

Female in focus: interactions with Greta Gerwig's films on Letterboxd

Mujer en foco: interacciones con las películas de Greta Gerwig en Letterboxd

Fecha de envío: 05/12/2024 Fecha de aceptación: 01/04/2025 Fecha de publicación: 05/04/2025

Helena Godoy de Almeida Leite
Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná
E-mail: helenaleite.2019@alunos.utfpr.edu.br

Vanessa Hartmann Alves
Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná
E-mail: vanessaalves.1998@alunos.utfpr.edu.br

Carolina Fernandes da Silva Mandaji
Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná
E-mail: cfernandes@professores.utfpr.edu.br
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2857-5925>

DOI: 10.26807/rp.v29i122.2206

Resumen

Las producciones académicas sobre estudios de género han crecido significativamente en Comunicación, especialmente desde 2015. La construcción cultural de lo que significa ser mujer, particularmente en la industria audiovisual, está moldeada por discursos misóginos y sexistas que desvalorizan el trabajo femenino. Este estudio explora cómo el público percibe películas dirigidas por mujeres, centrándose en Letterboxd, una red social para discusión de películas. La metodología incluye análisis cuantitativo de comentarios sobre las películas de Greta Gerwig — Lady Bird (2017), Little Women (2019) y Barbie (2023) — para identificar términos y temas recurrentes relacionados con el género. Los objetivos son: 1) analizar interacciones con las películas de Gerwig en Letterboxd; 2) identificar temas principales discutidos por usuarios; 3) destacar términos relevantes sobre género; y 4) comprender el papel de la plataforma en la interacción del público con películas centradas en mujeres. Hallazgos preliminares sugieren que las interacciones reflejan experiencias femeninas y dinámicas de poder de género, destacando el potencial de Letterboxd para estudiar representación de género en obras audiovisuales. Esta investigación también enfatiza la capacidad de la plataforma para capturar percepciones del público de manera estructurada. El estudio contribuye a discusiones sobre género en cine y cultura digital, abriendo caminos para futuras investigaciones sobre la recepción de películas dirigidas por mujeres en espacios digitales.

Palabras Clave: audiovisual, interacción, estudios de género, letterboxd, greta gerwig.

Abstract

Academic productions on gender studies have grown significantly in the field of Communication, especially since 2015. The cultural construction of what it means to be a woman, particularly in the audiovisual industry, is shaped by misogynistic and sexist discourses that devalue women's labor. This study explores how audiences perceive films directed by women, focusing on Letterboxd, a social network dedicated to film discussion and discovery. The methodology includes a quantitative analysis of user comments on Greta Gerwig's films — Lady Bird (2017), Little Women (2019), and Barbie (2023) — to identify recurring terms and themes related to gender. The objectives are: 1) to analyze interactions with Gerwig's films on Letterboxd; 2) to identify the main topics discussed by users; 3) to highlight relevant terms connected to gender discussions; and 4) to understand the platform's role in shaping audience engagement with women-centered films. Preliminary findings suggest that user interactions reflect female experiences and gender power dynamics, underscoring Letterboxd's potential as a tool for studying gender representation in audiovisual works. This research also emphasizes the platform's unique ability to capture audience perceptions in a structured and accessible way. The study contributes to broader discussions about gender in cinema and digital culture, opening avenues for future research on the reception of female-directed films in digital spaces.

Keywords: audiovisual, interaction, gender studies, letterboxd, greta gerwig.

1. Introduction

Academic productions on gender studies have seen significant growth in the field of Communication in recent years (Tomazetti, 2019). Social roles and the female and male otherness have been questioned for decades, however, it was only in 2015 that gender studies began to gain greater prominence among Communication professionals and researchers. Therefore, it becomes essential to reflect on the role of women in several spaces, among them, the field of audiovisual work.

Gender is understood as a social category applied to sexed bodies (Scott, 1995). Thus, it is noted that the cultural construction regarding what it means to be a woman, particularly in the context of a woman working in the audiovisual field, is shaped by misogynistic and sexist discourses that devalue and undermines women's labor. By correlating gender values with sex, men — associated with “production” — hence, high-ranking positions would be placed at the top of the hierarchy, while women — associated with “reproduction” — are subdued, along with their work, as observed in the main reflections of Helena Hirata and Danièle Kergoat (2007).

San Diego State University publishes the *Celluloid Ceiling* (Lauren, 2024) report annually, a research that provides valuable data on the presence of women working behind the cameras in the highest-grossing films in the United States. In 2023, the percentage of female directors dropped by 2% compared to 2022. Among the top 250 highest-grossing films, women account for only 16%, and among the top 100, just 14%. In light of this scenario, it is possible to question: how does the audience perceive film productions developed by women?

Therefore, to understand the relationship between gender and audiovisual work, it is important to highlight the cinematic process, which begins in the creative phase and, upon completion, is signed by the director as the author, hereby carrying and reflecting their worldview. However, perceptions of the work require the presence of the audience, in the form of interaction, in order to fully achieve the film experience (Penafria *et al.*, 2016, p. 95).

With the popularization of digital environments, interactions are being reshaped, as is the relationship between audiences and cinematic productions. Based on the concept of cyberculture, communication within networks is understood to be instantaneous and widespread (Rudiger, p. 126), thus, it is also possible to identify how a given community uses virtual spaces to express its perceptions about a work and its themes through the use of Letterboxd, which is defined as follows:

Letterboxd is a global social network for grass-roots film discussion and discovery. Use it as a diary to record and share your opinion about films as you watch them, or just to keep track of films you've seen in the past. Showcase your favorites on your profile page. Rate, review and tag films as you add them. Find and follow your friends to see what they're enjoying. Keep a watchlist of films you'd like to see, and create lists/collections on any given topic. We've been described as “like GoodReads for movies”. (Letterboxd, 2024, online)

As methodological support, the concepts outlined by Suely Fragoso, Raquel Recuero, and Adriana Amaral (2011, p. 167-203) regarding ethnographic approaches in digital environment research are employed. Since this is a preliminary study relating gender issues in cinema with the chosen platform, the aim is to identify through quantitative research the most relevant terms left by users in comments about the cinematic productions of female directors and,

therefrom, identify whether the comments reflect discussions concerning the female gender.

Based on the previously presented concepts, the object of analysis are the productions of North American director Greta Gerwig, considering the three films signed by her, namely: *Lady Bird* (2017), *Little Women* (2019), and *Barbie* (2023). The decision to analyze Greta Gerwig and her work stems from two main reasons: 1) the global reach of these productions and 2) the narrative themes involving issues of the female gender featuring women as protagonists.

Finally, according to this methodology and considering the reflections to be produced from the collected data, this study has four main objectives: 1) To quantitatively analyze the interactions with women-centered cinema, of director Greta Gerwig, on the Letterboxd platform; 2) Through quantitative research, ascertain the main topics that emerge in discussions about the aforementioned films; 3) To identify relevant terms related to gender discussions and 4) To understand the role of the Letterboxd platform in the audience's interaction with women-centered films.

2. Gender Studies, Communication, and Women in Audiovisual

This section consists of four theoretical discussions, namely: 1) a brief background on the understanding of the female gender as an analytical category; 2) how gender studies connect communication with Cinema; 3) the way Cinema reflects on gender relations; 4) the social context of women workers in the audiovisual industry, and the relevance of focusing on female directors. Thus, the aim is to clarify the merit of analyzing the cinematic works of Greta Gerwig as the focal point of this research.

Gender is “a social category imposed on a sexed body” (Scott, 1995, p. 75). Within a patriarchal society, a set of values and characteristics tied to the sexes establishes social roles for men and women, thereby separating the masculine from the feminine. Scott (1995) argues that there are three central points through which gender should be regarded: first, it is an articulating element of social relations between the sexes by recognizing the differences between them; second, through social relations in their multiple instances and environments, gender is as well a fundamental way of signifying power relations; third, the oppression present in these binary relations is both reflected in and by social institutions and organizations.

The social roles assigned to gender emphasize the separation and polarization between masculine and feminine. While for men values of production, culture, and strength are assigned, women are left with reproduction, nature, and fragility (Oliveira, 1993), which is also reflected in hegemonic cinema, as this research will demonstrate. Rosiska Darcy de Oliveira, in her work *Elogio à Diferença* (Praise of Difference), highlights that “the body is a historical experience” (1993, p. 15). Hence, it is evident that one is not speaking of a feminine “essence” but rather of feminine “experiences” constructed from a culture that privileges male domination.

Power relations emphasize male domination, as noted by Scott (1995) and Oliveira (1993), patriarchal culture favors male dominance in both public and private spheres. For example, while in politics, male hegemony is established through the predominance of men in positions of power, leading to the creation of laws for their own benefit, at home, the objectification of the female body is reflected by the notion of “ownership” of women by men (Oliveira, 1993).

These reflections on the construction of gender as an analytical category, understanding

that the established binary system favored male dominance — demonstrated in the studies of Scott and Oliveira — are the result of feminist academic research, which began in the 1970s and escalated since the 1980s. The gender studies produced from this period are deeply influenced by an epistemic movement of feminist thought, which seeks to understand “the structures that led women to occupy subordinate roles to men” (Tomazetti, 2019, p. 54). In this respect, it is important to highlight that the feminist movement became fundamental for the production of knowledge and the establishment of gender as a field of study.

Starting in the 1970s, gender studies and feminist theories also began to permeate the field of Cinema. Laura Mulvey, in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, from 1975, discusses the implications of dominant cinema or hegemonic cinema in the objectification of women. According to Mulvey, this cinematic model perpetuates patriarchal norms and privileges the male gaze, turning women into objects of desire. Narrative and visual conventions reinforce this dynamic, centering the male experience. Mulvey proposes that new forms of cinema can challenge and subvert these norms, offering more complex representations of women's experiences.

The feminist movement and the gendered lens established in Cinema, through theorists as Mulvey, research focused on both the representation of women and the represented women, that is, the female workers in audiovisual. Tomazetti (2019) points out that within Cinema studies, there are two main lines along which research is directed: the first are reflections addressing the particularities of the production and representation of women in cinema, while the second focuses on the production of cinema made by women, exploring their processes of authorship and the construction of subjectivity within cinematic narratives. In both lines, there is an appropriation of feminist theories related to cinema, with a particular emphasis on the works of Teresa De Lauretis and Laura Mulvey. Therefore, the present research focuses on the production of cinema made by women.

Elizabeth Ann Kaplan (1995), a film director and feminist theorist, asserts that audiovisual creation reflects the real situation of women. In film representation, hegemonic cinema disregards the female voice and reduces women to objects of desire or supporting roles. However, by shifting focus to the other side of the camera, Kaplan underlines that women working in cinema also face omission caused by gender hierarchy. Data from *Celluloid Ceiling* (2023) highlight the history of female audiovisual labor that has been subordinated to male dominance since its inception. The consequences of the sexual division of labor¹ also extend to audiovisual productions, making the lives of female audiovisual workers a constant struggle for their voices to be heard and their views validated (de Almeida & Coelho, 2015).

Both in the United States and Brazil, the presence of women behind the camera has always been smaller than that of men, hence, having women in prominent technical positions in audiovisual production, such as directing, empowers them to challenge this historically oppressive system (Kaplan, 1995). Films directed by women serve as a means to make women's diverse and ever-changing worldviews public, and by having authorship over the stories, allows them to break away from being represented solely as objects of male desire, validating female subjectivities and experiences.

A woman in a directing role holds the power to tell the story from her perspective, choosing whether or not gender will play a relevant role in her narrative. Kathryn Bigelow

¹ The sexual division of labor refers to the way social labor is divided based on gender relations; such form is historically adapted and specific to each society. It is characterized by the prioritization of men in the productive sphere and women in the reproductive sphere, while simultaneously the appropriation by men of roles with aggregated social value (political, religious, military, etc.). (KERGOAT, 2003, p. 55-56)

was the first female director to win Hollywood's Academy Award for Best Picture, in 2010. Her film, *The Hurt Locker*, features male protagonists and, as a war movie, is primarily targeted at a male audience (de Almeida & Coelho, 2015). On the other hand, Greta Gerwig, the director highlighted in this research, is known for emphasizing female protagonism in her works (*Lady Bird*, 2017; *Little Women*, 2020; *Barbie*, 2023).

This parallel is not intended to compare the quality or significance of the works, as this study argues that the identities of the directors are diverse, and they are free to tell their stories in their own ways. However, by focusing on a filmmaker who prioritizes the portrayal of female experiences, one can identify in this act an effort to make women “producers of meaning” (de Almeida & Coelho, 2015, p. 163), rather than merely carriers of meanings constructed by hegemonic cinema, which are feminine depictions already ingrained in audiences.

Thus, in order to understand the influence of these works, it is also necessary to look at the audience. Kaplan (1995) stresses the importance of examining the reception process, how the audience receives/interprets a film and how this determines which films can be made and how they will be interpreted. Placing a woman in the role of director of a film with female protagonists is a break from hegemonic cinema, however, analyzing how the audience receives these films explicitly reveals the extent to which this break has been accepted and/or interpreted in a way that reshapes the public's view on the representation of women in cinema. “We need to know more about how people 'interpret' films, not theoretically, but concretely” (Kaplan, 1995, p. 279), in this way, it will be possible to understand whether the shift in perspective regarding the representation of the feminine influences how the audience constructs its notions of gender performativity.

Thereby, the gender factor is just one lens through which it is possible to understand the cinematographic production made by women, nevertheless, it is valid due to the need to understand how the audience interacts with these works and whether the gender factor is relevant in their interpretations of the experiences and subjectivity of the protagonists. Accordingly, the next section will provide further explanations on the concepts of interaction, cyberculture, and the platform used for analysis in this research.

3. Interaction, Cyberculture and Platform

With the evolution of the internet, forms of social interaction have also changed and adapted, prompting communication studies to keep pace with these transformations. Initially, linguistic studies considered interaction “as a communicative practice involving a network of influences established between interlocutors” (Muniz-Lima & Custódio Filho, 2020, p. 144), however, with the evolution of technologies and communication mediators, the perspective of interaction needs to be adapted and “Considering that all forms of interaction are valid, not just face-to-face” (Fragoso, Recuero, Amaral, 2011, p. 173), it becomes necessary to observe the new ways of constructing collective thought occurring in the virtual environment.

Therefore, when analyzing the interactions between interlocutors on a platform in the digital environment, this interaction is understood to have a low degree of synchronicity (Muniz-Lima & Custódio Filho, 2020, p. 158), since conversations are formed at different times for each agent, furthermore, on the social network that is the cyberspace used in this article, all agents determine their interactions through a specific object — the film they are commenting on, and hence, the social roles (Muniz-Lima & Custódio Filho, 2020, p. 158) of

such interlocutors are equal, regarding the element of voice management, it can be said that interaction on Letterboxd takes place in a poly-managed manner, where the

participants assume the simultaneous role of speaker and interlocutor, having the opportunity to shape what is being presented in the text in a manner that is, so to speak, more democratic, given that the possibility of dialogue is at stake. (Muniz-Lima & Custódio Filho, 2020, p. 159).

Social networks and interaction platforms are capable of engendering online collectives (Santos, Cypriano, 2014, p. 64), as the platform used in this study: Letterboxd. The website is structured as a space for cataloging and critiquing cinematographic productions, allowing for movie ratings through scores, likes, and comments, additionally, the network also offers the feature to follow other users' accounts, thus forming a page displaying the activities of these individuals.

Another way to access reviews and comments about a certain production is directly on the film's page, which includes technical information such as cast, crew, synopsis, poster, and interactive elements like the list of where the movie is available to watch, options for sharing the page, and the user review section, along with the comments that have already been left there.

With this, Letterboxd brings together a community of like-minded people with an interest in cinematic productions who share their perceptions on the films they've watched. In this way, the interaction between users is centered around a predetermined object: the film, as Santos and Cypriano state that

Participation occurs through a system that encourages relationships, sharing, and exchanges among users, i.e., a system that fosters collaboration from anyone willing to engage and interact with others through the platform. (Santos, Cypriano, 2014, p. 64)

It is noteworthy that platforms encourage interactions among their users as much as possible, especially those that base their content production on the messages left on their pages, as is the case with Letterboxd. However, when reflecting sociologically on cyberspaces that promote interaction it is possible to question: what relationships and reflections are being created by this community? In this sense, Francisco Rudiger (2011) argues that

Life in the network demands its political price by placing us in circuits of interaction that, in addition to being ephemeral, fragmented, and functional, are often triggered or tend to exist only in the abstract, anonymous, and (audio)visual registry of technological devices. (Rudiger, 2011, p. 129)

The author emphasizes that by living in a network of shared information and extensive interactions that are present only in the cyber environment, the power to cause real change in offline life becomes weakened. Thus, the social and political power of each individual is present only in the static world of cyberspace.

Therefore, subjects of great social and political relevance are that also become part of the interactions within communication networks, just as films that address certain discussions receive comments from users of the Letterboxd platform.

4. Methodology

By using virtual ethnography as a methodological approach, the aim is to understand how the online community created by Letterboxd users interacts with productions by female directors. Bearing in mind that “ethnography contributes to understanding the role and complexity of computer-mediated communication and the ICTs” (Fragoso, *et al.*, 2011, p. 173), it is possible to build insights that correlate online aspects with the offline contexts in which such group is part of.

For the data collection process, 100 comments from each of director Greta Gerwig's productions were selected. The criterion used for selection was the number of likes, aiming to identify the comments with the greatest impact on Letterboxd users.

After separating the comments, a data cleaning process was carried out, with the separation of words and the removal of terms that are not relevant for the analysis (conjunctions, articles, prepositions, numerals, emojis, and special characters). Subsequently, the repetition of words in the comments for each film was counted; for the creation of word clouds, only words that were repeated more than 5 times were considered, again focusing on the impact of the terms for the analysis.

The analysis of the results follows the methodological definitions determined by virtual ethnography, in which the collected data is related to online and offline contexts, aiming to understand the community formed by Letterboxd users and the relation between the comments made about each production with female gender studies and women's roles in the audiovisual sector.

For this, the words will be grouped into three categories: Names – containing the names of real people and characters mentioned; Reflections – words related to what the user reflected on about the film; and Extras – words that do not fit into the other categories. Based on this division, it is possible to establish connections with the aforementioned concepts and develop insights about users' interactions with Greta Gerwig's productions.

5. The object - Greta Gerwig and the selected films

Before beginning the discussions about the analysis, this section aims to describe the object of the research: the films of Greta Gerwig². Greta Celeste Gerwig, born in 1983 in Sacramento, United States, is a director, screenwriter, and actress. The American filmmaker, after graduating with degrees in English and philosophy from Barnard College at Columbia University, planned to pursue a career as a playwright, however, after being rejected from several master's programs in the field, she turned her focus to acting in feature films and became a prominent figure in the New York-based cinematic movement known as Mumblecore.

This movement, characterized as a subgenre of American independent cinema, emphasizes the naturalness of dialogue and performances, allowing Gerwig to develop her career alongside other filmmakers such as Joe Swanberg and Noah Baumbach. Although her early trajectory was marked by roles as an actress, particularly as Frances Halladay in *Frances Ha* (2012), this research focuses on her work as a director and screenwriter.

It was in *Frances Ha* (2012) that Greta Gerwig exposed to the public the sexist situations she faced due to her collaborations with other filmmakers. After the great success of the

² The information in this section are sourced from articles by the *Instituto de Cinema* (n.d.), *Mulheres no Cinema* (2023), and *Toledo* (2024).

film, Gerwig realized that she was not fully recognized for her work behind the camera, thus following the completion of the screenplay for *Lady Bird* (2017), Gerwig decided to return to the director's role. From that point on, the filmmaker's subsequent works, *Little Women* (2019) and *Barbie* (2023), reinforced Greta Gerwig as a recognized screenwriter and director, not only within Mumblecore but also with great influence in blockbuster films. Hereinafter, the stories of the films used as the object of this research will be briefly described: *Lady Bird* (2017), *Little Women* (2019), and *Barbie* (2023).

Christine McPherson (Saoirse Ronan), or *Lady Bird*, is in her final year at a Catholic school in Sacramento, California. She dreams of attending college far from her hometown, but her mother disapproves of the idea. Amid school responsibilities, a first romance, and her complicated relationship with her mother, *Lady Bird* (2017) depicts the struggles, relationships, desires, and responsibilities of a young woman transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. With this film, Greta Gerwig became the 5th woman ever nominated for the Academy Award for Best Director and the 13th female director to have a film nominated for Best Picture.

In 2019, Greta wrote and directed *Little Women*, an adaptation of Louisa May Alcott's classic novel "Little Women", published in 1868. The story follows the lives of the sisters Jo, Meg, Beth, and Amy March and, in Gerwig's vision, it takes a non-chronological approach with updates to its ending. Once again, the filmmaker focuses on telling the story of different women and their relationships of love, friendship, and sisterhood. The film received six Academy Awards nominations, including Best Picture, and won the *Critics' Choice Award* for Best Adapted Screenplay.

To complete Greta Gerwig's trilogy of films addressed in this research, is the major 2023 blockbuster, *Barbie*. With a budget of approximately \$145 million dollars, *Barbie* became the highest-grossing film of 2023, earning \$1.44 billion dollars (Toledo, 2024), it can be considered the most influential film in Gerwig's career as a director. In this feature film, *Barbie* lives in her perfect world, *Barbieland*, but after the protagonist begins to notice "flaws" in her life, she must go to the real world and connect with the girl playing with her to solve her problem. At the Academy Awards, *Barbie* was nominated in six categories, including Best Picture and Best Adapted Screenplay, but the Academy did not award it in any of them.

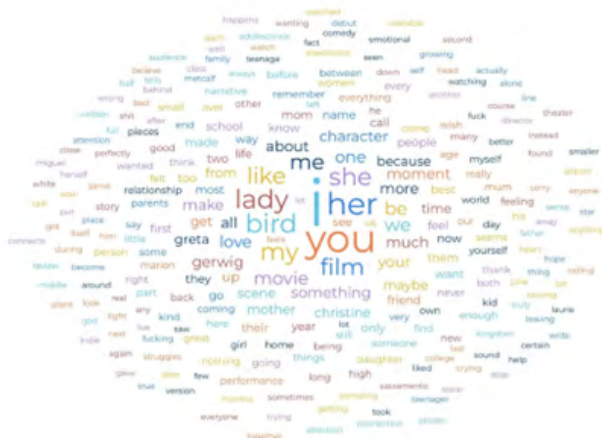
6. Analysis

This section contains the analyses conducted based on the collection of words from the 100 most-liked comments on Letterboxd for the three feature films directed by Greta Gerwig, the assembling of the word clouds for each film was carried out after separating each comment into useful words for the analysis, as described in the methodology.

After the first filtering, 7,254 words were obtained for *Lady Bird* (2017), 5,765 for *Little Women* (2019), and 8,543 for *Barbie* (2023). Due to the high number of terms found, only those that appeared more than five times were used, thus considering the relevance of the word within the comments.

Finally, as previously explained, the analysis divides the words into three groups: names, reflections, and extras. This way, the goal is to organize the insights from the relevant terms in the comments about the films, relating them to the theoretical concepts discussed herein. Therefore, the analysis consists of detailing the terms with significant repetition, as well as their relation to the questions posed by the article, meaning not all words will be analyzed but could form part of an expanded version of the present study.

Figure 1: Lady Bird's (2017) Word Cloud



6.1.1 Names

The most frequently repeated names are those of the film's protagonist, *Christine*, or *Lady Bird*, as she demands to be called, she is the teenager who drives the narrative of the feature film, besides giving the movie its title. Therefore, within the comments, the main character is the focal point, as other characters are not among the most mentioned terms by name. It is worth noting that the word *mom* appears more frequently than the character's actual name - *Marion*.

Another prominent name is that of *Greta Gerwig*, the film's director, demonstrating that the audience is familiar with her and acknowledges her through their comments on the movie, reinforcing her authorial responsibility and contributing to her growing prominence within the North American audiovisual industry.

6.1.2 Reflections

Relationships drive the narrative in *Lady Bird*. Although the word *relationship* is not the most prominent in the cloud, it holds significance and is worth mentioning in this analysis. As previously stated, Greta Gerwig established her film career within the Mumblecore movement, known for its naturalistic dialogues and performances, it is through *Lady Bird*'s relationships that Gerwig showcases her ability to transform this fictional story into something relatable and familiar to the audience. The first boyfriend, the first heartbreak, losing virginity, family disagreements, and friendships are relational experiences that surround the protagonist, guiding the audience through the spaces of this cinematic world, allowing viewers to somehow relate with her experiences.

Among the cited words, the terms associated with the concept of relationships are *mother, parents, daughter, father, family, friend, myself*. Indicating that the protagonist's family dynamics had a significant impact on viewers, such that they frequently mentioned these semantic terms, more so than friendships and romantic relationships, which are also relevant to the narrative. Moreover, different words are present when referring to *mother*, such as *mother* in a more formal context, *mom* as a shortened version, and *mum*, an even more colloquial form. The maternal figure in the narrative is portrayed with power,

3The study extensively discusses the subject in postmodernity, addressing human subjectivity in the contemporary world, a concept that applies to cyberspace, but not exclusively to it.

6.2.1 Names

At the center of the word cloud are the names of the film's characters and actresses — *Jo*, *Florence*, *Saoirse*, *March*, *Pugh*, etc. Since the narrative revolves around a family and their relationships, these names appear as the most frequently mentioned words, as well as because the family is composed of women, it is evident that female names are emphasized by the audience. Beyond the protagonists, it is noteworthy that secondary characters (*Laura Dern* and *Mr. Laurence*) also hold prominence among the relevant words, indicating the presence of comments related to the film's plot, without focusing solely on the main characters.

Once again, the name of the director — *Greta Gerwig* — appears at the center of the words, demonstrating the intrinsic connection the audience makes between the production and its creator. Moreover, since the selected comments are the most liked on the platform, it can be inferred that there is a sense of closeness from the audience with the director's works, forming a community that may be present due to the figure she represents, whether with positive or negative opinions about her work.

6.2.2 Reflections

By portraying the growth journey of the March sisters, the film can be categorized in the “*coming-of-age*” genre, or simply personal growth films. Therefore, the relevance of the words *little*, *women*, *girls*, and *life* demonstrates the audience's understanding of the protagonists' changes at different life stages, and thus sharing the experiences depicted in the film, generating, in this way, an identification of female life experiences. It is not the focus of this research to understand whether, by citing girls and women, the audience is referring to the cinematic situations, personal experiences, or the relationship between reality and film construction. However, it raises the question of developing further research to analyze the discourses of viewers and enrich studies on interactions with the Letterboxd platform, as it offers an opportunity to concretely understand the public's interpretations, a challenge raised by Kaplan (1995).

The presence of words related to emotions, such as *love*, *emotional*, *emotion*, *feeling*, *feels*, and *cry*, highlights the dramatic nature of the film's narrative and may reflect an association of the feminine with binary gender values. The film centers on the relationships of the March sisters throughout their lives, with a focus on their romantic and family dynamics. In this way, the audience's response emphasizing love, crying, and words like *sentiment*, *feeling*, and *emotional* depict the emotional impact the story of these women has. This emotional impact raises the question of whether the narrative constructs and motivates its characters based on emotion, thereby replicating a binary perspective of the female gender, which has historically been associated with emotion and sentimentality, while masculinity is linked to rationality and thoughtfulness.

Just as words related to emotions stand out, terms referring to family are also notable, and attribute familial values to the message conveyed to the audience. In the word cloud, terms such as *sisters*, *family*, *aunt*, and *father* appear as significant figures in the most liked comments about this film. Set in 19th-century United States, and reflecting the inequalities faced by women of the time, the family nucleus plays a major role in shaping the characters and influences many of their life choices. Much of the narrative takes place in the March family's home, and it is among sisters and relatives that the protagonists have the majority

6.2.3 Extras

Another notable name in the comments is that of the character *Ken* and *Ryan Gosling*, the actor who portrays him, Ken is also a generic name for the men of Barbieland, which justifies its frequent mention. However, it is possible to note that the actor's name is cited more often than *Margot Robbie*, the actress playing the protagonist Barbie, which could be related to how the audience received the actors in the production.

6.3.2 Reflections

Among the most frequently used words in the Barbie movie comments on Letterboxd, the theme of gender stands out as both present and significant. To begin with, the term *gender* itself denotes that viewers recognize gender-related themes in the film, an unsurprising remark, given that feminine and masculine are positioned as distinct opposites throughout the movie. This aligns with Scott's (1995) argument, as gender is understood through differences between the sexes, signifying power relations and the oppressions reflected in social structures.

Among the oppressions debated in the film, the term *patriarchy* stands out in the comments. Patriarchy refers to a social organization that prioritizes male power over female, restricting women's lives through rules and norms established by men, leading to female oppression in all spheres, as previously discussed (Scott, 1995; Oliveira, 1993). However, while the film seriously exposes patriarchy, it also addresses the theme comically, as seen when Ken says he thought patriarchy was about the power of men and horses. Therefore, although this research does not aim to address discursive questions, it raises the issue of whether the comments discuss patriarchy with a humorous tone or if they approach the topic with seriousness.

The words *feminism* and *feminist* also reflect that the film's message as received by the audience, relevant enough to be commented, is directly linked to gender. In this research, feminism is understood as stated by bell hooks "a movement to end sexism, sexist domination, and oppression" (2019, p. 120). As a movement that opposes gender-based oppression, feminism in Barbie is different across the worlds presented in the narrative. While in the depicted real world, gender equality and the fight against sexism in relationships are clearly present in the characters' discussions, Barbieland represents a world where Barbies can do everything, but exclude Kens from any decision-making, thereby replicating gender inequalities. Thus, as with the use of the term patriarchy, further research would be valuable in analyzing the context in which feminism is set in the comments.

In order to conclude the highlighted words related to the concept of gender, there is *womanhood*. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, this noun means "the condition of being a woman." Other translations include "femininity," "female character," or "woman's status." Barbie, as the other Gerwig films explored herein, centers on women protagonists to discuss female experiences and portrays the plurality of women, even though all the main characters are white, challenging what this singular condition of being a woman would be. Since gender places them in a position of oppression due to patriarchy and sexism, these women differ in aspects as personality, education, class, reality (in Barbie's case), and time. The presence of the word *womanhood* can either underline aspects in which the commenter identifies with the portrayal of womanhood in the film or remarks the factor of the plurality of female experiences.

6.3.3 Extras

It is important to stress the presence of several terms related to the Barbie doll product that arise in the comments, such as *commercial*, *sell*, *product*, *toy*, and *corporate*, for instance. This shows that the relationship between the audience's comments and the film extends beyond the fictional world created by the narrative and also acknowledges the layers of reality embedded within the film's representation.

It is impossible to disentangle the image of Barbie in the feature film from the doll, which is a product of the Mattel company, something the audience affirms by repeatedly mentioning the aforementioned terms throughout the comments. This relationship could be explored in more detail in future analyses specifically focused on the production and the company behind the product it features.

7. Final Considerations

Based on the reflections derived from the words useful for analysis, it is evident that the concept of gender plays a significant role in the interactions of viewers. The comments on the three films contain repeated words that connect with female experiences, gender power dynamics, and relationships from women's viewpoint. As shown in the analysis, even without knowing who made the comment or the specific context in which the highlighted word is inserted, it is still possible to connect it to the female gender and the experiences of women in the world.

It is also understood that there is a need to use the Letterboxd platform in analyses of interactions with cinematic productions due to its unique characteristics and the assurance that the comments there are specifically aimed at a given work, moreover the limited academic production on the platform opens up opportunities to apply various methodologies linking the fields of cyberculture and communication.

Lastly, this research is understood as an initial step in analyzing audience interactions with female audiovisual productions in the virtual environment of Letterboxd, and perceives the potential to expand studies using different objects and methodologies to enrich academic productions in communication focusing on gender studies.

References

- Barbie (2023). (s.d.). Letterboxd.com. <https://letterboxd.com/film/barbie/>
- Almeida, P. A. de, & Coelho, P. (2022). Discursos, performatividades e padrões visuais no cinema: reflexões sobre as representações de gênero, o mercado cinematográfico e o cinema de mulheres. *ACENO - Revista de Antropologia Do Centro-Oeste*, 2(3), 159–176. <https://doi.org/10.48074/aceno.v2i3.2529>
- De Lauretis, T. (1994). A tecnologia de gênero. In H. B. De Holanda (Org.), *Tendências e impasses: o feminismo como crítica cultural* (pp. 206-242). Ministério Público do Estado da Bahia. https://www.mpba.mp.br/sites/default/files/biblioteca/direitos-humanos/direitos-das-mulheres/obras-digitalizadas/heloisa-buarque-de-hollanda-pensamento-feminista_-conceitos-fundamentais-bazar-do-tempo-_2019_.pdf
- Fragoso, S., Recuero, R., & Amaral, A. (2011). *MÉTODOS DE PESQUISA PARA INTERNET*. Sulina.
- Hirata, H., & Kergoat, D. (2007). Novas configurações da divisão sexual do trabalho. *Cadernos De Pesquisa*, 37(132), 595–609. Recuperado de <https://publicacoes.fcc.org.br/cp/article/view/344>
- Hooks, B. (2018). *O feminismo é para todo mundo: políticas arrebatadoras* (A. L. Libânio, Trad.). Rosa dos Tempos.
- Kaplan, E. A. (1995). *A mulher e o cinema: os dois lados da câmera*. (H. M. P. Pessoa, Trad.). Rocco. <https://periodicos.uff.br/contracampo/article/download/17331/10969/65114>
- Kergoat, D. (2003). Divisão sexual do trabalho e relações sociais de sexo. In M. Emílio, M. Teixeira, M. Nobre, & T. Godinho (Orgs.). *Trabalho e cidadania ativa para as mulheres: desafios para as Políticas Públicas* (pp. 55-63). Coordenadoria Especial da Mulher. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/brasilien/05634.pdf#page=55>
- Instituto de Cinema. (s.d.). *Mulheres no Cinema: Greta Gerwig* <https://institutodecinema.com.br/>

[mais/conteudo/mulheres-no-cinema-greta-gerwig](#)

Lady Bird (2017). (s.d.). Letterboxd.com. <https://letterboxd.com/film/lady-bird/>

Lauzen, M. M. (2024). The celluloid ceiling: Employment of behind-the-scenes women on top grossing US films in 2023. *Center for the Study of Women in*

Television & Film—Home to the longest running and most comprehensive studies of women in film and television. The Celluloid Ceiling. <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-Celluloid-Ceiling-Report.pdf>

Little Women (2019). (s.d.). Letterboxd.com. <https://letterboxd.com/film/little-women-2019/>

Muniz-Lima, I., & Custódio Filho, V. (2020). Revisitando o conceito de interação. *Revista Investigações*, 33(especial), 141-164. <https://doi.org/10.51359/2175-294x.2020.244451>

Oliveira, R. (1993) *Elogio da diferença: O feminino Emergente*. Brasiliense.

Penafria, M., Vilão, H., & Ramiro, T. (2016). O ato de criação cinematográfica e a Teoria dos Cineastas. In M. Penafria, E. T. Baggio, A. R. Graça & D. C. Araujo (Eds.), *Propostas para a Teoria do Cinema: Teoria dos cineastas - Vol. 2*. LabCom.IFP. https://labcomca.ubi.pt/propostas-para-a-teoria-do-cinema-teoria-dos-cineastas-vol-2/#flipbook-df_22824/1/

Mulher no Cinema. (2023, 19 de julho). *Do mumblecore ao blockbuster: quem é Greta Gerwig, diretora de "Barbie"*. <https://mulhernocinema.com/especiais/saiba-mais-sobre-greta-gerwig-diretora-de-lady-bird-e-adoraveis-mulheres/>

Quesada, T. C., Goulart, M. M., Nascimento de S. N., & Almeida, G. (2021). Comunicação e Gênero como área de pesquisa: características e desenvolvimento dos estudos a partir da análise bibliométrica. *Intercom - Revista Brasileira De Ciências Da Comunicação*, 44(3). <https://doi.org/10.1590/1809-58442021305>

Rüdiger, F. (2013). *As Teorias da Cibercultura: Perspectivas, Questões e Autores* (2a ed.). Sulina.

Santos, F. C., & Cypriano, C. P. (2014). Redes sociais, redes de sociabilidade. *Revista Brasileira de Ciências Sociais*, 29(85), 63-78. <https://doi.org/10.1590/S0102-69092014000200005>

Scott, J. W. (1995). Gênero: uma categoria útil de análise histórica. *Educação & realidade*, 20(2), 71-99. <https://seer.ufrgs.br/index.php/educacaoerealidade/article/view/71721>

Toledo, M. (2024, 1 de janeiro). *Veja as maiores bilheterias de 2023*. CNN Brasil. <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/entretenimento/veja-as-maiores-bilheterias-de-2023/>

Tomazetti, T. P. (2019). *Genealogias dissidentes: os estudos de gênero nas teses e dissertações em comunicação do Brasil (1972-2015)*. [Tese de doutorado, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul]. Repositório Digital da Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. <http://hdl.handle.net/10183/193542>