



Representation of Women in Bollywood Films

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Abstract

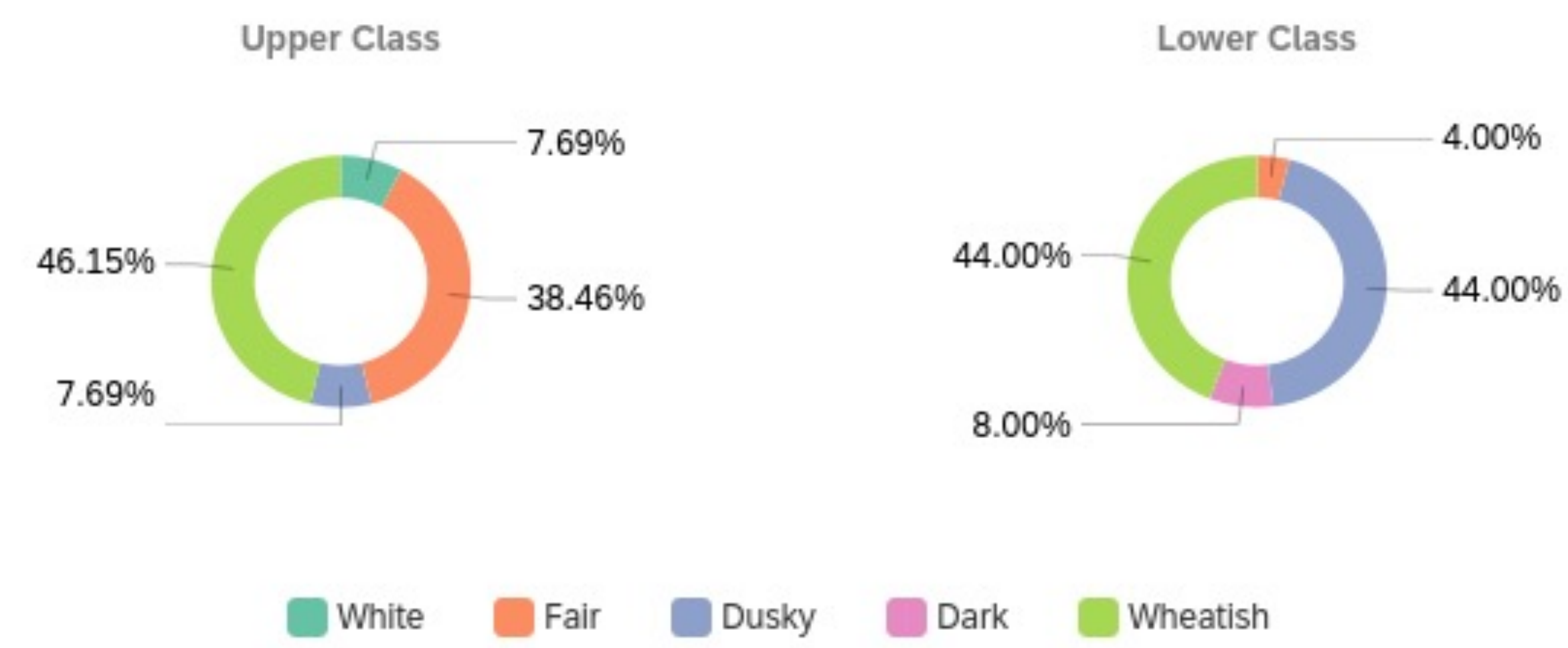
This project aims to understand and explain patterns in the representation of Bollywood films directed by women. Films have a significant influence on culture. In the past, Bollywood films have represented women according to misogynistic stereotypes. However, recently there has been an increase in the number of women directors in the industry. In order to understand how women directors are changing the portrayal of women in Indian culture, this study examines the lives of women directors in Bollywood and their work that has been released in the commercial industry in India in the last 10 years. Researchers have developed a coding book that uses techniques of a research method called 'film coding.' Research assistants gather both qualitative and quantitative data on films through using Qualtrics surveys. Researchers record observations on demographics, representation, behavior, and women relationships. The project is still new, as only sixteen films have been coded. Therefore, there are no conclusive results yet, however there are apparent trends in the data.

Introduction/Purpose

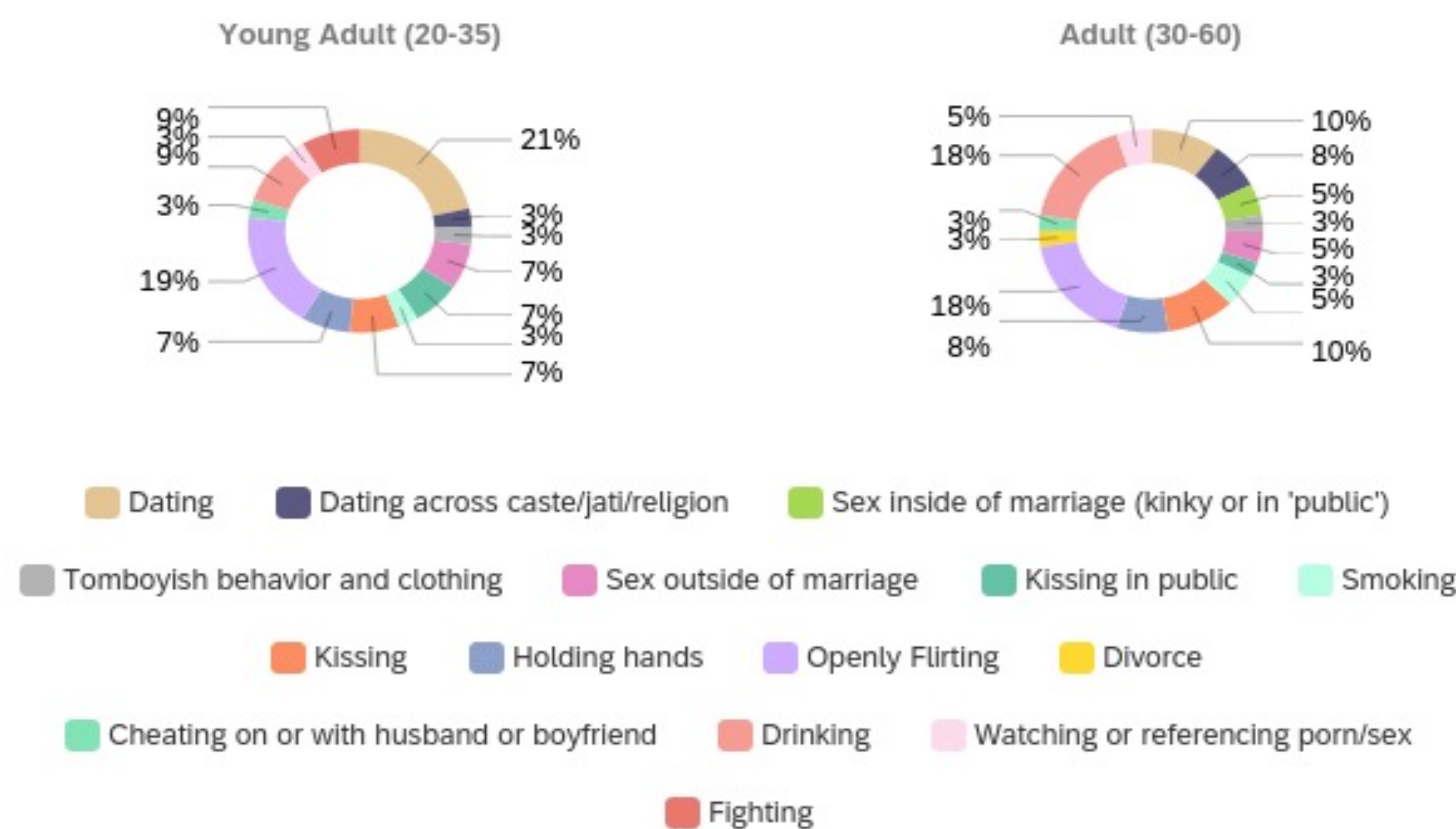
Films are an artform that reflect cultural norms and expectations of countries at moments in time. In India's film industry, Bollywood, stereotyping became an extremely popular form of portrayal—particularly towards women. For example, it is taboo for a woman to flirt or drink on screen. However, as women have gained economic and social equality in India, cultural norms are changing and evolving. Since gaining economic equality, the number of women directors in Bollywood has increased. As a result, women are being portrayed in a more progressive light, however there are still deep-rooted issues of inequality in gender representation.

Since this is a relatively new progression in the Bollywood industry, there is little research compiled on the topic of women director's influence and its consequences. Therefore, this research project attempts to examine how the personal background and experiences of women directors influences how women are represented in recent Bollywood films. This is done by film coding—interpreting qualitative and quantitative data on films. This data is then analyzed alongside coded interviews with women directors. Each film is coded by multiple undergraduate students to guarantee the most accurate findings, and surveys are conducted using Qualtrics and analyzed using Excel. This method is most effective because we are examining qualitative features of films and need to convert concepts into categories to be interpreted in meaningful ways. Although the study is fairly new and findings are not conclusive, trends of increased taboo behavior, economic representation, and challenging cultural norms are causing Bollywood to become more progressive in representation.

Class versus Skin Tone



Taboo Behavior versus Age



Methods

Undergraduate research assistants watched and analyzed Bollywood films directed by women through Qualtrics coding surveys. Analysis is done by comparing demographic to representation, for example class and skin tone. Coders were trained in cultural context, as well as converting Qualtrics surveys to Excel documents for data to be manipulated and interpreted. Since the project is ongoing, the survey questions have been refined to better reflect the information being extracted from the films. Each film is watched and analyzed by multiple coders. These coders meet weekly to review and edit survey answers to ensure the answers are correct and lead to the most accurate findings.

Conclusion/Results

Of the 53 films that are involved in this research, only sixteen films have been coded so far. Since our data set is not complete, we cannot definitively draw any conclusions. Still, specific trends regarding skin color and class seem to be emerging in the data that has already been collected. It has been found that the majority of women are represented as wheatish compared to white, fair, dusky, and dark skin tones. It is also notable that skin color tends to become darker as the class/status lowers. Trends regarding women and taboo behavior are also emerging; while a vast majority of characters do not display any taboo behavior, the most common taboo behaviors are dating, flirting, and drinking. This type of behavior is also the most common in young adults and adults. While we have no conclusive results yet, it is apparent that women directors are portraying female characters in ways that go against the norm of Indian culture. While there are still underlying cultural trends that may be classist or misogynistic, such as lower-class women being portrayed with darker skin tones, women in film are straying from the norm. The film coding surveys have proven an effective method for data collection, however specific questions could continue to be fine-tuned to make the data as representative as possible. For future research, we could film code the behavior of men in the same women directed films or investigate the portrayal of women in films directed by men. Currently, we are only focused on how women are portrayed and using background information for the portrayal of men. However, having data on how men are portrayed would make it much easier to make direct comparisons between how the two genders are portrayed.

References

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