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To Present a Female Body in Documentary Film

A Study of *My Body* (Olin 2002)

Bachelor's thesis in Film Studies

Supervisor: Anne Marit Myrstad

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Summary

This paper consists of an examination of how the female body is depicted according to the male and female gaze in feminist film theory, and further discusses their relation to the documentary film *My Body*. I ask the question of whether the documentary’s presentation of the female body is a product of the male gaze or the female gaze, or if it is both. In the discussion, I present arguments supporting both claims, which overall confirms that both gazes are present and employed in the documentary.

Sammendrag

Denne artikkelen består av en undersøkelse av hvordan kvinnekroppen er avbildet i henhold til det mannlige og kvinnelige blikket i feministisk filmteori, og diskuterer videre deres forhold til dokumentarfilmen *Kroppen min*. Jeg stiller spørsmålet om dokumentarens presentasjon av kvinnekroppen er et produkt av det mannlige blikket eller det kvinnelige blikket, eller om det er begge deler. I diskusjonen presenterer jeg argumenter som støtter begge påstandene, som samlet sett bekrefter at begge blikkene er til stede og benyttes i dokumentaren.

Introduction

In 2002, Norwegian filmmaker Margreth Olin released the short documentary *My Body* (Olin 2002), known in Norwegian as *Kroppen min*, which was expected to be a celebration of women's bodies. However, the film shocked viewers with its negative and critical portrayal of women's influence. Olin's naked and honest self-portrait presented the female body as a tribute to men, rather than an expression of female empowerment. The film sparked controversy and debate about the objectification of women's bodies, and the negative portrayal can be seen as a reflection of broader societal attitudes towards women. Women have long been objectified and sexualized in the media and popular culture, often at the expense of their agency and autonomy. Olin's film highlights the need for more diverse and empowering representations of women's bodies, while still pointing the finger at ill behaviours from her so-called "fellow sisters". At first look, Olin tells the story of how she found empowerment in her own body by accepting its flaws and imperfections. However, the way she expresses her experience and story lead the audience to believe that Olin has found value and meaning through men's desire, sexual attraction, and her ability to become a mother.

The theoretical argumentation and the concepts that inspired me to investigate Olin's documentary *My Body* is feminist film theory where the male gaze and the female gaze is at centre. These are the concepts I will use in my research, mostly because they have been widely opposed to each other by representing two completely different perspectives, but also because I am interested to find out where they might meet or cross paths. The reason for choosing Olin's documentary film is because when I first saw it, I felt as though it sent a strong and empowering message to women about their bodies, but it also gave some non-empowering reports as well. After careful consideration, I am now under the impression that it is the perfect example where we encounter both gazes, but in diverse ways. This hypothesis is something I want to explore further, which is why I chose Olin's documentary and the theoretical concepts of the male and female gaze for my bachelor's thesis.

The thesis will hence evolve around the feminist film theory “*the male gaze*” founded by Laura Mulvey and “*the female gaze*” depicted by Lisa French regarding Margreth Olin’s documentary *My Body*. The subject is whether Olin’s visual and narrative presentation of the female body in her documentary film is a product of the female gaze or the male gaze, or if it might be both. To answer this, I will first establish a theoretical framework which consists of both the male and female gaze theories. Then, an analysis of the documentary will follow with focus on how the female body is presented and expressed by filmmaker Olin, as well as what purpose it has and what message it sends. After the preparatory work has been done and the essential knowledge is secured, a discussion will commence. In the latter, I will discuss how presenting a female body in a subjective, personal, and critical matter as a way of telling one’s story and experience is an expression of Olin’s own female gaze in a documentary about herself. However, presenting a female body as a tribute to men can also be viewed as a modern take on the male gaze, attempting to reinforce conventional gender roles and patriarchal power structures which blossomed in traditional Hollywood cinema.

Theoretical Framework

Laura Mulvey and “*The Male Gaze*”

Laura Mulvey is a prominent British feminist film theorist, cultural critic, and filmmaker. Her ground-breaking essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, which was published in 1975, has become one of the most influential works in the field of film theory. In this essay, Mulvey introduced the concept of the “*male gaze*” and the female “*to-be-looked-at-ness*”, which refer to the way mainstream Hollywood cinema caters to heterosexual male viewers by reinforcing gender roles and objectifying women on screen (Doughty and Wright 2022, 181). She builds her argument by employing psychoanalytic theory to explain how popular cinema produces a particular gaze that accommodates the idea that the spectator is male. Because Mulvey’s essay is based on the notion that mainstream Hollywood film reflects and reveals the sexual difference which has always been established in our society (Mulvey 1975, 833), the scenic presentation of a film’s environment and people is hence known to mirror the reality we live in. For that reason, Mulvey’s use of psychoanalytic theory as a political weapon is an appropriate demonstration of how the patriarchal society has structured film form.

In her essay, Mulvey describes that women in film are presented as the image and man as bearer of the look. Her statement:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness (Mulvey 1975, 837).

This quote confirms the key idea in which the female subject in traditional storytelling is always passive, whereas the male counterpart remains active and dominant. Because the woman on screen is displayed as a sexual object to be looked at and admired, she becomes the spectacle of the film with little to none influence on the narrative.

Accordingly, Mulvey expresses that the visual presence of a woman tends to work against the development of a storyline, and rather freezes the flow of action to create erotic moments in-between the narrative (Mulvey 1975, 837). Although the woman's presence is primarily linked to her male counterpart, which almost always is the hero of the story, it also relates to the audience watching. Women in traditional film has functioned both as erotic objects for the characters within the story as well as erotic objects for the spectator within the movie theatre (Mulvey 1975, 838). This proves that female to-be-looked-at-ness transfers across the screen story, through the camera, all the way to the audience. It also proves that the male gaze is equivalent throughout the film's storyline and the receiving society, which again demonstrates how the patriarchal society has structured film form.

Furthermore, the presentation of the female body in mainstream Hollywood film is built on the notion of the male gaze in which the woman becomes an object to be appreciated and desired. Mulvey describes the woman on screen as "*a perfect product, whose body, stylised and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film, and the direct recipient of the spectator's look*" (Mulvey 1975, 841). In psychoanalytic terms, the female character is a product of what Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, called scopophilia, which denotes pleasure in looking at people and images as erotic objects. Together with fetishism, which refers to sexual

desire surrounding an object or body part associated with a woman, there is a development of objectification and sexualization of the female body (Doughty and Wright 2022, 180). Mulvey refers to this as “*fetishistic scopophilia*”, which extensively builds up the physical beauty of the object, hereby the woman’s body, and transforming it into something satisfying for the viewer (Mulvey 1975, 840). Consequently, the male gaze in its function produces a bodily to-be-looked-at-ness, which furthermore lays the foundation of the objectification of the female body for sexual pleasure and gratification.

In addition to presenting female bodies as sexual objects in traditional Hollywood cinema, the presentation of the female persona and purpose are also of traditional calibre. Women have throughout time been given the roles of mothers, wives, and daughters, which refer to traditional gender roles and their place in patriarchal societies. Theoretically, Mulvey explains the function of women as a symbol for the castration threat by the absence of a penis and their job of raising children, which denotes their reproductive ability and relation to men. Once this has been comprehended and achieved, their meaning is at an end (Mulvey 1975, 833). Inadvertently, this means that women’s value is related to the men in their lives and their ability to make them fathers. They have no meaning beyond wifely duties and motherhood, and this is fairly presented in mainstream Hollywood film.

Lisa French and “*The Female Gaze*”

Lisa French is an Australian Professor in Screen and Media at RMIT University’s School of Media and Communication, which she in 2017 was appointed Dean. She has served on Screen Australia’s Gender Matters Taskforce and is a lifetime member of both the Australian Film Institute and Women in Film and Television (RMIT University 2023). Throughout her career French has published extensively on women in film and television while also producing various documentaries on the topic. Her latest publication, *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film: An International Perspective*, explores the representation of women in documentary film and incorporates the concept of “*the female gaze*”. French argues that the female gaze, referring to a representation produced by a female filmmaker, offers a more nuanced and empathetic perspective on women’s experiences (French 2021, 2). This representation tends to challenge dominant patriarchal narratives which was previously described as Laura Mulvey’s male gaze.

The term “female gaze” describes the individual perspective, observation, and form of any female filmmaker. Professor French implies that each individual woman possesses a unique perspective, shaped by her personal experiences and cultural background, which influences her perception of the world around her. This perspective, commonly referred to as the female gaze, is a lens through which women view and interpret the surrounding society and people (French 2021, 54). A key point of the female gaze is the expression of female subjectivity, which refers to a gaze shaped by a female look, voice, emotional response, and perspective. A woman’s documentary is therefore known as a filmic depiction of the subjective experience or perspective of someone who lives in a female body (French 2021, 256). By telling and visualizing the things that has infected her life and body, the female filmmaker creates a gendered experience that other women can relate to. In other words, the female gaze from the subjective filmmaker generates a female aesthetic which is made by and for women.

One of the case studies in French’s book *The Female Gaze in Documentary Film* regarding filmmaker Marie Mandy’s documentary *Filming Desire: A Journey Through Women’s Film* (Mandy 2000) explores how women across cultures understand, view, and portray desire through film. The documentary contains a series of interviews from female filmmakers based in five different continents (French 2021, 178). The excerpts shown by filmmaker Mandy illustrate women directors who express erotic aesthetics with a tendency to treat the female body more holistically than male filmmakers, although there are differences between the female filmmakers’ presentations also. From her study she has made two key feminist observations: “1) that women’s bodies have been portrayed through a dominant masculine lens with the gaze of most cinema being historically colonised through men’s eyes; and 2) that sex has been portrayed as the fulfilment of men’s desires rather than of women’s” (French 2021, 182). These observations express the same as Laura Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze in which the presentation of the female body is meant for male pleasure.

However, French also argues that the documentary form provides more opportunities for diverse perspectives and alternative representations of women because of the female gaze. Since documentary film is an area where women’s participation is higher than other filmmaking genres, particularly narrative feature production (French 2021, 15), she argues that female documentary filmmakers have the potential to challenge traditional gender roles and power

structures by creating more nuanced and empowering representations of women and their bodies. One way in which they challenge traditional gender roles set by the male gaze and its presentation of women as wives and mothers, is by presenting themselves and other women from their subjective point of view. Although almost all women experience and know what it means to be female in a patriarchal society, there are still enormous differences in female experience across cultures, class, and backgrounds (French 2021, 250). As a collective group, women share the feeling of disempowerment by not being the dominant gender in society. Nonetheless, they manage to live different lives with different goals and dreams, which documentary film helps them explore and express. In today's female subjective documentary films, women are the subject of the narrative and the voice of the story.

Analysis: *My Body*

The filmmaker Margreth Olin is an award-winning Norwegian director and producer who has produced several feature-length documentaries, including the short documentary *My Body* from 2002 which is viewed as Olin's naked self-portrait (Olin 2023). In the documentary, Olin exposes herself both literally and emotionally, presenting her body and lifelong experience regarding it. The film is a narrative story about her body and the things that other women and girls have said about it. Olin candidly discusses how comments and verbal attacks have impacted her self-perception and relationship with her own body. Furthermore, she shares anecdotes about encounters with men who have found her "imperfect" body parts attractive (Olin 2002). The documentary is a powerful exploration of body image and the societal pressures that women face to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. It highlights the impact of negative body talk on individuals' self-esteem and mental health. By sharing her own story, Olin encourages viewers to reflect on their own relationship with their bodies and to challenge harmful societal norms. Overall, the documentary provides a poignant commentary on the complexities of body image and self-acceptance.

First-Person Documentary Film

Olin's documentary is clear in its subjectivity and first-person narration. The film is therefore construed as a specific documentary form called first-person essay, which is also understood to be an autobiography. Autobiography is described as a personal account of someone's experience, maturation, and outlook on life (Nichols 2017, 107). In Olin's case, it is her own perspective on her life that is conveyed. Because she is the narrator, it becomes a first-person essay that depicts a personal account of some aspect of Olin's own experience or point of view. First-person essay is similar to autobiography, but it further stresses the individual development (Nichols 2017, 106). Autobiography is often seen as an avant-garde film form that relies on the representative "I" or "we" to guide the audience through the film. When it comes to first-person films such as Olin's *My Body*, Professor and author Michael Renov describes that an autobiographical approach of writing the "self" through sound and image is a filmmaker's way of incorporating themselves into the documentary (Renov 2008, 44). The way in which filmmaker Olin expresses the "self" in her documentary is by simply making the subject herself and her body. This is further acknowledged by film scholar and Professor Julia Erhart in her work regarding feminist first-person documentaries in the book *Gendering History on Screen: Women Filmmakers and Historical Films*. According to Erhart, first-person documentary film is focused on the life of an individual (Erhart 2018, 63). In concern of the subject's limits, first-person seems to include intimate work that deals with the director's own life (Erhart 2018, 65), which in this circumstance would be Olin herself. On that note, Olin's documentary film is classified as an autobiography that conveys the filmmaker's story through a first-person perspective and voice.

Presentation of the Female Body

Olin begins her documentary film by speaking directly to the audience. She captures our attention right away by showing us a close-up shot of her hands covering her genitalia while the voice-over says, "You're going to get a story I never thought I'd tell, because it's sort of my secrets. The story of my body" (Olin 2002, 00:52-01:05). Right away she presents her body being full of secrets she originally did not want to share. By the first shot of herself covering her private parts, it is safe to assume that she has long been hiding these secrets. Since the following scene consists of her taking her shoes and clothes off, she is now ready to share her story. Olin presents a wide shot of her whole body that gradually moves to close-ups of her face and other body parts. However, the more pieces of clothing she takes off, the blurrier the images

get. The lens becomes out of focus which makes it hard to make out what body part the close-up is of and what piece of clothing she removes. We do not see her whole naked body until the camera moves up from her feet to her face, although she is standing sideways whilst covering her breasts. Olin's eyes are locked on us before the screen turns black and the film title "kroppen min", also known as "my body", appears (Olin 2002, 01:30-02:18). The use of an out-of-focus lens as a cinematic feature in this sequence contributes to the notion that Olin is not quite ready, or not yet comfortable enough to clearly show herself. It might reflect her previous desire to hide her body because of her bad self-image. However, she is in the beginning phase of opening up, but for the moment the audience must wait in suspense.

Olin employs various cinematic features and effects to present the female body in a way that challenges traditional notions of beauty and femininity. One of the most striking techniques that Olin uses is close-up shots of her own body. These shots consist of different body parts such as the stomach, breasts, and thighs, mostly her private parts. Other parts like feet, knees, hands, and neck are also depicted, with focus on highlighting their flaws and imperfections. An example of this is when Olin speaks about her childhood and how other girls and women began to comment on her looks. She was approximately 5 years old when a girlfriend of her mother suggested that she should bring her daughter to a specialist. On screen, there are close-up images of her abnormal feet from various perspectives shown in black-and-white colours. "*The bumps on her feet should be stamped away because she wouldn't look good in high heels. Her feet would destroy all shoes, most likely she would have to wear men's shoes*", the woman said. The next scene, this time in colour, presents a grown Margreth in a shoe shop trying on sneakers when she sees another woman trying on a pair of high heel slippers. Then, a black-and-white photo of her feet fills the screen again while she reveals that it became a saying; "*Margreth's weird feet*" (Olin 2002, 02:40-03:40). Olin further expresses another self-consciousness when telling the story of a slightly older friend commenting on her belly. "*You have such a big belly, it goes out a bit like that. You must tuck your stomach in, so you get more of a waist*". Olin was 8 years old and weighted 20 kg. She tucked her stomach in until she was 20 (Olin 2002, 04:05-04:39). By presenting close-ups of her honest and "not-so-perfect" body parts that welcome shadows to amplify her bodily imperfections and defects, Olin challenges the idealized image of the styled and perfectly lit female body that is often presented in media and popular culture, which women are expected to live up to.

Another technique that Olin employs in the documentary film is the use of voice-over. Throughout the documentary, she is the narrator and the storyteller that guides the audience through the film. Olin especially invites other women by speaking directly to the female spectator, asking individuals to think about what kind of “fellow sisters” they are (Olin 2002, 15:40-15:52). Olin says as follows; “*When I’m making the story of my body, I find that it is girls, other women, who have never left me alone*”. Playing in the background is the song “October 8” by the Midnight Choir, singing the lyrics “I feel like dying tonight” while the image on screen is Olin holding and covering her breasts, almost hiding them (Olin 2002, 15:25-15:40). This cinematic feature combined of voice-over, song lyrics, and bodily images creates a gloomy and sad atmosphere that illustrates the thoughts and feelings Olin have had about her body, including her need for hiding it. Thus, a displeasure and apparent hatred is directed at the women who have made condescending comments about her appearance. Through such cinematic choices, Olin highlights that the way women “stare” at other women is often critical and judgmental in contrast to men.

A message to take away from the documentary is that men and their desire for Olin have had a huge role in building her self-esteem and personal value. The way men have shown excitement and positivity towards Olin’s body is expressed in her documentary by presenting caring men who smile, laugh, and wink. These men are clearly showing attraction towards Olin, and therefore she confidently thanks God that another gender exists (Olin 2002, 15:50-16:20). In these moments, the background music is happy, cosy, and encouraging. The music hence contributes to sending the message that men are a great security for Olin and are the ones who have helped her improve her self-image. When expressing her romantic phantasies, she develops good and warm feelings in relation to the other sex and what they will bring her. A man that gives her a safe space to exist in, is a man that will do her good (Olin 2002, 16:15-17:10). Not only does her comfort around men come from phantasies, but her previous boyfriends have also given her the safety and empowerment she needed. Her ex-boyfriend Magnus for instance, used to say to her that her shoulders were nice and strong, and Jens said that her stomach would have to be the softest place on the planet (Olin 2002, 17:47-18:02). These comments are quite different from the previously mentioned comments made by her childhood friend that led to Olin tucking in her stomach for twelve years. Men have given Olin the courage and freedom to be herself in her own skin, and therefore she presents her body as a tribute to men in the documentary film.

In addition to praising men, Olin presents her body's ability to grow a child as another reason for discovering her value. As the symbol and representation of this renowned bodily value she uses her daughter, which she depicts on screen as a young, careless girl in a blue t-shirt and black skirt dancing and twirling around. "*This is Maria, she has grown inside my belly. [...] For two years she grew and lived off my body*". On screen there is a photo of Olin's naked upper body, excluding her head and shoulders. Olin's voice-over speaks of "*the dearest thing that is, it comes from here*", meaning the stomach she has long been ashamed of. She asks herself while showing a cuddling session with her baby daughter, "*how can I gag and tighten, and bend and stretch, and tuck and punish, something that has such powers in it?*" (Olin 2002, 19:15-20:08). She presents her body as a vessel for her daughter and explains that anything that can create and take care of a human life is not worth hiding or complaining about. By showing a photo of her pregnant belly, she expresses that she will yet again experience what her body is capable of (Olin 2002, 22:23-22:40). Olin's bodily and personal value is a consequence of her becoming a mother and is therefore centred around her reproductive ability. Hence, her body becomes a representation of the creation and care for children, which sends the following message: for a woman to find her value in life, she must first create life, and thereafter experience motherhood.

Discussion

After looking into feminist film theory with focus on the male and female gaze and then analysing how the female body is presented in Margreth Olin's documentary film *My Body*, the next step will be to discuss which gaze the documentary is a product of. As presented in the introduction, my hypothesis is that filmmaker Olin uses aspects from both gazes in her work. I will further discuss how Olin's visual and narrative presentation of the female body is an expression of her own female gaze, while also deliberate if it can be construed as a form of male gaze, inspiring conventional gender roles and patriarchal power structures.

From the very beginning of her documentary film, Olin visually and narratively presents her body in an honest and personal matter as a way of telling her own story and experience. She guides us through her childhood, teens, and her recent years as an adult. On this journey she shares moments and experiences which have caused her to obtain insecurities and hatred concerning her looks. By undressing on screen and posing naked in front of the camera, she

sends a strong and empowering message to all girls and women about how to find beauty in their imperfections, and to not let negative comments and thoughts dictate their self-image and self-esteem. Through exposing herself both physically and emotionally, she shamelessly depicts the consequences of today's societal attitudes towards women that also exist in film and television. Rather than presenting herself as this flawless, perfect, and desirable object as the male gaze in traditional Hollywood film inspires (Mulvey 1975, 841), she takes an empowering stand against objectification and judgement. Since the first-person story is told through her eyes, voice, and body alone, the audience are witnessing Olin expressing her own gaze, which would make the documentary a product of the female gaze. Through this gaze, she is not a sexual object meant to please other people, but an inspiring and courageous woman who tells the story of how she found value and confidence in her own skin.

Even though Olin's journey to self-empowerment is an inspirational one, she does not shy away from the reasons why her self-image was destroyed in the first place. From early on, she experienced mean and hurtful comments, some of which were previously presented in the analysis of the documentary, that hugely impacted her self-perception. For instance, remarks about her ugly and weird feet came from her mother's friend, and a childhood friend told Olin at eight years old to tuck in her belly to get more of a waist because it stood out. That comment made her tuck in her stomach for the next twelve years, which led to stomach problems and pain. While on the other side, Olin's ex-boyfriend told her that her stomach would have to be the softest place on the planet, giving her the confidence needed to stop tucking it in. Frankly, the documentary sends a strong and harsh message to women about criticizing and judging each other, and Olin's way of getting the message across is to slam other women and call-out their bad behaviours. The documentary film is not empathetic towards women like the female gaze often is, and therefore it contradicts Professor French's notion that female filmmakers offer a more nuanced perspective on women's experiences.

In Olin's case, the perspective is clear in its critic of women and the part they have played in the destruction of her self-image. Perhaps standing naked, showing her whole imperfect and flawed body, is a way for Olin to finally say "fuck you" to all the women who have criticized her, and at the same time say "thank you" to all the men who have given her the courage to do it. Because Olin puts men up on a pedestal as the reason for her happiness and value, the

documentary takes a turn for the male gaze. Olin has found her value and meaning through men's recognition and desire, for that reason she depicts the male gaze's view that a woman's value and meaning is related to men, and thereby originate from men. She also challenges Laura Mulvey's view that the male gaze is negative and destructive towards women when she presents evidence of women breaking her down. These reasons point to a male gaze perspective, which would give the assurance that the documentary share some aspects and views with the male gaze.

On the other side, Professor French stresses that female subjectivity is a key point regarding the female gaze. As earlier stated, a woman's documentary is a filmic depiction of the subjective experience or perspective of someone who lives in a female body (French 2021, 256). Although most women experience what it is like to be female, there are still enormous differences across cultures, class, and backgrounds. Therefore, the female gaze leaves room for telling and visualizing the things that has infected an individual's life and body. In that regard, Olin's documentary would be considered empowering for herself and herself alone. In addition, the documentary is a first-person autobiography, which means that the story and experience is her own (Erhart 2018, 63). Olin writes her "self" into the film by presenting the subject as her body, the lens as her eyes, and the narration as her voice. She simply tells her subjective point of view and is distinctive in her use of the representative "I", rather than "we" or "us". Consequently, the female gaze is apparent in the documentary by means of Olin's female subjectivity.

Regardless of Olin's subjectivity, presenting a female body as a tribute to men can be construed as a modern take on the male gaze in which women are objects meant for male pleasure and dominance. Not to mention the message she sends by implying that she found her value by becoming a mother. Although Olin is expressing her own personal feelings and view, her impact on other girls and women can be catastrophic if this message reaches the "easy" targets who are searching for their value. They might start to believe that unless they maintain a relationship with a man and have children, they have no worth. This is exactly what Laura Mulvey expresses the male gaze to be evolved around. When she writes about women's value and meaning, it is always related to men and their reproductive abilities (Mulvey 1975, 833). Women are viewed only as mothers, wives, and daughters, which reflect their place in patriarchal societies and are examples of the traditional gender roles Olin is accused of reinforcing.

With her documentary, Olin gives the impression that a woman's value is given and earned by having children and keeping a man. But what about the women who do not want children or a man? Will they never be of value? Professor French brings forward a documentary in her book that deals with this issue. In the documentary *To Kid or Not to Kid* (Trump 2019), filmmaker Maxine Trump surveys the social biases and stigma on women who choose not to become mothers. These stigmas include statements saying that women are useless if they remain childless, without children they are not complete women, and that childless women can never be happy (French 2021, 65). When these are presented as potential outcomes for choosing not to marry or have children, it becomes difficult for women to make that choice. Do they want to be happy and valuable, or depressed and worthless? Consequently, women become more inclined to choose marriage and motherhood, although their value will always be linked to their husband and children. In view of the male gaze, the result will be women and their bodies becoming nothing more than sexual objects for men, and reproductive machines for children. Outside of their wifely duties and motherhood, they have no further value. That is why Olin's presentation of the female body and its significance, can be seen as an attempt to strengthen conventional gender roles and patriarchal power structures demonstrated by the male gaze.

Conclusion

After building a theoretical framework of the male and female gaze film theories and conducting an analysis of Margreth Olin's presentation of the female body in the short documentary *My Body*, I was able to find correlations between the documentary and the two gazes that led me to believe that the film is a product of them both. In summary, the male gaze founded by Laura Mulvey is a form of filmic representation of men and women in patriarchal societies that blossomed in traditional Hollywood cinema. This gaze is known for catering to heterosexual male viewers by reinforcing gender roles claiming that women are only meant to be mothers and wives, or otherwise sexual objects meant for male pleasure. The male gaze has a long history of objectifying women on screen, while giving them little to none value outside of their relation to men. The female gaze on the other hand, is presented by Lisa French and defines the individual perspective, observation, and creational form of any female filmmaker. It refers to a gaze shaped by female eyes, voice, emotional response, and perspective. For a film or documentary to be considered a product of the female gaze it must be a filmic depiction of the subjective experience or perspective of someone living in a female body. The short

documentary *My Body* fit this description by visually and narratively presenting Olin's body and her subjective experience regarding it. However, there are some aspects of the male gaze incorporated in the documentary as well. Olin presents her body as a symbol for her renowned value, an expression of body-positivity that challenges traditional beauty and femininity, and a forceful statue of critic against women because of their degrading comments, but most of all she presents it as a tribute to men and her daughter for giving her confidence and value. Because of Olin's many presentations conveying different messages, it becomes difficult to place the documentary within only one of the two gazes when they are both present.

The findings from the analysis argues that Olin's documentary is a product of the female gaze because she shares her journey to self-empowerment through her own subjective perspective, voice, and body. The film is a first-person story expressing Olin's own female gaze, where she presents the repair of her previously broken self-image, her "imperfect" body's journey to be "more than good enough", and her unpleasant experiences turning into inspiring life-lessons. However, her reasons for finding value in her body and within herself relate to the male gaze. The source of her value relies with men and her daughter, they are the reason for her self-empowerment and her gaining a better self-image. The documentary is therefore also a product of the male gaze because Olin presents her bodily and personal worth as being based on her reproductive capability and ability to attract men, which represent traditional gender roles and further inspire women to seek validation from men while also generate a desire to bear children.

On behalf of the findings, I conclude that Margreth Olin's short documentary *My Body* is a product of both the female gaze and the male gaze, although they are employed in separate ways to convey different messages. Therefore, it is unsure what message the audience takes away from watching the documentary. Perhaps their view is related to their own personal experience and perspective, and for that reason it comes down to their own individual gaze. In this case, men would more likely see the film as an inspirational story about a woman and her self-empowerment because they cannot relate on a personal level. However, I would argue that most women will see it as a disempowerment for them. In today's day and age, women preach that self-value and happiness should come from themselves, and that seeking validation from men and children would take away their independence, equality, and value as human beings. In other words, modern women find value outside of being baby-makers and sexual toys for men.

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