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Topic: A feminist approach to analyse the portrayal of the working women in The Devil Wears Prada and The Intern.

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Declaration:

I declare that this assignment is my own work and does not involve plagiarism or collusion.

The sources of other people's work have been appropriately referenced, failing which I am willing to accept the necessary disciplinary action(s) to be taken against me.

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Chapter 1: Introductory Chapter

1.1 Background

There has been an increasing trend of Women in the workforce. However, has society's perception of them been changed? The answer to that question, regrettably, is no, it has not. Stereotypes still play a significant role in our perception and judgement of working women today. It comes as no surprise that films play an important role in this. Be it by reinforcing or proving the stereotypes wrong, films could serve as a double-edged sword to accentuate the issue or resolve it.

The films *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Intern*, are two well-received films of critical acclaim, grossing at \$325 million and \$194.6 million respectively despite both only having a budget of \$35 million ("*The Devil Wears Prada*", 2006; "*The Intern*", 2014). But, more important than the revenue generated by the films, is what the film itself entails. *The Devil Wears Prada* draws on the relationship between the working women Miranda and Andrea, and how Andy is eager to please Miranda by working hard in every way possible (Lessne, 2020). The film also focuses on the relationship between Andy and her boyfriend and how she begins to prioritise her career over her boyfriend, before realizing that she did not want to lead a life like Miranda's. The second film, *The Intern* is in every way different from a typical family, in which Jules works and Matt stays at home as a househusband. The conflicts between Jules's work and her family is the crux of the film's plot (Hege, 2015), dealing with the idea of women 'having it all' (Eliza, 2015), balancing both her family and her career. The two films are beacons of hope for working women hoping to make their way into the workforce amidst the stereotypes society may impose on them.

This paper attempts to analyse the concept of 'the working woman' and if the way they have been depicted is realistic.

1.2 Rationale

It is no secret that working women face challenges everyday due to the stereotypical expectations imposed on them by society. This paper chooses to focus on the common mindset that women belong in the kitchen and that men belong in the office and women being communal and men being agentic. The former results in the biased and fixed opinion that women are to prioritise their family over their careers (Medina, 2016; Konrich, 2019). This patriarchal perspective causes society to judge a businesswoman negatively (Gupta, 2021). The way in which the latter affects women is more complex. Women are stereotypically perceived to be motherly, possessing communal characteristics, while men on the other hand are assertive, possessing agentic characteristics. Yet, since the beginning of time, being agentic is the criteria which people look out for in successful business leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, in order to climb up the rungs, men often look out for similar agentic characteristics in women. However, a woman showing masculinity introduces incongruity between the expectations and reality, which causes society to label her as a misfit when she is simply just trying to pursue success.

Whether or not a film is able to accurately portray a race, era, or gender, its indisputable impact on people could go both ways. Of the 40% of films, made in 2019, with female protagonists, only 5 portray women in the workplace. The sheer lack of films to portray working women, makes it even more crucial that films centered around working women have to do so accurately. This paper seeks to find out if the two films were able to break the stereotypes of working women.

1.3 Research Questions

1. Looking at the "Women at Home" (Medina, 2016) and "Agency and Communion" (Schein, 1973) stereotypes, how are the working women Miranda Priestly and Andrea 'Andy' Sachs in *The Devil Wears Prada* and Jules Ostin in *The Intern* portrayed in the films?
2. The premise of the two films is based on the fact that women break stereotypes. However, to what extent are the films actually true to the sentiment?

1.4 Thesis Statement

Due to their challenging of the autonomy of the "Women at Home" and "Agency and Communion" stereotypes, among many others, the films portray Miranda and Andrea, from *The Devil Wears Prada*, and Jules from *The Intern*, as women who are judged and disliked by their societies. In doing so, they accurately substantiate the existence and impacts of gender stereotypes in the workplace, which also prevents them from truly breaking free from the stereotype, as there is still a burden placed on them.

1.5 Delimitations

This paper is only concerned with how women are presented in the workplace. Other representations of women would not be looked at.

This paper is focused on looking at the two mentioned stereotypes, "Women at Home" and "Agentic and Communion". Other gender stereotypes working women face would not be brought up.

1.6 Significance

This paper hopes to understand how stereotypes are alive and well in films, and through doing so, explore how working women can be better portrayed in film, to break the moulds forced on them.

1.7 Limitations

This paper only focuses on the two aforementioned films. Thus, the views of women in the workplace and how they break structural stereotypes are case-specific and may be too absolute to generalise the cinema industry and its presentation of working women. Even if they do show how gender stereotypes exist and are overcome by working women, they are far too small to be fully representative of the entire cinema industry.

As the two films are directed by two different filmmakers, and edited and shot by different film crews, the portrayals of working women in both films, may offer contrasting views of working women, which may affect the conclusion.

This paper will not cover every aspect of the portrayal of working women or every scene in the film but instead chooses to focus on scenes which highlight the characteristics of the various working women and or tie in the idea of stereotypes regarding women and work-life and women and their characteristics.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Role Congruity Theory and Prejudice

When expectations of a role and the person in question do not align, a lowered evaluation of one's ability is the result (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly & Dieckman, 2005). Gender stereotypes innately can be classified into prescriptive and descriptive. The former refers to stereotypes surrounding the typical role which men and women are believed to do, the latter surrounding what men and women should do (Koenig, 2018). This usually implies that the expectations of the role as well as that of the role occupant is violated. When women first start their career, they're judged on the extent to which they fit into descriptive stereotype moulds given to them. When women start to climb the ranks, to excel and succeed, they still are judged by prescriptive stereotypes (Ansari, 2014). The "Men at Work, Women at Home" (Medina, 2016) as well as "Communal and Agency" (Schein, 1973) continue to remain as one of the most prevalent and impactful stereotypes. This paper treats both stereotypes as prescriptive and descriptive.

Women, upon entering the workforce, are unable to escape these stereotypes. Breaking it on the other hand, results in judgement. Balancing the two, hitting the sweet spot, is easier said than done (Catalyst, 2007).

2.2 Men at Work, Women at Home

This stereotype is perhaps one of the most long lasting one and stems from historical roles of women and despite the drastic change and rise of women's rights in the 21st century, the

perception of women's roles in society, in this aspect, has yet to be changed by time. According to a study by Psychology of Women Quarterly, it was found that society continues to strongly stereotype men and women on gender role behaviors, such as who should take care of the housework (Medina, 2016), as they did more than 30 years ago. The claim that this stereotype continues to exist is even further backed up by Kornrich (2019) who empirically proved that women are more likely to be held responsible for housework than men. This impacts working women as they are expected to prioritise their families, after all that should be their 'responsibility'. And when it is not done, they are shamed for selfishly turning their backs against their family and going out to work (Gupta, 2021). The contrast and incompatibility between our perceptions of women who should be at home, taking care of the family, and the reality that they are working, results in prejudice and judgement for not being the stereotypical 'good' women. Faced with this reality, women often find themselves having to choose between a career with less devotion to family or vice versa (Tower & Alkardy, 2008), which is exactly the conflict that the working women face in the films.

2.3 Agency and Communion (Schein, 1973) and the Gender Double Bind in Leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007)

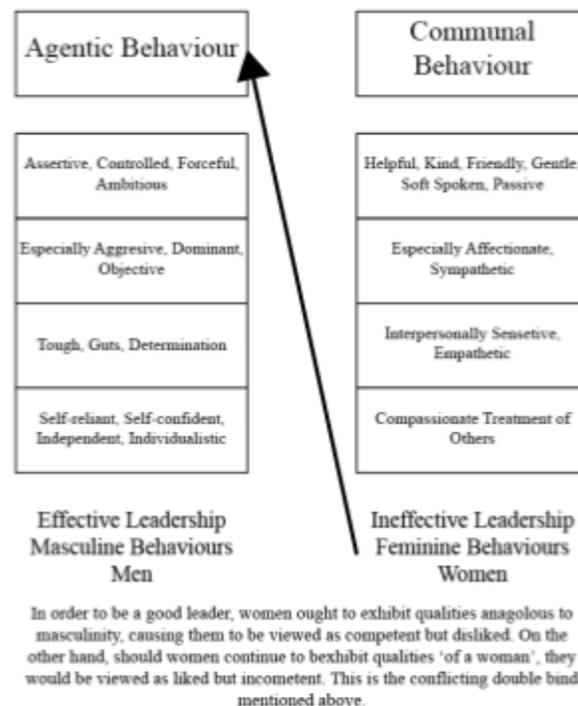


Figure 1. A revised Agentic and Communal Stereotype of Leaders Behaviours' (Eagly & Carli, 2007) while referencing 'The Double-Bind Dilemma for Women in Leadership' (Catalyst, 2018).

Women, as seen in Figure 1, are associated with being motherly, taking care of the family, and as such are attributed communal behaviours (Fullagar et al., 2003). Men on the other hand, are associated with work, which also accounts for the stereotype that successful leaders need to be, like men, agentic. Contextualised, prejudice follows from society starting to perceive women as actual leaders, an inconsistency in the communal attributes of women and agentic ones of successful leaders (Eagly & Karau, 2002). The ramification - a gender double bind - was

summed up aptly by Carly Fiorina, the high-profile former CEO of Hewlett Packard, as either being a "bitch" or a "bimbo". To navigate herself to a leadership, managerial position, a woman, or a man, would need to prove her ability to lead. However, the truth is that many perceive leadership as agentic, a quality affiliated with masculinity. This is where the dilemma enters. Simply, being a woman is not enough. Communal behaviour, expected of a woman, would not bring her anywhere close to management, making competency no longer an indisputable factor (Heilman, 2001). On the other hand, should she choose to display agentic, aggressive, confident qualities, all of which are related to masculinity, she no longer 'fits' into the mould given to her, jolting our assumptions and possibly resulting in prejudice. For women leaders a key dilemma is whether they should be feminine or 'business like' (Mavin, 2009). To achieve success as a leader, they adopt agentic behaviour (stereotyped as masculine), and fail to confine to feminine behaviour. Violations like these result in them being less liked and devaluation of their abilities (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

3.0 Methodology

This paper would analyse scenes from *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Intern*. It specifically looks at scenes which portray how the working women balance their career and their relationship with their significant other, how being a career woman has or has not affected them in the workplace and in their lives and how being a successful career woman comes (or not) at a cost. Aspects of film such as lighting would also be looked at.

"*Men at Work, Women at Home*", substantiated by Medina 2016, as well as "*Agency and Communion*" (Schein, 1973) would be the two stereotypes that this paper would pitch the working women against, to gain deeper understanding on how the women in the film break said stereotypes.

4.0 Discussion and Analysis

4.1 Stephen, Nate and Matt

Regardless of society's evolution, the "Women at Home" stereotype remains prevalent throughout the film, presenting it as a timeless mindset that has yet to change.

Miranda is deemed a fiasco by society, "driv[ing]" yet another husband away. Judgement of Miranda ironically, does not stem from her career success but her relationship success instead; which is the prescriptive stereotype, that women should be confined to their homes, taking care of a family. Coined the "Snow Queen", the "career obsessed" Miranda refuses to succumb to the expectations society loads on her - being a wife who would go all out to sustain a (failing) marriage. The fact that her effort and sacrifice she made for her career is not being recognised is simply due to the expectation that she is not supposed to do so; her duty lies in pleasing her husband not being a successful career woman. However, unlike others, the burden of relationships is not synonymous with sacrifice for Miranda. When threatened with Stephen's impending divorce, she remained indifferent, disallowing it to affect herself. But, ultimately, she is still affected by it, hiding her disquietude for her daughters below the iceberg of insouciant demeanour.



Figure 2., Miranda confiding in Andy about her concern for her daughters.

Her concern does not lie in her reputation - well aware of her appellation as "The Dragon Lady" - but in the "unfair", unconducive environment her daughters are brought up in, so much so that she is brought to tears, as seen in Figure 2; which can be linked to the society's perception of Miranda. This is the only scene in the film in which we see Miranda lose her coldness and heartlessness that she has during work and gets personal. This is alluded to by her lack of cosmetics, which emphasised her fair skin and red, puffy eyes, reminiscent of crying. Dropping her concealer, Miranda looks more human - vulnerable. Just as cosmetics helps her to hide her flaws, Miranda hides behind her ruthlessness, covering up her vulnerabilities. When that layer is gone, she becomes no more than anyone else, human, which we see in this scene. This vulnerability we see is not because of society's comments on her incapacities in marriage, but from what really matters to her, how it affects her daughters. Though it did affect her, it had little

effect on her career. This does not discount societal judgement on her, which continues to exist because of her choice to prioritise her career over Stephen.

Andy is forced into a mutually exclusive work-life conflict. For Andy, society is not the one criticizing her. It is Nate. Our first take of the film is likely to pin Miranda as the villain. Zooming into Andy's relationship, however, we might revise that idea. Nate was unsupportive of Andy's "suck[y]" job and her becoming of a "*Runway* girl". Buying "'\$5' strawberries" to celebrate Andy's resignation, only to be dismayed when faced with the reality that Andy continued her job with her "whacko" boss. Throughout the film, Andy incessantly uses the phrase "I didn't have a choice", suggesting that she often felt oppressed or forced into doing what she did for her career. Everything she did was for the sake of her career, her obligation to it. Nate not only did not offer her his support, but he guilts Andy for this, claiming sarcastically that everything was "forced" upon her; making her feel worse for changing, pointing out how she hypocritically went against her word and changed who she was despite saying otherwise. Nate can be seen to be superficially upset at Andy's lack of attention, which is the descriptive stereotype, Nate expects Andy to love him. Instead of understanding how demanding her job is and rooting for her, Nate was critical of her mistakes, holding her to the standard he wanted, suffocating her.



Figure 3., Nigel's reaction to Andy's failing personal life.

And, society does not aid this either. Nigel, Andy's superior, speaks blatantly, as if it were a well known fact that success in a career would follow the personal lack thereof. The soft ambient lighting in Figure 3. trivialises the idea that Nigel puts forth, making it easily received; compared to hard lighting, which is harsh. The natural environment behind them subtly reinforces this idea, presenting work-life as a binaristic dichotomy that is like nature - inherent in society. (The presented) Society is structured in such a way that a working woman can only have either. And, Andy feels the obligation to choose her personal life, because of the pressure society (and Nate) puts on her.

Jules is the antithesis of Miranda, Andy, and to many other career women. To give Jules the career opportunity, "rising star" Matt stepped into the kitchen so Jules "could" pursue her career. Matt's willingness and Jules's career success does not derail the inevitable expectations that are imposed on Jules, as seen through judgement of the mothers at Paige's school.

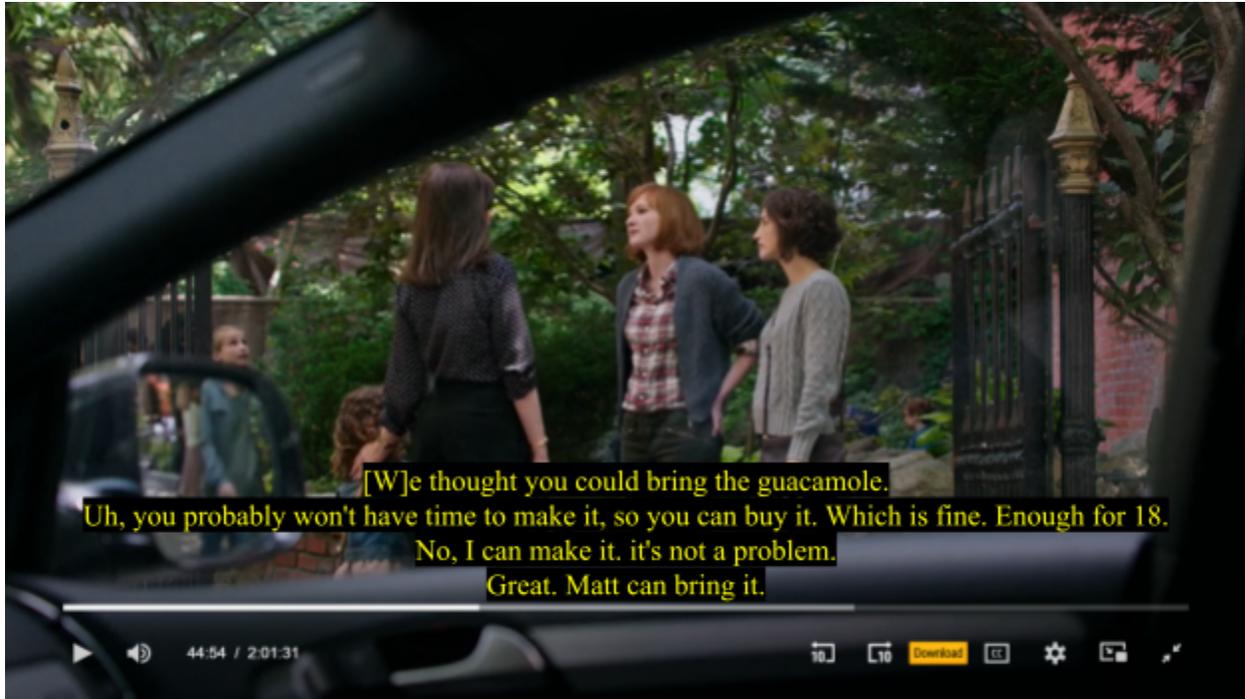


Figure 4., The mothers at Paige's school being condescending of Jules.

Though subtle, the subtext of the other mothers surreptitiously insinuate that Jules is incapable of balancing her duties as a mother and a boss. The mothers assume that Jules "won't" be able to make it, and offers "[her]" to buy it instead. Seemingly considerate, they propounded to Jules an easy way out, being condescending towards her,. It seems as if they are offering her an easy way out so as to prove their point that she cannot handle everything at once. Perhaps they are jealous of her? They are trying to beat her down because they have an inferiority

complex when comparing themselves to a successful woman?



Figure 5., The mothers at Paige's school using a euphemism to veil their criticisms of Jules.

They are also stunned, as seen in Figure 5, upon the awakening that they were talking to one who worked for Jules, Ben. The Over-The-Shoulder (OTS) shot allows us to see their reaction at the exact point in the conversation, emphasizing it. Indirectly, they hint that Jules is a hard person to work with. When questioned about their "pr[ide]" for Jules, they hesitantly agree, suggesting some reluctance. The fact that they felt the need to say "No, for sure" implies that they wanted to strengthen their agreement, from "yeah" to "for sure", suggesting that they wanted to reinforce their agreement to come off as if they were proud of Jules. However, when we see them do this, it makes us think they are pulling off a facade and instead are hesitant and reluctant to support Jules in her career. The onus of women in a marriage is what besets them from success. Though trivial and light, the judgement of society perhaps may have influenced Jules into choosing her family over her career.

Despite all the differences in character, Jules is not free from the chain, having to choose either sacrificing her career or her marriage. Letting go of the career she "love[d]" isn't any easier than giving up on her relationship, one of which's attribution is the ramifications of a divorce. As previously explored in *Miranda*, a divorce's impact on a child. Jules additionally looks at her uncertainties of marriage after divorce, knowing that she's "not [that] easy". The differential gender treatment and nuances of post-divorce on a woman is rightfully highlighted here. This results in Jules convinced to accept the "payback" of her appointing a new CEO such that she can make the futile effort to mend the broken relationship she shares. Societal expectations of women at home extend beyond taking care of a family, but also affects the lack thereof.

4.2 The Agentic/Communal Woman

Miranda has the guts to do what needs to be done. If she were a man, this may come off as passion for the industry. However, the fact is that the film portrays her as ruthless and heartless. In the scene where *Miranda* is introduced, we see chaos. Everyone rushes around wildly in an attempt to prepare for her entrance, suggesting a fear which they have of *Miranda*. To begin with, the fast pace of the score becomes the fast pace of the scene, which thrills us, immerses us in the constantly changing sequence, creating a disorganised atmosphere, attesting the fear they have of *Miranda*'s impending presence. Moreover, instead of a full, establishing shot, to establish the setting of the scene and introduce the characters, snippets of the office are constantly toggled with that of *Miranda* entering the building. The intentional lack of context and withholding of information, of setting and reason, puts us in the shoes of *Andy*, lost, building on our feeling of confusion. The mayhem perplexes us, and further manifests the disarray. Lastly, *Miranda* isn't established with a full shot either. In place of, we see close up shots of her high

heels, her handbag, her hair. This introduces a third party viewer, who views the scene. However, the viewer does not look Miranda in the face. By not directly revealing the character, we wonder: "what stops the viewer from looking at her in the eye?", creating a sense of fear of Miranda, foreboding and apprehension. The hecticness and anxiety we see on the screen is emphasised by the aspects of the film, portraying Miranda as a boss who is feared by those beneath her before she even enters the screen. Her agency, or 'heartlessness', is substantiated by her use of Jacqueline as a tool, orchestrating a plan for her to retain her job, stepping over Nigel. Miranda justifies herself, claiming that she did it for the good of *Runway*. Instead of confining to the conventional way of empathetic towards Nigel, her close colleague, she made the "necessary" choice to "get ahead". Despite her perfectly reasonable reasoning, the diegesis of the plot makes us disapprove of her actions, viewing her as selfish, prideful and ruthless. At the core of it, we do see how she made the choice to prioritise her career success, which comes at the expense of us judging her for being heartless.

The Communal woman doesn't have it any better. Andy's communion can be seen through how she establishes relationships with those around her, Nigel and Emily. Andy almost lost herself in the film, losing sight of what matters to her at heart - her relationships. Realizing that being the ruthless Miranda isn't the life that she "want[ed]", she left *Runway*. However, Miranda ultimately admits to her liking of Andy. Miranda was a woman not to be "bore[d]" with "questions", who could not even bother to "call" her own husband to arrange dinner. Yet, she voluntarily took the time to fax her recommending reference in support of Andy. As the interviewer encapsulated, "[y]ou [Andy] must have done something right". Incompetent as she might be, Miranda recognises her warmth and communion which in itself earned her Miranda's respect.

The portrayal of Andy's communion parallels Jules in its impacts. The first shot which we see of Jules best corroborates both facets of communion. When Jules is introduced to the audience, her compassion is likely to be the first thing that we pick up on.

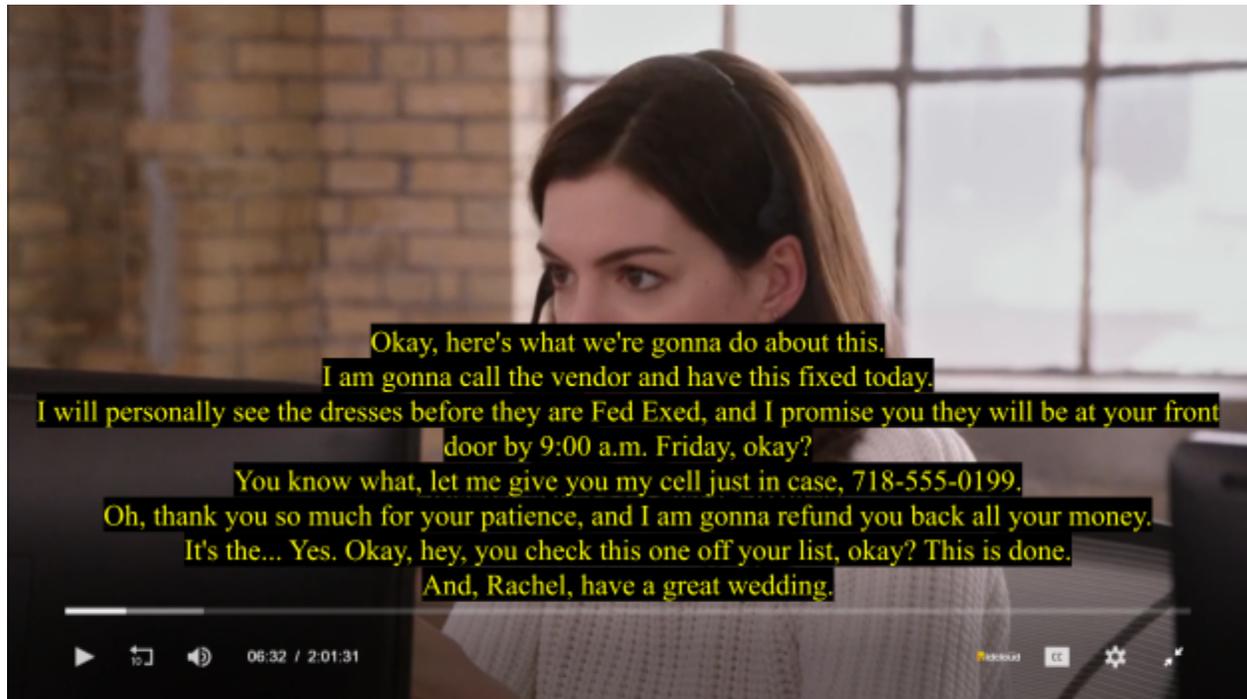


Figure 6. Jules, The Communal woman. Jules' response to a customer's failed purchase.

In Figure 6, Jules can be seen staring intently into the computer screen, while responding to a customer who has had some issues with her order. "We" uses inclusive language, evincing Jules's empathy, speaking as if she were in the situation together with the customer. Jules is portrayed as a boss whose care goes beyond superficiality, inline with the motherly attributes we would expect of women. The scene also encapsulates Jules naivety in her "promise" to the customer. While it does show Jules's investment, the employee next to her deprecates her, frowning and shaking her head. Like Miranda, we expect her to be respected, contrastingly the fact is that her employee outrightly disapproved of her. The sheer lack of respect of Jules is appalling. Regardless of her established warmth, Jules is still judged as an incompetent leader.

4.3 A Happily Ever After?

Miranda finds her fulfillment in her career, being the lone wolf we expect her to be. She does not accede to society's judgemental demands of her supposed role as a successful wife drag her down. Miranda does not need any relationships in her life, returning back to her work as if nothing had happened, "ridicul[ing]" the proposition to even take a break, dismissing yet "another" divorce with an apathetic "I don't really care". She willingly decides to sacrifice her relationship; relenting to her career, from which she derives her bliss, not from any relationship she could possibly have. And for doing so, society harshly beats her down. However, she still refuses to relent and salvage her relationship for the sake of them - her career comes first.

Andy "deign[s]" to whereas others would "die" to work at *Runway*; it is her ladder to climb to the editorial job she actually wants. She thus claims that she "won't" let Miranda get to her. However, after a bare ten minutes of making that claim, she changes her fashion. Though Andy passed it off as being "same Andy, better clothes", the significance of her change in her fashion was a mark, showing that she was willing to try in her job. Her next change, intangible, lies in her priorities.

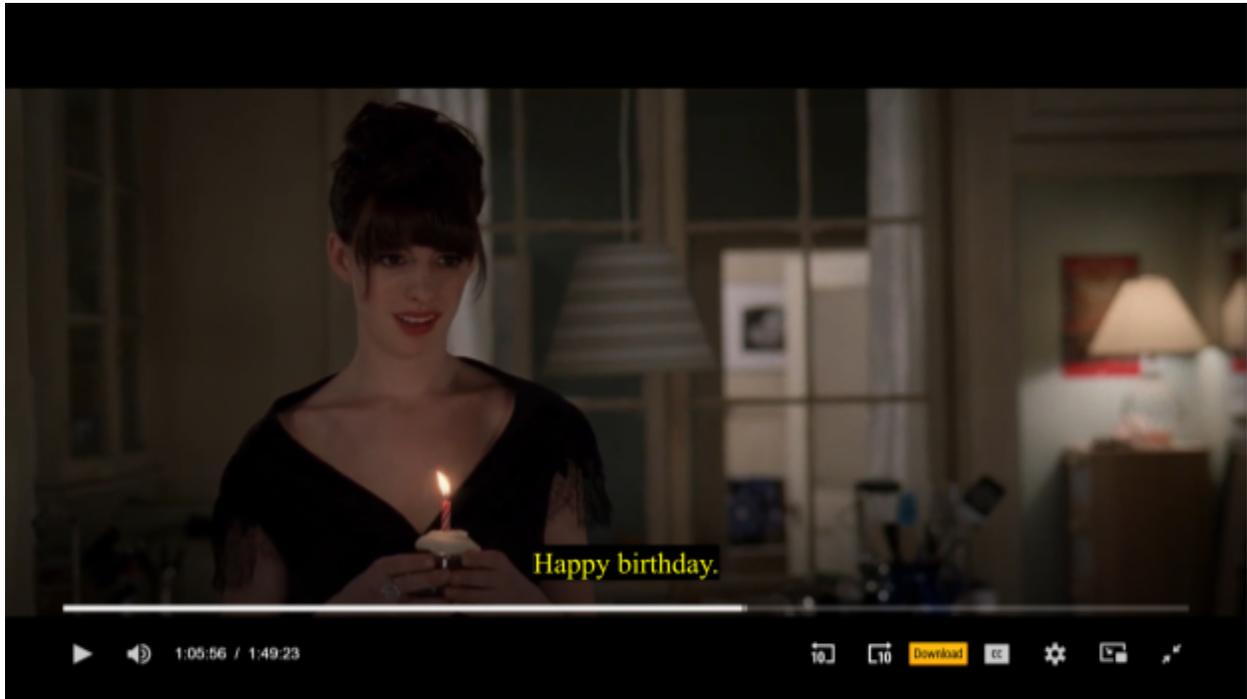


Figure 7. Andy's interaction with Nate after missing his birthday party for a work event she had to attend.

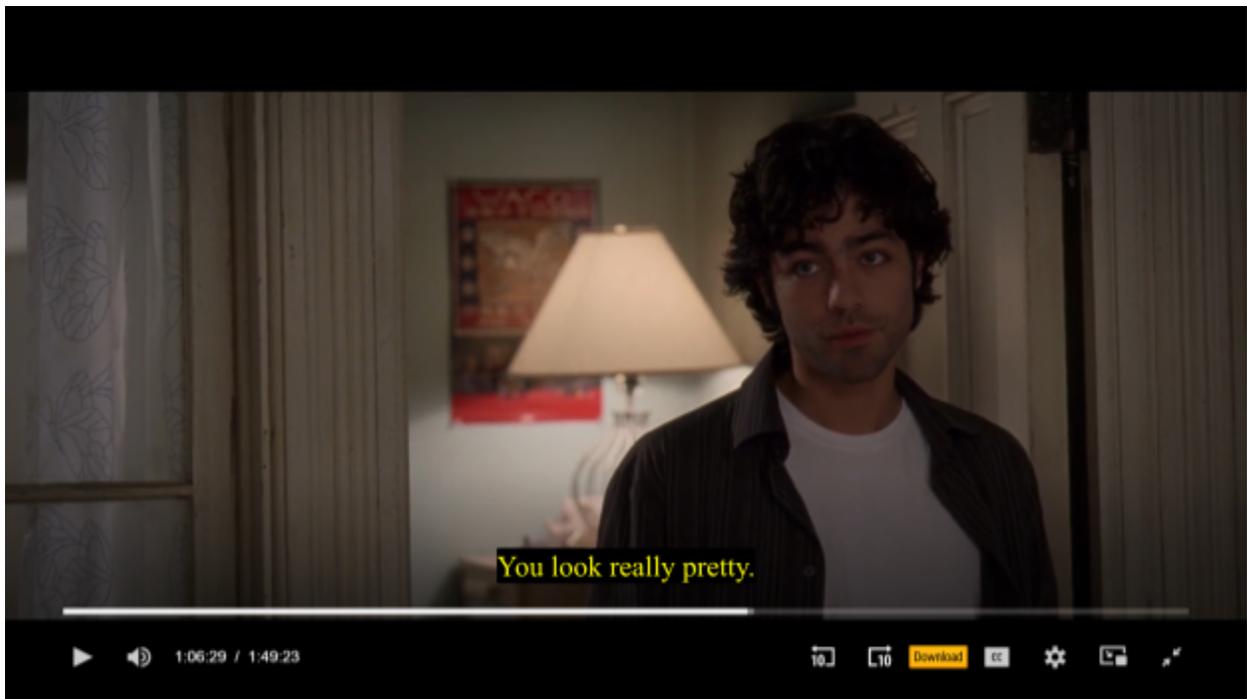


Figure 8. Nate's interaction with Andy after she missed his birthday party for a work event she had to attend.

Andy's job begins to rise in Andy's priorities, overtaking Nate. Because of her commitment to her job, she misses Nate's birthday. Instead of using a two-shot or an OTS shot in this scene, the two characters, in Figure 7 and 8, are separated by the shots. This disconnects them, emphasizing on both the literal distance between them in the scene and, in turn, the emotional one too, caused by Andy's change. The dim lighting of the scene creates a desolate and bleak mood, reinforcing the idea of Andy's change impacting their relationship. Her last change is in her limits. That was Nate's limit. In the end, Andy realises that leading a life like Miranda is not what she wanted, and reconciles with Nate, returning to her initial goal - to be an editor.

Jules's fulfillment is found in her career and her family, she wants both. When forced to make a choice between the two, she chooses her family on the futile hope that Matt would change. She was willing to hire a new CEO for "'you-me' us [Matt and Andy]", her judgement clouded by the thought of being alone. Ben, and later Matt, however, persuades her otherwise, making her realise that no one can care for the company the way she does, Matt promising that he would try harder. Jules ends with both sides of the coin, the family she fought so hard to keep, and the career she fought harder to build. It certainly could not have ended better. But, the fact is that there is nothing preventing Matt from cheating again, and Jules is simply trusting him blindly, without proof.

All of them, in one way or another, break the stereotypical expectations that one might have. Yet, for all of the stereotypes that they broke, they had a cross to bear in exchange, nothing came free. To do well in her career, Miranda affects her children; to be with Nate, Andy left *Runway*, which she arguably liked; to run her company, Jules lets Matt take the backseat. The films attempts to break the stereotypes. But the very fact that doing so all comes at a sacrifice

suggests that breaking said stereotypes comes at a cost and no one can have it all, a seeming antithesis to the films' premise. Objectively, none of them achieved the 'perfect' ending, for all of their fulfilment came at a cost. But to what extent were their endings fulfilling and how fair was its tradeoff?

5.0 Conclusion

"It's 2015, are we still critical of working moms?" The answer to that question, Jules, is yes, but not only working moms. It is any working woman. "Women at Home" and "Agency and Communion" are two stereotypes, which women in the films break, and are disapprovingly judged for. The films acknowledge the existence and impacts of the stereotypes through said societal judgement. They transcend the stereotype, breaking it. But it is this very transcendence that paradoxically causes them to be different, subjecting them to the unfair burden to carry for not fitting into our expectations.

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