

1º Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Humanas - Humanidades entre pasado y futuro. Escuela de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Gral. San Martín, 2019.

Gender Issues in I am not an Easy Man.

García Ces, Patricia.

Cita:

García Ces, Patricia (2019). *Gender Issues in I am not an Easy Man*. 1º Congreso Internacional de Ciencias Humanas - Humanidades entre pasado y futuro. Escuela de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional de San Martín, Gral. San Martín.

Dirección estable:

<https://www.aacademica.org/1.congreso.internacional.de.ciencias.humanas/1542>

ARK: <https://n2t.net/ark:/13683/eRUe/t2g>



Esta obra está bajo una licencia de Creative Commons.
Para ver una copia de esta licencia, visite
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/deed.es>.

Acta Académica es un proyecto académico sin fines de lucro enmarcado en la iniciativa de acceso abierto. Acta Académica fue creado para facilitar a investigadores de todo el mundo el compartir su producción académica. Para crear un perfil gratuitamente o acceder a otros trabajos visite:
<https://www.aacademica.org>.

Gender Issues in *I am not an Easy Man*

Author: Patricia García Ces

Escuela de Humanidades, UNSAM

pgarciaces@unsam.edu.ar

Abstract

Amidst the rising tide of feminist voices from all over the world, with movements such as #MeToo or Ni Una Menos, and women's massive marches and demonstrations sweeping the globe, gender equality issues have finally come to the fore, especially over the last few years. Reflecting upon the complex dynamics between women and men and stereotyped gender roles and conventions dictated by society, French director Eléonore Pourriat's film *I am not an Easy Man* (*Je ne suis pas un homme facile*, 2018) offers an insightful, thought-provoking exploration of gender issues, shading light on a number of invisibilized inequalities and the naturalized sexism inherent in the patriarchy.

The aim of this article is to discuss, from a gender analysis perspective, how Pourriat's film challenges and subverts the hegemonic binary gender order –especially, male privilege–, and leads viewers, through irony and satire, to further their awareness of and reflect on culturally constructed expectations, assumptions and constraints that are differentially assigned to women and men, femininity and masculinity, in our current heteronormative sex/gender/sexuality system.

Keywords: binarism; asymmetry; gender roles; gender stereotypes; male privilege

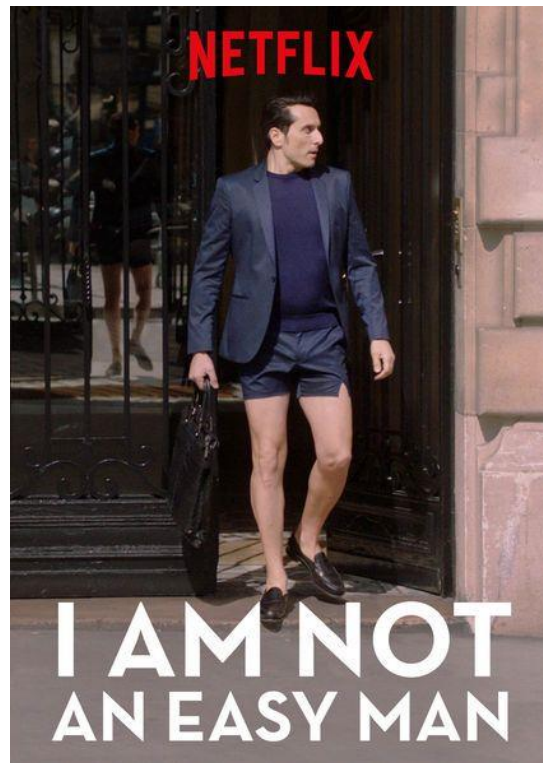
Introduction

Films are undoubtedly among the most pervasive tools used by the hegemonic patriarchy to disseminate its ideology. Their lure stems from a type of invisible narration drawing on an array of codes. Some of these codes (e.g. intertextuality) are also used by other narrative forms, while others are inherent to the audiovisual medium (e.g. composition or editing). All these elements combine to create an illusion of reality, making audiences believe (from a passive stance) that they are “witnessing” life itself, rather than a construction, usually male-centered and/or told from the male gaze –such as is still the case of most mainstream cinema (Neroni, 2005).

I am not an Easy Man features Damien, a male chauvinistic executive who makes it a habit of degrading and objectifying women. One day, as he is walking down the street talking to a friend and coworker about unfaithfulness, Damien passes out after bumping his head into a street sign. When he comes to, he finds himself in an alternate reality, where it is women who are dominant while men are submissive and subservient. As the movie unfolds, Damien

experiences what it feels like to be a second-rate person due to one's gender. Women disrespect and abuse him –because he is “just” a man–, and he ends up getting fired when he speaks out against gender inequality. He gets a new job as a personal assistant for a high-powered writer called Alexandra, who is the female chauvinist equivalent to the “old” Damien.

The rest of the film unfolds very much as a typical romantic comedy. However, by satirizing everyday situations we have witnessed or experienced ourselves countless times, but making us see them as ridiculous, awkward or even outrageous merely because they are portrayed through a reversal of gender roles, Pourriat forces us to consider how much we have come to naturalize a number of sexist gender norms and behaviors, without questioning them at all.



Visibilizing binarism and asymmetry

Our Western sex-gender-sexuality system, like most systems in the rest of the world, only allows for two sexes, two genders and two sexual orientations. This binary paradigm of culturally scripted performance is widely accepted as dogmatic truth and reproduced by most people, resulting in the erasure of any other existing categories (Butler, 2004). Still, there are individuals whose primary or secondary sexual characteristics, gender identity or sexual orientation do not fulfill the medical, psychological and/or societal requirements to be

included in one group or the other, which usually leads them to being perceived as and feeling inadequate, or even abnormal or deviant. By dividing the world into only two sets (which are also viewed as opposites), and asymmetrically conferring value and normalizing one («male»/ «masculine»/ «heterosexual») at the expense of the other (« female »/ « feminine »/ « homosexual »), countless people are invisibilized and over half of the planet’s population –i.e. women– are denied equality.

Binarism and asymmetry are clearly portrayed in one of the first scenes of the movie, when in the context of a staff meeting to discuss an application that Damien has developed to improve (heterosexual) male sexual experiences, one of his female colleagues points out that the app is not inclusive, especially from a woman’s perspective. The males in the room derisively laugh at the woman’s contribution, dismissing it outright, while Damien further denies it any serious consideration by inviting her to discuss it “over drinks and dinner tonight”. The woman’s reaction: just rolling her eyes and leaving the room, clearly shows how naturalized this behavior is. Also, Damien’s comment on the usefulness of developing a gay app shows his ignorance of the fact that such apps already exist (e.g. Grindr or HER), revealing his heterosexist view of the world.

Another interesting instance of sexist asymmetry is present in the way that the powerful Alexandra finds Damien endearing because of his “masculinist”, rebellious nature, trying to challenge gender norms in the alternate world, where it is the voices of women that are taken seriously. The condescending way in which she takes his ideas and complaints –just because they are a man’s– clearly mirrors the way women’s feminist claims are often ignored or mocked.

Also, in the alternate reality, women’s bodies are not objectified, and they do not routinely subject themselves to all sorts of cumbersome treatments, procedures, and adornment for the pleasure of men. So, women wear plain, comfortable clothes and footwear, and are often shown bare-breasted, even walking or jogging around on the street,



while men are expected to “look pretty” all the time and be concerned about their appearance, watch their weight, wear sexy outfits, and wax their body hair.

Deconstructing gender roles and stereotypes

In the alternate reality portrayed throughout the film, women hold high-ranking positions, abuse their male employees, are “naturally” unfaithful, and selfish in bed. Also, it is men who are expected to do the reproductive work: raise the children, cook and take care of the household, and also put up with all manner of abuse by their women, simply because that is the way things are. Those men who struggle for gender equality (referred to as “masculinists”) are denigrated, which points to the many pejorative labels ascribed to women who do not conform and fight for their rights (e.g. feminazis, dykes), and makes us see the unfairness of such contemptuous and trivializing treatment of feminist ideals and struggles.



By subverting the positions and roles of the genders, the parallel world of the film also offers viewers the chance to acknowledge the fact that while certain male chauvinistic attitudes may benefit some groups of women, such as the young and beautiful ones, they do so in an inappropriate, sexist way –even though this type of sexism may often be “benevolent”, and therefore undetectable.

Denouncing male privilege

Male privilege is a term used in sociology to examine the social, economic and political rights and advantages that are available to men merely on the basis of their sex. A man’s access to these benefits may vary depending on the degree to which he complies with the heteronormative ideal of masculinity of his society (Keith, 2017). The fact that patriarchal

systems have long been in place, unquestioned and unchallenged for generations, has resulted in male privilege becoming invisible. Thus, men usually assume it is their own merits that confer them their special status, rather than the unearned benefits they enjoy for just being male.

The main spheres of male privilege are:

- Family life: Men usually get cared for, rather than taking care of others. Even since childhood, they are granted more independence and autonomy than girls, and as adults, they have more free time than women.
- Social and work life: Thanks to the sex division of labor their lives and free time do not often change significantly due to fatherhood, which gives them better chances of success in the labor market. Also, the gender pay gap results in men getting higher wages than women for doing the same job.
- Sexuality: Men are not likely to get sexually assaulted. They are expected to be hypersexual, and do not get criticized for being promiscuous or consuming pornography or prostitution.

The very title *I am not an easy man* points to one of the many double standards that stem from male privilege. Men are praised for having multiple sexual partners while women are deemed promiscuous (“easy”) and stigmatized for the same behavior.

Conclusion

We live in a society where masculinity has been constructed to equate strength, courage, rationality, and power. *I am not an easy man* asks us to wonder what would happen if, overnight, we were flung into a dystopian world –for males. What would it be like if, all of a sudden, being a man meant having to fight for your basic rights (including the basic right to be respected as a person), and



needing a “masculinist” movement to represent you and make your voice be heard?

Probably the most effective tool of the movie is resorting to ridiculization, through satire, rather than criticizing sexism, patriarchy, and gender roles head on. In order to do so, the film makes use of almost every imaginable gender cliché and turns them upside down by applying them to males. Thus, the constructedness underlying the whole gender order – and gender itself– is brought to the fore.



Making viewers feel shocked at the everyday mistreatment and abuses perpetrated by women on men, and getting the audience to side with the victimized males, Pourriat leads us to question our part in the gender system, and to reflect on the naturalization of sexist attitudes and behaviors that we, as a society, engage in on a daily basis, but usually do not even register because we have come to take them for granted as part of “business as usual”. Thus, we are forced to acknowledge how odd, unacceptable, or just plainunfair, some of the things we see as normal would be just if the genders of those involved were flipped.

Bibliography and Reference Sources

Butler, J. (2004). Undoing Gender. Routledge, New York ; London.

Case, C. E. & Lippard, C. D. (2009), Humorous Assaults on Patriarchal Ideology. Sociological Inquiry, 79: 240-255. <http://doi:10.1111/j.1475-682X.2009.00282.x>

Carrera, M. V., DePalma, R., & Lameiras, M. (2012). Sex/gender identity: Moving beyond fixed and 'natural' categories. *Sexualities*, 15(8), 995–1016.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460712459158>

De Lachomette, E.; Dailly, E. (producers), Pourriat, E.(director). (2018) *Je ne suis pas un homme facile*. France. Autopilot Entertainment / Film Invaders / LOVEMYTV / MademoiselleFilms.

Johnson, C. (2009). Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema. In *Feminist Film Theory: a Reader*, edited by Sue Thornham, New York University Press, New York.

Keith, T. (2017). Patriarchy, Male Privilege, and the Consequences of Living in a Patriarchal Society. *Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture: An Intersectional Approach to the Complexities and Challenges of Male Identity*. Routledge. ISBN 978-1-31-759534-2.

Neroni, H. (2005). *The Violent Woman: Fertility, Narrative, and Violence in Contemporary American Cinema*. Albany: State U of New York.

Ryder, B. (1991). *Straight talk: Male Heterosexual Privilege*. Queen's LJ.