



Representation in Female-Directed Bollywood Films

Rowland Paige and Hakjae Oh

Rebecca Peters, PhD Candidate



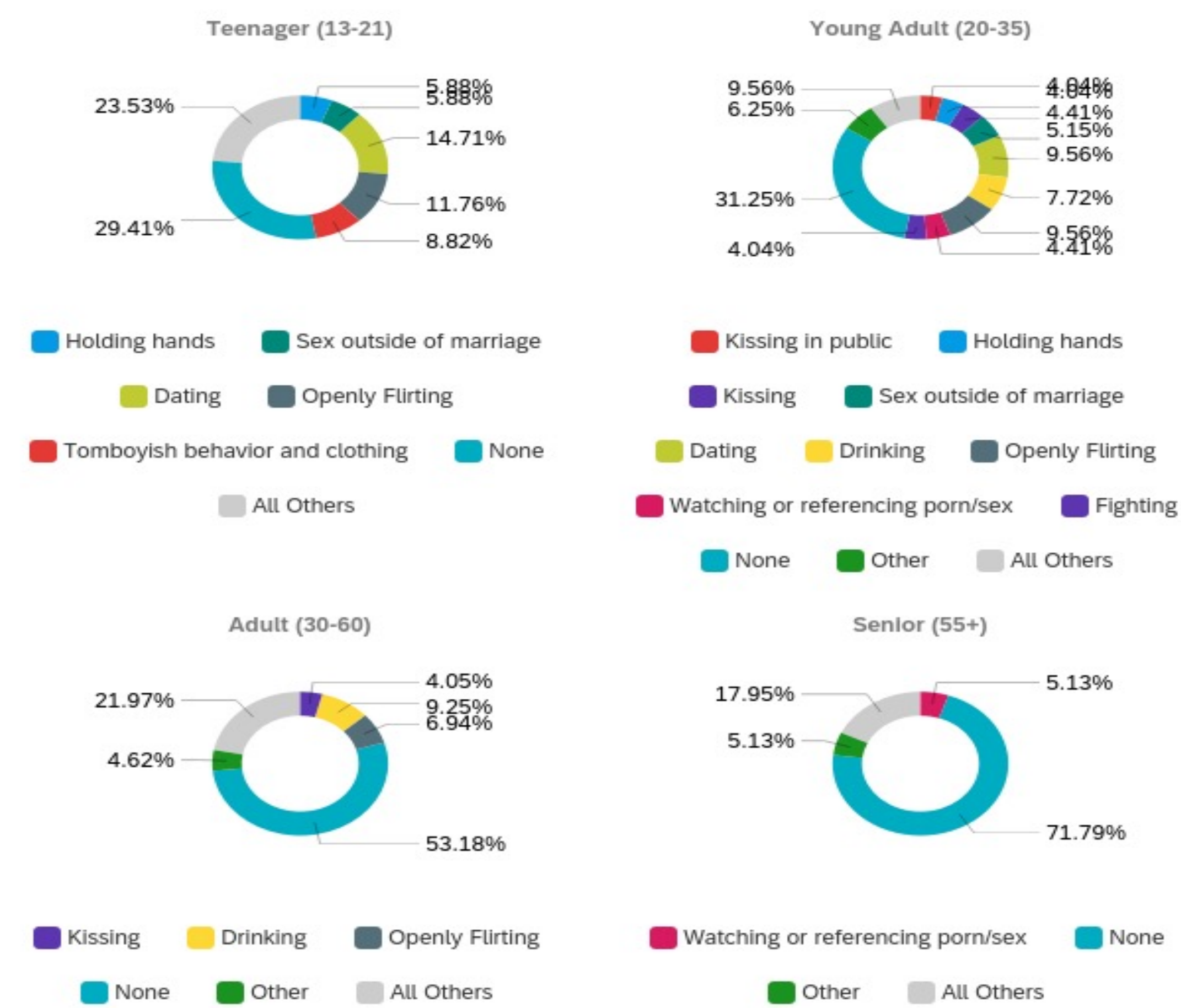
College of Arts and Sciences, Department of Religion

Abstract

Cinema and other cultural artifacts inhabit a special place in a cultural landscape in that they both influence and are influenced by the societies in which they originate. For this reason, our research project has focused on the portrayal of women in Bollywood, the leading film industry of India, where women have traditionally been characterized according to misogynistic interpretations of a woman's role in society. However, there has been a recent increase in female directors employed in the industry. This change has made Bollywood an interesting case study. In this project, we gathered information through qualitative surveys that surrounded the role of women in Bollywood films directed by women and released to wider audiences. Researchers compiled this data through the survey database of Qualtrics to identify certain taboo behaviors, articles of clothing, and other indicators exhibited by female characters. Although the study is still in its early phases, this project highlights preliminary results from more than twenty films.

Taboo Behavior vs Age

Taboo behavior by age (omitting children) with a minimum of 4% grouping



Background Information

This project focuses on Bollywood films, known for its massive global presence and characterization of women characters according to misogynistic interpretations of a woman's role in Indian society. It is for this reason we selected films solely directed by women, allowing for an interesting case study of portrayal of women in film. To quantify the impacts of having a woman in the role of a director, our project utilized what is called "film coding", where we mark different indicators of representation such as appearance, religion, social class, education levels, taboo behaviors, etc. as well as their frequencies present in the films. To ensure accuracy, this process is done individually among different research assistants and then collectively discussed to choose the most correct answer to be submitted through Qualtrics, a surveying software. This project is an ongoing process, where new movies are included every year to release a meta-analysis once the surveys' information is deemed sufficient. These results are still pending and require more surveys from different films to allow comparison. Cinema's purpose isn't just to entertain, but to inform. By analyzing the effects of Bollywood's changes in hiring practices, we can gain insight as to how representation of not just women, but other mishandled groups can be approached and improved.



Trauma Identified vs Type of Trauma

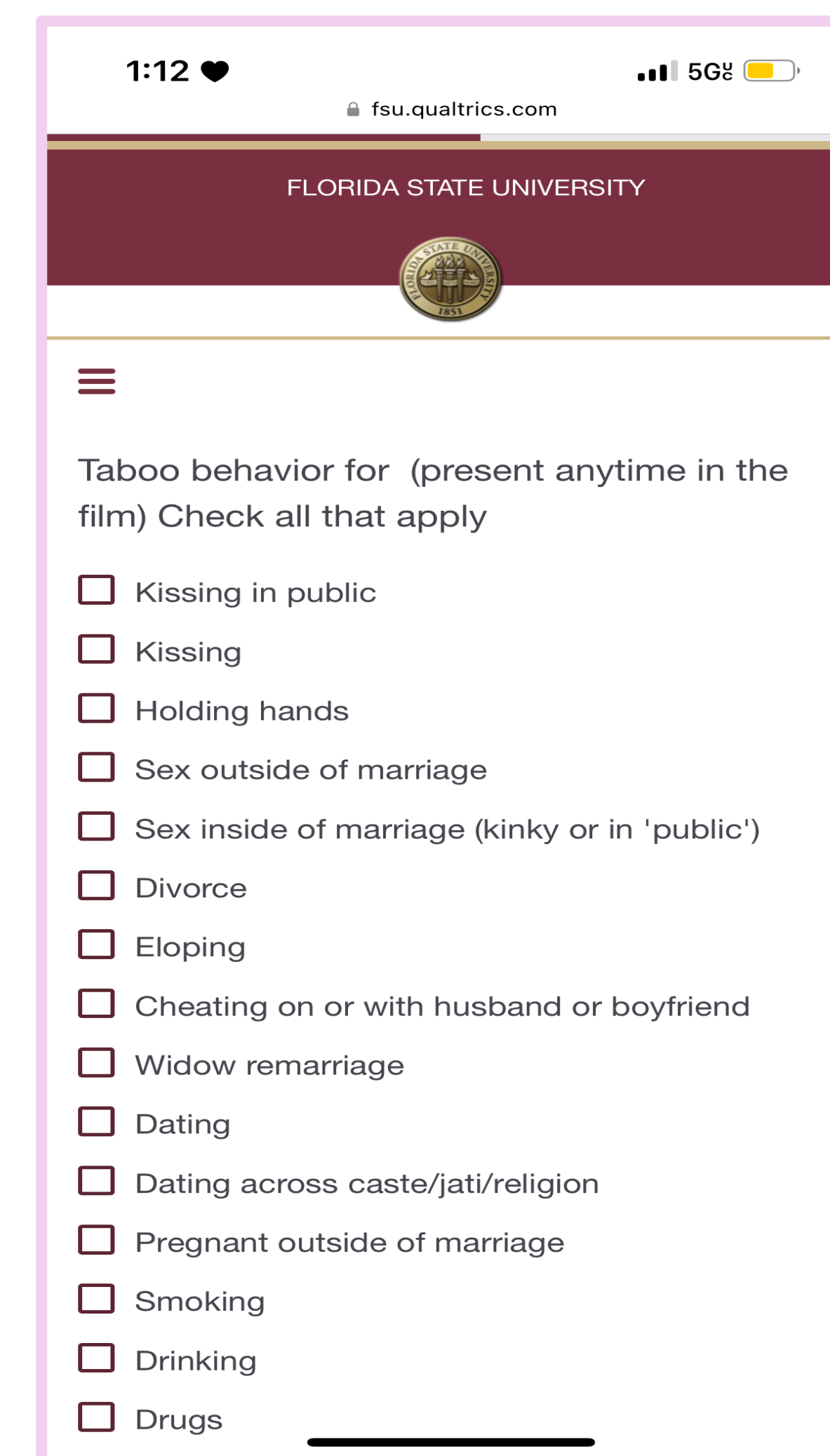


Methods

- Upon watching the films, we note down all relevant film coding and input all the data to Qualtrics.
We are taught to identify characteristics such as caste, religion, clothing, etc.
We note each criteria's presence or lack of presence at any point in the film for each female character.
This process is done individually by each researcher to achieve reproducibility of results
The surveys are discussed with the research mentor weekly to ensure accurate data is recorded.
After the results are agreed upon, we input that data into the final surveys, ready for comparison with other films' results. Comparison of results allow researchers to analyze the films' dominating criteria as well as pinpoint certain relationships between two characteristics.

Results/Conclusions

It is important to note that this research is still ongoing with around 25 films surveyed out of a goal of 40. Even with our current research, we can identify multiple patterns found through the surveys. Take for example, the relation between common taboo acts committed in India and age. Based on the data we can see that women directors are more likely to showcase young women as having more taboo behaviors such as dating and drinking. However, a lot of restriction remains for the older age group, with approximately 72 percent of the age 55+ group presenting no taboo behaviors. Another interesting find is the relation between the type of trauma experienced by female characters and its acknowledgement by others. While universally major charges such as murder and suicide are acknowledged by the majority, (approximately 55 and 75 percent respectively) trauma commonly associated with women such as catcalling, and rape are not as acknowledged (25 percent and 35 percent respectively). These phenomenon are significant because it shows how modern Indian society is changing their cultural views towards women. However, progression is not sudden, as even modern movies directed by women contain the previously mentioned traditional tropes.



References

