

## **Properties of a lady: Public perceptions of women in the James Bond franchise**

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### **Abstract:**

The role of the 'Bond Girl' within the James Bond film franchise has been discussed and debated by scholars, critics, actors, and fans alike. The figure plays a central role in framing our understanding of the title hero, and her presence on screen and in promotional materials has contributed greatly to the popular appeal of the series. This staple character has long been criticized as being a 'window dressing' or 'sexy appendage' to the films offering little narrative value. And yet, over the years, the Bond Girl has played an increasingly important role in the films, aiding Bond physically and intellectually on his missions. In this research, we examine the findings of an original survey that asked Americans about their perceptions of women in Bond films. A slight majority of participants felt that the representation of women in the franchise had improved over time, while over 60% deemed Bond Girls today to be 'strong and empowered.' Respondent gender, sexual orientation, attitudes toward feminism, and fandom help explain who prioritizes skill in a Bond Girl versus who prioritizes looks, as well as how one feels about series tropes such as sex scenes, double entendres for character names, and the use of the phrase 'Bond Girl' itself.

**Keywords:** James Bond, Bond Girl, women, gender, public opinion, survey

In a recent interview promoting her upcoming film *No Time To Die* (Fukunaga 2020), producer Barbara Broccoli discussed her vision for the future of the James Bond series and commented on casting for the title role following the impending retirement of current star Daniel Craig. She stated that James Bond:

can be of any color, but he is male [...] I believe we should be creating new characters for women – strong female characters. I'm not particularly

interested in taking a male character and having a woman play it. I think women are far more interesting than that (Lang 16).

While her statement dismisses all suggestions, rumors, and/or hopes of a gender swap for the title role, it also highlights the importance of women in the world of Bond and the presumption of a growing appetite for strong(er) women characters in Bond films and beyond.

While James Bond is both a popular cultural icon and global film brand, his Bond Girl is also a highly recognizable figure (and coveted film role) long associated with (Western) cultural beauty standards. The figure has historically been criticized as being a 'window dressing' and 'sexy appendage' to the films with limited agency or impact on mission success (see Funnell 2008). She is often depicted through the 'male gaze' (see Mulvey 1988) and positioned as an object of struggle between Bond and the primary villain who is almost always a man. While scholars have explored representational politics through (feminist) textual analysis (see Funnell 2018) and examined the ways in which the characterization of women has been influenced by social movements/ideologies like feminism (see Funnell 2011), geopolitics like the Cold War (see Funnell and Dodds 2017), and cultural trends (see Chapman 2008), limited attention has been directed towards public preferences and expectations regarding Bond Girls.

In spite of the global popularity of franchise and its unprecedented cultural viability extending across a nearly 6-decade period, the Bond films have not been the subject of much research from an audience studies perspective more generally either. Scholars typically analyze various facets of the films (see Gerrard 2020), key influences/influencers during the creative filmmaking process (see Vogel 2014), and contemporaneous social, political, and ideological factors that might influence the production as well as possible reception of the films (Black 2001). Moreover, critical works like *Fan Phenomena: James Bond* (Hines 2015) explore fan culture and the ways that Bond enthusiasts connect with and communicate through the texts. However, a detailed consideration of general audience preferences – i.e. what might attract filmgoers to a Bond film – has yet to be conducted. Thus it is imperative to explore audience preferences as the franchise seeks to engage more than just its traditional fan base as it aims to compete against other (Hollywood) blockbusters for record-breaking profits in the billion dollar box-office.

This essay examines this idea more deeply, inquiring into popular expectations of gender and especially the representation of women in the James Bond film series. How does the public feel about the role of women in the series, both today and over time? How do these ideas vary between and across different groups? And why does the representation of Bond women (continue to) matter? Through an original survey, we consider how demographics, views on American society, and one's existing relationship with the series influence public perceptions. Our survey reveals a public that believes the representation of women in the Bond films has improved and that today's Bond Girl is strong and empowered. We also find strong evidence that respondent gender, sexual orientation, viewpoints on

women's rights, and fandom consistently explain attitudes regarding the form and function of women in the Bond franchise. Women and LGBTQIA+ respondents, individuals who believe equal rights for women have not progressed far enough, and fans of the series (as measured through the number of films seen) prioritize a Bond Girl's skill. However, this alliance fractures when it comes to tropes like whether every Bond film should have a sex scene, if a Bond Girl should always have a double entendre for a name, and if the term 'Bond Girl' itself is positive and flattering. On questions involving these aspects of the series, Bond fans (as well as those more generally interested in the franchise) are more likely to respond affirmatively, while women and those seeking more progress on women's rights react negatively. Such findings have clear implications for the direction the James Bond films take in the near future.

### **The Women of Bond**

As a character, James Bond is not only defined by his actions (i.e. what he does), but also by his social privilege (i.e. who he is) as relayed through his encounters with other characters and especially women. The cinematic Bond is an adaptation of the literary figure featured in a series of novels and short stories written by Ian Fleming (1953-66). As such, the heroic identity of Bond in the film series is rooted in the British lover literary tradition (Hawkins 29-30) which relies on the 'lover' stereotype of masculinity and is conveyed through virility. As a result, seducing and sexually satisfying (heroic and villainous) women is built into the world of Bond and this heteronormative performativity is framed as a tipping point that ensures mission success (Black 107). Since the inaugural *Dr. No* (Young 1962), the cinematic world of Bond has strongly relied on a network of women to shape the heroic image and iconic identity of Bond.

While the women featured in the Bond series range in terms of their role (from primary characters to secondary figures), affiliation (heroic and villainous), and social locations (such as race, sexual orientation, and age), they are often grouped together under the umbrella term 'Bond Girl.'<sup>1</sup> This academic and popular moniker not only obscures the diversity notable in the representation of women across the series but also reduces their narrative importance by presenting them as functions of Bond (i.e. they are Bond's girl). Moreover, the use of the term 'girl' to describe and often patronize women infantilizes them and diminishes their professional accomplishments while stressing their sexual availability to Bond (with womanhood being reserved in the series for marriage and motherhood). By comparison, the men featured in Bond films are given standalone identities (i.e. they are not Bond's men) and are never insulted/infantilized through their referencing as 'Bond Boys.' While it is difficult to avoid using the term 'Bond Girl' due to its cultural pervasiveness, it is important to be attentive to the messages being relayed through it about gender, power, and identity in series (Funnell, 'Reworking' 12).

Bond interacts with a variety of women in each film. The first major category consists of protagonists who are envisaged through the Bond Girl archetype. Here the term Bond Girl is reserved for one woman in each film who is the primary hero and is romantically

involved with Bond in the end (Funnell, 'From' 63). She is frequently depicted as an object of desire via the 'male gaze' (see Mulvey 1988) as Bond and the villain compete for her affections. The Bond Girl has gone through various phases including English Partner (1962-1969), American Sidekick (1971-1989), and Action Hero (1995-2002), with the archetype being deconstructed and reintroduced across the Craig Era (2006-2015; see Funnell, 'Reworking' 2018). While Bond Girls vary in terms of their narrative importance, autonomy in decision making, heroic competency, and core abilities (in such areas of fighting, driving, and intelligence gathering, among others), their social locations remain relatively consistent. For instance, a white woman has been featured as the lead protagonist in twenty-one of twenty-four (88%) Bond films. This draws attention to the centrality of whiteness in the casting for this coveted role across five decades.

The second major category consists of villainous women who often work as henchpeople for the arch-villain. Much like the Bond Girl, these villains shift through various phases of representation with their frequency of appearance, narrative importance, autonomy, and competency fluctuating in response to changing waves of feminism: second wave (1960s), antifeminist backlash (1970s), third wave (1980s), and postfeminist (1990s onwards) movements (see Funnell, 'Negotiating' 2011). Women villains frequently challenge the heteropatriarchy and especially their presumed/prescribed position both sexually and socially below Bond. They are killed off in their films in order to resolve the threat to Bond's libidinal masculinity and restore phallogocentric order. While there is greater racial diversity amongst villains than Bond Girls, the series relies on problematic stereotypes when representing women of color. Travis Wagner notes that black women in particular have been presented in deeply troubling ways through hypersexualization and treated as disposable objects of pleasure in the series (see Wagner 2015).

The third category consists of recurring characters within MI6 who engage with Bond largely in professional contexts. Miss/Eve Moneypenny is the most recurring woman/character in the series and works as the personal assistant to Bond's boss, M. She has long served as a trusted friend and ally to Bond, and her flirtatious exchanges with Bond never progress romantically outside of the office. Lois Maxwell pioneered the role but was replaced after *A View to a Kill* (Glen 1985) when she was deemed too old to play the part. By comparison, Desmond Llewelyn, who was first featured in *From Russia with Love* (Young 1963) was able to continue playing the role of Q until his death in 1999. Their differing career trajectories draw attention to the intersection of gender and age in the series for supportive figures (Dodds 215); the series relies strongly on the aesthetic ideal of femininity (which is largely white, slim, and young) in the depiction of women and relays the impression that women working with/under Bond are to serve as objects of desire for him and the (target) viewer (presumed to be a man) by extension. In *Skyfall* (Mendes 2012), Moneypenny was given an origin story and introduced as a field agent who was subsequently demoted to a desk job after accidentally shooting Bond in the field. Unlike Bond, Moneypenny has yet to be given a redemption narrative after making *one* mistake in

the field and this double standard can be attributed, at least in part, to her being a black woman (played by Naomie Harris) in the Craig era films (see Kristin Shaw 2015).

Age, professional experience, and race also play a role in shaping the identity of Judi Dench who plays Bond's boss M across the Brosnan- (1995-2002) and Craig-era films (2006-2015). While Dench's M is clearly distinguished from her predecessors via gender, the films also stress her lack of military/field experience and imply that she rose through the ranks via civil service. She is referred to as a 'bean counter' and the 'evil queen of numbers' by her agents and staff who openly question her authority (see Boyce 2015, Patton 2015, Holliday 2015). The early films also mention that she is married with children. While Dench's M is shown to navigate the sexual politics of military and government agencies, she remains privileged by her race and her confrontation of sexism does not explicitly address the racism within the organization. This is most evident in *Skyfall* when she sides with and supports Bond, who is not physically fit to return to the field, over Money Penny who followed *her* order to take the unclean shot at Bond; Bond is supported by M while Money Penny is disciplined and demoted. As the series progresses, the films increasingly stress the maternal nature of Dench's M (who is now widowed and estranged from her biological children) and by the end of *Skyfall* she requires the protection of Bond who is positioned as her (only family and) surrogate son.

Bond also interacts with a series of secondary women across his films who range in terms of their role, screen time, autonomy, and heroic competency as well as whether or not they are (important enough to be) named. Charles Burnetts likens these women to 'fluffers' in the porn industry who keep the leading man aroused until his primary (love/sex) interest arrives at which time they disappear off-screen (60). Moreover, the opening credits feature the (semi-)nude bodies of women cast in shadow/silhouette dancing/moving in a variety of scenarios. According to Sabine Planka, 'sex sells' and the Bond franchise serves up the bodies of these nameless women who are not featured in the film proper as appetizers to stimulate the viewer's appetite (141). These images are paired with title tracks that are predominantly performed by women, or men with a 'feminine quality' to their voice (Piotrowska 167). Their melodies are often woven into the soundtrack and help to shape (and arguably provide balance to) the (masculine) world of Bond. While there is greater diversity amongst the musical performers (i.e. the disembodied voices) who are heard and not seen, the anonymous and often silent women featured on screen are more consistent in terms of their race (i.e. white), physique (i.e. slim), and age (i.e. young).

The Bond franchise has also historically relied on women in their extra-textual materials and marketing strategies.<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the first four decades of the franchise,<sup>3</sup> scantily clad women are featured on Bond movie posters in sexually suggestive poses as well as touching or looking at Bond in a longing way. These posters simultaneously convey and confirm the heroic masculinity of Bond who is presented as gentleman (via tuxedo) hero (via holding his gun) who is also desired by a bevy of beautiful women (i.e. the lover). *Playboy* magazine was also frequently used to promote the franchise and since 1965 has (un)covered many of the Bond films with special issues like '007 Oriental Eyefuls' for *You*

*Only Live Twice* (Gilbert 1967), 'Vegas Comes Up 007' for *Diamonds Are Forever* (Hamilton 1971) and 'Women of 007' published in conjunction with *The Living Daylights* (Glen 1987). These photo spreads not only help to confirm the 'male gaze' and emphasize the pleasures of looking at the women of Bond (see Hines 2018), but they also offer the consumer a glimpse of what Bond gets to see behind closed doors as the film themselves do not feature nudity. The franchise has expanded beyond *Playboy* and utilizes other men's magazines in its marketing of Bond women in various stages of undress. Overall, the Bond franchise has historically relied on women and especially the aesthetic ideal of femininity to both shape and promote the world of Bond to men, the presumed viewers and arguably target demographic.

### **License to Critique**

In 1995, Barbara Broccoli took over as co-producer of the Bond franchise and has since played a strong role in shaping its direction (as noted above). However, just because a woman occupies a creative position (such as producer or even filmmaker), it does not mean that her films will be decidedly feminist. Most often, she has to work within an innately conservative cultural industry that is dominated by men as well as profit minded and focused. James Bond is the longest running film franchise in history and a global cinematic brand that has to compete against new(er) Hollywood blockbusters such as films from the Marvel cinematic universe – the most recent *Avengers: Endgame* (Russo and Russo 2019) earned \$2.8 billion USD at the worldwide box-office ('2019') – for revenue. As such, the Bond films need to maintain a balance between continuity (i.e. emphasizing the Bond brand) and change (i.e. updating the series including its gender politics) as scholars like James Chapman (2008) have noted.

This leads to an interesting line of questioning centering on women and representational politics. What do individuals today want to see in a Bond film? Are strong(er) women characters a priority? Moreover, does the public perceive such strength exists and if the franchise has made (equitable) representation a priority? Are the preferences of Bond fans similar to or different from non-Bond fans and casual viewers that the franchise is hoping to attract in order to maximize profits? How do preferences fall along demographic lines as well as political ideologies/viewpoints? While there is a lot of speculation as to what fans want, the loudest voices on social media often drown out other points of view. Given the high stakes of the billion dollar blockbuster era (i.e. increasing monetary investment in productions to encourage large box-office revenue), it is important to examine what might appeal to fans and casual viewers of the Bond films in a key target market, the United States, as the franchise is set to turn the page to a new chapter.

### ***The American Connection***

Our interest in exploring the preferences of American filmgoers goes beyond our geographic location (within the United States) and our respective research tracts exploring American popular culture and political consciousness. It is also influenced by the history of Bond

production itself. Although the Bond franchise is largely considered to be a British film series centered on a British gentleman hero, the films from the outset have been Anglo-American co-productions. American producer Albert R. Broccoli secured the filmmaking rights and wanted to create films that would directly appeal to American filmgoers, who constitute one of the most lucrative film markets in the world. In fact, his vision for James Bond as a mid-Atlantic hero won out over that of its British literary creator Ian Fleming; Broccoli cast Sean Connery for his rugged masculinity over Fleming's choice of David Niven in order to reduce jarring English mannerisms that might not appeal to American viewers (Chapman 114). As a cinematic figure, Bond has been conceptualized from the outset as an Anglo-American hero.

Second, many of Bond films emphasize the importance of the Anglo-American connection. Bond is often supported in the field by at least one American counterpart who represents US institutional power. CIA Agent Felix Leiter appears in nearly half of the Bond films in addition to other allies like Jack Wade. There is also an entire character phase of the Bond Girl – The American Sidekick (1971-89) – that centers on American actors and/or characters who support Bond and replace Leiter in the field as Bond's primary US contact (see Funnell 2008). The re-gendering of the Anglo-American connection given Bond's penchant for one-upping and domesticating his Bond Girl influences the standing of the United States in the film and re-imagines their geopolitical relationship with Britain coming across as the dominant actor (see Funnell and Dodds 2017).

Third, Bond films of the 1960s started filmmaking trends resulting in American imitations like *Our Man Flint* (Mann 1966) trying to capitalize on its popularity. However, from the 1970s onwards, the franchise responds to and incorporates other trends (such as space epics like *Star Wars* [Lucas 1977] in *Moonraker* [Gilbert 1979]) in order to remain commercially viable (see Chapman 2008). Developments in Hollywood filmmaking and especially the rise of the billion-dollar blockbuster have strongly influenced the narratives, aesthetics, tone, and characterizations in the Bond films. For instance, *Casino Royale* (2006) is a prequel that presents the origin story of Bond and reboots the series. Many core elements of the Bond brand are reworked enabling the franchise to better compete in the global film market. In particular, the heroic model governing the series has shifted from the British lover rooted in the Bond literary series to a more body-based mode of heroic masculinity popularized in Hollywood (see Funnell, 'I Know,' 461-64). American politics have long played an important role in the development of action filmmaking and particularly the conceptualization of hard-bodied heroes in Hollywood (see Jeffords 1993). Thus, it is important to explore how American politics and audience preferences – which have long had an impact on Hollywood films including its co-productions – influence the direction of Bond films.

## ***The Survey***

We conducted a nationwide survey of 511 Americans that was in the field from October 25-29, 2019.<sup>4</sup> Qualtrics, a prominent academic and corporate market research firm, recruited our participants from their pre-existing survey respondent pool (which numbers in the millions domestically).<sup>5</sup> Our survey was one of any number of surveys a member of this respondent pool could have taken at the time; before consenting to take part, potential participants were only told that the purpose of the research was to learn how Americans feel about issues related to media. Efforts were made by Qualtrics to ensure the survey sample would be nationally representative in terms of race, sex, age, socioeconomic status, and partisanship. Residents of forty-four states participated, with 1/3 of the respondents describing themselves as living in urban areas and 1/4 living in rural areas.

The demographics of our sample, in many ways, resemble that of the American public at large. A majority of our respondents (71%) were white; the 3 next largest racial/ethnic subgroups were Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx (11%), Black/African American (10%), and Asian/Asian American (5%). In terms of gender and sexual orientation, 51% of our respondents identified as women and 88% as heterosexual. 17% were between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, 31% were between thirty and forty-four, 27% were between forty-five and fifty-nine, and 25% were sixty years of age or older. A third of respondents attended religious services every week or almost every week, while 35% never did so. With respect to education, 36% of our respondents held a bachelor's degree or higher. 40% of our respondents either read the front section of a newspaper or news content on the internet, watched news coverage on television, or listened to news content via the radio or podcasts daily. On the other hand, 27% engaged with the news about once a month or less. In terms of politics, 42% identified as Democrats and 36% as Republicans on a 7-point party identification scale, while 38% placed themselves between very and slightly liberal and 31% between very and slightly conservative on a seven-point ideology scale. In sum, our sample group generally reflects the demographics and ideological viewpoints of the American populace at large at the time the survey was conducted.

Before considering the Bond franchise and issues of gender within it, respondents were asked a series of questions related to current issues in the United States. Two of these questions focused on their feelings about social change. With respect to women's rights, 42% of the respondents felt the United States has not gone far enough while 15% believed it has gone too far. In addition, 37% of respondents were either somewhat worried or very worried that 'the American way of life is under threat.' We also inquired into how participants viewed themselves with respect to personal and social change. 32% of our respondents saw themselves as 'open to new experiences and complex' rather than 'conventional and uncreative.'

Those surveyed were also asked to identify their personal relationship and experience with the James Bond franchise. They were asked about their level of interest in James Bond as well as other blockbuster series like *Star Wars*, *Mission Impossible*, *The Fast and the Furious*, and *John Wick*. They were given a list of the twenty-four Bond films and



asked to select the ones they had seen. In addition, they were given a list of sixteen actors and asked to select those who had played Bond across the franchise's history.<sup>6</sup>

Our results reveal a respondent pool that we characterize as having moderate interest in and knowledge of James Bond. For example, 44% designated themselves as being interested in James Bond while 23% selected that they were not; nearly one third of participants described themselves as 'neither being interested nor disinterested' in the series. Comparatively speaking, James Bond films ranked second in terms of interest out of the five series we tested, coming in only behind *Star Wars*. While 12% of our survey reported that they had never seen a Bond film, 6% stated that they had watched all 24. The mean number of films seen was eight while the mode was only three. 12% of respondents were correctly able to identify all six men who have played James Bond, but much more common responses were correctly identifying one (21%) or two (19%) actors.

From there, our survey focused on the role of gender and the depiction of women in the cinematic world of James Bond.<sup>7</sup> We gathered opinions on the modern state of Bond Girls by asking 'do you think that Bond Girls today are strong and empowered?' of our participants. We also get a more temporal angle on the state of women in these films by asking respondents if 'over time, female representation in the Bond franchise has improved and progressed, remained the same, or worsened and regressed.' We also inquired into traits 'Bond Girls today are/should be valued for,' offering those who took the survey a list of twelve possibilities (from which respondents could choose as many as they wished). These options, discussed below, constitute a composite of Bond scholarship exploring the form and function of femininity across the film series (see Chapman [2008], Funnell [2008], Neuendorf et al. [2010], Funnell ed. [2015], Funnell and Dodds [2017]). We also asked questions about specific tropes related to Bond Girls within the series, such as whether there should be a sex scene in every film and if a Bond Girl should have a double entendre (e.g. Pussy Galore) for a name. Finally, we inquired into feelings about the term 'Bond Girl' itself, asking if participants thought it was positive and flattering, appropriate and representative of her role, or negative and offensive.

### **She Has a Powerful Weapon**

When it comes to the state of the Bond Girl, our survey findings reveal an American public that senses an evolution in a positive direction over time. A slight majority (50.5%) felt that the representation of women in the series had improved and progressed over time, while only 5% said it had worsened and regressed. The other 44% felt representation had remained the same. Moreover, 61% of respondents also perceive Bond Girls as strong and empowered today while only 15% said they were not. The remaining 24% were unsure. But what might representation, strength, and power entail in terms of character traits themselves? Our question asking respondents about the value of specific properties may offer more insight.

The top four Bond Girl qualities selected by our respondents were proficiency as spies (57.9%), intellectual skills (57.5%), looks/beauty (53.6%), and ability to fight opponents

(51.3%). A majority of our survey sample prioritizes Bond Girls with an aptitude for espionage, as well as the presence of both brains and brawn. A Bond Girl's looks and beauty, also selected by over half our respondents, might serve as a standalone feature – given that she is a predetermined sexualized figure and object of the 'male gaze' – but might also factor into her efficiency as a spy. Sexuality and especially seduction play a role in spy culture and can help a woman operative (oftentimes post-coitus) gain access to confidential resources (such as intelligence, access cards/code, and core people) guarded or possessed by her target.

The next four qualities, all selected by between forty and fifty percent of those surveyed, include athleticism (44.1%), status as an equal/co-hero to James Bond (43.5%), physique/bodies (42.9%) and ability to shoot weapons (42.9%). A strong minority seem to prioritize a Bond Girl's physical skills, expertise with a gun, and ability to match up to the heroic standard of Bond. The selection of a Bond Girl's body/physique is more difficult to interpret as it might relate to her level of fitness (to perform her job) or aesthetics (to be pleasing to the eye) or both.

The four qualities least selected by survey participants include professional accomplishments and institutional rank (39.0%), driving skills (34.8%), role as damsels in distress (14.4%), and ability to have children (10.3%). While car culture (which is often feminized) plays a key role in the franchise, the ability of a Bond Girl to drive a vehicle (and oftentimes flirt with Bond while doing so) seems to be less pertinent. So too is the professional and institutional resume she brings to the situation at hand. Importantly, the lowest two rankings insinuate that respondents expect the Bond Girl to be an active member of the plot rather than a passive appendage to it. Given the low level of response to the 'damsel in distress' option (as compared to others previously mentioned), an impression is left that strong(er) and more capable women are expected to be featured in the Bond films. Moreover, since family and parenthood are not stressed in the Bond franchise, their association with the Bond Girl is low. In fact, Bond's most serious relationships often end up being fatal for the Bond Girl as marriage and family are not sustainable in the series. It will be interesting to see how marriage/domestic partnership are depicted in the upcoming film *No Time To Die*, as Bond's love interest from *Spectre* (Mendes 2015), Madeleine Swann, is returning and has been presented in trailers as the reason why Bond has retired from the service. Moreover, a few spoilers suggest that Swann and Bond have started a family together. The release of Billie Eilish's new title track 'No Time To Die' suggests a potential break-up of the presumed couple due to betrayal and the positioning of Swann as an antagonist or at the very least a foil to mission success (Wright 2020).

### ***For His Eyes Only?***

In the recent billion-dollar blockbuster era, a film franchise like James Bond is competing in the global market with other popular films. In order to maximize box office revenue, the Bond films need to attract the widest possible audience. Since Bond Girls are strongly associated with the Bond brand, it is important to consider which qualities are prioritized by

different types of viewers. In other words, if the goal is to maximize profits, then the depiction of women might be an element helping to ensure the financial success of a Bond film.

One way to determine which members of the public prioritize which properties of a Bond Girl would be to treat all twelve aforementioned traits as separate entities, modeling each as a dependent variable shaped by our survey respondents' demographics, attitudes, and existing relationships with the Bond franchise. We suspect, however, that feelings about certain traits might be related. For example, it seems reasonable to believe that if a respondent selected a Bond Girl's ability to shoot a weapon, they likely also selected her ability to fight (i.e. connected by her engagement in a combat/conflict scenario) or even drive a car (i.e. connected by her use of spy/action artefacts). To explore if such latent relationships exist between these twelve traits, we conducted a factor analysis, the results of which can be found in **Appendix A**.<sup>8</sup>

Two distinct factors (or clusters of variables) worthy of deeper analysis emerged from this process. The first of these, which we describe as Skill, focuses on the competency of a Bond Girl; selecting some, most, or all of athleticism, intellect, fighting abilities, ability to shoot weapons, professional rank, proficiency as a spy, positioning as an equal/co-hero to Bond, and driving skill was a regular occurrence within the survey sample. A second factor focuses on Looks; selecting both a Bond Girl's beauty and physique was common amongst some participants.<sup>9</sup>

After these factors were identified, we explored which characteristics of the survey respondents were significantly connected with the selection of Skill and Looks respectively. We were most interested in examining how various factors like existing relationship and overall familiarity with the Bond series, demographics, political affiliation, viewpoints on feminism and society, media consumption, and a general sense of openness to new experiences might influence preferences for what traits women embody on screen. To test the significance and strength of these potential predictors on what individuals might value in a Bond Girl, we conducted ordinary least squares regression models with robust standard errors. The full results of these models can be found in **Appendix B**. Our conversation here will focus on statistical relationships that reach a traditional level of significance ( $p < .05$ ).

With respect to a respondent's existing relationship with the series, there are two types of individuals who were significantly more likely to select elements capturing a Bond Girl's Skill: those who have seen the most Bond films and those who can name more Bond actors from a given list. This suggests that true fans of the franchise prioritized the hero Bond being properly supported in the field by a smart and physically capable Bond Girl who can, among other things, shoot, fight, drive, and spy with the best of them. Individuals open to new experiences also appraised Skill more highly than those who are not.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a respondent's gender and attitudes towards feminism were also linked with significantly prioritizing Skill in a Bond Girl. The more an individual believes that women's rights have not progressed far enough, the more likely they were to select elements within Skill. Women were more likely to esteem Skill when compared to men. We

also find that sexual orientation plays a role; survey respondents identifying as LGBTQIA+ prioritized Skill to a greater extent than those who identified as heterosexual.

These same three predictors play a role in explaining which individuals were significantly more likely to select elements of Looks. Men, heterosexuals, and people who think that women's rights have gone too far prioritized qualities like beauty and physique. The Bond Girl has long served as an object of the 'male gaze' and her sexuality has played a role in defining the heroic identity of Bond. Viewers are encouraged to share the point of view of Bond and objectify the women on screen (see Mulvey's 'gaze theory' for details).

Of great(er) interest here is the relationship between thinking feminism has gone too far and prioritizing Looks. While the sexual objectification of women can be seen as a marketing strategy as well as a facet of seduction for women in spy work, it might also serve as a representational strategy aimed at reducing the accomplishments of professional/action women on screen; it relays the impression that women should be seen first (i.e. valued primarily for their image, beauty, and/or sexuality) and heard less (i.e. presented in a subordinate narrative position to Bond). Moreover, across the series, Bond not only works alongside Bond Girls but also invariably 'one-ups' them in the field. Women are not only put down professionally as a way to bolster Bond's own accomplishments, but also their independence is stripped away as they are domesticated by Bond by the end of the film. As such, the Bond films do relay traditional gender roles by featuring strong women who are put back into their normative place in the heteropatriarchy.

### ***But Of Course You Are***

Although in some ways the Bond franchise has changed in the 58 years since the release of *Dr. No*, other elements of the films have proven quite durable across the 24 films in the series. Hardcore fans and even casual followers have come to anticipate a general formula that involves exotic locales, fast cars, and diabolical villains often bent on world domination, with more specific elements like a title theme, a gun barrel sequence, vodka martinis shaken not stirred, and the main character introducing himself as 'Bond, James Bond.' This formula extends to the roles some women play within the franchise as well. We gathered survey data on how individuals feel about the necessity of a sex scene in every James Bond film, the use of double entendres for character names, and even the description of women as 'Bond Girls' by those who discuss Bond on a regular basis. We employ logit and ordered logit modeling to better understand the relationships between these tropes related to Bond Girls and the same battery of predictors used in our Skill and Looks models. The full results of these models can be found in **Appendix C**. Our conversation here will, once again, focus on statistical relationships that reach a traditional level of significance ( $p < .05$ ).

We begin by analyzing support for the presence of a sex scene in every James Bond film given that libidinal masculinity is a defining feature of the title character; Bond is known for his ability to seduce (good and bad) women and sex frequently serves as a tipping to ensure mission success (Black 107). Those with interest in the franchise and those who have seen more of the films are significantly supportive of this plot point. A respondent

interested in Bond is 55% more likely to say every film should have a sex scene than someone who is not interested. Having seen all 24 of the James Bond films makes one 68% more likely to say there should be a sex scene in every James Bond film than someone who has never seen one of the films and 38% more likely than someone who has seen the average number of films (which in our sample is 8). In contrast, we see significant differences on this question based on gender, with women 60% less likely than men to support having a sex scene in each of the films. Conservatives also were less likely than liberals to laud this idea.

Many of these same dynamics can be seen on the question of Bond Girls having double entendres for names. Bond films are renown for giving women names with two interpretations – one is literal/straightforward (i.e. it is their name) and the other is often risqué (i.e. there is often a sexual connotation). While Pussy Galore (*Goldfinger* [Hamilton 1964]), Agent XXX (*The Spy Who Loved Me* [Gilbert 1977]), and Dr. Holly Goodhead (*Moonraker* [Gilbert 1979]) are set up as comparable secret agents to Bond, their names essentialize their characters in relation to their sexuality and detract from their overall competency; Bond Girls are arguably trivialized as audiences are set up to share a laugh with Bond when he hears the name (i.e. audiences are in on the joke) while laughing at the women who possess them (i.e. Bond Girls are the joke). Participants interested in James Bond films are more likely to say that a Bond Girl's name should always be a double entendre. For instance, those who have seen all 24 films are twice as likely to believe this than those who have seen 3 films, the modal number in our sample. On the other hand, women are 56% more likely to say 'never' than men are; respondents who think the United States has not gone far enough on equal rights for women are 81% more likely to say 'never' as well. As in our earlier models examining Skill and Looks, we also find that sexual orientation significantly predicts responses; LGBTQIA+ respondents are about 50% more likely than heterosexuals to say a Bond Girl's name should never be a double entendre. In addition, older individuals are less supportive of the use of double entendres as names.

Finally, with respect to positive and negative impressions of the term Bond Girl itself, fandom for the series as well as personal viewpoints about women's rights were influential factors. For instance, those who described themselves as interested in the franchise were more than twice as likely to say the term Bond Girl was positive and flattering than those who said they were disinterested. Those who had seen all 24 Bond films were over twice as likely to approve of the term than those who had seen none of the films. In contrast, those who believe the United States has not gone far enough in giving women equal rights with men are twice as likely to find the term Bond Girl negative and offensive than those who believe equal rights have gone too far. Unlike in the previous two models, however, here we find no evidence that gender shapes attitudes. We do see though that older individuals react less positively to the term, while Republicans react more positively.

## **Bond Girls Are Forever**

A preliminary examination of the personal preferences of our respondents draws attention to the fact that the Bond Girl is valued for her spy skills and action-oriented abilities in addition to her beauty and physique. While some might consider her a sexy appendage to the main storyline and our findings confirm that an audience (perhaps an unsurprising one) exists for a Bond Girl's beauty and physique, the majority of respondents indicated a preference for a more competent and engaged Bond Girl over a damsel in distress who requires saving. Importantly, the preference for Skill in a Bond Girl is notable in the traditional Bond market (i.e. fans) as well as newer and/or marginal/minority viewers interested in seeing more multifaceted and empowered women on screen. This confirms that there *is* an appetite for strong(er) women in the Bond franchise and it would likely track well with a variety of audiences. As a result, the Bond franchise has an opportunity to decisively shape cultural attitudes about the 'properties of a lady' in the wake of the #MeToo movement and broader conversations about the empowerment of women as well as marginalized communities at large. However, given the split between fans and either women or supporters of equal rights for women on issues related to tropes featured across the series, one might consider whether there are limits to how much change to the franchise can be delivered and how much continuity must be preserved.

While our study considers the politics of representation in relation to gender, it does not significantly address the systemic racism that informs the Bond franchise. While Barbara Broccoli claims that Bond 'can be of any color,' the same cannot necessarily be said for the Bond Girl who has largely remained white across the franchise. Instead, there is greater diversity in terms of race and age amongst women villains, MI6 allies, and secondary women although their characterizations often rely on limiting stereotypes and present demotion/punishment/death being inflicted on them by figures of (institutional) privilege (M, the arch villain, etc.). This trend is likely to continue in *No Time To Die* with Léa Seydoux and/or Ana de Armas serving as the romantic interest(s) while Lashana Lynch is set up in a competitive/antagonistic/non-romantic role. Further research on the centrality and maintenance of white privilege and colonial imagery/legacy of Bond (and his white Bond Girl especially when the travel to and through the global south) is greatly needed as the franchise prepares to turn the page and sets its sights on the next actor to take on the title role.

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## Appendix A: Factor Analysis

Variable	Skill	Looks
Athletic	<b>0.571</b>	0.160
Intellect	<b>0.650</b>	-0.105
Fight	<b>0.750</b>	0.173
Shoot	<b>0.712</b>	0.175
Rank	<b>0.601</b>	-0.280
Spies	<b>0.600</b>	-0.053
Equal	<b>0.598</b>	-0.132
Driving	<b>0.740</b>	0.084
Beauty	-0.001	<b>0.822</b>
Physique	0.109	<b>0.822</b>
Damsel	-0.039	0.229
Children	-0.044	-0.036



## Appendix B: Bond Girl Trait Factors

	Skill	Looks
Interest in Bond	.027 (.058)	.109 (.062)
Bond Films Seen	.026* (.009)	.015 (.008)
# of Bonds Correct	.120* (.029)	.053 (.030)
Gender	-.384* (.081)	.408* (.089)
Race	-.133 (.098)	-.072 (.101)
Sexual Orientation	-.337* (.113)	.327* (.127)
Education	-.047 (.025)	-.043 (.027)
Religiosity	-.029 (.025)	-.019 (.028)
Age	-.001 (.003)	.000 (.003)
News	.037 (.021)	.034 (.022)
Openness	.104* (.039)	-.030 (.039)
Party Identification	.048 (.062)	.113 (.060)
Ideology	-.003 (.029)	.031 (.026)
Women's Rights	.146* (.067)	-.145* (.065)
Way of Life	.031 (.030)	.045 (.032)
Constant	-1.42* (.408)	-1.14* (.439)
N	511	511
R-Squared	.231	.179

\* =  $p < .05$ . OLS regression with robust standard errors. For Gender, male=1. For Race, white=1. For Sexual Orientation, heterosexual=1.

## Appendix C: Support for Franchise Tropes

	Sex Scene?	Double Entendre?	Term Bond Girl?
Interest in Bond	.411* (.162)	.420* (.144)	.504* (.136)
Bond Films Seen	.046* (.024)	.040* (.020)	.039* (.019)
# of Bonds Correct	-.041 (.084)	-.043 (.069)	-.046 (.065)
Gender	.904* (.229)	.712* (.205)	.177 (.194)
Race	-.411 (.265)	.005 (.232)	.180 (.219)
Sexual Orientation	.547 (.349)	.722* (.299)	.550 (.287)
Age	-.009 (.009)	-.028* (.007)	-.046* (.007)
Education	.077 (.068)	.068 (.061)	.013 (.057)
News	.021 (.060)	.054 (.051)	.021 (.048)
Religiosity	-.049 (.075)	-.006 (.063)	-.111 (.061)
Openness	-.087 (.111)	-.125 (.095)	-.160 (.087)
Party Identification	.288 (.165)	.103 (.143)	.308* (.134)
Ideology	-.198* (.080)	-.085 (.068)	-.068 (.062)
Women's Rights	-.212 (.174)	-.452* (.154)	-.434* (.148)
Way of Life	.116 (.084)	.029 (.154)	.077 (.069)
N	416	430	511
Pseudo R-Squared	.13	.11	.12

\* =  $p < .05$ . 'Sex Scene?' is a logit model, while 'Double Entendre' and 'Term Bond Girl?' are ordered logit models. For Gender, male=1. For Race, white=1. For Sexual Orientation, heterosexual=1.

## Appendix D: Survey Questions

The following survey questions were analyzed as part of this study:

Over time, female representation in the Bond franchise has...? Worsened and regressed/Remained the same/Improved and progressed/Unsure

Do you think that Bond Girls today are strong and empowered? No/Unsure/Yes

Do you think that Bond Girls today are/should be valued for (check all that apply)...? Their looks and beauty/their physique and bodies/their athleticism/their intellectual skills/their ability to fight opponents/their ability to shoot weapons/their professional accomplishments and institutional rank/their proficiency as spies/their role as damsels in distress/their ability to have children/their status as an equal and co-hero to James Bond/their driving skills (e.g. cars, airplanes, etc.)

Do you think there should be a sex scene in every James Bond film? No/Unsure/Yes

Do you think that a Bond Girl should have a double entendre for a name (e.g. Pussy Galore)? Never/Sometimes/Always (NOTE: respondents could also answer Unsure, but such responses are not analyzed in our models because 'Sometimes' constitutes a clear middle category)

Do you think that the term 'Bond Girl' is...? Negative and offensive/Appropriate and representative of her role/Positive and flattering

### Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> In his James Bond novels, Ian Fleming referred to Bond's love interest as 'the girl.' His terminology has been expanded to 'Bond G/girl' and applied to the women featured in the films.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed consideration of continuity and change across micro-, meso-, and macro-level of the 'Bond Brand Assemblage', see Preece et al. (2018).

<sup>3</sup> Bond movie posters in the Craig era are notably different and do not employ the typical 'Bond style' aesthetic. They are more minimalist and direct, focusing squarely on Daniel Craig as James Bond as well as a handful of key elements from the film. In addition, there are few images of women and the ones included are often taken directly from the film. This change in aesthetic reflects broader changes in the franchise as *Casino Royale* reboots the series and focuses on Bond's origin story and development of the style. The Craig era films also introduce a new model of heroic masculinity that focuses on muscular masculinity rather than libido and sexual conquest. Thus, the movie posters pivot away from using sex as a mechanism to 'sell' the films.

<sup>4</sup> The specific wording of the survey questions included in this research may be obtained from the authors upon request.

<sup>5</sup> Qualtrics surveys leverage existing relationships with 20 different double opt-in market research panels. This includes specialized recruitment efforts focused on reaching traditionally hard to reach

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groups. As evidence of their place in the market research industry, Qualtrics cites work with 11,000+ corporations (including well-known names like Microsoft, Sony, BMW, and CVS, to name a few), 2,500 universities, and 99 of the top 100 business schools.

<sup>6</sup> The 16 possibilities were (in alphabetical order) Pierce Brosnan, Michael Caine, Sean Connery, Daniel Craig, Benedict Cumberbatch, Timothy Dalton, Daniel Day-Lewis, Ralph Fiennes, Colin Firth, Mel Gibson, Jude Law, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Liam Neeson, David Niven, and Peter O'Toole.

<sup>7</sup> Questions analyzed in this research are available in their entirety in **Appendix D**.

<sup>8</sup> A factor analysis allows one to determine if responses to a survey have common patterns that reveal a smaller set of underlying variables (which we might call factors or clusters).

<sup>9</sup> A third, somewhat weaker factor emerged as well, which we labeled 'Domesticity.' It linked the Bond Girl as a damsel in distress and her ability to have children. We choose not to analyze this further because, as our survey results revealed, these two traits were valued by very few of our survey respondents. In addition, multivariate modeling revealed very little of interest when it comes to who specifically valued these traits at significant levels.