

Portrait of Intersectional Feminism in The Movie

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ABSTRACT

Background. Intersectional studies are often associated with political efforts to understand the interconnections between gender, class and race. Antonia Brico as the main character shows a strong ambition to become a famous conductor in classical music despite getting rejection from men, financial difficulties, and social pressure.

Purpose. This research aims to analyze the various forms of discrimination faced by women in The Conductor movie, focusing on the intersectional feminist theory proposed by Kimberly Crenshaw.

Method. This study employs descriptive qualitative methodologies. The dataset for this research consists of 14 instances of discrimination against women, as well as the portrayal of women's efforts to attain gender equality in the movie. These data are utilized by researchers to facilitate the analysis process.

Results. The researchers identified multiple instances of discrimination encountered by women, particularly the protagonist Antonia Brico, who faced challenges from different sources. One example of this is the strong urge and motivation to advocate for women's rights in society, particularly in the position of leadership, within the realm of music. In addition, this movie presents other issues, including social, cultural, and political challenges that are primarily connected to Antonia Brico's personal battle.

Conclusion. Brico shows her intellectual ability by studying with renowned musicians and conductors, even studying abroad, to gain knowledge and achieve her goals. She also demonstrates the courage to self-actualize, which is shown by her efforts to challenge perspectives that undermine women, such as the belief that women cannot lead and must hold positions below men. In addition, she also showed patience and tenacity in facing all the obstacles of oppression and discrimination that occurred.

KEYWORDS

Discrimination, Feminism, Gender, Woman

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INTRODUCTION

Movies have a significant impact in creating society's views and culture. Movies are considered a source of entertainment, a mirror of culture, a platform for information dissemination, a shaper of public opinion, and a social critic. This viewpoint supports the freedom of artistic expression in filmmaking as well as its ability to stimulate, arouse sentiments, and communicate ideas. As a result, movies can shape individuals' perspectives and opinions on various social, political and cultural issues. This makes movies a frequent target of surveillance and scrutiny in American culture.



The “images of women” approach developed in the 1970’s examines the portrayal of women in American films by considering historical background, stereotypes, and the extent to which the characters serve as role models for women. In this era, the use of intersectionality as a technique to examine the oppression faced by women and oppressed groups is gaining ground. Intersectionality refers to how one’s marginalized identity intersects with other identities, thus leading to higher levels of oppression. Intersectionality examines the linkages or correlations between different systems or manifestations of oppression, domination or discrimination.

Swim defines discrimination as actions that disadvantage others based on race, ethnicity or religion. Discrimination is the unfair or unequal treatment of individuals or groups because of their personal attributes. In the event of an accident at an intersection, the victim may be affected by discriminatory factors such as gender and race. Intersectionality is a framework that specifically examines how women face various forms of oppression in different aspects of life. Attention has shifted towards examining how race, class and gender intersect to shape and change power dynamics in the social and material aspects of women’s lives. Intersectionality is the most effective approach to studying how the categories of race, class and gender influence each other.

Intersectional studies are often associated with political efforts to understand the interconnections between gender, class and race. Another important branch of feminist thought has also embraced and elaborated on this concept. One of the films that will be examined through the lens of intersectional feminism theory in this research is “The Conductor” (2018), directed by Maria Peters and based on the true story of Antonia Brico, the world’s first female conductor. The movie chronicles the experiences of a woman named Antonia Brico, who struggles against sexism and suffering in the male-dominated classical music industry. She faces challenges such as gender stereotypes, men’s distrust of women’s abilities, and difficulties in assuming leadership positions. The movie reflects Antonia Brico’s strong ambition to become a renowned conductor in classical music, but she had to face severe obstacles such as rejection from men, financial difficulties, and social pressure.

As a Dutch-American immigrant, Antonia Brico also faces the challenge of finding her place in the diverse American society, having to navigate between her original identity and new social expectations. The movie depicts gender inequality in classical music, where women are often overlooked or not given equal opportunities to conduct orchestras. The protagonist also faces challenges to fully express her artistic vision due to certain institutional limitations and social expectations. In addition, the movie also shows the existence of social class differences, where the rich dominate and can do what they want with money and social status without regard to the lower class. This is illustrated when Mrs. Thomson, the mother of Frank Thomson (Antonia’s lover), tries to prevent Antonia from holding an orchestra concert. The movie clearly shows that at that time, women were very restricted in playing music, let alone becoming a conductor, which was a male-dominated role.

In this movie, women are very limited in playing music, let alone being a conductor, where women move the baton to give orders to the men. In fact, because of these musical limitations, a woman in the movie is willing to disguise herself as a man by wearing a corset in order to play a musical instrument. The movie clearly shows two social classes, the upper class and the lower middle class. There is a rich group and a poor group. The rich can get what they want with money and social status without regard to the lower class. At that time Mrs. Thomson, the mother of Frank Thomson who was Antonia Brico’s lover, wanted to prevent Antonia from holding an orchestra concert. Antonia and her friends had advertised this in the newspaper, but with Mrs. Thomson’s dominance, she combined the event advertisement with a car advertisement, making it difficult for

newspaper readers to see. In addition, when Antonia Brico wanted to learn to play the piano with one of the great musicians and conductors named Mr. Goldsmith, Mr.

Goldsmith laughed at her dream and said, “get married and have children” which from the statement illustrates that a woman's destiny is only to get married, have children, take care of her husband and take care of the household. Women have no right to do more than that. In addition, the movie has several issues such as social, cultural and political issues that appear in the movie, mostly related to Antonia Brico's struggle. Speaking of social issues, there are several scenes related to these issues. This can be seen when Antonia Brico has to deal with gender discrimination and stereotypes in her environment, especially in her family and workplace. She has to fight hard to get the same recognition and opportunities as her male counterparts in the world of singing.

The movie also highlights the cultural differences between the United States and Europe in accepting women as conductors. In the United States, Antonia Brico faces greater challenges to prove her worth as a woman in the male-dominated world of classical music. In addition, the movie also depicts the political background of the time, particularly the Second World War and the cold war that affected Antonia Brico's career.

These political conditions affect the opportunities and challenges Antonio faces in strengthening the continuity of his career. From the explanation above, this research aims to find out how the oppression experienced by the main character in the movie *The Conductor* with an intersectionality perspective. Because it sees the relationship between the object and the theory of intersectionality in which it discusses issues of oppression and discrimination experienced by women from various directions. Thus, intersectionality focuses on women who experience oppression from all directions in their lives.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this research, the researchers applied a descriptive qualitative approach. Library research refers to the systematic investigation of books, scientific articles, encyclopedias, and other sources (Sugiyono, 2014). This method emphasizes the collection of meaningful data and involves describing and interpreting the relevance of the material obtained. The researcher used descriptive to analyze the data collected, which included numerical, visual, and textual information. This research uses data quotations to explain the methodology used in the presentation (Moleong, 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Conductor, a 2018 film directed by Maria Peters, tells the true story of Antonia Brico, the world's first female orchestra conductor. Set in the 1920s, the film follows Antonia, born Willy Wolters to adoptive parents, as she faces challenges in pursuing her passion to become a conductor in the male-dominated classical music industry. Through an intersectional feminist lens, this analysis examines the various forms of oppression and discrimination Antonia faces because of her gender, as well as the intersection of her gender with her social class and adoptive status. Drawing on Kimberly Crenshaw's theory of intersectional feminism, this analysis highlights how Antonia's experience of marginalization in the male-centric world of music is compounded by her marginalized position within her own adopted family.

Discrimination in the Family

One of the main forms of oppression Antonia experiences is within her own adoptive family, particularly from her adoptive mother who is known to be overbearing and harsh towards Antonio. The movie features several scenes depicting the mother's attempts to control and limit Antonia's

aspirations and activities, reflecting the gender-based expectations and norms prevailing in their household.

In the first data extract, when Antonia comes home from work, the mother's main concern is not Antonia's well-being, but rather Antonia's salary. The mother's dismissive response to Antonia's fatigue, saying "Can you cut the onions? I'm cooking onion soup," and the father's futile attempts to defend Antonia, show how Antonia is expected to prioritize household duties over her own needs or career ambitions. This scene highlights the gendered division of labor within the family, where the mother relegates Antonia to the traditional female role of cooking and doing household chores, despite Antonia's role as breadwinner.

In addition, the mother's attempt to exercise control over Antonia. After learning that Antonia has been fired from her job, the mother confronts Antonia in an aggressive manner, accusing her of fraud and demanding to know where she works and how she earns money. The mother's intrusive behavior, including searching Antonia's room, reflects her desire to monitor and restrict Antonia's activities. Antonia's refusal to provide information to her mother is a form of resistance to this oppressive control.

The most extreme act of oppression from the mother, where she destroys Antonia's piano, a symbol of her love for music, and forces her out of the family home. This violent reaction highlights the mother's unwillingness to accept Antonia's pursuit of a career in music, which she perceives as a violation of traditional gender roles. The father's passive compliance with the mother's actions further underscores Antonia's isolation and lack of support within the family. These examples of oppression in Antonia's adopted family reflect the intersection of gender, social class and her adopted status. As a woman in the 1920s, Antonia was expected to fulfill household responsibilities and conform to societal norms of femininity. Her role as the family's main breadwinner, a responsibility traditionally considered masculine, further challenged these expectations. Moreover, her status as an adopted daughter, revealed in the second data excerpt, suggests that the mother's hostility may stem from a lack of biological connection or resentment towards Antonia's intrusion into the family hierarchy.

Antonia's experiences of oppression within her own family, compounded by her gender, class and adopted status, foreshadow the challenges she will face in the male-dominated classical music industry. The film's depiction of Antonia's struggles at home becomes the basis for understanding the systemic barriers and discrimination she will face as she pursues her dream of becoming a renowned orchestra conductor.

Discrimination in the Workplace

The film's narrative also explores the discrimination and obstacles Antonia faced in the classical music industry, which was heavily dominated by men during the 1920s. Despite her immense talent and passion to become a conductor, Antonia faced significant resistance and hesitation from her male peers, reflecting the gender-based barriers prevalent in the industry at the time.

One pivotal scene that highlights Antonia's struggle for recognition occurs when she approaches a prestigious conservatory to audition for their conducting program. The admissions committee, consisting entirely of men, initially rejects her application, dismissing her aspirations with the demeaning statement, "Conducting is not a woman's job" (one of the Film's dialogs). This blatant sexism demonstrates the deeply ingrained gender bias that Antonia must overcome in order for her to get a chance to pursue her dreams.

Undaunted, Antonia persisted and, with her determination and talent, she managed to secure a place in the conservatory's conducting program. However, her journey does not get any easier, as she faces continued discrimination and marginalization from her male peers and instructors. In one scene, Antonia is refused to conduct the school orchestra, with the instructor citing her gender as the reason, stating, "We can't let a woman conduct our orchestra" (Film dialog). The refusal to recognize Antonia's skills and abilities solely on the basis of her gender reflects deep-rooted prejudices within the classical music world.

The film also highlights Antonia's struggle for recognition through her interactions with Frank Thomsen, a renowned orchestra conductor who initially belittles Antonia as a "newbie" and questions her ability to lead a professional orchestra (Film dialogue). Thomsen's dismissive attitude and his unwillingness to take Antonia seriously represents the broader societal attitudes that Antonia must face in pursuing a career as a conductor.

Despite these setbacks, Antonia remains resilient and continues to hone her skills, determined to prove her worth and overcome gender-based barriers. In a pivotal scene, Antonia performs a private recital for Thomsen, showcasing her immense talent and mastery of the orchestra. Impressed by her abilities, Thomsen finally recognizes Antonia's abilities, and the film shows a shift in his perspective, which hints at a potential change in the industry's acceptance of female conductors (Film dialogue).

Antonia's experience in the classical music industry illustrates the intersection of gender discrimination, power and institutions. As a woman working in a traditionally male-dominated field, she faces systemic barriers and skepticism that challenge her ability to pursue her passion and achieve her dreams. The film's depiction of these discriminatory practices highlights the deep-rooted gender biases that women like Antonia must face to gain recognition and respect within the male-centric world of classical music.

Antonia's Resilience and Triumph in the Face of Adversity

Despite the various obstacles and forms of oppression that Antonia faces, both within her family and the classical music industry, the movie ultimately portrays her as a resilient and triumphant figure. Through her unwavering determination, her talent, and her refusal to accept the limitations imposed upon her, Antonia emerges as a strong and pioneering symbol of female empowerment in the male-dominated world of classical music.

One of the key moments that showcases Antonia's resilience is when she decides to audition for a prestigious conservatory, despite her mother explicitly forbidding it. This act of defiance, in the face of family opposition, reflects Antonia's commitment to her dreams and her willingness to challenge the gender-based expectations placed upon her (Film scene). Her persistence and talent in gaining a place in the conservatory program further highlights her determination to overcome the obstacles placed in her path.

Antonia's resilience is also seen in her persistence in pursuing leadership opportunities, even when faced with repeated rejection and discrimination. Her refusal to be swayed by the conservatory's refusal to allow her to conduct the school orchestra, and her determination to prove her worth to the skeptical Frank Thomsen, demonstrate her strength of character and refusal to be silenced or marginalized.

The film's climactic scene, in which Antonia holds a private recital for Thomsen, serves as a powerful testament to her abilities and the transformative impact of her talent. Thomsen's initial hesitation and disregard for Antonia transforms into admiration and recognition as he witnesses her extraordinary abilities. This pivotal moment not only confirms Antonia's mastery of her hard-earned

craft, but also suggests a potential shift in the industry's willingness to accept and celebrate female conductors.

However, Antonia's victory is not just about her individual achievement. The film's narrative suggests that her success has wider implications for the empowerment of women in the classical music industry and beyond. By breaking through gender-based barriers and establishing herself as a renowned conductor, Antonia paved the way for other women to follow in her footsteps and challenge the male-dominated status quo.

The film's finale, in which Antonia is shown conducting a professional orchestra in front of a rousing audience, symbolizes her ultimate victory and the validation of her lifelong pursuit of her dream. This powerful scene not only celebrates Antonia's personal achievement, but also represents a broader victory for women's rights and the dismantling of gender-based discrimination in the world of classical music.

The Significance of Antonia Brico's Character in the Context of Intersectional Feminism

The Conductor, through its depiction of Antonia Brico's extraordinary journey, is a powerful testament to the challenges and triumphs of women in the male-dominated classical music industry. Using an intersectional feminist lens, the film highlights Antonia's varied experiences, where her gender intersects with her social class and adopted status, adding to the forms of oppression and discrimination she faces.

Antonia's struggles within her own adopted family, where she is expected to conform to traditional gender roles and domestic responsibilities, foreshadow the obstacles she will face in the classical music industry. The film's exploration of gender-based bias and the obstacles Antonia must overcome to pursue her passion to become a conductor powerfully illustrates the systemic nature of discrimination women faced in this field during the 1920s.

However, the film's narrative also celebrates Antonia's resilience, determination and triumph, positioning her as a pioneering figure who defied the limitations imposed on her and carved a path for women's empowerment in classical music. Antonia's story, as depicted in *The Conductor*, resonates with the core tenets of intersectional feminism, which recognizes the intersection of multiple forms of oppression and the need for a holistic approach to address gender inequality.

By centering on Antonia's experiences and highlighting the intersections between gender, class, and adoptive status, the film provides a nuanced and compelling exploration of the challenges faced by marginalized individuals in pursuit of their dreams. Antonia's journey not only inspires admiration for her personal achievements, but also serves as a powerful reminder of the need to dismantle systemic barriers that impede the advancement and recognition of women in traditionally male-dominated fields.

The conductor's portrayal of Antonia Brico's story, grounded in the principles of intersectional feminism, offers a compelling narrative that transcends the boundaries of the classical music world. It is a testament to the resilience and strength of the human spirit, as well as an invitation to continue pursuing gender equality and the empowerment of women in all spheres of society.

CONCLUSION

The condition of women is linked to the existence of women who experience oppression and discrimination. As a Dutch-American immigrant, Antonia Brico faced the challenge of finding her place in a culturally diverse American society, including the lack of opportunities given to women in music. She must navigate between her original identity and new social expectations. It clearly displays two social classes, the upper class and the lower middle class. There is a rich group and a

poor group. The rich dominate because they can get what they want with money and social status without caring about the lower class. It is then seen when Antonia Brico has to face gender discrimination and stereotypes in her environment, especially in her family and workplace. She has to fight hard to get the same recognition and opportunities as her male counterparts in the world of singing.

After describing these conditions, the researcher also describes the strategies used by the main character to achieve equality. Antonia Brico shows her intellectual ability by studying with famous musicians and conductors, even studying abroad, to gain knowledge and achieve her goals. She also shows the courage to self-actualize, which is shown by her efforts to challenge perspectives that undermine women, such as the belief that women cannot lead and must hold positions below men. In addition, she also showed patience and tenacity in facing all the obstacles of oppression and discrimination that occurred.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Formal analysis; Methodology; Writing - review and editing.

Author 2: Project administration; Investigation.

Author 3: Data curation; Resources.

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