Glamour in Contemporary American Cinema

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Glamour in Contemporary American Cinema

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Department of English
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University of South Florida

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ABSTRACT

American cinematic glamour shapes hegemonic notions of femininity, beauty, performativity, sensuality, and sexuality for both female actresses and viewers. In addition, glamour has an economic component in encouraging women to buy products, such as clothing and makeup, to help them emulate their idols from cinema. Glamour is more than beauty and notoriety: it is achieved through careful stylization of tangible aspects—hair, clothes, makeup—and intangible, cinematic elements—performance, dialog, lighting, and camera techniques. In Classical Hollywood, traditionally white standards of beauty were often exalted as glamorous, and many leading roles were played by racialized white actresses; however, actresses of color were frequently cast into the stereotype of “Other” in the roles of servants, sexualized objects, and villains. As a result, female viewers of color experienced decades of cultural pressure to conform to the white standards of glamour and aesthetics that Hollywood disseminated, but cultural ideals of beauty are becoming more diverse within the twenty-first century as a result of actresses of color being cast in glamorous leading roles. Currently, a gap exists between glamour scholarship of the past decade and scholarship about actresses of color: glamour scholars usually concentrate on racialized white actresses from Classical Hollywood, but scholarship about contemporary actresses of color often centers on the representation of racialized identities without discussing these actresses’ glamorous depictions. The increased representation of actresses of color within twenty-first century film calls for a reassessment of American cinematic glamour.
I address this gap with an evaluation of how the principles of aesthetics and femininity are changing within American culture, resulting from women of color in leading cinematic roles from 1999-2020. A dissertation of this nature is qualitative and illustrative since no single definition of glamour exists. I select movies that are representatives of different places in the spectrum of sensuality/sexuality in order to illuminate three categories: Enigmatic Glamour, Heroine Glamour, and Current Glamour. Then, I create a framework named (In)tangible Glamour to evaluate and record qualitative data about seven characteristics of glamour, such as performance and stylization, for nine leading actresses: Anne Hathaway in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), Ziyi Zhang in *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005), Carrie-Anne Moss in *The Matrix* (1999), Lucy Liu in *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), Gal Gadot in *Wonder Woman* (2017), Naomi Scott in *Aladdin* (2019), and Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, and Letitia Wright in *Black Panther* (2018). With my paradigm, I analyze concepts of contemporary glamour and examine the ways in which minority glamour contains modes of resistance to past Hollywood stereotypes, creating a more racially inclusive reading of American aesthetics and femininity.
INTRODUCTION

Glamour is an intangible concept with tangible, ubiquitous influence in contemporary American culture. Seemingly “natural” beauty standards to the everyday person are an internalization of carefully constructed images, performative behaviors, and products that are coded to ignite desire and encourage emulation. Decades of Hollywood glamour shape American women’s notions of heteronormative beauty, behavior, and desire; these ideals are then reinforced by a plethora of print and digital media advising women how to achieve a paradoxical illusion of effortless glamour. Many women mirror the standards they see on screen and in magazines, affecting how women perceive themselves and other women.

Glamour is always culturally and contextually determined. Notions of glamour build on historical notions of beauty and adjust to the context of each passing decade. Cinema plays a significant role because of the Hollywood studio system during the 1920s-1960s, which is an era sometimes labeled by scholars as the Classical Age or the Golden Age. While the studio system no longer exists, contemporary stars are often stylized using similar glamorous coding. For example, the cultural association of red lipstick and glitzy dresses as glamorous has roots from Old Hollywood that has endured into contemporary American cinema. Moreover, glamour is effort made effortless: the labor of the actress and those who style her is concealed from the audience, so the average person is unaware of the work behind the construction. Since the formulation of glamour adapts from one generation to the next, glamour can only be described based on principles of aesthetics, sexuality, femininity, confidence, and numerous internal and external qualities of the time period. Thus, I analyze twenty-first century American cinema
toward an understanding of how contemporary glamour is constructed and how these depictions allow for more racially diverse portrayals of beauty and femininity than the standards set in the Classical Age of the industry.

The medium of film offers complex sensory dimensions to analyze glamour when compared to static texts, such as photographs. Through film, one can observe not only physical attributes but also acting, dialogue, non-diegetic sound, movement, and narrative development—all of which distinguish cinematic glamour from a picture. These elements, under the supervision of the film’s director, construct images of glamour that not only reflect past notions of beauty and desire but also give blueprints for future actresses and viewers to emulate. Therefore, glamour is a dialogue among director, actress, and viewer. A director has his/her own concept of culture and glamour, the actress shapes the vision through her talent, and the viewers have their own interpretations. These three parties form an interactive triangle of discourse similar to the rhetorical triangle of writer/text/audience. The widespread results of these interactions can be observed within the beauty standards in magazines and advertisements marketed to mass consumer culture.

The aim of this dissertation is to address a gap in current glamour scholarship between glamour research and scholarship on actresses of color. Glamour scholars often focus on the Classical Age of Hollywood; since most of the era’s actresses are coded as “white,” the scholars concentrate on aesthetics with limited discussion of race. In contrast, scholars who write about the glamour of women of color tend to focus more on the actresses’ compliance/resistance to Hollywood stereotyping and less about aesthetics. I address this gap with a tandem evaluation of minority and traditional glamour in order to understand how the principles of aesthetics and femininity are changing within American culture, resulting from more women of color in leading
cinematic roles. I devise a framework to compare the aesthetics of actresses, both traditional and minority, who play thematically similar roles. With my paradigm, I illustrate concepts of contemporary glamour and examine the ways in which minority glamour contains modes of resistance to past Hollywood stereotypes, creating a more racially inclusive reading of aesthetics and femininity.

Classical Age concepts of glamour once relied on rigid notions of race based on essentialism, so I employ the words “traditional” and “minority” in ways that are cognizant of how images of race are a construction. My usage of the word “traditional” aligns with the usage of “white” in the scholarships of Richard Dyer and Angela McRobbie, which describe an ideal of whiteness set as the beauty standards for both the film and beauty industry; often, the faces and bodies of white actresses had to be altered by makeup, surgical techniques, lighting, and camera angles to generate a fictitious beauty aesthetic, which was marketed to the audience as “natural” beauty. The word “white” suggests ideas of essentialism and does not fit stars like Rita Hayworth, who was coded as both white and Spanish. Therefore, “traditional” will refer to the idealism of “whiteness” that Hollywood idealizes and perpetuates today.

In addition, the terms “minority” and “person of color” are used interchangeably in this dissertation. While I acknowledge that differences in meaning exist between the terms, my usage of the term “minority” draws attention to two issues. First, the Classical Age of Hollywood’s glamour created a binary separation of white and non-white actresses within films, which leads to a flattening of ethnic differences between racialized communities, such as African American, Latinx, and Asian American. Often denied lead roles, women of color were cast into the stereotype of Other, playing roles as servants, sexualized objects, and villains who were foiled against white leads. Second, women of color are a minority within the film industry. While
recent public outcry for diverse, non-stereotypical representation within films has resulted in more women of color in leading roles, these actresses comprise a small number in both the predominantly white film industry and membership in the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Thus, I use the term “minority” as an umbrella category within my framework to denote both of these issues; however, I make sure to avoid the same flattening within the chapters when I discuss each individual actress as part of a racialized community. For example, Lucy Liu’s experience as an Asian American actress is different from the experiences of African actress Lupita Nyong’o; they may have commonalities under the umbrella category of “minorities” due to past industry stereotyping and limitations, but both actresses’ identities are shaped by different ethnic communities. Their portrayals within Hollywood and their receptions by American audiences are informed by both the history of the industry and the way that certain racialized groups are viewed within American society. All actresses’ identities as parts of ethnic communities are recognized within the chapter discussions.

What is Glamour?

Scholarship on glamour encompasses much more than cinematic glamour, and often, conversations of cinematic glamour focus on the Classical Age of Hollywood. Academic studies into the celebrated actresses of the era—Gloria Swanson, Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, and Audrey Hepburn—are important to understanding the foundations of cinematic glamour. Molly Haskell, author of From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies, refers to the fascination that the moviegoers had for the studio stars as “mystical, quasi-religious,” and she asserts that “until the disintegration of the studio system in the fifties and sixties, they [the actors and actresses] were real gods and
“goddesses” (11). The level of reverence Haskell describes attests to power that glamour has on
the audience, and the aesthetic effects of these Classical Age stars can be observed in American
women’s femininity. Indeed, Haskell comments on the interchange of discourse between movie
stars and fans: “Like two-way mirrors linking the immediate past with the immediate future,
women in the movies reflected, perpetuated, and in some respects offered innovations on the
roles of women in society. Shopgirls [sic] copied them, housewives escaped through them” (12).
Glamorous women were not only the object of desire, but they also taught their female viewers
how to imitate desire to attract sexual interest. Haskell also discusses men’s desire for glamorous
women; however, for the purposes of this project, this study will focus on the influence that
female cinematic glamour has on women’s femininity.

Scholars have differing opinions as to whether or not glamour makes women objects for
the patriarchal male gaze, which is often characterized as the way that traditional patriarchal
attitudes of society have led to the objectification of women for male sexual desires. Laura
Mulvey’s discussion of the male gaze in Visual and Other Pleasures suggests that women are
stylized by men simply for male erotic fantasies: “The determining male gaze projects its fantasy
onto 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-belooked-at-ness” (Mulvey 19). The “to-
belooked-at-ness” that Mulvey describes matches how Hollywood studios stylized actresses’
appearance, poses, voices, makeup, and clothing to convey certain codes of femininity and
fantasy. Furthermore, her discussion of stylization reflects the processes that Dietrich and
Hayworth underwent to project an ideal of white womanliness based on male fantasy, which hid
bodily features not considered ideal (Dyer 43). However, Carol Dyhouse, author of Glamour:
Women, History, Feminism, offers a challenge to Mulvey’s notions that these stars were objectified by the male gaze: “These women had no doubt about their own desirability, and they were desiring subjects, not just objects of the male gaze” (46). Indeed, Anne Anlin Cheng author of “Shine: On Race, Glamour, and the Modern,” argues that there are two types of glamour in the Classical Age of Hollywood, and one type was more resistant to the gaze than the other. The first type is a “pearlized, feminized, and vulnerable surface” seen in actresses like Lillian Gish and Marilyn Monroe, but the second type—associated with the glamour of Jean Harlow, Gloria Swanson, Marlene Dietrich, and Anna May Wong—is “shellacked beauty [...] the presentation of self as object for consumption coexists with the rendering of that self as indigestible” (Cheng 1031-1032). The shellacked beauty may be stylized by the gaze of the filmmakers, but resists the male gaze of the audience and, perhaps, even those who style her. Both Dyhouse and Cheng see glamour as a vehicle to resist patriarchal male gaze and give actresses subjectivity and control.

In the decades following the Classical Age of Hollywood, the concept of glamour has changed within contemporary American culture but has remained a term usually applied to heteronormative, cisgender women, especially when described in scholarship. Male glamour does exist, especially within queer spaces, such as RuPaul’s Drag Race, but within the sometimes socially conservative, yet seemingly liberal spaces of the film industry, glamour is still a predominately cisgender, female term. Stephen Gundle, author of Glamour: A History, delineates the evolution of the word from its uses within European Renaissance royal courts to contemporary pop culture, and he argues that glamour is a characteristic possessed by women. He discusses the contradicting views of glamour within contemporary culture: he says, first, that glamour is something possessed by actresses and other famous people and is “utterly removed from the daily lives of average people,” and second, he also acknowledges that society has
another view of glamour where “magazine articles, books, and television programs continually spell out how every woman can glamorize herself” (Gundle 3). The dichotomy between inaccessible and the everyday appears within the writings of other scholars. Gundle makes a fair argument that glamour is often marketed toward the everyday woman; however, this dissertation contends that glamour is a concept reserved for the film stars because of the extensive work required for the construction is an ideal that no woman can achieve without the help of outside stylization.

Gundle’s framework for evaluating contemporary glamour applies to more famous women than only actresses because of the rise of consumerism in the American economy. According to Gundle, the politics under Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher lead to societal shift from industrial economies focused on satisfying primary needs to a post-industrial service economy driven by increased consumerism. This economic shift led to a cultural shift within the 1980-1990s where glamour became a commodity to be consumed by the masses (Gundle 354-356). To illustrate his paradigm, he uses four famous women that most people would probably consider to be unlike: Jackie Kennedy-Onassis, Madonna, Princess Diana, and Pamela Anderson. According to Gundle, they have five glamorous characteristics in common: an attractive appearance, sex-symbol status, fashionable clothes, ubiquitous pictures in magazines and other media, and reputation for scandal (373-374). Most of his criteria for these four women focus heavily on their bodily attributes. He also delineates an essential quality of glamour: women cannot be glamorous in a vacuum because they need their glamour to be validated by external forces, such as pop culture admirers.

The criteria for glamour also vary among scholars. Carol Dyhouse’s glamour framework focuses on the earlier decades of the Classical Age of Hollywood, and she illustrates her criteria
through the performances and stylization of Garbo, Swanson, and Dietrich. In her framework, glamour is developed through lighting, glitter, expensive jewelry, feathers, fur, slinky dresses, bodily curves, makeup, perfume, and a confident attitude. Not only were Gloria Swanson and Jean Harlow confident in attitude (as opposed to a demure type of glamour), but they also displayed their sexuality on screen. Dyhouse and other contemporary scholars, such as Cheng and Weingart, all focus on how black and white movies relied heavily on lighting and glitter to entrance viewers. In addition to mise-en-scène, Dyhouse discusses how the ideal body types of the 1920s and 1930s included curves: “The glamorous idea was slenderness, but with three sets of twin heart-shaped curves: lips, bosom, behind” (38). While Dyhouse considers these three heart-shaped curves as specific to the time period, one can see the three curves in contemporary actresses with one key difference: the concept of glamour within the late twentieth and twenty-first century has broadened to include a range of body types besides slender. Gal Gadot, Danai Gurira, and Naomi Scott all have various body shapes, but the glamour of their makeup and costumes often accentuate the three heart shapes of sensual lips, rounded breasts, and voluptuous bottoms.

The most recent scholarship on Glamour Theory exists in journal articles. Brigitte Weingart’s “‘That Screen Magnetism’: Warhol’s Glamour” explains the criteria for Andy Warhol’s “grammar of glamour,” in which Warhol uses the camera and mise-en-scène to create glamour. In “The Geography of Celebrity and Glamour: Reflections on Economy, Culture, and Desire in the City,” Elizabeth Currid-Halkett and Allen J. Scott have their own glamour framework, and they underscore how journalists and critics are essential in the formulation of glamour. Elizabeth Wilson’s “A Note on Glamour” analyzes the differences between celebrity and glamour, and she insists that glamour must appear effortless. Stevens, Cappellini, and Smith,
authors of “Nigellissima: A Study of Glamour, Performativity and Embodiment,” analyze how glamour can be used to disrupt patriarchy, and they illustrate the marketing strategies used to transform Nigella Lawson, a woman too voluptuous to fit traditional glamour criteria, into a glamorous cooking television star. Sarah Elsie Baker—author of “A Glamorous Feminism by Design?”—discusses the tools of glamour, such as nail polish, and analyzes the ways in which glamour affects contemporary femininity.

**Glamorous Women in Hollywood Cinema**

Glamour once was a concept predominantly reserved for white actresses, and scholars have written about the effect that Hollywood’s limitation of minorities has on minority viewers' constructions of femininity and beauty. In *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender Culture and Social Change*, Angela McRobbie discusses how both the “heyday of (white) Hollywood glamour” and fashion magazines that imitate corresponding beauty standards influence American women’s femininity for decades until the early “post-feminist” era of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century (65-66). Mass media of the “feminine commercial domain”—which includes movies, tv shows, and magazines—follow the predominantly white standards of beauty, and they limited minority representation to “young (light skinned) black and (respectably demure) Asian women [sic]” (McRobbie 65). When images of women’s beauty and desirability are limited to mainly white women and light-complexioned minorities, racialized white beauty standards then become the standard for many American women.

Indeed, Classical Age Hollywood glamour cultivated such an impossible ideal of “whiteness” that even racialized white actresses did not embody these standards without the stylization of the studio. Richard Dyer, author of *White*, asserts that being “deemed visibly
"white" includes characteristics beyond skin tone: “the shape of the nose, eyes and lips, the colour and set of hair, even body shape may all be mobilised to determine someone’s ‘colour’” (42). He notes how the “realm of glamour” had more restrictive standards of whiteness than simply racialized ethnicity and how a single facial feature, such as “a mouth or nose may be perceived as insufficiently attractive in terms that obviously, though not explicitly, declare it not white enough” (42). Simply put, the ideal “white” woman did not exist. Even the features of white actresses had to be altered or covered up in a way that made the audience think the ideal of whiteness not only existed but could be achieved. Dyer lists several actresses who had makeup and lighting applied in certain ways to hide facial features that did not fit the producers’ ideals: Marlene Dietrich, Claudette Colbert, Ginger Rogers, Hedy Lamarr, Barbara Stanwyck (43). The most notable glamorous women of the Classical Age of Hollywood did not live up to the parameters that the studios envisioned and had to be altered. According to Adrienne McLean, author of Being Rita Hayworth, alterations were “relatively common” though hidden from the public eye like a “dirty secret” (33). Indeed, Dietrich had been told she had a “‘broad Slavic nose,’” and Josef von Sternberg used makeup and spotlights to give the cinematic illusion that her nose was smaller on screen (qtd. in Dyer 43). Dietrich’s story demonstrates that the glamour ideals of Old Hollywood were a carefully constructed work of fiction even though numerous women strove to embody such ideals.

One must also take into consideration the women had been limited, glossed over, or excluded from the Classical Age movie set. Even when select minorities were chosen to be on screen, they were stylized to conform to white beauty standards and often cast into stereotypical roles that reinforced prejudices of the era. Lily Wong, author of Transpacific Attachments: Sex Work, Media Networks, and Affected Networks of Chineseness, describes how Chinese American
actress Anna May Wong had to play “particular Orientalist imaginations of Chinese women [...] as either the innocently available lotus blossom or the morally loose dragon lady” (53). One can observe a combination of these tropes in Anna May Wong’s role as Ling Moy in *Daughter of the Dragon* (1931). Wong’s character demurely lures the engaged Ronald Petrie into a trap so that she can kill him. She asks, “If I stay, will my hair ever become golden curls? And my skin ivory like Ronald’s?” which he then replies, “Strange, I prefer yours” (*Daughter of the Dragon*). The movie suggests that white skin tone and blond hair are desirable traits that Asians envy, and the usage of the word “strange” assumes that, in the 1930s, it would be outlandish for a white male to prefer Asian features over a white woman’s features. Anna May Wong’s villainous role in *Daughter of the Dragon* reflected and perpetuated “yellow fever,” a racial stereotype of Asians as nefarious. However, Cheng views Wong’s role in *Piccadilly* (1929) as resistant to Orientalism and the male gaze because Wong’s glamour is “‘hard diva photography,’” which allows her to be glamorous without vulnerability: “we are given the fascination not of a darkened or exposed body, or of one penetrated or ruptured by the gaze, but of a body clad in resistant and mobile gleam” (1031). Even when Wong stars in Orientalistic roles, her costuming and the manner in which she performs are modes of resistance.

African American actresses also faced challenges in conforming to the Classical Age of Hollywood’s white beauty standards. In *Reel to Real: Race, Sex, Class at the Movies*, bell hooks describes the struggle Black actresses endured to alter themselves physically and mentally to fit glamour parameters: “any black actress who wants to make it in Hollywood has to confront a world where glamour, beauty, sensuality and sexuality, desirability are always encoded as white. Therefore, the Black female who wishes to ‘make it’ [...] has] to disidentify with her body and be

1 The usage of the word “Orientalistic” relates to the manner in which Said describes how the United States would portray the “Orient,” such as China, as an exotic Other in order to maintain power over it.
willing to make herself over” (18). According to hooks, African American actresses dissociated themselves from their bodies in order to adhere to the ideal of whiteness that the studios wanted. Dyer cites Lena Horne as an example of how studios would make women of color alter their appearances: “producers, hoping to pass her off for white, told her to ‘sing prettily’ by not opening her mouth too wide” (42). The Hollywood producers viewed her wide mouth as a racialized Black facial feature, so her body was stylized on screen to hide her identity as a Black woman. Such restrictions on the actress not only would affect the actress’s concept of her own identity, but also affects her audience. McRobbie asserts that consumers who are women of color found themselves “adjusting to the norms of dominant white glamorous and high maintenance femininity” (65). Women would feel pressure to copy the beauty of the actresses that they see in film, tv shows, and magazines, yet emulation is difficult when a woman has a different body type or skin tone than what appears on screen.

Some scholars argue that Rita Hayworth was allowed to maintain her ethnicity while being a studio star. In her book Being Rita Hayworth, Adrienne McLean rejects Dyer’s assertion that desire was “‘always’” white and argues that “Hayworth’s ethnic background was always a prominent element in her star appeal” (32). Arguably, McLean makes a good point about how Hayworth was marketed in numerous articles mentioning her Spanish heritage, which is part of her argument that Hayworth’s ethnicity had not been completely erased by the studio. However, many of the news articles from that time period that McLean cites lauds Hayworth’s transformation into the Hollywood image of whiteness as being superior to how she looked as a racialized Spanish woman: “‘transformed from a Spanish heavy into a livelier, Americanized Hedy Lamarr’ (1941), [...] ‘looks more typically American than typically Latin since she turned herself into a redhead’ [...] (1943), [...] ‘fully metamorphose at last into Rita Hayworth of
Hollywood and the world’ (1946)” (44). These articles highlight the underlying premise of glamour in the Hollywood system: Hayworth could still retain ties to her Spanish heritage as long as she looked the part of a white woman. Her light complexion allowed her to “pass” as white during that time.² Hayworth adhered to the strict regimen changes, such as dieting, like many Hollywood actresses, but she also endured “raising her low forehead through two years of painful electrolysis on her hairline” so that her appearance would look stereotypically white (McLean 33). While McLean does not use the word glamour in discussing why Hayworth was attaining “an impossible, but desirable, physical or moral idea” (33), her discussion demonstrates how glamour dictates beauty in Hollywood, which then becomes the standard that female consumers emulate. Hayworth’s success had much to do with her light complexion, as McRobbie notes in her discussion of minority actresses, and Hayworth’s ethnicity was not villainized like Anna May Wong’s. Nevertheless, the glamour standards at the time resulted in Hayworth enduring physical, and possible emotional, pain so that she could fit the ideal of whiteness the studio wanted.

Cinematic glamour affects women by setting a standard to emulate, which then translates economically to the magazines, cosmetic surgery, non-surgical beauty procedures, and beauty products women buy. As Haskell notes, some women made conscious decisions to emulate the beauty they see on screen (12). Arguably, not all women take part in the hegemonic standards of mainstream American culture, but scholarship shows that a great many women do. Then one must also wonder how glamour affects women’s perceptions on an unconscious level, even if they do not outwardly conform to dominant beauty standards. Indeed, bell hooks acknowledges

² The concept of “passing” suggests essentialist qualities of whiteness; however, I am using this word in a historical context as Dyer uses it with Leana Horne to illustrate how the studio purposefully hides ethnicity to market minorities as white women.
that moviegoers typically do not watch narrative films for educational purposes, yet she asserts that cinema often teaches viewers about social norms: “Movies not only provide a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class, they provide a shared experience, a common starting point from which diverse audiences can dialogue about these charged issues” (3). Her discussion underscores an important idea about the power of film: cinema influences people’s conceptualizations about highly charged social constructions. Glamour sits at the intersectionality of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other issues that society constantly redefines. Cinema is often a mode of transmission for disseminating hegemonic, and sometimes subversive, ideas about these issues. Therefore, academia should invest further study into understanding the role cinema plays in how Americans conceptualize femininity and beauty.

With the current social outcry for more minority representation in cinema that occurred as a result of April Reign’s 2015 #OscarsSoWhite, there is a need for more scholarship on minority glamour as representation among ethnically diverse Oscar-winning films grow. After feeling frustration at not seeing diversity in the 2015 film nominations by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Reign launched the viral hashtag. In 2016, the Academy’s current president, Cheryl Boone Isaacs, invited three hundred new members in an attempt to diversify (Ashagre). At the time, membership in the Academy was 92% white and 75% male, and the nomination process had “essentially shut-out non-white acting nominees from all twenty spots in the lead and supporting acting roles” (Romo). Reign’s second round of retweeting the hashtag in 2016 started a viral movement in the US about minority representation and inclusion into the Academy. According to Reign, her hashtag is “‘not about saying who is snubbed and who should have been nominated, it’s about opening the discussion more on how the decisions were made, who was cast and who tells the story behind the camera’” (qtd. in Workneh). As the
momentum of the movement grew, the Academy continued its promise for diversity, and in 2018, the Academy invited “a record number of 928 new members [...] across 59 countries [...] to include more women and more people of color” (Romo). In 2019, Spike Lee credits his winning an Oscar for *BlacKkKlansman* to the #OscarsSoWhite movement and then-President Isaacs, and Lee said, “‘They opened up the Academy to make the Academy look more like America’” (qtd. in Groom and Dobuzinskis). In his acceptance speech, *Roma* director Alfonso Cuaron expressed gratitude for the Academy’s award for a film about a character “‘that has historically been relegated to the background of cinema,’” but backstage, he acknowledged that cinematic representation of Hispanics, overall, needs improvement (qtd. in Groom and Dobuzinskis). The lessons of the 2019 Oscars demonstrate that the film industry is recognizing the need for more people of color within careers such as acting, directing, and behind-the-scenes technical work.

**Chapter Summaries**

I apply the same methodology in evaluating glamour in films as I would a written text: a close reading analysis. A dissertation of this nature is qualitative and illustrative since no single definition of glamour exists. I created a framework using select criteria synthesized from a range of sources and included cinematic techniques, such as lighting and camera work. With this framework, I evaluate several actresses’ potential to achieve glamour within twelve movies, and I am using the word “achieve” deliberately to demonstrate that glamour is a result of purposeful action beyond simply beauty or notoriety. My glamour paradigm, which I named *(In)tangible Glamour*, is a principle of organization of my own making in which the data is categorized on a grid showing comparisons between films. (See Table 1.) *(In)tangible Glamour* has two main
categories: the tangible (body, costuming, and makeup) and the intangible (voice, performance, lighting, and camera shots/angles). I use the same grid in all the chapters, and I compare the portrayals of traditional glamour compared with minority glamour. I record qualitative data about the seven characteristics for all actresses, and then illustrate my finding within each chapter.

Table 1. My Framework: (In)tangible Glamour*

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<tr>
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<th>Tangible Elements</th>
<th>Intangible Elements</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hair/Body</td>
<td>Costume</td>
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<td>Movie Scene 1</td>
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<td>Scene 2</td>
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<td>Scene 5</td>
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*I created this grid to record my notes on each of the movies. The grid’s color coding allows for detailed comparison between traditional and minority glamour.

Chapter One, “Ruminations on Current Cinematic Glamour,” is where I outline the evolution of Western culture’s concept of glamour through the centuries before discussing what I view as Contemporary Glamour. Classical age glamour is subdivided into two types with one being more vulnerable to the patriarchal male gaze than the other. I contend that between the Classical Age of Cinema and twenty-first century cinema, these types have developed so that neither glamorous depiction is vulnerable to the gaze, and I relabel evolved types as “Enigmatic
Glamour” and “Heroine Glamour” based on where the type of glamour falls on the sexuality/sensuality spectrum. Both Heroine and Enigmatic Glamour define actresses of the early twentieth century, but in the years approaching the 2020s, the lines between these two types blur a bit, and I discuss how I deconstruct the binary for Current Glamour of 2017-2020. After, I engage with feminist film theory, phenomenology, and theories of the sublime in order to support my arguments about Contemporary Glamour.

Chapter Two, “Enigmatic Glamour,” examines the type of glamour associated with sensual appeal. This chapter outlines the development of one of the strongest glamorous tropes within American culture: The Glamorous Cinderella Transformation. American cinema has numerous direct adaptations of the fairy tales, and there are even more movies that indirectly weave in the fairy tale trope, such as *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). The popularity of the Cinderella archetype within American media suggests a correlation between the American dream and Cinderella’s rag-to-riches transformation. Within this chapter, I illustrate the ways in which Anne Hathaway—as Andy from *The Devil Wears Prada*—and Ziyi Zhang—as Chiyo/Sayuri from *Memoirs of a Geisha*—develop sensual appeal, the ability to control the male gaze without being consumed by it, and the sublime.

Chapter 3, “Heroine Glamour,” studies female action heroes who illustrate the glamour associated with sexual appeal. The glamour of the female action hero wins the sympathy of the audience and reinforces societal ideas of justice, which are common within American cinema. In this chapter, I study the glamour of Carrie-Anne Moss—as Trinity in *The Matrix* (1999)—and Lucy Liu—Alex in 2000 reboot of the television show *Charlie’s Angels*. Female action heroes have roots in the early silent film era, and the characters of Trinity and Alex fight enemies using martial arts cinematography that comes from Hong Kong Cinema. Similar to Enigmatic
Glamour, Heroine Glamour also creates the sublime through a combination of awe and fear displayed by heroines’ crime-fighting skills in the larger-than-life movie theater format.

Chapter Four, “Current Glamour,” addresses how glamour changes from the early 2000s to movies that are made a decade later: *Wonder Woman* (2017), *Black Panther* (2018), and *Aladdin* (2019). The binary split of sensuality versus sexuality that has existed from the Classical Age is less rigid. In fact, I argue that the depictions of Wonder Woman, Nakia, Okoye, Shuri, and Princess Jasmine deconstruct the dichotomy by combining elements of sensuality and sexuality while privileging neither. These glamorous actresses reflect current American society’s call for more diverse representation within Hollywood, especially of women of color in powerful leadership roles. I contend that filmmakers are making leaps in cinematic and cultural evolution in making finer distinctions of representations of glamour than they had a decade ago.

By exploring these seven films, I illustrate the ways in which Contemporary Glamour changes within the twentieth century. I explore how glamour has evolved from the Classical Age of Hollywood to the contemporary era as well as how feminist film theories and phenomenology influence the ways in which audiences engage with cinema. With my framework (*In*)tangible *Glamour*, I assess the potentials of achieving glamour for both traditional actresses and actresses of color. Finally, I illustrate the ways in which glamour is represented currently and possibilities for future interpretive studies.
CHAPTER ONE:
RUMINATIONS ON THE EVOLUTION OF CINEMATIC GLAMOUR

The History and the Mystery

My definition of contemporary glamour combines the etymology of the English word “glamour” with recent glamour scholarship in journals about fashion, economics, and cultural studies; in addition, I also refine my criteria using film theory about the patriarchal male gaze, phenomenology, and sensuality. The earliest written usages of the noun and verb “glamour” in the English language date back to the 1700s and was associated with magic and spells. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the noun “glamour” was a spell of “magical or fictitious beauty,” which connotes that glamour was a deceptive illusion (“Glamour/glamor, n.”). Some scholars believe the word “glamour” to be a “corruption” of the word “grammar,” which had roots in the Celtic “‘gramarye,’ which meant occult learning or magic” (Wilson 95). Other scholars believe the word originated with the Icelandic word for moon, and then a form of this Icelandic usage appears in the Scottish phrase “glam-sight,” meaning “illusion or ‘moonshine’” (Stevens el al. 580). In addition to the noun form, glamour was used as a transitive verb meaning “to charm, enchant” (“Glamour/glamor, v.”). As a transitive verb, glamour suggests a relationship between the person that casts the spell and the person who is affected by the spell. Although contemporary usages of glamour as a noun changed from its older parole (and its verb form hardly exists except in pop culture supernatural romance fiction and cinema), the word still retains some of its associations of magical allure. Even in its noun form, glamour still has some
of that transitive relationship of its older verb form since the glamour ideals of the film stars often transfer to the mainstream, heteronormative female audience. Enigmatic glamour would entrance audiences for a sublime experience, which would transport audiences into the world of the film; this process is reminiscent of the spell-like meaning of the word. In addition, the transitive relationship of the verb form could also apply to how glamour transfers ideals of femininity from the screen to the audience.

As the definition of glamour expanded over a few centuries to include personality traits and mass marketing, glamour became an important cultural and economic aspect of mass culture. During the British Regency, the definition of glamour broadened to include personality as a defining characteristic. Elizabeth Wilson, author of “A Note on Glamour,” discusses how dandies, such as Lord Byron, expanded the definition of glamour: “The individual imposes himself upon society by means not of power but of beauty and personality, unanchored and divorced from traditional social relations” (97). In its earliest usage, glamour had been a primarily visual element, but the changes within the British Regency period mark the expansion of the glamour criteria. A dandy charmed people with words, voice, and mannerisms, which combines the visual with auditory elements. Wilson sees the dandy as an important step in the evolution of glamour because “glamour is primarily an attribute of an individual,” but she notes that contemporary glamour requires more than just beauty and personality: “The appearance of glamour resides, though, or is created in combination with dress, hair, scent, and even mise en scène [sic]. Its end result is the sheen, the mask of perfection, the untouchability and numinous power of the icon [sic]” (105). Her discussion of “the mask of perfection” reinforces the concept that glamour retains its roots in a magical illusion. Just as the earliest usage of the word from the 1700s meant a “fictitious beauty,” Wilson’s discussion of a “sheen” and “mask” suggests that
glamour is a facade created for the audience through individual talent, clothing, and *mise-en-scène*, which is the French film term for setting. Her emphasis on the word “icon” also suggests there is a transformation from average woman into glamour.

While earlier usages of the word “glamour” relied on concepts of enchantment, later usages of glamour rely on purposeful staging of the individual as being somewhat magical. Indeed, glamour is something that is created, but the mark of the Enigmatic glamour lies with a mystical relationship to magic and mystery. In “Nigellissima: A Study of Glamour, Performativity, and Embodiment,” Stevens et al. insist that a person cannot be glamorous unless the audience think of her as magical: “Glamour is a matter of appearance and performance and of manipulating or polishing surfaces, separating the ordinary from the extraordinary, and fabricating the magical” (586). In their analysis of the famous television cook Nigella Lawson’s rise to glamour, they argue that her high social status had not been enough to elevate her into being a glamour icon because “what was missing was the alchemic [sic] combination of these elements to craft a magical representation of her life, and transform a beautiful and privileged woman into a glamorous TV ‘star’” (Stevens, et al. 586). Nigella’s rise into a glamorous icon depended on a crucial element of glamour: magic. The magical element is what drew fans to the British Regency dandy and then to contemporary glamorous stars.

The age of the dandy plays another role in the concept of current glamour because of how the dandy was first to combine glamour with cultural and economic value. Wilson contends that glamour of the dandy “anticipates the rise of spectacular mass culture—for eventually, ‘stars’ replace aristocrats and princes as figures of glamour” (97). The mass culture that Wilson describes is the fan base of the Hollywood studio system. Currid-Halkett and Scott, authors of “The Geography and Celebrity and Glamour: Reflections on Economy, Culture, and Desire in
the City,” consider the fan base and branding aspect of glamour to be essential to glamour’s definition. They emphasize that glamour cannot exist without audience adoration: “Equally, celebrity and glamour are intertwined with consumers’ tastes and impulses in regard to entertainment and distraction, especially in so far as they respond to subliminal desires and fantasies within selected fractions of the market” (9). Glamour cannot exist in a vacuum: it must be reinforced by a plethora of fans. The marketing of glamorous Hollywood stars translated into the economics of mass consumer culture: “Stars were and are primarily performers, but are then transformed into objects of fetishization or fascination, which in turn ensures that the products associated with them are stamped with a unique and powerful brand [...] generating high economic rents and related spillover revenues” (4). Much like the notoriety of the dandies, Hollywood stars’ personalities and glamour made them powerful, and endorsements of powerful people are worth social and economic capital.

The transitive, economic effects of glamour can be seen in the industries that are dedicated to helping the average person achieve glamour. In the 1900s, “glamourize” came into usage as “to make glamorous or attractive” as women sought to adorn themselves with clothing and makeup similar to what Hollywood stars used (“Glamorize, glamourize, v.”). This relatively new verb indicates that glamour changed from being a deceptive illusion to something desirable that can be attained by the average person. At least, that is what the industry would have their customers believe with a plethora of women’s magazines featuring articles discussing techniques for average heteronormative women to achieve their potentials of glamour.

Many scholars write about the everyday woman’s mimicry of glamour and how the desire for emulation feeds into mass consumer culture. In the 1930s, popular women’s magazines, such Picturegoer and Film Fashionland, featured cosmetics and beauty products,
clothes similar to those worn by glamorous actresses, and clothing patterns for women to make those clothes at home (Dyhouse 55). Susan Douglas, author of Where the Girls Are: Growing Up Female with the Mass Media, writes about how numerous young women in the 1960s would study “advice columns” in women’s magazines, such as Seventeen, Glamour, 'Teen [sic], and Mademoiselle; these magazines would appeal to women’s desires to achieve “flawless skin, thick, shiny hair, a slender figure, and great clothes” (99). Her description of “lemminglike [sic] in our desire to imitate what we saw in Seventeen and Glamour” suggests that the media and consumer industry of glamour teaches women important roles about feminine beauty (Douglas 103). The magazine readers would then glamourize themselves in the hopes of achieving ideal feminine desirability. Currid-Halkett and Scott’s 2013 article emphasizes the importance of glamour in contemporary global markets: “Celebrities and the glamour that they radiate are now essential components of the commodity system of capitalism” (3). Sarah Baker’s 2017 article “A Glamorous Feminism by Design?” offers an explanation for the link between glamour, femininity, desirability, and consumerism: “Glamour is one vision of what ‘the good life’ looks like, whereby the consumption of things can supposedly make life more pleasurable and attractive [...] the act of putting on red lipstick is glamorous by association with aspirational Hollywood icons” (58). Glamour still appeals in the twenty-first century American culture (which then feeds into global markets) because of the way that glamour suggests to the average woman that she, too, can achieve the ideal of femininity. Thus, glamour is inexorably tied to consumerism because of the products that are marketed to consumers who hope to achieve the ideals of femininity and beauty.

Nevertheless, achieving a glamorous look is not its own reward because glamour has more rewards than superficial satisfaction. In a manner similar to how femme fatales use their
glamour to overcome the obstacles of patriarchal culture, audiences of glamorous actresses also want to use glamour to achieve agency: “Glamorous practices are the dreams of transformation. Glamour enables femininity to operate as a form of cultural capital (even if only temporary), and the material practices of glamour can be a way out of the norms of class, gender, and sexuality” (Baker 65). Although glamour draws on some traditionally gendered feminine ideals of womanhood, glamour also paradoxically uses femininity to subvert hegemonic norms. Just as glamorous women in film use their glamour as a form of capital, the audiences hope to achieve cultural capital as well. Baker notes that “glamorous practices” create a “temporary state” because the illusion cannot be maintained by the average woman: “Glamorous materials deteriorate and glamorous practices cannot ultimately transcend the everyday; red nail polish is always chipped at the end” (66). The materials that Baker refers to would be tangible items like makeup, costume, and nail polish. I would argue that audiences learn to adapt some of the intangible aspects of glamour as well, such as voice, mannerisms, and attitude. Nevertheless, there are intangible aspects of glamour that cannot be replicated outside of cinema, such as lighting and camera angles, and the lack of these elements also highlight the constructiveness of glamour as well as the difficulty of replicating the cinematic version of glamour. However, a fan’s inability to replicate glamour fully does not undermine her ability to use glamour as cultural capital.

The exposure of glamour’s artifice is a powerful moment of questioning for the average woman. A chip in red nail polish is a symbol of imperfection and, thus, disrupts the illusion of flawlessness. Baker sees this breakdown of glamour as a mode of resistance to unrealistic ideals for women: “The everyday experience of glamour demonstrates the limits of heteronormative femininity, that nobody fits the white, heterosexual, respectable vision of perfection held up as
desirable. From this failure [...] a location for questioning and resisting traditional gender roles [arises]” (66). According to Baker, when average women try to embody the ideals of glamour, they also realize the impossibility of imitating what they can see on screen, which would lead to questioning gender roles. In some respects, she does make a fair point that glamour is unsustainable, but I argue that the continued existence of women’s magazines and beauty products dedicated to helping women achieve glamour suggests that seeing the chipped nail polish is not enough to help women question the constructiveness of hegemonic norms. Since exposing the illusion is not sufficient to challenge hegemonic status quo, I contend that the answer to how glamour changes cultural ideas of femininity lies within diverse representations of glamorous actresses.

**Contemporary Glamour: Enigmatic, Heroine, and Current**

Both types of Classical Era glamour adapted to the changing standards of femininity within American culture to thrive within American twenty-first century cinema. According to Cheng, the two types of glamour within the Classical Age are a “pearlized, feminine, vulnerable surface” and a “shellacked beauty,” and she views the shellacked beauty as resistant to male gaze while the pearlized was not (1031-1032). Cheng’s description of the pearlized type suggests that actresses styled in this type of glamour projected a gendered femininity that aligned with traditional patriarchal views of the feminine as passive objects of the male gaze. Cheng’s description of the two types are still relevant in new categories of glamour within twenty-first century cinema.

I deconstruct Cheng’s dichotomy in order to create my own scale to categorize twenty-first century glamour. Those binary differences she describes became polar ends of the spectrum
that I created to categorize performance based on the use of sensual or sexual glamour. (See Table 2.) I argue that contemporary performances of pearlized glamour, which I label “Enigmatic Glamour,” demonstrate that a more traditionally aligned gendered feminine glamour can express vulnerability without making the actress an object of the male gaze. Enigmatic glamour appears in characters who are very fashionable or have a magical mystique about them. In addition, I redefine Cheng’s shellacked glamour—which keeps the actress removed from the audience—as “Heroine glamour,” and I contend that this type of glamour expresses strength without alienating the audience. Heroine Glamour appears in the roles of the action heroes and superheroes: the characters are tough when they need to fight crime, but they also have multidimensional personalities that can also express vulnerability without being perceived as weak. Heroine Glamour relies primarily on sexuality while Enigmatic Glamour relies primarily on sensuality. Both types of glamour within the early twenty-first century display resilience, confidence, leadership, and strength, and both transport viewers into the sublime. Current glamour, from 2017-2020, exists within the middle of the spectrum, possessing characteristics of both Enigmatic and Heroine Glamour.

Table 2. Glamour Spectrum of Sensuality/Sexuality*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sensuality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enigmatic Glamour</td>
<td>Current Glamour</td>
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| *The Devil Wears Prada*  
*Memoirs of a Geisha* | *Wonder Woman*  
*Black Panther*  
*Aladdin* | *The Matrix*  
*Charlie’s Angels* |

*I created this glamour spectrum to show how twenty-first century films fall upon differing points of a scale of sensuality/sexuality.*
While I acknowledge that many of the feminist film theorists’ ideas about the gaze certainly apply to some of the pearlized glamour of the Classical Era, I also question if the theorists’ viewpoints of the male gaze would change upon seeing the differing portrayals of glamour within the twenty-first century. According to leading 1980’s film theorist Laura Mulvey, the male patriarchal gaze plays an important role in shaping and controlling the woman on screen: “male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly” (Mulvey 19). Prominent film theorist Sue Thornham, in particular, helps readers understand just how Mulvey’s discussion of stylization is achieved through directorial vision and camera techniques: “What we see, as spectators, is determined by the gaze of the camera, and that in turn is aligned, through point--of--view shots, with the gaze of the film's characters at each other [...] the look of the central male character which is privileged, so that we see events largely through his eyes and identify with his gaze” (Thornham 218). According to Thornham, not only does a male director’s point of view shape the way that camera captures images of women, but the audience tends to align their viewpoint with the male character’s. References to Mulvey’s work appear in numerous scholarship decades later, and theorists situate their viewpoints within reference to where they stand regarding Mulvey’s scholarship.

The underlying premise of why the audience would align with the male viewpoint becomes even more clear when reading Shohini Chaudhuri’s contextualization of Claire Johnston’s theories of cinematic iconography. According to Chaudhuri, a male director shapes the portrayal of a female actress, and thus, Hollywood movies reinforce “mythical female stereotypes” about the various roles that women have in society (27). The word “mythical” refers to a Cultural Studies concept by Roland Barthes about the way that culture adds “a second
Chaudhuri explains that Johnston sees reinforcement of patriarchal ideals about woman-as-object within movies that are directed by men, but she views films by early female directors like Ida Lupino as disrupting patriarchal mythologies. Johnston makes an excellent point in seeing how depictions can disrupt mythologies based on the director's input, and I posit to take this same logic further. As feminism and queer theory lead to a wider acceptance of the fluidity of gender within the past two decades, cinema has reflected more fluidity in the portrayal of masculinity and femininity. This fluidity affects the second semiological level as well, which would lead to new mythologies. Therefore, both male and female directors would most likely be operating in constructing different mythologies than the 1980s when Mulvey published. Possibilities exist for different readings of the gaze when it comes to contemporary glamour.

Film scholar Samantha Lindop, author of *Postfeminism and the Fatale Figure in Neo-Noir Cinema*, acknowledges the limitations of relying too heavily on Mulvey's work and offers another approach of understanding the gaze. She discusses how Mulvey’s ideas were popular at a time when psychoanalysis was popular in feminist theory, but she stresses that Mulvey’s work leaves a gap in “consider[ing] female, gay, and lesbian spectators” (27). Although Lindop’s scholarship deals mainly with reexamining the femme fatales of film noir, her ideas provide another way to view female protagonists that attributes them more power than gaze theory: “By moving away from psychoanalysis, spectatorship, and the gaze, to examine psychological considerations and narrative content, the *femme fatale* can very often be viewed sympathetically” (32). The term “femme fatale” translates from French as “fatal woman,” and Lindop says that the term originated in 1955 when Raymond Borde and Etienne Chaumeton “defined the figure as a
‘new type of woman,’ one who is as fatal for herself as she is to those who become entangled in her schemes” (1). The “new type of woman” was actually a woman who craved a career and independence outside of the home. When American men left home and their jobs to fight in World War II, American women were encouraged to take traditionally male positions in the workforce. The negative cultural perception of the femme fatale correlated with 1940s societal backlash against women who wanted to continue working outside the home after World War II ended (48). The femme fatale became a symbol of a woman who wanted a lifestyle outside of marriage and staying at home to raise children, and movies depicted her as dangerous in order to maintain the status quo of male dominance. Douglas writes that femme fatales were thought of as “black widow spiders, seductresses, and gun-crazy bitches whose appetites for money and sex drove men to ruin” (Douglas 48). In movies, the hazards they posed to the male characters suggested to the audience that women who wanted independence from the home were dangerous.

The dangers femme fatales posed to male characters can be observed in the actions of Phyllis Dietrichson, played by Barbara Stanwyck, in Double Indemnity (1944). Phyllis first piques Walter Neff’s sexual interest by greeting him in a towel, and when she banter with Neff while he promotes insurance, she crosses her legs in a way that draws his gaze to the anklet on her bare ankle. Her “black widow” character unveils as the audience learns that she murdered the first Mrs. Dietrichson, manipulated Neff to kill Mr. Dietrichson (her husband), and has an affair with Nino Zachetti so that he would kill Neff for her. She uses her sexuality to manipulate all the men in her life, and when Neff asks if her expressions of love had been real, she confesses, “No, I never loved you, Walter, not you or anybody else. I’m rotten to the heart. I used you, just as you said” (Double Indemnity). Phyllis’s statement reinforces the concept that femme fatales deceive men without ever having romantic feelings, and Double Indemnity is one of many noir movies in
which cunning, independent women were depicted as dangerous. The negative perceptions of the
dame fatale persisted for decades, but Lindop sees a post-feminist reading as a way to feel
sympathy and admiration for a character that 1980s and 1990s feminist film theories could not
find redeemable.

Lindop’s post-feminist readings of femme fatale could lead to more positive
interpretations of the character as well as provide a way to explain why contemporary glamour is
not oppressed by the gaze as pearlized glamour had been. Rather than become an object of the
gaze, the femme fatale commands the gaze of the male characters and the audience without being
dominated by them. Lindop uses the example of Ava Gardner in *The Killers* (1946): “She turns,
and even though there are several people in the frame the camera draws the spectator’s gaze in
with that of an instantly besotted Ole, through the crowd to her like a magnet” (21). Lindop
describes Gardner’s character as “very glamorous and seductive” and “overtly feminine and
erotic, confidently using the power of her sexuality as a means to an end” (21-22). Rather than be
crushed into an object of the gaze, the femme fatales—like Gardner’s character—manipulate the
expectations of sexist men to achieve their goals during a time period in which women did not
have much agency outside of marriage.

Similar to the femme fatale, contemporary glamour allows the actress to control the gaze
and give her agency in situations where male privilege would otherwise disenfranchise her. Since
twenty-first century glamorous characters are not encumbered by the same backlash against
strong female characters as the femme fatale faced after World War II, glamorous women can
achieve their goals without sacrificing others’ lives in the pursuit. An example of manipulation
of the gaze occurs within *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005) when Sayuri, played by Ziyi Zhang, draws
men’s attention to her so that their patronage pays her debt to the *okiya* (geisha house) and wins
her freedom. She draws male attention without becoming an object for male sexual gratification. Sayuri’s cunning is praised and rewarded, and her plans to rise in fame and power does not cause the death of male characters or her female rivals.

Contemporary glamour also attracts the gaze of the audience, but the relationship between viewer and actress differs from the patriarchal gaze. In fact, actresses’ glamour transports viewers to a state of sublime awe, which is similar to how a painting could invoke the sublime within an appreciator of art. Throughout the centuries, Western philosophers contribute their ideas on the sublime, and the Ancient Greek philosopher Dionysius Longinus (though that might have been his real name) writes the “first significant treatment” of the sublime in his first century C.E. work *On Sublimity* (Fawver 10). Longinus describes the sublime as an “elevation” inspired by literature: “[... our soul is uplifted by the true sublime; it takes a proud flight and is filled with joy and vaunting, as though it had itself produced what it has heard” (Roberts 55-57). Longinus’s link between art and the sublime suggests that art ignites the senses of the human body, so a person feels an elevation, or joy, that the art conveys. Longinus’s link between art and the sublime continues to exist in current usage of the word. The Oxford English Dictionary states that two of the current definitions of the noun and adjective usage of the word “sublime” derives from the writings of Romantic philosopher Edmund Burke: “Of a feature of nature or art: that fills the mind with a sense of overwhelming grandeur or irresistible power; that inspires awe, great reverence, or other high emotion, by reason of its beauty, vastness, or grandeur” (“Sublime, adj. and n.”). Therefore, a person who encounters a work that inspires heightened feelings of awe has encountered the sublime. Not all cinema invokes the sublime, and Enigmatic Glamour is a cinematic “feature [...] of art” that conveys a sublime aesthetic with the combination of beauty (tangible elements) with intangible elements, such as voice, attitude, lighting, and camera shots.
Malcom Barnard, author of “The Body, the Garment, and the Kantian Sublime in Fashion,” contextualizes Burke’s argument that “beauty” alone is not sublime: “[Burke] argued that the sublime was distinct from being beautiful in being something that arouses in people the physiological and emotional effects of fear, if not horror, as well as attraction” (24). Burke lived during a time before cinema, but the feeling of fear mixed with awe would probably be the same feelings a person has upon entering a cathedral: the grandeur and the architecture evoke awe while also reminding the person of their infinitesimal size in comparison to a deity. In this situation, the “fear” that the person feels is not supposed to cause apprehension of going to the cathedral; rather, the viewer feels a version of heightened senses that borders on the overwhelming and is filled with a sense of awe and fascination. Thus, glamour works in a similar fashion: the audience is not feeling “fear” but rather a sense of overwhelming, heightened sensation while also feeling drawn to the actress.

The heightened sensation that audiences feel correlates to the film's capacity to engage the audience, which explains glamour’s ability to evoke the emotions associated with the sublime. Phenomenology scholar Vivian Sobchack, author of *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, writes about how the human body is a “sense-making” site in which the “lived body” is “making conscious sense of our carnal senses” with the physical world around, which happens when someone is “watching a film” (1). Her ideas on the relationship between the viewer and the images on screen offers an explanation for the mysterious way in which glamour invokes the sublime aesthetic. Sobchack draws on Umberto Eco’s ideas about how cinema creates a space in-between “bodily knowing” and “a peculiar kind of non-knowing” that causes “a gap which sometimes may register as a sense of dread in the pit of the stomach, or in a soaring, euphoric sensation” (qtd. in Sobchack 75). Eco’s ideas suggest that the engagement
within cinema causes sensual feelings in the viewers, which Sobchack expands upon when she writes about how a film causes her to feel sensations that are aroused by the content on screen and not her own lived body: “I am sensually solicited, provoked by, and consciously located in the figural objects that are elsewhere (on the screen where my senses partially grasp them, I am not focused on my own body’s sensual particularity either)” (78). Sobchack suggests that her awareness of her lived body’s senses dulls as she becomes engrossed in the film. One could interpret that as Sobchack not being aware of how her clothes feel on her skin or ambient noises in the movie theater. Sobchack gives the example of watching a scene from The Piano where she sees wool clothing and how her “sense of touch [...] is intensified. My skin becomes extremely, if generally, sensitized” (78). She identified with the textures presented on screen, and her body reacted as if she could almost touch the wool. Glamour works under the same premise: the audience needs to have some emotional connection to the film, which then causes sensory reactions. Therefore, the elements of the In(tangible) glamour appeal to a variety of human senses: the actress’s extravagant, fashionable clothing and makeup appeals to the audience’s sense of touch, the actress’s beauty appeals to the audience’s sight and desires, and the actress’s voice appeals to the audience’s hearing.

Sobchack’s concepts of bodies as sense-making sites helps explain the way in which glamour appeals to audiences. All types of glamour exist on a continuum of sensuality and sexuality: Enigmatic Glamour is on the sensual side of the spectrum, and Heroine Glamour is on the sexual side. According to Alcira Alizade, author of Feminine Sensuality, sensuality and sexuality are different experiences. Alizade considers sexuality as belonging to the “field of eroticism” but sensuality is “freely floating energy” and “appeals to the senses whose stimulation can give rise to an enormous voluptuousness that is totally alien to the physiology of sexuality”
While both sexuality and sensuality can be triggered by stimulations of the body, sexuality is limited to the erogenous zones. Sensuality is the appreciation of stimuli to the five senses in more areas of the human body than simply orifices, and Alizade says that sensuality appeals to “an invisible sense, which implies the elevation of the senses above corporeality [...] where there is room for the transcendental, the beautiful, and the sublime” (3). Hence, sexuality is limited to the physical while sensuality begins with physical sensation and leads to sublime transcendence. Enigmatic Glamour relies on a sensual appeal because audiences are enamored with the actresses even if the characters are demure in terms of sexual appeal. Furthermore, sensual appeals help explain why heterosexual women are drawn to the Enigmatic Glamour: female fans are drawn in by the sublime pleasure they experience while watching a film. The glamour of the actress and the power of these heightened senses transport the audience into the sublime.

While Alizade privileges sensuality over sexuality in experiencing the sublime, I contend that Heroine Glamour also creates moments of the sublime. Kurt Fawver, author of The Terror of Possibility: A Re-evaluation and Reconception of the Sublime Aesthetic, argues that the medium of film uses the “near-entirety of the human sensorium to achieve its fullest realization” of the cinematic sublime aesthetic, which he describes as “a feeling of terror and awe evoked by things that are of great power and size” (118). The concepts of power and size that he mentions can be interpreted in several ways. First, the criterion of size can be explained by how closeups of glamorous actresses’ faces fill up several feet of the actual movie screen, which gives the impression that glamorous actresses are larger than life. While both types of glamour feature closeups, Enigmatic Glamour often uses closeups to convey emotional scenes, but in Heroine Glamour, medium close-ups and closeups are used to convey assertiveness and power during
critical action scenes. For example, in *The Matrix* (1999), a closeup shows Trinity assuming command as the new ranking officer, and she forces Neo to accept that she will accompany him to rescue Morpheus. Her determined visage fills the screen, and the viewer feels Neo’s nervousness before he yields. This simultaneous feeling of terror and awe is a different kind of sublime than Alizade’s description of heightened sensation, and Fawver’s definition aligns closely with Burke’s theories. Second, Heroine Glamour is aligned with both the metaphorical and actual power of the characters: Trinity is a gritty warrior in *The Matrix*, Alex is a crime-fighting vigilante in *Charlie’s Angels* (2000), Diana is an awe-inspiring superhero in *Wonder Woman* (2017), Princess Jasmine is a staunch advocate for her people in *Aladdin* (2019), and the Wakanda warriors Nakia, Okoye, and Shuri are courageous champions of justice in *Black Panther* (2018). All of these glamorous characters are confident, intelligent, and powerful—both socially and politically. The glamour of the actresses who play these parts inspires both awe and fear, and the glamour transports the audience to a heightened state of reverence and the sublime.
The Glamorous “Cinderella” Transformation

One of the most enduring Enigmatic Glamour tropes within American cinema is a Cinderella-like transformation of a poor, uncouth girl into a glamorous, successful lady of high society. According to Jill Rudy, one of the editors of *The Routledge Companion to Media and Fairy-tale Cultures*, the fairy tale of “Cinderella” is a “perennial fairy-tale favorite” and can be found in the “stories from around the world: Chinese, Egyptian, North American Indigenous, Mexican, Russian” because “it speaks to universal longings for acceptance, for social wealth, and for relief from drudgery and abuse” (5). The version of Cinderella most commonly known in Western culture is Charles Perrault’s “Cendrillon,” in which a fairy godmother transforms various objects to attire Cinderella for the ball where she meets a prince who wants to marry her (Berst 7). Perrault’s version of Cinderella evolved into the story that contemporary Americans know, and “as of 2016, the International Fairy Tale Filmography (IFTF) listed 132 ‘Cinderella’ versions” (Rudy 5). The story of Cinderella plays an important role in Western society due to its constant retelling.

Apart from the many direct adaptations of the Cinderella tale (in which the protagonist is named Cinderella and follows the fairy tale pattern), there are numerous indirect adaptations of the Cinderella trope in twentieth century films (in which the protagonist suffers in poverty, meets
a helpful person who can transform her to a higher social station, and finds happiness with a prince). Three movies that fit this indirect pattern are *My Fair Lady* (1964), *Pretty Woman* (1990), and *She’s All That* (1999). The three movies feature renowned actresses, and all three films suggest that glamorous transformation is the route needed for the protagonists to find happiness. In *Pretty Woman*, prostitute Vivian Ward (Julia Roberts) is aided by hotel manager Barney Thompson (in the fairy godmother role) who coordinates her attire and teaches her formal dinner etiquette so that she can impress her “prince” and achieve happiness. Vivian’s transformation is a sensual one, and the audience enjoys her excitement in trying new clothes, eating new foods, and socializing with the wealthy class during a polo match (*Pretty Woman*). Her “Cinderella” transformation is glamorous and desirable, which explains the continued popularity of this movie in the Romantic Comedy genre. Thus, the popularity of both direct and indirect retellings of the Cinderella story within American culture suggests a societal need for this type of story within twentieth century cinema.

Indeed, expert fairytale scholar Jack Zipes, author of *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, underscores the importance of fairy tales as an integral part of the formation and upkeep of societies. Zipes discusses how fairy tales derive from an oral tradition that was not for children’s entertainment (unlike the contemporary perception of fairy tales within Western society), and he argues that fairy tales are “part and parcel of a general civilizing process” in which “different social institutions and individual writers and artists [sic] used the tale either to bring about conformity or to question the dominant civilizing process of a society” (x-xi). Furthermore, fairy tales are used “to motivate its [society’s] members to cooperate and co-exist in peaceful ways,” and Zipes argues that contemporary reiterations of fairy tales “compel storytellers and listeners alike to
explore the Freudian question of why humans are so discontent with civilization” (x). Fairy tales feature protagonists who go on a “quest” to find “helpful people [...] that will enable protagonists to transform themselves and their environment and make the world more suitable for living in peace and contentment” (x). Zipes’s theories help explain why the glamorous Cinderella story continues into twenty-first century cinema: the story motivates viewers to think that with a glamorous transformation, they can find as much happiness and social acceptance as the Cinderella-like protagonist.

*The Devil Wears Prada* and *Memoirs of a Geisha* include Cinderella motifs: a Cinderella-like protagonist, an evil stepmother, stepsisters that are pitted against Cinderella, and a fairy godmother-like character who aids in Cinderella’s transformation. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, the Cinderella-like protagonist Andy Sachs, played by Anne Hathaway, transforms from a dowdy, self-conscious college-grad to a glamorous, successful career-woman in the fashion industry. Although Andy comes from a middle-class background, she lives in a cramped New York apartment, earns barely enough to afford rent, and toils as an assistant to the editor-in-chief of *Runway* fashion magazine, Miranda Priestly. The character of Miranda, played by Meryl Streep, is the evil stepmother trope of the fairy tale, but her depiction aligns with the Perrault version of the stepmother: “The stepmother is not simply evil, as in other versions, but proud, haughty, and a bit to be pitied” (Berst 7). Miranda often assigns Andy to do impossible tasks that cut into Andy’s personal time, such as booking Miranda a flight out of Miami during a hurricane. Miranda’s arduous expectations test Andy’s morals and loyalties, but the movie also shows us that Miranda is a sympathetic character; no matter how successful Miranda is in business, the media will exploit any weaknesses or romantic failures because a patriarchal society judges her more harshly than a man in the same career. Miranda pits her primary assistant Emily against
Andy, just as Cinderella's stepmother does with Cinderella’s stepsisters, but Andy remains loyal throughout the movie and feels sympathy for Miranda’s plight with the media. Finally, the last element of the Cinderella story occurs when Andy has a glamorous transformation with the help of a character named Nigel, who loosely assumes the role of a fairy godmother. Nigel gives Andy couture clothes that designers send to *Runway*, helps coordinate a makeup and hair makeover, and imparts advice that helps Andy transform from the “sad little person” he once called Andy into a glamorous woman.

*Memoirs of a Geisha* features all four types of characters plus a glamorous transformation of an orphaned servant girl into an enchanting geisha. The Cinderella-like protagonist is Chiyo, who is later played by Ziyi Zhang when she becomes an adult, enters the geisha profession, and adopts the name of Sayuri. Just like Cinderella, Chiyo’s parents die when she is young, and she becomes a servant girl working in an okiya, which is a geisha house. The literal definition of the word *geisha* means “‘artist,’” and Japanese geisha are professionally trained in the enjoyment of aesthetic pleasure (Iwasaki 1-2). Dating back to the mid-1800s, the geisha tradition allowed women to exist outside the “confines of marriage tradition,” and geisha are professional entertainers trained in music, song, and dance (Prasso 200). Chiyo’s hopes of becoming a geisha are ruined when she tries to run away from the okiya, and she spends her youth toiling as a maid. The stepmother character is Mother, a tough businesswoman who runs the okiya, and the stepsister characters are the popular geisha Hatsumomo and her protege Pumpkin. Hatsumomo is jealous of Chiyo’s beauty and fears Chiyo becoming a geisha, so she treats Chiyo with cruelty. Chiyo’s transformation into the geisha Sayuri occurs when she is trained by her fairy godmother, Mameha, who is Hatsumomo’s professional rival. Mameha teaches Chiyo how to walk, behave,
dress, and flirt as a geisha, so Chiyo can earn enough money to eliminate her debt to the okiya and win the heart of the “prince” she desires.

Both of these protagonists transform into glamorous, successful, and desirable women who navigate wealthy social circles with ease. These Cinderella-like characters use their sensuality to attract both their peers and the audience alike, which is a key component of Enigmatic Glamour. The actresses’ performances elevate the audiences’ senses into the realm of the sublime, so the audiences are in a state of awe. In what follows, I will compare the elements of (In)Tangible Glamour between Andy, a traditionally glamorous actress from The Devil Wears Prada, and Chiyo, an Asian actress from Memoirs of a Geisha.

When Andy and young Chiyo are introduced into their respective films, the directors call attention to their humble backgrounds, just like Cinderella. According to Rudy, the protagonists of fairytale stories are “often clueless [...] yet engaging” and have “reversals of fortune” (7). The Devil Wears Prada begins with Andy interviewing at Runway magazine, and her appearance shows that she neither understands how to dress appropriately for an interview nor style her hair. She wears a casual beige jacket that is not business attire, a lilac sweater vest, and a rumpled, white button-up blouse. The outfit not only suggests a lack of professionalism, but also a sense of laziness in neglecting to iron her shirt. Her slightly disheveled hairstyle reinforces her naïveté when interviewing at a fashion magazine: her choppy hair is not the same length, has no layers to give shape, is slightly frizzy, and is plainly parted down the middle. Like Cinderella, Andy depends on her hard work to speak louder than her appearance, which she proclaims to Miranda when she realizes that she might not be chosen for the job: "You're right. I don't fit in here. I'm not skinny or glamorous, and I don't know that much about fashion. But I'm smart. I learn fast, and I will work hard" (The Devil Wears Prada). Andy’s mention of the word “glamorous”
reinforces the idea that glamour is closely tied to fashion and beauty, and she positions herself in opposition to that. She believes that her work ethic will compensate for her lack of glamour, and she fails to realize that glamour could complement her natural talents and be an integral part of her success at Runway.

In Memoirs of a Geisha, Chiyo’s reversal of fortune occurs almost midway through the movie when she becomes the geisha Sayuri, but until her fairy godmother arrives, she faces the difficult life of a servant in the okiya. The audience is introduced to the adult Chiyo when Pumpkin has her debut as a geisha, and the most poignant moment of the scene occurs when Chiyo stands at the okiya’s gate. The camera shows a medium close-up shot of Chiyo with her eyes slightly above eye-level, which creates an uneasiness in the viewer. Chiyo stands in the middle, pauses to watch Pumpkin leave, and pulls the wooden gate closed. The slats of the gate make her appear like she is locked in a cage, and her unusual, blue eyes are framed between the slats. The symbolism of the gate suggests that she leads a life of drudgery like Cinderella, and at this point in her life, she has no hope that her fortune will improve. Even her costume reinforces her dreary state: Chiyo wears a pale blue servant’s kimono, and her hair is demurely pulled back into a low ponytail. She is softly lit, and she looks like she could just fade into the shadows if her life continues on the same trajectory (Memoirs of a Geisha). Although she made an offering at a temple as a child hoping that her life would change, her status as a maid prevents her from achieving the glamour of a geisha.

The intervention of the fairy godmother-like character enables both women to realize their potentials to achieve glamour. When Nigel helps Andy with her makeover, he comments that he is not sure he has any couture clothing in the Runway closet that would fit Andy’s size six body, and his comment reinforces the extreme standards of the fashion industry. In an earlier
scene, Nigel remarks on the ever-narrowing waist size standards of the industry, where size zero has replaced size two in desirability and a size six “is the new fourteen” (*The Devil Wears Prada*). A slim figure has been the standard of glamorous female figures since the Classical Age, and “most had to do battle with their shape through diet, exercise, and the careful cut of clothes” (Dyhouse 38). For example, Rita Hayworth, dieted to fit the demanding body sizes of the time (McLean 33), and Elizabeth Arden ran a salon filled with exercise machines dedicated to slimming down “‘every fat ass in the world’” (qtd in Dyhouse 39). Andy also loses enough weight to drop a dress size in the months after her glamorous transformation, but the film does not show how. She admits—to Nigel’s astonishment—that she is a size four, and they both celebrate the weight loss as a victory. Thus, the movie *The Devil Wears Prada* reinforces the strictly slender body size requirements of Classical Age Cinema.

Andy’s transformation into an Enigmatic Woman encompasses more than just a makeover of makeup, hair, and clothing; she has a newfound confidence that amazes her coworkers and, later, Miranda. In her interview with Miranda, Andy’s sentences trailed off as her insecurity grew. Once hired, she used a naive charm as a way of coping with her lack of confidence in her job. However, after her Cinderella-transformation, she displays a new-found self-assuredness, and the cinematography of the post-transformation scene, costuming, and dialogue all demonstrate this change. The stepsister-character, Emily, starts to complain about Andy to a coworker when Emily’s words were cut off by Andy’s entrance. Emily remarks, “I knew from the moment I saw her that she was going to be a complete and utter disas—,” but then she pauses mid-word to stare open-mouthed at Andy. The camera switches to a long shot of Andy opening the double doors to the office and walks in as trendy upbeat soundtrack plays. Her body looks slimmer in form fitting clothing. Her hair is now one length, straightened, and has
face-framing layers with thick front bangs going slightly past her eyebrows. She wears a couture jacket, necklaces, skinny leather pants, Chanel boots, and a fancy purse. The camera pans left as Andy walks to her desk, doing a hair flip to show off her new style, as if she were a glamorous actress on the red carpet. The camera switches to a medium long shot of Andy answering the phone confidently and handling a client named “Patrick” with whom she had struggled via telephone in the beginning of her career (*The Devil Wears Prada*). The medium camera shot allows the audience to see the entirety of the tangible aspects of Andy’s transformation, and the shot-reverse-shots between Andy and Emily then highlights Emily’s astonishment of Andy’s newfound glamour. However, the dialogue of Andy’s phone call with Patrick, and her subsequent conversation with Emily underscores the intangible aspects of Andy’s transformation: Andy has poise that she lacked before.

As an Enigmatic Woman, Andy can control the gaze of males without being consumed by the patriarchal male gaze. The evening of her transformation, Andy waits outside the restaurant where her boyfriend, Nate, works. Nate leaves the restaurant, almost walks past where she leans against a car, and does a double take. The high angle shot looks down at Andy's Chanel boots, pans up her leather pants over her jacket, and shows a medium shot of her leaning on a black car with her arms crossed casually. Her eyes are softly focused on the ground in front of her before she looks directly at him. Her ability to stop him in his tracks shows that she commands the gaze. The non-diegetic soundtrack of Madonna's "Vogue" plays during the panning shot, which further highlights aspects of Andy’s glamour. The lyrics of the song list eleven Classical glamorous actresses—such as Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe, and Marlene Dietrich—as well as brief descriptions of their glamour: “on the cover of a magazine,” “picture of a beauty queen,” “they had style, they had grace,” and “ladies with an attitude” (Madonna).
The juxtaposition of this song with Andy’s makeover suggests that Andy is as glamorous as those Classical actresses now that she has embraced all aspects of her career in a fashion magazine. Not only does she have the physical look of glamour, but she now possesses the intangible aspects of grace and attitude, which is apparent in the way that Andy casually leans on the car and command’s the gaze of her boyfriend.

The song “Vogue” also transitions into a montage of various couture outfits that Andy wears in the subsequent weeks working at Runway. Andy’s transformation is a working-class story of Cinderella dancing at the ball. However, scholars like Lillian Barger, author of “Backlash: From Nine to Five to The Devil Wears Prada” sees the montage as reminiscent of another fairytale: “The awkward duckling becomes a graceful and desirable swan via consumption” (347). Barger’s analysis alludes to the fairytale of the Ugly Duckling, in which a swan chick raised as a duckling feels inadequate when its peers become handsome ducks, but the chick later matures into a beautiful swan. The premise of the story is a misidentification, and Barger’s use of the folktale suggests that Andy is only consuming products when she was a swan all along. However, Barger’s analysis fails to take into consideration the non-physical aspects of Andy’s transformation, such as the boosted self-confidence that is an integral aspect of glamour. Indeed, Andy’s transformation is not a transition from misidentification to identification, as the fairytale of the Ugly Duckling suggests, but rather a transformation from a life of drudgery and abuse to a glamorous life of poise and success.

Andy’s embrace of glamour raises important questions as to whether glamour changes Andy’s identity or if glamour simply enhances the natural talents she possesses. When Andy asks Nate what he thinks about her transformation, and he replies, “Uh, I think we better get out of here before my girlfriend sees me” (The Devil Wears Prada). Nate’s joke about “before my
girlfriend sees me” suggests Andy’s glamorous side has made her into an entirely different person; this joke foreshadows Andy’s struggle with glamour and identity for the rest of the movie. Her glamour gives her respect and confidence at work, but she encounters conflicts with her boyfriend and her friends about her transformation. Andy’s long-time best friend Lilly calls Andy a “glamazon” as an insult when Lilly misinterprets an out-of-context moment when Andy talks with a handsome man. The word “glamazon” usually has positive usages connotations; according to Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary, the first usages of the word dates back to 1943 and means, “an exceptionally glamorous, tall, and self-assured woman” (“Glamazon”). However, Lilly derogatorily uses “glamazon” in order to deride Andy’s glamour as the root cause of Andy’s distance from her personal life rather than acknowledge that Andy has more stringent work responsibilities than Lilly does. Moreover, Dana Stevens, author of “Don’t We Look Fabulous? The Devil Wears Prada is Good, Clean Fun,” argues that the “sacrifices we see Andy making for work [...] are only comic exaggerations of the standard compromises that many young people, male and female, are asked to put up with in entry-level jobs” (Stevens, “Don’t”). Although Andy forgoes events in her personal life due to work, she tries to make up for these moments, such as giving her boyfriend a belated birthday cupcake. Nate and Lilly’s criticisms of Andy seem unrealistic since they all are in demanding, entry level jobs that “pay the rent” (The Devil Wears Prada). Furthermore, their remarks set a false dichotomy between how Andy was before and after the Cinderella-like transformation. Simply because their emotional needs were not being met due to Andy’s demanding job, they placed the blame on Andy by making her think that being glamorous changed her identity. Rather, glamour is a temporary state—and according to Baker, a source of cultural capital—that gives Andy an edge in a male-dominated publication industry. Her glamour is an aspect of her identity and not something that changes who she is.
Evidence of her refusal to compromise her morals occurs at the end of the movie when Andy quits her job because she does not want to become as ruthless in the workplace as Miranda. At that moment, Andy is glamorous wearing a couture gown at the Paris Fashion Week, but she still has confidence and agency to choose another path.

The glamorous aspects of the film overshadow the subplots concerning Andy’s personal relationships, and Andy’s transformation borders on the sublime. When Andy first interviewed in her dowdy outfit, Miranda says, “And you have no style or sense of fashion,” before dismissing Andy’s objection that style is subjective. Andy takes a falsely superior attitude in thinking that she has risen above the influence of the fashion industry, which she mistakenly deems as superficial. In the iconic “cerulean sweater” scene, Miranda schools Andy in the hegemonic power of fashion and its influence in the lives of people who underestimate the industry: “However that blue represents millions of dollars and countless jobs and it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing a sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room from a ‘pile of stuff’” (The Devil Wears Prada). Both of these scenes develop Andy’s character as naive to the economic aspects of fashion and the transformative power that clothes have on people.

According to Amanda Fortini, author of “The Devil’s in the Details: What the Film Gets Right about Fashion Magazines,” fashionable clothing is not simply a superficial accessory but rather a necessary component to success: “Clothing possesses a talismanic quality, a transformative power: Put on a smart suit and a pair of stylish heels, and you are instantly more commanding. Deals can be signed or broken, promotions gained or lost, all by the hem of a skirt” (Fortini). Before Andy embraces fashion and glamour, she is not a confident person, but once she
transforms into a glamorous woman, she learns to command the gaze like an Enigmatic Woman, which becomes apparent in the scene when she attends the Fashion Gala Benefit.

The cinematography, soundtrack, costume, and Anne Hathaway’s glamour combine to give the audience a sublime experience when Andy attends the Fashion Gala Benefit. The scene begins with aerial shots of New York illuminated by lights, which then switches to a long shot of black limousine driving at night through streets illuminated by flashing billboards. Then there is a medium shot of the limousine with Andy's face looking out in wonder at the event as an upbeat techno song that sounds similar to the music associated with fashion runways play. The vocals “Here I am,” reinforce the idea that Andy has entered into the next level of her transformation: into the sublime. In addition, the vocals also suggest that Andy has kept this glamorous, commanding side hidden in her life and that she will showcase her abilities at the Gala. There is a longshot of Andy opening the door and stepping out so that the audience can appreciate the costuming: a V-neck form-fitting black evening gown with delicate black lace designs hanging three inches down from the off-shoulder sleeves. She has front bangs with an updo featuring a white flower clip in the back, and her makeup consists of heavy eyeliner, heavy mascara, and glossy red lipstick. As Fortini discusses, fashion has a talismanic power in that Andy has suddenly achieved a level of respect and recognition that even her harshest critics appreciate. In a previous scene, Nigel scoffs at the incredulity of the gown fitting Andy’s size six body and says sarcastically, "Oh yeah, A little Crisco and some fishing line, and we're in business” (The Devil Wears Prada). Nigel’s remark had been a joke that only a lubricating substance like Crisco oil could help Andy wear a snug, haute couture evening gown, but when Nigel sees her exiting the limo in the dress, he pauses while giving interviews. Andy’s ability to command the gaze goes beyond heterosexual attraction because the film suggests that Nigel is gay; the gaze is linked
with sensuality and the sublime because she attracts the respect of others who were most critical of her, including Emily and Miranda. Upon seeing Andy, Emily blurts, "Oh my god, Andy, you look so chic," which is high praise from a woman who could not even compliment Andy’s first transformation in the office scene (The Devil Wears Prada). Furthermore, Andy’s glamour and her ability to aid Miranda during the Gala earns Miranda’s attention. Andy’s heightened confidence and command the gaze comes as a result of the fashion elevating her into the sublime. According to Barnard, “Fashion is always in the sublime” (38), which suggests that the sublime appeals to those who see embodiment of fashionable clothes. Thus, the audience experiences the sublime in sensual appreciation of the textures of the lace on Andy’s gown, the radiance of her red-lipped smile, and the sound of her voice as she subtly aids Miranda at the Gala. Andy transfixes her peers and the audience alike in a sublime experience.

Just as a fairy godmother-like intervention changed Andy’s life, Chiyo has a similar experience that leads to her transforming into the most desired geisha in her district. Chiyo’s fairy godmother Mameha, played by Michelle Yeoh, is the most glamorous geisha in the profession, and, unbeknownst to Chiyo, she had been hired by the “Prince” character, the Chairman, so that Chiyo could achieve her wish to become a geisha. The fairy godmother role is further solidified when Mameha remarks that Chiyo must undergo a transformation, just as Cinderella does. After Mameha assesses Chiyo’s unrefined, maid-style bows and her slurping of tea, the audience hears Mameha’s voiceover as a sequence of scenes showcases Chiyo’s lessons over the months: “We must transform you. And what takes years, you must learn in months” (Memoirs of a Geisha). Unlike Cinderella, Chiyo’s transformation is not aided by magic, so her transformation occurs through hard work and practice. Sequences of Chiyo’s lessons cut into the action of a later sequence when Chiyo dresses up for her debut as a maiko, which is an
apprentice geisha. The first scene in the debut preparation scene is a closeup of Chiyo’s hand applying thick, white makeup to her neck and lower half of her face before using a brush to apply red lipstick. The scenes with the makeup preparation build on sensuality since there are those in the audience who can associate the sensations Chiyo experiences with using their own makeup brushes. The red of the brush builds the sensual experience because the brush is a phallic object drawing attention to the sense-making site of the mouth. In between the makeup shots are sequences of shots of Sayuri learning from Mameha how to show her wrist—subtly but provocatively—when pouring tea and how to dance. Juxtaposed between the lessons of art are sequences that also display the harsh realities of the profession, such as when Chiyo has to put her hands in ice water before playing the shamisen and when she has her hair combed into a style using hot oil. These images build a sensual experience because the women in the audience can also relate to the pain of Western contemporary beauty standards, such as waxing off body hair or undergoing painful hair treatments to achieve a silky hairdo.

Mameha reinforces the concept that geisha control the male gaze in the scene where Chiyo practices her skills in the Miyako streets. Since the profession of geisha reinforces heteronormative values within the society, Mameha informs Chiyo that the test that will determine if Chiyo is ready for her debut as geisha will occur when Chiyo can stop abruptly a man’s walk in a street “with a single look” (Memoirs of a Geisha). At first, Chiyo is incredulous, but Mameha demonstrates her control of the male gaze by making eye contact with a strange man on the street, who promptly stops to watch her walk by. Mameha choses the Chiyo’s target: a boy on a bicycle. The audience next sees Chiyo through the cyclist’s point of view as she walks down the street, and her eyes demurely shift from the road to making eye contact directly with the camera. The blue of her unusual eyes contrasts sharply with her pale skin and dark hair, and
for a moment, she breaks the fourth wall of the film to look directly at the audience. Her beauty overwhelms the boy on the bicycle, he loses focus, he crashes into a chicken cart, and the next shot is a humorous, chaotic mess of chickens flying everywhere. For a moment, the audience feels just as disoriented as the crashed boy, but the humor of the scene draws a laugh because Chiyo not only commands the gaze, but also has the potential to cause significant changes in her environment. As she assesses the boy’s path to her, she also notices the cart arriving at the intersection at the same time, and she knows how to create a bigger showcase of her ability than Mameha’s gaze. This moment foreshadows her future success as a geisha because she earned more money from her mizuaage—a sponsorship rite of passage—than even Mameha.

In the juxtaposed sequence of scenes, Mameha also establishes that the job of a geisha is to create sublime art for patrons. Throughout the film, Mother and Mameha reinforce the concept that geisha are not prostitutes. Mameha teaches Chiyo to play the shamisen and dance with fans because these beautiful displays are what men want to see in the teahouses: “music, the art of conversation. That's the surest way to attract a danna. On your feet, not off them” (Memoirs of a Geisha). A danna is a geisha’s prime patron who ensures financial security. A geisha who does not have a danna is in an unstable financial position and must rely on popularity of bookings, and the lack of danna makes Hatsumomo, Chiyo’s rival stepsister-character, jealous of Chiyo’s success. Chiyo’s conversational abilities at the teahouse infuriate Hatsumomo, who relies more on sexuality than sensuality. Chiyo, however, is an expert at conversation and sensuality of dance, and she quickly gains popularity at her debut as a maiko. Chiyo’s dance with the fans demonstrates traditional art skills that Mameha teaches her, and during her training, Mameha’s voiceover reinforces the connection between the geisha’s art and the sublime: “We sell our skills, not our bodies. We create another secret world. A place only of beauty. To be a geisha is to be
judged as a moving work of art” (Memoirs of a Geisha). The secret world of beauty that Mameha
describes sounds like the sublime because the audience feels transported from the physical realm
to an appreciation of art and beauty of the sublime. A geisha embodies both tangible and
intangible aspects of glamour: she wears embroidered kimonos of expensive Tatsumura silk, has
stylish hair, and uses alluring makeup, but a geisha also has to master intangible arts, such as
dancing, playing instruments, and fostering conversations that appeal to their clients. Chiyo
possesses all of these elements plus a quick wit, which adds to her glamour as an Enigmatic
Woman.

Chiyo’s transformation into the geisha later known as Sayuri has a similar cinematic
debut to the audience as Andy has. In a scene similar to Andy’s transformation debut, Chiyo’s
debut to the audience and her “stepsister” Pumpkin occurs when Chiyo is presented through the
opening of double doors. Following the juxtaposed sequence of her training and putting on
makeup for her debut, rice paper double doors open to show a long shot of Chiyo kneeling inside
a room with her back to the camera. The camera is at a low angle, so when Chiyo stands, she
takes up the entire frame, which gives the audience the feeling as if they are gazing up at
someone powerful. Chiyo wears a yellow silk kimono with elegant embroidery of flowers in
pastel colors, and orange obi with orange and red flowers is tied around her waist with a large
loop in the back (Memoirs of a Geisha). Peeking out of her obi is a red collar, which is a sign of
a maiko, or apprentice geisha (Iwasaki 207). Chiyo pauses to look into a mirror, and the camera
gives us a closeup of her head. For the first time, the audience sees her in makeup that greatly
contrasts the makeup Chiyo has when she trains with Mameha. Thick white foundation covers
Chiyo’s face almost to the hairline, her lips are deep sensual red, heavy eyeliner and mascara line
her eyes, and red blush on cheeks gives her a rosy glow. A cherry blossom hair ornament pins to
her updo and hangs jeweled flowers down to frame the right side of her face (*Memoirs of a Geisha*). Within Japanese culture, the cherry blossoms symbolize “the fragility and beauty of life” (Cantu), so the hairpin in Chiyo’s hair represents as a Cinderella character: like the cherry blossoms, Chiyo must bloom quickly and glamorously in order to earn enough money for her freedom. Furthermore, her entrance through the double doors symbolizes a transition in her life; like Andy, Chiyo is blossoming from a life of obscurity into becoming successful in her profession.

The connection between Chiyo’s glamour and the sublime is at its peak during her dance at the theater, but much of her stylization in this scene appeals to Western standards of beauty and would likely transport a Western audience into the sublime. Since this scene occurs after Chiyo debuts as a geisha, she has taken a new name of Sayuri to commemorate her transition in life, and from now on, she will be referred to as such within this discussion. Sayuri’s dance begins with a long shot of her entering the stage wearing an all-white kimono, and within the shot, she is surrounded by the heads of the crowd. The longshot gives the audience the visual perspective as if they are sitting within the theater watching the show. A bright blue spotlight illuminates Sayuri, giving her a ghostly appearance and setting the scene for a girl walking in the snow. Then the camera switches to a closeup of her bare feet in tall platform shoes—about twelve inches tall and much taller than the six-inch platform shoes that geisha wear—as she delicately makes her way down the length of the stage. Sayuri’s lack of tabi socks during this dance would have been viewed as unattractive for the time period because maiko and geisha “always wear socks” because tabi socks “lends a dainty appearance to the foot” (Iwasaki 80). Therefore, a geisha like Sayuri would not have been showing her feet in a public performance because that would not have been considered beautiful in the Japanese standards of the era.
Mineko Iwasaki, one of the most celebrated geishas of her generation, wrote an autobiography called *Geisha, A Life*, in which she clears up inaccuracies about Arthur Golden’s book, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, from which this film is adapted. When one reads her autobiography, one can see how vastly different Sayuri’s depiction is compared to how geisha actually look, and by comparing her descriptions with the visual of the film, one can see the ways in which this movie had been adapted to a Western audience’s ideals of glamour. For example, Sayuri’s hair is worn loose in a Western-style straightened hairstyle. Since Sayuri is a maiko, her hair should have been worn in the *wareshiobu* hairstyle; only after a coming-of-age ceremony called *mizuage*—which has nothing to do with the sale of virginity that the film depicts—can a geiko [geisha] wear other types of hairdos (Iwasaki 206). One explanation for this inaccuracy could be that Sayuri’s hair was purposefully styled straight to appeal to the film’s Western audience’s association of straight hair with beauty. In fact, many of the lead geisha characters’ hairstyles within the movie do not align with the traditional geisha styles illustrated in both pictures and narrative of Iwasaki’s book.

Glamour’s oldest definitions as being aligned with magic and beguiling are invoked in Sayuri’s dance. The closeup of Sayuri’s face as she looks over her shoulder is illuminated by low key blue lighting that sharply contrasts the white paint on her face, white kimono, and white umbrella—all which are tinted blue from the spotlight—against the dark of her hair. Her red lips are slightly parted in a sensual way, and the sharp contrast of red against the bluish-white clothes and the black hair draws the attention of the viewers to her mouth, an erogenous zone. In this one shot, the actress Ziyi Zhang has all the glamour and sensuality of a traditional Hollywood actress, and the actress maintains the professionalism of the Japanese character she plays. One must note that Zhang is actually a Chinese actress; Zhang, Gong Li (Hatsumomo), and Michelle
Yeoh were specially chosen for the geisha characters because they were “even in Japan, a stronger draw for audiences than any contemporary Japanese actresses” (R. Williams 89). Unfortunately, Hollywood has a common practice of flattening ethnic and cultural differences in casting roles of people of color, but Zhang gives a strong performance in her character’s dance. Sayuri dances as a lead in the theater’s annual show to attract potential sponsors for her mizuage. Even in the early moments of her entrance, before she starts dancing, her graceful moments, red lips, silky hair, and glittering eyes transfix the audience under her spell. The camera alternates between long shots of Sayuri, closeups of her hands and feet, and then closeups of specific audience members watching her. The facial expressions of the “Prince” character, the Chairman, demonstrate that he is transfixed by her glamour, and other crowd members are also experiencing the sublime of her dance. Even Hatsumomo’s face reveals a grudging admiration for Sayuri’s talent, which demonstrates that Sayuri displays unique skill to bewitch her enemy. The editing of the shots of the crowd’s expressions as Sayuri dances demonstrates that Sayuri’s glamour has a sublime charm upon the theater’s audience, and the sensuality of the dance entrances the film’s audience as well.

Sayuri’s talent as a dancer highlights an aspect of glamour not previously discussed: not all glamour requires talents like dance, but many talented Classical Age actresses were well known for their dancing abilities. For example, Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire were well known dancing partners in several movies, such as *Swing Time* (1936), and Rita Hayworth is known for her dances in *Gilda* (1946). Sayuri’s dance differs from what Western audiences know from Classical Age actresses, but from seeing the expressions of the other characters in the audience, the film’s viewers can appreciate that Sayuri showcases an advanced level of talent even among geisha, who are professional dancers. While a Western film audience would not be familiar with
geisha dancing, the cinematography of the scene and her measured movements invoke the sublime for them. The scene begins with the sound of the shamisen while Sayuri’s dance creates a narrative about a girl caught in a blizzard. She is illuminated by the blue spotlight as she dances and is seemingly thrown by storm to the ground where she lies on her stomach. Then the spotlight turns red as she stretches on the floor and arches her back into a hyperextension until her shoulders nearly touch the soles of her feet. The red illuminating her body as she stretches backward has a sensual look, which would appeal to both the show’s audience and the film’s audience. For a moment, Sayuri seems to transcend the limits of human physicality as she creates the “secret world” of the sublime that Mameha describes during Sayuri’s training (Memoirs of a Geisha). Sayuri exudes confidence and grace as her glamour beguiles the audience, and her enchantment convinces hesitant sponsors of her mizuage to bid on her. Like Cinderella dancing at the ball, she enraptures the “Prince” with her dancing skills. Furthermore, this dance solidifies Sayuri’s notoriety as a glamorous geisha in her district, which eventually leads to her earning enough money to pay her debts and inherit the okiya as Mother’s adopted daughter.

Glamour, Orientalism, and Cultural Appropriation

While this film has merits in showcasing the Enigmatic Glamour of actresses of color, one must also address the Orientalistic depictions of geisha. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said’s seminal book Orientalism defines the Western practice of Orientalism as the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having an authority over the Orient,” which influences the way in which the Orient has been misrepresented for Western audiences (Said 3). Orientalism occurs because “the relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination,” and due to pervasiveness of such a practice in Western culture, Said comes to the
conclusion that those who write about the Orient must consider “the limitations on thought and action imposed by Orientalism” (Said 3, 6). Sheridan Prasso, author of *The Asian Mystique*, acknowledges Said’s point that Western writers must “maintain awareness” when writing about the Orient, and she acknowledges her own biases in her perspectives when she says that being “an American writing this book, I cannot escape being from a power with definite interests and a long history in the Orient” (Prasso 19). In this statement, Prasso acknowledges how Orientalism creates “images, expectations, and misperceptions” of Asians for Westerners called the “Asian Mystique,” and Prasso argues how the allure of the “fantasy of the exotic” feeds into Western consumerism and ultimately taints the way Westerners perceive Asians (Prasso 5). Both Said and Prasso caution that Western writers must be careful not to let Orientalism or the Asian Mystique influence the portrayal of the Orient.

Through Orientalistic depictions and images fostered by the Asian Mystique, Orientalism of the Japanese geisha taints the way Westerners perceive the precise role of the geisha profession. The Asian Mystique image of the “tea-serving geisha” in Western culture lends to the Western misconception of Asian women as being “submissive, subservient, exotic” (Prasso 8). In her article, “The Exotic Geisha,” Liza Dalby explains the Western fascination with geisha as, “racially, linguistically, and culturally foreign geisha have always been sexually charged emblems of western male fantasy” (Dalby). Orientalism in the portrayal of geisha in Western writings augmented the misperception of geisha, and Puccini’s Madame Butterfly, modeled after the performance of geisha/actress Madame Sadayakko, reinforces the prevailing Western stereotype of geisha as child-like and submissive (Downer 201). In addition to the damage inflicted by Orientalistic writings, the reputation of geisha suffered after World War II when prostitutes calling themselves “geesha girls” sold sex to American GIs, and as a result, the image
of geisha as being trained in the sexual arts became the prevailing misconception among Americans (Prasso 52).

Said’s theories of Orientalism apply to author Arthur Golden’s character of Sayuri because Golden appropriated a geisha’s story and created an inaccurate, sexualized representation of geisha in his novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* to appeal to the expectations of a Western audience. When the novel was adapted into a film, elements of the film continue to follow the inaccuracies of the book. The frame narrative of the film with an elderly Sayuri’s voiceover narration creates the impression of authenticity that the movie is an autobiography (*Memoirs of a Geisha*). Nevertheless, Sayuri is a fictional character that Golden created, and controversy arose when Mineko Iwasaki—the geisha Golden credits for greatly assisting his research—expressed outrage over the portrayal of geisha in his novel. In addition to her complaints that Golden incorporated aspects of her life into *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Iwasaki insists that Golden’s interpretation of *mizuage* (which Golden depicts as the ritual deflowering of an apprentice geisha by the highest bidding customer) has inaccuracies and gives readers the impression that geisha resemble prostitutes (Iwasaki 187, 205-206). Although the movie pointedly mentions three times that geisha are not prostitutes, the misinterpretation of *mizuage*—first developed by the book and then reinforced by the movie—solidifies the overssexualized image of geisha to the film’s audience.

While fans of the movie can enjoy the cinematic beauty of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the line between appreciation and cultural appropriation occurs when Western fans start stylizing themselves as geisha. Sayuri’s character lends the impression that geisha spend their lives trying to win the hearts of men and their financial support. Iwasaki dispels this myth by sharing that she had earned approximately $500,000 a year in the 1960s and scoffs at the notion that geisha
would resort to prostitution for money when geisha are paid so well (188). Although Iwasaki’s novel was published three years before the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the Orientalistic fantasy of the geisha continues within Western culture. In fact, the movie inspired a Western fashion trend with clothing and beauty products designed for fans to obtain the exotic look and allure of the geisha. A 2005 article in *Time* featured an article entitled “Inspiration of a Geisha” with the headline “Porcelain Skin and Ruby Lips Will Be All the Rage Come Fall,” and the word “Fall” describes how the fashion trend results with the release of the film *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The article describes “geisha-style pampering,” which is cultural appropriation of geisha’s beauty to feed Western desires of the exotic: “Suddenly suburban housewives were poking hair sticks through their tresses, and Madonna even gave herself a makeover complete with kimonos and jet-black hair” (Kroll 17). With the release of the novel, the article comments how Fresh cosmetics will have a *Memoirs of a Geisha* “beauty collection” of cosmetics to mirror the look customers see in theaters, and the author of the article writes, “What woman wouldn’t want that?” (Kroll 17). The discussion of housewives with “hair sticks” suggests a commonplace Western desire to appropriate looks that had become trendy within the fashion world and among artists, such as Madonna. These consumers are inspired by an Orientalistic tale of a desirable woman, and they channeled these “exotic” fashion trends to feed their own desires of escape and sexual attraction. Rather than view the geisha tradition as a profession devoted to art, American consumers viewed the geisha tradition as a masquerade for living out Orientalistic fantasies.

The American fashion industry’s desire for the glamour of geisha fuels continued Orientalistic appropriation of geisha into recent years. *Vogue’s* March 2017 “diversity issue” featured Caucasian American model Karlie Koss dressed as a geisha with the caption, “Paying homage to Japan’s geisha culture, Karlie Kloss soaks up the serenity” (Schillinger 476). In the
photo shoot, Kloss—whose hair is usually blonde—dyes her hair black, wears it in a geisha-like updo, has white foundation on her face, models fashionable kimonos, and stands outside of a teahouse. Like the image of geisha from Memoirs of a Geisha, Vogue’s depiction of geisha is a Westernized version with thinner layers of white face paint, non-traditional hairstyles in some of the pictures, and modern-styled kimono. Kloss’s version of a geisha is stylized to appeal to Western consumers, but her stylization gives the look of “authenticity” for readers not familiar with the tradition. This is Orientalism because a Western company is taking the image of geisha, shaping that image as representative of the geisha tradition while using a Caucasian model, and profiting from the reputation of geisha. Critics accused Vogue of “whitewashing” because the magazine should have hired an Asian model rather than stylizing a Caucasian model as Japanese. Kloss apologized via Twitter for participating in creating “images [that] appropriate a culture that is not my own” (qtd. in Lang). Vogue’s photoshoot is reminiscent of American desire for fantasy and masquerade as the housewives with hair sticks 18 years before. There is a line between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation, which Vogue could have handled differently had they worked with the actual geisha community in shaping an image that would honor the profession.

Conclusion

The Cinderella trope endures within American culture because it appeals to the desires of transformation and success. Zipes asserts that fairy tales play an integral role in the civilizing process of teaching people how to live within society. Cinderella motif appeals to the working class’s desire for success and social mobility; it is a glamorous tale in which a poor, abused girl
transforms into a charming lady wearing fashionable clothing to meet her prince. Glamour is a tool of cultural capital that allows protagonists to achieve their goals and happiness.

In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Andy embodies the glamour of the Enigmatic Woman as her transformation makes her more self-assured. Her dowdy clothes reflected the lack of self-confidence at work, but Nigel’s makeover styles Andy into a glamorous woman. She not only gains confidence at work, but she also learns to control the gaze and use it to her advantage. The cinematography of the Gala scene exhibits her sensuality and also reinforces the association between glamour and the sublime. Within the film, Andy’s prince is not actually her boyfriend but rather the goal of gaining a job within the journalism field, and she achieves this using the glamour and self-assurance that she earns during her time at *Runway*.

*Memoirs of a Geisha* more closely follows the Cinderella trope by featuring an orphaned girl, Chiyo, who becomes the most notable geisha in her district. Mameha, her fairy godmother, instructs Chiyo in the art of becoming a geisha, a woman whose profession is dedicated to the sublime arts of dancing and beauty. Like Andy, Chiyo learns to control the gaze, and in doing so, she eventually wins the heart of the Chairman. As an Enigmatic Woman, she wins the affection of those in her district by her expert dance at the theater, and her sensuality and skill transport both the theater’s audience and the film’s audience into the sublime.

While *Memoirs of Geisha* demonstrate how the glamour of women of color can be stylized similar to traditional glamour, one must be aware of the way that Orientalism plays a role in the depiction of Sayuri. The film’s controversy stems from inaccurate portrayals of *mizuage*, which lend the impression that geisha are prostitutes. Furthermore, the film suggests that being geisha is centered on attracting male lovers as patrons, and this inaccurate association feeds Western fantasies of the exotic as hypersexual. Thus, American fashion arose to supply
makeup to help American women achieve a Westernized version of the geisha image in order to enact fantasies of masquerade. Orientalistic depictions, unfortunately, create misconceptions that are difficult to remedy, and obscure the fact that the geisha are professional artists that are cherished by their culture.

The glamour of actresses of color continues to be an evolving process. One must recognize the Orientalistic depictions in Memoirs of Geisha as a product of its time, but one can also appreciate the strides that the movie takes in giving Asian actresses the opportunities to play glamorous roles in American cinema. During the Classical Age of cinema, there was “no dearth of Asian American actresses longing to play roles in Hollywood,” but instead glamorous white actresses were cast in non-white roles, in which “yellowface” was used (Rajgopal 149). Some notable white actresses in yellowface are Mary Pickford in Madame Butterfly (1915), Katherine Hepburn in Dragon Seed (1944), and Jennifer Jones in Love Is a Many-Splendored Thing (1955). While there are some minority actresses who received lead roles, such as Anna May Wong, these roles were often as villains, which both reflected and perpetuated racial stereotypes of Asians as nefarious to adhere to American cultural fears of the time period. Although Memoirs of Geisha has inaccuracies in depiction, these actresses play glamorous roles for a Western audience, which is important in opening up representation of Asian women within American cinema.

Zhang’s Chiyo has similar (In)tangible glamour elements as Hathaway’s Andy. After their Cinderella-like transformations, both characters wear fashionable clothes, have dramatic makeup, and hairstyles that are appropriate to their professions. In addition to these tangible traits, they also have intangible aspects as well: both are more confident in their professions and feature moments of where they transport viewers into the sublime during pivotal moments in the movies. Their outfits are often featured in long shots, and the camera zooms in to give readers
the chance to appreciate the details of their glamorous outfits. Lastly, both characters are
determined to reach their dreams, and with hard work, they both achieve success.
CHAPTER 3:

HEROINE GLAMOUR IN THE MATRIX AND CHARLIE’S ANGELS

The History of the Heroine

Heroine Glamour sits at the opposite end of the sexuality/sensuality spectrum compared with Enigmatic Glamour. While Enigmatic Glamour relied on sensual appeals to lift the audience into the sublime, Heroine glamour relies on both Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime as well as Kurt Fawver’s discussion of the sublime cinematic aesthetic. Burke discusses how the sublime “arouses in people the physiological and emotional effects of fear, if not horror, as well as attraction” (Barnard 24), and Fawver argues that cinematic sublime aesthetic is “a feeling of terror and awe evoked by things that are of great power and size” (Fawver 118). I argue that Heroine Glamour arouses both awe and fear due to the heroine’s combat prowess, and that the physical size of the action heroines in a theater screen develops the audiences’ wonder.

I contend that this type of Glamour descends from the “shellacked” glamour that Cheng describes about Classical Hollywood, which was embodied by Anna May Wong, Jean Harlow, Gloria Swanson, and Marlene Dietrich (1031). Cheng describes how shellacked glamour resists patriarchal male gaze: “Glamour’s shellacked beauty reminds us that the presentation of self as object for consumption coexists with the rendering of that self as indigestible” (1031-1032). During the Classical Era, actresses were stylized for the male gaze as Mulvey describes, and Cheng asserts that even though certain glamorous actresses were styled that way, the type of glamour they embodied resisted the gaze by being “indigestible.” I posit that this indigestible
glamour developed over the decades, coupled with the rise of feminist action heroes in the 1990s, and experimented having heroines who openly expressed love (without being perceived as weak) in order to become the glamorous female action heroes of the early twentieth century. Furthermore, I contend that Heroine Glamour enables female action heroes to defeat patriarchal oppression through fiercely tough personalities as well as crime-fighting abilities; in addition, I also argue that this type of glamour resonates with fans who want to see strong female characters who are both strong physically but also emotionally caring for loved ones.

The relationship between adventurous heroines and glamour has roots in the silent film era. According to Gladys Knight, author of *Female Action Heroes: A Guide to Women in Comics, Video Games, Film and Television*, the first two decades of the twentieth century featured “serial queens,” which is “a term that refers to the spunky female leads of short films that were released weekly and played before the featured film” (Knight xvi). Popular until the 1920s, these short films, such as *The Perils of Pauline* and *The Hazards of Helen*, featured unmarried characters and did not contain dialogue, so the actresses relied on action to tell their adventurous stories. The serials featured the non-traditional life of the “New Woman,” which challenged gender conventions of the era concerning fashion, social liberation, and sexuality (xvi-xvii). Most notable about these characters are their connections to glamour: according to Knight, the serial queens wear “trendy fashions” and possess “surprising athletic skill and nerve” (xvi). The combination of the serial queens’ clothing and daring stunts make them an early prototype of modern female action heroines.

The influence of feminism and the backlash against feminism of the 1960-1970s resulted in varied depictions of women in film and television, and one of the most notable action hero television shows of the 1970s—that has twice been adapted into movies during the twenty-first
century—is *Charlie’s Angels*. Susan Douglas, author of *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media*, says that while popular media transmitted ideas of feminism to viewers, the feminist ideal that women should be “taken seriously and treated with respect regardless of whether they were conventionally ‘attractive’” was simultaneously undermined by popular media with shows like *Charlie’s Angels*, which offers “new exemplars of the liberated woman” by reinforcing “the importance of female attractiveness to female success” (191). The television show featured three glamorous women whose fashion and beauty were just as important as their abilities to fight crime. Like the serial queens, the Angels were popular action heroes, but according to Knight, the Angels’ fighting sequences were not on par with male action heroes: “Even when they engaged in violence, which occurred with less frequency than on shows featuring male action heroes, the fight scenes were brief and less forceful” (Knight 45). The Angels also took assignments from a “traditional patriarch” known as “Charlie,” which reinforces the idea that women can be feminist fighters as long as they reported to the command of a man” (Douglas 214). During that time period, cinematic male action stars, such as Superman and Luke Skywalker, did not have to report to the authority of a higher-ranking male, but the women of *Charlie’s Angels* could only use their fighting skills if directed by Charlie. Thus, their adventures were only permissible when sanctioned by the patriarchy.

In addition to being action heroes, the Angels were glamorous icons of the 1970s, which sharply deviates from non-glamorous action heroines of later decades. As models of Heroine Glamour, the Angels exhibited overt sexuality rather than the subtle sensuality of Enigmatic Glamour. Although their jobs included fighting, they had to maintain an attractive appearance: “The women of Charlie’s Angels were coded as sex symbols because of their femininity—the exhibition of their hair, their made-up faces, and the clothes they wore” (Knight 45). The
emphasis of being both a fighter and a beautiful woman demonstrates the antithetical combination of feminism and antifeminism of the era, and emphasis on fashionable clothes and makeup suggests that they exemplified the glamour ideals of the era. The Angels’ glamour includes tangible aspects (the makeup, hair, and costumes) and intangible aspects (confident attitudes). According to Knight, their glamour appealed to both men and women: “Women took pleasure in the demonstration of independent, seemingly liberated women, working together in an exciting career and living active lifestyles. [...] Men enjoyed the spectacle of glamorous women, women who were traditionally feminine and not too aggressive” (44). The Angels thus reinforced heteronormativity: males desired the Angels since the heroines’ roles did not disrupt male authority, and women liked vicariously living fantasies of an independent, glamorous lifestyle.

Cinema, television, and comics often feature glamorous female action heroes, but the 1980s and 1990s also featured gritty female action heroes who were not perky like the women on Charlie’s Angels. Knight, especially, sees the changes in the action heroine paradigm starting with the 1990s: “No longer limited to love interests, mothers, wives, and sisters, strong women increasingly became the standard in a variety of action roles. They might be martial arts heroes, fierce vampires, heroic cheerleaders, space adventurers, or sangfroid assassins” (Knight xxi). The feminist goals of featuring female characters who were not concerned about their appearances were embodied by Ripley from Alien (1979) and the “sangfroid” Sarah Connor from Terminator 2: Judgement Day (1991). Sarah Connor is not glamorous. According to Shannon Keating, author of “The ‘Terminator’ Franchise Has Let Sarah Connor Down,” Sarah transforms from “damsel in distress” in the original Terminator (1984) to a woman whose body was not stylized to resemble other contemporary glamorous heroines: “ [...] thanks to chin-ups in her cell
at the hospital where she was institutionalized, she’d transformed her entire body into a weapon
[...] indelible pop cultural image because of its specificity and relative rarity: a woman hero
whom physical strength [...] signified by [...] bulk [sic]” (Keating). Keating’s emphasis on
the word “bulk” refers to how female heroines have toned muscles that are considered more
feminine than masculine, and heroines rarely display bulky muscles like their male action hero
counterparts. In addition, Sarah had been institutionalized because society had considered her
insane for preparing for a robot apocalypse known as Judgement Day, which differs from the
glitzy Angels who lead fashionable lives. Furthermore, Sarah was not supposed to be considered
beautiful, which is a key aspect of glamour. In an interview, director James Cameron confirms
that he chose not to portray Sarah like other heroines: “Sarah Connor was not a beauty icon. She
was strong, she was troubled, she was a terrible mother, and she earned the respect of the
audience through pure grit” (qtd. in Keating). In using the words “troubled” and “grit,” Cameron
demonstrates how Sarah has a more nuanced depiction of heroines that includes flaws, such as
mental illness. Sarah Connor paves the way for a more complex type of female action hero that
appears in twenty-first century cinema.

There are debates whether or not heroines follow the traditional “Hero’s Journey”
archetype, coined by Joseph Campbell. In The Hero with a Thousand Faces, Campbell asserts
that traditional hero stories—“fairy tale, legend, ritual, or myth”—follow a specific character
development and plot line: “Whether the hero be ridiculous or sublime, Greek or barbarian,
gentile or Jew, his journey varies little in essential plan” (30). Campbell sees the archetype as
being universal to “Everyman” across many cultures, and he outlines three major acts of the
journey (departure, the trials, the return) as well as how each act could be subdivided into
specific moments, such as “The Call to Adventure” or “Woman as Temptress” (28-29). Although
there are many stories that have followed this pattern in Greek mythology (Oedipus) and in popular culture (Star Wars), Campbell’s discussion relies on the presumption that all heroes are male, traditionally masculine, and heterosexual.

Scholars who study fairy tales and female heroes often compare the heroine's journey to Campbell’s Hero’s Journey to create the framework of the Heroine’s Journey. Certain aspects of Campbell’s archetype overlap with the Heroine’s Journey, such as the “call” and the “refusal of the call,” which Valerie Frankel outlines in her essay, “The Hero’s and Heroine’s Journey” (7). Frankel argues that the Heroine’s Journey has a “subset” pattern known as the “Warrior Woman,” and she sees this pattern as existing in mythological tales and the media of the 1990s and early twentieth century: Xena from Xena: Warrior Princess, Buffy from Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Katniss from The Hunger Games, and Wonder Woman from DC Comics (7). Thus, the path of the “Warrior Woman” is different from the quest of male warriors. This is not to say that women’s stories are essentially different from men’s, but in the case of contemporary American cinema and television, feminism has allowed for more experimentation in heroine stories as compared to hero’s stories.

Both Xena: Warrior Princess and Buffy the Vampire Slayer follow similar paths in the Woman Warrior version of the Heroine’s Journey. According to Carolyn Skelton, who writes a chapter entitled “Xena: Warrior Princess” in The Essential Cult TV Reader, the show Xena: Warrior Princess (1995-2001) combines the “masculine Hollywood cinematic traditions of buddy bonding, superheroes, and wandering law antiheroes” with a “rewriting of conventional discourses of gender and sexuality” (331-332). Xena experiences buddy bonding with her sidekick Gabrielle, but the ambiguity of their relationship can both be read as romantic or platonic, depending on the audience. Furthermore, Skelton views Xena as reshaping “the
conventions of action heroes and woman warriors” (329). Xena’s quest is not a search for a magical object but rather an adventurous travel across the globe. Similar to Xena, Buffy the Vampire Slayer also follows the Woman Warrior pattern by having close relationships to her sidekicks and not deliberately seeking out a particular quest. Frankel argues that Buffy “quests to rescue her loved ones, not to destroy the tyrant as Harry Potter and Luke Skywalker does. [...] As she struggles against the Patriarchy [...] she grows into someone who creates her own destiny” (6). Rather than embark on a journey where she leaves home as the traditional male hero does, Buffy Summers wants to live a normal teenage life and live in her hometown of Sunnydale. She battles evil when it threatens the safety of her friends and family. In addition, Buffy’s and Xena’s struggles against patriarchal forces in their lives inspire them to create their own destinies separate from the norms of traditional gender roles. Xena and Buffy inspire women both seek love and to have adventurous lives like the glamorous Charlie’s Angels, and they have the battle skills of Sarah Connor.

The evolution of the heroine within cinema is not a linear progress in which every depiction in the coming decades creates more independent characters. One of the most feminist heroines is Trinity, from The Matrix (1999); she is a glamorous, complex character who battles like Sarah Connor and also plays with gender norms like Xena. Her character at the verge of the twenty-first century influences feminist depictions of action heroines for decades. However, Alex of the 2000 version of Charlie’s Angels is a flat character who portrays 1970s femininity and glamour and reinforces Orientalistic depictions of Asian women as dragon ladies. Until the recent social demand for more cinematic representations of women of color, Alex had been one of the few twenty-first century action heroines. Knight notes the dearth of diverse representation of minorities: “Leading female roles continue to be dominated by white women, with few
positive roles permitted to women of color. The few women of color who are represented in action genres are generally reduced to sidekick status or portrayed in negative ways” (xxi). Women of color superheroes exist, such as Storm of the X-Men, but her role had been minor compared to the other traditional female superheroes of the early 2000s franchise.

Furthermore, the lack of cinematic representation of heroines of color in leading roles negatively affects moviegoers. According to bell hooks, film “provide[s] a narrative for specific discourses of race, sex, and class” (3), so if discourses portray women of color negatively, that perpetuates negative ethnic stereotypes and also may influence the audience to unconsciously equate whiteness with heroism. Although the voiceover narrative during the Charlie’s Angels introduction montage suggests that all the Angels are equally important, an examination of the film shows that Alex plays a flat character sidekick role to the traditionally glamorous Natalie and Dylan, her love life does not get equal attention, and her ethnicity is used within the undercover missions to reinforce stereotypes of the submissive Asian woman as well as the Asian Dragon Lady trope. Nevertheless, both Trinity and Alex create a standard for early twenty-first century action heroine glamour within cinema, and almost two decades later, new depictions of glamorous action heroines build off them.

**Glamorous Action Heroes**

The Matrix (1999) and Charlie’s Angels (2000) popularized the Hong Kong fighting-style for American action heroes. Hong Kong cinema developed a unique, recognizable style distinct from Chinese cinema and Hollywood, and the genre is characterized by “choreographed action scenes, melodramatic sentiments, poeticized violence” (Yau 1). While some Hong Kong stars—such as Jet Li and Yun-Fat Chow—became popular in Hollywood, the 1990s saw
increasing popularity of choreographed Hong Kong fighting-styles within movies such as *Mortal Kombat* (1995) and *The Matrix* (Yau 13-14). Lisa Funnell, author of “Assimilating Hong Kong Style for the Hollywood Action Woman,” notes that two “notable choreographers”—the Yuen brothers—from Hong Kong cinema created the “two distinct models of female heroism transcribed from ‘girls with guns’: (1) [...] *Charlie’s Angels* series [...] and (2) the Trinity warrior featured in *The Matrix* films” (70). The “guns with guns” genre within Hong Kong cinema of 1980-1990s emphasizes female crime-fighting partnership, but Funnell asserts that the Hollywood depiction of “girls with guns” bears little resemblance to the original Hong Kong genre: “[The Angels and Trinity] are distinctly American, cater to the tastes of American/Western audiences, and relate American/Western ideals of gender, race and heroism” (70-71). Funnell’s argument about the reflection of Western ideals resonates with bell hook’s ideas about cinema transmitting cultural ideas. Although the Hong Kong “girls with guns” and *Charlie’s Angels* share the same roots and feature crime-fighting partners, their depictions highly differ because they transmit different social norms of beauty, gender, and glamour.

Since *The Matrix* debuted in theaters one year before *Charlie’s Angels*, Trinity was the first exposure American audiences had to American actresses using Hong Kong style fighting. Within the first scene of the movie, Trinity—played by Carrie-Anne Moss—is seemingly surrounded by police without any hope of escape, but just before she launches into a series of martial arts moves, one of the Matrix’s “Agents” tells the police chief that the officers are “already dead” (*The Matrix*). The agent’s remark creates the first moments of ambiguity about Trinity: is she a heroine or villain? However, the flat, slightly malevolent voice of the agent provides viewers with the clue that Trinity is not evil. *The Matrix* was released eight years after *Terminator: Judgement Day*, so the audience would probably guess that Trinity is a heroine like
Sarah Conner, willing to bend the rules of heroism to achieve her goals. As the audience wonders how she can survive being surrounded, Trinity launches into a series of martial arts moves with inhuman speed and efficiency.

Part of Trinity’s glamour is the way that she uses martial arts fighting to fight the agents within the oppressive Matrix: a computer simulation built by artificially intelligent machines to enslave humanity’s minds while their bodies are used as battery fuel. Trinity is part of the human resistance to the Matrix, and while she is logged into the simulation, she can fight using Hong-Kong fighting skills that are hardwired directly into her brain. Although Martial arts fighting is strenuous on the body, Trinity does not lose her equanimity while she throws effortless punches and kicks. Rather, her fighting abilities are part of her glamour as viewers feel the sublime mix of awe and terror. According to Knight, Trinity’s beauty, her fighting skills, and her costume reinforce her status as a glamorous action hero: “Trinity astonished moviegoers with her meteoric martial arts moves and slow-motion leg kicks, skintight black leather attire, and short, slicked-back hairdo” (vii). These “slow-motion kicks” that Knight refers to are part of The Matrix’s signature “bullet time” effect: “‘bullet time,’ [...] which is the vision, speed, and body hardness to deflect oncoming bullets” (Lawrence and Jewett 295). “Bullet time” allows the characters within the Matrix simulation to move inhumanly fast so they deflect offensive attacks and also throw punches quicker than opponents; since the audience is privy to the bullet time, any action looks like extreme slow motion while the characters moving in bullet time move slightly faster than their surroundings. This faster-than-bullet speed gives these heroes the ability to fight with inhuman characteristics, which seems ethereal and glamorous. Although Trinity cannot move as fast as Neo in dodging bullets, her speed of fighting within the Matrix allows her to move at bullet time speed, which makes her glamorous in her martial arts abilities.
The first scene when Trinity is surrounded by the police is when the audience sees her exhibiting her Hong Kong-fighting style. The first shot of Trinity is a medium long shot with her standing to the right side of the screen; her back is turned to the camera, and she claps her hands behind her head as if to show her surrender. The cop taking out the handcuffs is in focus at the start of the sequence with Trinity out-of-focus, but then, the focus shifts so that her body is in focus (The Matrix). Trinity wears a black leather jacket and black catsuit that accentuates her butt, which emphasizes the body curves associated with 1920-1930s glamour (Dyhouse 38). The catsuit is a fashion trend for glamorous action heroes ever since Michelle Pfeiffer dressed as Catwoman in Batman Returns (1992): “In a nod to feminine tradition, Catwoman was a fashion trendsetter. Her eponymic ‘catsuit’ was such a hit that it inspired a trend among subsequent female action heroes” (Knight 30). Trinity’s catsuit draws attention to her traditionally glamorous svelte physique as she fights in the Hong-Kong style. Noir lighting creates high contrast on the shadows of Trinity’s face, and the green tinted lighting reinforces the concept that she is in Matrix simulation because green represents the “green screen” of 1980-1990s DOS computers. Trinity’s iconic short haircut only reaches the nape of her neck and is gelled back, which is reminiscent of the glamorous trend of short pixie hair popularized by Demi Moore’s haircut in Ghost (1990). According to Simone Kitchens, author of “Demi Moore in ‘Ghost’: the Unexpected Icon,” Moore’s short-cropped hair “signaled a major shift away from the big hair of the late ‘80s [...] also marked the beginning of what would become a very androgynous period in fashion, with women everywhere emulating this short boy-like fashion” (Kitchens). The combination of Trinity’s catsuit and the short-cropped hair reflects 1990s fashion and glamour, and the accentuation of her curves reflects Classical glamour, but these effects only exist within the Matrix simulation. Within the world of the film, the antagonist machines create the Matrix to
fulfill human desire to keep humans complacent, so Trinity’s glamorous appearance within the Matrix suggests that she embodies 1990s sexual appeal.

The audience's first experience with bullet time occurs when Trinity escapes the police. Trinity pretends that she is going to be cuffed before she hits the cop, and bullet time is engaged when she jumps into the air; time slows to bullet time as she launches a kick while the camera rotates around her, and the time goes back to normal as she lands the kick. Her face is emotionless, but she lets out a martial arts yell as she does kicks and punches, which is consistent with Hong Kong cinema. In addition to her martial arts skills, she shoots guns and can jump across rooftops easily. The Wachowski directors draw attention to her superhuman abilities within the Matrix as Trinity completes a jump across an enormous gap between rooftops, and a shocked police officer remarks, “That's impossible” (*The Matrix*). The remark of the impossibility makes viewers wonder if Trinity is a superhero like Wonder Woman, but her escape from police also makes the viewer question if she is a vigilante or villain. Knight views Trinity’s ambiguity as a hallmark of 1990s action heroines: “Catwoman was one of the first prominent female anti-heroes. [...] In the 1990s, female action heroes in movies and television, even the “good” ones, are increasingly depicted as nervy [sic], swaggering, and subtly outside the law. This trend has produced such iconic characters as the rebel Trinity” (Knight 35). Both the visual of the catsuit and the villain/vigilante behavior makes Trinity reminiscent of Catwoman, who had been a glamorous character, and these associative connections are established within the film’s first few minutes.

Trinity’s first moment of the sublime’s mix of awe and fear occurs when she completes a humanly impossible jump from the rooftop into a building’s window. As Trinity jumps, she straightens her body into a Superman flight pose; she spins as she is propelled through the air,
and the camera keeps the entire length of her body in the shot. Her ability to hold a Superman flight pose in mid-air causes the viewer to wonder if she is actually a superhero vigilante, and the length of her body spiraling in the jump looks larger than life on a movie screen, which develops the sublime. Trinity crashes through the small window, rolls down a flight of stairs onto her back, and immediately curls upward into a shooting position holding two guns pointed at the window. The sublime superhuman-like facade that Trinity shows in the first sequences of the film ends as the camera zooms in from a medium shot to her face. The urgent music swells as the audience can see the fear in her face and the shaking of her hands holding the guns. The glamorous sublime ends as the Wachowski directors show the audience Trinity’s fear and vulnerability as she bits her lip and says, “Get up Trinity. Just get up. Get up!” (The Matrix). Trinity’s need to talk herself out of freezing in action informs the viewers that she is not invincible. The decision to show human fragility makes Trinity a sympathetic character who is both glamorous and more relatable than the shellacked glamour of Classical Era cinema.

Although The Matrix was made a year before the start of the twenty-first century, Trinity embodies the characteristics of Heroine Glamour.

The 2000 remake of the television show Charlie’s Angels also features the Yuen brothers’ Hong Kong fighting choreography as The Matrix does, but the Angels’ depictions of feminine glamour and heroism greatly differ from Trinity. In the opening scene, the Angels save a commercial flight from danger, which informs the audience that these women are vigilantes, but their bubbly attitudes indicate a different type of action hero than the gritty Sarah Connor/Trinity type. According to Knight, the format of the 1970s Angel trio always includes “a brunette with short hair [… who] was considered the smart one” as well as an “athletic blonde” and an Angel “skilled in combat” (Knight 44). In the 2000s movie, Alex—played by Lucy Liu—
serves the role of the brunette with intricate knowledge of technology, Natalie—played by Cameron Diaz—is the ditzy blond, and Dylan—played by Drew Barrymore—left the police academy because she is too rebellious for a traditional crime-fighting unit. Alex is the first woman of color to be an Angel, and her depiction of minority glamour has traits of traditional glamour mixed into it. Knight says that the 1970s Angels “exude femininity and glamour [...] In addition to bikinis, short skirts, and tight jeans, the women wore designer blouses, slacks, and an assortment of gowns. The real-life cost of keeping the women beautiful was exorbitant, illustrating just how important the glamour look was to the producers” (Knight 48). Alex, Natalie, and Dylan all wear popular 2000s fashions and hairstyles in order to look glamorous: Natalie sports a red one-shoulder blouse, Dylan has powder-blue eyeshadow, and Alex wears a black corset top, all of which are typical 2000s fashion styles (Dragoumis). In addition, all the Angels wear tight jeans in almost each scene, glamorous evening gowns when undercover, and bikinis at the movie’s finale. This continuation of the 1970s emphasis on glamour is significant because it reinforces the cultural association between glamour and success since each scene features the Angels wearing trendy clothes as they fight crime.

Unlike the ambiguity of Trinity’s introduction, the opening action sequence of Charlie’s Angels clearly establishes the trio as definitively “good” action heroes apprehending a criminal. Dylan, wearing a disguise, throws a male criminal out of a commercial airplane to save passengers from peril, and the non-diegetic heavy metal song “Live Wire” by Mötley Crüe plays as Alex parachutes nearby, apprehends the man in mid-air, then lands both of them into a speedboat driven by Natalie, who wears a sparkling, gold bikini. Natalie casually asks Alex, “Nice flight?” as if Alex had been performing a mundane task rather than performing a dangerous feat (Charlie’s Angels). Until this point, Alex has not taken off her helmet to show the
audience that she is a woman, and the use of the non-diegetic song by Mötley Crüe lends the impression that the helmeted parachutist is a male action hero, such as James Bond. However, the audience’s expectations are overturned as the camera shows an over-the-shoulder closeup as Alex pivots when she takes off her helmet. She shakes her head twice to let her long, dark hair swirl glamorously around her head as if she were in a shampoo commercial. Her mouth opens wide in a smile as if Liu is showing off to the camera, and the audience can clearly see her cat-eye eyeliner, "naturalistic" foundation that shows off her freckles, and coral lipstick. Alex’s use of exaggerated cat-eye eyeliner over-accentuates her Asian eyes as if to remind the audience that she is Other among the Caucasian Angels. Alex’s glamour is apparent with the flipping of her hair and her flirtatious mannerism, which contrasts greatly with the mood set up by the metal song. Her introduction sets up the concept that these Angels are tough women like their 1970s counterparts, and they are still glamorous while fighting crime.

The *Charlie's Angels* vocalized theme song plays as the three Angels drive the speedboat away, and the theme song creates continuity between the glamour of the 1970s Angels with the twenty-first century Angels. The director—simply referred to as McG—uses the montage to appeal to the various age groups within the audience: for the adults, the montage serves to connect the new Angels to the character types of the original 1979s trio, and for younger viewers, the montage serves as a quick introduction to the Angels’ lives and the format of their crime-fighting unit. Within the montage, Alex wins a horse-riding trophy, and the professionalism of her outfit plus the expensiveness of her sport suggests that she comes from a wealthy family, which establishes a connection between glamour and money. In another clip, Alex wins a fencing match, throws off her helmet, and flips her hair around. Since fencing is associated with aristocracy, the movie further solidifies that, of all the Angels, Alex comes from
a high socioeconomic background. Her hair flipping in the fencing scene and the parachuting scene implies that she also knows how to exhibit her beauty in a style that is traditionally glamorous. In another shot, Alex wears a NASA suit while walking with other astronauts, which conveys that she has both intelligence and physical prowess. Charlie’s voiceover during the montage solidifies the concept that glamour plus beauty equals success when he says, “They have three things in common: They’re brilliant, beautiful, and they work for me” (Charlie’s Angels). Charlie’s list of “three things” omits an important aspect of being an Angel: they possess martial arts fighting. Although these women are action heroes, he neglects to mention their strength, stamina, and fighting skills. Instead, the show reinforces the idea that glamour is key to their success rather than the physical requirements of being a crime-fighter.

When Alex fights a character known as the “Thin Man,” the audience can see the similarity of her fighting skills to Hong Kong cinema. Alex had been unarmed when she was attacked by the Thin Man, and in a stunt similar to Jackie Chan, she grabs a rusty metal chain as a tool to fight. The audience would be familiar with Jackie Chan’s Hong Kong-choreographed stunts in popular American movies like Rush Hour (1998) in which he grabs ordinary objects in his surroundings to provide non-lethal ways to combat his adversaries. Alex’s choreography with swings and twists resembles Chan’s because she does not intend to kill the Thin Man with the lethal metal chain. Unlike other action stars like Trinity and Sarah Connor, Alex does not carry a gun, which is a decisive moral stance all the 2000s Angels take in the sequel Charlie’s Angels: Full Throttle. Rather, Alex relies on the metal chain and martial arts kicks to defeat her enemy, but her glamour also develops the sublime in a different way than Trinity does. Trinity’s sublimity is a mix of awe and fear, but Alex’s a mix of classical glamour and awe. Although Alex does not use guns, Alex could easily kill a human with her fighting skills. Furthermore, the
heavy metal song “Blind” by Korn implies that Alex has a tough interior to match the intensity of the guitars and the drums. Alex transfixes the audience with her fighting skills but also leaves the audience amazed at her restraint and respect for human life. The sublime feeling is desire and adoration of her beauty and skills.

In addition to the differences in opening scenes and fighting styles, Trinity and Alex differ in the way that the films introduce the audience to both women’s relationships with the significant men in their lives. Alex takes a hyper traditionally gendered feminine domestic role with her boyfriend while Trinity’s initial interaction with Neo is both ethereal-like and an inversion of gender expectations. Trinity anonymously contacts Neo through online chat rooms, and she meets him at a nightclub that plays Rob Zombie’s “Dragula.” Similar to the opening scene in Charlie’s Angels, the use of the metal song develops a masculine atmosphere to the club, and the song reinforces Neo’s misguided impression that his anonymous informant is male. Neo is impressed to meet the infamous “Trinity” because of her reputation, and when he admits that he thought she would be a man, she says, “Most guys do” (The Matrix). Neo’s expectation reveals the gender assumptions of contemporary American society that primarily males are interested in computers. Trinity overturns both his and the audience’s gendered expectations by revealing her identity.

Although Neo is the “One” in The Matrix’s narrative, Trinity’s role in the film is greater than serving as a feminine guide/goddess of Neo’s Hero’s Journey. In “Mastering the Real: Trinity as the ‘Real’ Hero of The Matrix,” G. Christopher Williams argues that the film relies on an inversion of “predominantly feminine narratives” of Alice in Wonderland and Snow White in order to “show Trinity to be the more powerful figure” than Neo, and Williams begins his analysis with how “her very name suggests an inversion of basic cultural assumptions and
expectations” (7-8). Williams provides an alternative interpretation to the popular perception that Neo is the hero of the narrative; rather, he claims that Trinity is the actual hero of the movie because the film begins with her and shows her transformation into the hero (G. Williams 7-8). Indeed, Trinity undergoes many of the steps of the Heroine’s journey before the onset of the film’s narrative. When she meets Neo in the bar, she is fulfilling the Heroine’s Journey’s step of finding the “Sensitive Man as Completion” (Frankel 7). As a sensitive man, Neo helps Trinity realize her role as a hero, and her name suggests that she is Neo’s supernatural savior. Indeed, her belief and kiss resurrect Neo from death, and her love gives him the strength to defeat Agent Smith. Her hacker abilities, heroine role, fighting skills, and glamour both unnerves and attracts Neo and the audience, which is a sublime experience.

Trinity’s glamour relies on a combination of noir lighting, beauty, and cinematic techniques to keep the audience feeling visually unbalanced. The audience’s first view of Trinity with Neo features her standing slightly off center in a medium close up. Her off-centered position makes the audience feel as off-balanced as Neo does because most humans feel at ease when the subject of a shot is in the center. Trinity wears a black corset, so the audience can admire her slender, muscular body; she is not bulky like Sarah Connor since her physique in the Matrix resembles her real-world body where she eats rationed food, which probably lacks the nutrition for bulky muscles. Her slicked-back dark hair highly contrasts her very light skin and her glittering eyes. She has highly arched eyebrows, heavy eyeliner, voluminous mascara, and neutral eyeshadow. The dark noir lighting has low-key lighting on her face, and the brightness contrasting with the shadows suggests that she is an angelic rescue for Neo. She is both sexually appealing but also other-worldly, and her voice is low and smooth. She steps forward as she says, “Right now, all I can tell you is that you're in danger” (The Matrix). Her movement has her
standing in the center of the medium close shot, which creates visual balance, but her words simultaneously put both Neo and the audience off-balance. She leans in as if she is going to kiss Neo, which heightens the sexual tension, but instead, she rests her cheek against his and converses with him. Trinity’s measured movements would appear to anyone at the bar as if she is flirting with Neo, but her words of warning make the audience feel Neo’s mix of desire and fear. Therefore, Trinity’s glamour mixes sexuality with the fear of her mysterious warning.

Although Trinity’s first scene with Neo inverts gender expectations, Alex’s first scene with her boyfriend not only reinforces traditional gendered feminine roles but suggests that women have to pretend to be less intelligent than men in order to keep a male partner. Funnell comments on the ways in which the Angels’ femininity is used as a cover to make them non-threatening among their male action hero peers, and she cites scholarship about this trend within the Hong Kong “girls with guns” genre: “According to Lenuta Giukin, feminine masquerade is a central tool used by the warrior women of ‘girls with guns’ to conceal ‘a more aggressive heroic identity that grants them the status of heroine in this male dominated space’” (qtd. in Funnell 71). Giukin’s argument underlines the importance of drawing attention to heroines’ femininity so that these characters were more socially accepted by patriarchal societies. All three Angels are both traditionally feminine and glamorous, but Alex assumes the most domestic role of the trio because she is twice portrayed cooking delicious meals to please her boyfriend. Even while completing domestic chores, Alex is portrayed as glamorous. In the movie-set trailer in which she lives, naturalistic light enters in from the left side which gives the place a warm glow, and the warmth of the light and the neutral colors of the trailer is contrasted by the dark colors of her outfit and her hair. While Alex is baking muffins, she is dressed as if she is at a nightclub: she wears a leather corset, tight black pants, hair tied up in chopsticks, and cat-eye eyeliner. Her
outfit seems incongruous with baking muffins since flour splatters from the mixing process could potentially ruin the color composition of the black clothes. She cooks not for herself (which is apparent by the fact she never tastes her rock-solid muffins) but for the pleasure of others, which reinforces a gendered feminine role of wife/mother.

However, Alex’s cooking predilection alone is not the problematic element of the scene: her forced naïveté depletes some of the feminist aspects of her character. When her actor-boyfriend questions the script and asks why not defuse an explosive by yanking wires, Alex goes from laughing to serious and says, "No, honey, those are dummy wires" before going through a technical explanation of the circuits while she retrieves muffins out of the oven. Her boyfriend micro-aggressively inquires how she knows so much “for a bikini waxer,” and then the camera shows a closeup of her face as her eyes go wide. She turns around to put her arms behind his head and says both innocently and seductively, “Isn't it amazing how much information you can learn off the internet?” (Charlie’s Angels). Alex wants to conceal her secret job from her boyfriend, but the manner in which accomplishes this goal sets a bad precedent for action hero femininity. A later conversation among the Angels reveals that Alex has told the truth of her job to previous male partners with disastrous consequences: “They come on all lovey dovey [sic] until they find out I can shatter a cinder block with my forehead” (Charlie’s Angels). Her past experience taints her decision, and instead of being honest with her current boyfriend, Alex decides that she needs to lie and pretend she is naive. Rather than achieve potential intimacy with her partner, she uses femininity as a masquerade for her action hero life, and her femininity reinforces the idea that female action heroes can only be successful if they strictly perform traditional femininity.
Further differences between Trinity and Alex becomes apparent when both action heroines go on operations in the field. Usually Trinity’s entrances into the Matrix are for covert missions, but when she and Neo rescue Morpheus, they directly engage in one of the most notable scenes in the movie: the hallway shootout at the entrance to the Matrix agents’ stronghold. Trinity wears sunglasses with a shiny black leather trench coat, which she later takes off to reveal a high neck sleeveless leather top, black leather pants, and black leather boots with a chunky heel. She looks beautiful as if she is going to a nightclub instead of a rescue mission. Her pores and the lines of her face are more smoothed out. When she is not in the Matrix simulation, the audience can see her pores and lines on her face, but the Matrix allows her to be glamorous. As she and Neo fight their way past the enemy, Trinity glamorizes gun violence, as the Hong Kong “girls with guns” action heroines; while such glamorization of gun violence is not uncommon in male action hero movies, *The Matrix* glamorizes the action for female action heroes, which had not been done before with the unglamorous Sarah Connor. When Alex shoots a Matrix agent in close range on a rooftop, she is posed with her legs spread out, toes pointed in different directions, left hand loose at her side. Rather than assume a two-hand shooting stance, Trinity looks casual as she says “dodge this” before firing. The Wachowski directors use bullet time during the succeeding long shot that shows Trinity in the right side of the frame so the audience can see her body, her arm in the air after firing the shot, the agent flying backward, and Neo on the ground. Trinity is in control of the situation as she coolly rescues Neo as if he is the traditional “damsel in distress,” which further subverts traditional gender roles. In addition, bullet time in this scene allows the audience to admire her calmness during pressure and the glamour of her beauty and action.
Both Trinity and Alex are beautiful when they go on reconnaissance missions, but Alex’s depiction of going undercover as an Asian masseuse to spy on Corwin at Madame Wong’s House of Blossoms draws on Orientalistic desires of Western audiences. The master shot shows Corwin in the foreground face-down for a message and Alex walking in on the right. The audience can see her body but not her head because her back is to the camera. Her hair is pulled back into an elaborate bun with fake cherry blossom twigs and red blossoms. Alex wears red lipstick, red eyeshadow, and thick black cat-eye eyeliner. Alex’s costume does not resemble a masseuse’s uniform or even Asian clothes; rather her clothes represent a Western fetishized fantasy of an exotic Asian Woman. Alex wears a red halter dress with gold cherry blossom designs with spaghetti cross straps across one shoulder, and black strappy high heels. Funnel states that the Angels are always hypersexualized when they go undercover: “The women of Charlie’s Angels are explicitly sexualized and fetishized when engaged in recognizance [sic] missions in order to gain access to privileged information/spaces possessed or guarded predominantly by white men” (71). Corwin, a rich white male, approves of her appearance and does not suspect her to be dangerous. He is obviously sexually attracted to her by calling her “Yoko,” which is demeaning because he sees her as a fantasy of Yoko Ono and because he fails to realize that Yoko is Japanese and the woman standing before him is Chinese. Although Alex cannot break cover by displaying anger, the emotionless way she replies, “At your service” both informs the audience of her displeasure and maintains the fetishized facade for Corwin. Alex’s vocal composure and facial annoyance represent a positive moment for this character because she knows she has to play a part to get information, but at the same time, she silently resists Corwin’s demeaning behavior.
Alex’s attitude during the rest of the scene demonstrates a resistance to the male gaze, but the undercover costumes of traditionally glamorous Natalie and Dylan are Orientalistic. Alex uses a girlish voice to explain to Corwin that triggering certain pressure points increases circulation, but then she triggers a pressure point that renders Corwin unconscious. She demonstrates her power over Corwin (as the symbol of patriarchy) as she continues her discussion of the uses of pressure points and says flatly, “render a man unconscious.” The brutal manner in which she reasserts her power over Corwin demonstrates her resistance to his patriarchal power and gaze. Her deft handling of the scene and her intelligence would have made it possible for the scene to be a solo operation, but the filmmakers made an error in judgement by including the other two Angels in “yellowface” and dressed in mock-geisha kimonos with black wigs. The non-diegetic song, “Turning Japanese,” by The Vapors in this scene reinforces the concept that a person can appropriate the racialized facial features of another. Natalie and Dylan are both Caucasian, but they use eyeliner to make them look as if they have Asian eye shapes. The appropriation of geisha-like kimonos and their eyeliner techniques are both Orientalistic practices because the Angels are pretending that they can achieve an undercover Asian identity with these props as if an Asian identity is simply just a kimono and eye shape. These “yellowface” practices were used in Classical Age cinema, and the use of “yellowface” in a twenty-first century film disgustedly continues a racist element of past American cinema and detracts from Alex’s triumph over the male gaze.

Another scene in which Charlie’s Angels others Asian cultures occurs when Dylan and Natalie react to Alex’s rock-solid muffins. Alex is proud of making muffins “from scratch” but expresses annoyance when the other Angels make fun of her muffins’ hardness. Natalie throws a muffin, which embeds into the door as Bosley enters. Bosley asks about the muffin, which Dylan
labels as a “Chinese fighting muffin.” Dylan makes a play on words by combining the idea of a Chinese fighting star, a weapon, with Alex’s ethnicity. Alex looks perturbed as she says, “They're not Chinese. They're not fighting. They're blueberry” (Charlie’s Angels). Funnell views this scene as Alex “taking offense to her labeling of muffins and subsequently her domestic skills as Chinese, because she was trying to be American in this space” (72). In Funnell’s viewpoint, she sees this moment as Alex simply being annoyed at not embodying the “model minority” stereotype within American culture: “Liu’s characterization in the series appears reflective of the ‘model minority’ myth, a popular representation of Asian Americans which highlights their rapid ascension in the public spaces of politics and business, and assimilation into white mainstream culture” (Funnell 72). Certainly, Funnell’s interpretations are valid if one were to view the scene as Alex wanting to assimilate into American culture; however, another way to view this scene would be to think about how Alex’s ethnicity is always Orientalized by the other characters. Neither Dylan’s or Natalie’s ethnic backgrounds are ever the source of a joke, and on two missions, Alex’s disguise relies on American stereotypes of Asian women as either being subservient or The Dragon Lady.

In another undercover mission, Alex’s disguise embodies the Dragon Lady stereotype of Asian Women. Shoba Rajgopal, author of ‘The Daughter of Fu Manchu’: The Pedagogy of Deconstructing the Representation of Asian Women in Film and Fiction” lists some of the “classic stereotypes” about women of color, including the “Dragon Lady” (152). Rajgopal describes the Dragon Lady stereotype as a “‘hypersexual’ Asian woman ‘who seduces and then destroys’” (154). In Classical Cinema, Anna May Wong played a Dragon Lady in The Daughter of Fu Manchu when her character, Ling Moy, seduces Ronald Petrie so that she can kill him; when Petrie chooses his fiancée over Ling Moy, she says, “You must have a taste of a thousand
bitter deaths before you die” (*The Daughter of Fu Manchu*). Ling Moy is therefore a Dragon Lady because she is the daughter of a criminal known as The Dragon, and she desires suffering and death to a man whom she seduced. The Dragon Lady differs from the Femme Fatale because the Dragon Lady’s portrayal born on Orientalistic portrayals of Asian as Other as well as “yellow fever,” an American racial stereotype of Asians as nefarious. The Dragon Lady stereotype continues into the popular 1990s series *Ally McBeal* in which Lucy Liu plays the cold and cruel Ling Woo (Rajgopal 154). Female audiences during the 1990s would most likely have been familiar with the character of Ling Woo and would have recognized that Liu was playing a similar role in *Charlie’s Angels* when Alex goes undercover at RedStar Systems.

Alex’s Dragon Lady persona demonstrates an important concept of early twentieth century action heroines: many characters reinforce heteronormative values by suggesting that female action heroes are the most successful when they use their sexuality as a distraction for men. The establishing shot of the scene is Corwin's Red Star Systems building, and a white muscle car with the Angels briefly stops in front of it while Natalie says, “You ready to whip them into shape, Alex?” Natalie’s joke foreshadows that Alex will have to employ a dominatrix-like person during the operation. The next shot is a high angle of Alex dressed in a leather business suit with the other Angels in disguise. The non-diegetic song “Barracuda” by Heart plays; although the lyrics of the song do not play, the theme of this widely recognized song is about a woman getting revenge on a man who wronged her (Heart). This song sets up the idea that Alex is a dangerous woman who men should fear.

The closeup shots of Alex’s body both highlight the three sets of curves valued by Classical Cinema’s glamour and, simultaneously, commands the male gaze in order to distract the male engineers so the other two Angels can infiltrate the Red Star System. According to
Dyhouse, the ideal body type of 1920s and 1930s glamour “was slenderness, but with three sets of twin heart-shaped curves: lips, bosom, behind” (38). Although these three hearts were accentuated for the pleasure of the male gaze, Alex’s commanding personality demonstrates that she purposefully controls the gaze without being subjected to it. The master shot in the engineers’ shared office is a low angle shot looking up at Alex as she leads the other Angels (disguised as male engineers) down the center of a white, bland office. High key lighting is used so that the audience can see the stark contrast between her black leather suit and the office mise-en-scène. Overhead illumination causes the black material to shine around the curves of her body. Alex looks like a dominatrix: she wears heavy eye makeup under cat-eye glasses and a leather business suit with the jacket zipped to an exaggeratedly low V-neck. Her business suit would not be considered workplace appropriate; rather, the extreme dip of the V-neck and the leather material suggests that she is wearing a sexual role-play costume. A close up of the stern expression on her red lips draws attention to the first heart shaped lip, which is a sexual orifice. Next, there is a closeup of her buttocks with the diegetic sound of the tight leather creaking as she walks. The leather draws attention to the shapeliness of her gluteal muscles, which is a sexuality desirable feature. Her hair is half pulled up so the rest falls in long waves to her breasts, which draws attention to the third heart-shaped curve of Classical Glamour. As she moves out of the frame, all the men hastily scramble to follow her, which suggests that they desire her. Although Alex had not been kind to their peer Doris, the men are so overwhelmed by Alex’s hypersexual appeal that they are willing to follow her, which leaves the Red Star System’s vault vulnerable to the other Angels. Alex wears clothes that are coded for sexual appeal, which is a defining aspect of Heroine Glamour, but from her cool body language and stern expression, the audience can see that she wields power over the bumbling men.
Alex develops the role of the Asian Dragon Lady when she plays with heteronormative sexual fantasies of both dominance and innocence to distract the male engineers sitting in the auditorium from noticing the disguised Angels. In the auditorium, the male Red Star Systems engineers sit like eager students listening to Alex talk. She wields a black pointer stick that she uses to whip the table closest to the front like a dominatrix, which makes the males both aroused and fearful as they flinch. The whip’s crack is loud enough to startle the audience, and the viewers’ intimated reaction mixes with awe for a sublime experience. Alex asks the men for suggestions to be made to their bosses, and when one of them answers, she jumps on the desk, grabs his head, and holds it to her breast while she strokes his hair. She alternates between yelling like a dominatrix and then soothingly baby-talking to the men, which plays to the patriarchal male fantasy of the mother/whore dynamic. When Alex breaks the stick in two on her thigh in a martial arts move, male employees look away in pain as if she were castrating them, but their fear disappears when she asks if any of them have another good idea. As they all enthusiastically raise their hands, the camera switches to a longshot of Alex striking a “sexy schoolgirl” pose with her head cocked to her side. She plays with her hair, childishly points her feet inward, and says flirtatiously, “Can anyone show me?” (*Charlie’s Angels*). Her alternation between yelling and baby talk—dominatrix and schoolgirl innocence—entices the men sexually. This behavior is the hallmark of a Dragon Lady, who uses both allure and punishment for the men in her life. Although any of the three Angels could have played a dominatrix role, Alex’s depiction is reminiscent of the Asian Dragon Lady of Classical Cinema because of the performative techniques of the role and the cinematic history of the stereotype repeated within twentieth and twenty-first century cinema.
Liu’s performance in this scene is evocative of both Anna May Wong’s Dragon Lady role in *Daughter of Fu Manchu* and Liu’s performance as Ling Woo in the popular 1990s television series *Ally McBeal*. Similar to how Alex alternates between dominatrix yells and baby talk, Ling Woo entices and frightens men with her “purrts and growls”; hence, Rajgopal views Ling Woo as a Dragon Lady “caricature” of Asian women (154). Liu’s continuation of similar performative gestures and tones of voice between the characters in *Ally McBeal* and *Charlie’s Angels* suggests that Liu is often cast in roles that perpetuate the stereotype. Rajgopal lists two other roles in which Liu plays Dragon Ladies: “Pearl, the sadistic dominatrix and mafia hitwoman [sic] in *Payback* (1999)” and the “Asian Dragon Lady O-Ren Ishii, a brutal assassin, Queen of Tokyo Underworld and leader of the Crazy 88 Fighters” (155). In addition to those films, Liu has a short appearance in the television series *Ugly Betty* in 2007 where her character Grace Chin is another Dragon Lady who seduces a male protagonist to enact revenge for the way he humiliated her in college (“Derailed”). All five of these roles perpetuate the stereotype of the Asian Dragon Lady, and therefore, one cannot discuss Liu’s glamour within *Charlie’s Angels* without acknowledging how Alex fits into a long lineage of cinematic stereotypes of Asian women.

All elements of *(In)tangible Glamour* augment Alex’s authority at the Red Star Systems scene, but in *The Matrix*, the Wachowski directors have to rely on intangible elements only when Trinity is outside of the Matrix simulation. When Morpheus is held captive within the computer program, Trinity decides to accompany Neo on a rescue mission. Both characters are outside of the Matrix, so the audience sees Trinity's physical body without the glamorous, tangible elements—such as glamorous clothing and makeup—that the Matrix gives her digital avatar. In the real world, she inhabits a battered hovercraft ship called the Nebuchadnezzar, and her clothes are as drab and careworn as the ship’s mise-en-scène. Trinity’s costume reflects the “used
future” trope, popularized by *Star Wars*, “where spaceships look dirty, dingy, and used” and become “home to renegades” (“Used Future”). The Matrix augments her appearance as having fashionable, sleek catsuits, but in the real world, she wears a long-sleeved scoop-neck cotton shirt and threadbare trousers. The sharp contrast of the used-future appearance suggests that Trinity is a hero out of necessity: while the Angels choose a glamorous vigilante job, Trinity fights (unpaid) because her hacker skills are necessary for human survival. Moreover, the ruggedness of Trinity’s costume evokes similarities to Sarah Connor, who also fights to prevent human extinction. Trinity wears a naturalistic foundation with minimal mascara and no eyeliner, so she looks like she has no makeup in a post-apocalyptic world. Even without the tangible glamorous elements like makeup and fashionable clothes, she is still a captivating character because the audience can see the determination in her eyes and the self-confidence she possesses as temporary captain of the ship.

Within the scene where she argues with Neo, lighting helps the audience to perceive her as a glamorous heroine. Inside the Matrix simulation, the green-tinted lighting symbolizes the green screen of DOS computers, but in the real world, the characters are illuminated by blue-tinted lighting. Color researchers Rathee and Rajain discuss how psychologists study the mental and physical associations of the color blue: “Psychologically, it is thought that […] cool colours such as blue are linked to feelings of calmness, peacefulness, relaxation, and pleasantness,” and in physiology, blue is less stimulating in “connection with blood pressure, skin-conductance and respiratory rate” (210). The blue light engenders positive associations for the human resistance fighters, and Trinity wears blue, which suggests that she is a calming force to both Neo and the anxious audience in the scene after Morpheus’s capture. In addition to the blue atmosphere, Trinity is also illuminated in noir lighting, which creates a chiaroscuro effect on her face by
having one side in darkness and the other in light. The effect of this technique reminds the audience that Trinity’s brand of heroism differs from female action heroes like the Angels because Trinity often uses deadly force as a resistance fighter. Her eyes reflect much of the low-key lighting, which causes a glamorous, scintillating effect. Even without the tangible glamorous elements, Trinity is still a captivating character due to her intangible elements.

In addition to the lighting of this scene, Trinity’s confident attitude makes her a glamorous character when she uses her rank to decide who goes on the rescue mission. Neo argues for a solo mission, and Trinity uses body language and assertiveness to maintain control of the conflict. Within the shot, she stands just to the right of center, but then she pivots as she approaches Neo. Her face is centered in the frame, and she informs him that she will decide the rescue mission’s plan: “I believe if you were really serious about saving him, you are going to need my help. And since I'm the ranking officer on this ship, if you don't like it, I believe you can go to hell because you aren't going anywhere else” (*The Matrix*). Trinity’s voice is commanding as she reminds Neo of her authority as temporary captain, and her repetition of “I believe” asserts her certainty of destiny when Neo questions his own. He feels doubtful about his own powers since he is in the beginning stages of his Hero’s Quest, but Trinity travels farther into her Heroine’s Quest and has a conviction that Neo lacks. Moss’s blocking within the frame and commanding tone makes Trinity a memorizing, yet intimidating, character. Neo acquiesces to her authority, and the audience is reminded that Trinity is not a minor character but rather a female action hero like Sarah Connor.

A reversal of the gender roles of fairy tale tropes also plays a role in Trinity’s glamour. Her kiss resurrects Neo’s flatlined heart so that he can defeat the Matrix agents, and the blocking of a heroine leaning over a sleeping “‘prince’” is “an inversion of the Sleeping Beauty and Snow
White stories” (G. Williams 14). In traditional fairy tales, a male hero bends over a sleeping damsel-in-distress to awaken her from eternal sleep—a symbol of death—with a kiss. In The Matrix, the physical positioning of Neo in the chair resembles a bed in the like traditional fairy tales, and as Trinity leans over him, her eyes sparkle in the reflected light with tenderness. Not only does she look emotionally vulnerable, but the audience can hear the anguish in her voice as she tells Neo about the Oracle’s prophecy to her: the man she loves would be “The One” to ensure humanity’s survival. She wills him back to life as she whispers, “I'm not afraid anymore. So you see, you can't be dead. You can't be because I love you. You hear me? I love you (The Matrix). Trinity kissing Neo is a glamorous moment because of the fairy tale kissing-scene trope and because sparks literally fly behind their heads as the machines use lasers to infiltrate the Nebuchadnezzar. Furthermore, Trinity’s display of vulnerability, triumph over fear, and declaration of love makes her a glamorous heroine in a way that Sarah Connor is not. Although Sarah protects her son, their relationship is difficult at times because trauma makes her emotionally cold. Trinity, however, experiences trauma, yet she still allows herself the freedom to love, which makes her more akin to the Heroine Glamour of Xena the Warrior Princess and Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Trinity’s glamour is built on glamorous tangible elements in the Matrix simulation, intangible self-confidence, and similarities to glamorous fairy tale tropes.

**Conclusion**

Heroine Glamour combines Classical Cinema’s shellacked glamour with a character’s ability to express love and vulnerability without succumbing to the male gaze. The popularity of female action heroes has roots in the early days of cinema with the serial queens of the 1920s and 1930s. Both feminism and its backlash shaped the way that heroines are depicted on screen from
the 1970s into the twenty-first century. While many female action heroes combine glamour with fighting abilities, such as the original 1970s television show *Charlie’s Angels*, there are some female action heroes who are not glamorous and are emotionally cold, such as Sarah Connor from *Terminator: Judgment Day*. The 1990s saw the rise of female action heroes who combined the elements of feminism, fighting abilities, and emotional complexity within the television shows of *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Both of these heroines illustrate the elements of *(In)tangible Glamour* and shaped societal demand for strong action heroines within twenty-first century cinema, such as Trinity, from *The Matrix*, and Alex, from the 2000 reboot of *Charlie’s Angels*.

Both Trinity and Alex’s martial arts scenes were choreographed by the Yuen brothers whose work had been famous in Hong Kong cinema, but Trinity and Alex represent vastly different American adaptations of the Hong Kong “girls with guns” genre. Trinity belongs to a human resistance team that battles artificially intelligent machines within the computer simulation of the Matrix, and her glamour is connected to the sublime through the audience’s awe and fear watching her fighting skills and her authority as leader. Alex and the other Angels pursue careers of crime-fighting, and they are often hypersexualized as they go undercover. Alex’s connection to the sublime is through her Classically Glamorous beauty and the audience’s awe of her martial arts kills. Both heroines use Hong Kong fighting-styles, but Trinity’s technique corresponds to the serious tone of the deadly battles within the Matrix while Alex’s style mirrors Jackie Chan’s creative and comical talent in order to match the light-hearted tone of the film.

Trinity’s depiction within the movie also allows for a more nuanced interpretation of twenty-first century female action heroes as compared to previous decades. Like Sarah Connor,
Trinity is a gritty warrior who does not hesitate to use deadly violence, but Trinity departs from the Sarah Connor role by also being emotionally vulnerable when Neo temporarily dies. In this way, she reflects the growth of 1990s action heroines like Xena and Buffy who openly express their love for their fellow warriors and loved ones. In addition, Trinity is able to invert the gender roles of fairytale tropes, which is a feminist rewrite of societal norms. Trinity is confident because of her growth within the Heroine’s Journey, and her willingness to share her love resurrects Neo with a kiss. Neo assumes the place of the traditionally female damsel-in-distress, and Trinity is the hero of the story that sparks life back into him. This is a glamorous moment in fairy tale stories, and Trinity’s role in the trope augments her Heroine Glamour.

Alex’s depiction in *Charlie’s Angels* shows an Asian American woman in a different role compared to Classical Hollywood cinema, which often portrays Asian as villainous. Alex’s heroism is established within Angels’ first operation when she parachutes out of a helicopter to apprehend a criminal. Not only does she execute a dangerous stunt in catching him in mid-air, but she also lands him successfully within the Angels’ speedboat. She has expert knowledge of technology, and she wants to cook for her friends and family as an expression of her love. When going undercover, Alex knows how to play both the submissive Asian role and the Asian Dragon Lady role in order to attract the male gaze while maintaining subjectivity. However, Liu is often cast in the Dragon Lady role in both cinema and television, which perpetuates the stereotype of the villainous Asian woman. However, Alex does not behave like the submissive Asian woman or the Dragon Lady when she is not conducting an Angel undercover mission, so I argue that Alex would play those roles while undercover because she is familiar with the stereotypes of the era and is using them to her advantage. In the early 2000s, there were not many strong,
glamorous Asian American roles for women, and Liu furthered representation for actresses of color by playing Alex.
CHAPTER 4:
CURRENT GLAMOUR IN WONDER WOMAN, ALADDIN, AND BLACK PANTHER

A New Stage in Glamour

Since glamour reflects both trends in the film industry and changes within culture, recent years (2017-2020) mark a change in glamorous depictions from the earliest years of the twenty-first century. The cultural outcry for increased minority representation within cinema—due to the popularity of April Reign’s #OscarsSoWhite in 2015 and 2016—led to the admittance of more women and people of color into the exclusive, predominantly white Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (Romo, Workneh). As the criteria for award nominations changed, more films starring, and directed-by, people of color became nominated and won. Both Spike Lee and Alfonso Cuaron, directors whose movies won awards in 2019, credit the change in the academy as an influential step in recognizing the need for diverse representation within Hollywood (Groom and Dobuzinskis). As changes within diverse casting occur, there are more opportunities for actresses of color to star in leading roles in films and become icons of glamour. Therefore, glamour evolves to include more nuanced definitions and representations as actresses of color—such as Naomi Scott and Tessa Thompson—star in glamorous action hero roles. Within this chapter, I note two significant changes in the depiction of glamour: first, the polarized differences between sensuality and sexuality has become less stark within the spectrum in recent years, and second, the representations of minority glamour has not only grown in genres from
comedy to science fiction but also has some movies, such as *Black Panther*, shedding stereotypes of women of color in more nuanced and positive portrayals as warriors and scientists.

First, all types of glamour—from Classical Glamour to Contemporary Glamour—exist on a spectrum of sensuality versus sexuality, and often, from the early days of cinema to the start of the twentieth century, depictions usually lay on one side of the spectrum or another. Thus, Enigmatic Glamour lay primarily on the sensual end of the continuum whereas Heroine Glamour was mostly situated at the opposite end. I use terms like “primarily” and “mostly” to discuss a tendency to side with one end or another while acknowledging that some actresses of Heroine Glamour can have sensual aspects while having sexual appeal and vice versa for Enigmatic Glamour. Chapters Three and Four discuss the glamour of films from the first six years of the twenty-first century. I argue that within the last few years, there has been a shift away from polarization and toward centrality within the spectrum with glamorous actresses bringing both sensuality and sexuality to character portrayals, which I label Current Glamour.

The second defining aspect of Current Glamour is increased, diverse cinematic representations of minority glamour in recent years (2017-2020) as compared to the early years of the twenty-first century. In recent years, there have been increased representations of Asians within cinema, such as *To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before* (2018), starring Lana Condor, and *Crazy Rich Asians* (2018), featuring a predominantly Asian cast. In addition, there are Asians as glamorous action heroines in television series, such as Ming-Na Wen and Chloe Bennet from Marvel’s *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* (2013-2020). Also, there are more actresses of Indian descent in leading roles within cinema and television. For example, Mindi Kaling is a producer of television shows, such as the Hulu series *Four Weddings and a Funeral* (2019), and she also produces and stars in *The Mindy Project* (2012-2017) and *Late Night* (2019). Naomi Scott performs in
Disney’s live action version of *Aladdin* (2019) as well as the 2019 remake of *Charlie’s Angels*. Women of mixed African and Hispanic ancestry are also getting lead roles in popular science fiction movies, such as Tessa Thompson in *Men in Black: International* (2019) and Zoe Saldana in Marvel’s *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014). African American women, as well as actresses from African nations, are casted in more leading roles with nuanced representations: Taraji P. Henson, Octavia Spencer, and Janelle Monáe in *Hidden Figures*; Viola Davis in the television series *How to Get Away with Murder* (2014-2020); and Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira, Letitia Wright, and Angela Bassett in *Black Panther* (2018). Between television series and cinema, more women of color are featured in glamorous, leading roles, which changes the dynamic of glamour and women’s conceptions of femininity and beauty.

Many of the Current Glamour roles feature women who are breaking racial stereotypes that persisted within Hollywood for decades; however, change in the industry can be slow and Orientalized portrayals of women of color still exist. In the previous chapters, I discuss how Ziyi Zhang, from *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and Lucy Liu, from the 2000 remake of *Charlie’s Angels*, are glamorous, but they are exoticized in their respective roles. In the 2017 remake of *The Mummy*, Sofia Boutella plays Princess Ahmanet who is an Ancient Egyptian princess who was supposed to inherit her father’s throne. When her father names his newborn son as his heir, Ahmanet makes an evil pact with a supernatural deity in order to gain magical powers, and she murders her father and his family. Ahmanet is punished by mummification before she can channel the deity through her lover, and a mercenary named Nick (played by Tom Cruise) accidentally awakens Ahmanet. Most of Boutella’s limited screen time as the Mummy Ahmanet is devoted to seducing Nick, played by Tom Cruise, so that she can reincarnate her lover through his body. Boutella, as both the living Ahmanet and the undead Mummy Ahmanet, is exoticized wearing
revealing immodest clothing that an Ancient Egyptians princess would not wear, which makes her the object of the patriarchal male gaze that Mulvey discusses and an Orientalized character. Her character has no more depth than simply a hypersexual female figure for the male audience’s pleasure and consumption. Kayleigh Donaldson, author of “How the Mummy Did Sofia Boutella Dirty,” writes that the 2017 *Mummy* ignored Boutella’s talents as “charismatic” actress, portrayed her as an “sex object,” and “reduces a potentially interesting female villain to nothing more than another excuse for Tom Cruise to show that he’s still got it” (Donaldson). The movie producers, Universal, are attempting to build a “Dark Universe” in recreating older monster movies, and Ahmanet would have been a unique addition to the predominantly male monster genre. However, when watching the 2019 *Mummy*, one notices that the living Ahmanet’s scenes are brief and only used to seduce the audience, and the ending of the movie reveals that Boutella will not continue in the Monster Dark Universe: Tom Cruise will be the new Mummy as Ahmanet’s lifeless corpse is returned to imprisonment. Boutella is a glamorous actress who would have brought more representation of women of color into the genre, but the portrayal in this film is Orientalized and highly disappointing.

Current Glamour is my assessment of films from recent years in order to project what seems to be significant changes to the film industry in a relatively small period of time: 2017-2020. Changes within glamour often evolve over periods of time, and therefore, scholars often demarcate a range of decades when specific glamorous eras begin and cease. However, my choice of 2017 is not arbitrary: Warner Brothers’ *Wonder Woman*, released in 2017, marks a historical shift in cinema, with effects currently rippling from that date in the films of the next three years. *Wonder Woman*, starring a female superhero and directed by a female director, forced the industry to accept that female leading superheroes can be just as profitable and
popular as their male superhero counterparts. Once studios recognized a new market was profitable, they increased representation of female heroines in film, and representation affects women’s conceptualization of glamour as well as girls’ self-confidence. In addition, the #OscarsSoWhite inspired a more diverse representation of actresses of color within film. I chose Disney’s Aladdin because Jasmine is the first princess of color in a live-action remake and Black Panther for its positive portrayal of actresses of African descent. These three films demonstrate a dramatic shift in glamour from the early 2000s as well as portray strong female characters in a way that shatters stereotypes within the film industry.

*Wonder Woman Starts a New Heroine Era*

One of the best examples of traditional glamour during recent years is *Wonder Woman* (2017) because the protagonist, Diana Prince, embodies both sensuality and sexuality. Diana, played by Gal Gadot, resides on a mythical island hidden from the outside world, and as she embarks on her quest in the real world, the audience feels Diana’s enjoyment of the world through her five senses: some of the most sensual moments are when she tastes ice cream for the first time and tells the vendor that he should be “proud” of his fare, or when Steve teaches her to dance, which she calls “swaying” because she is unfamiliar with romantic dancing (*Wonder Woman*). These scenes are sensual moments because Gadot's charisma helps the audience to feel tactile sensations and joy that Diana feels. Simultaneously, she is a sexual woman because of the palpable male attraction she receives when men in the London streets stare at her and how Steve awkwardly hides his sexual interest in her. Steve tells his assistant, Eta Candy, to get Diana clothes that would conceal Diana’s sexual appeal “to make her look less distracting.” Even when Diana’s entire body is covered by a trench coat, the tailored garment hugs her hourglass shape,
and so Steven thinks that adding glasses will make Diana less attractive, and Eta mocks the logic of his attempt by replying, “Really? Specs? And suddenly she's not the most beautiful woman you've ever seen?” (*Wonder Woman*). Eta’s remark suggests that Diana has a sensual, sexual glamour that cannot be concealed with mere props: no matter how Steve tries to change her appearance, Diana radiates through any disguise because glamour is beauty, charisma, and enigmatic appeal.

Gadot’s portrayal as a superhero is similar to other traditionally glamorous female action heroines in the last decade who are both sensual and sexual. Many of these strong female protagonists come from the action and science fiction genre: Scarlett Johansson from Marvel’s *The Avengers* series (2012-2019), Katniss from *The Hunger Games* series (2012-2015), Natalie Portman from *Thor: The Dark World* (2013), and Daisy Ridley from *Star Wars: Episodes VII-IX* (2015-2019). All of these actresses add to the discussion of glamour and femininity as their portrayals show different versions of femininity. For example, Johansson’s Black Widow is a highly sexual character who uses men’s attraction toward her as a tool for extracting intel for an operation whereas Katniss is a masculine girl who awkwardly performs femininity and sexuality as a tool to win sponsors’ support during the Hunger Games. Nevertheless, these strong female characters often are members of ensemble mixed-male-and-female casts except for Katniss, who is classified as an action hero but not a superhero. *Wonder Woman* changed the industry with both its fan popularity as well as its ticket sales.

*Wonder Woman’s* success at the box office changed the way the industry views female-led and female-directed action heroine films. The film’s production had been a gamble: at the time of its 2017 release, *Wonder Woman* was “the first female-fronted film of the now 10-year-old modern superhero boom, and the first to be directed by a woman” because as recently as
2014, film studios were afraid of the failures of previous films starring a female superhero lead, such as “Elektra, Catwoman, and even the 1984 (!) Supergirl [sic]” (Leon). Male superhero movies are constantly made and remade, but the failures of only three female-led superhero movies—one of which occurred more than 30 years prior—prevented Hollywood from feeling confident in investing in female superheroes. Not having female superheroes affects representation of women in cinema and would lead young viewers to think that female superheroes could only assist male superheroes. However, Wonder Woman changed Hollywood’s negative perception about creating movies with female superheroes in leading roles: Wonder Woman earned $821 million in the global box office (Rubin) and surpassed domestic earnings for male-centered superhero films, such as Iron Man, Man of Steel, and Suicide Squad (Stefansky). In addition to monetary success of the movie, Wonder Woman is also famous for being directed by a female director, Patty Jenkins. The success of the film paved the way for other female superhero leading movies directed by, and sometimes co-directed by, female directors, such as Captain Marvel (2019) and Birds of Prey: And the Fabulous Emancipation of One Harley Quinn (2020). Jenkins’s work inspired Warner Brothers to make a sequel called Wonder Woman 1984 (2020), but the film’s release date was postponed due to the 2020 coronavirus epidemic because Warner Brothers expects the film “to be one of the highest-grossing movies of the year (Rubin). The release date delay of Wonder Woman 1984 demonstrates its importance to the studio because they want the movie to premiere in theaters, which shows a change in the industry’s perception about the box office success of films starring female superheroes.

Although Diana and these other strong traditionally glamorous female heroes are widening the portrayals of female leading protagonists in movies, scholarly and cultural debate
exists about the hypersexualization of these characters. Diana’s male colleges—such as Batman and Superman—in *The Justice League* (2017) wear armor that protects their arms and legs as well as their torso, but much of Diana’s armor would be impractical; her limbs are exposed simply because female comic book heroines wear hypersexualized costumes to satisfy the appetites of the predominantly male readership. T. Keith Edmunds, author of “Heroines Aplenty,” discusses trends among the way that heroines are drawn: “[heroines] must also be presented with a hyperfeminized body in order to avoid undermining the fantasy of the male readership [...] costume design often involves skintight [sic] materials and generous displays of skin, as well as the amplified features of the female shape” (205). Edmund’s discussion of the male “fantasy” sounds similar to Mulvey’s discussion of actresses being stylized for the male gaze, and Edmund’s discussion resembles many feminist objections to how comic book heroines are drawn. He does not discuss Wonder Woman directly, but the 2017 cinematic adaptation of Wonder Woman’s costume fits the criteria he lists. Diana’s battle armor consists of a strapless red metal corset with gold trim of an eagle above the breasts, a gold W-shaped belt, a bluish black leather skirt that barely covers more than a bikini would, metal armbands, a metal headband, and knee-high wedge boots. Her arms, shoulder, and legs are potentially vulnerable in a fight, and the impracticality of the costume suggests that even Gadot’s Wonder Woman is not immune to cultural hypersexualization.

Even with the hypersexualization, the 2017 cinematic version of *Wonder Woman* is more feminist than the way the heroine is represented in the Silver Age of Comics, and her feminism and superhero strength inspire young girls. During the 1960s, the comic book Wonder Woman gives up her superhero powers to live as her alter ego (Diana Prince), and she is just as concerned with fashion and “sex appeal” as she is with learning to fight crime with karate skills
instead of superpowers (Zechowski and Neumann 137). Scholars studying this time period claim that Wonder Woman’s meeker portrayal represents the backlash against the feminist movements of the 1960s. Wonder Woman continued to evolve through the different shifts in comic book trends, but Jenkins’s 2017 film is new stand-alone story that gives the character a feminist depiction meant to inspire young girls. In fact, Jenkins purposely avoids making the film R-rated and explains her reasoning: “I was very aware that little girls were going to want to see the film, and I was very protective of that” (qtd. in Pous). Jenkins wants *Wonder Woman* to inspire girls to be heroes, and when the film premiered, parents posted photos of little girls dressed up as Wonder Woman on social media, which suggests that these girls admire a character who proves that women can be heroes (Pous). Jenkins’s Wonder Woman fights as both her alias Diana Prince and Wonder Woman (her superhero identity). Diana challenges the all-male military command over their decisions that will cost soldiers’ lives. When she travels through Belgium during World War I, Diana cannot ignore how the Germans have attacked and enslaved the local townspeople. Against the urgings of Steve, she reveals her battle armor and fights as Wonder Woman, capturing No Man’s Land for the British and freeing the town from German rule. Wonder Woman inspires girls to develop their agencies, and the actress Gal Gadot comments on the effect seeing a positive female superhero has on young female children: “It had an effect on them; it meant something to them. [...] I want to hear what they have to say. Often it’s about a profound effect that it’s had on their life. Usually it’s that it triggered them to make a change, to do something they would never do, to be courageous” (qtd. in Van Meter). Diana fights on behalf of the oppressed even if the odds are against her, and her strength inspires the young female viewership to develop their agencies and be brave.
Disney’s Influence on Glamour: *Aladdin* and *Black Panther*

As cinematic representation grows with the inclusion of more actresses of color, one must also pay attention to the production companies and the influence they have in shaping the next stages of glamour. Similar to the way the Studio System of Classic Hollywood once dictated the norms of glamour, I argue that Disney’s live action adaptations of fairy tale films and the Marvel franchise movies are a dominant force in shaping Current Glamour. Disney cinema has an audience of both adults and children, and, therefore, the representation of characters within Disney films influence the way audiences perceive women and minorities. Zack Zipes, author of *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion*, argues that fairy tales serve the cultural purpose of a “civilizing process” in which “to bring about conformity or to question the dominant civilizing process of a society” (x-xi). According to Zipes, Disney significantly influences American culture: “No artist or writer in the twentieth century managed to have such a profound influence on civilizing children and adults as Walt Disney” (191). Indeed, after his death in 1966, his company continued Disney’s ideologies within film, and within the twenty-first century, Disney films now dominate the film industry with the popularity of the Marvel franchise and live-action fairy tale remakes. Since 2010, Disney’s movie sales have towered above other studios: Disney “accounted for 26.3% of all U.S. ticket sales in 2018,” which approximates to almost three billion dollars in earnings (Whitten, “Superhero”). In 2019, Disney bought 20th Century Fox, which resulted in Disney having a larger sales advantage than its competitors. Disney “represented 38% of the movie industry haul in 2019,” earned $3.72 billion domestically, and more than $10 billion internationally (Whitten, “Disney”). Considering the large audience Disney has, it is important for scholarship—especially glamour scholarship—to pay attention to the representation of women in these movies as Disney remakes its older animated fairy tale
movies into live-action films. For the purposes of this chapter, I discuss minority glamour within the 2019 fairy tale Aladdin and the 2018 Marvel’s Black Panther.

The 2019 Disney live-action remake of Aladdin depicts Princess Jasmine as a glamorous, feminist character, which is a stark contrast to the flat, Orientalistic portrayal of Princess Jasmine in Disney’s 1992 animated version of Aladdin. According to Postcolonial theorist Edward Said, Orientalism is the “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having an authority over the Orient,” which influences how the Orient has been misrepresented for Western audiences (3). Rather than depict a Medieval Middle Eastern society, the story of Aladdin combines elements of stereotypes about Arabs and Western fantasy to please Western audiences. This tale resembles the Cinderella rags-to-riches trope, which resonates with Western audiences, so there are older theatrical performances and cinematic adaptations, such as Aladdin and His Lamp (1952). The most widely known adaptations are the two Disney films, and the differences in the 2019 depiction of Princess Jasmine reflects the efforts of director Guy Ritchie to develop the character beyond the Orientalistic pitfalls of the 1992 animated film.

The origins of Aladdin do not trace to Medieval Middle Eastern cultures as other tales of One Hundred and One Nights do, and the history of the story reveals an Orientalistic flattening of Middle Eastern and Asian cultures from its inception. The first written Western documentation of Aladdin occurred when French writer Antoine Galland included the story that he heard from a Syrian storyteller, Hannā Diyāb, in his translation of 1001 Nights. Scholars once believed that Galland invented the tale, but in more recent years, they have found Diyāb’s memoirs, which confirms his existence (Romano). Diyāb’s Aladdin is set in China, but according to a scholar named Paulo Lemos Horta, who edited the 2018 translation of Galland’s Aladdin, the story has been “Arabized” because the society in with Aladdin lives is “defined by Muslim
practices” and includes “a genie coming out of a lamp” (qtd. in Waxman). Scholars, such as Horta, are still unsure of the story’s origins and thus speculate that perhaps the story is a combination of oral stories that Diyāb heard while traveling (Waxman). Thus, the storyline of Aladdin is an amalgamation of many fantastic elements from various cultures, but Hollywood’s adaptations firmly depict the story as being set in the Middle East, and Classical Hollywood cinematic adaptations of the tale feature Caucasians in yellowface (Romano). Classical Hollywood’s influence on the tale shapes later cinematic versions of Aladdin, especially those created by the Walt Disney company.

Disney’s 1992 animated Aladdin features Orientalistic portrayals of Arab cultures for an American audience. Originally, the film had been set in Baghdad, but the First Gulf War prompted the creators to set the story in a fictional kingdom of Agrabah, which is an anagram of Baghdad (Waxman). In the film’s theatrical release, the first song, “Arabian Nights,” a Middle Eastern character tells the American audience about the brutal culture of Agrabah: “Oh, I come from a land/ From a faraway place/ Where the caravan camels roam/ Where they cut off your ear/ If they don’t like your face/ It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home” (Frook). The original theatrical song depicts Arabic culture as being “barbaric” and violent, and the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee complained to Disney about the portrayal. Disney eventually changed the lyrics in the videotape version to remove the mention of violence: “Where it’s flat and immense/ And the heat is intense/ It’s barbaric, but hey, it’s home” (Frook). Since the film is a children’s movie, the film introduces many young American viewers to an ethnic population that is a minority within the United States; with the movie presenting Arab culture as violent, Disney perpetuates the Orientalism by teaching children that Middle Eastern cultures are “barbaric”—especially considering that particular word survived into the revised edition of the song. Feminist
theorist bell hooks asserts that movies often teach their audiences about social norms and culture, and since Disney’s target audience for animated classics are children, the movie’s depiction leads to the perpetuation of negative Middle Eastern stereotypes.

In addition to the opening scene, the portrayal of Agrabah’s townspeople and Princess Jasmine further develops the exoticism of the movie. Orientalistic stereotypes of Arabs flourish in the movie because the people of Agrabah “are frequently depicted as barbarous sword-wielders and sexualized belly dancers” (Romano). In the first musical number featuring the protagonist Aladdin, the audience is introduced to the cruelty of the townspeople, and many of the women are dressed in cropped off-shoulder tops that reveal their midriffs, which would not have been consistent with women’s attire for the time period (Aladdin [1992]). Moreover, Princess Jasmine’s costume resembles a belly dancer rather than an Arabian princess, and Romano argues that Middle Eastern culture is Orientalized as an “oppressive and controlling culture” that Princess Jasmine wants to escape by marrying for love (Romano). Her views on marriage reflect the American ideology of love matches. During this time period, both Medieval Europe and the Medieval Middle East would have similar attitudes and expectations of arranged marriages; therefore, Jasmine’s escapism suggests that she wants an outlet from a traditional, repressive life toward a life that would be appealing to American audiences.

While the opening song “Arabian Nights” leads audiences to believe they are getting an “authentic” experience of a Middle Eastern tale, the reality is that the 1992 Aladdin is the Disney portrayal of an American fairy tale. According to Zack Zipes, all Disney fairy tale films, “from Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs up through Beauty and the Beast,” follow a simple pattern of a “yearning” heroine “imprisoned by evil forces” who is then rescued by a hero that defeats the “scheming minister” (207). Zipes’s pattern matches the elements of Aladdin with Jasmine
longing for an escape from arranged marriage, resisting her marriage to the evil Vizier Jafar, and being rescued by Aladdin. Zipes discusses how Disney changed traditional fairy tales from being “rebellious and progressive” to being “domesticate[d]” and “conservative,” and he argues that Disney’s fairy tale films diverged from portrayals of the originating cultures to being a means of transmitting American norms: “It is the repetition of Disney’s infantile anal quest to cleanse the world—the core of American mythology—that enabled him to strike a chord with American viewers from the 1920s to the present” (191, 198). The “cleansing” that Zipes discusses is the Western “tendency to infantilize and sanitize the genre so that children would not somehow be harmed by some of the more nefarious fairy tales that might be allegedly too violent or indecent for them” (192). As a result, Disney alters Diyāb’s Aladdin to create the 1992 film that offers a sanitized tale for an American audience, supports the American rags-to-riches “Cinderella-like” mythology, keeps the “yearning” Princess Jasmine from crossing patriarchal boundaries by having her rescued by a male hero, and deceives the audience into thinking that this highly Orientalized Western fantasy actually represents Middle Eastern culture.

One significant critique of both the 1992 movie and the 2019 remake is the lack of Middle Eastern representation among the cast. The 1992 animated film is a whitewashing of characters because much of the cast was Caucasian. Linda Larkin, a Caucasian woman, voices Jasmine (“Aladdin (1992)”). Unlike Disney’s Pocahontas (1995) and Mulan (1998), Disney’s Aladdin had not hired an actress of color with a similar ethnic heritage to voice Jasmine. How is this different from Katherine Hepburn wearing yellow-face to play an Asian woman in Dragon Seed (1944)? Jasmine is voiced by a Caucasian woman, dresses like a belly dancer, and spouts American ideals of love-matches rather than arranged marriages; her character might have been
drawn to look like an Arab princess, but the character is utterly divorced from the culture and people she represents, which is emblematic of the Orientalization within Hollywood.

When the 2019 Director Ritchie announced his casting decisions, fans of Aladdin expressed ire that some of the main characters are not Middle Eastern. Naomi Scott, who plays Jasmine, is a controversial choice because she is part English, part Indian. Scott only shares a similar complexion to Jasmine, but she comes from a different racialized ethnic group. Critics wondered why there is not more Middle Eastern representation in a movie about Arabs. After watching the film, a BuzzFeed News senior culture writer named Scacchi Koul accused Disney of “whitewashing this fake city by assuming that Indian and Egyptians and Middle Easterners are all the same, smooshing together cultures and ethnicities and vague histories” (Koul). Koul makes a valid argument about how Hollywood’s history of flattening of racialized ethnic differences between cultures continues into contemporary cinema, and her concerns demonstrate that Hollywood needs more work in increasing representation among cast. Although Scott is not of the same ethnic background as Jasmine, she develops Jasmine beyond her 1992 portrayal and helps the audience to see more portrayals of minority glamour.

The 2019 Disney live-action remake of Aladdin creates a more nuanced depiction of Princess Jasmine—as well as the people of Agrabah—in an attempt to remedy the Orientalism of the 1992 animated movie, and glamour is used to develop Jasmine beyond her initial, limited depiction. Zipes contends that “there is no complexity in a Disney fairy-tale film, no exploration of character or the causes that create obstacles for the protagonists in the narratives” (207). However, the 2019 film delves into Jasmine’s backstory and creates a reason for why Jasmine leads a restricting life confined to the palace: her father becomes overly protective of Jasmine after her mother passes, and he fails to see how mature and ready she is for leadership. Jasmine is
a glamorous character who has the tangible elements of beauty but the intangible elements of resilience and dedication to fight for her people. Unlike the 1992 version that makes Aladdin the next sultan for marrying a princess, the 2019 film shows Jasmine earning her place as Sultan, and, after, she decides to pursue Aladdin in a relationship. Although the film still reflects American ideals through the wedding-as-resolution trope and the feminist way that Jasmine resists Jafar, the film makes progress in creating Jasmine as a more humanized character rather than a stereotype. Her glamour allows the audience to see that Jasmine is more than a prize to be won by a male suitor.

As Disney creates live-action remakes of their beloved animated films, the conglomerate also produces the Marvel Cinematic Universe, and Marvel’s 2018 movie [*Black Panther*](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7895806/) both adds African and Africa American representation to a predominantly white superhero genre and presents an idealized vision of what African nations could have been like without the oppression of colonialism. The [*Black Panther*](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt7895806/) comic debuted amid the 1960s American Civil Rights Era to feature the first Black superhero in mainstream American comics: T’Challa, who is superhero king of the fictional, technologically-advanced African nation of Wakanda (Smith). Since Wakanda uses its technology to hide from European colonizers, the kingdom represents an Afrofuturistic vision of how a wealthy African nation could prosper without the racism of the outside world. Afrofuturism is a genre that appears in many mediums—such as comics, television, and cinema—and redefines how Black identity and culture can be conceptualized in positive ways, and the theorists who discuss the genre use the term “Black,” to refer to the entirety of peoples of African ancestry, both those who reside in African as well as those of the African Diaspora. According to Ytasha Womack, author of [*Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*](https://www.amazon.com/Afrofuturism-World-Black-Science-Fiction/dp/0262037385), “Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical
fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism [sic] with non-Western beliefs. In some cases, it’s a total reenvisioning of the past and speculation about the future rife with cultural critiques” (Womack 9). Thus, Afrofuturism provides a way to explore Black identity beyond the restraints of systemic racism and speculate the ways that Black identity can be celebrated in the present and into the future.

An example of Afrofuturism is the fan-favorite Dora Milaje: a fictional warrior order of women who protect Wakanda’s king. Black Panther draws West African history to imagine a military order of female warriors who have historical depth while using advanced technological weaponry: “it is clear that one of their main antecedents was the famous all-female African military corps of Dahomey, West Africa (now the Republic of Benin), whom the French dubbed ‘Dahomey Amazons.’ [...] By the end of the 19th century an estimated 4,000 women” numbered their ranks (Coleman). Using Afrofuturism and glamorous scenes with General Okoye, Black Panther demonstrates how African women have historical precedents of powerful, fighting women that can inspire the Black audience. Afrofuturistic aspects of the Dora Milaje’s technology can be seen when Okoye uses her Vibranium shoes to cling to the top of a speeding car, and the audience can enjoy ironic humor in the way that she sneers at the antagonists’ use of bullets as “primitive” (Black Panther). Okoye’s use of the word “primitive” is a reversal of European colonialist attitudes of indigenous Africans as “primitive” and “savage.” Chinua Achebe, in “An Image of Africa,” discusses this imperial disdain of Africa as “If Europe, advancing in civilization, could cast a backward glance periodically at Africa, trapped in primordial barbarity [...] carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate” (25). The Afrofuturism of Black Panther allows the audience to envision a world where Africans thrive without racist ideologies
of being as inferior to Europeans, and Okoye’s remark provides humor if a speculative situation
where Africans are more technologically advanced than Westerners.

In order to understand the revolutionary representation of *Black Panther*’s positive Black
female superheroes for mainstream American cinema, one must first understand the systemic,
racist stereotypes of Black women within American cinema. Three of the most negative
 caricatures of Black women that pervade cinema are the Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire,
and as recently as 2004, Halle Berry’s role in *Catwoman* reinforces the Black “Jezebel”
character. According to Jerald, et. al, the Jezebel stereotype’s origins date from the American era
of slavery in which Black women were perceived to be “hypersexual and insatiable,” and the
scholars cite studies in which media aids the “internalization of [...] stereotypes about Black
women are both linked to negative psychological outcomes and riskier sexual behaviors” (609-610).
Like Ahmanet in the 2017 remake of *The Mummy*, Catwoman is also subjected to
stereotypes as the Jezebel character: her powers only grow when she transforms from a meek
person to a hypersexual superhero. Scholars, such as Heldman, et al., argue that Berry’s
Catwoman does not control the gaze but rather is stylized for male pleasure: Catwoman “is
constructed for the consumption of the male gaze that follows her. The film presents her agency,
power, and freedom as derivative of her hypersexualization” (Heldman et al 8). Although the
character of Catwoman is a sensual and/or sexual anti-hero, Halle Berry’s depiction stands apart
from other portrayals of Catwoman, such as Eartha Kitt (1967-1968), Michelle Pfeiffer (1992),
and Anne Hathaway (2012). Berry’s Catwoman wears a black leather bra and leather pants that
are torn from cat scratches to reveal her legs, so her costume is hypersexualized beyond even
Pfeiffer’s iconic suit. However, Pfeiffer controls the gaze and her powers augment her innate
sexuality, but Berry’s Catwoman is stylized for the pleasure of the gaze and her powers cannot
function unless is she overly sexual. Until *Black Panther*, mainstream American cinema did not have another leading Black female superhero whose power is not derived from hypersexuality.

*Black Panther* features three prominent female warriors in T'Challa's entourage: Shuri (T'Challa's sister), Nakia (a spy and T'Challa's love interest), and Okoye (a General in the Dora Milaje, which is the all-female guardians of Wakanda’s king). All of these women are distinguished warriors, but their depictions do not follow the hypersexualized stereotype of the Jezebel trope of Black women in cinema. Ruth E. Carter, costume designer for *Black Panther*, makes sure that Nakia’s costume at the underground gambling club is “sexy but not revealing,” which suggests that she wanted her character to be glamorous without perpetuating any negative stereotypes of Black women (Ryzik). In addition, Salamishah Tillet, English Professor at University of Pennsylvania who writes a guest column for the *Hollywood Reporter*, argues that *Black Panther* is a more feminist film than *Wonder Woman* because the women grow up in an egalitarian society: “Not only does the movie surpass the Bechdel test, but those scenes in which two or more women are talking to, disagreeing with, or fighting alongside each other without a man present are some of the movie’s most riveting ones” (Tillet). The Bechdel test measures women’s representation in film as more than stock characters who discuss males; for a movie to pass the Bechdel test, the female characters must have names and also engage in discussions that are not centered around a man. Not only do the female trio in Black Panther break from stereotypical representations, but they also depict positive women’s representations within film.

In fact, many *Black Panther* fans, including director Ryan Coogler, think that the female-led scenes are the best parts of the movie. In an interview with *Variety*, Coogler comments about the scene when the women of Wakanda lead the film when T'Challa is unconscious from injuries: “‘That part of the movie you feel like you’re watching something fresh and new. [...]
That part was exciting. We have these actresses who could easily carry their own movie”” (qtd. in Setoodeh). Fan response to the women of Wakanda has Coogler considering making an all-female spinoff focused on the trio (Setoodeh). The popularity of Shuri, Nakia, and Okoye suggest that glamour is an important factor to make them more popular than the male lead, T’Challa. Beauty alone does not account for their popularity; these women add humor to the movie and complexity to the action scenes, such as all three women engaging in the car chase scene in Busan and the battle to reclaim Wakanda from Killmonger. Their tangible and intangible glamorous elements make them popular heroes who resonate deeply with fans.

Shuri’s glamour is the most complex of the trio because she demonstrates that Black women can be beautiful, skilled in fighting, and adept at science. Earlier versions of the comic books has T’Challa as the only heir to the Wakanda throne, but Reginald Hudlin, writer-director of the Black Panther comics from 2005-2009, created T’Challa's younger sister, Shuri, because he “‘wanted girls to read the [comic] book and feel as empowered as boys. So, I wanted her to be as smart and tough and brave and everything you think of as Black Panther, so that eventually she would be a Black Panther as well’” (qtd. in Tillet). Shuri, played by Letitia Wright, is a princess unlike any of Disney’s traditional fairy tale princesses: not only is she trained in combat, but she also is a scientist who develops advanced technology in Wakanda. Tillet asserts that Shuri is a unique representation of Black women unlike any seen in American cinema: “Shuri is sui generis in Hollywood: a young black woman who is revered for her genius, wit, killer smile and military guile” (Tillet). Indeed, Shuri is a charismatic character beloved by her peers. The scope of Shuri’s intelligence outdoes other Marvel geniuses Tony Stark (Iron Man) and Bruce Banner (Hulk) in Avengers: Infinity War (2018) when she solves the conundrum of how to separate the Mind Stone from Vision. Allen, another scholarly critic of the film, considers Shuri
to be a role model “as a confident creator of advanced technologies” (21). Thus, Shuri’s ingenuity in problem-solving and her skills as an innovator make her unique among female superheroes, and she demonstrates that women can be glamorous and scientists.

Lastly, *Black Panther* changes the industry and depictions of glamour by demonstrating that an all-Black cast can be popular, and thus profitable, with mainstream America. According to Smith, many all-Black films are viewed as “niche entertainment, instead of as part of the mainstream” (Smith). He cites Tyler Perry’s *Madea* movies as well as the *Barbershop* franchise as “films that depict a reality where whiteness isn’t the default [so they] have been ghettoized [sic]” (Smith). By using the word “ghettoized,” Smith not only suggests that these films have been marginalized within the industry, but he also implies that these representations of Blacks appeal to certain subcultures within the African American communities. The characters of Madea and the *Barbershop* may not be relatable to a broad spectrum of African Americans, and as a niche cinema, these characters are not marketed to Caucasians or other racialized ethnic groups. *Black Panther* gives representation to Black actors and actresses, and the portrayals of characters are designed to appeal to a mainstream audience. Therefore, the audience does not need to be Black to enjoy the movie, just as viewers do not need to be Caucasian to enjoy *Thor* or *Iron Man*. For this reason, *Black Panther* is an avant-garde film that provides a more nuanced depiction of glamorous, Black female characters and sets a precedent for other films starring glamorous actresses of color to follow.

**Current Glamour**

*Current Glamour*, like previous stages of glamour, relies on costume, makeup, and hairstyles to convey ideals of beauty and femininity to the viewers, and as a traditionally
glamorous woman living in Europe, modern-day Diana Prince wears fashionable, Western clothes. After the end of World War II, Diana stops being the superhero Wonder Woman, and, instead, spends her days working at the Louvre. As a glamorous woman living in Paris, Diana dresses stylishly, but even her modest clothes cannot disguise her glamour and sensuality. The audience first glimpses a closeup of her legs from the knees down as she enters the Louvre. She wears black leather stiletto knee-high boots, and a crimson winter cape covers her body. The audience does not see her face, yet, but the audience’s intrigue about Diana begins. The first time the audience sees Diana, she is in a medium shot with her eyes at the two-thirds level, and her gaze looks beyond the audience as there is a voiceover narration of Diana reflecting on her past desire to help humanity. The voiceover builds mystery as to why Diana has stopped being Wonder Woman: audiences had seen Batman and Superman’s puzzlement at the appearance of an unknown heroine in Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice (2016), but Wonder Woman two years later, no one knows why Diana resigns from helping others. Thus, when the medium shots start, Diana is partially shadowed, representing her years of anonymity, but as she walks down a hallway, overhead highlighting illuminates her clearly for the first time in the movie. With the overhead lighting and the model-like swaying of her hips, Diana is simply stunning like a traditionally glamorous actress of Old Hollywood. Even with the understated clothing, she radiates sensuality with the deep red cape that covers her body, red lipstick to match the cape, heavy eye makeup, and hair in a ponytail. Later the audience will learn that Diana is a demigod, and the glamorous elements of her feminine, fashionable clothing and her confident stride create the notion that Diana is not an average woman.

Princess Jasmine of Agrabah also makes a glamorous entrance into the throne room when the audience first sees her in her station as a royal. Although viewers first saw her earlier in the
movie masquerading as a handmaiden outside the palace, the scene when she is dressed and participating in royal affairs demonstrates that she is mature enough to rule the throne of Agrabah. The longshot of two massive golden doors opens to reveal Jasmine standing in the center of the shot, and this introduction with the use of double doors is similar to both Andy’s and Sayuri’s revealing moments of glamorous transformation. Scott has Enigmatic glamour since her clothes and mannerisms are more sensual than sexual. Harmonious music plays as she descends the stairs, and after the prince says, “Oh wow,” the camera focuses on a medium closeup of Jasmine. The shot, situated at a low angle, shows that she is powerful and glamorous, and the positioning suggests that Jasmine is superior to the other men in the room who would relegate her to the lower position because she is female. Lighting, even balanced on the left and the right, illuminates the highlighter makeup on her cheekbones, which reflects current makeup styles of YouTube stars. Disney’s target audience is Generation Z, who would be familiar with the latest makeup trends on popular YouTube videos, and thus, Jasmine’s makeup would be viewed as embodying the current beauty trends of glamour.

Similar to how Diana is introduced to the audience with fashionable clothing, Jasmine wears glamorous Middle Eastern-style attire. Although the 1992 animated Jasmine wears clothing akin to a belly dancer’s costume, Scott wears clothing that is modest, regal, and reflective of Middle Eastern clothing patterns. However, her attire is a hybrid of Middle Eastern design and glamorous American fashion. Jasmine wears a magenta long dress with short sleeves with gold embroidery; the dress has a slit to reveal emerald pants and has a dress train of several feet of pink and gold material. She has a crown of gold and emeralds, earrings and necklace of gold and emeralds, and high-heeled gold sandals. The short sleeved-dress and high-heel sandals reflect American fashion, and perhaps the costume choice is to represent a modern-day
interpretation of the character in order for the audience to relate. Jasmine wears kohl eyeliner, mascara, bronzer blush, highlighter, and a neutral lip color. Jasmine’s pulled-back hair reveals the wealth and craftsmanship of the crown, so the audience can see the opulence of the kingdom reflected in its princess. Jasmine’s glamour resides in the exhibition of wealth and beauty. Although Scott is not actually Middle Eastern, Scott’s portrayal of Jasmine teaches the young audience that women of color can also be glamorous.

In addition to her beauty, Jasmine also enchants the viewers with her wit and her subversion of gender roles. When a foreign prince asks for her hand in marriage, she exudes power and grace as she examines him cautiously. The prince boastfully parades himself and asks why no one told him of her beauty. Jasmine sees that he only craves her wealth and her superficial appearance, and she sarcastically quips, “No one mentioned yours either,” with a slight tilt of her head. Both the dialogue and the tilt inform the audience that she is not interested in a spouse who thinks of her as an object. She then mocks him and shows resistance to gender roles when she says, “We have the same title, yet are never described in the same way” (Aladdin [2019]). Her father gently reproaches her by saying her name, which suggests that he does not approve of a woman openly criticizing a man. Moreover, Jasmine not only draws attention to the double standards in portrayal, but she is also criticizing the gendered differences in power. Princes are described differently because they wield sociopolitical power, princesses are only described in terms of superficial appearance because they are expected only to marry and produce heirs. In this scene, Jasmine shows a young audience a different image than traditional animated fairy tale princesses: she demonstrates that princesses are subjected to unfair gender roles. Her rejection of the prince illustrates that she is a woman who exerts agency over her life.
*Black Panther* also features a depiction of non-Western style clothing in the portrayals of glamorous attire for both Nakia and Princess Shuri. Ruth Carter, the costume designer, drew on the traditional clothing of several African tribes to create the attire for the fictitious Wakanda tribes as they celebrate the formal ascension of T'Challa as king. Carter describes Nakia’s costume as inspired by “the Suri of Ethiopia, so her traditional look was made of shells, beads, and leaves” (Ryzik). Nakia wears beaded necklaces of green, yellow, and white; a beaded halter top of green, yellow, and white; and a leather band that covers her right shoulder that also has beads of seashells with two gold bands. She has heavy mascara, dark eyeshadow, no lip color, white horizontal, parallel painted lines going from her hairline down to her nose, a vertical stripe down her chin, and white dots around eyebrows, underneath her eyes, and underneath her lips. Her hair is curled into little knots tightly on her head with highlighted bronze color at the knots. In an interview on the *Daily Show*, Lupita Nyong’o discusses the importance of not using Western straightened hair in any of the Wakanda’s women: “Black people on the continent [Africa] were doing all sorts of things with their hair [...] but the kind of shaming or rejecting of kinks and curls is new. And that did come with the white man” (“Lupita”). Nyong’o discusses how representation of African ideals of beauty is important because the shaming of Black hair is a consequence of colonialism. Nakia’s hair hairstyle embraces that “curls” and various hairstyles that Nyong’o mentions in the interview, and her representation shows audiences that glamour does not always have to follow Western beauty standards.

In addition to her clothing, Nakia’s non-Western dancing mesmerizes audiences with her physical strength and dancing talent. A medium shot shows Nakia with her tribe on the boat and before zooming out into a long shot as she rotates in her dance. While she dances, she holds two metal circles at shoulder height, and she keeps her torso leaned forward and still while she
dances and rotates in a circle. Nakia dances in time with the drumbeats, and her mouth is open and smiling but she is not ululating like the rest of her tribe. Her dancing style is different from the Western styles that audiences are accustomed to seeing, but the audience can see her routine requires developed muscle strength and talent to depict. Similar to how Sayuri’s dance develops her graceful glamour, Nakia’s dance also enhances her glamour as a beautiful, talented African woman.

Princess Shuri, like Princess Jasmine, has been introduced to the audience before T’Challa’s royal ascension, but her costume in previous scenes is Afrofuturistic rather than traditional. In the river scene, Shuri wears traditional clothing as well, and she also dances with her mother when the boats sail down the river. Like Nakia, Shuri also wears a traditional African hairstyle of tightly braided hair. Shuri’s formal, traditional princess clothing shows a body type different from the three heart shaped curves of Classical Hollywood Glamour; she has a “boyish” body type similar to the look that Audrey Hepburn popularized in 1960s American cinema. Shuri wears a beaded headdress over her face that splits into an upside down "Y" above her nose bridge, and the ends of the “Y” shape holds a panther jawline bone over her jawline, which most likely distinguishes her as being of the royal bloodline and a potential Black Panther. She wears several colorful beaded necklaces from her collarbone to almost her jawline, and colorful beaded necklaces drape off her shoulders. Shuri wears a gold-plated corset with intricate decorations, gold arm bangles, and a shift dress splits to reveal gray leggings. Although American audiences may not be familiar with African wardrobes, Shuri’s attire has a regal quality, especially with the jawbone headdress, and she gives a Western audience a vision of what a non-Western princess can look like. Furthermore, she expands the parameters of glamour by representing what is beautiful and regal in non-Western cultures.
Shuri’s glamour also includes a joking, charismatic personality that charms both the people of Wakanda and the audience. Before the priest crowns T’Challa, he asks if “any member of the royal family” would like to claim the throne, and Shuri raises her hand, which shocks both the coronation’s audience and the theater viewers because they assume that Shuri is serious in her challenge. However, Shuri surprises the audience’s expectations by then saying, “This corset is really uncomfortable, so could we all just wrap it up and go home?” Her mother looks exasperated and chidingly pats her shoulder, the coronation audience on screen understands that she was just joking and shakes their heads in bemusement at her interruption, and the audience laughs too because Shuri’s remark was unexpected and humorous. The way that the coronation’s audience reacts demonstrates that they are familiar with her antics, and they are not angry with her because she diffuses the tension during T’Challa’s most vulnerable moment before he is accepted as king. Shuri signifies a different type of princess than previous Disney princesses; in recent years, Disney princesses have become less formal and more awkward, such as Rapunzel and Anna, but Disney princesses have not been adept at telling jokes to put people at ease. Shuri’s charm and glamour derives largely from her likable attitude and the way that she adds humor to the film.

In addition to Nakia and Shuri, Okoye is also a glamorous woman, and her character provides an alternative view of femininity than mainstream American culture. Okoye—like the other Dora Milaje warriors in her command—shaves her head, and she has tattoo designs on her scalp. Mainstream American beauty standards frown upon bald heads for women, and even women who lose their hair to cancer often will wear wigs to hide a bald head. However, some African cultures, such as the Maasai, consider shaved heads to be desirable, and Okoye represents a widening standard of beauty for Black women. As a warrior, Okoye wears the
scarlet military uniform of the Dora Milaje throughout most of the film, and her glamour mostly resembles the Shellac Glamour of Anna May Wong from Classical Hollywood, which is the antithesis of the pearlized glamour that I define as Enigmatic Glamour. The type of glamour that Wong had not only resisted the male gaze but also depended on a glamorous “metallic luster” from the glittering metal of her costume (1031). The metallic shininess of Okoye’s glamour presents a variation of Heroine Glamour in which the metal of the costume is an outward shell that reflects the inner resilience of the warrior within. Okoye’s Dora Milaje is not only beautiful but also imposing since it suggests that she is as strong as metal. By wearing the traditional rings worn by the Ndebele women of South Africa (Ryzik), her costume achieves the same metallic luster as Wong’s metal costume. As the General of the Dora Milaje, she wears gold while her regimen wears silver, and she wears several layers of gold rings to protect her throat, gold bands around her neck and wrists, gold designs across the red bodice, gold plating on the shoulders, and gold cartilage earrings. The combination of the striking red color and the glinting gold develop Okoye’s tangible aspects of glamour.

The design of Okoye’s costume further widens the portrayal of African fashion as glamorous and beautiful. On the front of the scarlet uniform is a decorative beaded strip that hangs from under the breast to mid-thigh, and the beaded strips add decorative patterns to the outfit. Carter says she drew her inspiration from beaded clothing “‘that you see throughout Africa—the Turkana, the Maasai’” (Ryzik). The inclusion of the beaded aspects of the uniform adds to the idea that femininity and beauty do not necessarily have to be exclusive from being a strong warrior. According to Danai Gurira, the costumes of the Dora Milaje “are very structured but beautiful. Feminine but not revealing [...] The ferocity is not compromised for femininity. They’re both allowed and we don’t see that enough and we don’t know that enough societally
[sic] as little girls growing up” (Toby). Gurira makes a valid assertion that Okoye, as a military leader, presents a different type of femininity than what young girls are accustomed to seeing. Although Okoye’s clothes are not revealing skin as Charlie’s Angels, Okoye is also sexy and a warrior, and she gives an alternative type of warrior portrayal to the Angels.

In addition to the tangible aspects of Okoye’s glamour, her hilarious quips during the movie—as well as her vocal rejection of Western beauty standards—endears her to the audience. For example, when T’Challa prepares to rescue Nakia and other kidnapped women, he says he does not need Okoye’s backup, and Okoye humorously rolls her eyes, makes a dismissive noise, and cautions T’Challa not to freeze when he sees Nakia. When T’Challa is overwhelmed by the captors and is held at gunpoint, Okoye appears and lazily slays the villains without breaking eye contact with him before saying, “You froze” (Black Panther). Her deadpan witty humor keeps the audience laughing and lightens the mood of serious scenes, which is an important aspect of her glamour.

Okoye’s hilarious frustration at wearing a wig when going undercover develops an important criticism of Western beauty standards. In order to conceal herself from being recognized as Dora Milaje, Okoye wears a wig of Western “beachy curls,” which are currently popular. Okoye expresses her irritation with having to wear a wig by twitching her head and exclaiming, “Bast willing, this will go quickly and I can get this ridiculous thing off my head” (Black Panther). Nakia teases her by telling it looks “nice” and suggesting that Okoye embrace the look, and Okoye rejects her advice to exasperatedly reply, “What? It’s a disgrace” (Black Panther). By referring to the wig as “ridiculous,” Okoye rejects Western beauty standards that often limit the expression of natural Black hair or even bald heads, and her remark of the “disgrace” suggests that Black women should not have to alter their appearances to fit the
traditionally white glamorous appeal. Gurira remarks that this scene in the movie is a powerful moment for Black women: “It’s such an Eastern standard of beauty versus a Western standard [...] it so subverts the idea of feminine beauty” (Toby). While Classical Hollywood had Black actresses altering their appearances to look as if they are white, Gurira lauds the way that *Black Panther* offers positive and affirming representations of traditionally Black standards of beauty.

In fact, Okoye has to fight in the underground casino, she uses her wig as a weapon by throwing it in the face of her attacker, which is a humorous moment akin to how Jackie Chan would use everyday objects as weapons. Unlike other female superheroes who have to fight with unbound hair, Okoye has a full range of vision without hair as an obstacle. This scene demonstrates the ridiculous standards of beauty expectations for women and female superheroes, but also shows that Okoye is a glamorous, witty woman who amuses the audience.

In *Wonder Woman*, Diana also criticizes Western beauty standards and the restrictiveness of women’s fashion. When Diana tries on Edwardian clothes for the first time, she stumbles while wearing high heels in order to show her awkwardness with European fashion. Her inability to walk in heels suggests to the audience that a woman raised apart from mainstream Western culture would not be accustomed to wearing heels, but, ironically, her Wonder Woman boots have wedged heels, which suggests that even female superheroes have to be styled with impractical fighting gear so that they can portray “sexiness” in their costumes. Next, the audience sees a long shot of Diana wearing a mauve Edwardian gown while standing on a pedestal in front of a trifold mirror. Frustrated at the wide bell-shaped frame of the dress, she holds the front of the dress frame up so she can kick. Diana is puzzled by the restrictiveness of the attire and asks Etta, “How can a woman possibly fight in this?” Like the scene with Okoye’s wig, Diana’s shopping scene challenges women’s beauty standards. Because Diana grows up
apart from mainstream Western culture, she cannot understand why women’s clothing limits movement and the ability to fight. Edwardian’s women’s clothing would be impractical for combat, but Diana’s criticism does not just apply to Edwardian clothes. The criticism of the high heels reminds viewers that women have to alter natural human walking strides to accommodate inane, fashionable shoes, and the criticism of the dress also draws attention to the idea that gendered clothing reinforces restricting gender roles and clothes for women. When Diana fights as Wonder Woman, she wears clothing of her own choosing, which suggests a rejection of modern women’s style clothing.

Princess Jasmine fights on behalf of her own people, but unlike Wonder Woman and the Black Panther trio, she uses her words to defeat Jafar, and the scene in which she overturns Jafar’s coup teaches the females in the audience to embrace their agencies. Earlier in the movie, Jasmine’s voice was silenced by both her father and Jafar, and she expresses frustration in a musical number where she sings, “All I know is I won’t go speechless” (Aladdin). Cinematic glamour has an entire genre of the singing talent of musicals, and Jasmine’s song develops her glamour as well as leads to the climax of her story arc. Unlike the flat character of 1992 Jasmine, the 2019 Jasmine has a backstory in having her agency curbed by the males in her life, and her character arc zeniths when she regains her voice to overturn Jafar’s order as the new Sultan. Jafar orders guards to capture Jasmine, and she starts singing, “Centuries old and unbending/ ‘stay in your place/ better seen and not heard’/ Well now that story is ending” (Aladdin). As Jasmine repeats men’s orders that have restricted her in the past, she realizes that she has the power to resist. Her subversive lyric, “I won't be silenced” enables her to resist the captors’ restraints, and the guards disappear. Jasmine re-enters into the throne room, and all her guards disappear as she passionately sings her song. Bright lighting illuminates Jasmine as her eyes sparkle with
determination. A medium shot follows her around the throne room as she sings at the disappearing guards, and as she climbs the throne, her camera shows a glamorous closeup of her singing defiantly at Jafar, “All I know is I won't go speechless” (*Aladdin*). After the last word, the camera zooms out to an extreme long shot of Jasmine at the far end of the throne room, and the colors fade as the audience realizes that the song was her inner narrative. Although that scene took place in her imagination, the audience sees Jasmine a glamorous, empowered woman who is ready to fight for her kingdom. None of the traditional fairy tale princesses has ever challenged patriarchal silencing of women (although Mulan does challenge women’s right to join the army), and Jasmine’s glamour develops her as a role model for young women.

After the song is over, Jasmine confidently marches back into the throne room to challenge Jafar, and the scene demonstrates that Jasmine is ready to become the Sultan. She appeals to the leader of the guards, Hakim, to side with her instead of Jafar. When Jafar says that he is concerned with “glory for the kingdom of Agrabah,” she retorts, “No. You seek glory for yourself,” before shouting, “You would win it off the backs of my people!” She then asks Hakim if he “will stay silent while Jafar destroys our beloved kingdom” or if he will do what is best for Agrabah and support her claim to the throne (*Aladdin*). The passionate reclaiming of her voice persuades Hakim to support Jasmine in overthrowing Jafar’s coup. This scene is a pivotal moment in Jasmine’s glamour. Unlike Charlie’s Angels or Diana, Jasmine has not seen other women as warriors (and her mother died when she was young), so she does not have strong female role models. Instead, Jasmine charts her own territory in regaining her voice from males who ignored her ideas, such as her father who thinks she cannot rule as Sultan because she is a woman. Without resorting to violence, she reclaimed the rule of Agrabah, which makes her a strong character. Although the film had much more potential to expand her character in wrestling
control of Genie from Jafar, the director decided to keep with the ending of the 1992 story by having Aladdin ultimately defeat Jafar. However, that does not diminish the strides Jasmine makes in discovering her voice and agency, and she earns her place as Sultan when her father realizes she is capable of ruling the kingdom.

**Conclusion**

In the years since *Wonder Woman’s* release in 2017, American cinematic glamour is developing into a new stage of glamour, when compared to the glamour of the early years of the twenty-first century. Previously, the early years of the 2000s featured a polarized binary of the sensual Enigmatic Glamour and the sexual Heroine Glamour. In the past few years, glamorous actresses exhibit a new type of glamour that combines both sexuality and sensuality, which I label Current Glamour. Since glamour adapts to the culture and context of the society, glamour keeps evolving, and Current Glamour can be defined as having a combination of sensuality/sexuality as well as an increased representation of actresses of color in leading roles.

The #OscarsSoWhite in 2015 and 2016 inspired more diversity within the Hollywood industry, and the success of *Wonder Woman* and *Black Panther* proves that movies featuring women superhero leads and casts composed solely of people of color can be financially successful. In addition, the social popularity of two films draws, as well as the 2019 *Aladdin*, convinces studios that audiences want to see more people of color in leading roles. These changes within the industry are leading to more positive depictions of women of color in certain films; however, changes do not occur overnight, and negative depictions of minorities still occur in films, such as the 2017 remake of *The Mummy*. It is possible the leading studios, like Disney, will continue to change the industry with the release of more films starring positive
representations of people of color, such as the live-action remake of *Mulan* (2020), *Wonder Woman 1984* (2020), and *Black Panther II* (2022).
CONCLUSION:

IMPLICATIONS OF GLAMOUR IN FUTURE CINEMA

American cinematic glamour helps to shape the way that the average person thinks about women’s beauty, femininity, and behavior. Moreover, glamour transmits hegemonic ideals about gender roles, especially for heteronormative, cisgender women. Classical Hollywood shapes the concept of glamour for the American public, and often casting focuses on what I label “traditional” glamour: both white actresses and actresses of color whose stylization attempts to veil their racialized, ethnic bodily features. The start of the twenty-first century marks greater inclusion of actresses of color in glamorous, leading roles, but societal concepts of glamour are often slow to change, and sometimes, racialized ethnic stereotypes still exist within cinema, such as the Orientalized depiction of Asian and Middle Eastern women in Memoirs of a Geisha, the 2000 remake of Charlie’s Angels, and the 2017 remake of The Mummy. However, there have also been some groundbreaking, positive depictions of traditionally glamorous women in action movies, such as Wonder Woman, and empowering depictions of actresses of color, such as Black Panther and the 2019 Aladdin.

Glamour provides a way to talk about powerful female representation in cinema, especially roles that influence the audience's perceptions of representation, femininity, beauty, sexuality, sensuality, and agency. The conversation about glamour from the past ten years often focuses on the white actresses of Classical Hollywood, but scholarship on actresses of color resides in journal articles, which are often in databases hidden from public view behind a paywall. There needs to be a contemporary cultural discussion of glamour because the concept is
still current. Some scholars, such as Carol Dyhouse, think that the term *glamour* “has lost edge and meaning” simply because the word “is so widely and loosely used today” (167). Perhaps Dyhouse thinks that increased usage cheapens the meaning. However, I disagree: if a word is being used more frequently, then the word must still convey a particular concept that is both meaningful and relevant. If “glamour” is outdated, why do people still use it to describe fashionable, beautiful, and enigmatic stars that walk down the red carpet and attend the yearly Met Gala? Why is it still used to describe royalty, such as the British Future-King William, Future-Queen Kate, and, most especially, the fan-favorite-ex-royals Harry and Megan? Why is “glamorous” a constant word repeated in shows about fashion, such as *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (2009-ongoing)? The concept of glamour is ubiquitous because the desire to be glamorous still shapes women’s lives. Many women’s magazines still advise women how to be glamorous. Also, there is a current trend for women who just gave birth to have glamorous makeovers so they can have beautiful, flawless first photos with their newborns. Brides—especially in reality television show *Say Yes to the Dress* (2007-ongoing) and its many popular spin-off shows—often say that they want to look glamorous on their wedding day. American culture is filled with numerous moments where all types of women—cisgender women, individuals who identify as gendered female, and persons who are sometimes feminine—want to feel or look glamorous, even if it is for a special occasion. The societal need means that there should be more analysis into glamour, especially for current usage and for a wider representation of women beyond the traditionally glamorous actresses of Classical Cinema.

Not only is the discussion of glamour relevant to women’s conceptions of femininity, gender, and other ideologies and norms within American culture, but glamour also provides a way to discuss cinema’s inclusion of women. The University of Southern California
Annenberg’s Inclusion Initiative published a study in 2019 analyzing the actual statistics of diverse cinematic representation in which they calculated presentations of Gender, Race/Ethnicity, LGBTQ, and Disability in the top 100 movies of 2007 to 2008. In that time period, the representation of women on screen with speaking parts increased from 29.9% in 2007 to 33.1% in 2018, and the number of speaking women has grown dramatically in the “Action and/or Adventure” genre (Smith, Stacey, et al. 1). The increase of women in action hero movies most likely correlates to the popularity of female action heroes from the 1990s as well as the surge of new movies in the Marvel and DC franchises. When researchers compared the top films of 2018, women—more often than men—are depicted as attractive, having sexy attire, and some nudity (Smith, Stacey, et al. 2). These three characteristics are often associated with glamour as well because of the sexuality, sensuality, and beauty elements. The percentages of these roles provide a way to think about how women are portrayed in film: for a film to be successful, do women have to be portrayed glamorously? Glamour has its benefits in portraying strong characters, but one must also wonder if there could be a negative aspect to seeing women predominantly portrayed as glamorous. Does that put more pressure on girls and women to keep up glamorous appearances, rather than acknowledge that glamour is a temporary state? These questions are important implications of current glamour and is one area where scholarship could expand.

In addition, USC Annenberg’s Inclusion Initiative also analyzed the frequency of representations of racialized ethnic groups within 2018, and their findings help contextualize the notion that Hollywood has undergone complete transformation with regard to diverse casting. Award-winning movies—like Moonlight (2016), Black Panther, Roma (2018), Crazy Rich Asians (2018), and Parasite (2019)—give moviegoers the impression that many current films
feature people of color and international stars. Actually, Hollywood’s diverse casting is limited when one examines the scope of mainstream movies made within a year. Annenberg’s Inclusion Initiative’s study acknowledges that there are more people of color in 2018 cinema compared to previous years (Smith, Stacey, et al. 2), but the actual representation of diversity within films does not correspond with the diversity of the American population. Of the top 100 films of 2018, forty-six have Asian females, thirty have Latinas, eleven have LGBT females, one has a Native American female, and eight films have Middle Eastern/North African females (Smith, Stacey, et al. 4). The statistics of these numbers inform us that only certain kinds of stories are being represented: many of these films revolve around white-centered experiences and/or are cast in favor of white actresses.

Furthermore, one must also wonder if the few representations of these actresses of color include racial stereotypes. For example, Trevor Noah, host of the Daily Show, discusses how harmful stereotypes of Muslims as dangerous antagonists in movies influences the audience’s perception: “That imagery is powerful. ’Cause [sic] a lot of the [American] people who watch those movies don’t even come into contact with diverse people, so their image of these [diverse] people is defined by Hollywood. And you would think that a place that considers itself so liberal would try to find a way to represent people” (“What Scarlett”). Noah’s discussion echoes what bell hooks writes: cinema influences the way in which viewers conceptualize important issues, such as gender and race. If women of color are presented in negative caricatures, those images cause harm. However, if more actresses of color were given glamorous roles, could that be a way to bring more positive portrayals for audience members and create positive perceptions? As discussed in Chapter Four, audiences respond to glamorous representations of minority women in leading roles. Representation is important, but specifically glamorous representation has the
potential to help young viewers have positive role models and identify with non-White standards of beauty.

Sometimes, it is hard for women of color to get roles because roles often go to traditionally glamorous women. For example, Scarlett Johansson, a Caucasian actress, was cast as a Japanese woman in the live-action adaptation of Ghost in the Shell (2017), which prompted anime fan backlash and social media accusations of “whitewashing” (Frank). By choosing Johansson, the director makes a strange equation between whiteness and superiority because Johansson’s character was born a Japanese woman, but after she died, her mind was resurrected into a white woman’s body. Amid the criticism of this role and another casting as a transgender man (which she turned down), Johansson spoke out against the “‘political correctness’” that she interprets as preventing her from playing any role: “‘You know, as an actor I should be able to play any person, or any tree, or any animal because that is my job’” (qtd in Frank). Since Johansson is a cisgender, glamorous white actress, she enjoys white privilege that Hollywood has afforded women who fit similar criteria; Johansson does not understand that there are Japanese American actresses who are not cast because studios have the misguided perception that certain (usually white) actresses will bring in more revenue. Until movies like Crazy Rich Asians and Black Panther, producers thought that mainstream movies featuring actresses of color would not be as successful. For example, Zoë Kravitz auditioned to play Catwoman in The Dark Knight Rises but was informed that “‘they weren’t going urban’” (qtd in Herndon). In that context, “urban” is used as a euphemism for Black, and this anecdote is one of many in which women of color are denied roles because the film creators do not envision minorities as certain characters (even if the roles do not explicitly call for a certain racialized role). Ironically, Kravitz will star as a future Catwoman in the 2021 remake of The Batman.
The backlash against Scarlett Johansson is not about making Johansson feel like Kravitz did, but to help her understand the truth about white privilege and casting. Johansson, and possibly other traditionally glamorous actresses like her, should aim to understand that sometimes not getting every role possible allows opportunities for women of color to actually play parts that are written specifically for a character of color. Trevor Noah articulates the way in which Hollywood casting biases operate in favor of white women: “‘You [Johansson] can play a Japanese robot if you want to, and you can play a white woman in *Avengers*, a white woman in a romantic comedy, and a white woman in an action, a white woman in a drama. You can play all of them, but the Japanese woman who’s acting? She most probably can only play the Japanese robot’” (‘What Scarlett’). Hollywood has a history of portraying white experience as universal experience, and therefore, women in mainstream romantic comedies or action movies are white even though the character roles do not specify any particular racialized ethnicity. While there are some movies that have started to change this norm, Hollywood has a long way to cast more actresses of color in glamorous, leading roles.

Recently, Disney casted an African American, Halle Bailey, as Ariel in the upcoming live-action remake of *The Little Mermaid*, and some backlash demonstrates the way in which minority glamour still has ways to go before being viewed as equal to traditional glamour. There are fans and celebrities who celebrate Bailey’s achievement in earning the role, including both Jodi Benson (who voiced Ariel in the 1989 animated film), and Sierra Boggess (who voiced Ariel in the Broadway adaptation) (Yasharoff). However, critics on Twitter using #notmyariel argue that a Danish mermaid should have a white actress representing Ariel. *Freeform*—an American, Disney-owned channel with programming marketed toward teenagers—supports Bailey by arguing that Danish people can be Black and have red hair (Watson). In addition,
Director Rob Marshall, who had conducted extensive interviews, defends his casting decision saying, “It was abundantly clear that Halle possesses that rare combination of spirit, heart, youth, innocence, and substance—plus a glorious singing voice—all intrinsic qualities necessary to play this iconic role” (qtd. in Yasharoff). The intrinsic qualities Marshall describes are necessary elements of glamour. From his criteria, it is clear that Bailey’s casting was not a token breadcrumb but a role she earned because she is glamorous. Her glamour will add vivacity and charisma to Ariel, and since the role does not depend on having any particular racialized character, then it is permissible that any worthy, glamorous actress should have it.

In the coming years, there will be more actresses of color starring in glamorous leading roles, and hopefully this will expand the representations of minority glamour. Both Tiffany Haddish (African American) and Salma Hayek (Latinx) star in *Like a Boss* (2020). The 2020 live-action remake of Disney’s *Mulan* stars Chinese American actress Yifei Liu, and later this year, Zendaya (mixed heritage) plays the love interest in the remake of *Dune*. In 2022, *Thor: Love and Thunder* (2022) will star Natalie Portman as the new Thor, and during the recent Comic Con, co-star Tessa Thompson (mixed heritage) confirmed that Portman’s character will need a queen. While the details of the movie are not yet known, fans are excited to see the first openly LGBTQ superhero in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. These movies will add to glamorous representations of women of color, and hopefully, scholarship will analyze this new step in the evolution of glamour.
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