acceptable for you to casually call a woman that? Please don’t.” A response from reader “JoePublic” does not argue with “Jen’s” point, but invalidates it by making flirtatious jokes out of the situation. “…all women who don’t want to sleep with you are slutty ^_^…but seriously…human beings are too complex to be simplified by describing them as types of any kind…male or female…especially [sic] female ^_^.” Employing cutesy smiley faces to illustrate his cheekiness, “JoePublic” condescends to “Jen,” making her appear silly for expressing anger about something so trivial. Despite other complaints from readers identifying as both male and female about titling the post, “Slutty Kristen Stewart,” Billington made no comment in response, nor did he change the title.

Slash Film is the only blog of the three that gives readers the option to flag a comment in the case that it is deemed inappropriate, in which case it will be brought to moderator attention. Along with that, readers also have the options to ‘like’ a comment or ‘reply’ specifically to one person. Either moderators rarely receive flagged comments or they rarely delete them, because all of the quoted additions still show up on their original threads. Some readers attempt to chastise or challenge offensive comments but to no
avail. Given the open nature of the Internet, none of these sites have a policy on the type of content they will allow and what they deem inappropriate which sends the message that online sexual harassment demands no repercussions.

Along with deterring female commenters through sexually objectifying actresses, online sexual harassment can occur in the form of attack against females for simply participating in the discussion. Early research exploring how men and women use the Internet differently shows that as with many technologies, men were early adopters and therefore became proficient in it first. “Cross cultural research has found that compared to males, females are more likely to be technophobic, less likely to be technophiles, perceive less advantages for new technology, and have less experience with technology” (Morahan-Martin, “Gender and the Internet,” 172). But that was in the mid 1990s. Today, the Internet is not a luxury, but a necessity. The Millennial generation, born between 1981 and 2000, is “the first generation in human history who regard behaviors like tweeting and texting, along with websites like Facebook, YouTube, Google, and Wikipedia, not as astonishing innovations of the digital era, but as everyday parts of their social lives and their search for understanding” (Keeter and Taylor, “The Millennials”). Today, especially among Millennials, the difference between the number of men and women online is slight, though the reasons for use still vary. For instance, “women are more likely than men to value the positive effects of email for improving relationships, from expanding their circle of colleagues to encourage teamwork” (Fallows, “How Women and Men Use the Internet”). The value of more personal correspondence like e-mail could explain the supposed lack of females reading or commenting on cinephile blogs. However signs point to the fear of not being accepted by others, or worse, being
harassed: “women’s dramatic decline in participation rates coincided with increased
general awareness about worrisome behavior in chat rooms” (“How Women and Men Use
the Internet”). While chat rooms are now a way of the past, online comment threads are a
popular way to communicate with others in an open discussion.

Like all forms of sexual harassment against women, online harassment is often
seen as an inconsequential part of natural human interaction. It is easy for society to
dismiss it because ultimately, online threats are just words that occur in a vacuum. But
these words have consequences to the victims, even if they are empty. Online harassment
can range from comments about a woman’s body, to creating sexually explicit rumors or
photos of a woman, to threatening physical or sexual violence, but typically contains the
same three criteria: “(1) its victims are female, (2) the harassment is aimed at particular
women, and (3) the abuse invokes the targeted individual’s gender in sexually threatening
and degrading ways” (Keats Citron, “Law’s Expressive Value in Combating Cyber
Gender Harassment”). Online sexual harassment on any area of the spectrum can have
profound effects on the victim, most detrimentally to her reputation or her participation
online. As a means of stopping the harassment, females more often than not choose to
scale back their place in the online discourse, or stop sharing opinions and thoughts
online altogether, depriving the Internet of female perspectives. Similarly, damage to a
woman’s reputation after online harassment can have an effect on her place in the
working world, especially if that place is in online media. For example, the story of
entrepreneurial blogger Alyssa Royse:

“In August 2008, Ms. Royse commented on the business acumen of the studio that made
the film “The Dark Knight.” Shortly thereafter, anonymous individuals attacked Ms.
Royse with rape threats and demeaning comments on her blog. One threatened: “Get a
life you two dollar whore blogger, The Dark Knight doesn’t suck, you suck! Don’t ever
post another blog or [sic] unless you want to get ganged up.” Another poster urged, “[I] hope someone shoots then rapes you.” A poster stated: “if you were my wife [I] would beat you.” Others disparaged her intellect: “[t]his is why women are TOO STUPID to think critically and intelligently about film; AND business for that matter” and “why don’t you make yourself useful and go have a baby.” Ms. Royse explained that of the nearly 200 comments, only 3 failed to mention her gender in disparaging or threatening manner. To stop the harassment, she closed the comments and deleted 50 of the most violent and threatening ones” (Keats Citron).

Royse’s blog is a seattlepi.com reader blog and therefore she is the sole editor and contributor of content. It is safe to say that none of the male bloggers on the cinephile blogs have experienced threats of this magnitude for expressing their opinion on a film. Royse wrote a blog post in response to the violent and sexist comments she received in which she explains that, “it’s an intense feeling. Yah, [sic] that scares me. Not for my own safety- no, I don’t take the threats literally or seriously- but for the general anger and temperament that we seem to be fostering and condoning. Is this really amongst us, lurking until it can seep out in the incredible cowardice that is anonymous blog-harassment? (Hmmm, not so different than the vile way in which this kind of weak-minded hatred against women has always played out. Behind closed doors!)” (“My First Death Threats- And they weren’t from Batman”). Numerous other instances of extreme sexual harassment online have received national press. Still, much of the harassment that occurs online is seen as harmless dissention that people have to deal with on a daily basis. “Commentators trivialize the harassment of women online by arguing that: (1) it constitutes innocuous teasing, (2) women can address the harassment on their own, and (3) cyber-harassment coheres with the Internet’s unique norms” (Keats Citron). These might all be acceptable arguments if females weren’t the majority of victims of this kind of assault. The fact remains that while both men and women can be targets of online
harassment, women are continuously the victims of gendered attacks. But as seen from
the discussion thread for Peter Sciretta’s post, “Why Are There So Few Female
Filmmakers?” when “AngryBroomstick” brought up the word “sexism,” she was attacked
from all sides. When a woman is confronted with that opposition, her remaining options
are to stop expressing her opinion, adopt a less gendered perspective, or simply take the
abuse. None of these are choices that male Internet users must make. When online
harassment occurs, it strongly supports and reflects the patriarchal hierarchy in which
women are inferior. The extension of this belief to the Internet only ensures that sexual
harassment will continue to be accepted in our society.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Sexism is not a problem that can be solved easily. The biggest obstacle facing it is
a lack of true understanding of what it is by both men and women. It is not a subject often
discussed in schools across America and remains in a shroud of mystery for many,
though its stigmas are quite apparent. In a society that places great emphasis on popular
culture including cinema, it is important to question how this emphasis affects our own
prejudices and beliefs, in this case toward gender. With the Internet now an integral part
of our media consumption, a link has been added between the average American and
glorified Hollywood.

In terms of fanboy movie blogs, I believe a definite prejudice towards women
exists, though it is both at times unintentional and highly influenced by the ideas and
films that Hollywood produces. And certainly it is not a case of all sexism all the time,
nor is sexism only found on these sites. Any blog, professional or amateur, on any topic,
has most likely hosted sexist, racist, homophobic, and other hateful remarks. But I found
that particularly in fan-centric arenas where readers are passionate about their opinions, hateful and violent insults become a prominent part of the discussion. In my research I did my best to choose examples of sexism on these sites that demonstrate the reflections of Hollywood that I laid out. Ultimately, everyday I visited these sites I found hundreds of more examples of both bloggers and readers directly and indirectly disregarding women in every area of filmmaking and fandom. When it comes to filmmakers and writers, it seems that women constantly have to prove themselves, while men are still given projects even after less than box office success. With the low number of major films released that are directed or written by women, it is easy enough for male fans to ignore them altogether, lumping them into the generic category of chick flicks. Meanwhile, female fans are constantly subjected to male influenced cinema while simultaneously being stereotyped in films that are supposedly made for them. Partially due to Hollywood’s own rejection of female audiences, these sites assume women are an “other,” and not part of the fan collective, freeing the bloggers and readers from any obligation to see women as equal creators and fans. Instead, they are sexualized and ridiculed, deterring even obsessive female fans from participating in the discourse, leaving only the men to be courted by Hollywood.

Because these sites are not a typical subject of academic research and definitely target a lower brow audience, I find the obvious sexual imbalance even more troubling. There is an entire collective of people not only in the United States who are subjected and contribute to these remarks just by passing through a website on an extremely popular interest. That the remarks are not challenged but tolerated and left alone teaches that sexism is all in good fun and women who think otherwise are uptight or a colloquial
favorite, ‘a feminazi.’ While many may see these comments as inconsequential jokes, they strongly support a culture that devalues women as nothing but objects of male manipulation. The fact that they are posted on the Internet does not make them any less threatening, offensive, or degrading. As long as Hollywood continues to solely validate fanboys on the Internet, female fans and filmmakers will continue to be overlooked. But the bottom line remains that these blogs share a portion of the responsibility for the continued privilege of males over females because they refuse to break the cycle or even acknowledge it.
Works Cited


<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1612687,00.html>.