



Feminism in Selected American Movies: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract in English

This study investigates the depiction of female figures in productions like “*Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)” and “*Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016)”. It aims to examine how the main characters in these selected movies employ language as an instrument of resistance and solidarity, and to analyze how patriarchal and academic power frameworks are recreated and challenged via texts within the movies. To achieve these aims, this research adopts Fairclough’s three categories of model of CDA, that investigates discourse based on textual level (lexical choice and grammatical frameworks), discursive level (output and explanation of dialogue), and the social level (ideological and authority-based embodiment). “*Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)” mainly concerned on heroines’ evolution from confronting obstacle to take charge of their lives. The movie provokes inquiries about conventional anticipations of manner of women, arousing notable arguments on feminism’s independence. The reaction of audiences indicates the influence of these movies in constructing hypotheses on these problems. At the same time, the movie “*Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016)” talks about women who have black skin working at NASA during significant periods of history. Basically, this paper views these movies not only as entertainment but as important artifacts that will inform the way scholars formulate gender and power. *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016) do not just qualify as films; they have become powerful prisms, in which gender, empowering, and feminist identity concerns are put into perspective..

Paper Info

Keywords

Feminism, critical discourse analysis, *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991), *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016), textual analysis, historical contextualization, intersectionality

1. Introduction:

The link between American movies and feminism can show a progressive narrative that mirrors and impacts community attitudes of female identity. Evaluating how the theme of female identity is tackled in these movies illustrates perspectives on the complicated way movies convey concepts of gender functions and fairness. This investigation evaluates the manifestation of the discussion and explanation of women's rights in American cinema.

The emergence of the concept of identity of women can be traced back to the early 1900s, as the filmmaker Dorothy Arzner provoked the concept of gender. Although the period of silent movies is popular, glimpses of the ideology of womanhood can be noticed. During the second part of 20 century, profound transformations took place in the theme of these movies. This investigation depends on influential writing, for example, the book by Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," and the book by bell hooks, "Reel to Real: Race, Sex, and Class at the Movies," to clarify how criticism of the concept of feminism developed.

At the beginning of the 21st century, the debates about feminism in USA movies have grown more complicated and refined. Since various viewpoints about feminism focus on sexual orientation, social rank, and ethnicity, directors have confronted greater difficulty in representing gender.

This study examines movies like *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016) to investigate how women's ideology is represented and to what degree it impacts the viewpoints of gender functions. However, the representation of women in American movies has remained unstable. The filmmaker has faced much censure for dehumanizing women, keeping restricted depictions, and providing harmful stereotypes.

In short, this investigation evaluates the depiction of women in American cinema, focusing on its historical enhancement and domains where depiction remained limited to gain a clear idea about how movies construct and influence community viewpoints toward women's rights. This research is organized around two main objectives: first, to examine how the main characters in *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016) employ language as an instrument of resistance and solidarity, and second, to analyze how patriarchal and academic power frameworks are recreated and challenged via texts within the movies. So, the researcher seeks to answer the following questions: firstly, how do the main characters linguistically form resistance and solidarity within the conversation? Secondly, in what ways do the chosen movies recreate and challenge controlled ideologies via conversations across three categories of Fairclough's CDA?

2. Literature review

Recent studies have increasingly utilized CDA to investigate how sexism power connections are included in media texts. For example, KhosraviNik and Unger(2020) indicated how Fairclough's CDA can successively reveal ideological frameworks in widespread media conversations, uncovering how lexical choices function to legitimize or deny gender-based dominance. Meanwhile, Boudana and Sehl (2021) employed CDA to filmic depiction of black women in news documentaries and concluded that power rankings were promoted through masterful vocabularies and syntactic utterances. Lazar(2018) employed CDA to examine female-oriented. He/she concentrated on the role of discourse as a site of challenge through which females strategically employ speech to deny agency. Similarly, the same findings were uncovered in the study of Abootalebi and Behnam (2022) through their examination of Iranian series, where the women confront patriarchal principles via modality and approaches of turn-taking.

Resembling CDA research, many investigators have explored women's speech in cinematic contexts. In(2019), Banerjee investigated gendered conversations in tentative Hollywood movies and found that solidity of women is regularly represented via spoken texts rather than non-verbal signs alone, promoting the importance of language in forming womanhood subjectivity. In addition, Cho and Kim (2022) examined workplace challenges in *Hidden Figures (Melfi, 2016)*, pointing out how civility organizations and indirect rejection served as instruments of subversive authority accompanied by ethnicity and gender institutional environments. Whereas, Begum(2023) examined *Thelma & Louise (Scott, 1991)* via a womanhood lens and debated that the movie's lexical expression of freedom functions as both individual power and grouped defiance.

Unlike these studies, Halim and Ahmad (2021) noticed that the challenge in feminism sometimes moves from bodily force to mental and discursive denial, stringing with postfeminist stories of soft authority. A recent study done by Al-Mutairi (2024)integrated CDA with junctional to examine black American women's portrayal in biographical movies, uncovering that females can use their language intellectually or decisively to force or to resist injustice.

Characteristics of Feminisms

Sampselle (1990) posits the main criteria of feminism:

1. The acknowledgment of equal rights or gender equality for men and women.
2. Someone's value to society must be measured by their ability to contribute, not by their gender identity or nature.
3. It is important to emphasize "bodily integrity" and provide women with the same rights over their bodies as males (Petchesky, 1984).

Numerous authors examine the second portion of written work from a variety of angles. While some authors reject this idea and focus on femininity through individual and social

awareness, others highlight the significance of femininity through biological characteristics. Using Hygieia, the nursing goddess and metaphor of healing, as an example from the first group, Connell (1985) linked nursing and femininity to the origins of nurturing. Connell claims that the feminine symbol of hygiene, which is often overlooked in historical accounts of nursing and medicine that prioritize the male, is a source of strength for nursing.

Feminism, according to Connell (1985), is a recognition that is formed from the “feminine” in contrast to the “masculine.” As a field, nursing can be improved with the help of an enhanced understanding of feminine consciousness. Connell challenges the issue of a consistently prevailing technological paradigm in the field of acute care and urges us to embrace a broader value of feminine consciousness as a way of strengthening the practice of nursing that is devoted to nurturing a humanistic and healing environment. This view supports the opinion of Chodorow (1978), who argues that motherhood is not secondary to masculinity, but the fortitude of feminine nature and its qualities are positive.

However, Chodorow has not escaped criticism, especially concerning her biologically deterministic conception. Although Connell praises and promotes the acknowledgment of the feminine, critics believe that she places so much emphasis on the feminine as to interpret this as the encouragement of going into femininity, although with a significantly powerful rather than a weak stance. As much as this school of thought upholds the importance of femininity, it can also be viewed as offering a challenge to the overall feminist agenda of breaking gender roles (Chodorow, 1978; Connell, 1985).

3. Methodology

Analytical Framework: Fairclough’s Model of CDA

The critical discourse analysis approach offered by Fairclough creates a powerful and systematic framework of discourse analysis aimed at examining the sophisticated processes through which discourse creates, enforces, and at the same time questions the relations of power in the realms of the masses. According to him, this framework depends on the fact that discourse is never neuter; instead, it functions as a social habit that both constitutes and is constituted by the societal and conceptual milieu surrounding it (Fairclough, 1992, 2013). The model is categorized into three connected dimensions: text, discursive practice, and social practice. These three categories allow investigators to shift smoothly from the micro-layer of linguistic properties to the macro-layer of social and political texture.

A crucial element of critical discourse analysis includes both the macro level (including ideas like power, financial problems, and subjugation among populations) and the micro level (including terms like dialogue, language employment, and communication). Linking between these two levels is fundamental for detailed critical research.

Regarding the textual level, it focuses on the linguistic features of speech. This contains the investigation of lexical choices, grammatical frameworks, the usage of pronouns, syntactic organizations, modality, as well as other linguistic properties. For example, choosing model verbs like must or should refers to power, obligation, or convincing others, whereas using the usage of “I” or “we” may form an additive ideology and solidarity. Discursive practice level is wider in that it captures the process of producing, sharing, and applying utterances. This stage examines how specific features of language are presented, repeated, or incorporated, and how others are relegated or made silent. The dimension also emphasizes the relationship between the text and the audience, questioning how text and audience are repressed and interrogating how texts are constructed along with being constructed by social structures. An eventual level, the social practice level places speech into a broadened cultural, social, and ideological context, including gender-based domination, structural racism, economic habits, and economic hierarchies. It is a dimension that allows the researchers to relate particular linguistic decisions with structured social facts, which clarifies the way texts reproduce and recreate structural asymmetries.

Overall, the model allows one to examine reality extensively, taking into account all the complexities of discourse, its impact on society, and the mutual relations between language and the rest of the socio-cultural environment by considering all three layers.

B. Justification of Adopting Fairclough’s CDA

The researcher uses this analytical framework to justify the design of the research database and to ensure conformity with the conceptual goals of the inquiry. The conversations that transpire between the characters in the chosen movies are not just imaginary as such; they also serve as cultural discourses, which reveal as well as define gender and ideological structures. It is these dialogues of interference between the performance and challenge of social identities. Moreover, the model created by Fairclough is especially suitable in this study, as it focuses on language as a means of power relations occurrence and opposition. The Critical Discourse Analysis by Fairclough is centered on the spoken texts as a space of epistemic struggle, explaining the agency and darting of people in hierarchical arrangements. It enables an intersectional study of gender and race, which is depicted in such a scenario as *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016). According to explaining the role of discourse in society, narration discloses subtle approaches of challenge, conformity, and refusal of feminist ideas.

The methodological paradigm that is used in a critical discourse analysis of feminism in the US cinemas is what makes the much-needed systematic research and explanation of all the complex rules that come into play in the ambiance of gender representation in the discourse of the cinematographic account. The paper aims to use an interwoven and diverse method in explaining the construction, negotiation, and construction of feminism ideologies in American production. The chosen methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches, relying on the analysis

of the film, discourse analysis, and cultural studies, and, therefore, allowing one to develop a more subtle perception of the phenomenon.

When investigating the chosen speeches in *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016), critical discourse analysis incorporates a dual type of approaches that can help differentiate between the methodological and the conceptual approaches. The terms that are used by researchers who apply CDA will always contain elements of authority, predominance, racial bias, social status, racial group, and continuity. These lexical units are analytical terms used to critically study discourse in terms of the cognitive processes and the socio-economic organization.

4. Data and Analysis

a. Data Selection and Justification

The data for this research encompasses the selected conversations from two critically renowned movies: *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016). These movies were intentionally selected since they are considered unique but complementary illustrations of female opposition to institutional authority and patriarchal. *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991) provides a bold portrayal of black women resisting gender-based dominance and reclaiming strength in a society dominated by men. In contrast, *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016) explains a subtler but neutrally impactful sort of resistance through mental qualification and occupational excellence within the context of ethnic inequality and gender bias. By concentrating on spoken text rather than non-verbal signs alone, this research considers language as a site of ideological framework, denial, and defiance, fully ranging with Fairclough's CDA model. The movie's tentative, class diversity, and gender-based dominance allows the study to consist of white female rebellion and black female denial, offering an intersectional overview. In addition, the common popularity and impactful culture indicate that ideologies combined in the conversations circulate largely within social text. Therefore, the chosen data are contextually wealthy and sociologically important, making the data suitable for revealing utterances of discourse empowerment and sabotage.

b. Data Collection and Processing

The fundamental data were selected from freely accessible platforms, YouTube. Conversations were transcribed literally to keep precision, conserving original utterances, pauses, and concentration relevant to the first dimension of Fairclough's CDA (textual analysis). This method confirms that the linguistic subject stays loyal to the movies' original contexts, which is fundamental for CDA's micro-level emphasis. After that, transcriptions were arranged thematically, accompanied by key anthologies identified based on their relevance to the text of

female authority relations and, denial of societal limitations. This organized procedure guarantees that the selected samples are linguistically accurate and methodologically manageable.

c. Sampling Strategy

In this research, the researchers utilize only conversations that directly explain resistance of black women, ideological deny, or empowerment. In *Thelma & Louis* (Scott, 1991), anthologies emphasis moments through which protagonists obviously face the authority of males and ensure their identity and power. In *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016), the chosen quotes show how black women deny systemic racism and gender, confronted with mental defiance and perseverance. The data were selected for their portrayal value in mirroring wider discursive utterances, instead of random patterns. This selected tool ensures that the samples are both enough and relevant to answer the questions of this study effectively.

4.2 Analysis

In order to have a deep understanding of how women are represented and examine how feminist ideology is portrayed in American films, this study employed a critical discourse analysis framework of Fairclough for two selected movies: *Thelma and Louise* by Ridley Scott 1991 and *Hidden Figures* by Theodore Melfi 2016.

4.2.1 *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991)

“You get what you settle for.”

In this quote, Louise conveys a brief and direct utterance that expresses the significance of self-determination as well as individual empowerment. Linguistically, the pronoun “You” popularizes the message, turning it into an international assertion instead of an individual remark, whereas the verb “settle” denotes passive agreement of restrictions. The straightforward, declarative phrase focuses on urgency and visibility, leading to the message being both obligated and easily received by the audience. According to the second level, discursive practice, the sentence symbolizes, whilst ideological denial, considering Louise as a hard-working agent confronting societal expectations. The comments made by the orator go beyond direct mention of Thelma. At the same time, he invites the audience to think about the socio-structural standards that are widespread, so that they should obey those feminine rules. At the third level of analysis, which is the social praxis, this utterance criticizes patriarchal structures that legitimize female oppressions and interventions, thus revealing the ideology behind gendered power relations. Therefore, the speech can be viewed as a statement of women's agency, a call to fight internalized injustice, to reassert their power; it explains how processes of talking can successfully transform the relationship dynamics in the community.

In addition, Louise's statement summarizes the feminist construct of independence and freedom. It shows how the characters manage to tactically weasel themselves out of repressive

situations in the context of the wider film. It anticipates the command to women to claim their right to what they deserve and reject social pressure.

"I finally figured out who we are. We are the people who cannot take it anymore."

This sentence utilizes the pronoun "we" to form the additive identity and participate experience, pointing out the main character's solidarity in confronting injustice. The first clause, "I finally figured out," denotes reflexive awareness as well as mental realization, focusing on the fact that resistance appears via conscious cogitation instead of impulsive behavior. The utterance "can't take it anymore" expresses frustration and intention, employing vivid, colloquial discourse to resonate with the audience's experiences of extended subjugation. Discursively, the utterance of Thelma refers to a turning point through which the main figures show their resistance to patriarchal and cultural and social limitations, refusing agency within their communication and figuratively for the audience. According to the social level, the sentence implies female consciousness, illustrating their refusal to impose social principles and urging readers to rethink about injustice that women face in society, in line with the opinions of Fairclough's speech that speech mediates agency of power.

"You shoot off a guy's head with his pants down, believe me, Texas is not the place you want to get caught."

In this quote, Louise uses dark jokes and colloquial metaphors to express authority within a risky context. According to the textual level, the idiomatic utterance and imperative phrase "believe me" establish power and dominance, subverting conventional anticipations of feminist passivity. Discursively, the sentence serves as a strategic alert, regulating manner and ensuring competence in refusing danger while pointing out energetic resistance to male dominance. It also locates the communication in the context of the geographical and societal context of "Texas", which mirrors the socially established legal dominance of males in society. Finally, according to the social level, the line criticizes patriarchal and lawful frameworks that penalize feminists' self-resistance whilst normalizing male dominance, illustrating how discourse can uncover and compete societal unfairness via cinematic text.

"Something's crossed over in me, and I can't go back. I mean, I just couldn't live."

This sentence utilizes symbolic and declarative discourse to symbolize an irreparable individual transformation. The duplication of negation "can't," "couldn't" ensures the impossibility of restoration to the obedient state, whilst the utterance "crossed over in me" proposes deep internal transformation. According to the discursive level, Thelma locates herself as an agency subject who effectively reshapes her personality, denoting a break from previous obedience to confronting traditional roles of gender roles. Finally, from a social level, the sentence criticizes the socialist anticipation of feminist endurance and capitulation, considering freedom as social and individuality as importance. According to the CDA model of Fairclough, this sentence

illustrates how language can reconstruct subject location and destroy dominant perspectives about gender, focusing on the transitive ability of language in female resistance.

4.2.2. *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016):

“Every time we get a chance to get ahead, they move the finish line. Every time.”

The sentence of Katherine Johnson employs repetition to denote organized unfairness and defeat. At the textual level, the utterance “they move the finish line” uses symbolic language to represent academic barriers as a permanently transformation and unwinnable, whilst the repetition of the phrase “every time” focuses on the repeated constitutional injustice. Discursively, the utterance serves as a criticism of workplace structural, demonstrating negation of agency in a society dominated by male-based principles. Katherine’s words re-echo beyond anecdote, requesting the audience to understand the insistence nature of discernment. On a social level, this utterance points out the intersectional injustice, illustrating how sexism and race are organized in the academic habitat. By applying Fairclough’s CDA, this quote represents how language can uncover and resist a deeply established framework of power in the community.

“More than 50 million people watching, and not one of them knows I’m here.”

This utterance utilizes passive structure to focus on invisibility, the phrase “More than 50 million” emphasizing general exposure set side by side with individual erasure. At the textual level, the passive structure turns the concentration on the action rather than the actor, pointing out the systemic ignorance of contributions created by marginalized females. Discursively, the utterance of Mary Jackson criticizes the chosen acknowledgment of accomplishment in occupational spaces, making her a storyteller and a picture of ignorant voices. Socially, the sentence uncovers the undervaluation of African American black women within the STEM area, facing cultural, social, and academic identities that invisibilize their drudgery. Based on Fairclough’s level of CDA, the discourse discovers how speech can encode dissimilarity of social and cultural structure and supplies a platform for refusing injustice by bringing to light the lived experience.

“They let women do some things at NASA, Mr. Johnson. And it's not because we wear skirts. It's because we wear glasses.”

This quote also uses derision and distinction in order to discredit charges touching on gender ideals. At the textual level, the contrast between the statement that we wear skirts vs. we wear glasses refers to the process of making decisions based on gender into that of a meritocratic admission, where cognitive competence is the dominant factor. In discursive practice, Dorothy Vaughan challenges doggedly patriarchal discourses, thus preserving authority and authority in a subordinated academia. The quote also encourages the viewers to rethink stereotyped notions of ability, consequently making speech a vehicle for manipulating the embedded ideologies. On a social level, the sentence criticizes the existing gender standards and restrictions against women in the labor force. To shed some light on the feminist quest to achieve fair treatment and respect

based on merit and not sexual orientation, the analysis will be conducted to determine how the protagonists go through bureaucratic racism.

“We all get there together, or we don't get there at all.”

This quote focuses on cumulative accomplishment and inclusion and prefigures agency using the first-person pronoun we. The affirmative and simple form gives a sense of accountability and integrated solidarity, thus persuading to collaborate as a key process, all textually. The line uses feminism in the story to be able to help each other overcome the systemic impediments of the events in the story, which puts the power of the discourse in defining the power. Lastly, socially, it depicts the values of mutual agency and additive resistance embodied by women in their approach to resistance to injustice, which shows that language may be used to empower community action against injustice. According to the Critical Discourse Analysis model that was presented by Fairclough, such a sentence personalizes the discourse through which ideological positions appear and creates the process of cultural and social change by sharing narratives. This line also portrays female friendship and commonality. The paper explores the collaborative spirit of feminist movements, and it is important that all can work together to overcome structural challenges. It is a perfect representation of a feminist approach where one ought to help each other in achieving common goals.

The above lines present a preliminary overview of the feminist themes that are discernible in the chosen films, or interpretative theories that are used to interpret them. They outline the struggles of the main characters to independence, their cries of rebellion against the existing social expectations, and the different predicaments the women face in their unique circumstances. They reveal the determination of characters, his or her rebellion, and his or her willingness to address the structural obstacles and the conventional culture. All the quotations emphasize the general feminist theme expressed by the movie.

5. Conclusion and Summary

This exploration of womanist perspectives within *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991) and *Hidden Figures* (Melfi, 2016) traces a transforming analytical process that rebuilds the understanding of the researcher and provides findings of substantial meaning to the academic community. Various gender-representation aspects, power relations, as well as the role of socio-historic factors like legacy and class as manifested in the films, were revealed through a thorough analysis of the narrative patterns and perception of audiences by the films.

The analysis, in *Thelma and Louise* (Scott, 1991), emphasized coercive narratives where feminist characters were in a dilemma on achieving equilibrium in their lives. The depiction of heroes who change their position of oppressed and oppressed people into that of independent decision-makers is sturdy in interacting with contemporary concepts of what it means to be a

woman. The movie generated much societal debate with both positive and negative reviews, thus signifying its critical role in rebranding feminist power and values in society.

Hidden Figures (Melfi, 2016) has a strong representation of a black girl who was working at NASA in a very critical era in history. This film prefigures the work of such people and highlights the story that has long been sidelined. It has come to become symbolic of the larger trend of diversity and inclusion that does not simply rest with media representation but rather spans outside of the media representation into a broader sociocultural dialogue. In a more general feminist context, this study explains that the films act as a mirror, constructing and recreating images of power, sexism, and the concept of womanhood as viewed by an audience. Such representations do not limit the effect of cinema and the spectators, who question the already existing paradigms. When carrying out this research, the researcher concluded that the media is a powerful platform where female interests and impact could be realized. The two movies show how storytelling can undermine established beliefs and how they alarm scholars and audiences to force them to reconsider their expectations. The analysis of these movies, plus viewer perception, will provide the study with the full picture of how womanhood and cinema interact to create emergent consciousness.

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Abstract in Arabic

النسوية في افلام امريكية مختارة : تحليل الخطاب النقدي

الخلاصة :

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة كيفية استخدام الشخصيات الرئيسية في فيلمي "ثيلما ولويس" و "شخصيات خفية" للغة كأداة للمقاومة والتماسك، وتحليل أطر السلطة الأبوية والأكاديمية التي تُعاد صياغتها وتحديها من خلال النصوص في الأفلام. ولتحقيق هذه الأهداف، يعتمد هذا البحث على نموذج فيركلوف للتحليل النقدي للخطاب، الذي يدرس الخطاب بناءً على المستوى النصي (الاختيار المعجمي والأطر النحوية)، والمستوى الخطابية (مخرجات الحوار وتفسيره)، والمستوى الاجتماعي (التجسيد الأيديولوجي والسلطوي). يتمحور الموضوع الرئيسي لفيلم "ثيلما ولويس" حول رحلة بطلتيه من المواقف الصعبة إلى تولي زمام أمور حياتهما. وقد أدت هذه التساؤلات حول الحكمة المتعارف عليها فيما يتعلق بالسلوك السليم للرجال والنساء إلى نقاشات مهمة حول استقلال المرأة. تُظهر ردود الفعل المتباينة تجاه الفيلم مدى تأثيره على كيفية إدراك الناس لهذه المشاكل. يروي فيلم "شخصيات خفية" قصة النساء الأمريكيات من أصل أفريقي العاملات في وكالة ناسا خلال مرحلة مهمة من التاريخ، وهي قصة أقل شهرة. باختصار، لا تنتظر هذه الدراسة إلى هذه الأفلام على أنها مجرد أفلام ترفيهية، بل كأعمال مهمة تُشكل رؤية الباحثين للنوع الاجتماعي والسلطة. فيلمي "ثيلما ولويس" و "شخصيات خفية" ليسا مجرد قصص على الشاشة؛ لقد أصبحوا مؤثرين في تشكيل أفكارنا حول النوع الاجتماعي، والتمكين، وما يعنيه أن تكون نسويًا.