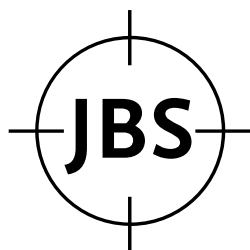


James Bond, Gender Studies, and Popular Culture Pedagogy

A Case Study

LISA J. HACKETT, JO COGHLAN, AND HUW NOLAN

This article considers how James Bond films are rich texts to teach critical gender studies in undergraduate university studies. It draws on a case study of teaching practices at a regional Australian university that adopted three academic articles which examined how gender was framed and represented in Bond films and considered how patriarchal representations could be identified, interpreted, and contested. It found that not only are Bondian gender representations strongly grounded in patriarchal practices, but more recent efforts to soften Bond's hegemonic masculinity are seen by students with some scepticism. The article begins with a brief introduction to academic literature that argues representations of women in popular culture are overly reliant on gender stereotypes, which are largely negative and disempowering. Following this is a discussion of some of the key ways gender is framed and represented in Bond films, followed by a specific discussion of the representations of Bond girls. This article also examines why Bond girls are represented in ways that posit their narrative value as secondary to Bond and as such they are likely to be seduced, raped, or killed. Having established the gender politics of Bond films in their cultural context, a case study of the use of James Bond in an undergraduate university unit of study focused on developing critical thinking skills is presented along with the findings.



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GENDER STEREOTYPES IN POPULAR CULTURE

Studies of gender in popular culture are not new to scholarship. What is almost universal in most studies is that women continue to be portrayed negatively, often reliant on stereotypes (Collins 2011; Murnen 2016; Smith and Coghlan 2022; Kumar 2022). Gender stereotypes are those which posit differences between what is framed as typical feminine behaviours from typical masculine behaviours (Kachel, Steffen, and Niedlich 2016). Studies generally show that women are not only under-represented in popular culture forms such as film and television, but that when women are portrayed, it is “often in a circumscribed and negative manner” (Collins, 290). Such representations of women in popular culture show that the inequalities found in film stereotypes generally mirror the inequalities women experience in the real world (Gilpatric 2010, 735). The discursive nature of gender stereotypes has been extensively examined in various popular culture forms including in films and television (Adessa Towbin 2004; Birnie Henke, Zimmermann Umble and Smith 1996; Calvert et al. 2001; Hoerrner 1996; Stevens and Harrison 2004; Walsh and Leaper 2020); but also in other popular culture forms, such as toys (Murnen et al. 2016; Sherman and Zurbriggen 2014); video games (Downs and Smith 2010); in music videos and magazines (Brown et al. 2006); and in advertising (Grau and Zotos 2016; Lazar 2006; Stankiewicz and Rosselli 2008; Windels et al. 2020).

Studies of gender stereotypes in popular culture have also examined sociological issues of body image (Bessenoff 2006; Grabe, Ward, and Hyde 2008; Hackett and Rall 2018; Herbozo et al. 2004; Myers and Crowther 2007); women’s representations as homemakers and sexual gatekeepers (Collins); in gendered representations of women’s work (Banchefsky et al. 2016; Cheryan et al. 2009); in relation to sexuality (Ocasio-Russe 2017); and religion (Sjo 2016). How gender stereotypes shape ideas of nationality have also been examined (Cuelenaere, Willems, and Joye 2019); as they have in relation to gender and STEM (Steinke and Tavaréz 2017); how women are represented as “bitches” and “bimbos” (Guerilla Girls 2003); how women are framed in relation to violence (Gilpatric; King 2008; Linz and Donnerstein 1994); and gendered representations of race (Manatu 2003; Mastro and Greenberg 2000). Postmodern feminists such as Angela McRobbie (2004) have also challenged the privileged representations of white, Western, heterosexual women in popular culture. The James Bond franchise has a long history of using gender stereotypes to underpin and reinforce its narratives of Bond’s hegemonic masculinity.

GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN JAMES BOND

James Bond is an “icon of adventure, a guru of male style, an emblem of glamour, a champion of consumerism” with the popular nickname “Mr Kiss Kiss Bang Bang”, which “spells out” Bond as a “loaded symbol of sex and violence” (Lindner 2014, 1). His sexuality and masculinity are defined by a “freedom from marriage [and] an easy familiarity with the brand names that are the accompaniments to a consumer lifestyle – cars, cigarettes, liquor – and a licence to look” (Denning 2014, 73). He is, as Claire Hines argues, an “aspirational masculine image” (2014, 99). Toby Miller asserts that Bond has “violent patriarchal attitudes” (2014, 291), and Bond films represent “overt hypersexualisation of the female body and the emphasis placed on virile masculinity” (Prorokova-Konrad 2022, 2).

The uber-masculine persona of James Bond has been a predictable element for the Bond franchise’s worldwide audience (Carpenter 2002). For Kimberly Neuendorf et al., “[w]estern society’s patriarchal, individualistic culture” is evident in Bond films; and Bond “promotes stereotypical, sex-typed male attitudes, especially when interacting with women” (2010, 759). As Helana Bassil-Morozow reminds us, numerous scholars (Garland 2010; Lawless 2014; Funnell and Dodds 2017) have all noted the

geopolitical overtones of Bond’s love life in that his ideological views are inseparable from his sexual conduct and politics. His love for women is tied to his role as an ambassador of kitsch Englishness: a well-dressed, polite, stiff-upper-lip and martini-drinking superhero. It is also linked to his promotion of Western values in general. (2020, 91)

The Bond series has become entrenched in Western popular culture with the films’ diegetic form so highly predictable and dependable (Neuendorf et al., 748). It is also important to note, as Katharine Cox does, that Bond exists as a global franchise (2014, 185). The character of James Bond is an icon of both British and global cinema (Spicer 2003). He “remains one of the most famous fictional characters and [is a] firmly established cultural icon” (Lindner, 10). As a “popular hero”, Bond acts as a “political and sexual hero for the lower middle classes” (Bennett and Woollacott 2014, 19). Bond enjoys a privileged position. He is

white, cis-gendered, middle-class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and [a] British man who has enjoyed a private school education and attended Cambridge University. He can move, act, and perform; gain access to places, spaces and

resources; and use his intersectional and social capital in ways the most people cannot. (Funnell and Dodds, 1)

It is this privilege, continue Funnell and Dodds, that makes “Bond such an attractive character with worldwide appeal” (*ibid.*). Emerging in the decline of post-war Britain, Bond represented the “fantasies” of Britain’s waning “global influence”, while “simultaneously glamorising an affluent lifestyle based on brand-name consumerism, exotic travel and sexual conquest” (Lindner, 1). Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott argue that Bond is a “pre-eminently English hero, single-handedly saving the Western world from threatening catastrophe”, meaning Bond and Britain are placed “at the centre of world affairs” emerging in a period when Britain’s “world-power status was visibly and rapidly declining” (2014, 19); hence Bond represents for British men a “post-imperial fantasy life” (Miller, 295). His body is “presented as the ideal masculinity and dietetically contrasted with the physique of the arch-villain in order to reaffirm his physical superiority as hero” (Funnell and Dodds, 24) – Bond’s male enemies are often shown as older and often with “physical impairments which that limits [them] physical[ly]” (*ibid.*, 25). With Bond as “able-bodied and sensual”, he is signalled above that of the villain who has a “visible physical impairment, which is assumed to be detrimental to their libido” (*ibid.*, 26). Or put differently, the Bond films “use sexuality to contrast the (hetero)normativity of Bond with the sexual aberrance of his opponents” (*ibid.*, 29). Monica Germaná argues that as well as “sexual ambivalence”, aspects such as “race and ethnicity are clear indicators of the villains’ deviancy” (2020, 41).

Given the reliance on the Bond films of stereotypical representations of gender, it is unsurprising that the franchise has been critiqued for its “gender politics” attracting a “plethora of critical commentary” (Funnell and Dodds, 9). Critics accuse Bond of “racism, sexism, and snobbery” (Lindner, 1) and argue the franchise “articulate[s] a broad range of cultural and ideological concerns” (*ibid.*, 3). Michael Denning’s critique of Bond is the characters “continuation of the tradition of snobbery with violence, an all too familiar aristocratic clubman with an even greater degree of sadism thrown in” (58). Toby Miller is more direct, arguing Bond is a “symptom of imperialism, sexism, Orientalism, class hierarchy, and jingoism”, with the Bond franchise the “first form of mass pornography” (285). The debates over the sexist and racist nature of both Bond books and films are frequent, and continue with persistent claims that the next Bond should be black, a woman, or both (Germaná, 63). These Bondian frames sit in a binary with the representations of Bond girls.

THE BOND GIRLS

The term “girls” historically “diminishes, deprecate(s), and trivialize(s) women by labelling them as immature or inexperienced” (Wood 2011, cited in Funnell and Dodds, 177). For Monica Germaná the term “signals” the “infantilization of women whose ‘girlhood’ is not placed on the same historical level as Bond’s ‘manhood’” (15). As Funnell argues, the term “Bond girl” strongly communicates discourses about “gender, sexuality, and power” (2018, 12). Bennett and Woollacott suggest that the phrase “Bond girls” is “committed to constructing female gender identities and forms of sexuality in relation to the norms of masculinity supplied by the figure of Bond” (1987, 241). Critiques of Bond regularly refer to the misogyny embedded in the franchise as well as to the “glamorization of violence” (Germaná, 157). Female characters in the 007 films are framed as objects of sex, violence, or otherwise considered easily dispensable (Garland; Jenkins 2005), and as such they are sexualised and objectified (Arp and Decker 2006).

For Bassil-Morozow the Bond girls are often “objects of desire” with “their sole role in the narrative [...] to reflect the protagonist’s super-human qualities” (92). Tony Garland’s view is that the Bond girl functions as a “desexualized femme fatale with the inherent transgression that inevitably subordinates her to sexual consummation with Bond as a representative of the patriarchal system” (180). She variously “tempts, distracts, and [or] assists” Bond. As the lead actor she is considered beautiful and intelligent and ends up in a “romantic engagement” with Bond (Neuendorf et al., 747). This formula, which is integral to the franchise’s success, has become a significant element in our “popular culture tapestry” (ibid., 749). Funnell however does distinguish between the “good” and “bad” Bond girl:

In order to be presented as a “good” character, the Bond Girl is expected to submit to the will and libido of James Bond, forfeiting her own liberated sexual identity for a domesticated one. By comparison, women who embrace their liberal sexualities and refuse to adhere to the ‘Bondian’ standard of normative femininity are presented as ‘bad’ and are violently punished. (2011, 201)

Funnell and Dodds also distinguish the American Bond girl from other Bond girls. In this case the American Bond girl, “who has taken her freedom and independence too far, gets realigned within a traditional gendered order and the United States who she represents is encouraged to seek out the support of the

United Kingdom in order to safeguard their geopolitical interests” (59). Furthermore, “American men may be killed in action but they are never captured and imprisoned the same way as American women” in Bond films. Bond girls are also positioned as “good” or “bad” depending on their nation’s affiliation, particularly evident in the Russian-themed Bond films (*ibid.*, 79). Sabine Planka argues that “James Bond as a character, is virtually inconceivable without women. They serve as his enemies, allies, and lovers and their characters are defined almost exclusively by their relationships with him” (2015, 139). For Funnell and Dodds, Bond’s love interests “frequently bear the brunt of his calculative strategies. They are the ones who get fatally injured, tied up, and left exposed” because of Bond’s “physical and sexual prowess” (14-15). Germaná asserts that Bond films are a “composite of sex, spectacle and menace” in which Bond girls are often killed (3). Bond is considered by Elena Duque Sanchez et al. to “habitually embod[y] a model of masculinity that disdains women” (2022, 102). Denning suggests that the original Bond books were the “first British thrillers to make sexual encounters central to the plot and to the hero” (68). Garland describes the Bond films as “erotic thrillers” because sex is so central to the narrative progression of the film (181).

This Bondian narrative is a “version of a persistent and recurrent masculine fantasy dressed up in the latest fashion of consumer society”, argues Denning (69). Bond is the “first screen action hero to embody and address the new, fragile pleasure of the commodity” (Miller, 295). The fantasy of Bond, posit Funnell and Dodds, “radiate[s] sexual magnetism” which is able to “excite, seduce, and sexually satisfy women”, with this serving as a “visual and haptic signifier” of “his libidinal masculinity” which “makes women swoon” (27). His “intense sexual liaisons”, argues Germaná, “speak of lust rather than love” (14). Funnell and Dodds remind us that it is in both the “bedroom and in the field” that Bond’s hegemonic masculinity is on display (10; cf. Connell 2005). Bond uses his “physical and sexual prowess to his and Britain’s advantage” (Funnell and Dodds, 8). What is clearly evident in this narrative structure is a “voyeuristic eye, coding women as its objects [and a] culture whose every discourse is dominated by [...] a code of sexual signifiers” (Denning, 70). One of the sexual signifiers, argues Hines, is that Bond girls are the “natural focus for male lust”, and as such they “neutralise accusations of homosexuality” (101).

Bond uses his “seduction and sex” to advance his mission (Funnell and Dodds, 10), whereas the villains are never shown to have sex, meaning villains are never positioned as a sexual threat to Bond. Rather, Bond seduces and steals the villains’ girlfriends (*ibid.*, 11). In some instances, Bond’s sexualised masculinity appears less seductive and more akin to sexual assault. This is evident in *Goldfin-*

ger (1964). Bond girl Pussy Galore (Honor Blackman), inferred as a lesbian, initially resists Bond, but does end up having sex with Bond in a barn, in which Galore does not give verbal consent (ibid., 31). Rather, sex with Bond is “forcefully imposed” (ibid., 28). Here, Linda Lindsey’s view is worth noting: “[i]n four decades of James Bond films [...] women are depicted enjoying rape”. More so, according to Lindsey, “James Bond gets to play out men’s fantasies – he drives fast cars, fights ruthless villains, wears a nice suit and has sex with any girl he desires all who eventually say yes to him” (qtd. in Germaná, 3). Even in office banter, especially with Money Penny, this can be interpreted as sexual harassment with his office flirtations and inuendo sitting glaringly against the #MeToo movement (Funnell and Dodd, 10).

Garland, however, goes on to remind us that it is in Daniel Craig’s *Casino Royale* (2006), that Bond is not vulnerable “to sexual seduction and does not indulge in any short-term sexual relationships” (181). Bond’s only sexual encounter is with Vesper Lynd (Eva Green), the female lead, after the main plot has been resolved and Bond has “recovered from debilitating torture”. The torture is one of a number that target Bond’s masculinity. Apart from *Casino Royale*, Bond’s “male attributes” were “under threat” from the centipede encroaching upon his groin in *Dr. No* (1962), to the laser beam threatening castration in *Goldfinger* (Germaná, 57; Miller, 292). These scenes, however, are rare as they “expose his vulnerability [and] undermine the foundations of [Bond’s] phallic authority” (Germaná, 57). While Cox considers the torture scene in *Casino Royale* as a “rebirth” and “refashioning” of Bond’s masculinity as an effort to remain “faithful” to Fleming’s original version of Bond (184), the film is arguably framed by contemporary gender politics. However, Bond’s relationship with Vesper specifically “positions Craig’s Bond as a nodal point upon a journey both towards and away from Fleming’s fictional creation of 1953” (ibid.). Yet Vesper remains a Bond girl, as she “embodies everything immediately associated with Bond: sex, danger, precarious living, and risk”, and she dies (Garland, 181). “Bond girls”, however, is a pejorative term that captures both female heroes and villains. Regardless of how autonomous these characters are initially depicted to be, they are often “identified as an adjunct to Bond (the male protagonist), or in terms of their relationship to other male characters” (Neuendorf et al., 750). Bassil-Morozow captures the gender dynamics of the Bond films, arguing Bond is

a dominant male as well as his position as a representative of the superior Western civilisation. His efforts reveal the initially resilient female enemy to

be inherently fragile, feminine and therefore in need of saving. Moreover, sex with Bond often works as a kind of “litmus test” for the women’s fragility as, after the first sex scene, they become dependent on 007 for physical survival as well as for support and guidance. In a parallel narrative dimension, these women are also seduced by the Western values Bond supposedly represents. We are not told, however, what happens to the women. (93)

In *GoldenEye* (1995), M describes Bond as being a “sexist, misogynistic dinosaur”, and a “relic”, referencing changing gender politics; but, as Funnell and Dodds note, the “reality is that for Bond’s female allies (and now boss)” is largely unchanged:

If the women appear too powerful, resourceful, and capable they then are literally put in their place. They either fall victim to the arch-villain who captures them and/or require Bond to rescue/seduce them so they can better acquaint with the true order of things, namely Bond as protector figure. (67)

In short, argue Bennett and Woollacott, Bond serves as an “ideological shorthand for the appropriate image of masculinity in relation to which feminine sexual identities were to be constructed”, meaning Bond provides an “ideological construction [of] gender relations and identity” (2014, 24).

BOND AS PEDAGOGY

To date has been a discussion of gender representations in popular culture generally, and a more detailed examination of the nature of gender representations in Bond films, with a focus on Bond’s hegemonic masculinity and how it is narratively juxtaposed against discursive representations of Bond girls. The second half of this article contextualises how these Bondian patriarchal representations prove insightful in examining how gender stereotypes can be interrogated and contested, suggesting the value of using Bond as a device for developing critical thinking in university students.

Interrogating how popular culture produces and reproduces gender stereotypes is necessary according to Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz and Dana Mastro because popular culture shapes how gender is portrayed, and this has a “measurable influence on people’s perceptions of the real world” (2008, 131). This is particularly the case when “sexualised and stereotypical portrayals” are experi-

enced by young audiences (Collins, 290). While the influence of films on social attitudes is complex, there is little debate that as “culture industries” (Hesmondhalgh 2007, 3) they do have an influence on social understandings of people, place, and identity (Lawless 2014, 79). Film is largely considered a text that reflects society’s values and views, and simultaneously informs society’s views and values, hence film representations have consequences for how real life is understood. Films, as texts, can be seen as “meaningful document[s]” (ibid.), which can “serve an educational purpose by offering an enlargement of the viewers’ knowledge of the world and the cultures that they contain” (ibid., 79-80).

James Bond films are considered as informative texts to tease out understandings about gender and its representations, but also to examine a range of historical, political, philosophical, and sociological issues such as body image, age, race, religion, sexuality, disability, and nationalism. As David Hesmondhalgh argues, films “contribute strongly to our sense of who we are, of what it means to be a woman or a man, an African or an Arab [...] straight or gay” (3). Bond, as a global popular culture icon, is arguably influential in constructions of both “sexuality and nationhood”, and as such, he retains “ideological potency” (Bennett and Woollacott 2014, 28). For these reasons, Bondian representations of gender stereotypes provide educators rich and accessible content to explore gender politics and develop pedagogically-sound critical thinking practices.

THE CASE STUDY

Three academic articles examining gender representations in James Bond films were selected by the instructors of a first-year undergraduate unit of study titled “Foundations of Academic Research”. Its aim is to introduce “skills for critical and successful undergraduate research” (UNE Course Handbook, 2023). It is a practical unit designed to instruct students on how to do research for their studies and how to use that research successfully in their assessments. The assessment was designed to give students the opportunity to learn how to evaluate academic sources and how to extrapolate findings in order to create a solid argument for their assessments. As this is a core unit that all students are required to take, the student cohort is made up of students from across liberal arts disciplines. A central concern of the instructors was to find content that was accessible and universal, but also allowed for the development of academic skills, such as critical thinking. A secondary concern was to make the assessments as accessible as possible to entry-level students. As researchers who specialise in the realm of popular culture, we understood its power to communicate and reveal social

norms. James Bond was one of the first items of popular culture that we considered. Academic Lisa Funnell outlines her reasons for studying Bond:

James Bond is the longest-running and most profitable film series in history. With 23 [now 25] films released by Eon Productions across a 50-year period [now 60 years], the series has inspired an unprecedented degree of transgenerational fandom extending across the globe [...] Given the longevity of the series and its widespread influence, it is important to critically examine the messages being relayed about the social value of women and men. (2015, 88)

Our sentiments for picking Bond echoed Funnell's. Funnell's call to critically examine gender provided the focus for the assessment. The choice of gender seemed appropriate due to the misogynistic nature of Bondian representations of women.

The first assessment asked students to identify key elements of the selected peer-reviewed James Bond articles. Students were required to provide short answers to seven questions which included: "Are these articles peer-reviewed, and how do you know that?" and "What methods are the authors using to gather data?", through to asking them to rate the articles in terms of academic value suitable for inclusion in an undergraduate essay. The second assessment required the students to write an annotated bibliography of the three given articles. This assessment had five components: the article needed to be correctly referenced; the aim of the research needed to be clearly articulated; key details from the articles needed to be summarised (e.g., method, findings, argument etc.); a consideration of the usefulness of the article for their essay (assessment three); and an evaluative comment on each of the pieces of academic work was required. The focus for this assessment was on the arguments presented in each of the three articles, none of which required a reader to have had prior engagement with James Bond to be understood. As a scaffolded assessment, this second task allowed the students to engage with their feedback from the first assessment. Through repeated examination of the same three texts, students could not only understand where they did well or not so well, and they are also, with this assessment, able to evolve their responses and incorporate them into the annotations. The final assessment asked the students to answer the following short essay question: "The James Bond films have often been criticised for their chauvinistic portrayal of women. Discuss how portrayals of Bond girls have changed over time in the Bond films". Students were required to use at least two of the given texts and

to find two further peer-reviewed articles to support their arguments. The close reading of the original three texts prepared the students to find these further two texts.

The first article set as a core reading was Kimberly Neuendorf et al.'s 2010 piece titled "Shaken and Stirred: A Content Analysis of Women's Portrayals in James Bond films". The second was Sabine Planka's 2015 article "Female Bodies in the James Bond Title Sequences". The third article was "No Time to Lose Sex-appeal: Love and Attractiveness in the Last James Bond Movie", by Elena Duque Sanchez et al. (2022). Neuendorf et al.'s article undertook a content analysis of twenty James Bond films assessing portrayals of 195 female characters. The films ranged from *Dr. No* to *Die Another Day* (2002). The study found that of the 195 female characters, only twenty-six were coded as being in a "major role" (Neuendorf et al., 758). The average age of a female character in a Bond film was thirty with a slender body type (ibid.); 72% of the women in the selected Bond films were Caucasian; 26% had a US accent; 88% had some sexual contact with Bond; and only 9% of female characters had some form of sexual content with men other than Bond (ibid., 753). A significant majority of female characters had some sexual activity with Bond, and as Elisabeth Ladenson has pointed out, "even presumed lesbians have sex with Bond" (qtd. in Neuendorf et al., 758). Nearly 20% of female characters were assumed dead by the end of the film (Neuendorf et al., 758).

In discussing the findings, the authors noted that the number of female roles in Bond films increased over the twenty-year period examined. Female characters were portrayed as "more sexually active" and were "more likely to be recipients of physical harm" (ibid., 757). The authors also note that while sexual activity and physical harm have increased these two traits have "always been a notable part of the Bond world" (ibid., 758). The study reveals a trend away from the "limited female roles of the fifties and the attendant feminization and glamorization of females, and toward a more autonomous and active participation" of female characters (ibid., 757). The authors conclude that the

collective body of Bond films, with its great popularity over decades among a wide range of audience types, stands to serve as an important source of social cognitive outcomes regarding appropriate role behaviors for women – still stereotyped, with persistent allusions to violence and sex [...] and with unrealistic standards of female beauty. (ibid., 759)

Planka's 2015 article focuses on the Bond title sequences and the role they play in integrating female sexuality. Using gaze theory, Planka argue the "semi-nude female body is served up as an appetizer to a presumed male audience" (139). A title sequence announces how a film is to be "read and provides clues" about the film and its genre (ibid.). Planka associates the notion of the title sequence as an appetiser – "small dishes of food served before the main course of a meal in order to stimulate one's appetite through non-verbal means", which has the "effect of deprecating femininity" (ibid., 141). In short, "sex sells", reliant on the "overt sexualization and exploitation of the female body" (ibid.).

Planka finds that the Bond title sequences "rely on the de-individualization, objectification, and overt sexualization of women. The female body is deployed as a defamiliarized or veiled enticement in order to stimulate the desire for femininity and female sexuality" (ibid., 142). The Bond films from the 1970s to the 1990s, in particular, present the female body in especially "eroticized and sexualized ways" (ibid., 144). *A View to a Kill* (1985) is an indicative example with a woman unzipping her jacket and the numbers "007" appear in neon red between her breasts. This "sexualization is further intensified", argues Planka, with the women holding a gun, "symbolizing" life and death, and this combination being "sexually charged" (ibid.). The use of guns in James Bond title sequences go further. When the gun is presented as "part of the women", it transforms her into a danger that must be eliminated. Thus, the title sequence of *GoldenEye*

no longer shows the penetration of a female body by a phallic gun, but the emergence of the gun from the female body. On a visual level, the woman has appropriated the gun, a phallic object, and is thus presented as a hermaphroditic, Janus-like creature beginning to resist male attempts at sexualization. This image signals a shift in female representation in the franchise during the 1990s in which women claim phallic power and pose a new threat to Bond. (ibid., 144)

Bond title sequences therefore largely posit women's "superficial empowerment" but simultaneously denote their "inevitable subordination", with Bond appearing "as an individual, actively directing the sexualized woman at his side" (ibid., 144-145). In *GoldenEye*

women claim a different gender role – they possess the weapon/the phallic symbol – and become a risk to the "law of the father". They no longer function as symbols of sexual difference and threaten the position of Bond/men

as potential voyeurs. The only way for Bond, who functions as a screen surrogate for the male viewer, to maintain his narrative/social privilege is to (re)assert control over the women in the film. (ibid., 145)

While *Casino Royale* and *Skyfall* (2012) offer more abstract Bond focused title sequences (ibid., 146), *Quantum of Solace* (2008)

reverts back to tradition by showcasing female body parts in a desert and dancing women in a terrestrial globe reduced to latitudes and longitudes. Women are reintroduced as objects, devoid of autonomy, serving as surfaces for the projection of the male gaze, and contributing to the characterization of Bond. (ibid., 147)

Planka concludes that Bond title sequences are designed to attract the attention of the viewer through “the overt display of female sexuality” (ibid., 146). The anonymous women of Bond’s title sequences, with the exception of Vesper Lynd in Daniel Craig’s *Casino Royale*, are reduced to a focus on their physicality and erotic movements. These women are “objectified” and invite male viewers to “look at the women without inhibition, take pleasure in their aestheticized physicality, and project his fantasies onto their bodies” (ibid.).

Sanchez et al.’s article examines audience perceptions of Bond treatment of women, particularly focusing on *No Time to Die* (2021). To do this, the researchers collected data from three sources; online film reviews, viewer comments on an online film review site, and audience interviews. Research questions focused on understanding narrative shifts in *No Time To Die* in relation to Bond’s character and his love interest, as well as his sex appeal. In relation to Bond’s character, the researchers found he was “macho, a womanizer, self-centred, a gallant conqueror, sly, elegant, virile, hedonistic, crass, a lecher, amoral, cold, implacable, cynical, domineering, misogynistic, bad-tempered” but also “charming” (Sanchez et al., 111). In relation to his love interests in the film, Bond’s “amorous feelings” were “heavily criticized”. Scenes of “love and gentleness” were “considered to be at odds with Bond’s character”, one of “toxic masculinity” (ibid.). Another main criticism that the researchers found was the shift to a more “politically correct” cast, which included Moneypenny cast as a black woman and Q depicted as a homosexual or bisexual. While diversity is celebrated, the concern was that the casting appeared to be designed to introduce a more “progressive”

and “feminist” frame. However, some research showed that these changes were also seen as an “attack on white heterosexual men” (ibid.).

FINDINGS FROM THE CASE STUDY

The sense of familiarity that James Bond evoked in the students provided an accessible gateway through which to engage with academic research around gender. Students who had not watched Bond did not report feeling at a disadvantage for not doing so. Rather, as some pointed out, Bond is familiar throughout popular culture, enough for them to understand the critiques of Bond made by the authors of the academic articles they were engaging with. The sense of familiarity with using James Bond also helped reduce potential anxiety that early undergraduate students can face when being first introduced to academic concepts. One of our key roles as academics is to facilitate students’ entry into, and success within, academia. Imposter syndrome occurs at all levels of education, and as educators we should take advantage of whatever tools we can to help students recognise that they are both capable of achieving in academia and that they deserve to be there. Using a popular culture icon such as James Bond, as flawed and interesting as he may be, helps to bridge gaps. There was some apprehension that requiring the students to re-engage with the same three texts across the trimester may lead to some student disengagement; however, student feedback was positive, with students expressing appreciation that they were able to build upon the knowledge gained from each assessment.

Student performance in these assessments was generally good, with higher than average grades across the unit. Student comments to the lecturers generally reflected the aims of the scaffolded assessments and the rationale for using James Bond as a focal point. Students reported that Bond’s reputation with women was widely discussed in popular culture that they felt they could follow the arguments set out in the three assigned articles without having to undertake wider research on Bond. From an instruction point of view, this provided the opportunity for students to focus on the articles without being distracted by arguments set out elsewhere, as can commonly happen when new topics are introduced. For the first two assessments, the aim was to get the students to focus entirely on the three prescribed articles and as instructors we consider this a success. The first assessment attracted higher than average grades, with many students successfully undertaking a close reading of the articles in order to answer the questions well. This put them in good stead for developing the annotated bibliography required for the second assessment. Those students who received lower grades, or failed, did so not because they did not know James Bond, but because they made errors

in identifying the right elements of a research article on which to draw their answers. The scaffolding structure of the assessment tasks gave instructors the ability to aid students in correcting these issues before proceeding with the next task.

The second assessment built upon the first, asking the students to produce an annotated bibliography of the three prescribed articles. We have run annotated bibliography assessments in prior iterations of this unit, and despite students being instructed not to cross reference, their relative lack of knowledge of the topic meant that students would read widely to understand the articles. This led to a small but significant cohort of students comparing the articles they were annotating to others they had read within their assessments, which impacted their grade. Changing the focus to the James Bond articles saw an immediate reduction in this error. This change also led to an improvement of overall grade.

The third assessment asked students to write a short essay using at least two of the prescribed articles and at two more found through their own research. This builds upon not only the previous two assessments, but other skills taught throughout the course, including how to effectively search for academic evidence, how to integrate research into their writing, and how to structure academic essays. The majority of students were successfully supplied additional references that were closely related which allowed them to develop arguments that tightly adhered to the topic. One thing that did surprise us was how many students felt confident to include more than the minimum two additional articles. Another pleasant surprise was the range of articles that students on the whole chose. The topic of gender representation in James Bond has garnered academic interest, particularly over the last couple of decades, but it was still pleasing to see that students had chosen individually from these, rather than a small number of articles being presented again and again. Both these outcomes have prompted us to consider increasing the length of the essay (which could be accommodated by reducing the scope of the end of trimester quiz). This would allow students to explore the topic a little further and to utilise the breadth of their research a little more.

Returning to Lisa Funnell's explanation to why she studies James Bond and our own motivations for choosing this suite of assessment tasks, we have discussed how Bond could be useful for further assessments. Bond's potential as a platform for exploring gender was obvious to us. Yet Bond is more than just a site of gender representation, and the scope of the films provides further opportunities for instructors to introduce and explore. For example, representations of

race, disability, and politics all present themselves as viable topics for using Bond as a teaching tool.

One limitation that was considered was that focusing on James Bone could arguably be too narrow given the range of disciplines that students who sit this course are undertaking. This limitation, although recognised, we found to be acceptable, as it created equity between students as they were all doing the same readings and topic. This also allowed for more robust discussions in tutorials and on Moodle (the students' virtual learning environment). For many students this unit is their first exposure to the world of academia, and we felt it was important to keep the students focused on the aim of the unit (i.e., to equip them with the skills to undertake undergraduate research), which we felt could be dissipated should they have a range of topics to choose from. We also note that this approach possibly would not be as successful in higher undergraduate units.

The familiarity of James Bond reduced the mental load of understanding the content of the articles, that is, they could focus on identifying elements such as key arguments, how data analysis was performed, and the strengths and weakness of each article without also having to learn the subject (i.e., James Bond) that was under consideration. This concentrated the students focus on how to produce good research at the undergraduate level. Student feedback overall for the course was high, with students using both the formal course assessment tools and informal feedback to instructors to register their satisfaction with the course.

CONCLUSION

The fictional world of James Bond is one of the most extensive in contemporary popular culture. The longevity of the franchise provides the basis for it being a source through which to examine social changes over the last sixty or so years. Sitting prominently among these avenues of enquiry is the way Bond has reflected and explicated social norms around gender and sexual relationships. This places Bond as an excellent case study through which undergraduate students can be exposed to academic discussion around gender in society. The concept of gender, as in gender stereotypes and gender politics, and Bond has been extensively examined by researchers and will no doubt continue to be, as Eon Films pivots its stories to reflect the world around them, as they have managed to do during Bond's tenure as the longest running film franchise. The widespread reach of Bond, not only through the official Bond films and books, but through the seemingly endless parodies, tributes, and references made throughout popular culture, ensures his familiarity even to those who have never watched or read Bond. For these reasons we chose Bond as our vehicle to introduce first year un-

dergraduate students to the world of academia, and more narrowly, the field of gender studies. Both student feedback and our own reflections on the course have revealed to us the potency of using the familiarity of Bond to facilitate critical thinking and student success.

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