

In memory of Carrie Fisher

[Words: 42.996]

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Preface

The original idea for my thesis was to look at the depiction of sex and drugs in popular American TV series. The pitch had already been submitted and I had discussed the subject with my advisor, Stig Kulset. This was in the fall of 2015. On December 16th 2015, *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* (Abrams) premiered, and as soon as I got home that same night, I wrote a very long email to Stig: I *had to* change the topic, because I had just seen *Star Wars*, and it had a strong female protagonist! *Star Wars* and feminism are, after all, two of my favorite things. Needless to say, I was on cloud nine, and as soon as I woke up the next day, I went back to the theatre and saw it again.

When I watched the entire *Star Wars* saga for the first time, I was a teenager who didn't know much about feminism. As a kid, I remember always thinking of it as a boys' thing, because all the characters appeared to be men, and there was a lot of action and fighting. I didn't react to Leia being as good as the only woman in the original trilogy, because I was so used to watching movies about men where the woman functioned as the icing on the cake for him. I never knew what that feeling of discomfort was when the camera zoomed in on naked girls in movies like *American Pie* (Weitz & Weitz, 1999), followed by pictures of men staring at them. I used to think that I just wasn't comfortable enough with the naked body to look at it on the big screen. Did I consider myself a feminist? No, because I was definitely not an angry, man-hating, non-shaving lady with nothing better to do than complain.

When I started university, however, things changed. Reading feminist theory and attending lectures on the subject of women on film, made me change my view completely. Suddenly I understood that feeling of discomfort I had experienced so many times. I started to notice things I was previously blind to. When I watched *Star Wars* again, I realized that so many things were wrong, but to me, one thing was always very important, and that was to not overlook the abilities of the few women present. Film and society are intertwined, and one cannot change without the other. Therefore, equality on film is of great importance.

I would like to thank Olav, whose support and encouragement knows no limits; Maya, who's never seen a *Star Wars* film, but told me every day that I was gonna rock this; my parents, who

have no idea what it is I'm really doing, but back me up all the same, and; my brother, for sending me ridiculous *Star Wars* memes.

I owe a huge thanks to my advisor, Stig Kulset, whose lectures taught me about feminism in film theory, and whose advice has been not only crucial, but also encouraging and motivational, even if he's not the biggest *Star Wars* fan. Similarly, Anne Gjelsvik has through her books and lectures, partaken in sparking my interest for film and questions of gender representation, among other topics. I wonder what would be the subject of this thesis had I not attended their classes.

Lise Lotte Monsen

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Introduction

It seems that everyone everywhere knows something about *Star Wars*. I think it's safe to say that in the Western part of the world, you won't find anyone who hasn't heard about it. People who haven't even seen any of the movies will know who Darth Vader is, seen Stormtrooper costumes, or heard lines like: "These are not the droids you're looking for," and "Luke, I am your father," which is actually not even the correct citation ("No, I am your father"). *Star Wars* references are heavily used on TV and in films, as well as on social media. A friend of mine told me that after she first watched *Star Wars*, it was like a whole new world opened to her. She said that she finally was in on all the jokes and that she felt like she had been missing out for all these years. You're not interested in *Star Wars*? Too bad, because you can't escape it—not entirely. The *Star Wars* saga has reached a popularity so immense that it is hard to grasp. Since its release in 1977, it's been passed down to the next generation, maintaining this popularity with new movies, TV series, and merchandise.

Film and media have become so incorporated into our daily lives that we seldom stop to think about the potential impact it may have on our attitudes and behaviors towards certain groups in the society in which we live. When a film is set in a fantasy world like that of *Star Wars*, one might assume that it has nothing to do with our own, real world. The films clearly state that what plays out, happened a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away, but that does not mean it cannot tell us something about the ideological structures of the real world.

If you're reading this, you have probably seen *Star Wars*, but to be safe and avoid the potential of confusion, let me start off with an overview of the films in chronological order by year of release:

Title	Year	Director	Referred to in text as...
<i>Star Wars(: Episode IV – A New Hope)*</i>	1977	George Lucas	<i>Episode IV</i> or <i>A New Hope</i>
<i>Star Wars: Episode V – The Empire Strikes Back</i>	1980	Irvin Kershner	<i>Episode V</i> or <i>Empire Strikes Back</i>
<i>Star Wars: Episode VI – Return of the Jedi</i>	1983	Richard Marquand	<i>Episode VI</i> or <i>Return of the Jedi</i>
<i>Star Wars: Episode I – The Phantom Menace</i>	1999	George Lucas	<i>Episode I</i> or <i>Phantom Menace</i>

<i>Star Wars: Episode II – Attack of the Clones</i>	2002	George Lucas	<i>Episode II or Attack of the Clones</i>
<i>Star Wars: Episode III – Revenge of the Sith</i>	2005	George Lucas	<i>Episode III or Revenge of the Sith</i>
<i>Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens</i>	2015	J.J. Abrams	<i>Episode VII or The Force Awakens</i>
<i>Rogue One</i>	2016	Gareth Edwards	<i>Rogue One</i>

*Known as *Episode IV – A New Hope* today, the first film was originally just named *Star Wars*

Star Wars: Episode VIII – The Last Jedi is set for release in December 2017, directed by Rian Johnson. The plot is still unknown.

The Dominant Ideology

George Lucas is along with acclaimed directors such as Steven Spielberg, Francis Ford Coppola, and Martin Scorsese, known as one of the so-called Film School Brats. By taking their knowledge of classical Hollywood and spicing these genres up with sex and violence, they created a new type of movie: the nostalgic Hollywood blockbuster. In most of these, straight white men played the heroes, while women remained helpers or villains (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009:40-41). Interestingly, George Lucas hated Hollywood. With the movies he made prior to *Star Wars*, *THX 1138* (1971) and *American Graffiti* (1973), he was considered an independent filmmaker. Lucas soon found that founding his space movie wasn't going to be easy. He was rejected by Universal, United Artists, and—ironic as it might be today—Disney. Fox, on the other hand, wanted to get their hands on George and his big hit *American Graffiti*, and gave him \$8 million. He also got to keep the merchandising and sequel rights (Beggs, 2015). In hindsight, you can safely say that Fox made a pretty big mistake regarding that part of the deal. The point is, however, that whether Lucas likes it or not, he became a part of Hollywood. This might be truer now than ever, being incorporated in Disney. Hollywood film can be identified by its form and style, but there are some underlying structures—historical, industrial, and economic—that affect how these films represent America. The classical Hollywood film has its own way of representing gender, race, class, and sexuality (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009:21).

America was founded on the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism, and these white, heterosexual men still dominate the different aspects of power. Ideological beliefs are seldom questioned by its holders – they're rather naturalized. An ideology functions optimally when the people in the given society recognize these ideas as objective truths, not socially

constructed opinions, which is what they really are. This is very much the truth, also in the case of film. It doesn't matter which social group you identify with; images and ideas of straight white male superiority is thrust upon us. These ideas can both cause reinforcement for straight white men, as well as different forms of self-hatred for those who do not belong to this group. For instance, women might get the notion that they could never be successful politicians or police officers, because most these shown on film are—you guessed it: men. The group that holds the main part of the control has greater means to produce and disperse their attitudes in their society, thus *their* standards become the norm (ibid.:8-13).

There is no denying that the movies in the *Star Wars* franchise are overcrowded with men. To quote writer Megan Kearns: "It's men, men, men as far as the eye can see. Hell, even the robots are dudes!" (Kearns, 2012). Up until *Episode VII*, that is up until 2015, it was quite frustrating to think about the obvious lack of women. But to say there weren't any women, memorable women at that, in the *Star Wars* films, would be a lie. Although few, they were present. *Star Wars* is fun. It's speedy action in a fantasy world. I would like to argue that this means it's even more important to recognize questions of gender. We are willingly feeding on what we feel is innocent entertainment, but like all media, it's secretly stuffed with the ideas of the dominant ideology. One of the first arguments used to resist the focus on American cinema as conveyer of ideological messages, was that Hollywood film was nothing but 'entertainment' (Benshoff & Griffin:13).

Aim and Fire: Intergalactic Equality

The aim of my thesis, is to look at how women are represented in one of the world's biggest film franchises, and if there has been a development on this area since 1977. *Star Wars* is a pop culture phenomenon unlike any other, loved by men, women, boys, and girls all over the planet. The galaxy far, far away is huge, but most of its inhabitants seem to be male. Are the few women present represented in a way that does the woman of the real world justice?

First, I will try to understand the appeal of *Star Wars*: how and why did it get so astronomically big? Next, I go through scenes of importance in shaping the female characters, and using their appearances in these scenes as a means of character analysis. Further, I look at what they are wearing, their social rank, and their relationships with other characters, including the spectator in terms of identification. The focus will be on the four women that have had major roles in the *Star Wars* films, but I will look at the women—even those in the background—as a whole,

chronologically, attempting to show how the saga has developed throughout the years in terms of representing females. The goal is to shine a light on the ambiguous status of women on film, using *Star Wars* as an example because of its prominent status in popular culture. Some of the motivation behind this research has been my own close relationship with the saga, and the somewhat ambivalent reaction I had to the films released in 2015 and 2016. With the emergence of two female protagonists over the course of one year, *Star Wars* has made an endeavor to change its absence of women. Thus, I shall also look at whether or not this was accomplished, and whether or not they were the first active and able females of the saga. Is there equality in outer space?

There's Something About *Star Wars*

The purpose of this project is not to map out why and how *Star Wars* became—and remains to be—popular in our world. However, these questions of placing the franchise in popular culture are important to have a quick look at, because the answers and explanations to them is the very reason the representation of women needs to be explored further. This is not by any means arguments to explain why *Star Wars* is good, but to try and understand the appeal of the franchise and why it became so big. What exactly is it about *Star Wars* that made people all over the world go absolutely crazy for it?

First, it is the universe of fiction: the galaxy far, far away. The spectator is invited to enter a space of unknown size, filled with planets never heard of. What will it look like once the spaceship lands—will it be a tropical, green jungle, a desert of red sand, or an icy landscape with snowy mountains? This galaxy offers all of the above and more. Every planet serves you a different kind of atmosphere. From nature to architecture, there is so much to be explored, and *Star Wars* gives you a taste of this diversity. Even more fascinating are those who inhabit these places. There are countless species of never-before-seen creatures, and the ones in the background are just as fascinating as the ones you get to see up close. The loyal, smart, Bigfoot-like Wookiees from the jungle planet Kashyyyk are taller than most, but beware of the vicious Tusken Raiders, commonly known as Sand People. Dressed in rags, faces covered, they attack people on desert planet Tatooine, home world of Luke and Anakin Skywalker. Both Wookiees and Sand People have—like many other species in this galaxy—their own languages. The movies are in English, which seems to be the humans' common tongue, but it's also in Huttese, Bocce, Binary (R2D2's beeps and bleeps), and Ewokese, just to mention a few. While one trashcan-resembling Droid (or robot, if you will) has come to be a very loved character from

the franchise, it is mainly the humans and their stories we follow. They look like us and speak like us, even though they are in outer space worrying about very different things—like an evil Emperor with dark powers—they are humans nonetheless.

Star Wars was the innovator of what is commonly known as the ‘used universe’ in filmmaking, making the costumes and locations look used, dirty, real and lived-in (Taylor, 2014:xv). What they wear doesn’t just teach us about the fashion in the given part of the galaxy, it adds another level of differentness to this whole new place we are visiting. In this sense, it helps us build our picture of this world and get a feeling of what it’s like outside the frame we’re presented with. Some styles may be inspired by historic wear from various parts of our own planet, like Queen Amidala’s traditional Asian inspired garments, but the combinations are not like anything you’ve seen before.

Some of the humans presented to us in *Star Wars* have a set of extraordinary powers. These people are known as the Jedi: keepers of peace and justice. A Jedi fights for what’s good and what’s right. They can play people’s minds with their so-called Jedi mind tricks, and they can jump great distances and move things without touching them. Perhaps the coolest thing about them, are their weapons and their ability to handle these. Behold: the lightsaber. Is there anyone out there who has seen *Star Wars* who *doesn’t* want a lightsaber?

Perhaps the most thrilling thing about the whole of *Star Wars*, and something that adds to the concept of the Jedi, is the Force. What the Force is, exactly, remains a mystery. The Force is some sort of power or energy that is all around us, even in our world. It can be whatever you want it to be: power derived from nature, religion, mindfulness, control of the self – it is invisible yet mighty. As Chris Taylor puts it:

”The Force is so basic a concept as to be universally appealing: a religion for the secular age that is so well suited to our times precisely because it is so bereft of detail. Everyone gets to add their own layers of meaning.” (ibid.:71)

The level of mystery that the Force adds to *Star Wars* gives the spectator the chance to add something of their own, not just to their daily life, but to the movies and the franchise as a whole. There is no background story given to us, but that makes it even better. Many of the planets and creatures in the movies weren’t named by George Lucas himself, or any of the

writers or people working on the movies, but by fans who have come up with their own backstories and names for every single little thing, on-screen and off-screen. Sites like Wookieepedia (starwars.wikia.com) function as an online Bible for anyone interested in knowing more than what is depicted in the movies.

Adding the Sith as an antithesis to the Jedi made *Star Wars* a classic story of good vs. evil. At the core of it, it is simply a *space fantasy* (Taylor, 2014:1). Elements from other genres such as comedy, action, romance, and drama, add to the appeal. In addition, it is timeless: it's not real so we don't have to try and place it in our own world. Let us not forget the epic, unique, and easily recognizable soundtrack, complementing the events and characters, making every scene feel majestic.

It's made up, but that doesn't necessarily make it completely unrealistic. The spectator is drawn in by the fantasy aspect: she knows it's not real, and because of this, anything can happen. What you are presented with when you enter this world, are human—or at least human-like—characters. They remind us of ourselves whether we share their personality traits or not, because we can recognize their human emotions. It's an enormous fantasy world that has something for everyone, and if you can't find it? Make it up in your head! It's the combination of all these things that makes *Star Wars* so special. It has meant a great deal to so many people. This is precisely why the role of the women is so important, because it seems that *Star Wars* has everything—everything except for a realistic number of women.

Approach and Method

So far, I've explained what I'm doing and why I'm doing it. The question that remains, then, is *how*. Being aware of the underlying ideological structures we're exposed to in our daily use of film and other media, is of great importance, because it reflects attitudes in society. We have become so used to seeing films mainly about white people; about heterosexuals; about men, that we don't notice the lack of diversity. It's not about analyzing everything and forgetting to enjoy what you're watching, but about opening one's eyes. Some say ignorance is bliss, but if we remain blind to the issues at hand, it becomes extremely hard to take action and change things. Choosing these films as my subject is somewhat tactical. I don't want this to be just for those who study or work with film and media theory. *Star Wars* has the potential to attract more readers, and thereby spread awareness of the lack of women on film, and in turn the feminist message, which is often misunderstood as one of a negative spirit.

I have thought this as something I would have loved to read during my first year in university. Thus, I have chosen not to use the heaviest of theory. Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin's *America On Film: Representing Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality at the Movies* (2009) is seen as a introductory book to this aspect of film studies, which is exactly why I've chosen to use it. While much of it may seem very basic to those who have a long background on this field, it is easy to grasp for most, and says a lot with little. For feminist theory, I have used Tania Modleski and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as Laura Mulvey, which it seems cannot be avoided. Modleski's approach is, as I will get more into, close to my own: recognizing that there are some problems, but not forgetting to salute the positive aspects. In relation to this, I've used some of Rikke Schubart's theory about the female hero, as a means to explain the 'in-between', somewhat ambivalent, standpoint of mine. De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) looks at the oppression of women and her status as Other to the man. She used the terms *immanence* and *transcendence* to explain the different roles of men and women. Transcendence is freedom and self-realization. Every human being is both immanent and transcendent, but one can be trapped in immanence—stagnation within a situation—and thus be unable to achieve transcendence (Scholz, 2008). I will use these terms when regarding the development of the women. I have not focused on one theory or theorist in particular, as I wanted a bigger picture. Names like Anneke Smelik and Murray Smith will, for instance, pop up here and there.

For a historical overview and the story of *Star Wars*, Chris Taylor's book *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe* (2014) serves as a reliant source. It also offers the views of other fans, which has been important to me in this work. This is why I've also used a lot of articles and commentaries found online. Not necessarily written by academics, these articles show how others read the women of *Star Wars*. Sometimes they open up my eyes to new aspects, and sometimes they support popular views that I argue against. I have actively avoided the aspects of sound and lighting in regards to the women. There are two reasons for this. First, and once again, I want this to be something that anyone can read. Getting in too deep on these matters might work against my goal of spreading awareness of the general representation of women on film. Of course, lighting and sound may have an effect on the representation of characters, but I would like to keep the focus elsewhere, because, second: I do not find *Star Wars* to be actively using lighting and sound to direct some kind of male gaze. The goal of these films was always to present the viewer with an epic adventure story, and frankly, I do not think they took the time to think about these matters, something the lack of women indicates. The soundtrack—the

music—however, is a big part of the saga’s epicness, and so I will take a quick look at the themes of the characters in question.

It has been very important to me that this text did not become a collection of other people’s theories and arguments. I wanted to create something new. Some parts may come off as light on established theories, and this is the reason why. The most valuable thing I learned while studying, was being independent. It sparked my creative sides, and I understood that writing could be an incredibly powerful tool for spreading a message. This is my feminist reading of *Star Wars*.

Reading the Women

When working with feminist film theory, it is almost impossible to avoid mentioning the milestone essay of Laura Mulvey. Looking at two of Alfred Hitchcock's works, she proposes that women on film traditionally have one function. This function works in two ways: as an erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as an erotic object for the spectators within the auditorium, the tension between the looks from either side of the screen shifting (Mulvey, 1975:203). While I acknowledge some of the points made in the essay, I do not find the approach to be satisfying. For instance, she writes that "the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form," which is a fact (ibid.:198). The problem arises when as a feminist critic, she forgets to look for the strength in the women present. When a film is overcrowded by men and/or reduces the woman to the love interest of the straight white male protagonist, it is easy to forget that the woman could still have goals of her own—a personality and a life, as well as abilities. *Yes*, when a movie is mainly made *by* men, *for* men, it is problematic in itself, but it doesn't necessarily mean that the woman present is not of importance in any way. Starting from a pessimistic standpoint is exactly the sort of approach I would like to distance myself from. Tania Modleski is a film theorist whose work points more in the direction I am going. She takes one of Mulvey's examples, Hitchcock's *Rear Window* (1954). Where Mulvey sees the woman, Lisa Freemont, as a passive object of the male gaze, Modleski manages to give examples that establishes that she must not be reduced to this, as there is much more to her (Modleski, 1988:727). This is what I seek to do. Of course, one cannot see something that isn't there. We still have a very long way to go to reach equality in the film industry—both on and off screen—this does not mean, however, that women are unable and weak, which is what I wish to demonstrate, using one of the world's biggest phenomena.

In the introduction, I explained the reasons why the woman's role in *Star Wars* is so important. The representation of women on film can, because of the inherent and more or less hidden ideological structures, tell us something about our own, very much real, world. The fact that the women are so few, makes their appearance not only more important to analyze, but also more interesting: they're women in a man's world. My goal, then, is to call for an *awareness* of these women, both the characters and their accomplishments (should there be any). When

enjoying the entertainment aspect of a film, we often overlook what we are really presented with. By awareness, then, I mean acknowledging their presence—shifting the focus to them and seeing them for what they are, centering on their roles as well as what they say and do. To thoroughly examine how the women of *Star Wars* are shaped and thus represented, I want to have a close look at every scene of importance to this purpose. How do the movies construct how we as spectators see the female characters? It might seem trivial, but it is important to start by looking at the scenes in which the women take part, focusing on their behavior and actions, as well as how others treat them. Maybe you've never watched *I-VI* and focused mainly on the women. Maybe you've watched *Episode VII* and *Rogue One*, focusing only on the women because they were the main characters, and forgotten to look at how other characters talk to them and who they're surrounded by. I will be reading the characters, but the main purpose of this, is to make you—the reader—aware of exactly what is happening by going through, yes, well, exactly what is happening.

After six movies, George Lucas quite confidently stated that "there will definitely be no Episodes VII-IX. That's because there isn't any story. I mean, I never thought of anything." (Taylor, 2014:469). The six movies had shown us what happened during the rise and fall of Darth Vader. While the original trilogy focuses on his son and his adventures, the prequel trilogy shows us how he came to be the dark lord. We meet him as an adult, cloaked and masked, then get to travel back and see him as a child and later a teenager. In *Episode VI*, he dies, and the Empire is defeated. Now that the main threat and villain is gone, what would the movies be about? Of course, there were books and stories about everything that happened afterwards. Officially licensed, but not in the movies, named the Expanded Universe—a name that speaks for itself. Han and Leia had twins, Luke got married, and the entire history of the Jedi and Sith was made up. There is a whole online encyclopedia, Wookieepedia, dedicated to articles that are put together by combining the facts we learn from the movies with the ones from the Expanded Universe (starwars.wikia.com). Articles are updated and modified as fans learn or make up more. In 2013, however, the world learned about the plans of a new trilogy. The first movie was set for release in 2015. The Internet was flowing over with articles and theories. A group of fresh faces was revealed, as well as the return of the beloved 'original trio': Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, and Harrison Ford would again play the roles of Luke Skywalker, Leia Organa and Han Solo, respectively.

As *Episode VII* premiered in December 2015, all speculation that the press conferences, teasers and trailers had evoked could be laid to rest. We get to know the deserting Stormtrooper Finn and the Resistance Pilot Poe, but the main character is a woman: young scavenger Rey, living by herself on the desert planet Jakku. It's been more than thirty years since the fall of the Empire, and the Jedi are gone. A new evil dictatorial force, the First Order, is attempting to control the galaxy. Fans immediately recognized the similarities to the first movie, *Episode IV*. Rey carries many similarities to the young Luke Skywalker: no knowledge of her parents, stuck on a desert planet where nothing ever happens, hungry for adventure. She's amazed, like Luke, by stories of the Jedi and the Force, and ends up with a lightsaber in her hands before you know it. She stands up to the evil male Sith, Kylo Ren, son of Han Solo and Leia Organa. The new Jedi apprentice of our time was female. She might have been the first female main character of the film franchise, but she was neither the first nor the last to take a stand.

Leia Organa

In 1975, while working on the second draft for what would later be known as *Episode IV*, George Lucas realized something: there were way too many men in his story and barely any women at all. At the time, the feminist movement was growing strong and Lucas decided to dodge any criticism from them by making his hero, then named Luke Starkiller, an eighteen-year-old woman (Taylor, 2014:147). What we ended up with was something quite different. Two years later a strange woman appeared on the big screen. Her dark brown hair was twisted into two buns, covering each of her ears. She was clad in a long, white, dress, and she was carrying a gun. Fearlessly, she was pointing it at the peculiar soldiers in white plastic armor, taking them down with the laser beams flying from her weapon. Her name was Leia Organa, Princess of Alderaan, and she was about to go down in history.

Help me, Obi-Wan Kenobi: A New Hope

We're somewhere in an unknown galaxy. Spaceship *Tantive IV* is attacked by imperial troops. Scared, golden humanoid droid C-3PO implies that the Princess has been running from these people for a while by informing the spectator that she's gotten away before. We also understand that she must be important: it's her the evil leader wants. Darth Vader names her a member of the Rebel Alliance, and she's got information that he wants his hands on. Within the first minutes of the movie we now know as *Episode IV*, Leia established herself as a strong and independent woman who was more than willing to step up and protect herself, although she does not say much in this particular scene. Despite her bravery, she is caught. She did not go

down without a fight, though. For the next twenty minutes, there is not a sign of Leia. It is in this part where we meet the original trilogy's main hero: Luke Skywalker, a farmer's boy living in the desert of the planet Tatooine. After buying two droids, he discovers a hologram message hidden in the one that looks like a decorative trashcan. The hologram shows the Princess begging for help from someone named Obi-Wan Kenobi. Luke is quick to comment on how beautiful she is, and wonders who she is. Upon his discovery, he has dinner with his aunt and uncle, and this is the first time we see another female besides Leia. Luke's aunt, Beru, does not speak at all during the meal: Luke and his uncle, Owen, carry the conversation. When Luke leaves the room, she talks to her husband briefly. The next scene opens with Beru cooking.

Luke meets wise, old Obi-Wan, who saves him from being attacked by Sand People out in the desert. At his house, Obi-Wan tells Luke that he has special powers like his father, who was a Jedi. They look at Leia's hologram again. Returning home, Luke finds his aunt and uncle burnt to death. Luke, Obi-Wan and the two male droids, C-3PO and R2D2, travel to Mos Eisley, a city on Tatooine. It's been 45 minutes of screen time, and so far we've only seen two females—one is captured by evil forces, the other is already dead. We've met plenty of men, and we are about to meet even more. In a bar they visit, we can for the first time see a couple of women hanging out, but it's heavily overcrowded by men. They meet cheeky smuggler Han Solo, who agrees to take them on his ship, the *Millennium Falcon*, along with his hairy sidekick, Chewbacca.

Another place in the same galaxy, Leia is brought in front of the evil Lord. Darth Vader speaks of her as strong: he knows she won't give up any information. She acts fierce and speaks up to Vader and his accomplices, still not showing any sign of fear. To put her off, he blows up her home planet of Alderaan right in front of her eyes, using his new weapon of mass destruction. This, understandably, upsets her.

When the *Falcon* is taken by Darth Vader and his dark Empire, Luke realizes Leia is on the same ship, the planet-sized *Death Star*. He becomes desperate to help her, almost whiny. He hasn't even met her and knows nothing about her except that he thinks she's beautiful. Han only agrees to help save her after picking up word that she's rich. After being saved, Leia is much more central in the action, probably because she's been locked up and hasn't been able to do much up until now. She doesn't seem the least bit distressed being attacked by Stormtroopers as they run. Han and Luke both show signs of worry through their body

language. Leia grabs Han's weapon and shoots it herself. She's fearless and fierce – definitely no damsel in distress, despite that Luke seems to think she is one. Women on film are often reduced to being the love interests of the male protagonist, waiting to be rescued by him. This is partly due to the perseverance of the classical Hollywood form, which has always privileged men and male roles (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009:213). While it might be true that Leia is being saved in this scene, and again later in the films, this does not have to mean that she's weak and depending on a man. If one of the guys had been captured, wouldn't they have tried to save him too? After all, Luke needs to be saved at the end of *Episode V*, and Han in *Episode VI*. If anything, it's the motive behind this particular rescue mission that is questionable. Does Luke want to save her only because he thinks she's beautiful? Does he want to save her because he thinks she *needs* to be saved, because she's a helpless woman? Does he do it for the adventure? Maybe he just wants to save her because he's a good person. Maybe he would have done the same thing if Han was the person in the hologram message. Maybe not. Either way, Leia here shows us that being rescued can be necessary, but that once she's out, she is capable of taking care of herself.

As the trio fall into a garbage shaft, Leia has the nerve to mock their rescuing abilities. She does not know these men at all, but she speaks up, yells and tells them what to do. R2D2 saves the trio from being crushed in the shaft, and when they get out, this happens:

Han: If we can just avoid any more female advice... we ought to be able to get out of here. [Shoots at the door, trying to break it]

Leia: No, wait! They'll hear!

Han: [To Chewbacca] Come here you big coward. Chewie, come here.

Leia: [To Han] Listen, I don't know who you are or where you came from, but from now on, you do as I tell you. Okay?

Han: Look, Your Worshipfulness, let's get one thing straight. I take orders from just one person: me.

Leia: It's a wonder you're still alive. Will somebody get this big walking carpet out of my way? [Referring to Chewbacca]

Han: No reward is worth this.

Along with what we've learned about her so far, this conversation arguably sets a standard for Leia throughout the movies: she's unafraid, brave, intelligent, outspoken, and gives a street-smart vibe. Not to mention, she's self-confident as well as a revolutionary. Another example is when Leia sees the *Falcon* for the first time, while they're still trying to escape the Empire.

She's unimpressed and not afraid to show it: "You came in *that* thing? You're braver than I thought."

Even in a stressed situation, she throws in a comment of such manner. During the escape, she kisses Luke's cheek "for luck," and thus the potential for romance is established. At this point, it seems like she has forgotten herself, watching worriedly as the guys do all the shooting. Obi-Wan dies, and although Leia should be crushed after just having watched her home planet blown to pieces, she has to comfort Luke over the death of his new friend. Once they get away from the Death Star, Han and Luke talk about Leia, whom they met mere hours ago, as a romantic interest. While Luke is sincerely interested, Han pretends to be only to mess with Luke.

In a strategy meeting on the Rebel base, Leia is the only woman present among male commanders and pilots. She has found a weakness in the Death Star, but during the presentation of it, she doesn't speak a word. The Rebels prepare for attack. Luke complains to Leia about Han's plans to leave. Han, like Obi-Wan, is a person Luke has known for a very short amount of time, yet he is clearly upset. Leia shows a different level of maturity here, telling him: "He's got to follow his own path. No one can choose it for him."

None of the pilots in the attack on the *Death Star* are women. Leia watches closely with other leaders and commanders of the Alliance, but does not say much. After winning the battle, Luke is welcomed as a hero. Han has decided to stay, and him and Leia greet Luke as he jumps out of his X-wing. The three throw their arms around each other and walk around as the happiest trio in the history of the universe. The movie ends with a dialogue-less scene where Han and Luke are celebrated and rewarded with medals for their bravery, presented and put on them by Leia.

Simone de Beauvoir suggests three strategies for women's path to transcendence: 1) women must go to work, 2) women must pursue and participate in intellectual activity, and 3) women must strive to transform society into a socialist society (Scholz, 2008). After the first movie, Leia can certainly check two of these things off the list right away. She's a princess and she's been rescued by a couple of men, but she's definitely not helpless. The first movie of the *Star Wars* franchise—originally simply named *Star Wars*—helps us establish who Princess Leia is. Of course, when what came to be known as *A New Hope* or *Episode IV* was made, there was no knowing whether it would be successful, hence it wasn't granted that there would be any

sequels. Indeed, it became more popular than anyone could have predicted. When understanding the movies and its characters today, we look at the franchise as a whole, including every movie that the given character appears in. One can undoubtedly analyze the characters based on just the first movie, but that is not the aim of my work. In this sense, we can see *Episode IV* as the establishing of the character, while the sequels allow us to see a potential development or help us get to know the character even better.

”I’d just as soon kiss a Wookiee!”: *The Empire Strikes Back*

The long-awaited sequel came in 1980, three years later. Like its predecessor, it opened with the famous crawling text, which informs us what’s been going on in the galaxy since our last visit. The Rebels have found a new base on ice planet Hoth, and they are being led by Luke Skywalker, whom Darth Vader is obsessed with finding. The first person we meet in this film is Luke. He’s riding his white Tauntaun in the snowy landscape when he is attacked by a Wampa—a two-legged, furry, white predator. Next, we meet Han. He is at the base, and we first see Leia as Han looks at her. He is leaving the Rebels, and seems nervous to approach Leia. She gives him a stern look. He announces that he’s going and Leia does not seem to care. While Han’s facial expression changes and shows a range of emotions, Leia’s face is like stone. His tone is sarcastic, clearly hurt that she doesn’t seem to care about his departure. He walks off, but she soon comes stomping after him.

Leia: Han!

Han: Yes, Your Highnesses?

Leia: I thought you had decided to stay.

Han: Well, the bounty hunter we ran into in Ord Mantell changed my mind.

Leia: Han, we need you!

Han: *We* need?

Leia: Yes.

Han: Well, what about what *you* need?

Leia: I need? I don’t know what you’re talking about.

Han: You probably don’t.

Leia: And what precisely am I supposed to know?

Han: Come on! You want me to stay because of the way you feel about me.

Leia: Yes! You’re a great help to us. You’re a natural leader.

Han: No! That’s not it. [Points to his own face] Come on. Aaah, come on!

Leia: You’re imagining things.

Han: Am I? Then why are you following me? Afraid I was gonna leave without giving you a goodbye kiss?

Leia: I'd just as soon kiss a Wookiee!

Han: I can arrange that. [Walks away from her and shouts:] You could use a good kiss!

Han again finds a reason to stay: rescuing Luke like a true hero in the freezing weather. Leia waits inside the base. Her expression reads worry when told there is no sign of her two companions, but she keeps composure. After successfully rescuing Luke, Han returns. Luke is recovering. Leia enters:

Han: [Smug, cheeky tone] Well, Your Worship, looks like you managed to keep me around for a little while longer.

Leia: [No expression] I had nothing to do with it. General Rieekan thinks it's dangerous for any ships to leave the system until we've activated the energy field.

Han: That's a good story. I think you just can't bear to let a gorgeous guy like me out of your sight.

Leia: I don't know where you get your delusions, laser brain.

Chewie: [Laughs]

Han: [To Chewbacca] Laugh it up, fuzzball, but you didn't see us alone in the south passage. [Walks over to Leia, puts his arm around her] She expressed her true feelings for me.

Leia: [Clearly annoyed] My—Why you stuck up, half-witted, scruffy-looking nerf herder!

Han: [To Leia] Who's scruffy looking? [To Luke] I must have hit pretty close to the mark to get her all riled up like that, huh, kid?

Leia: [Walks over to the bed] Well, I guess you don't know everything about women yet. [Kisses Luke in front of everyone]

This dialogue demonstrates the tension between Han and Leia. Luke also holds her as a romantic interest, but it's only now that he truly becomes part of the game to win her heart.

When unidentified objects are discovered near the base, Leia is the first to be informed. This conflicts with the information from the crawling text at the beginning of the film which tells us Luke is the leader, and among other things strengthens the perception of Leia as the actual leader. During the imperial attack on Hoth, she is in command. She tells the fighter pilots exactly what to do, proving that she knows battle strategy. She's surrounded by men, but they all listen to her. Although they do the actual fighting, she's the boss.

Han wants to rescue Leia from Hoth, and she does go with him, that is, after mocking both him and his ship. Their first kiss happens during a classic Han and Leia moment, in which they half argue, half flirt:

Han: Hey, Your Worship, I'm only trying to help.

Leia: Would you please stop calling me that?

Han: Sure, Leia.

Leia: You make it so difficult sometimes.

Han: I do, I really do. You could be a little nicer, though. Come on, admit it. Sometimes you think I'm all right.

Leia: Occasionally...maybe...when you aren't acting like a scoundrel.

Han: Scoundrel? Scoundrel? I like the sound of that. [Rubs her hand]

Leia: Stop that.

Han: Stop what?

Leia: Stop that. My hands are dirty.

Han: My hands are dirty, too. What are you afraid of?

Leia: Afraid?

Han: You're trembling.

Leia: I'm not trembling.

Han: You like me because I'm a scoundrel. [Moves his face closer to hers] There aren't enough scoundrels in your life.

Leia: I happen to like nice men.

Han: I'm a nice man.

Leia: No, you're not. You're— [Han kisses Leia and she kisses him back]

At this point, it's pretty clear that Leia is more interested in Han than Luke. In fact, from the moment they first meet, there is something brewing between the two. I'm going to talk more about the dynamics of their relationship later.

Leia is never afraid to argue or state her opinion if she feels that something is not right, or that there is a better way, no matter how scary or stressed the situation is. In the belly of the monster, she argues with Han, and again when they get to Cloud City and something smells fishy. Yet another man shows interest in Leia: Lando Calrissian. He doesn't hold back on the compliments, and even kisses her hand. He is very visibly taken with her. When she gets a new dress, he exclaims: "You look absolutely beautiful. You truly belong here with us among the clouds."

After discovering Lando has lured them into a trap and Han is to be frozen into carbonite to be delivered to Jabba the Hutt whom he is in debt to, Chewie goes crazy:

Han: Hey, listen to me! Chewie! Chewie! This won't help me. Hey, save your strength [...] The princess—You have to take care of her. Do you hear me? Huh? [Kisses Leia passionately]

Leia: I love you.

Han: I know.

Leia hugs Chewie as Han is being frozen. She looks away then looks again. She's horrified as the statue-looking carbonite Han comes up from out of the ground. Vader commands Lando to bring "the Princess and the Wookiee" to his ship, but Lando decides to help them instead. When Lando goes on speaker all over Cloud City, we get to see the people that live there receiving his message. This is the first time in the movie that we see any women besides Leia, and they are only extras. It's been almost an hour and forty-five minutes, with less than twenty minutes left.

Towards the end, we get the first indication that Leia is Force-sensitive, as she hears Luke's voice in her head. Despite Lando's warnings, she risks flying back to rescue Luke. The movie ends with Luke and Leia looking out the window of a large ship.

Leia Strikes Back: *Return of the Jedi*

The ending to the original trilogy came in 1983. The opening crawl tells us that Luke has returned to Tatooine to try and rescue Han from Jabba the Hutt. There is no mention of Leia.

Jabba's Palace is the first location of the film. There are quite a few women here, all entertaining him with dancing and singing. They're all dressed in bikinis and underwear, and wear a lot of makeup. Jabba kills one of the dancers for fun by throwing her into a pit where he keeps a monster. He watches, laughing and eating. A small bounty hunter enters with the mighty Chewbacca in chains. It's Leia in disguise, as she reveals when sneaking off to de-freeze Han. Having temporarily lost his sight, he asks who it is, upon which she replies: "Someone who loves you very much." She promises to get him out of there, but Jabba stops and captures them both. Han is thrown in a cell with Chewie, and Chewie can't stop hugging him—they're best friends.

When Luke enters, now a Jedi knight, he sees Leia lying in front of Jabba, dressed in a skimpy bikini and with a chain around her neck. She is his slave. Leia watches worriedly from above when Jabba throws Luke into the same pit as his dancer was just killed in. She is delighted when he kills the beast. She does not let the chains refrain her from speaking, seemingly unafraid.

Jabba brings Leia on his ship to watch Luke, Han, and Chewie be fed to the Sarlacc, a monster. She never seems to be afraid of her captor, but is visibly disgusted by him anytime he drags her closer to him with the chain. While the men are breaking free outside, throwing Jabba's men into the monster's mouth instead, Leia chokes Jabba to death with the chains he's kept her in. Rikke Schubart talks of five female archetypes, one of which is the Rape-Avenger. The Rape-Avenger kills the man, or men, who raped her. She takes vengeance into her own hands, turning the tables on her attacker. In the rape-revenge drama of the 1970s, rape did not discipline a woman, but rather jerked her out of ordinary femininity, into the role of the lethal femme fatale (Schubart, 2007:27). Although not every trait of the Rape-Avenger can be applied to Leia, some of it does. He degraded her and deserves to be punished. She shows no remorse, sadness or shock. As soon as she sees that he's dead, she carries on with her business: a girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do. Turning Leia into his slave, is Jabba's attempt to control her; to entrap her and keep her immanent. Her refusal to do so, bears witness of her transcendence.

On the main ship of the rebel fleet, we meet another woman of important status: Mon Mothma, one of the leader figures of the Rebel Alliance. She talks in front of everyone. Leia is the only other female in the room. Leia is out of her slave bikini, dressed in beige and khaki green shirt, pants and a vest. Leia, Luke, Han, Chewie, R2 and C-3PO go to the Forest Moon of Endor. On the ship, all members of the trio (Leia, Luke, and Han) discuss what they are going to do. They all have a say, they all know something and suggest something – they're in it together, working as a team who respect each other. On Endor, Luke and Leia, wearing the same outfit, go after two imperial scouts on a speeder through the forest. Leia flies, Luke is on the back. After losing Luke, Leia is shot down. When Luke returns, both him and Han are worried about her. This can be viewed in different ways. On one hand, Leia can take care of herself. One can argue that Luke and Han don't think she's strong enough to do okay on her own. On the other, they're a team and she's by herself during an attack. She's their friend and they care about her. Whatever the view, Leia ends up being more than okay.

Leia is accepted into a tribe of little bear-like Ewoks after befriending one of them in the forest. The Ewok and Leia take down two imperial scouts by working together. The men, on the other hand, are caught in an Ewok trap while looking for her, and brought back to the village to be eaten. Leia can't convince the Ewoks to let her friends go, despite her status among them. Han and Luke are released after C-3PO, who the Ewoks think is a god, tells them to. Han and Leia kiss. The same night, Luke and Leia talk:

Leia: Luke, what's wrong?

Luke: Leia, do you remember your mother, your real mother?

Leia: Just a little bit. She died when I was very young.

Luke: What do you remember?

Leia: Just images, really. Feelings.

Luke: Tell me.

Leia: She was... very beautiful. Kind...but sad. Why are you asking me this?

Luke: I have no memory of my mother. I never knew her.

Leia: Luke, tell me, what's troubling you?

Luke: Vader is here. Now. On this moon.

Leia: How do you know?

Luke: I felt his presence. He's come for me. He can feel when I'm near. That's why I have to go. As long as I stay I'm endangering the group and our mission here. I have to face him.

Leia: Why?

Luke: He's my father.

Leia: Your father?

Luke: There's more. It won't be easy for you to hear it, but you must. If I don't make it back, you're the only hope for the Alliance.

Leia: Don't talk that way. You have a power I don't understand and could never have.

Luke: You're wrong, Leia. You have that power, too. In time, you'll learn to use it as I have. The Force is strong in my family. My father has it. I have it. And...my sister has it. [Pauses. They look at each other] Yes. It's you, Leia.

Leia: I know. Somehow...I've always known.

Luke: Then you know why I have to face him.

Leia: No! Luke, run away. Far away. If he can feel your presence then leave this place. I wish I could go with you.

Luke: No, you don't. You've always been strong.

Leia: But why must you confront him?

Luke: Because...there is good in him. I've felt it. He won't turn me over to the emperor. I can save him. I can turn him back to the good side. I have to try.
[Luke kisses Leia's cheek and walks away. Han comes to her]

Han: Hey, what's going on?

Leia: Nothing. I just want to be alone for a little while.

Han: Nothing? Come on, tell me. What's going on?

Leia: I... I can't tell you.

Han: Could you tell Luke? Is that who you could tell?

Leia: I...

Han: Ahh. [Starts to walk away, then comes back] I'm sorry.

Leia: Hold me. [They hug]

It's quite conspicuous that Leia has such a small reaction to being the daughter of the evil she has been fighting for years, and that Luke is the one who must face him. Vader never even mentions Leia. Is Luke more important because he is a Jedi, or because he is a man? Leia is Force sensitive too, but hasn't received the same training as her brother. This conversation also demonstrates vulnerability in both Han and Leia: Han is afraid that Leia loves Luke more than him, and Leia fails to be her usual fierce self.

Leia is shot by a Stormtrooper when covering for Han, who's trying to get into the Empire's shield generator on Endor. Han stops what he's doing immediately, sits down next to her and looks at her. Queue one very famous line making its second appearance, only now, the roles have been switched:

Han: I love you.

Leia: [Smiling] I know.

Being hurt doesn't stop our princess, as she shoots two Stormtroopers while on the ground. Meanwhile, Vader mentions Leia for the first time: "Obi-Wan was wise to hide her from me. Now his failure is complete. If you will not turn to the dark side, then perhaps she will."

Han and Leia watch the Death Star blowing up in the sky above Endor when Han asks the question he's been dreading:

Han: [Worried look] I'm sure Luke wasn't on that thing when it blew.

Leia: He wasn't. I can feel it.

Han: You love him. Don't you?

Leia: Yes.

Han: All right. I understand. Fine. When he comes back, I won't get in the way.

Leia: It's not like that at all. He's my brother. [Han and Leia kiss]

We do not learn a lot about Leia's background, but due to her age and the fact that she has been an important figure in the Rebel Alliance since the first film, she is transcendent. She works, she has a voice, and she is well-respected. An attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence (de Beauvoir, 1949:37). Leia, however, doesn't let this stop her. The fact that she is already transcendent when we meet her, demonstrates her independence, and falling in love is not an obstacle for transcendence. If anyone goes from immanent to transcendent in the original trilogy, it's Luke, who at the beginning is trapped in a meaningless existence, then discovers his powers and true place. A possible problem is that Luke may appear more powerful because we witness him gaining his status and strength, forgetting that Leia is strong to begin with.

Padmé Amidala

Perhaps it is because of the heat the prequel trilogy has received, but Padmé Amidala appears quite the contrast to the character of Leia Organa. In her first appearance, that is, the entirety of *Episode I*, she is very young; much younger than any of the other female characters in the film series. We do get to see young Jyn at the beginning of *Rogue One*, and a flash of young Rey in *Episode VII*, but it's minutes—seconds. Not the youngest queen ever elected, Padmé was active in politics for most of her life, and that may just have been the cause of some of her weaknesses.

The Decoy: *The Phantom Menace*

The first movie of the prequel trilogy saw the light of day in 1999. Concurrently with meeting young Jedi Obi-Wan Kenobi and his mentor, Qui-Gon Jinn, two male aliens are talking to the young Queen Amidala through a video call. We, as them, watch her through two screens in their office. She appears cold, replying to them in a manner that demonstrates she is no push-over in the negotiations at hand. The film then cuts to her council, consisting of both men and women. The two aliens now talk to a cloaked man who tells them the Queen is young and naïve, and therefore will be easy to control. Ten minutes later, she is captured. From then, it takes Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon two minutes to rescue her. Everyone on the escape transport are men, except from Amidala and her handmaidens. One of them is introduced to us by name: Padmé.

Queen Amidala has a deadpan expression on her face throughout. Half an hour into the movie, she hasn't done much, but has nonetheless been in the frame quite a lot. The two Jedi have a great deal of respect for her, but also make it clear that she is in danger and needs protection.

In a shop on planet Tatooine, Padmé meets little Anakin, who asks her if she's an angel, because angels are the most beautiful creatures in the universe. When she asks him if he is a slave, he is very offended. Apparently, questions of class aren't acceptable, but commenting on the looks of someone you've just met is.

Because of an approaching sandstorm, Anakin invites Padmé, Qui-Gon, R2, and Jar Jar Binks to seek shelter at his house. His mother, Shmi Skywalker, doesn't have much to say about the fact that her nine-year-old son has dragged a bunch of strangers into their home. Padmé and Shmi have lines directed at one another. It's not much, but it's a first for two women conversing in *Star Wars*. It is, however, mostly the men carrying the conversation around the table. Anakin is shown to have friends who are girls, which makes this the first time we see female children in the saga. Qui-Gon frees Anakin from slavery to train him as a Jedi, but not his mother. They leave her behind. Anakin tells her: "I will come back and free you, mom. I promise."

Padmé forms a bond with Anakin that resembles the one between an older sister and younger brother, functioning as a caretaker and maybe even a mother figure. Jar Jar, the ever-babbling alien, tells Anakin—a boy of nine—that he thinks Queen Amidala is 'hot'. The human-like male who is depicted as utterly stupid, annoying, and clumsy, is permitted to objectify a human female.

While we've been grazed with the presence of more women than ever before in *Star Wars* history, we're still nowhere near a 50/50 ratio concerning gender. The Jedi council is dominated by men: the few women present do not speak—that's left to the men. The majority of the Senate, too, are men.

Queen Amidala is a woman of few words, yet is very direct. Everything about her appears very stiff, including her clothes: her dresses and headpieces are so big they seem hard to move around in. Being desired captured by the bad guys, Amidala's adversaries see her as powerful and posing a threat to them. A problem that arises, is the question of the importance of the Queen's affairs in the narrative. The political aspect of *Episode I* isn't really what the movie is about, so its presence is somewhat confusing. Amidala might stand up to powerful people when opposing the Trade Federation, but it's stiff and serious, and no personality shines through. Our view of the Queen, however, changes when Padmé reveals in front of the Gungans that she is in fact Queen Amidala, and the girl in the fancy dress is her decoy and bodyguard, Sabé. Padmé stands

out as strong and intelligent during her speech, everyone listening closely to what she has to say. She has left her deadpan Amidala act behind, presenting herself humbly to the Gungans in order to try and form an alliance. Her speech and wit has the Gungan leader charmed as well as convinced. Padmé came up with a secret plan to protect herself. It's not even clear if her other handmaidens know about it. It could, of course, be argued that she was willing to let someone die or be captured in her stead, but anyone in a seat of dominion like her would have bodyguards either way. The point is that Padmé did not trust anyone but a small handful of women with her arrangement. In this sense, she did not rely on any man to come and save her.

Despite Padmé Amidala's position of power, once she is juxtaposed with other major characters in *Episode I*, she appears as nothing but a pawn. Her most important task is creating a bond with the main character, little Anakin. She is not a part of the truly important things happening in the first installment. Rather than help drive the story forward, she is a mere attribute to it. It is also hard to find examples of conversations where there is a sense of personality showing, as most conversations are either about politics or Anakin being trained as a Jedi.

As opposed to the original trilogy, some of the pilots taking part in the battle, are female. Obi-Wan and Qui-Gon try to get Padmé to safety, but becomes preoccupied when Sith apprentice and epitome of evil, Darth Maul, challenges them. At this point, Padmé starts partaking in the action, shooting at droids and not missing a single one. The portraying of Padmé is quite contradictive. In this scene, she is shown as more than able, as active and independent, while for most parts of the prequel trilogy, she is depicted as someone who needs the protection of a man. Rikke Schubart notes that while today's female hero is breaking society's gender expectations, she's also confirming them by being a fantasy of a woman outside her natural place (Schubart, 2007:6). Padmé has a few scenes in which she is allowed to break out of her normal pattern of being the one saved and/or under protection, but this can potentially create a contrast that makes her appear more helpless all the times she doesn't have a blaster at hand.

In the end, Palpatine tells Padmé that her boldness has saved her people, which in a sense is true. Yet, she is not represented as heroic on the same level as the men, neither by her peers or by the film itself. The only compliment she gets comes from a hidden enemy. Anakin is the one credited with saving the day after having killed a few evilly programmed droids. The Padmé we meet in *Episode I*, is transcendent, but pay mind to what happens in the next two episodes. Her development, it seems, is a reverse process.

Senator Amidala: *Attack of the Clones*

The prequel trilogy stuck with the pattern of the original trilogy, releasing a movie every three years. The opening crawl lets us know that Padmé is no longer queen, but a senator. She is on her way to the Galactic Senate where she wants to get through a proposal of creating an Army of the Republic to assist the Jedi.

Padmé is the first of the major characters we meet again. In the very first scene, she co-pilots a small ship with a man, Captain Tycho. The two are wearing the same outfit. Her new decoy, Cordé, is killed right before her eyes as they land on a platform, dying in Padmé's arms. The Jedi council and Palpatine suggests the Jedi protect her, as she is in danger. Obi-Wan and his apprentice, Anakin, is given the task. Anakin is grown up and very nervous to see Padmé again: "I haven't seen her in ten years, Master," he tells Obi-Wan, tense and sweaty. When they arrive, Padmé is in her living room with Jar Jar and her handmaiden, Dormé. She's taken aback when she sees him, all grown up, and he compliments her.

She doesn't waste any time with their meeting: she wants to know who's trying to kill her—she doesn't want any more security, she wants answers! After she leaves the room, Anakin expresses disappointment that Padmé didn't seem to reciprocate his feelings. To be quite fair, Anakin and Padmé didn't spend an awful lot of time together, and both were children at the time.

We meet another woman, bounty hunter Zam, as she is given the assignment to kill Senator Amidala. Padmé's apartment is guarded by Anakin and Obi-Wan while she sleeps:

Anakin: I don't like just waiting here for something to happen to her.

Obi-Wan: [Looks at a small, beeping gadget in his hand] What's going on?

Anakin: Ah, she covered the cameras. I don't think she liked me watching her.

Obi-Wan: What is she thinking?

Anakin: She programmed R2 to warn us if there is an intruder.

To Padmé, her right to privacy is more important than her security. She's not going to let a man watch her sleep on camera. She also apparently knows how to program droids.

In the original trilogy, the male characters seldom talk about Leia when she's not around. Anakin talks *a lot* about Padmé. He tells Obi-Wan that he wants to dream about her and that being around her makes him feel intoxicated, and his mentor reminds him that she is a politician, and they are not to be trusted. She is saved from Zam's murder attempt by the two Jedi in an action-filled sequence. In a nightclub, several skimpily dressed women are pictured. Obi-Wan finds Zam, but she is shot by those who hired her, dying in Obi-Wan's arms. Anakin and Padmé go into hiding on her home planet, Naboo, which she is not happy about:

Padmé: I do not like this idea of hiding.

Anakin: Don't worry. Now that the council has ordered an investigation it won't take Master Obi-Wan long to find this bounty hunter.

Padmé: I haven't worked for a year to defeat the Military Creation Act to not be there when its fate is decided.

Anakin: Sometimes we must let go of our pride and do what is requested of us.

Padmé: Anakin, you've grown up.

Anakin: Master Obi-Wan manages not to see it. [Pauses] Don't get me wrong, Obi-Wan is a great mentor. As wise as Master Yoda and... as powerful as Master Windu. I am truly thankful to be his apprentice. In some ways—a lot of ways—I'm really ahead of him. I'm ready for the trials, but he feels that I'm too unpredictable. He won't let me move on.

Padmé: That must be frustrating.

Anakin: It's worse. He's overly critical. He never listens. He—he doesn't understand. It's not fair!

Padmé: All mentors have a way of seeing more of our faults than we would like. It's the only way we grow.

Anakin: [Sighs, sitting down on the bed] I know.

Padmé: Anakin. Don't try to grow up too fast.

Anakin: But I am grown up. [Gets up, faces her directly] You said it yourself.

Padmé: Please don't look at me like that.

Anakin: Why not?

Padmé: [Serious tone] It makes me feel uncomfortable. [Walks away from him]

Anakin: [Smiling cockily to himself] Sorry, milady.

This conversation stands as an example of the very different levels of maturity these two are on. Anakin is not only blaming Obi-Wan for his own failure to move forward, but also does not respect Padmé when she asks him not to stare at her like she's a piece of meat. She has not reciprocated the romantic interest, which means Anakin should be obligated to respect her wishes of him laying off. She also shows sensibility and the ability to recognize that she has flaws, as everyone does, and that one can grow from knowing them.

Dormé, Padmé's new decoy, cries when saying goodbye to her: what if it is discovered that she has left the capital? Padmé smiles, replying: "Well, then my Jedi protector will have to prove how good he is," confirming her own need for a man to watch out for her. Typho and Obi-Wan exchange brief words as they watch Anakin and Padmé leave:

Obi-Wan: I do hope he doesn't try anything foolish.

Typho: I'd be more concerned about her doing something than him.

One thing is clear: Padmé doesn't leave up to the reputation Typho seems to think she has. Obi-Wan goes on to visit a restaurant resembling a typical American diner. There are two waitresses: a blonde woman in a very short dress and a female droid. For the first time, we get to see an older lady, as he proceeds to the Jedi archives, assisted by her. When he stops by to see Yoda training younglings—kids that are to become Jedi—only one of them is a girl.

Safe on Naboo, Padmé and Anakin talk a lot about politics. It doesn't seem like they know anything about each other outside of formal conversation. Attending a meeting with Queen Jamillia, Padmé has her longest conversation with another woman yet, discussing politics and security matters. Anakin is present, and is offended when she says that he is not a Jedi yet, merely a Padawan learner. She knows Naboo better, and is not afraid to speak up to him: "This is my home. I know it very well. That is why we're here. I think it would be wise if you took advantage of my knowledge in this instance." This brings up a question of consistency in terms of character. Just minutes ago, Padmé referred to Anakin as her Jedi protector, now she's brushing off his abilities. Is she confused or inconsistently written? The politically themed dialogue prohibits personality from shining through, but it nevertheless shows that Padmé is transcendent, using all three of de Beauvoir's strategies: she works, she participates in intellectual activity, and she strives to transform society into a socialist society (Scholz, 2008). Padmé's political career is her form of self-realization.

At the villa in the Naboo lake country where they'll be hiding, Padmé tells Anakin that she used to come there when she was younger, and that they used to swim to an island. She says that she loves the water. She's remembering old, simpler times, being younger and having no worries. She is sharing with him her romanticized nostalgia. Instead of replying to her or commenting on her thoughts, he remembers his home planet, Tatooine: "I don't like sand. It's coarse and

rough and irritating... and it gets everywhere. Not like here. Here everything is soft... and smooth.” They share their first kiss, abruptly stopped by Padmé, who thinks it’s a bad idea. Anakin apologizes.

During a picnic on a sunny meadow, Anakin tries to turn the conversation into a more flirty one, but it soon turns right back to politics. We meet them mid conversation:

Padmé: I don’t know.

Anakin: Sure you do. You just don’t want to tell me.

Padmé: You gonna use one of your Jedi mind tricks on me?

Anakin: They only work on the weak-minded.

Padmé: All right. I was 12. His name was Palo. We were both in the Legislative Youth Programme. He was a few years older than I. Very cute. Dark, curly hair. Dreamy eyes.

Anakin: [Bothered, seemingly jealous] All right, I get the picture. Whatever happened to him?

Padmé: I went into public service, he went on to become an artist.

Anakin: Maybe he was the smart one.

Padmé: You really don’t like politicians, do you?

Anakin: I like two or three... but I’m not really sure about one of them. [Both chuckle] I don’t think the system works.

Padmé: How would you have it work?

Anakin: We need a system where the politicians sit down and discuss the problem, agree what’s in the best interest of all people, and then do it.

Padmé: That’s exactly what we do. The trouble is that people don’t always agree.

Anakin: Well, then they should be made to.

Padmé: By whom? Who’s gonna make them?

Anakin: I don’t know. Someone.

Padmé: You?

Anakin: Of course not me.

Padmé: But someone.

Anakin: Someone wise.

Padmé: Sounds an awful lot like dictatorship to me.

Anakin: [Half smiles] Well, if it works.

Padmé: You’re making fun of me.

Anakin: No [Chuckling] I’d be much too frightened to tease a senator.

Anakin has just told Padmé, who holds democracy to be more important than anything, that he thinks dictatorship is fine. This should be sending out some warning signals, right?

When Anakin expresses his deep love for her after dinner one night, Padmé resists, again confirming the maturity gap: “We live in a real world. Come back to it. You’re studying to become a Jedi. I’m—I’m a senator. If you follow your thoughts through to conclusion it’ll take us to a place we cannot go, regardless of the way we feel about each other.” Simultaneously, though, she confesses that she has feelings for him too. Nonetheless, she concludes with that she wouldn’t be able to live a lie. It is also important to note that Padmé insists on not ruining *his* future: “I will not let you give up your future for me.” He is in training, while she is already a respected and well-known politician and former queen. If you listen to how Anakin talks throughout *Episode II* and *III*, you will notice how when someone disagrees with him, he is immediately openly and explicitly dissatisfied. He talks back and argues, and cannot handle critique. Padmé is not afraid to stand up to him. Concerning consistency of character, she is at least trying to keep her sense of rationality. Sympathizing with a character doesn’t really require that much: we recognize the character as human, learn about them, then morally evaluate them to decide whether we pledge allegiance to them (Smith, 1995:82-84). This means that we can sympathize with several characters. Padmé is with the good guys, who are those we are meant to root for, thus we’re meant to sympathize with her.

After Anakin has nightmares about his mother, Padmé comes with him to Tatooine to look for her. They run into Watto who used to own Anakin when he was a child, and he tells them he sold Shmi to a farmer named Lars, who freed and married her. At the Lars farm, they meet Cliegg Lars, Anakin’s now stepfather, his son Owen, and Owen’s girlfriend, Beru. The men sit down and Beru serves them. Shmi has been taken by the Sand People. Cliegg believes she is dead, yet Anakin goes to look for her while Padmé stays behind.

There are flashes, short scenes, from other places in the galaxy. Some politicians are talking about killing Senator Amidala, just like they were talking about killing Queen Amidala in *Episode I*. Meanwhile, Anakin finds Shmi tied up inside a tent in a Tusken Raider camp out in the desert. Now that he’s found her, he tells her she’s safe. She tells her son that he looks so handsome and that she’s so proud of him—she is now complete. Shmi dies in her son’s arms while trying to tell him she loves him. When Anakin comes back with his mother’s body, he confesses to Padmé that he killed every single Tusken Raider in the camp, even the women and children. Still, Padmé serves him some refreshments and doesn’t seem to bother her. She seems oblivious to all the signs pointing to him as troubled.

After Shmi's burial on the Lars farm, Obi-Wan sends a hologram asking for help, and while Padmé suggests helping him, Anakin resists:

Padmé: Ani, are you just gonna sit here and let him die? He's your friend, your mentor. He's—

Anakin: He's like my father! But you heard Master Windu. He gave me strict orders to stay here!

Padmé: He gave you strict orders to protect me, and I'm going to help Obi-Wan. If you plan to protect me, you'll just have to come along.

Although Padmé has never been afraid to speak up, many of her lines up until now have been comments to what someone else has been saying. Now she's taking control, telling Anakin what to do, and they are going to do it her way. Approaching Geonosis, she shows off skills in handling transport devices, not only co-piloting, but also pointing out a place to land. Before leaving the ship, she tells Anakin to follow her lead. When finding themselves trapped inside a factory where heavy machinery seems to be running on autopilot, Padmé needs to be saved by none other than male droid R2-D2, barely escaping death.

Despite her resistance, when death seems to be lurking, Padmé decides to confess her love for Anakin. Out on the arena, the two young lovers and Obi-Wan must fight to escape the beasts that have been unleashed on them. Padmé is the first to break halfway loose and climb on top of the pole she's been tied to. Her tight white clothes are ripped apart, revealing her midriff. Anakin saves her by picking her up on one of the beasts he's now riding. She handles a blaster again; it's been a while since last time. When the Jedi storm the arena, we for the first time see females swinging lightsabers.

When escaping, Padmé and one of the Clone troopers (at this point serving the good guys) fall out of the transport. Anakin wants to land and rescue her, but Obi-Wan asks him: "What do you think Padmé would do were she in your position?" to which Anakin replies that she would do her duty, and in doing so, confirms her as strong. In the dunes, Padmé tells the trooper to gather what troops he can so that they can assist the others. She is not one for giving up easily, and won't go down without a fight. She arrives at the hangar with a huge blaster in her hand. Then, in the very last scene of *Episode II*, she secretly marries the man who said dictatorship was alright.

When Your Husband Supports Dictatorship: *Revenge of the Sith*

Episode III would be the last installment of the prequel trilogy, revealing what happened when Anakin Skywalker turned over to the dark side and became Darth Vader. It would also be the last chapter in the story of Padmé Amidala. The first part of the film only deals with men in action-filled sequences. It takes 24 minutes before we see any women at all. Some of them are in Palpatine's court, and stay silent. One talks: Padmé. She is reunited with her husband and reveals to him that she is pregnant while her hair is in two buns, referencing what the audience has already figured out.

There is a scene in which Padmé combs her hair on the balcony of her penthouse apartment. Anakin stands behind her, watching. She talks about the baby, and he talks about how beautiful she is. We cut straight to Padmé's crying face in Anakin's nightmares, screaming: "Anakin, help me!" It's not a dream, but a foreseeing of the future: she will die in childbirth. She doesn't believe him, insisting that it was but a dream, then goes on to say that she doubts the Queen will let her continue to serve in the senate. Are women in the senate not allowed to have children? The change in Padmé becomes evident. De Beauvoir looks at the role of the wife, mother, and prostitute to show how women are forced into monotonous existences of having children, tending to the house, and being sexual objects for the male libido, thus kept from transcending through work and creativity, trapped in immanence (Mussett [no date]). Padmé's development is reversed. She *was* transcendent, now she is immanent. She doesn't care that it ruins her own career and keeping her from doing what she loves. In *Episode II*, she is more worried about ruining Anakin's career. There is also a problem if the galaxy doesn't allow mothers to work even if they want to.

Chancellor Palpatine wants his trusted Jedi friend Anakin to be on the Jedi council. Only Jedi Masters are allowed on the council, which now looks to strictly consist of men. He is allowed on the council, but is not granted the rank of Master. Back in the apartment, Padmé and Anakin have yet another conversation about politics:

Anakin: [Sighing] Sometimes I wonder what's happening to the Jedi order. I think this war is destroying the principles of the Republic.

Padmé: Have you ever considered that we may be on the wrong side?

Anakin: What do you mean?

Padmé:	What if the democracy we thought we were serving no longer exists, and the Republic has become the very evil we've been fighting to destroy?
Anakin:	I don't believe that. And you're sounding like a separatist.
Padmé:	This war represents a failure to listen. Now you're closer to the chancellor than anyone. Please, ask him to stop the fighting and let diplomacy resume.
Anakin:	[Pointing his finger at her] Don't ask me to do that. [Gets up] Make a motion in the senate, where that kind of a request belongs.
Padmé:	What is it?
Anakin:	Nothing.
Padmé:	Don't do this. Don't shut me out. Let me help you. [Walks over to him] Hold me. Like you did by the lake on Naboo. So long ago, when there was nothing but our love. No politics, no plotting, no war.

No politics? The main topic in the conversations between Padmé and Anakin has been exactly that. Again, we're served with an example that makes us question their relationship. One might say that the characters stay consistent in terms of what they say and do, but Padmé does the complete opposite of what her sensibility tells her, as well as going against what she's said almost immediately after mouthing it.

Padmé is not allowed to do what the men do. In most of her scenes, she is talking, not doing. She's not only forced into immanence by the men on-screen, but also those off-screen. Our perception of her is largely based on the things that she say. This makes it even problematic to see a personality and understand her fully, as it is mostly about politics. We know that she values democracy, justice and freedom. We know that she loves water and swimming, and that she is excited to become a mother. It stops there. How would other characters perceive her? At the same time as respecting her, they see her as weaker than them.

What happens next, is that Palpatine uses Padmé as a means to get what he wants from Anakin: he tells him about a man who used the dark side of the Force to stop people from dying. Anakin is easily manipulated, soaking up Palpatine's words like a sponge, adopting his world views without reflecting upon them, trusting him blindly. He acts on his feelings, which are often anger or jealousy. He's impulsive and weak-minded. In this sense, Padmé functions as a contrast to Anakin. She is concerned with the greater good, with common sense and a fair society. Although she gives in to her feelings for Anakin, her foundation is a stable one. She's beginning to realize that something is wrong, but Anakin is closing his eyes to it. When juxtaposed with her husband in such a context, she is inarguably the strong-minded one.

The relationship between Anakin and Obi-Wan has been somewhat rocky in *Episode II* and *III*. Now, there's a shift: from criticizing Anakin's arrogant behavior and him letting his feelings get the best of him, Obi-Wan suddenly tells Anakin how proud he is of him, stating that he is a far better Jedi than himself. Anakin's bad behavior is thus rewarded. Padmé's strength is not as visible to the spectator in the same sense as that of the male characters. She does not know of her strength, and therefore cannot be strong. The men's bravery is epitomized through scenes such as the one where Obi-Wan takes on not only General Grievous, four-armed with as many lightsabers, but also hundreds of battle droids, all by himself. Even looking at the extras, there is a divide. There are far more female background actors than in the original trilogy, but if an extra has a line, it's mostly a male one. We do see female Jedi, but again they're outnumbered by men. When the Clone troopers turn on the Jedi, following the orders of Palpatine, we are shown scenes of different Jedi being killed. One of them, a blue skinned woman in tight leather clothing, is shot at numerous times even after she's dead on the ground.

Padmé attends Congress with Bail Organa, who later adopts her daughter. They witness the official forging of the Galactic Empire. "So this is how liberty dies," she says, "With thunderous applause." When Obi-Wan later tells her that Anakin has turned to the dark side, she doesn't believe him, refusing to reveal Anakin's whereabouts. She is fooled, as he hides in her ship when she goes to see her husband, but Obi-Wan is doing it for her own good. He has told her that Anakin has killed all the children in training at the Jedi temple, yet she still runs into his arms when she arrives:

Anakin: I saw your ship. What are you doing out here?

Padmé: I was so worried about you. Obi-Wan told me terrible things.

Anakin: What things?

Padmé: He said you've turned to the dark side. That you... killed younglings.

Anakin: Obi-Wan is trying to turn you against me.

Padmé: He cares about us.

Anakin: Us?

Padmé: He knows [about the baby]. He wants to help you. [Anakin smiles] Anakin, all I want is your love.

Anakin: Love won't save you, Padmé. Only my new powers can do that.

Padmé: At what cost? You're a good person. Don't do this.

Anakin: I won't lose you the way I lost my mother. I am becoming more powerful than any Jedi has ever dreamed of. And I'm doing it for you. To protect you.

Padmé: Come away with me. Help me raise our child. [Increasingly desperate tone] Leave everything else behind while we still can.

Anakin: Don't you see? We don't have to run away anymore. I have brought peace to the Republic. I am more powerful than the chancellor. I—I can overthrow him. [Padmé is taking steps backwards, away from him] And together, you and I can rule the galaxy... make things the way we want them to be.

Padmé: [Shaking her head] I don't believe what I'm hearing. Obi-Wan was right. You've changed.

Anakin: I don't want to hear any more about Obi-Wan. The Jedi turned against me. Don't you turn against me.

Padmé: [Voice breaking] I don't know you anymore. Anakin... you're breaking my heart. You're going down a path I can't follow.

Anakin: Because of Obi-Wan?

Padmé: Because of what you've done. What you plan to do. Stop. Stop now. Come back. I love you.

Anakin: [Yelling] Liar! [Obi-Wan emerges from the ship, Anakin sees him]

Padmé: No!

Anakin: You're with him! You brought him here to kill me. [Chokes Padmé using his dark powers]

Padmé: No. [Choking]

Obi-Wan: Let her go.

Anakin: [Drops her. Padmé falls to the ground, gasping] You've turned her against me!

Obi-Wan: You have done that yourself.

Anakin: [Screaming] You will not take her from me!

Obi-Wan: Your anger and lust for power have already done that.

Even after the horrible truth is revealed to her, Padmé would still take him back. She still loves him with all her heart. Anakin tells Obi-Wan that if he's not with him, he's his enemy. This a reference to the speech held by President Bush to Congress on September 20th 2001, after the terrorist attacks on 9/11: "Either you're with us, or you are with the terrorists." (Taylor, 2014:420-421). Not only is this reference politically powerful, but it also reinforces Anakin's black-and-white view of the world, separating him even more from his wife.

Padmé is in terrible condition, but the first thing she asks Obi-Wan when he returns, is if Anakin is alright. Obi-Wan knows it would break her even more if she found out that he defeated him, and that he lost both arms and legs in the burning lava landscape. A female droid tells Obi-Wan and Bail Organa, now present, that Padmé is medically completely fine, but for reasons unknown, they are losing her: she has lost the will to live. Padmé cries, broken hearted, as she gives birth to twins, immediately naming one Luke and the other Leia. Her last words are about Anakin, as she tells Obi-Wan that she knows there is still good in him. Even after all that has

happened, she has not given up on him, but she has given up on herself. She doesn't want to live for her newborn babies: Anakin is more important. Her death is used by Palpatine to fuel Anakin's hate, enforcing his dark powers: "It seems, in your anger, you killed her."

The spectator will likely sympathize with Padmé based on her comprehension of the characters and the narrative, responding to Padmé's emotions with a different, but appropriate, emotion. Empathy, on the other hand, involves experiencing the same emotion as the character (Smith, 1995:102). The way I see it, empathy requires that we understand the emotions that the character is going through. It also requires that we go beyond allegiance, connecting further with the character. I'll use myself as an example: I sympathize with Padmé, but I do not understand her choices and I do not feel connected to her because of her (lack of a) storyline.

Padmé's funeral procession is huge. The people mourn the loss of a well-loved politician. Her casket is open, floating by itself through the streets, her pregnant stomach still intact. In her hands, she holds the necklace Anakin gives to her in *Episode I*. On Alderaan, Bail Organa presents baby Leia to his wife, while on Tatooine, Obi-Wan places Luke in the care of his aunt and uncle, Beru and Owen. Beru takes the baby in her arms and shows him to Owen.

So, who was Padmé, then? What did she accomplish? For her people, she was a warrior of democracy, although never shown to the spectator really succeeding in such matters. For Anakin, she was the motivation behind everything, including turning to the dark side: he does it because he thinks it can save her life. For Obi-Wan, she was a good friend, but still someone who needed protection. For Palpatine, she was a pawn in his evil, political game. Padmé tried to stay true to herself and her beliefs and values, but she died for nothing, unable to live without the man she loved, even after he kills innocent people. The future of her children doesn't seem to be a concern: Anakin is the only thing on her mind. De Beauvoir believes that women who live in a patriarchal culture sometimes contribute to their own subjugation, fleeing from responsibility into prefabricated beliefs and values (Mussett [no date]). The responsibility for Padmé's regression (from transcendence to immanence) may in part be her own, willingly giving up everything because she forgot that she knew better.

Rey

Ten years passed between what was supposed to be the last film of the *Star Wars* saga and *The Force Awakens*. Set approximately thirty years after the events of *Return of the Jedi*, things

have changed. The fall of the Empire fueled the forging of the First Order, who are out to kill Luke Skywalker, the last Jedi alive. No longer known as Princess Leia, General Organa leads the Resistance, desperate to find Luke and have him help the Resistance restore peace in the galaxy. She has sent her best pilot, a man by the name of Poe Dameron, on a mission to desert planet Jakku to collect information about Luke's whereabouts, but the settlement he visits is attacked by the First Order. Poe's droid, BB-8, is carrying the map to Luke and manages to escape, while Poe himself is captured.

The Girl with the Lightsaber: *The Force Awakens*

The first woman we meet stands out from any other woman we've seen for the entire saga: Captain Phasma is a commander of the Stormtroopers belonging to the First Order. Her full body Stormtrooper armor is chrome, and around her shoulders is a black and red cape. Her gender is revealed by her voice, as we do not see her face at any point in *Episode VII*. She commands her male troops to kill the villagers of Jakku. It soon becomes clear that one of the Stormtroopers will play a role as he is in focus during the attack, not following the orders and refusing to kill people.

About ten minutes into the film, we meet a character dressed in sand colored rags. The face is covered, almost resembling a Tusken Raider. This is our first meeting with the protagonist of the sequel trilogy, Rey. She is scavenging for parts, climbing around in the wreck of a spaceship. Outside in the desert landscape of Jakku, she removes her glasses and the cloth covering her nose and mouth, revealing that she is a girl. She makes her way through the dunes alone on a red speeder, racing past wrecks from days past, referencing the events of the original trilogy and the war against the Empire. She's got a weapon: a quarterstaff that she always carries with her for protection. She cannot afford a more advanced weapon, as she is living alone in a wreckage, trading the parts she scavenges for small portions of food to Unkar Plutt, a male alien with questionable morals. Rey seems to dream of a different life and a different time, putting on an old Rebel Alliance fighter pilot helmet as she eats her dinner alone in the sand. As she eats, she discovers a droid being attacked by another scavenger. She saves the droid, BB-8, fixing his bent antenna and letting him stay with her for the night. Unkar Plutt offers her 60 portions of food for BB-8, which is a lot for a poor, hard-working girl, but she tells him the droid is not for sale. Already, her character is starting to establish as one with good morals, this scene showing us she's one of the good guys. She tells BB-8 that she's been waiting for her family for a long time, and that she knows they'll be back one day.

The plot in many ways resembles that of *Episode IV*, but *VII* brings something completely new to the plate in the saga: not only is its main character female, but one of the other important characters is black. Finn, in addition to this, is a Stormtrooper. They have largely been faceless and mysterious, but Finn is humanized in his removal of the mask. While it appears most of the bad guys are male, quite a few women are seen in the control rooms of the First Order, which is a step up from the previous trilogies.

A scene that really sets the standard for Rey as a character, is when Finn comes to the Niima Outpost, the settlement where Rey lives. When he sees the two aliens trying to steal BB-8 from her, he immediately runs over to help her, but stops suddenly, surprised to see that she can handle herself, using her quarterstaff to chase the thieves away. She chases Finn down and sticks her weapon in his face when her new droid friend tells her he's wearing his master's jacket. He lies, telling her that he is with the Resistance. Upon telling her that BB-8 is carrying a map to Luke Skywalker, Rey is baffled: "Luke Skywalker? I thought he was a myth." She is not only independent, strong and unafraid, but also has the childlike wonder when it comes to adventure, just like Luke did in *A New Hope*.

When the First Order suddenly attacks, Finn grabs Rey's hand:

Rey: Let go of me!
Finn: Come on, we gotta move!
Rey: I know how to run without you holding my hand!

Rey is confused:

Rey: They're shooting at both of us.
Finn: Yeah. They saw you with me. You're marked.
Rey: Well, thanks for that.
Finn: Hey! I'm not the one who chased you down with a stick.

Finn grabs her hand once more, which she doesn't like at all. She is not afraid to let him know. When both are flung in the air by an explosion behind, she is the one that helps him up, yet he asks her if *she* is alright. She looks at him like he's dumb: obviously, she's fine.

The first time we hear Rey's name, is when she introduces herself to Finn on the *Millennium Falcon*, the ship they steal from Unkar Plutt to get off Jakku. Their escape becomes a bonding experience, as they work together, Finn shooting and Rey flying. Meanwhile, new villain Kylo Ren learns that BB-8 and Finn are accompanied by a girl, and it sets off his anger immensely.

There is a leakage on the *Falcon*, and Rey knows just how to fix it. Finn is clueless, and is having trouble even handing her the right tools. She is not afraid to express irritation at his confusion. BB-8 needs to get to the Resistance base, but Rey tells Finn she can't help, as she needs to get back to Jakku. When Finn asks her why, she replies: "None of your business, that's why." She is also very visibly and verbally displeased when Finn tries to climb while supporting himself on her head, telling him to "get off." This is where Han Solo and Chewbacca enters, making their first appearance in the new trilogy. As it is Han's ship, stolen from him, he wants to get rid of the three and carry on with his business. Rey immediately resists: "Wait, no! We need your help."—"This droid has to get to the Resistance base as soon as possible." Rey is not afraid to ask for help when it comes to doing the right thing. The *Falcon* is attacked by enemies of Han, and the monsters he is transporting get out of their cages, one of them grabbing Finn with its tentacles. Rey saves him from being eaten by closing a fuse which cuts of the arm it's got wrapped around Finn. Finn is screaming for the cut off tentacle to "get off" him, shrieking in fear as Rey approaches him. She does not take any credit for having saved him, simply saying: "That was lucky" when he tells her the fuse happened to close. They run, and once everyone is back on the *Falcon* safely, Rey jumps right into the co-pilot seat and starts flipping switches:

Han: Hey, where are you going?

Rey: Unkar Plutt installed a fuel pump, too. If we don't prime that, we're not going anywhere.

Han: I hate that guy.

Rey: And you could use a co-pilot.

Han: I got one, he's back there. [Points to Chewie, lying down growling] [To Rey:] Watch the thrust. We're going out of here at lightspeed.

Rey: From inside the hangar?! Is that even possible?

Han: I never ask that question till after I've done it. [Rathtar slams into the dash window. Rey yelps] This is not how I thought this day was gonna go. Angle the shield. Hang on back there.

As we can see from this conversation (among others), Rey is very upfront and very confident: she knows that she can handle the ship, aware of her own skills. She doesn't care that Han is an

older man with more experience, because she knows that she has something to bring to the plate either way. Her background is similar to that of Luke Skywalker, but she exudes a kind of confidence that he did not so early on in his adventures. De Beauvoir starts out with relating immanence and transcendence to gender, but reading on, she also considers 'possibilities' to depend on one's economic and social situation (de Beauvoir, 1949:69). Like Luke, Rey is at first kept from fully transcending because of her social and economic situation, not because she's female. She's strong and independent from the start, but isn't living up to her full potential.

Having gotten away, Rey tells Han that Finn is with the Resistance, while she is "just a scavenger." Rey and Finn can hardly believe it when Han talks about the Jedi, amazed by the story he tells them of what actually happened way back when. As they go in for landing on planet Takodana, Rey is both touched and mesmerized by the green landscape—she's never seen anything like it in her life: "I didn't know there was this much green in the whole galaxy." Before disembarking, Han has a moment alone with Finn where he tells him that "women always figure out the truth. Always," having figured out that Finn is lying about being with the Resistance, reading him like an open book. In this sense, Rey can be seen as somewhat gullible. Nevertheless, both Finn and Rey are trusting people they've never met, including each other. Finn is not lying because he has bad intentions, but because he is ashamed of his past. Han's comment could generally be read as more or less sexist, but if we look at his general character, it is the type of thing he would say. We know that he respects women, and that he doesn't mind an independent woman with power. This manifests even more right after, when he hands Rey a blaster outside the ship:

Han:	You might need this.
Rey:	[Not taking the gun] I think I can handle myself.
Han:	I know you do. That's why I'm giving it to you. Take it. [Rey accepts it and tries to take aim] You know how to use one of those?
Rey:	Yeah. You pull the trigger.
Han:	Little bit more to it than that. You got a lot to learn. You got a name?
Rey:	Rey.
Han:	Rey. I been thinking about bringing on some more crew, Rey. A second mate. Someone to help out. Someone who can keep up with Chewie and me, appreciates the Falcon.
Rey:	Are you offering me a job?
Han:	I wouldn't be nice to you. Doesn't pay much.

Rey:	[Smiling] You're offering me a job.
Han:	I'm thinking about it. [Rey's smile fades] Well?
Rey:	If you were I'd be flattered. But I have to get home.
Han:	Where, Jakku?
Rey:	I've already been away too long.

By offering her a job, he acknowledges her skill and as such admits his respect for the young girl he's just met. He is taking a liking to her in a fatherly manner. Han has lost a son, and here is a talented, adventurous girl who knows as much as him about ships. Like in his relationship with Leia, he is hesitant to show his affection too early, telling Rey that it's too bad she doesn't want the job, because Chewie kinda likes her.

They meet up with Han's old friend, Maz Kanata, a tiny, wrinkly alien woman with orange skin, huge glasses, and a little beanie on her head. She asks Han for her "boyfriend," Chewie. A female bounty hunter is watching them, and contacts the First Order to let them know she has located BB-8. Maz is an independent woman. She has been running the castle and its bar for years. Han knows she can help him get BB-8 to Leia, as he can't go himself: Leia doesn't want to see him. Finn decides to leave, and talks to a couple of aliens. She is saddened when he tells her the truth. This is where things take a turn: the voice from the basement. Following what sounds like the crying of a child, Rey discovers a chest hidden away, with a lightsaber hilt inside. Touching it, she has a vision that tells us something about her abilities. A number of things are happening: Yoda is speaking about the Force, Luke is touching R2 with his mechanical hand, Obi-Wan is speaking her name, Kylo-Ren and the Knights of Ren are standing in a field full of dead bodies. She sees herself as a child as her family is taken away, screaming for them to come back. Kylo Ren attacks her with his red lightsaber in a snowy forest. The vision ends with Obi-Wan whispering: "These are your first steps." And so we know that Rey is Force sensitive. She sees the past and the future in flashes, hearing the voices of Jedis from days past. When Maz finds her on the floor, she confirms this, but Rey doesn't want any part of it, refusing to take the lightsaber that once belonged to Luke Skywalker. When the First Order attacks, Finn takes the lightsaber. The Resistance shows up, staging a counter attack. Poe wasn't dead after all, and is seen flying his X-wing.

When Kylo Ren finds Rey walking in the forest, she refuses to tell him the whereabouts of BB-8. Using the Force, he has her faint, carrying her onto his ship. Finn and Han both watch, and Finn goes crazy, yelling and screaming desperately for her. A ship lands in front of them. Leia

and C-3PO disembark from it. C-3PO forgets himself, referring to her as Princess, then corrects himself: "General. Sorry."

Finn agrees to help Leia with information on the First Order and their weapon of mass destruction. She appreciates his bravery. As they talk, both men and women are seen in the background, listening. One of the women is Carrie Fisher's daughter, her hair in space buns, referencing her mother's famous hair style from the first film. A snippet of a woman tending to Chewbacca's wounds and telling him how very brave he is, stands as a comic relief in the seriousness of the events that just occurred.

This part of the film also gives us information on whatever happened between Han and Leia, and sets the record straight about their son, Ben Solo, now known as Kylo Ren. They are both grieving with the loss of the boy they knew and loved, and Leia is certain that "there is still light in him," referencing Padmé's last words to Obi-Wan in *Episode III*. Like her mother, Leia isn't willing to give up on the villain she loves, despite that these men go against everything they believe in.

Chained to Kylo Ren's torture chair in a cell, the lost son of Han and Leia tries to force information from Rey. Reading her mind, he sees that she feels Han was the father she never had, confirming the insinuations the spectator has been presented with already. This is where Rey realizes the power that lies within her, and where she uses the Force for the first time, penetrating Kylo's thoughts. This is the first time we ever see a woman use the Force in the films. She also becomes the first girl to use Jedi mind tricks right after, when the Stormtrooper guarding her agrees to remove the restraints, leave the cell with the door open, and drop his weapon for her to use. On the first try, it doesn't work, but when she concentrates, she succeeds.

Meanwhile, Leia and the Resistance talk strategy. Han suggests blowing up the entire Starkiller Base, which is ten times the size of the Death Star. Leia proclaims: "Han's right." The Resistance consists of both men and women now, as we can see from the people surrounding them. In the old Rebel Alliance, we only ever saw two women: Leia and Mon Mothma.

Kylo expresses concern for Rey's powers after learning of her escape from the cell. He sees her as a threat to him and his aspirations: "She's just beginning to test her powers. The longer it takes to find her, the more dangerous she becomes."

Finn, Han and Chewie have landed. Finn has joined them for one reason only: to save Rey. They manage to take down Captain Phasma, Finn's old commander. She is not so sure they will get away: "You can't be so stupid as to think this will be easy. My troops will storm this block and kill you all." Phasma is an interesting character. Stormtroopers are—at this time in the galaxy—taken from their families when they are babies, and raised to kill for the First Order. All of the Stormtroopers, however, are male. Whether Phasma was carefully selected, or she was a deranged person who wanted to fight for the bad guys, we don't know (yet). She is as unique as she is unforgiving, different from any other female character we've ever seen; the first to be outright evil.

Rey, on the other hand, is sneaking around on the base, carrying a blaster for protection. Simultaneously, Leia is in the control room at the Resistance base, overseeing the mission—still doing what she does best after all these years. When Rey bumps into Finn, Han and Chewie in one of the corridors, she is thankful and touched, especially towards Finn. The most difficult part of her escape, she managed on her own, using a power none of the three men hold. Had she needed to be rescued from the cell by them, the outcome would have been a lot more violent. Of course, getting off Starkiller Base is easier when your friends have a ship to take you away in.

As Rey with some controls to open doors for Han and Chewie, Han tells his hairy sidekick: "Girl knows her stuff," expressing his admiration for her talent once more. As Han comes face to face with his son, the three others watch from a distance. Han shows emotion more explicitly than ever; this is hard for him—he loves his son and wants him to come home. When Kylo drives his lightsaber through his father's chest, Finn gasps and jumps back, Chewie growls in agony, Rey screams: "No!" At the Resistance base, Force sensitive Leia senses that something is wrong. She already knows what has happened. The three remaining on Starkiller Base start shooting at the troops around them, before Finn and Rey go out in the snowy forest to face Kylo Ren:

Rey:	[Teary eyes] You're a monster.
Kylo:	It's just us now. Han Solo can't save you.

Rey shoots at Kylo, but he stops the shots with the Force. Finn screams her name as she is flung into the air, hitting a tree and falling to the ground. He uses Luke's lightsaber, but Kylo has the upper hand, and Finn hits the ground. Both Kylo and Rey try to use the Force to retrieve the blue lightsaber, but Rey is stronger. In the prequel trilogy, some female Jedi are seen using lightsabers, but this is the first time we ever see a woman going down in an epic lightsaber battle up close. She wins over Kylo, severely hurting him, before picking up an unconscious Finn from the ground as Chewie comes flying with the *Falcon* just in time before the ground beneath them collapses.

The Resistance has succeeded in blowing up Starkiller Base. Back on their own base, the pilots celebrate their victory. It is worth mentioning that *The Force Awakens* is the first movie in the series in which we see female fighter pilots. Rey and Leia, both visibly sad, walk towards each other. They hug, although they do not know each other—in fact, they've never even met. None of them say a word. Maybe it is connected to the Force; maybe they can feel the strength of the Force from the other.

The map to Luke has been retrieved, put together by a piece from BB-8, and one from R2-D2, who has just come back to life, and Rey is the one to go and find the long lost last Jedi. Rey says goodbye to the still unconscious Finn, as well as Leia. This is the only exchanging of words between the two women. With Chewie, she flies the *Falcon* to an island with a small mountain. Alone, she climbs the stone steps up to the top, where Luke turns around to look at her. She reaches out to give him his lightsaber. Not a word is said between the two. Rey is meeting the man she has more in common with than she knows, and the question that remains is of course whether he will train her to be a Jedi.

Episode VII has been criticized of having the exact same plot as *Episode IV*. Both Luke and Rey grow up on a desert planet; they both work hard; their parents are dead; they meet an older person who they see as a mentor; this mentor dies shortly after, hitting them hard; they are both Force sensitive. Rey is undoubtedly the main character, getting a lot more attention and being allowed to do more than any woman ever in the film series. She is to the sequel trilogy what Luke was to the original trilogy, but there is a difference: in her first episode, she shows more strength and ability than Luke does in two episodes. *Episode VI* is when the Jedi return—when Luke knows how to use his powers. Rey has already proved herself. Of course, she still has a lot to learn, but where Luke was insecure and sometimes even whiny, Rey is confident. The

spectator organizes the characters in a system of preference, and the story is laid out so that Rey is the one we're supposed to prefer (Smith, 1995:84). Thus, we sympathize with her. How empathy functions in *Star Wars*, I will get back to in chapter 5.

Upon meeting Finn for the first time, he seems to think that Rey needs to be saved. This happens several times throughout the film. At the end, it is Rey who has saved Finn, several times at that. His mission to rescue her from Starkiller Base ends up with her saving him from Kylo Ren, bringing him back safely to the Resistance base.

Rey is unarguably a fresh breath to the *Star Wars* saga, doing things no woman has been able—or should I say allowed—to do before her. She transcends through work and being served with possibilities. The *Star Wars* films do follow quite traditional narrative structures, but *Episode VII* disproves Mulvey's view on such films, in which women are passive and powerless objects of desire for men. Nevertheless, everything might not be as perfect as it may seem, as positive images of women on film are not enough to change the underlying structures (Smelik, 1999).

Jyn Erso

Disney didn't want to keep the fans waiting, and decided to release an anthology series of films in the years between those of the sequel trilogy. The very first stand-alone full feature film of the *Star Wars* saga, covers the events occurring just before *Episode IV*, in which the Rebel Alliance steals the plans to the Death Star in order to destroy it. A few familiar faces appear, but the main cast is made up of characters who live and die in this particular film. It has no opening crawl like the other films, rather, it opens with the main character, at this point in the film a little girl. Her name? Jyn Erso.

The Life and Death of a Rebel: *Rogue One*

Jyn is running through a field. Her grey clothes are as dirty as her face. While hiding in the tall grass of their secluded farm, she watches her mother, Lyra, stand up against the Empire's vicious Director Krennic and be shot and killed, while they take her father, Galen, with them to work for them on building their new weapon of mass destruction: the Death Star. Of the Death Star plans, Galen says to Krennic: "You're confusing peace with terror," already beginning to establish what kind of values are taught in the Erso home. She might be a child, but she doesn't cry and carries on running up into the hills, hiding in a cave, waiting for the family friend, Saw Gerrera, to come get her.

When we next meet Jyn, she's a grown woman, held in a jail cell guarded by Stormtroopers. She is transported to an imperial labor camp when Rebels attack the transport, freeing her from her chains. She immediately attack them and starts running, but is thrown to the ground by droid K-2SO: "Congratulations, you are being rescued. Please do not resist." She is not so much rescued as she is captured. The Rebels know she is the daughter of an imperial scientist. At the Rebel Alliance headquarters, she talks to Mon Mothma, a female leader figure of the Alliance. She introduces her to Cassian Andor, pilot and Intelligence Officer:

Cassian:	When was the last time you were in contact with your father?
Jyn:	Fifteen years ago.
Cassian:	Any idea where he's been all that time?
Jyn:	I like to think he's dead. Makes things easier.
Cassian:	Easier than what? That he's been a tool of the imperial war machine?
Jyn:	I've never had the luxury of political opinions.
Cassian:	Really? When was your last contact with Saw Gerrera?
Jyn:	[Pauses] It's been a long time.
Cassian:	But he'll remember you, though. Wouldn't he? He might agree to meet you, if you came as a friend.
Draven:	We're up against the clock here, girl, so if there's nothing to talk about, we'll just put you back where we found you.
Jyn:	I was a child. Saw Gerrera saved my life. He raised me, but I have no idea where he is, I haven't seen him in years.
Cassian:	We know how to find him. That's not our problem. What we need is someone who gets us through the door without being killed.
Jyn:	You're all Rebels, aren't you?
Mothma:	Yes, but Saw Gerrera is an extremist. He's been fighting on his own since he broke with the Rebellion. His militancy has caused the Alliance a great many problems. We have no choice now but to try and mend that broken trust.
Jyn:	What does this have to do with my father?

The Alliance doesn't care about her at this point, but what she can do for them—what they can use her for. What Jyn says here, starts establishing her character. She has adopted a strong mentality in order to get through. Deep down, though, talking about and thinking of her father, is emotional even after all those years. She definitely doesn't want to go back to the imperial labor camp either, and the thought of it sparks her to agree to their terms. Jyn only comes with Cassian and K-2SO to find Saw Gerrera because the Alliance offers her freedom and a fresh

start if she helps them. Behind her back, though, Cassian has received orders to kill Saw if they find him. Upon departure, Jyn shows confidence:

K-2SO:	Why does she get a blaster and I don't?
Cassian:	What?
Jyn:	I know how to use it.
Cassian:	That's what I'm afraid of. Give it to me.
Jyn:	We're going to Jedha. That's a war zone.
Cassian:	That's not the point of... Where did you get it?
Jyn:	[Casually] I found it.
K-2SO:	I find that answer vague and unconvincing.
Jyn:	Trust goes both ways.

Cassian lets her keep the blaster, although neither him nor K2 see eye to eye with her yet. She is just effective as Cassian with a blaster, if not better. Although she is a threat to them and vice versa, Jyn speaks out unafraid, like when she orders K2 to stay behind and guard the ship as they land on Jedha, as he is a reprogrammed imperial droid:

Jyn:	Half the people wanna reprogram you, the other half wanna put a hole in your head.
K-2SO:	I'm surprised you're so concerned with my safety.
Jyn:	I'm not. I'm just worried they might miss you and hit me.

When walking around the war-torn streets, Jyn and Cassian have to start working as a team to survive. He watches her take down several Stormtroopers all by herself, in awe of her skills. She doesn't only use a blaster—she's got a stick too. Taken prisoner by Saw's men, Jyn is brought in front of the man who saved her life, and we learn more about her background: Saw raised her, but ultimately left her behind as she posed a threat being the daughter of an imperial science officer. She's finished now; she gave the Rebels the introduction they wanted to meet with Saw, and now she's out. She doesn't want any part in it: "The Alliance, the—the Rebels, whatever it is you're calling yourselves these days... All it's ever brought me is pain." However, when Saw shows her a hologram message from her father, who says that he loves and misses her, emotions boil over and Jyn cries. She is informed that Galen has put a flaw in the Death Star that will make it easier for the Alliance to blow it up. In this scene, she talks to Saw about her upbringing: she was one of his soldiers, thus had the opportunity to transcend through work, despite social and economic status (de Beauvoir, 1949:69). However, her

emotions prohibit her from fully transcending at this point, as she hasn't agreed to do anything at all just yet, and is being forced to meet with Saw. Gender is not a factor.

Jyn's top priority becomes finding her father. When people talk of him as a tool of the Empire, she defends him. No one believes her when she tells them of the message he sent her. Jyn comes across as somewhat cold and straightforward when she talks about anything other than her father. She spites the orders Cassian gives her to stay on the ship when they go to Eadu where Galen is. She sneaks out carrying a huge blaster. When the Rebels come flying in, shooting, Galen is hit. She crawls over to him, promising him to destroy the Death star. He dies in her arms. Jyn is forced to leave her father's body behind when Cassian comes to collect her. She is devastated and can't hold it in:

Jyn:	You lied to me.
Cassian:	You're in shock.
Jyn:	You went up there to kill my father.
Cassian:	You don't know what you're talking about.
Jyn:	Deny it.
Cassian:	You're in shock, and looking for some place to put it. I've seen it before.
Jyn:	I bet you have. They know. You lied about why we came here, and you lied about why you went up alone.
Cassian:	I had every chance to pull the trigger, but did I? Did I?!
Jyn:	You might as well have. My father was living proof, and you put him at risk. Those were Alliance bombs that killed him.
Cassian:	I had orders. Orders that I disobeyed. But you wouldn't understand.
Jyn:	Orders? When you know they're wrong? You might as well be a Stormtrooper.
Cassian:	What do you know? We don't all have the luxury of deciding when and where we want to care about something. Suddenly the Rebellion is real for you. Some of us live it. I've been in this fight since I was six years old. You're not the only one who lost everything. Some of us just decided to do something about it.
Jyn:	[Shakes her head] You can't talk your way around this.
Cassian:	I don't have to.

Jyn takes promises seriously. She speaks during a Rebel Alliance meeting, but it appears that no one believes her. One man says he doesn't want to risk everything based on the testimony of a criminal. A black woman has the voice of little orange alien Maz Kanata in *The Force Awakens*, but during the meeting, for the first time, a black woman overtly speaks: Tynnra

Pamlo. She is worried: what chance do they have if it is true that the Empire has this power? Jyn shows a new side of herself, as an inspirational voice for the Rebels:

Jyn: What chance do we have? The question is: what *choice*? Run, hide, plead for mercy, scatter your forces! You give way to an eternity of submission. The time to fight is now! Every moment you waste is another step closer to the ashes of Jedha.

Half the Rebels agree with her, half don't. The leaders have the final say. Tynnra is in doubt:

Tynnra: You're asking us to invade an imperial installation based on nothing but hope.

Jyn: Rebellions are built on hope.

The council doesn't want to risk everything, but Cassian scrapes together a little team: himself, Chirrut, and a bunch of other male Rebels, including K2, are willing to spite the council because they believe in her. This is the first time she smiles and seems light-hearted:

Jyn: I'm not used to people sticking around when things go bad.

Cassian: Welcome home.

On their mission, Jyn functions as the commander, in charge of all the men. Apparently, none of the female Rebels believed her. She gives a motivational speech before they all embark, and it seems to work. From the moment they land on Scarif, location of the Death Star plans, there is tension between Cassian and Jyn, making the spectator wonder whether something will happen between them. With K2, they function as a team, while the others engage in a battle on the ground. Cassian talks to them through a walkie-talkie, but looks to Jyn for the final command. She is in charge.

When Mon Mothma is informed about the Rebels gone rogue, she smiles a small, proud smile. Did she believe them all along, but lacked the courage to speak up in front of her peers?

Jyn and Cassian gains access to the Empire's data archives. The two are now completely on the same page. Learning that the shield gate over Scarif has been closed and that they are trapped on the planet, none of them panic: they focus on their mission. The greater good is more important than saving their own skins. Before leaving K2 to keep watch, Jyn gives him a blaster, and it makes the droid announce his newfound and great respect for her:

Jyn: You'll need this. You wanted one, right?
K-2SO: Your behavior, Jyn Erso, is continually unexpected.

As in *Episode VII*, we see one female Rebel pilot, which is something that hasn't really changed throughout the history of *Star Wars*: close to all pilots are men. None of the Empire's pilots are women.

Jyn has a means to find the correct data file that no one else could: the file is her nickname that her father gave to her: Stardust. She and Cassian smiles to each other and keep going. Certain death doesn't seem to be on their minds at all. What follows is an action-filled sequence in which Jyn shoots to break the glass of the control room, jumps onto the tower of stacked data files, and climbs to grab the right one. Cassian jumps after, but falls when Krennic shoots at them from the control room. He is probably dead, but she has to keep going and keeps a straight face, climbing to the top of the transmitter. Like a real action hero, she swings through the hatch above her. An imperial fighter hits the tower, injuring her, but she doesn't stop: she's got a job to do. When Krennic comes up and points a gun at her, she's anything but afraid:

Krennic: Who are you?
Jyn: You know who I am. I'm Jyn Erso. Daughter of Galen and Lyra. You've lost.
Krennic: Oh I have, have I?
Jyn: My father's revenge. He built a flaw in the Death Star. He put a fuse in the middle of your machine, and I've just told the entire galaxy how to light it.
Krennic: The shield is up. Your signal will never reach the Rebel base. All your ships in here will be destroyed. I lose nothing but time. You, on the other hand, die with the Rebellion.

She has no weapon, yet she's going to say what she needs to get off her chest. She will stand for what she believes in till the very end. Jyn is bought some more time when Cassian suddenly shows up and shoots Krennic. She makes the transmission of the file from the tower and her mission is complete. It is the end. They go down the elevator to the beach, sitting down in the sand. When Cassian tells her how proud her father would be of her, she smiles. With tears in their eyes, they embrace and wait for the wave to take them. Scarif is history, and so is Jyn Erso. There is a difference between her and the other three major female characters in the saga: we know a lot about her past and why she has the values that she does. We might still get information on Rey, while the childhoods of Padmé and Leia remain mysteries. With Jyn, we

know all we'll know, because her story begins and ends in this film. From flashes of her dreams, we see some of the time before her family moved to the farm, while her father was still working for the Empire of his own free will. From the conversation with Saw Gerrera, we get a picture of what she did during her teen years. We know who she is as an adult, and then she's gone. At the point where she dies for the cause she believes in, she is fully transcendent, and she was never—as far as we know—been attempted forced into an immanent existence.

Jyn Erso is a sympathetic character, and most spectators can imagine—some might even relate to—the heartbreaking feeling of losing one's parents. When she dies for the cause of saving millions of other lives, we empathize with her, and because we've pledged allegiance to her, are saddened by it, as we've rooted for her the entire film (Smith, 1995:82-95). However, because of her emotionally closed off personality, there is the potential that she also be read as unapproachable, despite engaging in her as a character.

Episode IV picks up right where *Rogue One* ends, with a CGI generated, young Princess Leia receiving the plans to the Death Star, described during the film by her adoptive father as someone he trusts with his life. The story of Jyn Erso ends, and the story of Leia Organa begins.

A Unique Exterior: Costume

Fashion and style is something that varies from country to country, but even so, there is something universal about it that makes us recognize the time and world we live in. It makes sense that in a galaxy far away, clothes and fashion will differ from what we are already familiar with. Clothing is a key feature when constructing cinematic identities, and is used as a tool by the filmmaker to tell a story. Costumes are carefully selected, designed to appear on one actor, on a given set, to be framed and lit in a specific way (Andersson, 2011:103). In *Star Wars*, costumes are very important. They add something to the exterior that forms our perception of the fictional universe. It gives a certain feel. They also tell us something about the character in question. When thinking about *Star Wars*, many think of the costumes and accessories, not to mention the hairstyles and make-up: Han Solo's off-white shirt and black vest, the earthy colored robes of the Jedi, Queen Amidala's enormous headpieces, the white plastic armor of the imperial Stormtroopers.

The wardrobes of the women of *Star Wars* range from visually fascinating gowns to dirty, gray rags, and even full body armor. Their similitude is not only that they stand out from real-world attire today, but also that they tell us about the character clad in them. A character's clothing can express social status and time period, as well as giving us an understanding of whether the fictional world refers to a universe of fantasy or reality. If one looks even deeper, clothes can even reveal a character's inner life—their motivation, how they wish others to perceive them, and their personalities and states of mind (ibid.). The question that arises, then, is what we can say about these women based on the external and that which potentially lies beneath this surface.

Fashion trends can change drastically from one decade to the next, but even in 1977, Leia must have stood out when she appeared before the spectator. Her long, white dress might not be so outlandish, but it is combined with a hairstyle that today is commonly referred to as 'space buns'. George Lucas was deliberately looking for styles that were unfashionable at the time, and modeled Leia's double-bun hairdo after the hairstyles of revolutionary Mexico (Taylor, 2014:215). His method was to use the outdated, combining it in different ways to create

something new. When placed in the setting of spaceships and laser weapons, it becomes even more apparent to the audience that what plays out is not that of a realistic approach. Clothing can also say something about the social role or position of the character. The character's story is visualized through costumes (Wyckoff, cited in Andersson, 2011:103). What does the clothing of the women of *Star Wars* tell us about them?

Empowered or Enslaved?

Taking a look at *Episode IV*, Leia doesn't really change her outfit at all, with exception of the very last scene. She wears the same long, white dress and white leather boots, as well as the double-bun hairdo. The first time we see her, she's hiding behind something, wearing a white hood connected to her dress. She removes it, and soon after starts shooting back at the imperial intruders in full body armor. When recording the hologram message via R2 meant for Obi-Wan, she has put her hood back on. Leia wearing the hood represents a more careful side of her, while as when removing it, she's showing her true face: her unafraid and fierce self. There is no doubt that wearing a floor-length dress isn't the best option for such affairs, but it's what she's got on, and she doesn't have time to even think about changing it—she's too busy trying to free the galaxy of the evil Empire. For being a princess, one might even say she's dressed very casual. It is while wearing this outfit that Luke remarks for the first time that she's beautiful. In the last scene, Leia decorates Han and Luke for their service during a big ceremony. She has changed into a different dress, also white and floor-length, but tighter around the upper body and with a silver belt, bracelet and necklace. The dress has long, wide sleeves that makes it look like she's wearing a cape. Her hair is combed back and collected in a tidy braided bun on top of her head. She appears more formal than before. The men are wearing the same clothing as they did during the battle for which they are being honored.

Similarly, in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Leia only changes her clothes and hair twice. In the beginning, she's dressed very practical in terms of her mission and location (ice planet): a white one-piece winter suit with a white vest over it. She can move around easily and stays warm. Her hair is braided around her head like a crown. When arriving in Cloud City to meet with Han's old friend Lando, she changes—for the first time—into something not white. A long brown dress and a beige floor-length vest over it. She sticks with the braided hair, now in ponytail style. Again, a man (Lando) comments on her beauty, this time directly to her. Soon after, she's taken prisoner by Vader, thrown in a cell with the same dress that she will wear for the rest of her screen time in *Episode V*.

Episode VI Leia has got quite a diverse wardrobe, as if symbolizing her development throughout the trilogy. When posing as a bounty hunter before criminal space slug Jabba the Hutt, no one could determine the gender based on the attire. She's masked and her voice has been altered, making her sound more like a machine than a person. Only when she removes her helmet, we know that it's her. The transition to the metal bikini is therefore quite shocking, marking huge contrasts from one scene to the next. From being of undefined gender, posing as a threat to an infamous male criminal, she's reduced to a harmless object of male sexual desire. The giant slug keeps her in chains as his main attraction of the moment, lying before him at his court. She has gone from active and independent to being nothing more than his slave. The other women dancing around him, aren't dressed in much either. When he goes on to kill one of them, it emphasizes his view on them as ephemeral things—not people—that he can do with as he pleases. Noah Berlatsky compares this scene to an Orientalist harem fantasy, dubbing it a snippet of softcore porn in the middle of a children's adventure tale. He points out that for the rest of the series, she's covered and empowered, then all of a sudden is shown as a vulnerable sex toy. Berlatsky then goes on to suggest that Leia is "trying on different outfits" in order to see which of them Han likes better, and what he wants from her: does Han want a slave or does he want a comrade, dressed similarly to himself? Leia does change her style, as I will get into, but here it is claimed that who Leia is, has become less clear than before. Berlatsky shows somewhat ambivalent, first criticizing Leia, indicating that it is the woman herself that has put on the bikini and chains, triggering rape fantasy and sexual pleasure, then rejecting her slave identity when she chokes Jabba the Hutt with the chains she's been held in. He cites critic Vom Marlow, who writes that Leia strangles Jabba with the chains of patriarchy. She's on a mission to free her man, and she's a huge part of driving the narrative forward. He then asks what people are willing to do for love (Berlatsky, 2015). So, is she a strong, independent woman, or is she changing herself—inside as well as outside—for a man? Tricia Barr writes:

[...] *Return of the Jedi* happened. While the story allows Princess Leia to slay the Hutt who put her in the gold bikini of a slave, there is no doubt Carrie Fisher was put in an outfit intended to sexualize her (Barr, 2016).

That is exactly it: she is put in the outfit. Carrie Fisher didn't choose the skimpy metal bikini—those who made the film did, and they in turn let the villains be the ones forcing her to wear it, which means that the character Leia did not choose this outfit either. She's not putting herself

on display for Han or any of the other men, they are putting her on display for their own pleasure, very much against her will. The objectification is done by Jabba—permitted by the filmmaker—allowing the other characters as well as the spectator to do the same. In the second episode of his series *Ways of Seeing* (1972), John Berger talks of the female nude in European oil painting. He states that being *naked* is being yourself, whilst being *nude* is to be seen naked by others, yet not recognized as yourself. For a nude to be a nude, it has to be seen as an object. Most paintings like this have been lined up by the painter for the pleasure of the male spectator (the owner of the painting), who assesses them and judges them as sights. Berlatsky sees it as obvious that the bikini must have been a fan service of sorts, catering to hormonal young men for whom Leia already was a sex symbol (Berlatsky, 2015). It's hard to say what triggered the idea and implementation of the slave costume. Carrie Fisher herself wasn't a big fan of it. In the fall of 2015, Fisher did an interview with Daisy Ridley in anticipation of *Episode VII*, in which she told her younger co-star: "Don't be a slave like I was . . . You keep fighting against that slave outfit." (Fisher, 2015). Whatever the reason, it is true that in this scene, Leia is in fact being objectified, but if Leia's role in the films was to be nothing more than an object of desire, shouldn't there be more examples to point to? She is only shown wearing the bikini for a few minutes all together, yet it has become one of the most memorable moments in the films. This is an example of how the fans shape *Star Wars*. While it might not have been Lucas's intention that this would be one of the most talked about scenes or costumes in the franchise, that is what happened.

At fan events such as Comic Con or Star Wars Celebration, it is not uncommon to see women dressed as 'Slave Leia', not just sporting the gold bikini, but also a chain around their necks. I do agree that the scene is questionable in some ways. One might find it strange that someone would dress themselves in such a costume when knowing the objectifying symbolism behind it. Feminism, of course, is about empowering women, and that means dressing however they like. The problem with the actual character Leia, is that she did not *choose* this like the fan girls (and sometimes boys) did. While she is degraded and it is quite uncomfortable to watch, it isn't an all damsel in distress kind of situation. Think about it: in a way, Han is also an object of Jabba's. He has been frozen and made into a decoration in the villain's home. He isn't stripped of his clothes, but he is an object, both literally and metaphorically. The point is that Leia isn't any weaker than Han. She's been taken captive. She has no control over what the villains do to her, but neither would a man. Because she's a woman, and Jabba happens to like women, he finds another use for her than a carbonite piece of home decor. To Jabba the Hutt, it doesn't

matter if the captive is a man or a woman, because they are not important to him—they are all objects of entertainment and his gaze. The bikini symbolizes something: Leia's discontent with her attire and Jabba's treatment of her, triggers something in her, and she kills him when she has the chance, showing no remorse or mercy. No one gets to objectify her and get away with it!

As *Return of the Jedi* rolls on, Leia goes back to her normal and more covering garments. During a Rebel Alliance meeting, Leia is dressed top to toe in khaki green and beige, made up by a shirt, vest, and pants. Her hair has changed from the long, hanging braid that went with the



bikini, to the braid around her head which we've seen before. It's a huge contrast, but now we know that she has chosen the outfit herself. When on forest moon Endor, Leia and Luke have the exact same clothes on with a little bit of color variation: pants, boots, camouflage poncho and helmets. At this point, Luke knows that Leia is his sister, and this could be read as symbolizing their family likeness. When later meeting the Ewoks, Leia gets a casual, beige dress that is the shortest one she's had yet, but still quite long. It's a simple style, almost Cinderella-like, pre fairy godmother transformation. Her hair is down yet there is, of course, a braid incorporated. With the exception of this dress and the metal bikini, Leia's

clothing of choice has come to be quite casual over the course of the films. Sometimes, it's even military like, and does not differ so much from the men's. Interestingly, her clothes come to resemble those of her man, Han Solo. As the battle of Endor continues, she changes into an outfit that is quite obviously a reference to Han.

When thinking of what Princess Leia looks like, many will first of all think of the space bun hairstyle and the long white dress of the original movie—it's the 'original Princess Leia' (or the slave bikini, depending on who you're asking). From fairytales and Disney Classics, we have learned what to expect from someone that has a royal title in a fictional story. In such stories, it's not uncommon to see the princess wearing long, beautiful dresses. Leia's dress is not so formal that it looks as though she's headed for the ball at the castle, but she meets with

the expectations in some way. In the very last few seconds of *Rogue One*, we meet Leia just before the events of *Episode IV*, and she is wearing the same dress. She has gone willingly on this mission, but has chosen to wear a dress that prevents her from moving completely freely about should a conflict occur where physical effort is needed. White is typically a color that symbolizes purity. Leia's love for the color white is not necessarily an attempt to connect her with purity, and thus virginity. Carrie Fisher once stated: "I know Leia's favorite color is white," but that was about it (Taylor, 2014:302). White is also the dove, symbol of freedom. It is the color of the flag that is waved to bury the hatchet. Leia is a freedom fighter and revolutionary whose wish and goal is to bring peace to the galaxy. It could also not mean anything in particular: I, for instance, prefer to wear all black. There is no symbolism behind it other than that it is a color that I like and feel comfortable in. Then again, when she gets the chance to change in that very last scene of *A New Hope*, she chooses white. Wearing dresses could be Leia's way of trying to please the people, meeting with their expectations of a princess, doing what she feels is expected of her. Or maybe she just wants to dress up every now and then.

The space buns are on Leia's head for almost an entire film, but she does change her hair many times after this. There is, however, one similarity in all of her hairstyles: a braid of some sort. This braid also carries something symbolic. Noah Berlatsky writes that Leia is "running through different outfits and different identities". She is trying to find out what exactly it is that Han wants in a woman (Berlatsky, 2015). I'll be frank and quite explicit: this is wrong. Leia Organa does—as we have seen—indeed change her style. She spends a lot of time with men. In fact, she *only* spends time with men. Her style evolution could as such be connected to her surroundings more than her interest in Han. She sees what the men are wearing, and she is just as important a part of the war as they are. She knows that she's just as able as them, so why shouldn't she be wearing the same type of practical attire? What Leia does, is see herself as an equal to them. That she is picking up inspiration from men uncompromisingly, not making any excuses, shows this. This is where the braid comes into play, proving Berlatsky and others that share his views wrong. The braid is symbolic because it is something that she sticks with always. It doesn't matter if her hair is up or down, or if she's wearing a slave bikini, a dress or pants and a vest. It doesn't matter if she's shooting at a Stormtrooper or embracing her beloved Han—at the core of it, she stays the same. The braid reminds her of who she is, and she never forgets it. In *The Force Awakens*, more than thirty years later, she hasn't changed much from who she was style wise. She's still got the braid, she's still wearing a vest, shirt, pants and boots, even after her relationship with Han is over. When she wears a dress, it's loose fit, royal blue,

not white. Leia's style developed from her own strong sides, and she doesn't have to choose to have a completely feminine or completely masculine style: being herself means not choosing. She can do both. It was who she wanted to be all along.

Masquerade

An aspect I did not touch on with Leia Organa, was makeup. That is because it doesn't stand out or make much of a difference. It was following the trends of the late 70s, maybe even being a little bit more subtle than some. Sometimes she's wearing lipstick and a little bit of blush. It adds to her feminine side and as such differs her more from the men. It could be argued that Leia is wearing makeup because she wants men to find her appealing, but I find her makeup habits to be so standard and everyday like that I do not see it as necessary to look more into, also because I read Leia as a character who decides for herself what she wants to put on. Wearing makeup on an everyday basis is after all quite normal for women. Of course, one might question why she takes the time to do this when far more important things are going on.



Padmé Amidala stands as a contrast to the other major female characters in *Star Wars* when regarding costumes. Out of all the characters in the franchise—both male and female—she is the one who changes her outfit the most times. While Leia, Rey, and Jyn all wear the same

outfits for several scenes—some almost for an entire film, Padmé is close to having a new dress for each scene she's in. As such, it becomes harder to define some sort of signature outfit of hers. Sure, Leia only wore the slave bikini for a few minutes, but the shock factor made it iconic.

My use of the term 'masquerade' here has nothing to do with Mary Ann Doane's definition, a theory in which women finding themselves in a male position of authority put on a mask of femininity to compensate for their masculine position (Smelik, 1999). I use the term more literally to explain the way Padmé puts on an act as the Queen.

One of her most memorable costumes is her first one, the first time we meet her in *Episode I*. It is not because it's what she wears most of the time, but because it's got some sort of shock

factor: a huge contrast from what we've seen before. The young queen's face is painted white, with a red dot on each cheek. Her upper lip is red, while the lower has a red line in the middle. At first glance, she looks like a Japanese geisha. She's wearing an enormous headpiece and a floor-length, long sleeve, red dress that appears to be quite heavy to walk around in.

There is not only a contrast between Padmé Amidala and the other leading ladies, but also internally—that is, between Padmé and Queen Amidala. Of course, at the beginning of *Episode I*, we do not know that this is the same person (or at least we are not supposed to when we watch it for the first time). Amidala's handmaidens, which includes herself posing as handmaiden Padmé, are all dressed in the same bright orange dresses, complete with hoods. The attire bears similarities to monks and nuns. Their hair does not show under their hoods, and they seem to keep mostly quiet, enforcing the nun similitude. When Padmé goes with Qui-Gon on Tatooine, she changes from the orange uniform to blend in among the slaves and peasants. This costume is quite unisex: blue shirt, a gray pullover vest tunic, dark brown loose fit pants, and boots. As Padmé—that is, herself—she wears little to no makeup, as opposed to her public royal persona. The painted Queen Amidala speaks in a cold, straightforward manner. There is a lack of facial expressions: it's deadpan and uncompromising when she is debating. She appears almost emotionless, and is a woman of few, but powerful words. Without the heavy makeup, she is someone else completely. The role she takes as Queen Amidala is a masquerade. I will get back to the question of titles and class later on, but this is undoubtedly connected to costumes, especially in the case of Queen Amidala. As Padmé the handmaiden in *Episode I*, she is dressed much more functional. Costumes intervene with the actor's movements, which in turn allows further characterization (Andersson, 2011:103). Queen Amidala might not be allowed to do the same things as the men do in this trilogy, but could it be that her clothes disable her even more? Everything is so big and extravagant, that it would make it hard for her to move around quickly. Imagine running from the Empire with those enormous things on top of your head! On a more positive note, the makeup, dresses and exorbitant headpieces, make the concept of having a decoy easier.

Many of the costumes and looks in *Star Wars* are inspired by different cultures and time periods all around the world. As I mentioned already, there's Leia's revolutionary Mexico hair. The Sith and Jedi garbs are inspired by the Japanese samurai, including Darth Vader, whose helmet is based on Japanese armor. The uniforms of the Empire and First Order's officers, are inspired by World War II. Queen Amidala's gowns are drawn from Mongolian and Chinese royal attire.

Amanda Vail asks whether this is culturally appropriate, as George Lucas has stated that this makes Padmé more 'exotic', thus contributing to the notion of otherness; Orientalism (Vail, 2015). This makes the lack of racial diversity even more evident, especially among the women, if we look at the franchise as a whole.

While *Episode I* Padmé is in several scenes dressed more like the men, and is therefore able to move around easier, she doesn't fare as well in the next two. At the beginning of *Episode II*, Padmé and Captain Tycho are co-piloting a small ship, and are dressed in the exact same leather uniform. She is no longer queen, but a senator, and has left behind the traditional wear of queens. Gone is the theatrical makeup, but it doesn't take long before she's back in a long dress, although not as pompous as before. Every time she changes her dress—which is often—she changes her hair. To go through them all is pointless, because with Padmé, the dresses and hairdos don't symbolize her personality so much as they do her wealth and status. It's the fact that she changes so often that is the most interesting. Her dresses come in all sorts of different colors and fabrics. In fact, it makes her seem even more like royalty than the dramatic look of Queen Amidala. Senator Amidala *is* Padmé. Gone is the internal contrast. Leia, a royal, doesn't have close to as many elegant dresses as her mother. One could of course argue that it is connected to the time in which they find themselves: Padmé lives in the age before the Empire gains control of the galaxy, while Leia lives in a time of war.

Many of Padmé's costumes in *Episode II* and *III* seem to be meant to accentuate her natural beauty, like when she is dressed in her long night gown, curly hair cascading down her shoulders, or the pastel open back dress she wears by the lake on Naboo. Even when her and Anakin travel to Naboo to go into hiding and she tries to hide her identity, she is clad in dresses that make her stand out from the other people on the transport. On Naboo, the two attend a meeting with the new queen, who is dressed in the manner that Padmé formerly used to. Padmé's new dresses range from sweet to sexy—from light yellow and flowing with small flowers to dark and tight with a choker to go with it. Back on Tatooine when coming to look for Anakin's mother, she shows her bare midriff for the first time in a blue two piece dress, so when Padmé and Anakin go on a mission to rescue Obi-Wan, and her tight, white sweater is ripped apart by a monster, no one is shocked exposing her stomach. Like Leia's bikini, Padmé didn't choose to expose her body like this, although it must be pointed out that this particular costume is already very tight. All white, this outfit is a reference to her daughter. Notably, she's

equipped with a blaster, as Leia is. It is fair to assume that Padmé herself chooses what to wear, but that she stays within certain boundaries set by her political status.

The first time we meet her in *Episode III*, is when she reveals her pregnancy to Anakin. In this scene, she's got on a long, dark dress, but it's hardly as expressional as her hair here, because this lady has got space buns! Although they've never met, and although they are from different planets, mother and daughter show a certain likeness. It would seem that nature and nurture have both played parts when it comes to the woman that is Leia Organa. When in a long, silky night gown, natural beauty is the point of focus, brushing her long curls as Anakin watches her. She continues to change dresses, but when it all goes down and she needs to step up, she's quick to change into something a little more practical.

Padmé's clothes here are unlike what we've seen her in before. In a way, she almost resembles a Jedi—a feminized version of the traditional wear. With her light colors, she stands as a clear contrast to what used to be her significant other, now consumed by the dark side. Anakin has always dressed in quite dark colors for a Jedi, as if giving us a pointer to the fall of Anakin and rise of Vader. While Padmé failed to regard some of her own principles when she began a relationship with Anakin, she stands by her values in the end. The colors here represent this: although her husband's weak mind has been manipulated, she knows who she is, ultimately. Let's not forget that she's heavily pregnant with their child as she confronts him, which is a part of the actress's costume as well. She gives birth immediately after, wearing a long, white dress similar to that of Leia in *Episode IV*. Her two last outfits while still alive, are giving nods to what her two children are wearing in the first part of the original trilogy.

The last garb of this character is quite remarkable, as she is dressed in it after her death. It is not only the last costume the spectator gets to see her in, but also the last thing that she wears. It's not something she has picked for herself, but something her lifeless body has been clad in by others, in order to let the grieving citizens see her one last time in an open casket floating through the city streets. She's thus being put on display, but considering the circumstances, it's not meant to satisfy some kind of sexual pleasure: it's a ceremony to say goodbye—a funeral. It's not unusual that people who are to be buried in our own world, are washed, painted and dressed, although not displayed in this manner for the world to look upon the corpse. One must remember then, her status. Not only was she a respected politician and former queen, but also

loved dearly among the people. Maybe Lucas was inspired by the death and funeral procession of Princess Diana in 1997, with the exception of Lady Di's closed and covered casket.

Padmé's extravagant style does have the effect of making her seem vainer than others. War, escape, hiding; none of it stops her from taking the time to dress up.

Rey and Jyn: Unisex Universe?

With ten years in between films, and more than thirty years in the fictional universe, some things changed. From Padmé to Rey, the fancy dresses were lost. The makeup was gone. From clean and soft to filthy and rough. The new female protagonist didn't have time nor money to change her outfits and hair. She was too busy providing for herself; surviving. She doesn't even have time to clean the dirt off her face. Rey is shown sweating on several occasions, too. Up until the end of the film, she wears what looks like a poor man's Jedi garbs, as if referencing her future.



Even in a flashback to when she was a little girl, she is wearing the exact same thing. It says something about her social status, as Padmé's ever-changing wardrobe does hers. For the parts she scavenges, she gets food, not money. Only after having participated in the Resistance's mission to blow up Starkiller Base, does she have the opportunity to change, and it merely looks like an updated, cleaner version of what she used to wear. What Rey is wearing, could just as easily be worn by a man in this galaxy. Her hair doesn't change either, always in the same three-bun ponytail on the back of her head.

Jyn Erso, too, wears clothing that could be described as unisex. In a shirt, vest, pants, and boots, she wears almost the exact same thing as the men. She's dirty, sweaty, her hair is in a simple bun, and it's more about practicality than looking good. Like Han and Luke in *Episode IV*, and Leia in *Episode VI*, Jyn puts on a uniform to fool the imperials on Scarif, letting her walk freely. Neither Jyn nor Rey is seen wearing makeup, and it doesn't seem like they care about what they are wearing at all, as they don't change it. To them, what they're doing is more important. They

aren't the first women to wear unisex clothing: Leia started something back in *Episode V*. Although her clothes might have been a little tighter than those of her male accomplices, she began enabling herself more through the way she dressed. She did her hair and makeup, sure, but who says you can't do both?



What Jyn and Rey wear, might stand out from what people in the real world would wear, but compared to other people in the fictional universe, they don't exactly stand out. Color is a tool for instance used to underline the narrative, creating a cohesive fictional space (Kurland & Landis, cited in Andersson, 2011:105). In this case, there isn't a lot of color, and so it underlines both their carefree attitudes towards clothing, as well as their social status, as the colors look washed up from heavy usage and dirt. There has been a shift in the galaxy, wherein everyday clothing has become more genderless than ever before. I should not fail to mention though, that many men of high status too wear attire that could be considered very impractical for moving around in, but as I will get back to later, the elite is not who *Star Wars* is about.

Leia wears a dress at the end of *The Force Awakens*, and Mon Mothma and Tynnra Pamlo are wearing quite feminine attire at the Rebel Alliance headquarters in *Rogue One*, but aside from this, most women we see are wearing everyday clothing or uniforms that would function on men too, neither distinctively feminine nor masculine. Female fighter pilots would wear the exact same uniform as the male ones, and the women of the First Order have the same uniforms as their male peers. Captain Phasma's chrome Stormtrooper armor is the ultimate symbol that women now *can* do the same thing that men can. At the same time, it produces a contrast. If women can do the same thing as the men, then why are there so few of them?

In *Episode IV*, the dress-clad Leia doesn't miss a single target when she shoots, but when she's wearing her more androgynous attire in *V* and *VI*, she becomes even more active, doing more of what the guys do. Jyn, Rey, Phasma, Zam—they already are androgynous. There is one more thing they all have in common: they are all women who are surrounded by men, and are accepted into the male groups they are part of. Padmé fails to do so, seen as someone who needs

protection. She is very feminine, and her attire underlines it. A garment can limit the body, which it does for Padmé (Andersson, 2011:103). When she tries more practical outfits, they are still tight and feminine to the point where a man couldn't be wearing the same thing without being perceived as non-masculine. The women that are presented as independent, able, and active, all fall in-between distinctively feminine or masculine traits. Rikke Schubart suggests that the spectator, too, must place herself in-between, caught between pleasure and guilt, acceptance and denial (Schubart, 2007:7). This, unfortunately, does not erase the problem. The strong woman in *Star Wars* isn't just surrounded by men—she is one of them. This makes her problematic. She poses as the 'cool girl' who can hang with the guys. She is a girl who doesn't feel the need to have female friends with typically feminine traits. Because there are so few women, the films suggest that only *some* women can be as active and able as the men, and that this little handful cannot have all feminine traits if they want to accomplish something, and be accepted and respected—by the men.

If it seems that I am ambivalent, it is because I am. I find it refreshing that the women don't have to wear long dresses and makeup, but at the same time, a woman who is interested in hair, makeup, and fashion, isn't automatically weak and unable. There is nothing wrong with a woman not fitting into the expectations of stereotypical femininity, but it becomes conspicuous when two heroines in a row, in everyday speech could be referred to as 'tomboys'. As such, *Star Wars* supports a view in which masculine traits equals active, and feminine traits equals passive. This is not to say that there is anything wrong with being a so-called 'tomboy'. Maybe what it actually means, is that we have a wrongful view of the definitions of masculinity and femininity. Who's to say that being physically strong doesn't cohere with being feminine?

The only solution is to bring in more women and represent a wider range of styles and personalities—not to mention ethnicity—as is done with men.

Princesses, Queens, Scavengers, and Rebels: Social Class

In *Episode I*, Shmi Skywalker establishes that children are conceived the old-fashioned way. Much like the Immaculate Conception, Anakin—the chosen one—has no father, and there never was one. This means that there is an additional issue with the lack of women: without them, reproduction becomes a problem. In general throughout the episodes, diversity in gender, race, and sexual orientation, is largely absent. When it comes to the representation of class and social status, however, we are presented with a more satisfying and wider range. Even droids can have different social backgrounds from one another. Throughout the saga, major characters range from royalty to slaves.

Working Class Heroes

Dylan Millson has noted that, in the original trilogy, Leia, Han, and Luke are all working class:

Scenes of the working class are coded into the trilogy: Luke Skywalker is the son of a farmer; Han Solo, a smuggler, performs for commission the dirty work required of him by his boss, Jabba the Hut; Even Princess Leia is working class, as she gives up the prospect of a comfortable elite lifestyle to aid the rebellion; there are even scenes of her doing work with her hands, like on Hoth in *Empire Strikes Back* (Millson, 2016).

Millson has a point: Leia does give up her royal lifestyle to fight with the rebellion. Her royal title doesn't really have a function in the plot. Leia is a born and bred Rebel. Her adoptive father, Senator Bail Organa, is a vital part of the Alliance. In *Rogue One*, he gives her the plans to the Death Star because he trusts her more than anyone—Leia being a princess has nothing to do with this. She would have been an important part regardless of class. The question, then, remains: what was the purpose behind making Leia a princess? At the time of his research for the first film, Lucas had read a lot of fairytales, in which the main character was almost always female. He also at one point made Luke Skywalker into an eighteen-year-old girl. Chris Taylor defends the approach:

"Think Cinderella, Rapunzel, Snow White, Red Riding Hood, and Goldilocks—as much as they have to be saved by princes or woodcutters, we at least see the story through their eyes." (Taylor, 2014:147)

This interest in fairytales could explain why she was made a princess. In fairytales, the princess is often saved by a man of a lower class, and he does not only get the girl, but also wealth and honor. As such, the title is problematic, because it turns the woman in question into a stereotype that needs a man, and into an object of the man's desire. The man receives his wealth and status through her. At the beginning of *Episode IV*, Leia being a princess enhances the men's initial interest in her. To the farmer's boy Luke, she's beauty and mystery, and a part of his adventure is rescuing her and proving himself. To Han, she's a chance for him to achieve wealth. He often uses her royal title as a means to ridicule her when he realizes that he likes her, using it as a defense mechanism in order to avoid revealing his true feelings. Once the two get to know her, however, her being a princess doesn't make any difference. As Millson points out, she is, in many ways, working class just like them. She would rather save the galaxy than sit in her tower and wait for a man. Although the title may be seen as somewhat problematic, Leia redefines what being a princess is, maybe most explicitly in *The Force Awakens*, when she has become a general—General Organa. This is the ultimate statement of her self-realization, confirming that she is far from the stereotype, and never truly was.

While the title 'princess' is often seen as a stereotypical damsel in distress in stories and tales, a queen is often in a position of power. For instance, the Evil Queen in the story of Snow White, the fast-talking, fierce Queen Elinor in *Brave* (Andrews & Chapman, 2012), or the Queen of Hearts in *Alice in Wonderland* (Geronimi & Jackson, 1951). More recently, series like *Game of Thrones* (Benioff & Weiss, 2011-) has shown representations of a range of powerful, fierce women who rule over—or try/wish to rule over—their people. Queen Amidala was, at fourteen years old, not the youngest queen ever elected, but she is undoubtedly still very young. In *Episode II*, Padmé, now a senator, tells Anakin that she was in the Legislative Youth Programme when she was younger, which means she has been in politics from an early age. She did not inherit her title, but was elected by the people because she was popular and well loved. The political system in *Star Wars* comes across as quite confusing, as Michael Idato has noted:

[...]the Star Wars universe was always built on rather unsteady political traditions. Leia was a Princess of the planet Alderaan, and her mother, Padme Amidala, a Queen of the planet Naboo. But Leia's title was not by courtesy of her mother, rather, it came by way of her adopted parents, Bail Organa, who was Viceroy of Alderaan, and Brea Organa, who was Queen of Alderaan and its minister of education. To

make things even more messy, Leia was a Princess in days of the Old Republic. (A princess in a republic? God save us.) And her birth mother, Padme Amidala, who was Queen of Naboo, was actually an elected monarch, not a hereditary one (Idato, 2015).

Although both are royalty, there are many differences between Leia and Padmé. One thing that is especially striking, is the manner in which they talk.

I-III deal mostly with aristocrats and politicians, queens and senators, the high-falutin' Jedi Council. To hear how that kind of person talks in the original trilogy, listen to Princess Leia and Grand Moff Tarkin (Taylor, 2014:450).

Padmé has a much more stiff, monotone and utterly formal way of speaking when in her traditional queen's garments. Even when she talks to Anakin in private, the language is more formal than Leia's ever is. In combination with Padmé's extravagant fashion sense, this strengthens a view of Leia as more working class, and Padmé as more of an elite. Millson again makes an interesting note:

Lucas seems to be saying that in the absence of the working class, society will tend toward injustices like those of the Empire. The Empire was the result of a lack of working-class representation in the vote which gave then-senator Palpatine power, and the Empire was not challenged until the working class rebelled, overthrew it, and established a new government. It seems, then, that one mode for the spread of democratic values by the working class is by rebellion. (Millson, 2016)

For most spectators, working class characters will be much more relatable than a wealthy, political elite. This could be one of the reasons why Padmé is such a difficult character to grasp: she just isn't sympathetic enough because of her status, enhanced by what she wears, speaks about and how. Leia, Jyn, and Rey, all take direct part in the Rebellion against the dark side, whilst Padmé needs protection from the Jedi because she's so important. She becomes unapproachable.

I expressed earlier that a character like Rey is at first kept from transcending because of her social and economic situation, not because of gender. This does not necessarily mean that wealth and status equals transcendence, as is the case with Padmé. Padmé is transcendent because of her work, not because of her higher class. She regresses to immanence when giving up everything for Anakin.

Jyn and Rey can both be located somewhere in the lower or working class, Rey trading parts for food, Jyn being a criminal. Both grew up without their parents, but if anything, it's made them better people with good values. The wealthy and powerful upper class, with the exception of Padmé and Bail Organa, are evil. Jyn's parents gave up a luxurious lifestyle with the Empire because they didn't believe in what they stood for. Anakin's mother is the lowest class woman we meet, as she is a slave. She is kind, sensible, and good, willing to sacrifice anything for her son, and her social rank doesn't prevent people from respecting her. In fact, the people in the galaxy far, far away seem to respect each other regardless of class.

Galactic Romance

An important part of understanding the characters, is looking at their relationships. How they function in these heterosexual romances, can tell us a lot about who they are. Some do not even find themselves in romantic relationships, but here, that says just as much as being in one.

Mutual Respect

Twilight (Hardwicke, 2008), *Pretty in Pink* (Deutch, 1986), *Jules et Jim* (Truffaut, 1962), *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Lawrence, 2013), *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, 1939), *Casablanca* (Curtiz, 1942), *Bridget Jones's Diary* (Maguire, 2001), *Sabrina* (Wilder, 1954). What do these films have in common? They all depict love triangles between two men and one woman, a classic story. *Star Wars* too used this element. Due to the events of *Episode IV* and *V*, there was a question of who Leia would end up with—Han or Luke. No one was prepared for the twist that was to determine this:

In the history of *Star Wars*, few decisions—including the decision to make Jar Jar Binks a character in the prequels—have been as consistently controversial as the decision to make Leia Luke's sister. This was, after all, a romantic triangle that had lived in the memory of popular culture for six years. Fans had laughed at her kissing Luke "for luck" before their rope swing in *IV*, and whooped when she gave Luke a longer, more sensual kiss in the medical bay in *V*. Now it turned out that any fan rooting for Luke and Leia to get together had in fact been rooting for incest. The decision may have definitively settled the question of who Leia would end up with, Luke or Han, but it left a bad taste in its wake. (Taylor, 2014:322)

It is understandable that fans were appalled by this reveal. After all, the twins had kissed each other, and Luke was more so a typical good guy than Han. One could undoubtedly argue that the fans *wanted* a love triangle to make story more dramatic, or that they were disappointed that she couldn't go for the Jedi knight. However, there are some pretty clear pointers as to who Leia will be with in the end, and it has nothing to do with this twist.

There are different perceptions of the nature of the relationship between Han and Leia. There is no denying that Han has some problematic moments. After rescuing Leia from her cell in *A*

New Hope, the gang famously falls into a garbage shaft, from which R2 rescues them. When they get out, Han isn't too happy, stating: "If we could just avoid any more female advice... we ought to be able to get out of here." Clearly, this comment is quite offensive, not just to Leia, but to women in general. When looking at a work from a feminist perspective, it's easy to fall into the trap of focusing on negative aspects such as this. In this case, it's not simply black and white. Just a moment later, Leia turns to Han and says: "Listen, I don't know who you are or where you came from, but from now on, you do as I tell you. Okay?" As I presented examples of in chapter 1, Leia is not afraid to talk back, express her opinion, or give orders. She repeatedly mocks Han, if not his abilities, then his ship. Han does the same to her. In reality, it's not a case of throwing negative remarks at each other: it's a game in which the two tease each other, trying to find out if the other one has a romantic interest in them. There is sass and sarcasm, but at its core, it's playground flirting. When Leia kisses Luke, it's not because she wants him—it's to test Han.

If you compare the traits of Luke and Leia, the two are quite different. Luke is far from being on Leia's level of maturity. It's hard to say whether she is ahead of her age, or if he is behind. Either way, this may very well have to do with background. Luke is raised on a farm in the middle of nowhere. He hasn't experienced much in his life thus far. When he meets new people, he bonds with them immediately, and has no hesitations on whether to join the adventure. He is quick to open up, and sometimes appears as a whiny teenager. Leia is born into her wealth and title, and if we take the events of *Rogue One* into account, she is raised to be a revolutionary and to work to restore peace and justice, putting the greater good first. It may appear obvious that Leia would be more mentally matured than her brother based on this. She has experienced far more than him. Han is a smuggler—a criminal, used to worrying only about himself. Although Leia and Han come from different backgrounds, ultimately, they share many of the same traits, and they both have seen and done things on their respective escapades through the galaxy. Both have very strong personalities and are quite confident in themselves: they know who they are and they don't take nonsense from anyone. Although Luke speaks up and shows bravery, he doesn't share the feistiness of the other members of the trio. He has a different way of being, openly expressing his emotions as they occur. Like his sister, he has a sense of being calm and collected, but his is learned over time as he becomes a Jedi and learns to have more control.

Neither Han nor Leia are ever at a loss for words. When put in the situations that they are, they do what needs to be done, and do so bravely. Han and Leia both use a whole lot of sarcasm when they talk, especially to each other. It's like they have their own language with a mutual understanding of the rules. This is because they recognize the other one as a strong personality—as an equal. Luke and Leia also respect each other, but were they not siblings, their personalities would still not be as compatible as Han and Leia's. Where Han and Leia might bicker and compromise, standing their ground, Luke and Leia mostly agree, lacking the playfulness and passion of the other combination. As we know, of course, it takes some time before any of them admit to this, again showing a common trait: they have too much pride to give into something like romance just like that. When push comes to shove, it's Han that shows the interest explicitly first, by trying to make Leia admit to having feelings for him, not quite ready to spill his heart out just yet. Han and Leia's relationship is based on mutual respect and compromise. They are both used to being the one in charge—the one in control. Now they have to work together, like they do when they come up with a plan to escape the Empire on their way to Cloud City in *Episode V*. They are a team now, having met their match: someone who dares stand up to the other. The ultimate indication of the balance in their relationship, is unarguably their explicit formulation of their love for each other: the "I love you" answered with "I know". It is Leia who first tells Han she loves him, but the feeling is mutual, confirmed when the roles are switched, and it is Leia who tells Han she knows he loves her.

Some critics find the relationship to be problematic in terms of the character development of Leia. Megan Kearns, for instance, writes:

Even though Leia has romantic feelings for Han Solo in *The Empire Strikes Back*, she continues to call out his arrogant bullshit. [...] Throughout the trilogy, we see Leia lead and dispense tactical information to Rebel fighters. But ultimately, her underlying role appears to be to motivate Luke on his hero's quest and Han on his personal transformation (Kearns, 2012).

Kearns is torn when it comes to Leia. There is no denying that the men's story arcs are more exciting. That is because they are allowed to do more, not because they are more able. Even though Leia is Force sensitive, she never gets to wield a lightsaber like her twin brother. Although an important part of the rebellion, it is Han and Luke that receive medals at the end of *Episode IV*, and not her. Luke does become a Jedi. He goes from a bored farmer's boy living in the middle of the desert where nothing ever happens, having zero life experience, to being a

protector of the galaxy, experiencing more adventure than he could ever have dreamed of. Han Solo transforms from a self-centered criminal with questionable morals, to a friend, team player, and boyfriend. Noah Berlatsky accuses Leia of trying on different outfits to see what Han likes, so that she can be the woman he wants, willing to change for him (Berlatsky, 2015). If anyone changes in this relationship, it's him: he learns how to care about something, and last but not least to love: he becomes more like Leia. In his book, solely about how *Star Wars* took over the world, Chris Taylor expresses his views on the issue of Leia's role:

Luke had to grapple with the lure of the Dark Side after a disturbing revelation; Han got his sacrificial freezing scene; Lando got to redeem his betrayal and bad deal with the Empire. Leia? She was still handy with a blaster, sure, but all she got to learn was how to tremble in Han's arms, how to "use a good kiss," how to tell a man you love him. (Taylor, 2014:302)

There are especially three things that stand out as particularly problematic in this sense. First, Leia is forced to watch the Empire blow up her entire home planet of Alderaan right in front of her. According to Wookieepedia, 2 billion people lived on Alderaan, which means not only her family, but also *2 billion innocent people* are turned to ashes and dust (starwars.wikia.com). Leia's home is gone and her family is dead. When Obi-Wan is killed soon after, Luke is devastated, and Leia needs to comfort him. Luke has only just met Obi-Wan. No one comforts Leia or even asks her how she's doing. Second, Leia too is the offspring of Darth Vader, but she is not allowed the chance of exploring her feelings about it. Luke battles his emotions, torn between the father he never knew, and his loyalty to the rebellion and commitment to being a Jedi. When Luke tells Leia about her origin, she barely has a reaction—in fact, she seems more distressed when Luke first says that Vader is *his* father, before revealing to her that they are twins. When he tells her that she is his sister, all she says is that she knows, and that she's somehow always known it (which is a little bit off-putting considering that she has kissed him). It's quite conspicuous that Vader never talks about his daughter and cannot feel her presence as he does his son's. He is only interested in his son. Leia also learns that she is strong with the Force (although there has been implications to this already), and Vader should thus be able to sense this. This leads us to the third question: why is Leia not a Jedi? Considering that Luke is now the only Jedi in the galaxy following the death of Obi-Wan and Yoda, why isn't Leia taught how to use her abilities too? The task of passing on the Jedi way is now resting entirely on Luke's shoulders when he could have had help. When we meet Leia in *The Force Awakens*, there is still no sign of a lightsaber in her hands. She has not become a Jedi, but a general, and

is the leader of the Resistance—the Rebel Alliance of the new age. It could be argued that Leia had no interest in becoming a Jedi, but the question of why Leia was robbed of parts of her story arc, remains. In this regard, I can see how some might see Leia as nothing but a pawn in the process of the men’s character development, but to say the filmmaker didn’t have opportunities to enable her in more instances as a character, would be a lie.

Before Leia and Han are reunited in *Episode VII*, the spectator witnesses Han telling his female friend, Maz Kanata, that Leia does not want to see him. After their son Ben—now Kylo Ren—has captured Rey, they see each other for the first time in what appears to be quite a while. A conversation between the two sets the record straight for what has happened with their relationship:

Leia:	I can’t believe I was so foolish to think I could find Luke and bring him home.
Han:	Leia.
Leia:	Don’t do that.
Han:	Do what?
Leia:	Anything. [Walks off]
C-3PO:	[To Han:] Princesses.
Han:	[Walks after her] I’m trying to be helpful.
Leia:	[Chuckles sarcastically] When did that ever help? And don’t say the Death Star.
Han:	[Sighs] Listen to me, will you? I know every time you... Every time you look at me you’re reminded of him.
Leia:	You think I want to forget him? I want him back.
Han:	There’s nothing more we could have done. There’s too much Vader in him.
Leia:	That’s why I wanted him to train with Luke. I just never should have sent him away. That’s when I lost him. That’s when I lost you both.
Han:	We both had to deal with it in our own way. I went back to the only thing I was ever any good at.
Leia:	We both did.
Han:	We lost our son. Forever.
Leia:	No. It was Snoke. He seduced our son to the dark side. But we can still save him. Me. You.
Han:	If Luke couldn’t reach him, how could I?
Leia:	Luke is a Jedi. You’re his father. There is still light in him, I know it.

When Han is getting ready to leave for Starkiller Base with Chewie and Finn, Leia comes up to him:

Leia:	You know, no matter how much we fought... I've always hated watching you leave.
Han:	That's why I did it. [Cheeky smile] So you'd miss me.
Leia:	I did miss you.
Han:	It wasn't all bad, was it? Huh? Some of it was... good.
Leia:	Pretty good. [Both chuckle]
Han:	[Sighs] Some things never change.
Leia:	True. You still drive me crazy. [Han embraces Leia, pressing her head to his chest] If you see our son... bring him home.

From this, we can gather that Han and Leia stayed together for a long time after the events of *Episode VI*, but that their son turning to the dark side drove them apart. It seems they may have faced other difficulties in their relationship as well. Both Leia and Han are very much the same as before, with their snappy lines and teasing the other one. Perhaps it was precisely their strong personalities and similarities that caused problems between them. It is nonetheless obvious that the two still care very much about each other—the mutual love and respect is ever present. Han has gone back to his old ways, thus spiting the change he made for the better. Nevertheless, he gets right back in the game when the opportunity comes.

It is comprehensible how some critics view Leia as a pawn—a motivation or a piece in the men's story arcs. She *is* someone's love interest, and she is not allowed to do the same things as the men who hold her as this. However, it is important to note that at the point where the story begun in 1977, Leia was already a revolutionary and played an important role in the Rebel Alliance. Had it not been for her hologram message, Luke would have never been a part of the Rebellion and would probably never have become a Jedi: he would have been murdered along with his aunt and uncle on Tatooine. If Luke had died, he would never have met Han, and Han would still be a criminal. In this sense, Leia can definitely be seen as a pawn—the one that brings the group together. Yet, *The Force Awakens* again reminds us that Leia always knew who she was and what she wanted to do. She didn't need as much of a transformation as the men to find herself. Yes, she was someone's love interest, but someone was *her* love interest too. As Suzi Parker puts it:

Sure, Leia landed on Endor amid ewoks and showed her feminine side in "Jedi" by falling—and falling and falling some more—in love with Han. But what's wrong with a heroine finding her match? Nothing, especially if she does it on her own terms (Parker [no date]).

This, unfortunately, does not change the fact that Leia does not have any female friends. Who does Leia spend time with? Luke, Han, Chewbacca, two male droids and a male Ewok. In *Episode VII*, she gets to have a short conversation with Rey, but it can hardly be categorized as friendship. This is the first time she ever talks to another female character. She doesn't have any other women to talk to, something which perpetuates the notion that the lives of the women inhabiting this galaxy, ultimately revolve around men (Kearns, 2012). All of Leia's friends are men. As we shall see, there is one thing that hasn't changed much in the history of *Star Wars*: the women don't have friends of their own gender.

Love Kills

Already within the first few minutes after we've met Luke in *A New Hope*, he has—while seeing the hologram of Leia that R2 holds—expressed that he thinks she's beautiful. After rescuing her from her cell, he goes on to suggest his interest in her to Han, right after having met her for the first time. Han doesn't ever talk about Leia's looks, neither through complimenting her or by talking to other men about her. On Luke's expression of romantic interest in the Princess, he comments that "she's got a lot of spirit." This makes Han stand in contrast not only to Luke, but also to the father of his better half.

Anakin is only a little boy when him and Padmé meet for the first time. Their relationship in *Episode I* is less than platonic: a friendship like that between a sister and her younger brother. She takes the role of caretaker, as Rey does BB-8. Nevertheless, it is the start of something. Despite their age difference and never having met before, Anakin tells the older girl that she is beautiful, resembling an angel—the most beautiful creatures in the universe. It can be read as sweet: a little boy who's got a crush. Something doesn't feel right, however, when Jar Jar Binks later on tells this little boy that he thinks Padmé is *hot*. While off-putting, this is not the biggest problem that this film presents to us. It appears to me that in *Phantom Menace*, Padmé is nothing but a pawn in the story of Anakin Skywalker. Don't get me wrong: she is a queen and thus an important political figure in a difficult time with hidden threats, and she stands for what she believes in, uncompromising when debating her opponents. She shows her independence and ability to take care of herself when she reveals that she's been using a decoy, not even trusting

Jedi knights Obi-Wan Kenobi and Qui-Gon Jinn with the secret, although they are undoubtedly on her side. It is therefore questionable that in spite of this, her most important role in the events of the first installment of the prequel trilogy, is to establish some kind of bond with Anakin. Padmé does—like Leia—show to be handy with a blaster, and she takes part in the action towards the end of the film. At the very end of *Episode IV*, Luke and Han are rewarded with medals for their parts in the attack on the Death Star. Leia presents them with the medals, not receiving any credit for her own participation and role in the mission. Similarly, Padmé gets no recognition for her role, whereas Anakin is depicted as a hero, his effort portrayed as more impactful than those of everyone else. It is understandable that people are impressed by Anakin considering his young age, but it is questionable that it is yet again a man who is getting all the recognition.

In *Attack of the Clones*, Obi-Wan and Anakin are assigned to protect Padmé. Although never established in the movies, Wookieepedia confirms that Anakin is 9 years old in *Episode I*, and Padmé 14, which means she is five years his senior (starwars.wikia.com). *Episode II* is set ten years later. They have not seen each other since the events of the first film, but early on, Anakin makes it clear that he has not forgotten her, first by expressing his nervousness to Obi-Wan, then by starting his first exchanging of words with her in ten years like this:

Padmé:	Ani? My goodness, you've grown.
Anakin:	So have you. Grown more beautiful, I mean. Well f-for a senator, I mean."
Padmé:	[Laughs] Ani, you'll always be that little boy I knew on Tatooine.

Anakin admits to Jar Jar afterwards that he has thought about Padmé every day, and expresses that he is very disappointed that it does not seem she has been thinking about him the same way. Despite knowing that Jedi are not allowed to have romantic relationships, he expresses to Obi-Wan several times that he has such interest in her. He talks an awful lot about seeing her in his dreams and thinking about her, both to others and to Padmé herself.

Upon leaving for Naboo, Padmé exchanges a few words with her new decoy, Dormé, and they share a quick hug. She also talks to Queen Jamillia, and at the very beginning of the film, to her decoy Cordé as she dies in Padmé's arms following a bomb attack. Those are the only conversations she has with other women, and men are present during all of them. In the first episode, Padmé talks to her handmaidens briefly and to Shmi Skywalker, whilst in *Episode III*,

she doesn't talk to a single female character. She talks very little of Anakin before he turns to the dark side and she discusses the situation with Obi-Wan. It appears that any conversation she has outside of politics or with Anakin, is not important to the story. We don't know what kind of relationship Padmé has with her handmaidens, because we are not presented with that information, but at least she surrounds herself with women, unlike Leia. Nonetheless, the majority of people she converses with throughout the trilogy, are men.

As I mentioned in chapter 1, the conversations that Padmé and Anakin have, mostly revolve around politics—in particular before they start their secret relationship. It's not what most people picture flirting between a 19 year old man and 24 year old woman to be like. Their language is stiff and formal even when they are talking in private. There are attempts at a sense of playfulness, but it drowns in the heavy vocabulary and the fact that the two have very different views of the world. Almost every single time they talk, there is a void between them. On one side stands Anakin with the arrogance of a young man who still has a lot to learn. He is impulsive and narcissistic. On the other is Padmé, wise beyond her years, thinking before speaking and acting—sensible, calm.

In almost every conversation, a distinct difference is visible. Anakin has the arrogance of a young man with power who still has a lot to learn. He is impulsive and narcissistic, and acts on his feelings. Padmé has worked in politics for years, serving the people. She thinks before she speaks and acts, and is sensible and calm. Their age difference could be a contributing factor to this contrast. There is also a chance that Padmé is more mature as a result of getting into politics at an early age. Taking this into consideration—her job and political standpoint—one can ask why she goes on to start a relationship with someone who has told her explicitly that he thinks dictatorship is a good solution. To Padmé, democracy and liberty are two immensely important things, because it is important to the people she serves. She resists his proposition of starting a secret relationship at first, telling him that she will not give into this. At this point, she has not expressed her feelings for him as he has expressed his for her, although they have shared a kiss. When Padmé suddenly reveals that she is deeply in love with him before they are being brought onto the arena after their failed attempt at rescuing Obi-Wan, it is both surprising and unsurprising. The protagonist of most Hollywood films, is a straight white male who is seeking wealth or power, and he emerges victorious at the end of the film (Benshoff & Griffin, 2009:25). This usually involves getting the girl in addition to his main goal. We know that Anakin Skywalker becomes Darth Vader and that he is the father of Luke and Leia. It's quite obvious

who their mother is. Despite Padmé's story arc being close to non-existent, she is crucial: it is too late to introduce a new love interest for Anakin, and this would in turn erase the purpose of Padmé's presence in the films altogether (which, of course, is very problematic). This is the unsurprising aspect of her confession. If it seems like I am extremely negative about their relationship, it is because I have trouble understanding what exactly it is that brings these two together besides physical attraction. This is what is surprising about it.

Except for Cliegg Lars and Shmi Skywalker, Padmé and Anakin are the only characters we meet that we know to be married in the entire series thus far. Along with C-3PO and R2, the spectator gets to witness their secret wedding ceremony on Naboo at the very end of *Episode II*. The first time we ever see a woman in *Episode III*, it's been 24 minutes. It is Padmé, telling Anakin that she is pregnant. After this, Anakin starts having nightmares about Padmé dying in childbirth, and their conversations slowly change from being about politics to Anakin talking about that he cannot lose her as he lost his mother—that he must keep her and the baby safe, while Padmé assures him that everything will be fine: she is more worried about *him*. As it turns out, she had every reason to be concerned, when her husband and father-to-be whips out his lightsaber and kills a bunch of children at the Jedi temple.

In some ways, the love story between Padmé and Anakin is similar to that between human girl Bella and vampire boy Edward in *Twilight*. They do not really know each other, nor do they have very much in common, but for some reason they are madly in love. It doesn't help that in *Star Wars*, Padmé's main purpose is to have a relationship with the male protagonist who turns antagonist. Like the typical male protagonist, he gets both the girl and the power he has set out to achieve. This power is ultimately what turns him into the antagonist. However, when he turns into the main villain of the *Star Wars* series, Padmé rejects him. This could be a chance for her to redeem herself and live up to her potential. She knows that these aren't the values she stands for. During her pregnancy, she states that she most likely will not be allowed to serve as senator when she has her baby. She is willing to give up her political career—to give up fighting for the democracy and freedom that is so close to her heart, in order to have Anakin's child. She has given up many things for him. She is not willing, however, to give up the beliefs that are most fundamental to her character. The contrast between them becomes most apparent when he turns to the dark side, although it has always been there.

Anakin turns to the dark side because the Emperor lures him towards it by telling him the Sith can stop people from dying by using the dark side of the Force. Anakin is still haunted by his mother's death, and now he wants to save Padmé from dying in childbirth. Again, Padmé is but a pawn in the story of the making of a villain: Anakin turns evil for Padmé, but is rejected by her when he does so. Although Padmé does not want to be with a deranged killer with extremely questionable morals and political views, she cannot handle the thought of living without him, and so she dies after giving birth to Luke and Leia, just like in Anakin's nightmares. While her daughter some years later doesn't let her love for her man get in the way of her doing what needs to be done, Padmé has let Anakin take everything away from her, including her life. This is the chance that Padmé has to stand up and fight for what she believes in, but she gives up. She doesn't keep fighting for her children—her heart is so broken that she is unable to go on. The fault could be laid on Padmé or it could be laid on the filmmaker. Padmé's death is used as a punishment for Anakin, the anger and sorrow fueling his dark powers. He has throughout the trilogy been rewarded for his bad behavior by his mentors, but now there is finally a chance for him to get what he deserves: killing off the love of his life. The only problem is that it is ultimately Padmé that is being punished, while Darth Vader gets to rule the galaxy. Padmé's death was the final push over the edge in the downfall of Anakin Skywalker. Loving Anakin was the downfall of Padmé Amidala. While all of this fits Anakin's story arc as a bad guy, it doesn't change the fact that it erases Padmé's potential.

"Stop taking my hand!"

When it comes to Rey, much is still speculation. Padmé has appeared in three films, Leia in four. None of these women started their romantic relationships in their first film, although some interests were implied. As of this writing, Rey has yet to hold a romantic interest. Two more movies are set for release and anything could happen. However, someone has already taken an interest in her.

Stormtrooper FN-2187 escapes the First Order that controls him by working with captive Resistance pilot Poe Dameron. FN-2187—Finn—has been under the grip of Captain Phasma, a female Stormtrooper commander. While the Empire did not have a single woman working for them, it seems the times have changed. Nevertheless, when Finn sees Rey on Jakku for the first time, he is mesmerized. He immediately runs to her rescue when he sees her being attacked by two men trying to steal BB-8, but is dumbfounded when she takes them both down without anyone's help. Finn lies to Rey, telling her that he is with the Resistance. Whether he does it to

protect himself or to impress her, is hard to say, and it could easily be a mix of the two. When the First Order attacks the settlement on Jakku soon after, and they need to make a run for it, he takes her hand, much to her dismay: "Stop taking my hand!"

Aboard their getaway stolen ship, the *Millennium Falcon*, the two introduce themselves to each other for the first time as they haven't had time yet. Rey goes on to fix a leakage and tells Finn that she needs to get back to Jakku, upon which Finn asks her if she's "got a boyfriend? A cute boyfriend?" At this point, they have known each other for approximately a few hours or less, and he is showing romantic interest already. After having met Han and Chewie, they end up on Takodana, at Maz's castle. This is where Finn reveals who he really is, having lied to Rey:

Rey:	You can't just go. I won't let you.
Finn:	I'm not who you think I am.
Rey:	Finn, what are you talking about?
Finn:	I'm not Resistance. I'm not a hero. I'm a Stormtrooper. Like all of them, I was taken from a family I'll never know. And raised to do one thing. But my first battle, I made a choice. I wasn't gonna kill for them. So I ran. Right into you. And you looked at me like no one ever had. I was ashamed of what I was. But I'm done with the First Order. I'm never going back. Rey, come with me.
Rey:	Don't go.
Finn:	Take care of yourself. Please. [Walks away]

Rey accepts him without criticizing him for lying to her. They have bonded over the short time they have known each other, but it's hard to say whether it's romantic or strictly friendly. Both of these characters have felt alone in the world, thus it is not strange that they would latch onto each other, finally experiencing some sense of belonging and acceptance. When Takodana is attacked, and Rey is taken by Kylo Ren, Finn stays after all. On Starkiller Base, he tells Han that he has only come with them to "get Rey," again acting as if she needs him to save her.

Finn:	What happened to you? Did he hurt you?
Rey:	Finn, what are you doing here?
Finn:	We came back for you. [Chewie growls as to exclaim something] What'd he say?
Rey:	That is was your idea. [They hug] Thank you.
Finn:	How did you get away?
Rey:	I can't explain it. And you wouldn't believe it.
Han:	Escape now, hug later.

Throughout *Episode VII*, Finn expresses the feeling of needing to save Rey multiple times. When they come to get her at Starkiller Base, it is needed: without Han, Chewie and Finn, Rey might not have been able to leave the planet-sized station, although she has handled the trickiest part on her own by breaking out of the cell. This is also a demonstration of the power of the Force that lies within her. It is Rey who ends up saving Finn. First, she saves him by flying the *Millennium Falcon* from Jakku to get away from the First Order. Second, she saves him from one of the Rathtars that Han Solo is transporting by closing a fuse that chops off the arm it's got wrapped around Finn. Third, she saves him on Starkiller Base in the lightsaber match against Kylo Ren (of course, it's Chewie that picks them up before the station blows up). Back with the Resistance, Finn is still unconscious. When Rey gets ready to leave for her mission to find Luke, she says goodbye to him: "We'll see each other again. I believe that," then kisses his forehead. "Thank you, my friend." This line could be settling the question of whether there is any romantic interest from Rey's side, but we will have two more movies to explore their relationship further. While Rey and Finn do have compatible personality traits and the same values, and he has revealed to have an interest in her it does not necessarily mean that they need to end up as a couple.

There has always been a lot of talk about bringing balance to the Force in the *Star Wars* film series. One fan theory is that Rey will end up with Kylo Ren, thus bringing balance to the Force by uniting light and dark, but these are still just speculations; some fans are hoping for a gay relationship between Finn and Poe, or for Rey herself to be gay, revolutionizing the franchise with more diversity than ever. Some wish for Rey to not end up with anyone at all, which would be the ultimate statement of independence. Of course, fan theories come in all shapes and sizes, and online you can find a wide range if you're looking for support in whatever wishes you may have for the upcoming episodes. Nothing will be certain until all the pieces of the puzzle have been laid by the makers. When it comes to Rey's love life, we will have to wait and see. The same goes for friendships: a lot can still happen. So far, not much has changed about this aspect, because like her predecessors, Rey doesn't have any female friends. She talks to Maz and receives her support, sure, and she talks to Leia briefly towards the end, but who does she go on missions with? Who are her companions? Who does she get to know and bond with? Finn, Han, Chewie and BB-8. All men. She is the first female main character in the series, which is a little bit of a revolution in itself, but it doesn't change the fact that the majority of the cast are men.

Rey and Han create a special bond that goes beyond friendship. Rey has grown up without parents, always missing them and waiting for them to return. The thought of even leaving Jakku stresses her, because she wants to be there in case they come back. Han, on the other hand, has lost his son, and in Rey he sees a daughter; someone to pass his knowledge on to like a father should. Family is important to them both, and their shared interest in space ships strengthens their bond. Now that Han is dead and she had to leave an unconscious Finn behind, it remains to be seen whether she makes any female friends on her journey with Chewbacca to meet up with Luke Skywalker.

More Than Rebels?

Unlike the other heroines, Jyn Erso only gets one movie. Her story begins and ends in *Rogue One*. Jyn is a prisoner of the Empire, but is kidnapped from them by the Rebels, who know that she is the daughter of an imperial scientist. When Jyn meets Cassian for the first time, she is a prisoner of the Rebel Alliance, an alliance he has an important position in. He is in charge of her and seeing to that she doesn't try to pull anything when he takes her to see her old friend Saw Gerrera on desert moon Jedha. He lets her keep her blaster, even if he knows she might try and use it against him, agreeing with her when she tells him trust goes both ways, because he knows it's true.

In the way that Finn and Rey connect over their somewhat similar lonely backgrounds, so does Jyn and Cassian. Cassian has been with the Rebellion since he was a kid, while Jyn's parents hated the Empire. Jyn has got no love for the Empire either, watching them kill her mother and take her father away, as well as being raised by an extremist former Rebel. The funny comments in *Rogue One* never comes from either of the two. They are both very serious people, and because of the situation they are in, there is no time to let other parts of their personalities shine through. It is likely that the things they've experienced has made them more stern than they would have been otherwise. Neither are afraid to speak their minds, and both want to be heard. They know what they stand for and are brave enough to fight for it. Writer Olivia Truffaut-Wong has this to say of Jyn and Cassian:

They are equals both on the battle field and off, a dynamic completely foreign to past Star Wars couples. Take Anakin and Padmé, who were, like Leia and Han, constantly on different power levels. First, Padmé's political stature overshadowed Anakin's Jedi-in-training status, and then Anakin's evil Jedi took over not just their relationship but the galaxy. [...] Similarly, Han and Leia, despite being the most beloved

Star Wars couple of all time, were barely ever seen or treated as equals. [...] Leia's political power over Han was obvious [...], but his constant belittling of her political stature undermined her importance to the Rebellion and the plot of the films overall. It takes two movies for Han to start treating Leia like a true equal, but it takes Cassian half an hour to respect Jyn. [...] Jyn doesn't need Cassian to save her or show her how to use a gun, and Cassian doesn't need her to save him either (Truffaut-Wong, 2016).

Jyn and Cassian never really become a couple. Their friendship develops as they work together and begin to trust each other. They never kiss. The only physical contact they have outside of battle, is the embrace when they are on the beach waiting to die. They never express that they love each other, but there is a lot of respect. Could it be that, for once, there is no romance; that two major characters of the opposite sex aren't romantically interested in one another? Could it be that the embrace at the end is a product of their suppressed fear of dying, or dying alone? I agree with Truffaut-Wong in that they are equals, and I do think it comes across that they care about each other, but I disagree that they are the only couple (which I'm not even sure I'd categorize them as) who have this dynamic. What Truffaut-Wong calls belittling, is banter that goes both ways. Just listen to some of the first things Leia says to Han and Luke when they rescue her from her cell. She would never let anyone belittle her, as we so clearly see when she chokes Jabba the Hutt as soon as she gets the chance.

Tania Modleski has written that in proclaiming or assuming the advent of postfeminism, one actually engages in undermining the goals of feminism (Modleski, 1991:3). Where Mulvey sees the woman as nothing short of a passive object, Modleski believes that the representation of women on film is more complicated than that (Modleski, 2005:1-2). A postfeminist standpoint would mean accepting the women as *Star Wars* as substantial representations; as symbols of equality, but that would also mean closing one's eyes to the fact that they are living in a man's world, however strong they may be. A classical feminist approach would be focusing too much on the negative aspects, thus potentially overshadowing that which is a satisfactory representation. We've gotten two female protagonists in a row, meaning that we've had as many female leads as we've had male, but does that mean we've reached equality?

Perceiving *Star Wars*

Laura Mulvey uses psychoanalysis as a means to understand fascination of film, and how this fascination is reinforced by preexisting patterns based on social formations that have molded the male subject. She proposes that cinema offers several forms of pleasure. One is scopophilia, the desire to look; the looking itself as pleasurable. She also talks of voyeurism, the visual pleasure derived from looking at someone else, objectifying them, and of narcissism, which involves the self identifying with the character that is being looked at. Narcissism—and thus identification—for Mulvey, then, means that the male spectator identifies with the male protagonist of the film, combining his already present active power of the erotic look (at the woman) with the protagonist's control over the events of the story. In Mulvey's theory, the woman adopts the man's look when looking at herself, accepting herself as a passive object, using the male gaze subconsciously (Mulvey, 1975). Linda Williams explores what happens when the woman looks, focusing on the horror film, using a similar approach to that of Mulvey:

Whenever the movie screen holds a particularly effective image of terror, little boys and grown men make it a point of honor to look, while little girls and grown women cover their eyes or hide behind the shoulders of their dates. There are excellent reasons for this refusal of the woman to look, not the least of which is that she is often asked to bear witness to her own powerlessness in the face of rape, mutilation and murder. Another excellent reason for the refusal to look is the fact that women are given so little to identify with on the screen (Williams, 1984).

Women are generally given less to identify with on the screen than men, and as I shall return to, this is true for *Star Wars* too. While Mulvey and Williams both make some points that I can agree with to some extent. They cover the objectification of women on film, and the supposed threat she poses to the male spectator. Both fail, however, to turn the tables and look at aspects that may actually put the woman in a different light. Although Williams has other intentions with it, the question she asks is interesting: what happens when the woman looks? The focus in feminist theory is often the negative outcome for women, but can women not objectify men?

[...] is there a female gaze? Certainly, beautiful men abound in cinema. But I'd argue that there is no direct female equivalent of the male gaze. The male gaze creates a power imbalance. It supports a patriarchal

status quo, perpetuating women's real-life sexual objectification (Loreck, 2016).

As Janice Loreck here points out, there is no female counterpart, as the male gaze has become a standard. Women are so used to it that they barely notice partaking in their own objectification. E. Ann Kaplan has argued that female characters can possess the look, and even objectify male characters with her gaze, but because underlying structures are still intact, her desire has no power. The gaze isn't essentially male, but owning and activating the gaze, is to be in the 'masculine' position (Kaplan, cited in Smelik, 1999). I'd like to argue that women, despite not being presented with obvious means to do so, can objectify men when watching a film. In fact, that *Star Wars* has got so few women, and so many men, gives the straight female spectator a variety of male options for such means. Men will have to 'make do' with one or two. In general, there is a difference between women looking at men and men looking at women on film, because the movie is very seldom doing the objectification *for* the female spectator as it does for the male spectator. With the exception of an unfortunate costume on Leia, and a couple on Padmé, *Star Wars* has done a pretty good job with not explicitly pointing the male spectator in the direction of objectification. However, the male gaze is still a fact not only in *Episode I-VI*, which have male protagonists, but also in *Episode VII* and *Rogue One*, because they are still overcrowded with men, and the female protagonist is a part of their group, exuding a mixture of femininity and masculinity, as well as holding on to underlying patriarchal structures.

The female hero, thus, becomes a fantasy about a woman. Schubart uses *The Long Kiss Goodnight* (Harlin, 1996) as an example, in which the female lead is the only non-male CIA agent, making her an anomaly. While breaking society's gender norms, she also confirms them. Schubart also notes that today's female hero has to be young and beautiful, while male heroes don't, listing Chuck Norris and Arnold Schwarzenegger among others (Schubart, 2007:6). Objectively speaking, all of the women with major roles in *Star Wars* are beautiful. Leia returns at an older age, but she is the aged version of the beautiful woman we saw in the original trilogy. However, objectively speaking, many of the male major characters, too, are good-looking.

The problem still stands: men have more options when it comes to identifying with characters (Williams, 1984). Is identification gendered, or can men identify with female characters and vice versa? What happens when the protagonist is female in a franchise loved by so many men? And who does the female spectator identify with in the original and prequel trilogy?

All My Friends Are Men

George Lucas had two daughters, and harbored strong belief that sci-fi and fantasy both could and should appeal to preteen girls (Taylor, 2014:463). J.J. Abrams, director of *The Force Awakens*, went on an interview with Good Morning America before the film's release, he shared his thoughts on this: "Star Wars was always about—it was always a boys' thing and a movie that dads take their sons to, and though that's still very much the case, I was really hoping that this could be a movie that mothers can take their daughters to as well." (YouTube). In the years *Star Wars* has been around, there has been a development in the saga. From princesses and queens who were meant to be mere attributes, to heroines in unisex clothing, running the show, it is clear that something has happened. In 1977, some became confused with *Star Wars*:

Perhaps most remarkable about the first ten minutes is who isn't in them: no Luke, no Han Solo, no Obi-Wan. The only sympathetic human character is Princess Leia, and she only has two lines. Early viewers could be forgiven for thinking the droids are actually the movie's heroes. It proves to be an ensemble film, of course, with every apparent hero leading the audience on to another apparent hero: Leia to the droids, the droids to Luke, Luke to Obi-Wan, Obi-Wan to Han, Han and Luke back to Leia. [...] "Who's the hero?" [Don] Glut asks, even now (Taylor, 2014:219).

In each trilogy or film, there is one protagonist; one that receives just a little bit more focus, and who accomplishes just a little bit more than the others. Three trilogies and one standalone film leaves us with a total of four protagonists: Luke, Anakin, Rey, and Jyn. We follow these and their allies, rooting for them, but if you think about it, *Star Wars* is really the story about the rise and fall of Darth Vader. Even in *Episode VII*, more than thirty years after his death, Darth Vader inspires the darkness in his grandson, Kylo Ren. There are definitely fans who root for the bad guys, too. The saga presents the spectator with a range of characters, and you can choose your favorite. It doesn't have to be the protagonist or the protagonist's closest friends and allies. The Expanded Universe provides information on all the characters whose stories and backgrounds we don't learn of in the movies. Both professional authors and fans have made up the backstories of close to everything that is seen or mentioned in the episodes, as well as new stories set in the same galaxy, making up new characters. Hundreds of novels have been written, and a full encyclopedia can be found online. Striking about the Expanded Universe, is how many female characters have been created. One of the most popular characters from the EU is Mara Jade, the Emperor's hand, created by author Timothy Zahn. She ends up marrying Luke Skywalker in a later novel. According to Chris Taylor, Mara Jade "offers all of the feisty, fiery

personality that Leia should have developed, but ultimately lacked,” a statement I quite obviously disagree with, but it nonetheless shows that the creation of more female characters might be a reaction from the fandom to the lack of women in the films. Timothy Zahn was disappointed when a later writer killed off Mara Jade, stating: ”It was like, ’Oh, we only have two or three female characters; let’s kill off one of them.’ Such a waste.” (ibid.:351-8).

While we see more female extras in the background in the two newest films, they do not interact with the female leads. The woman that probably has the most contact with other women, is Padmé, whose story arc is the least developed one out of all four women. All of Leia’s, Rey’s and Jyn’s friends and most of their conversation partners, are men. Only four out of a so far total of eight movies pass the Bechdel Test. To pass it, the movie needs to have 1) two (named) women; 2) who talk to each other; 3) about something besides a man (bechdeltest.com). None of the three original trilogy films pass, neither does *Episode III*. The Bechdel Test is an eye-opener, as an enormous amount of movies fail it, but if we look at the four *Star Wars* films that pass it, it’s not really sufficient. *Episode I* barely passes, showing Padmé talking briefly to her handmaidens and exchanging a few words with Shmi. In *II*, she talks to two of her handmaidens and has a conversation with Queen Jamillia about politics and security, while all Beru says to her when they meet is: ”I’m Beru.” In *Episode VII*, Rey has a short conversation with Leia and a slightly longer one with Maz. *Rogue One*’s Jyn talks to her mother Lyra before they separate at the very start, as well as talking to Mon Mothma, but in the presence of several men. It’s far from impressive. While all the men have male friends, the women, except for Padmé, have no friends of the same sex. It is also important to remember that Padmé’s handmaidens first and foremost work for her, and aren’t present as friends, although friendships are likely to form. The Bechdel Test does nevertheless make you stop and think about the issue at hand, but in the case of *Star Wars* and many other films, it shows more fault than good. The question of identification becomes central here. The fact that the women only have male friends, means that they have no other females to identify with, and so one might ask what their notion of being a woman is based off of. It also confirms the general lack of women in the saga.

Identification: Coolness

When it comes to the spectator identifying with characters based on gender, I think back to when I was younger. When all the kids had watched the newest Disney film out, everybody wanted to play pretend. It never even struck my mind to want to be one of the male characters. I could like the male lead, but I didn’t identify with them: I looked to the girl(s). As a child,

gender wasn't a concept I thought much about, except that I knew I was a girl and that I felt comfortable with stereotypically girly things and the feminine. I didn't see the girls as less able than the men, because I mostly focused on what the women we're doing, feeling like I had more in common with them. Of course, many of the girls I identified with when I was younger, were problematic characters who weren't allowed to fulfill themselves, but the point is that women need more and better options when it comes to identification. I found an article online written by two female *Star Wars* fans who saw things a little bit differently:

I never wanted Han Solo. I wanted to be him. [...] Yes, Han Solo is a sexy beast. But that doesn't mean we all have to lust after him. We can be sexy beasts too, if we want (O'Connell & Ritter, 2015).

What is implied, is that had there been a female character doing the things Han Solo did—a cheeky smuggler with cool one-liners and a talent for flying spaceships—they would have wanted to be her. Gender isn't necessarily a factor: sometimes it's the character's traits that appeal to the spectator. Murray Smith's theory on character engagement can help us understand this aspect of identification:

The spectator and character are two concepts that are sympathetically related, together constituting what I term the *structure of sympathy*. The three basic levels of engagement must be supplemented by concepts accounting for 'empathic' phenomena— affective mimicry and emotional simulation—if a comprehensive theory of 'identification' is to be constructed (Smith, 1995:73).

The first of three levels is recognition: the spectator's construction of the character, typically connected to the image of a body—a human agent. Second, there's alignment: the process by which the spectator is placed in relation to characters. This is the amount of access she is given to the character's actions, as well as how they feel and what they know. Third and lastly, there's allegiance, the level on which the spectator makes a moral evaluation of the character. Based on this evaluation, she ranks the characters in a system of preference. Of allegiance, Smith writes that it is the level that is closest to what is meant by 'identification' in the everyday usage of the word, when people talk of 'identifying with' persons or characters on the basis of a range of different factors, like attitudes related to class, nation, age, ethnicity, and gender. Based on this moral evaluation, the spectator constructs moral structures—a system of preference for characters. He underlines that none of the three levels entail that she spectator replicates the character's traits or emotions: we can respond emotionally without doing so (ibid.:82-5). Thus, the spectator, regardless of gender, can 'identify' with a character based on moral evaluation,

pledging allegiance to him or her. However, this doesn't necessarily mean seeing yourself in the character, and so the problem will continue to arise for as long as people are not given the option to identify with someone who does their gender, race, or class, justice.

In regards to empathy, I find *Star Wars* to be somewhat short in presenting the spectator with the deeper emotions. Not to say that there aren't emotionally charged scenes that may produce empathy, but this type of emotional engagement isn't what I find to be the goal of the maker, as most of these scenes are very short or even lacking, like when Luke finds his aunt and uncle murdered and just carries on. I again want to stress that adventure is the core of these films. That, of course, doesn't mean that representations are less important, but when it comes to the spectator identifying with characters in *Star Wars*, it seems that the most important thing is that the character does 'cool stuff', exactly because of its epic adventure core. I do not have any theory to back this statement up, but I think about the general popularity of characters based on the opinions of my friends, and online communities, and of the two women that wrote about how badly they wanted to be Han Solo (O'Connell & Ritter, 2015). I too, favor the characters that do the 'cool things'; who have lightsabers, who can shoot a blaster without missing, who can use the Force or fly really fast, who has the cheekiest, smartest lines, because these 'cool things' are, after all, why people love *Star Wars*. This may also be the reason why a character like Padmé appears weaker or less interesting: because she doesn't get to do 'cool stuff'. I also do think that women are capable of avoiding the male gaze, choosing actively not to identify with the male protagonist, should the film have that. Undoubtedly, it can be highly uncomfortable for a woman to watch another woman be explicitly objectified on-screen, but this discomfort is a sign that the female spectator does not accept the male gaze.

Soundtrack

Music plays a very big part in setting an atmosphere and feel of the galaxy. From the very beginning of each film, there is complimentary, epic music played by an orchestra, and it has a particular style throughout. Because of its significant role, I thought it interesting to look at whether the music differs based on what gender character is shown.

In the soundtrack to the original trilogy, the good guys are accompanied by softer melodies, while the villains have more pompous, heavy ones. During action-filled sequences in which the good guys are challenged, the score is dramatic and wild, gliding over into victorious horns and strings when the heroes take the villains out. When characters are introduced, the melodies

seem to go with how the movie wants us to perceive them. Take Han Solo, who is introduced to us in a bar while the upbeat, catchy tune "Cantina Band" (Williams, 1977) is playing, or the peculiar music of the Ewoks. "Princess Leia's Theme" (ibid.) is used as an introduction to Leia, played in several of her scenes. It is a soft, slow melody, speeding a little bit up towards a climax, then slowing down again at the end. As is probably quite apparent, I see Leia as a fierce, strong character, thus, her theme seems to not compliment her personality, softening her down in a way. If we move on to the prequel trilogy, however, it doesn't seem that gender is really a factor when creating the music. Look, for instance, at "Anakin's Theme" (Williams, 1999), which is very soft and slow. "Queen Amidala and the Naboo Palace" (ibid.) is actually quite dramatic. In *Episode VII*, the light melody "The Scavenger" (Williams, 2015) helps establish Rey as a morally reliable character before we even know that she is a girl, as we thus far have learned that bad guys are recognized by a very different kind of music. What's played when two characters meet, also says something about the nature of the relationship that will develop. "Han and Leia" (ibid.) reveals more of the situation between the two. The score of *Rogue One* has a sadder, more dramatic tone throughout than its predecessors, as it is a war film. It describes the personality of Jyn Erso well, and isn't soft and slow, as she isn't. Notably, it was Michael Giacchino, not John Williams, who composed the music to *Rogue One*, and the soundtrack was released concurring with the film's premiere.

As sound and music isn't my main focus, I will stop here, concluding this part with stating that besides Leia's theme, I do not find there to be much of a problem with the soundtrack in terms of representing the women. Not everything needs to be overanalyzed, and I honestly think that when making the films, softening the women down with music wasn't something that came up. Sometimes it's easy. The way I see—or rather: hear—it, *Star Wars* doesn't have a problem with a soundtrack that discriminates characters.

#Wheresrey and Merchandising

Toy producer Hasbro got into trouble around the release of *Episode VII*, when fans noticed that they had made action figure sets from the film that did not include the main character. The set included Finn, Kylo Ren, Chewbacca, and Poe, as well as a random Stormtrooper and a random TIE-fighter pilot. Rey was nowhere to be seen, and the people of the internet were not happy. The hashtag #wheresrey witnessed of displeased fans all over the world, and things got worse for Hasbro when they launched a *The Force Awakens* Monopoly set that also failed to include her (Framke, 2016). It must have disappointed a lot of kids that their hero was excluded, but it

also reinforces the notion that boys should identify strictly with male characters, and in turn that *Star Wars* is for boys. Similarly, there are eighty-nine official action figures of Luke Skywalker, but only forty-four of Leia, even though she changes her clothes and hair many more times than her brother. Carrie Fisher herself wasn't too happy about some of the Leia figurines, especially those of her in the slave bikini: "I told George, 'You have the rights to my face... You do not have the rights to my lagoon of mystery!'"'. With Padmé, merchandising took a different turn, Yves Saint Laurent launching a Queen Amidala makeup collection (Taylor, 2014:253,405).

Conclusion

People have more or less subconsciously accepted the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism as the norm, in which straight, white men hold the highest position of power (Benshoff & Griffin:8-13). Most aren't aware of these underlying structures, and how they penetrate most aspects of society, including film and media. *Star Wars* is a space fantasy adventure, and the fact that people see it solely as entertainment, makes being aware of potential underlying structures, as well as of the representation of women, even more important.

We started out with Princess Leia Organa, a woman who enabled herself and didn't let love stop her from self-realization. She stood up for herself and what she believed in. No mercy was shown for the male who degraded her—Leia would never willingly let a man control her. She spoke up no matter what, even against vicious men like Tarkin and Vader. She was never allowed to explore her feelings about the villain being her father, or her Force sensitiveness, but she kept doing what she loved: working towards peace and justice with the Resistance. Still, Leia was alone among men. The only other women we see in the original trilogy apart from a few dancers, are Beru and Mon Mothma, and she doesn't talk to any of them. She doesn't have any female role models or friends present in the films. One of the biggest problems with Leia, is that it seems like she's just put there to have a woman in the film, and one woman is not enough. Much of the reason why Leia stands as a feminist character in spite of this, is the late Carrie Fisher, who, if you watch old interviews, is very similar to her character: feisty, cheeky, unafraid, straightforward, and never at a loss for words. She expressed discontent with the character, ending up having to take matters into her own hands with the way she interpreted the role (Taylor, 2014:328).

Next came Padmé Amidala who went through a reversed transition from transcendent to immanent. She was prohibited from being active and independent by men both in front of, and behind, the camera, but she didn't resist. She fails herself and her principles for a man that seems to love her more for her looks than her mind and heart, willing to give up everything for him, including the career that she loved, and in the end, her life. Even after he grabs a chokehold on her, thus domestically abusing her, she wants him back, convinced that there is still good in him. How unimportant the character was in the narrative beyond being a motivation for Anakin and the mother of his children that we've already met in *Episode IV-VI*, becomes evident when reading that George Lucas at one point in the drafts wanted to show Padmé founding the Rebel Alliance to "give her some purpose." (ibid.:418). It seems that as soon as she falls in love, she

forgets her own beliefs and strength. The prequels have more women in the background than the originals, but we're still far from an equal percentage of men and women. Although Padmé has her handmaidens, she barely talks to any other women, and all other major characters are male. It's also worth noting that close to all the named women in the prequels, die: Padmé, her decoy Cordé, Zam the bounty hunter, Shmi Skywalker, and Beru who dies in *Episode IV*. In fact, all *mothers* in *Star Wars*, except for Leia in *Episode VII*, die, something I would love to get more into on a different occasion with blank pages to fill. Padmé Amidala was put in *Star Wars* for the mere reason of being a pawn—a mere attribute, and she seemed to be fine with it. Shmi's death is also a motivation for her son's turning to the dark side, and it's the biggest function she has in the films.

Emerging in 2015, Rey was the first female main character of the saga, and it seemed at first that things had changed. She was held back from transcending not only because of her economic situation, but also emotions: the thought that she could never leave Jakku in case her family came back for her. With a little push from some people she meets along the way, she lives up to her potential. She had already started her journey towards freedom and self-realization through working, and has earned many skills from her independent life as a worker bee. She doesn't wear long, fancy dresses, and she doesn't seem to think much about men in terms of romance—at least not so far. Rey is the first female character we get to know up close who swings a lightsaber, and the first woman to use the Force in the manner that she does. She does all of the 'cool things' that the guys get to do throughout the saga, and she's good at it. There are more women in the background than ever, but yet again, most of the major characters are men. We meet Leia again, now a mother, which hasn't kept her from transcending at all, as she has become General. The main focus is on Rey, then there's Finn, Poe, Han, Chewie, BB-8, and Kylo Ren—all men. Introducing evil female characters as Captain Phasma does show that something has happened, but what exactly is that?

Jyn Erso almost came as a shock: two female main characters in a row?! Now we would have as many female as male leads! Fearless, straightforward, emotionally closed-off, skilled with a blaster, great with words, paying no mind to looks or fashion, Jyn does what needs to be done. She plays a major part in saving the galaxy from the evil Empire, and earns the respect of everyone she meets. Jyn transcends into death, refusing immanence explicitly when choosing to die for her cause if it means doing the right thing. It isn't just Jyn who dies, it's every major character in the film. Her mother is shot and killed within the first few minutes of the film, and

the only other woman with a major role, is Mon Mothma. There are several female fighter pilots and Rebels, but they are all kept in the background. The entire Rogue One team that go to Scarif to steal the Death Star plans, are men, with the exception of Jyn. She doesn't engage in explicitly romantic activities, although there are speculations about the nature of her and Cassian's relationship.

Rey and Jyn are allowed way more active roles than their predecessors. There is nothing the guys do that they can't do too. They are strong, independent women, unarguably. However, things haven't changed as much as it might appear at first glance. Yes, the main characters of the most recent two films are female, but the films are still heavily overcrowded with men. Just because the new films pass the Bechdel test, doesn't mean the situation is satisfactory. Padmé is a problematic character whose inconsistency and immanence fails to make her a good representation of a woman, especially because she is the only woman we have the chance to get to know. If we read Leia as a stand-alone character, she, on the other hand, is close to just as strong and able as the heroines of 2015 and 2016, thus Rey was not the first to emerge as a strong woman in *Star Wars*. There has been a clear upgrade in using more female extras and supporting characters, but most major characters are still men. It seems that, in creating female protagonists, they thought it enough, or maybe they just didn't think any more of it, because having a female hero with only male friends is good enough, right?

If we look away from the prequels, the problem isn't the women that *are* there, because they're strong, able, active, and independent. The problem is, rather, the women that *aren't* there. It just doesn't seem likely that neither Jyn nor Rey know any other women, because there are a lot of females in the background. How could it be that everyone they bump into are men? In *Episode VII*, Rey interacts with both Leia and Maz, two strong, independent women, but these aren't a major part of the action. After Rey, the focus is mainly on Finn, Poe, Han, Chewie, and Kylo Ren—all men. Jyn's crew consists solely of men.

To transcend in the galaxy far, far away, the woman must be active, and the *Star Wars* saga has depicted being active as an equivalent to possessing masculine traits, as the characters partaking in the action, in the majority of the cases, are men. These characters also surround themselves mainly with men. This opens up a question of the definition of what is masculine and what is feminine. Is gender nothing more than social constructs? Volume II of *The Second Sex* opens like this:

One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychic, or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society; it is civilization as a whole that elaborates this intermediary product between the male and the eunuch that is called feminine. Only the mediation of another can constitute an individual as an *Other*. [...] For girls and boys, the body is first the radiation of a subjectivity, the instrument that brings about the comprehension of the world: they apprehend the universe through their eyes and hands, and not through their sexual parts (de Beauvoir, 1949:330).

Men and women are biologically different. I am of the belief that some of that which is perceived as femininity, lies in the nature of many that are born women. Of course, we learn things along the way that shape us, and this is the part that is socially constructed. Had for instance Jyn and Rey been given strictly stereotypical feminine traits, we could have ended up with characters that were no more than caricatures of women, confirming the dominant ideology. In turn, this would have doomed them to immanence. I return to Rikke Schubart's notion that doing the opposite—placing the woman outside of what society sees as her 'natural place'—could do the same: confirming society's gender expectations (Schubart, 2007:6). Jyn and Rey can be read as attempts at redefining and reshaping what femininity (on film) is. They don't need a man, they don't care about how they look, they dress like the men, keeping a strong focus on their respective missions. They are healthy role models for young girls (and boys!). Yet, it is not enough. *Star Wars* is heavily overcrowded with men. It was in 1977, and it still is today. The chance of the women's strong position drowning in the hoards of men, is there. If the only woman present doesn't appeal to the female spectator, she might end up identifying with a male character. While boys and girls alike identified with the men in earlier films of the saga, there is a possibility that male spectators will choose to identify with one of the many male characters, who have a wide range of personality traits, making the young, beautiful, female protagonist an object of his active male gaze.

Most of the women of *Star Wars* are—the way I see it—represented in a way that does women justice, depicting strong, independent women who do things for themselves and/or the greater good, not to impress a man or live up to society's expectations. They are nonetheless underrepresented in the films in general, and the lack of racial diversity among the women is quite apparent. All the major female characters are white. In a study done of the top 100 films of 2015, it was found that women made up only 22% of the protagonists, 34% of the major characters, and 33% of the speaking characters. Only 13% of all female characters were black (Lauzen, 2016:2-3). Thus, it is not only in *Star Wars* that the situation isn't satisfactory

regarding the representation of women: this is the general state of popular cinema, upholding the dominant ideology of white patriarchal capitalism. One cannot shelter women from the male gaze the way the situation still is, as the norm is that the woman is Other, as de Beauvoir puts it (1949:37). If woman is Other, she is not equal with the man. Because the women are so few, the contrast becomes bigger, enforcing the notion of otherness. It must be said, however, that the representation of class is adequate, showing diversity not only in general, but also among the women, appealing to the working class, average Joes and Joanies: most people. As to why there are so few women, I see this, too, as a product of the underlying structures: the creators aren't aware of the impact of the dominant ideology on their product.

Two sentences from Rikke Schubart perfectly sums up my position when it comes not only to *Star Wars*, but to female characters on film in general:

Rather than choose a "correct" position (feminism or postfeminism) we must open ourselves up to another position: in-between. Just like the female heroine is placed between male and female gender roles, we, the audience, find ourselves caught between pleasure and guilt, between acceptance and denial (Schubart, 2007:7).

Like Modleski, I acknowledge the strong women, but I still think we have a long way to go, and that we must not get so excited about the presence of a female protagonist that we don't see what's in the background, or maybe, rather, what is *not* in the background. *Star Wars* has tried to do something about the previous state of things, and they are at least heading in the right direction, which should be acknowledged. In fact, it has been confirmed that Asian actress Kelly Marie Tran will play a major character named Rose in the upcoming *Episode VIII*, a maintenance worker with the Resistance (Loughrey, 2017).

The ultimate feminist hero would be a woman who defines herself; who can choose a significant other or not, as long as it's on her terms; who is not made to be a sexual spectacle for the male gaze but still can dress however she wants, who can be of any skin-color and; who surrounds herself with both men and women in equal amounts, as well as people of different races and sexualities, engaging in intellectual conversation, fighting for what she believes in.

There is not equality in space, but we're getting closer.

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