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Gender and Communication

Movie Analysis: Chocolat

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Chocolat tells the story of a young mother, who arrives at the fictional, repressed French village of Lansquenet-sous-Tannes with her six-year-old daughter and opens La Chocolaterie Maya, a small chocolate shop. Her chocolate quickly begins to change the lives of the townspeople. The reason I choose this movie is because it clearly shows what society expects from female genders and male genders. It has many detailed examples of showing gender differences and gender biases.

Vianne Rocher moves in a village in France with her daughter Anouk in 1959. The French village they move in is very traditional and old-fashioned. Vianne opens a Chocolate shop when villagers begin observing the forty days of Lent. Vianne gets lots of judgmental thoughts from the people who live in the village because she does not fit in their lifestyle and traditions. However, her friendly and optimistic nature begins to win the villagers over one by one. Vianne reads people very well and wins them with her delicious chocolates.

The first person Vianne gets involved is Armenda. Armenda is the landlord of Vianne. Armenda’s daughter Caroline will not let Armenda see her grandson Luc because Caroline thinks Armenda is a bad influence for her son. Vianne helps Luc and his grandmother to see each other in the chocolate shop.

Vianne also becomes friends with Josephine, who has an alcoholic husband Serge. After a while Josephine leaves her husband and moves in with Vianne and Anouk. She starts working with Vianne and changes herself a lot in a good way. Serge sees this change and decides to win back his wife so he changes himself, becomes a good man for his wife. They get back together and live happily.
As she continues making friends and changing village people’s life, people start to like her more and more. On the other hand, Comte de Reynaud, the town's mayor, cannot get involve with her from the beginning. All he wants Vianne to leave the town before she leads the town into a deeper level of temptation. At the end of the movie Vianne falls in love with the gipsy Roux and she stays in the village because she believes that she meant to be in the village and meant to change people’s lives.

The movie shows strong gender expectations. First of all, as soon as Vianne comes to the town, people get curious about her. She gets people’s attention. She arrives the town without a man with her. The mayor of the village goes to the chocolate shop to meet her and he assumes she is either divorced or lost her husband, since she has a daughter. However, she has never gotten married. The mayor of the village judges her because, for a society, it is “bad” or “wrong” to have children without getting married especially for a woman.

The systems of the society reflect a strong gender bias favoring men which makes it more difficult for women to have successful careers. Vianne is a powerful woman who stands strong by herself. She cleans the old shop, makes it pretty by herself. She does all the heavy work by herself. It confuses both women and men who live in the village. It is unusual for them to see a woman by herself being successful, happy and powerful. She is the only woman who has her own business/career in the village. The village has its own harmony that where woman follows her husband, go to church and be weak. Whoever ruins this pattern is judged. The article, Gender Bias or Motherhood Disadvantage? Judgments of Blue Collar Mothers and Fathers in the Workplace, agrees that women especially who are mothers face negativities in workplace. Sex-based views of occupations are still prevalent in society and these may bias the judgments of evaluators (Gungor, 2009).
Looking at the village people; men do everything they want such as; drinking, getting drunk, hitting their wives and being rude. They are not judged by anybody or even by church. On the other hand, all the village women has to live with their husbands, follow their rules, clean after them, be weak, not giving their ideas about any subject. As soon as they do something “wrong” they are judged by society and church.

Vianne is the woman who wants to show people how to live. She knows how to enjoy life and she wants to show this to other people too. After she falls in love with the gipsy who randomly comes to the town, people take it very seriously. It is a sin or shame for a single woman to flirt with a random man for society. They judge her very much and even try to burn the boat she sleeps in with the man. On the other hand, all men allow going to the pub/bar get drunk and being with any women they want. Women should sit home, clean, not talk to other man, take care of children, be weak and follow the rules their men show them. Vienna cannot fit in their society because she owns a chocolate shop by herself, she is powerful, and she does not afraid to talk loud or express her feelings.

In the movie Chocolat, there are different roles for men and women as I mentioned with examples. In the article, *Feminization in the movies? Occupational Roles of public relations characters in movies*, agrees that traditional gender roles, which are socially learned as cultural values, may cause the people to aspire to sex- typical occupations. Movies show that occupational roles for men are much higher than women (Lambert & White, 2012). However, the movie Chocolat tries to break down this bias with showing Vianne as a successful woman. It also shows that being successful woman is unusual for society and it is hard for society to accept this.
Analyzing the movie, I have seen both good and bad sides about the gender biases. The movie based on breaking down gender stereotypes and showing women how to be strong. At the same time, it showed how society looks at women and how actually difficult to be strong and successful, single and a mother at the same time. The point I am disappointed about the movie is the part when Vianne falls in love with the gipsy. As we all see in all the movies, women wait for the right man no matter what the movie’s subject is. Almost all of the films depict a female lead pursuing a romantic relationship. In some of the movies, the females’ romance is the primary focus of the plot, whereas in others it is secondary. The films in which it is secondary often show females capable of having a relationship as well as achieving other life goals (Smith & Cook). At first, the movie refers gender and social issues in a society. After all, it becomes a romantic movie. The strong woman, who has power the change people’s perspectives about gender stereotypes, falls in love and gets emotional. Vianne is an intelligent woman at the beginning of the movie. She controls her feelings well and not emotional as other women. The movie goes on and she becomes an emotionally weak women.

The second point that I realized was the certain look of women. Media always show us a “perfect woman”, “perfect body”, “perfect look”. The movie Chocolat was not different than other media influences. The strong woman Vianne looks beautiful. Her hair always looks in a certain perfect way even when she builds the coffee shop, cleans, sleeps…etc. She is a skinny mother. She always has perfect make up and clothes in any situation.

In conclusion, media show us certain gender roles. Men are often portrayed in fairly active work roles, while women tend to be shown as more dependent on social roles involving romance, friendship, and family. Men usually choose to display “joke images” or images that appear more independent, while women display relatively sentimental, emotional images. Men
are often pictured as dominant, in elevated positions, showing victory, while women are pictured in more helpless, submissive positions. Men act in comparatively “narrative ways” and women behave more submissively. Men and women display self-promoting and vain images to appear physically attractive and wear minimal clothing to appear sexy (Rose, 2012). No matter what the movies’ subjects are, there is always certain gender role in the movies. In the movie Chocolat, Vannie is an unusual woman who has male gender roles. It makes audience believe that the movie is going to break down the gender stereotypes. However, “women fall in love”, “women search for love” stereotypes come off in the movie. On the other hand, the movie throws light on equality between men and women and gives female audience hope. It shows people that women can stand up for their rights and it is possible to make them have the life they want.
References


