

# THE MALE GAZE THEORY

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LAURA MULVEY'S M G THEORY

**Mulvey** is predominantly known for her theory regarding sexual objectification on women in the media, more commonly known as “**The Male Gaze**” theory.

Being one of the most notable film theorists in the world, her ideas are clear proof of misogyny in film opened up the eyes of many, and in 1975, something that people simply accepted was finally questioned.

Although **Mulvey**’s theory has helped identify issues with gender in film, why do we still have the same issues decades later? Why do we still see the same roles for women in film and television regurgitated over and over again?

**Mulvey** states that “**the gender power asymmetry is a controlling force in cinema and constructed for the pleasure of the male viewer**, which is deeply rooted in patriarchal ideologies and discourses.” This means that the male viewer is the target audience, therefore their needs are met first and that this problem stems from an old fashioned, male-driven society. Her theory on how women are portrayed in film and the media is just as prevalent today as it was in 1975 when her text was first published.





# WHERE DID THE IDEA OF A 'MALE GAZE' COME FROM?

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- The “male gaze” invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and **suggests a sexualised** way of looking that **empowers men and objectifies women**.
- In the male gaze, woman **is visually positioned as an “object” of heterosexual male desire**. Her feelings, thoughts and her own sexual drives are less important than her being “framed” by male desire.
- A key idea of **feminist film theory**, the concept of the male gaze was introduced by scholar and filmmaker **Laura Mulvey** in her now famous 1975 essay, **Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema**.
- Although sometimes described as the “male gaze”, Mulvey’s concept is more accurately described as a heterosexual, masculine gaze.
- This has come about since we are more open/aware of wider demographics of sexual attraction becoming mainstream in society



**The Male Gaze suggests that the female viewer must experience the narrative secondarily, by identification with the male.**

The “gaze” is a term that **describes how viewers engage with visual media**. Originating in film theory and criticism in the **1970s**, the gaze refers to **how we look at** visual representations. These include advertisements, television programs and cinema.

When film critics talk about the gaze, they are often referring to the “male gaze”. **But what does that really mean?**

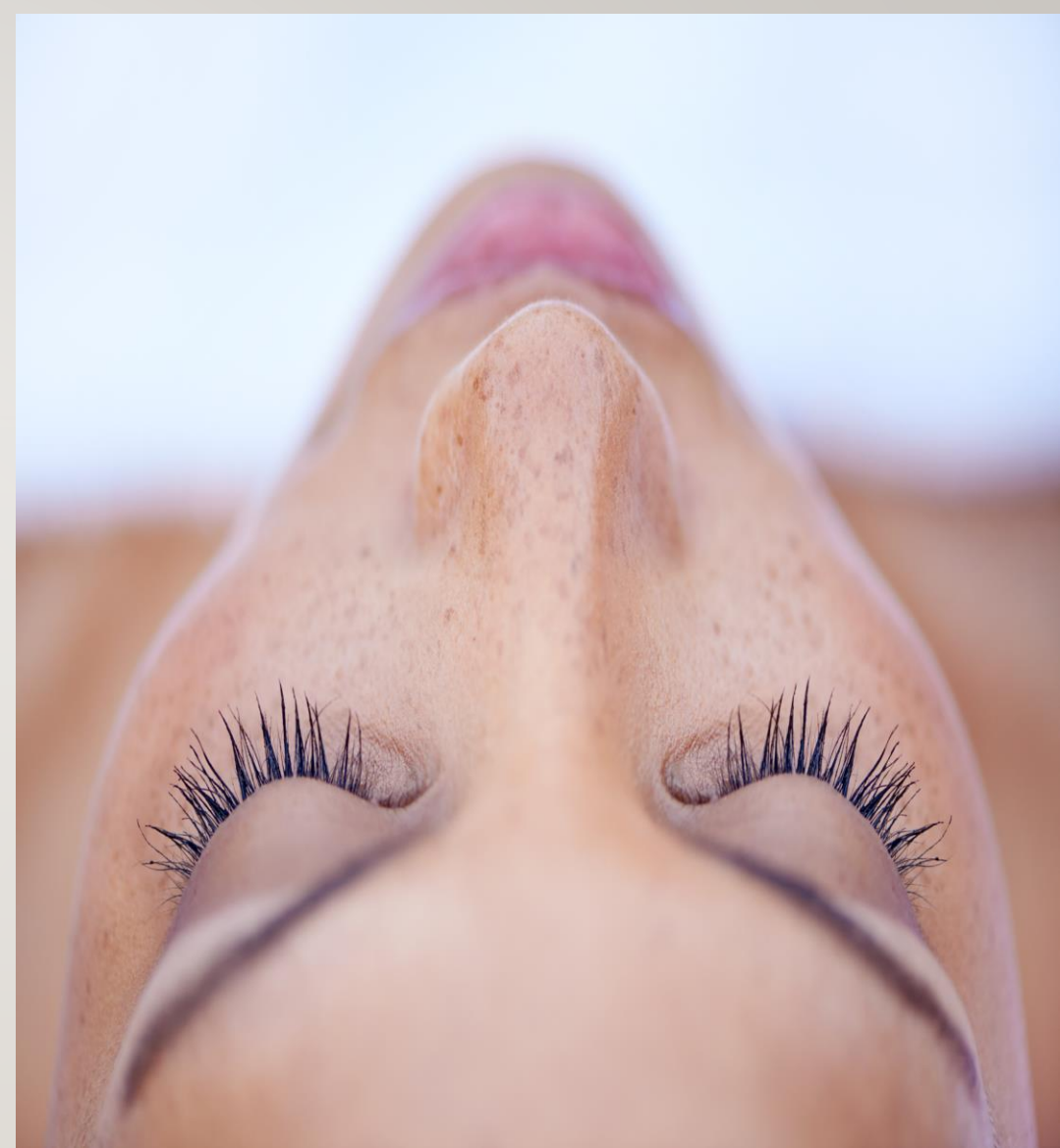
**Watch this excellent source and please make a note of the date – thirty years or so before Mulvey helped us realise what is happening...**

**The postman always rings twice. 1946 - YouTube**

(**The Postman Always Rings Twice** 1946) offers a famous example of the male gaze. In the scene, the audience is introduced to Cora Smith, the film's lead female character.

Using close-ups, the camera forces the viewer to stare at Cora's body. It creates a mode of looking that is sexual, voyeuristically unhealthy, and associated with the male protagonist's point-of-view.

The male gaze takes many forms, but can be identified by situations where female characters are controlled by, and mostly exist in terms of what they represent to, the hero. As Budd Boetticher, who directed classic Westerns during the 1950s, put it: "*What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance.*"



This can be seen in the different ways the camera repeatedly positions us to look at women's bodies.

Think of **Rear Window (1954)**, for a literal framing of women's bodies, [Rear Window - Turning Viewer into Voyeur - YouTube](#) or

**She's All That (1999)**, [She's All That | 'New Laney Boggs' \(HD\) - Freddie Prinze, Jr., Rachael Leigh Cook | MIRAMAX - YouTube](#) which revolves around a make-over.

For a modern example, the **Transformers film series (2006-2014)** presents women as sexual objects to be desired.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yI2Eh8swrEs>

[Are women still objectified? | Laura Mulvey Male Gaze theory explained! - YouTube](#)

Whilst watching this video on Mulvey's Male Gaze Theory – please make notes regarding any changes or new ideas that are emerging **within society that suggest women are or are not being objectified** -







Lara Croft: Tomb Raider  
(2001) – source: Paramount  
Pictures

**Typical examples of the male gaze include:** medium close-up shots of women from over a man's shoulder, shots that pan and fixate on a woman's body, and scenes that frequently occur which show a man actively observing a passive woman.

From the **feminist perspective**, this theory can be viewed in **three ways**: **How men look at women, how women look at themselves and finally, how women look at other women.**

DESCRIBE HOW THE **KNOWLEDGE AND APPLICATION OF MULVEY'S MALE GAZE THEORY** IS HELPFUL TOWARDS CHANGING STEREOTYPES AND HELPING SOCIETY PROGRESS TOWARDS MORE EQUALITY.

**Consider** how female representations on screen can be problematic for

1. Society as a whole
2. Women generally
3. Men who live alongside the Male Gaze

**4. Identify two strengths** in Mulvey's arguments that you can use in this **RAIL Paragraphs**

5. REPRESENTATION
6. AUDIENCE
7. INSTITUTION
8. LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

*“What counts is what the **heroine provokes**, or rather **what she represents**. She is the one, or **rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero**, or else the concern he feels for her, **who makes him act the way he does**. In herself the woman **has not the slightest importance.**”*

Budd Boetticher, Director of Classic Westerns during the 1950s

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What does the quotation suggest about how Women are viewed by Society or by Industries and Audiences?



**‘Representations of gender in video gaming are strongly influenced by social and cultural contexts.’**

**How far do you agree with this statement?**

**Answer with reference to ‘Lara Croft Go’**

**(20 Marks)**

**You must:**

**Make reference to the MALE GAZE and how society expects women to look and behave**

**Use STEREOTYPES in your answer**

**Challenge:**

**Make reference to UNDER-REPRESENTATION and MISREPRESENTATION in your answer.**