Representation of Women in Bollywood Films

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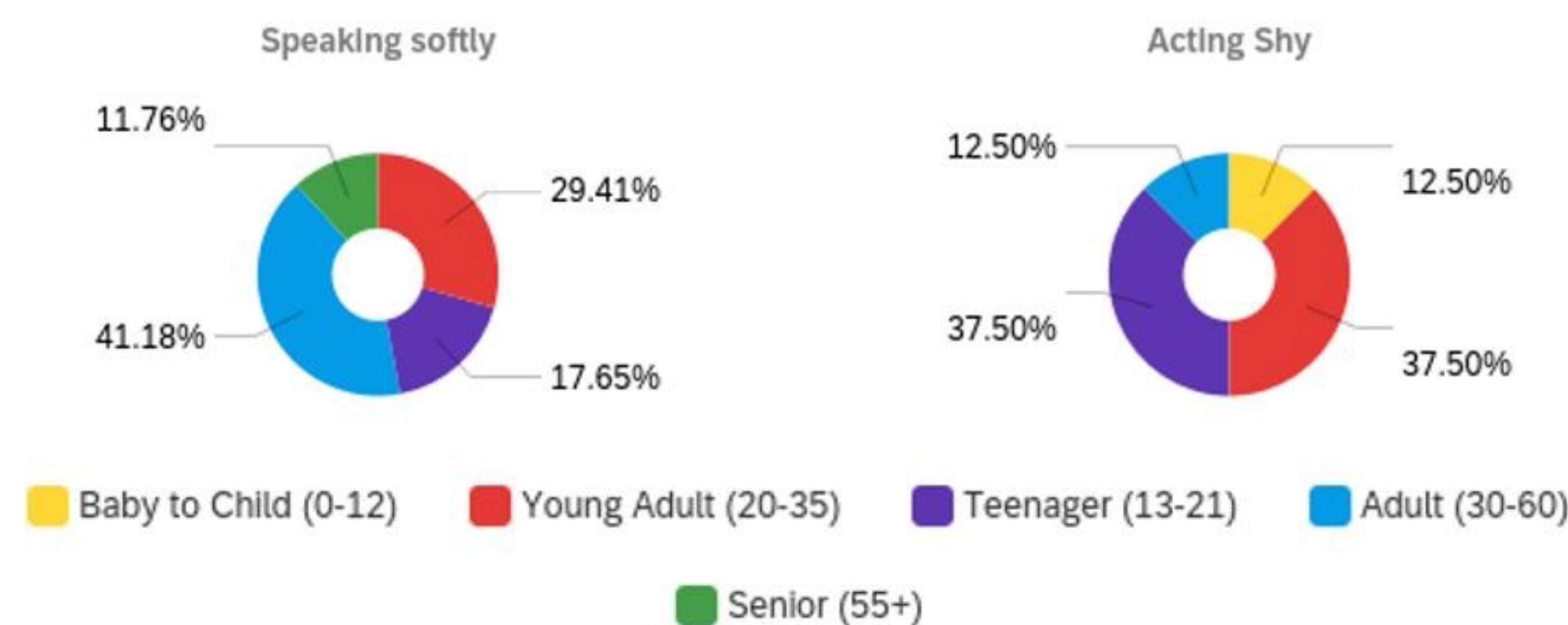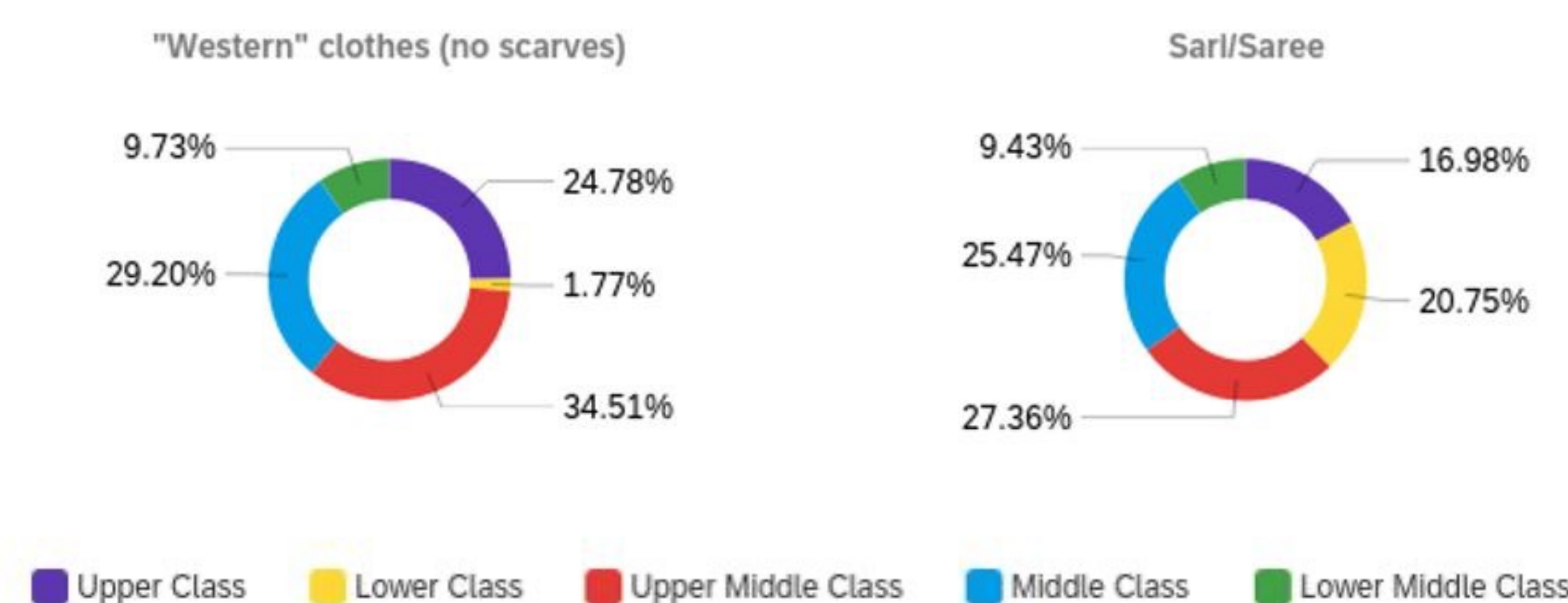Kayla Bretan, Lilian Phan, & mentor Rebecca Peters

Introduction

- Bollywood films are commercial films best known for their elaborate plots that include songs and dance numbers.
- Our research mainly focused on how women characters were interpreted by female directors.
- Bollywood films typically showcase the social expectation of a woman rather than represent the more relatable average Indian woman.
- Directors tend to portray each gender based on common gender stereotypes.
- An increasing trend of Bollywood films that are beginning to spotlight more independent women and modernize their movies.
- In this project, we collected quantitative and qualitative data on handpicked Bollywood films directed by women and compiled the data through a process called "film coding."
- The researchers watched the films and made note of how many characters of each gender and how many female-speaking characters.
- They were trained to analyze each female character based on their attire, career, education, religion, behaviors, relationships, and other indicators.
- The research is still ongoing, but after working through just three films, the data is uncovering fascinating discoveries.

Gendered Behavior by Age

Speaking softly

11.76%
29.41%
41.18%
17.65%

Acting Shy

12.50%   12.50%
37.50%   37.50%

■ Baby to Child (0-12)   ■ Young Adult (20-35)   ■ Teenager (13-21)   ■ Adult (30-60)
■ Senior (55+)

Attire by Class

"Western" clothes (no scarves)

9.73%   24.78%
29.20%   1.77%
34.51%

Sari/Saree

9.43%   16.98%
25.47%   20.75%
27.36%

■ Upper Class   ■ Lower Class   ■ Upper Middle Class   ■ Middle Class   ■ Lower Middle Class

Methods

Trained on "film coding"
- We discussed key concepts and how they may be presented in film.
- This coding method has been refined and updated throughout the course of our research.

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Watch & record behavior of female characters in movies with Qualtrics Survey Software
- The coder goes through and notes when any of the criteria is present or not present at any point in the film for each character.

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Surveys sent back to students to be revised
- We edit and review completed surveys to check for correctness.

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Survey answers are compared with partner & errors are revised
- Each film and character are coded by multiple participants to ensure accurate data is recorded.
- We regularly meet to discuss the criteria for each female character.

Results

- Female roles are demonstrated to wear a wider variety of clothing, allowing women to wear a less traditional clothing when considering than is other depictions.
- There are common gendered behavior per age group, with adults being more likely to speak softly, compared to teenagers who may be shown more to act shy.
- Gendered behavior is usually seen with the younger age group of teenagers and young adults. Though, the behavior of speaking softly is demonstrated to skew more towards the older age group of adults.
- When looking at attire, female directors seem to depict their female characters of higher status in more western clothing, while traditional clothing is seen more evenly among class.

Discussion

- We have no conclusive results because less than a quarter of the selected films have been surveyed.
- However, we have noticed a woman as a director does have an impact on female representation in Bollywood.
- There exists common patterns of how female directors portray their female characters.
- The shifts in the ways female characters are presented in Bollywood films may indicate the changing values and beliefs surrounding women.
- The influence of different perspectives in cinema is prevalent as female directors directly influence the ways women are represented in film.
- The future of this project will allow us to see the progress being made in Bollywood films in relation to its character development.

Acknowledgements

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