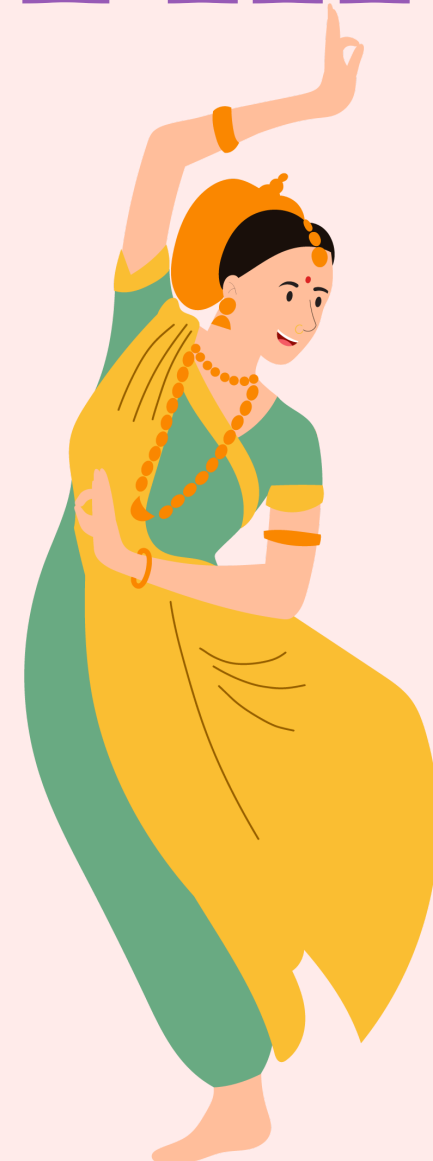


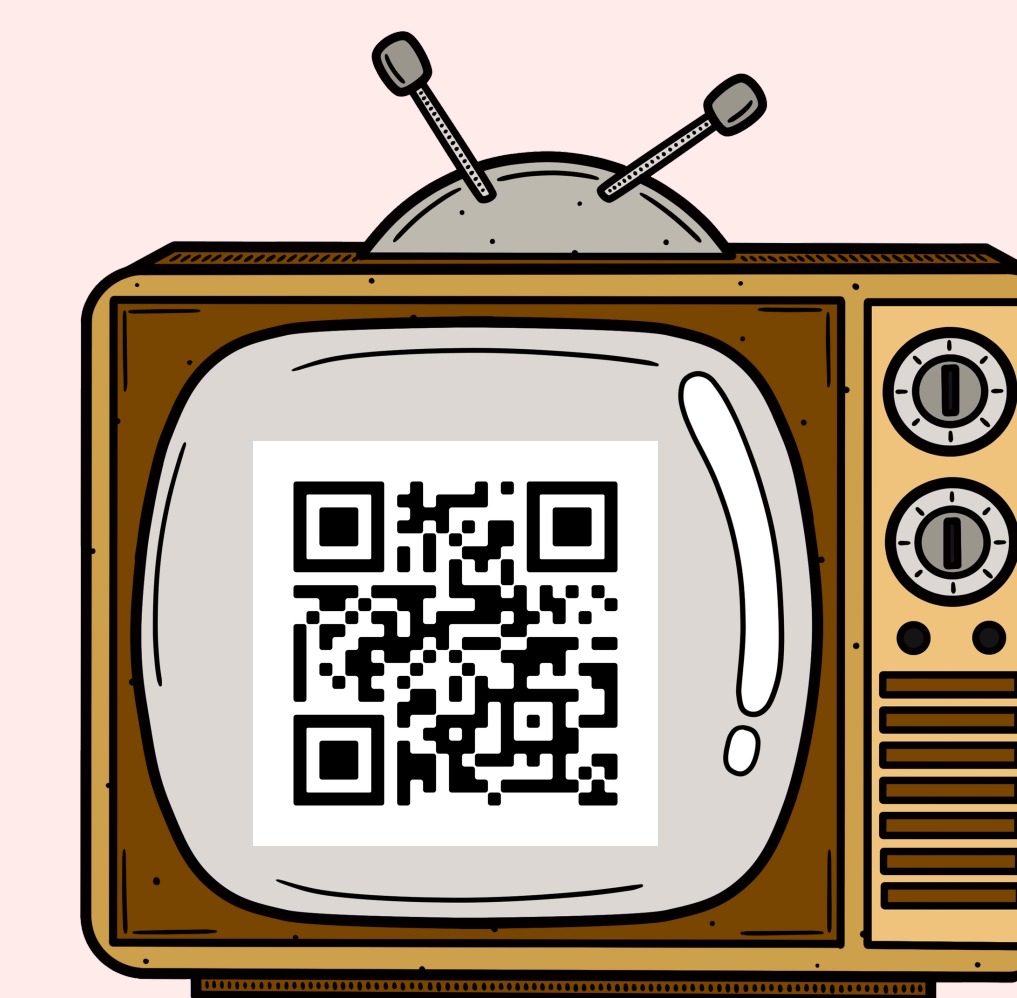
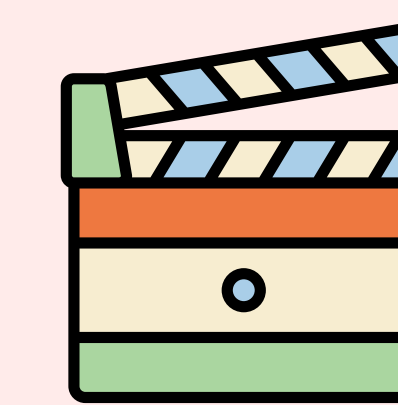
Through Her Lens: The Portrayal of Women in Woman-Directed Bollywood Films



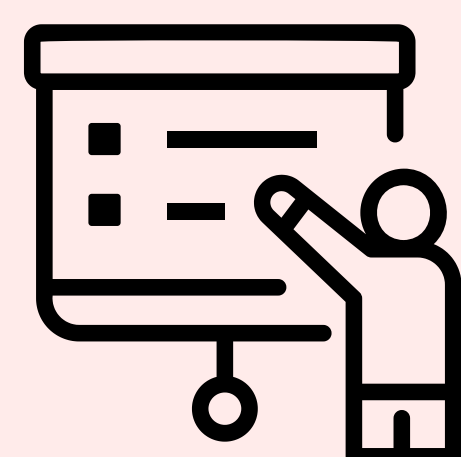
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References

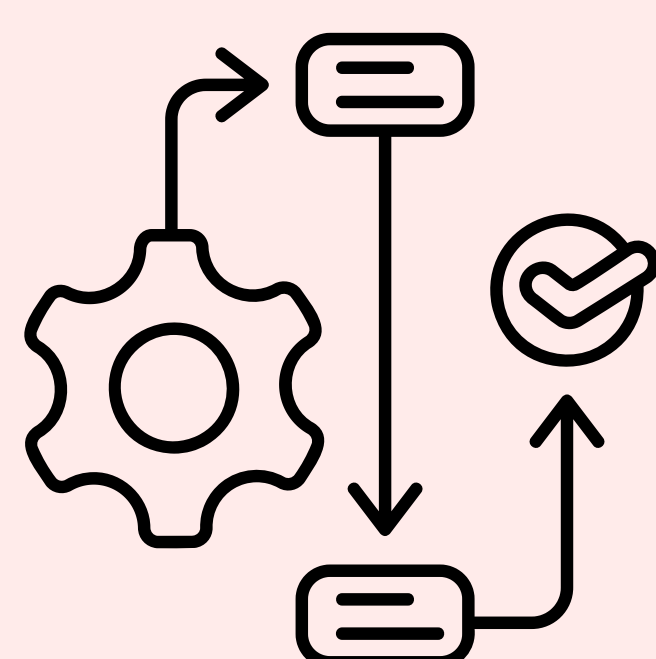


Introduction

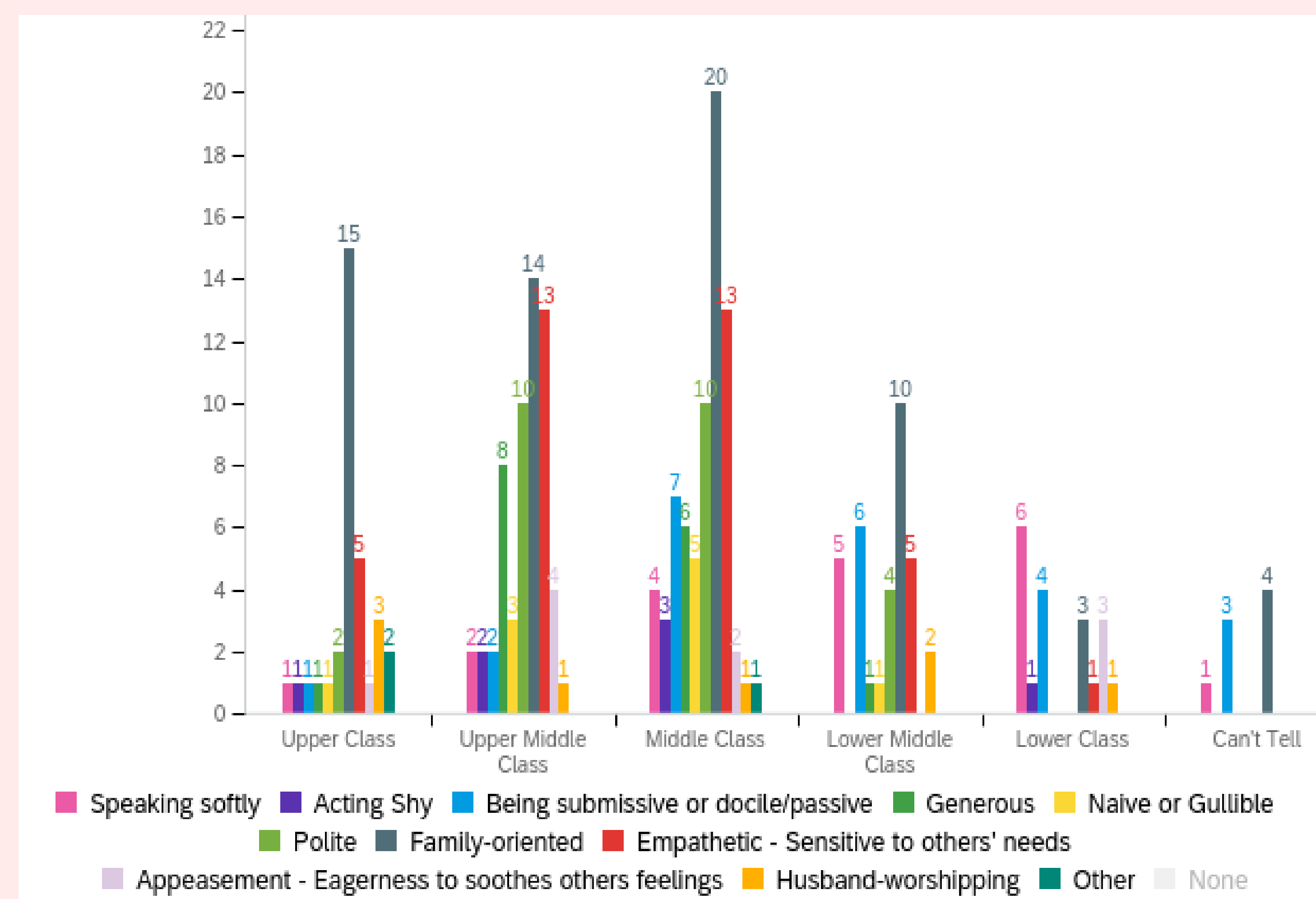
- Women make up over half the global population but rarely direct films.
- In Bollywood, only about 1 in 10 directors is a woman, creating a major gender imbalance.
- Female characters are often portrayed through male-centered perspectives.
- This study examines how women-directed films portray female characters.

Methodology

- Analyzed women-directed Bollywood films using structured survey coding.
- Each female-speaking character was systematically coded through Qualtrics surveys.
- Characters were evaluated across a series of key categories: including:
 - Demographics
 - Representation
 - Behavior
 - Female relationships
 - Narrative role
- We assessed whether each film passed the Bechdel Test (two named women speaking to each other about something other than a man).
- At least two trained researchers independently coded every character, with responses cross-checked for consistency.



Results



Gendered Behavior by Class

- Gendered behaviors (shy, submissive, overly polite) appeared most often among middle-class female characters.
- Upper-class women sometimes showed these traits but were rarely developed beyond family-oriented roles.
- Lower-class characters were less likely to display traditionally gendered behaviors.



Female Characters Defined Beyond Marriage/Motherhood

- 59% of married or maternal characters were defined primarily by their familial role.
- 41% were portrayed with identities beyond marriage or motherhood.
- This suggests some expansion of female identity, but family roles still dominate characterization.

Emergent Themes



- Class influenced gender expectations, with middle- and upper-class women more likely to reflect traditional femininity.
- Familial roles remained central to many female characters.
- However, 41% of married or maternal characters were portrayed beyond family roles, suggesting evolving portrayals.
- Women-directed films show greater diversity in female representation, but traditional norms remain influential.

Significance



- Bollywood is one of the most influential cultural industries in India and shapes public perceptions of gender roles.
- Although many married or maternal characters remain defined by family roles, 41% were portrayed beyond marriage or motherhood, indicating gradual shifts in representation.
- This suggests that women directors may be expanding the narrative possibilities for female characters, even while working within existing industry constraints.
- Understanding these patterns helps reveal how media representation can influence broader gender norms in Indian society.