A Study on Cultural Discipline Seen Through Oscar-Winning Films

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Abstract: *This study critically examines the representation of feminism in recent Oscar-winning films and explores how these depictions reflect broader power dynamics within cultural institutions. Although the Academy Awards have increasingly showcased "strong female" characters, a deeper analysis reveals that these portrayals often remain confined by traditional male-dominated narrative frameworks. Drawing on Foucault's theory of disciplinary power and feminist epistemology, informed by feminist standpoint theory, this research argues that the construction of female subjectivity in these films frequently reinforces existing power structures rather than deconstructing them. By analyzing characters in films such as CODA, Everything Everywhere All at Once, Minari, and Poor Things, the study highlights how female characters are often positioned as reflections or reversals of male roles, failing to achieve genuine feminist ideals. To ensure analytic consistency, the analysis is organized around four dimensions—agency, emotional labor, institutional endorsement, and narrative closure—while employing a working definition of "internalized discipline" to differentiate between surface progress and structural transformation. Publicly available institutional summaries are used solely as contextual materials, and claims are limited to analytic generalizations.*

Keywords: Disciplinary Power; Feminism; Foucault; Gender Representation; Oscar-winning Films

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

The Academy Awards, commonly referred to as the Oscars, hold significant cultural capital within the global film industry. As a platform that combines artistic value with commercial success, the Oscars have long been considered a benchmark for evaluating cinematic excellence [1]. However, the evaluation mechanisms of the Oscars have faced some criticism. For instance, movements such as "#OscarsSoWhite" reflect public concerns regarding fairness and cultural representation within the Oscar selection process. Since 2020, the Academy has increasingly prioritised fairness and cultural representation, making efforts to expand membership to include individuals from diverse gender and ethnic backgrounds [2] and introducing representation and inclusion standards for film evaluations [3], aiming to become more inclusive and reflective of global societal dynamics.

At present, feminism is a crucial topic within socio-cultural discourse. Although narratives within Oscar-winning films may superficially suggest progress in terms of gender equality and feminist representation, deeper investigation may reveal underlying cultural disciplinary mechanisms that subtly reinforce traditional power structures. Therefore, this study seeks to analyse how contemporary feminist themes are portrayed in Oscar-winning films, proposing that despite apparent advancements, there may be a regressive tendency influenced by invisible cultural forces. Focusing on Oscar-winning films from the past five years, this study adopts a small-N design, which emphasises analytic rather than statistical generalisation, and situates its analysis within carefully selected cases that are representative of broader tendencies.

In doing so, the study aims not only to interrogate the visible narratives of gender representation but also to map how disciplinary power operates across the production, evaluation, and reception of films. This perspective highlights that disciplinary mechanisms are not confined to overt regulations but also extend to processes of self-regulation at both the level of filmmakers and that of audiences, producing a cycle of reinforcement that normalises certain portrayals of women.

Furthermore, the research acknowledges the current shift in the Academy's institutional frameworks, such as the introduction of representation and inclusion standards, and evaluates their impact on cinematic narratives of gender. By critically exploring the intersection of feminist narratives, cultural discipline, and power and representation, this study situates itself within broader debates on how film industries embody, regulate, and potentially constrain feminist progress in a global cultural context.

1.2 Research Questions

The central research questions of this study are as follows:

How have feminist narratives been represented in Oscar-winning films over the past five years, and how do the selection criteria and institutional frameworks of the Academy shape these representations?

To what extent do these films present an illusion of feminist progress —appearing to advance gender equality on the surface—while simultaneously concealing deeper regressive tendencies reinforced through cultural discipline?

In what ways does the Oscars, as a cultural institution, operate as a mechanism of cultural discipline across the stages of production, evaluation, and reception, thereby subtly shaping how feminist ideals are portrayed and normalised in mainstream cinema?

These questions aim to investigate not only the visible feminist advancements in recent Oscar-winning films but also the less apparent structural and institutional forces that contribute to the reproduction, rather than the transformation, of existing gendered power relations. By adopting a small-N, analytic approach, the study seeks to identify patterns that may indicate broader tendencies while remaining attentive to the limitations of generalisation.

1.3 Research Aims, Significance, and Necessity

The primary aim of this study is to uncover the subtle and often overlooked ways in which cultural discipline manifests in the portrayal of feminist themes in contemporary Oscar-winning films. Although these films may appear progressive on the surface, this study seeks to demonstrate how they often reinforce the very power structures they claim to challenge. By applying feminist theory, Foucault's concept of discipline, this research aims to reveal the nuanced ways in which cultural institutions like the Oscars shape and constrain feminist representations. In particular, the study adopts a small-N design, focusing on a limited number of carefully selected Oscar-winning films (2019-2024), thereby prioritising analytic rather than statistical generalisation.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the broader discourse of feminist media critique. Through a critical analysis of Oscar-winning films from the past five years, this research provides insights into the limitations of current feminist portrayals and reflects on how popular culture engages with gender issues. Given the global influence of the Oscars, examining how these award-winning films construct, perpetuate, or subtly undermine feminist ideals is crucial for understanding their impact on public consciousness. Moreover, by situating the analysis within the interconnected stages of production, evaluation, and reception, the study highlights the Oscars not merely as a celebratory event but as a disciplinary mechanism that governs the circulation of cultural values across the film industry.

The necessity of this study stems from the increasing commodification of feminist narratives in the entertainment industry. As feminist themes become more marketable, these narratives risk being diluted, standardised, or incorporated into a neoliberal framework that prioritises profit over genuine social progress. By investigating the cultural discipline imposed by the Oscars, this study aims to expose contradictions in the current cinematic landscape and advocate for more authentic expressions of feminist ideals. At the same time, the study also considers how institutional standards, databases, and digital infrastructures serve as mediating technologies that regulate gender representation, thereby bridging traditional cultural critique with contemporary information-centred perspectives.

2. Materials and Methods

This study employs qualitative textual analysis as its primary research method, focusing on the narrative structures, character development, and visual symbols in selected Oscar-winning films. Textual analysis allows for in-depth readings of these films, identifying both explicit and implicit messages related to feminist themes. By comparing films from different years, the research also incorporates comparative analysis to track trends and shifts in the portrayal of feminist narratives.

The analysis is framed within theoretical perspectives drawn from feminist epistemology and standpoint theory, Foucault's concept of discipline. These frameworks are utilised to deconstruct the power relations embedded within these films' narrative strategies and to examine how the Oscars, as an institution, functions as a gatekeeper in shaping discourses of feminist progress.

To provide consistency across case studies, the analysis is guided by a set of recurring variables rather than a full coding scheme. These variables include: (1) agency, referring to the extent to which female characters initiate or control narrative outcomes; (2) emotional labour, capturing the disproportionate affective responsibilities assigned to women; (3) institutional endorsement, observed when a female character's recognition or success is validated by patriarchal or cultural authorities; and (4) narrative closure, assessing whether the resolution integrates female characters into existing social structures or allows for alternative trajectories. These guiding dimensions ensure a coherent analytic focus while retaining the flexibility of qualitative interpretation.

By integrating these methods, this study seeks to move beyond surface-level interpretations, revealing the deeper ideological currents that inform the portrayal of feminism in contemporary mainstream film. In addition, the study highlights that these variables can also be mapped against institutional standards and available digital records (e.g. award regulations, membership reports), thereby aligning textual interpretation with reproducible, information-centred perspectives.

3. Foucault's Theory of Discipline

3.1 Foucault's Discipline and Power Relations

Michel Foucault's concept of discipline is crucial for understanding how modern society regulates behaviour through subtle control mechanisms. As Foucault discusses in Discipline and Punish (1975), discipline operates as a power mechanism that functions not through overt coercion but through systems of surveillance, normalisation, and internalisation [4]. This power structure is not merely a top-down force; it permeates various institutions within society, shaping knowledge, behaviour, and social norms.

Foucault argues that in a disciplinary society, power is exercised through a complex network of techniques and practices that lead individuals to consciously conform. Unlike traditional sovereign power, which is repressive and overt, disciplinary power is more concealed and productive, operating within everyday practices and institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons. These institutions establish norms and monitor behaviour, gradually transforming certain ways of thinking and acting into accepted "truths" or "common sense" [5].

Foucault conceptualises disciplinary power as a "political technology of the body" [4], aimed at producing docile subjects. In modern society, power no longer relies on overt punishment to control the body but instead uses institutions like prisons, schools, and hospitals to subtly regulate behaviour, thoughts, and identities. This shift is marked by the replacement of executioners with a new professional class—including prison guards, doctors, clergy, psychologists, and educators—whose goal is not to destroy the body but to normalise behaviour and produce compliant, standardised individuals [6]. This transformation does not signify a simple "humanitarian progress" but the emergence of a new form of power: disciplinary power. Through a series of disciplinary techniques involving the regulation of time, space, and actions, disciplinary power produces "docile bodies" and extends its influence from prisons to factories, schools, and hospitals. In the cultural domain, similar mechanisms emerge through professionalised institutions such as film academies, award committees, and industry guilds, which regulate creative outputs in ways analogous to how prisons or schools regulate individuals.

This new mode of control establishes a novel penal structure, wherein power is "distributed throughout a unified network that can operate anywhere and extend consistently down to the smallest particles of the social body" [4].

Within this theoretical framework, discipline involves three key mechanisms:

a) Hierarchical Observation: Surveillance becomes a central tool, leading individuals to self-regulate under the awareness that they may be constantly observed.

b) Normalising Judgement: By correcting deviations from established norms, individuals are encouraged to conform to predefined standards.

c) Examination: Combining observation and normalisation, examination measures and categorises individuals, further solidifying power relations.

While Foucault located these mechanisms in institutions such as prisons or schools, their logic extends into the cultural field. In the case of the Oscars, hierarchical observation can be read in the constant visibility and scrutiny of film texts; normalising judgement operates through award criteria and critical discourses; and examination manifests in the classification and evaluation of films according to codified standards. These disciplinary processes illustrate how cultural institutions transform artistic practices into measurable and comparable outputs, thereby aligning creative expression with dominant norms. Such mechanisms today are further reinforced through digital infrastructures, including standardised databases, codified inclusion requirements, and algorithmic visibility, which extend disciplinary power into the informational domain.

3.2 The Interdependence of Knowledge and Power

Michel Foucault's theory of power-knowledge is fundamental for understanding how power is exercised and sustained in society. In Discipline and Punish, Foucault posits that power is not merely repressive but also productive and relational. Foucault moves beyond traditional views by conceptualising power as a force that generates knowledge, normalises behaviour, and induces individuals to internalise norms. For Foucault, power is not confined to specific institutions or individuals but is diffusely embedded within the everyday practices and discourses of society.

As Foucault states, "The individual...is the product of a specific technology of power that I call 'discipline.' We should cease to describe the effects of power in negative terms...In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge gained of him belong to this production" [4].

In this context, knowledge becomes a tool of control. In a disciplinary society, knowledge is systematised and used to classify, observe, and manage individuals [7]. Foucault introduces the concept of "biopower," which involves controlling populations through scientific discourses on the body, health, and behaviour. In this setting, knowledge becomes instrumental for the effective operation of power. For instance, in institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons, knowledge is produced through observation and classification, which, in turn, justifies and reinforces social order. In the cultural field, similar dynamics can be observed: the classification of films into genres, the codification of aesthetic standards, and the criteria used by award committees all function as forms of power-knowledge, simultaneously producing "legitimate" cultural products and excluding others.

Foucault notes, "Rules penetrate the smallest details of existence and ensure the capillary functioning of power through a comprehensive system of grading" [4]. Through this mechanism, power permeates every level of society, reinforcing and sustaining established social order. Applied to cinema, such grading takes the form of evaluation systems, award nominations, and critical discourses, which together transform subjective artistic practices into measurable hierarchies of cultural value.

This relationship between power and knowledge is particularly significant for understanding feminist narratives in Oscar-winning films. Female subjectivities represented on screen are not simply creative expressions but outcomes of institutionalised regimes of knowledge that define what kinds of "feminism" are deemed acceptable. Thus, even seemingly progressive portrayals often remain circumscribed within the epistemic boundaries established by power.

In contemporary settings, the interdependence of power and knowledge is reinforced by digital infrastructures. Archival databases, codified inclusion standards, and algorithmic recommendation systems further extend disciplinary power into the informational domain, shaping which cultural products achieve visibility and legitimacy.

3.3 Discipline as a Mechanism of Power-Knowledge

The relationship between power and knowledge is most evident within disciplinary mechanisms. As Foucault describes, surveillance serves not only as a source of power but also as a generator of knowledge. By observing and recording behaviour, institutions create knowledge about individuals, which is then used to

regulate and control them. This process is not merely repressive; it produces identities and subjectivities aligned with dominant norms. In the context of the media and entertainment industries, this dynamic is reflected in the processes of evaluation, classification, and production standards, which determine what is considered "acceptable" or "legitimate" in the cultural discourse. These mechanisms define the dominant narratives about gender in mainstream media, where certain representations of women are valorised while others are excluded.

The comparative relationship outlined in the table below can be derived from a review of the three key mechanisms of discipline and the summarised characteristics of the interdependence between power and knowledge.

Table 1. Discipline, Power, and Knowledge: A Comparative Overview [4-8]

Three Key Mechanisms of Discipline	Characteristics of the Relationship Between Power and Knowledge
Hierarchical Observation: Surveillance becomes a central tool, leading individuals to self-regulate under the awareness that they may be constantly observed.	**Knowledge and Control**: Knowledge is systematised and used to classify, observe, and manage individuals, thereby reinforcing social order.
Normalising Judgement: By correcting deviations from established norms, individuals are encouraged to conform to predefined standards.	**Biopower**: Through scientific discourses (such as those concerning health and behaviour), populations are controlled, enabling the effective operation of power.
Examination: Combining observation and normalisation, examination measures and categorises individuals, further solidifying power relations.	**Capillary Operation of Power**: Rules permeate every level of society, ensuring that power consistently maintains the established order across all layers.

Thus, we can identify that this relationship between power and knowledge aligns with the characteristics of discipline. In the cultural context, power-knowledge dynamics determine what is valued, seen, and remembered. Institutions like the media and film industry operate through this interaction, defining cultural standards and legitimising particular narratives. These industries produce knowledge that aligns with dominant ideologies while also requiring content creators to conform to these norms.

Foucault's disciplinary concepts extend to the analysis of cultural and social institutions, including the media and entertainment industries. From Foucault's perspective, these institutions perpetuate power dynamics by subtly influencing what is seen, heard, and valued in society. The entertainment industry, by determining which narratives are celebrated, regulates and constrains the types of content produced, particularly regarding issues like feminism. The Oscars, as an example of cultural institutions, play a key role in validating certain feminist narratives while simultaneously marginalising others. The criteria used in award selections and the emphasis on specific forms of gender representation reinforce dominant cultural values, while marginalising those that do not conform to these norms.

Applying this framework to the analysis of films or other cultural products reveals how the media serves as a site of cultural production and regulation. The internalisation of norms and adherence to specific standards, whether artistic or ideological, demonstrate the ways in which discipline is enacted within the cultural domain. This disciplinary process produces content that aligns with mainstream ideologies, often under the guise of progressive narratives but within the acceptable boundaries set by power structures.

In this context, understanding how discipline operates provides a powerful tool for critically analysing how feminist themes in the media are constrained by cultural and institutional pressures, leading to seemingly liberating representations that are ultimately influenced by invisible forces of control.

4. Feminist Theory

4.1 Feminist Epistemology

Feminist epistemology originates from a critique and reflection on traditional methods of knowledge production [9, 10]. Sandra Harding (1991), in *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?: Thinking from women's lives*, argues that the "objectivity" within Western knowledge systems is built upon a male perspective,

neglecting the experiences of women and other marginalised groups [11]. This approach to knowledge production not only reflects gender inequality but also limits the diversity and completeness of knowledge. Helen Longino (1990), in *Science as social knowledge: Values and objectivity in scientific inquiry*, further contends that scientific knowledge is not merely derived from data and experiments, but is shaped by social interactions and values [12]. Thus, feminist epistemology seeks to reveal the influence of power relations on knowledge, promoting a more inclusive and equitable process of knowledge production [12].

Key questions addressed by feminist epistemology include: How is knowledge gendered? How do the perspectives of different genders and social groups impact knowledge production? Building on these inquiries, Donna Haraway introduces the concept of "situated knowledge," emphasising that all knowledge is influenced by the social position and background of its producer. This notion challenges traditional epistemology's pursuit of universality and neutrality [13]. Applied to cinema, "situated knowledge" directs attention to whose standpoint structures what is visible on screen (camera position, editing priorities, the distribution of voice and silence) and off screen (festival gatekeeping, award juries, and critical canons). It invites analyses that locate filmic "truths" within concrete socio-institutional positions rather than treating them as universal.

Feminist epistemology advocates for the adoption of qualitative research, particularly focusing on reconstructing the knowledge production process through the lens of women's experiences. Harding (1991) introduces the concept of "strong objectivity," arguing that knowledge production must adequately consider the perspectives of marginalised groups to achieve true objectivity. She asserts that traditional scientific research, by neglecting such diversity, fails to be genuinely objective [11]. Longino (1990) emphasises the necessity of incorporating diverse perspectives and fostering open discussions in scientific research to overcome gender and social biases in the knowledge production process [12].

These works demonstrate how feminist epistemology is applied across different fields. Longino (1990), by analysing value judgements and consensus-building in scientific research, illustrates how a feminist perspective can challenge mainstream scientific knowledge systems. She argues that only through diversified discussions and questioning can scientific knowledge become more just and comprehensive [12]. Simultaneously, Intemann (2010) reviews feminist empiricism and standpoint theory, noting that combining the two enhances the theoretical depth of research, allowing knowledge production to be both empirically grounded and critically engaged [14].

This complementarity clarifies how epistemic rules and standpoints jointly structure what counts as knowledge and from where more adequate accounts can be produced. While feminist epistemology exposes how dominant norms shape what counts as knowledge, standpoint theory (in Section 4.2) specifies from where more adequate knowledge can be produced—namely, from marginalised positions that disclose occluded relations of power. Accordingly, our framework uses feminist epistemology to interrogate the Oscars' categories, standards, and critical vocabularies as knowledge practices, and uses standpoint theory to privilege women's lived coordinates (class, race/ethnicity, migration, family labour) when interpreting character agency and narrative closure. This complementarity directly targets male-centric narrative logics by treating women's experiences not as illustrative anecdotes but as theory-generating sites that can re-describe "progress" beyond masculinised success metrics.

In summary, the importance of feminist epistemology in knowledge production becomes apparent through these discussions. By challenging the traditional epistemological emphasis on universality and neutrality, feminist epistemology introduces a new perspective that intertwines knowledge with social context and power relations [15]. In the present study, this means reading "strong female" portrayals against the institutional conditions that certify them as progressive, thereby evaluating gender representation not solely by on-screen reversals of roles but by the epistemic pathways through which such representations acquire cultural legitimacy.

4.2 Feminist Standpoint Theory

Feminist Standpoint Theory, as an essential part of feminist theory, focuses on knowledge production from the perspectives of marginalised groups [16]. The theory was first proposed by Nancy Hartsock in the 1980s. In her work The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism, Hartsock (1983) introduced the concept of the "feminist standpoint" based on Marxist historical materialism [17]. She argued that marginalised groups in society, particularly women, offer unique insights into social inequalities and power relations due to their distinct experiences. The theory challenges traditional epistemology by asserting that knowledge should not be solely derived from the perspectives of elite groups,

but rather should originate from the experiences of the oppressed and marginalised, thereby revealing the essence of power structures [18].

The core issue in Feminist Standpoint Theory is how the experiences of marginalised groups can become the foundation for more critical and insightful knowledge. The theory advocates that knowledge production must be grounded in the standpoints of socially marginalised groups, as their experiences can expose injustices that mainstream perspectives often overlook [19]. Sandra Harding (1992), *in Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is Strong Objectivity?*, further elaborated on the concept of "strong objectivity," which requires us to view social realities from diverse standpoints, particularly those of marginalised groups [20]. In this sense, standpoint functions not as an "add-on" perspective but as a privileged critical vantage from which invisible power relations become legible; what appears as "progress" from the centre can be re-described, from the margins, as the reproduction of dominance.

Feminist Standpoint Theory employs qualitative research as its primary method, particularly through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and case studies, to gather the experiences of marginalised groups. Hartsock (1983), *in Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, explored how women's labour experiences, through the lens of historical materialism, can be transformed into critical social analysis. This approach emphasises grounding theory in concrete, lived experiences, thereby generating more insightful analyses [21]. Transposed to film analysis, standpoint directs attention to who is granted narrative authority and how that authority is secured: whose voice-over frames comprehension, whose gaze anchors camera placement, whose labour resolves conflict, and whose recognition confers narrative closure. These questions convert lived coordinates (class, race/ethnicity, migration, family labour) into analytic levers rather than illustrative anecdotes.

In their analysis, these works demonstrate how Standpoint Theory plays a role in revealing power relations. For example, Harding (1992) discusses how "strong objectivity" is manifested in epistemology, suggesting that by incorporating the experiences of marginalised groups into knowledge production, the comprehensiveness and fairness of knowledge are enhanced. She points out that traditional knowledge systems often ignore the perspectives of marginalised groups, while Standpoint Theory, by repositioning the knowledge producers, uncovers the roots of power inequalities [20]. Accordingly, the present study treats women's experiential positions in the selected films as theory-generating sites: agency is read through the distribution of decision-making capacity, emotional labour through patterned affective tasks, institutional endorsement through scenes of legitimation, and narrative closure through the integration (or refusal) of alternative life-trajectories.

Complementarity with Feminist Epistemology. Standpoint Theory complements feminist epistemology by specifying the location from which more adequate knowledge is produced, while feminist epistemology interrogates the rules by which such knowledge is authorised (in Section 4.1). In practice, filmic evidence is read through standpoints that disclose occluded relations of power, and the evaluative vocabularies that confer legitimacy upon those readings are scrutinised. This double movement resists taking mainstream recognition as a neutral proxy for value and re-describes "strong female" figures beyond masculinised success metrics.

Furthermore, Naples and Gurr's (2013) study reviewed the development of Standpoint Theory and its application in gender studies. She emphasised that Standpoint Theory not only aids in understanding social inequalities but also provides a framework for critiquing mainstream epistemology in gender research. The integration of Standpoint Theory with feminist empiricism enhances the empirical basis of research while also increasing its theoretical complexity and depth [22].

Standpoint Theory has been widely applied across various fields, particularly in sociology, education, and cultural studies. For instance, in The Epistemology of Resistance, Medina (2013) explores how gender and racial oppression can be analysed through Standpoint Theory, particularly in addressing "epistemic injustice." Standpoint Theory offers a crucial tool for countering such injustices [23]. Through case study analyses, Standpoint Theory reveals how the perspectives of marginalised groups play a critical role in knowledge production and provide theoretical support for building a more equitable society. Within cinema, its contribution is diagnostic rather than merely advocatory: by re-localising knowledge in women lived coordinates, it shows how apparently emancipatory arcs may be structured by dependence, recognition–seeking, or disciplined forms of competence.

The primary idea of Feminist Standpoint Theory is that by placing the experiences of marginalised groups at the core of knowledge production, the theory poses a significant challenge to traditional epistemology and methods of knowledge creation. This theory has had a widespread influence in academia and offers new perspectives for social justice and cultural critique. In future research, Standpoint Theory is expected to continue

playing a unique role in helping us understand complex issues of social inequality in the context of multiculturalism and globalisation.

4.3 Summary

Feminist epistemology and feminist standpoint theory, while differing in their theoretical foundations and methodologies, exhibit significant consistency in resisting established knowledge structures and challenging constructed role identities. Both theories centre on exposing how knowledge is shaped by specific gendered perspectives and social contexts, and they strive to redefine these perspectives to counteract mainstream society's monopoly on knowledge.

Firstly, both theories oppose the traditional epistemological construction of so-called "objective" knowledge. Feminist epistemology critiques the notions of "neutrality" and "universality," revealing that these ostensibly objective forms of knowledge are, in fact, shaped by male-dominated social structures that exclude the experiences of women and other marginalised groups. This knowledge structure is not only gendered but also sustains societal inequalities through implicit power dynamics [11].

Secondly, feminist standpoint theory emphasises that through the experiences of marginalised groups, we can gain a clearer understanding of hidden social inequalities and power relations. Standpoint theory advocates that knowledge production should not only focus on experiences excluded by mainstream discourse but also actively transform these experiences into tools for resisting dominant narratives. In this way, standpoint theory seeks to dismantle the stereotypical role identities embedded in traditional knowledge systems, fundamentally challenging the socially constructed roles [17].

Whether through epistemology or standpoint theory, both approaches within the feminist perspective focus on critiquing and reconstructing existing knowledge structures by resisting constructed role identities. They argue that only by opposing these mainstream methods of knowledge production can suppressed voices and perspectives be liberated, thereby genuinely advancing gender equality. Consequently, feminist theory expresses, on various levels, a resistance to authoritative knowledge systems and a profound critique of the inherent gender biases within them.

This complementarity clarifies how power–knowledge relations render certain feminist subject positions legible in mainstream recognition regimes while occluding others. On this basis, the analysis in Chapter 5 is organised around four dimensions—agency, emotional labour, institutional endorsement, and narrative closure—and uses an operational specification of "internalised discipline" to distinguish surface progress from structural transformation.

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 The Presence and Emphasis of Feminism in Oscar-Winning Films

As a preliminary note on scope and inference, this section adopts a small-N, interpretive approach aimed at analytic rather than statistical generalisation. Patterns are therefore described as tendencies contingent on the analysed corpus, rather than as claims of historical parity. Publicly available institutional summaries (e.g., membership overviews, representation and inclusion standards) are consulted only as contextual materials that situate the textual readings within concrete award practices.

Since the establishment of the Academy Awards, men have significantly dominated in winning awards, a phenomenon that has been confirmed in multiple studies. A study by Grout and Eagan (2020) analysed the outcomes of the Best Picture, Best Actor, Best Actress, Best Supporting Actor, and Best Supporting Actress awards from the inception of the Oscars until 2020. Their findings revealed that in films that won the Best Picture award, male actors (including both lead and supporting roles) overwhelmingly received the majority of performance awards and nominations. Specifically, in Best Picture-winning films, the overall award ratio for male actors was 64%, compared to only 36% for female actors [24]. This gender inequality highlights the longstanding gender bias in the selection of performance awards at the Oscars.

To further analyse this trend, A table is compiled to record a similar table that records the gender distribution of award winners for the four Oscar ceremonies from 2020 to the present (the 2020 and 2021 ceremonies were combined due to the global pandemic). In the table below, names without strikethrough indicate actors who won an award, while names with strikethrough indicate those who were nominated but did not win. The table is as follows:

Table 2. Gender Distribution of Oscar Award Winners and Nominees (2020–Present) [25-29]

YR	LEAD ACTR	LEAD ACTS	SUP ACTR	SUP ACTS	BEST PICTURE
2020/2021	Frances McDormand				Nomadland
2022		Troy Kotsur			CODA
2023	Michelle Yeoh		Ke Huy Quan	Stephanie Hsu	Everything Everywhere All at Once
2024		Cillian Murphy	Emily Blunt	Robert Downey Jr.	Oppenheimer
2025	Mikey Madison			Yura Borisov	Anora

Based on the statistical review of acting honors within Best Picture winners, the following distribution of awards and nominations can be observed:

Table 3. Distribution of Acting Honors in Best Picture Winners

Category	Male	Female
Lead Actor Winners	2	3
Lead Actor Nominees	0	0
Supporting Actor Winners	1	1
Supporting Actor Nominees	2	1
Total Honored Performances	5	5

Note: Percentages of individual performances honored in Best Picture winners are equally distributed between male (50%) and female (50%) actors.

For transparency and comparability, Table 2 is presented with the following scope and notation: (1) the unit of analysis is performances associated with Best Picture winners; (2) "honoured" distinguishes winners from nominees, as indicated in the legend; (3) the counting rule treats each individual performance once per ceremony; (4) the dataset is locked to the most recent completed ceremony within the study window. These clarifications standardise the calculation and reduce ambiguity about inclusion criteria.

The data shows that the award-winning ratio for male and female actors in Best Picture-winning films is evenly split at 50% each. Focusing solely on the awards from the past four years, the gender distribution of winners has reached a balance during this period. This short-run balance should be read as a contingent pattern rather than evidence of structural equality, given the long historical predominance of male honours and the limited timeframe of observation.

This shift is closely related to changes in the gender and racial composition of the voting members, as well as the introduction of new inclusion standards. These developments reflect changes in criteria towards greater inclusivity and openness, confirming the presence and increasing significance of feminism within the Oscars. The discussion includes how the Oscars have adjusted their evaluation criteria in recent years to accommodate the needs for diversity and inclusivity, such as by increasing the proportion of female directors, screenwriters, and actors, giving them a competitive edge in the selection process. Since the #OscarsSoWhite movement, the diversity of the Oscars has come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. In response to these issues, the Academy has implemented a series of reforms to its selection process, particularly in terms of membership composition and evaluation standards, aiming to reflect greater inclusivity and openness.

Since 2016, the diversity of Academy members has significantly improved, with an increasing proportion of women and ethnic minorities participating in the voting process [2]. Additionally, in 2020, the Academy launched the "Academy Aperture 2025" initiative, introducing new representation and inclusion standards to ensure that films nominated in the Best Picture category better reflect the diversity of global audiences [3].

These standards include requirements for diversity in cast, production teams, and themes to ensure broader representation. Within the present framework, such institutional shifts are referenced as contextual background that structures selection incentives and critical vocabularies, without being treated as a direct causal explanation for every observed textual feature.

These adjustments have not only enhanced the advantages of female directors, screenwriters, and actors in the selection process but have also brought greater attention to inclusivity within the awards framework. This shift underscores the presence and significance of feminism within the Oscars, reflecting the film industry's increasing emphasis on diversity and gender equality. However, while these reforms have led to noticeable short-term improvements, the full realisation of gender equality will require sustained efforts over a longer period. Nevertheless, the persistence of long-term disparities cautions against interpreting the recent pattern as definitive transformation; evaluation therefore proceeds by distinguishing surface progress from structural change in the subsequent sections.

5.2 The Oscars as a Mechanism of Cultural Discipline in the Film Industry

The Academy Awards, as one of the most influential cultural symbols in the film industry, exerts its impact not only by guiding film creation and consumption but also by shaping the overall cultural norms of the industry through its standards and rules. From the perspective of Foucault's power-knowledge theory, the Oscars represent both a symbol of power and an arbiter of knowledge. Its selection criteria and aesthetic preferences directly influence gender narratives and the construction of images within the film industry.

To keep the analytic pathway clear while avoiding excessive terminology, Table 4 condenses the relevant disciplinary mechanisms into a small set of observable cues and typical award-oriented effects.

Table 4. Compact Mapping of Disciplinary Mechanisms to Observable Cues and Effects

Disciplinary mechanism	Core observable cues in films	Typical award-oriented effect
Hierarchical Observation	Supervising figures; oversight framings; directed tasking	Self-monitoring; convergence on "safe" behaviour
Normalising Judgement	Corrective dialogue; praise/apology rituals; realignment to roles	Compliance rewarded; conciliatory/care scripts preferred
Examination	Auditions/tests/procedures; paperwork/credentials foregrounded	Worth quantified; closure via certification/endorsement

The Oscars establish an implicit mechanism of cultural discipline through their authority. Foucault posits that disciplinary power is a covert structure that shapes behaviour and norms through surveillance and standardisation [5]. By instituting clear selection rules and granting symbolic accolades, the Oscars regulate the content, form, and themes of cinematic creation. In recent years, driven by the rise of feminist movements and critiques such as #OscarsSoWhite, the Academy has gradually reformed its selection process, exemplified by the introduction of the "Academy Aperture 2025" initiative, which requires Best Picture nominees to meet more inclusive and diverse standards [3]. On the surface, this adjustment has elevated certain types of female representations, making them emblematic of the "progressiveness" demanded by contemporary society.

However, this form of discipline not only defines which female images are "acceptable" but also constrains the expression of other diverse representations of women. For instance, recent award-winning films such as *Everything Everywhere All at Once* (2023) [30] and *Poor Things* (2024) [31] showcase a reversal of traditional male-centric narratives. Nevertheless, their female characters remain largely confined by conventional power structures. These characters do not fully break free from traditional gender norms but are instead shaped under the influence of disciplinary power into "symbolic progressive" figures that align with mainstream aesthetics and market demands.

From Foucault's perspective of the interdependence between power and knowledge, the Oscars serve as both a rule-maker and an enforcer of power. Through its selection criteria, it defines what constitutes an "outstanding film" and transforms these standards into industry norms. These norms not only guide creators' production directions but also shape audience expectations. In gender narratives, the Oscars' promotion of certain female representations—such as independent, strong, or unconventional women—simultaneously implies which representations are unacceptable, thereby limiting the possibility of diverse female expressions

[24]. This power mechanism reflects Foucault's description of the disciplinary logic of "knowledge production," wherein knowledge is not merely a passive record but an active practice of power [4].

Despite the Oscars' recent attempts to enhance the presence of feminist narratives through diversity standards, such progress remains limited. For example, *She Said* (2022) [32], which focuses on issues of gender equality and anti-sexual harassment, demonstrates feminist progress in its themes. However, it also reveals the limitations of the Oscars' disciplinary mechanism—its themes and narrative forms align entirely with mainstream ideological expectations, lacking more diverse or radical expressions. This constraint not only affects the diversity of film creation but also, to some extent, entrenches existing gender power structures.

As a cultural disciplinary mechanism in the film industry, the Oscars simultaneously empower certain feminist narratives and representations while restricting other possibilities through its authority and rule-making. This discipline not only reproduces gendered power relations but also invisibly reinforces male-dominated cultural structures. As Foucault notes, power is both productive and normative in its operation [6]. Therefore, the disciplinary role of the Oscars warrants further reflection to transcend existing gender norms and provide greater opportunities for the diverse development of the film industry.

For clarity in what follows, references to "internalised discipline" denote narrative and production patterns in which conformity emerges without overt coercion and closure trades recognition for compliance with normative roles. Evidence is taken to be present when at least two of the following conditions hold: (1) agency is exercised primarily through emotional labour or reconciliation; (2) career or moral vindication depends on endorsement by gatekeepers (familial, communal, or institutional); (3) narrative closure converts disruption into restoration of the prevailing order.

5.3 Analysis of the Construction of Female Images in Oscar-Winning Films Over the Past Five Years

In recent years, Oscar-winning films have frequently featured "strong female" characters [33]. While these characters appear to subvert traditional gender role stereotypes, their essence remains deeply embedded within male-dominated narrative frameworks. The construction of female images seemingly challenges traditional power structures but, in reality, reinforces existing gendered power dynamics through mechanisms of mainstream cultural discipline and mirrored identification.

In what follows, close readings are organised along four analytic dimensions—agency, emotional labour, institutional endorsement, and narrative closure— to maintain commensurability with the operational specification introduced in Section 5.2. "Internalised discipline" is identified where empowerment is converted into recognised normalcy and closure hinges on compliance with normative roles, typically through endorsement by familial, communal, or institutional gatekeepers. The discussion proceeds by pointing to observable cues rather than causal claims.

5.3.1 Discipline and the Construction of Subjectivity

Foucault's theory of power suggests that power produces subjectivity through discipline, normalising individual behaviours to align with societal order. In the film *CODA* (2021) [34], Ruby's character, she is portrayed as a protector and bridge for her family, tasked with translating between her family and the external world while assuming both economic and emotional responsibilities. This portrayal ties Ruby's independence to her devotion to her family, framing her actions as a form of "sacrificial subjectivity." For instance, when Ruby is forced to choose between her musical aspirations and her family responsibilities, the film, while highlighting her eventual choice of music as personal growth, frames this decision within a disciplined structure. This discipline renders Ruby's "independence" inseparable from the family structure, as her self-worth is defined by her ability to meet her family's needs. Ruby's character positioning ultimately reinforces societal expectations of women's responsibilities within the family. Although she assumes the functional roles traditionally associated with men in the family, this shift does not truly alter the family's power structure. Instead, through the mechanism of discipline, the core of traditional power logic is transferred from men to women without questioning the legitimacy of that logic itself. Agency is foregrounded through the protagonist's artistic aspiration yet is repeatedly routed through family mediation; major decisions are framed as negotiations between self-realisation and caretaking duties. Emotional labour accumulates in recurrent translation/bridging tasks, casting the lead as the stable conduit between private need and public legitimacy. Institutional endorsement is staged through coaching, rehearsal, and audition procedures, rendering worth legible in

examination-like settings. Narrative closure secures success via credentialisation and familial recognition, translating independence into return and reintegration.

Taken together, the arc tends to convert agency into recognised normalcy: artistic autonomy is achieved through intensified care work and formal certification. Countervailing moments—for instance, brief refusals or assertions of priority—remain circumscribed by a resolution that re-centres endorsement and compliance, indicating the presence of internalised discipline.

Foucault argues that power operates not only through direct control but also by disciplining individual behaviours and identities. In the film *Everything Everywhere All at Once*, Evelyn, while ostensibly breaking free from gender role limitations by taking on the role of a saviour, is ultimately driven by the goal of restoring familial relationships. Her personal growth is constructed upon the foundation of family responsibilities: her "salvation" addresses not only the cosmic crisis but also the internal conflicts within her family, including her marital issues with Waymond, generational tensions with her daughter Joy, and cultural expectations from her father. Evelyn's growth trajectory is shaped by a disciplinary mechanism into a model of an "emotional hero." Her "strength" is not entirely directed toward self-actualisation but rather serves the continuation of family relationships. Even as the multiverse showcases alternate versions of Evelyn (such as a movie star, chef, or kung fu master), the ultimate purpose of these identities remains tied to the preservation of core familial bonds. This disciplinary mechanism, while seemingly blurring gender divisions, effectively rebinds women's "independence" within the framework of emotional and familial responsibilities.

In the film, Evelyn is positioned as a saviour figure, with her abilities stemming from her "lack of success"—her failure to achieve any notable accomplishments across multiple universes becomes the source of her potential to save the multiverse. This narrative subverts traditional hero archetypes but simultaneously constructs Evelyn's subjectivity through a masculinised logic. Evelyn's character embodies typical "male hero" traits: bravery, decisiveness, a strong sense of agency, and a willingness to sacrifice herself for a "greater mission." However, these traits do not fully deconstruct gendered power dynamics; instead, they are realised through a reversal of female representation within the framework of the male hero archetype. For instance, in her confrontation with the antagonist—a version of her daughter Joy from another universe—Evelyn demonstrates intelligence and capability that largely imitate traditional male heroes' crisis-resolution methods rather than offering an original expression outside of this logic. Although Evelyn appears to achieve independent subjectivity, this subjectivity is constructed through her imitation of male hero archetypes. Her "success" not only fails to break away from traditional gendered logic but also further ties female identity to masculinised traits, reinforcing male-oriented values as the standard for evaluating subjectivity.

Agency is dramatised as competence across universes, yet decision-making repeatedly reconverges on familial repair as the privileged telos. Emotional labour surfaces in patterned conciliation, de-escalation, and relational maintenance, assigned to the female lead as a continuing task. Institutional endorsement appears via bureaucratic appraisal spaces and quasi-gatekeeping scenes, where progress is legible once framed by administrative recognition. Narrative closure aligns empowerment with restoration of relational order, coupling capability with reconciliation and acceptance.

In summary, the female characters in these films appear to exhibit "independence" and "strength" through the reversal of traditional male traits. However, their construction remains deeply influenced by existing power logics of discipline and mirrored representation. Their subjectivity is not genuinely independent of traditional gender power structures but is instead defined and constrained within male-dominated narrative frameworks. By attributing masculinised traits to female characters, these narratives reinforce the power logic centred on male values in mainstream culture, failing to achieve a fundamental subversion of traditional gender roles. This portrayal of "reversed but not subverted" female images reflects a superficial effort by mainstream culture to adapt to changing gender ideologies, while simultaneously revealing an implicit preservation of traditional order at the deeper levels of power structures.

5.3.2 Disciplined Female Images and the Reinforcement of Male Power Structures

Poor Things tells the story of Bella Baxter, a female character who explores self-identity, pursues freedom, and challenges existing social and gender norms. On the surface, Bella's journey subverts the passivity of traditional female roles, imbuing her with the qualities of an adventurer and thinker. However, through the lens of Foucault's theory of disciplinary power, it becomes evident that Bella's subjectivity is largely shaped by male-dominated narrative logic. Her character is a reversal of the traditional male hero archetype rather than a complete subversion of it.

Agency is staged as mobility, experimentation, and boundary-crossing, yet the trajectory often adopts recognisable adventure templates that confer legibility. Emotional labour is less domestic than affective self-fashioning, managing recognition across social milieus. Institutional endorsement appears through procedural spaces of judgement (social salons, professional gatekeeping), where worth is negotiated in quasi-examination settings. Narrative closure ultimately stabilises a new normal that, while expanded, remains authenticated by prevailing metrics of competence and acceptance.

Foucault's theory of power reveals that power shapes subjectivity through discipline. In Poor Things, Bella's body becomes central to this disciplinary mechanism. As a "new life" resurrected by the male scientist Dr. Godwin Baxter, Bella's body symbolises the control and reproduction of male power. Although Bella demonstrates a strong desire for knowledge and sexuality and actively explores freedom and selfhood, these expressions of desire occur within a male-dominated social framework. Bella's actions are often framed as "rebellion" against male rules, such as her questioning of marriage and pursuit of sexual freedom. However, this "rebellion" fundamentally operates through the mechanisms of discipline within the existing power structures. Her freedom does not fully escape the logic of male power but is instead constrained within the reversal and transgression of established rules. For example, while Bella's pursuits appear to challenge patriarchy, her goals and actions remain referenced against male power, failing to transcend this framework.

Bella's growth and self-identity are achieved through imitation of the traditional male adventurer archetype. Her explorations, decisions, and quests for the unknown strongly embody the adventurer qualities of male hero narratives. For instance, Bella's journey and behavioural patterns are deeply masculinised: she seeks self-identity through continuous adventures and defiance of authority. However, this process relies on imitation and reversal of male hero narratives rather than a genuinely original deconstruction of gender. Her independence and freedom are realised within the mirror of male logic, making her identity a reflection of the male adventurer archetype. The relational dynamics in the film further reinforce this mirrored identity construction. Bella's interactions with male characters such as Dr. Baxter and Duncan Wedderburn demonstrate that her "freedom" is defined through opposition to and interaction with male authority. Each step of Bella's "growth" is deeply rooted in male-dominated logic, resulting in a subjectivity that is essentially a "reverse masculinisation."

In conclusion, while Bella's character appears to break free from the constraints of traditional female roles, she is ultimately disciplined and mirrored as a reversal of the male adventurer archetype. Her narrative does not achieve the feminist ideal of gender liberation but instead reinforces male power logic within mainstream culture through the implicit operations of power structures. This mode of construction not only obscures the continued existence of power hierarchies but also renders "rebellion" another manifestation of male-dominated narratives.

In the film *Minari* (2020) [35], Jacob is portrayed as the "dreamer" of the family, seeking to fulfil his personal ambitions through his farming venture, while Monica's role centres on supporting this dream. On the surface, this division of roles seems to invert traditional gender dynamics, with Jacob embodying the persistent adventurer and Monica the pragmatic realist. However, Monica's actions largely align with traditional expectations of women, as her decisions are framed by the needs of the family and Jacob's aspirations. For example, when Jacob's farm faces potential failure, Monica's presence becomes a pivotal source of support for his perseverance. This dynamic illustrates that Monica's perceived "independence" functions as a disciplined, service-oriented independence, shaped by her role as a complement to Jacob rather than arising from autonomous decision-making. Her "strength" is constructed within a framework that reflects and supports Jacob's character, thereby indirectly reinforcing traditional male-centred values.

In the cultural context of an immigrant family, Monica's character also reflects an implicit adherence to traditional Eastern family values. Her sacrifices and sense of responsibility align with the elevated expectations of the maternal role in East Asian culture, which often operates in tandem with male-dominated family structures. This cultural backdrop amplifies the disciplinary and mirrored aspects of Monica's role. While the film depicts some gender tensions through conflicts between Monica and Jacob, Monica's eventual compromises reinforce her function as the familial linchpin, further solidifying her role within the family unit.

An analysis of Monica's character demonstrates that her role, though ostensibly strong and independent, is deeply influenced by familial discipline and the mirroring of male-centric narratives. Her subjectivity remains framed within traditional gender expectations, fulfilled as part of Jacob's narrative of ambition. This construction obscures the persistent influence of deeper power structures, positioning Monica's strength as superficial and ultimately limiting the potential for genuine gender liberation.

Agency is distributed within a household economy where practical problem-solving by female characters stabilises the family project. Emotional labour accrues in care, mediation, and risk absorption, particularly

during crises. Institutional endorsement is indirect, mediated by community norms, work routines, and familial authority, which together delineate acceptable conduct. Narrative closure privileges duty-centred harmony as success, re-inscribing role expectations even as hardship is acknowledged.

Here, self-regulation is visible where normative expectations are voiced and enacted by the characters themselves, with endorsement arriving as tacit communal/familial approval. Although the film registers strain and partial contestation, closure restores the prevailing order, indicating that internalised discipline remains operative.

5.4 Reflection from a Feminist Theoretical Perspective: The Construction of Female Images in the Oscars and Their Conflict with Feminism

In recent years, the Academy Awards, as a key barometer of global film and television culture, have frequently showcased "strong female" characters in award-winning works [36]. These characters, while appearing to subvert traditional gender roles, fail to achieve a genuine deconstruction of gendered power dynamics when examined through the lenses of feminist epistemology and standpoint theory. Instead, through mechanisms of discipline, they reinforce existing male-dominated power structures. This phenomenon highlights the dissonance between the Academy's portrayal of female characters and the core values of feminism.

A portrayal is read as surface progress when the resolution reinscribes agency as compliance with the existing order: (1) empowerment culminates in reintegration rather than substantive reconfiguration; (2) the burden of emotional labour accrues to the female lead as the implicit price of vindication; (3) the certification of worth remains contingent on endorsements by institutional, familial, or communal gatekeepers; and (4) the alternative trajectories introduced by the plot are neutralised at the ending and folded back into prevailing norms. Where these tendencies are absent or meaningfully reversed, the movement is closer to structural transformation.

Feminist epistemology emphasises the diversity of subjective knowledge and the importance of marginalised perspectives, calling for the dismantling of centralised power logics and recognition of women's complexity and individuality as independent subjects. However, the "strong female" characters celebrated by the Academy often reflect a disciplined subjectivity, with their actions and behaviours serving mainstream narrative logics. For example, Evelyn in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* is framed as the "saviour" of the multiverse, but her growth remains tethered to the repair and continuation of familial relationships. Such constructions oversimplify the complexity of women as independent subjects, reducing them to functional roles that cater to the demands of mainstream culture.

True feminist progress should aim to dismantle existing power structures and reconstruct gender roles rather than define female subjectivity through the reversal of traditional male roles. Feminist epistemology argues that women's knowledge and actions should be grounded in their own experiences and unique perspectives, rather than being defined within male-dominated logics. This theoretical framework calls for film and television to draw inspiration from broader social experiences and cultural contexts to create characters that transcend gender stereotypes.

Foucault's theory of discipline provides a valuable lens for understanding how power reproduces social structures through disciplinary mechanisms. The Academy's portrayal of "strong female" characters, while ostensibly symbolising progress toward gender equality, effectively incorporates female roles into existing power frameworks through discipline. Characters like Ruby (*CODA*) and Monica (*Minari*) exemplify this phenomenon. These characters are imbued with the responsibilities and traits traditionally associated with male roles, but this allocation does not disrupt familial or societal power structures. Instead, their emotional labour and service-oriented subjectivity further reinforce established gender divisions.

The insidious nature of disciplinary mechanisms lies in their ability to obscure the continuation of traditional power through the creation of "acceptable" progressive images. Within the context of the Oscars, the "reversal" of female roles functions as a reinforcement of mainstream cultural power logics. This discipline not only fails to challenge male-centred cultural narratives but also ensures the covert stability of power structures through a veneer of progressiveness. The construction of female characters becomes particularly opaque due to their "seemingly progressive" surface, making the persistence of power structures harder to discern.

Feminist standpoint theory, by contrast, advocates for challenging dominant power narratives through marginalised perspectives. In opposition to disciplinary logic, standpoint theory calls for the inclusion of suppressed diversity and marginality into the centre, redefining the operation of cultural power. Within this framework, the representation of female characters in the Oscars should transcend the imitation and reversal of male traits, focusing instead on the authentic manifestation of female subjectivity within diverse social experiences. Factors such as women's familial roles, cultural backgrounds, racial identities, and social class

should form the core of narratives, rather than being disciplined into serving male-centric or mainstream cultural functions.

From the perspective of standpoint theory, the direction of feminist progress can be re-evaluated. Genuine progress involves creating independent female characters that are no longer reflections or mirrors of male roles but are instead grounded in female subjectivity and unique experiences. Such narratives would break away from existing power logics and introduce new possibilities for gender roles in visual culture.

These findings suggest that award-legible "progress" often remains commensurable with conciliatory affect, credential-centred vindication, and restorative closure. While this alignment does not negate moments of transgression registered within the texts, its persistence indicates the operation of internalised discipline in contemporary recognition regimes. Given the small-N, interpretive scope of the present analysis, claims are restricted to analytic generalisation. Future work could expand the corpus, integrate longitudinal comparisons, and refine the criteria with additional cases to test the stability of the patterns identified.

6. Conclusion

This study reveals that despite surface-level progress in depicting "strong female" characters, Oscar-winning films often reproduce traditional power structures through subtle disciplinary mechanisms. Female subjectivity is frequently constructed as a reversal of male archetypes rather than a break from patriarchal frameworks. This reinforces mainstream cultural power while masking its persistence under the guise of progress. True feminist representation in cinema requires a departure from imitative portrayals of male roles and a focus on authentic, diverse female experiences. By integrating feminist theories, this study underscores the need for cultural institutions like the Oscars to adopt more inclusive frameworks that challenge existing gender power dynamics and foster genuine progress in gender representation. Read through the four analytic dimensions identified in this study—agency, emotional labour, institutional endorsement, and narrative closure—the findings indicate that empowerment is often converted into recognised normalcy, typically via endorsement by gatekeepers and restorative endings. On this basis, the diagnostic of "internalised discipline" helps differentiate surface progress from structural transformation in award-legible portrayals, while the small-N, interpretive design limits claims to analytic generalisation.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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