Gender Policing in Mainstream Hindi Cinema:
A Decade of Central Female Characters
in Top-Grossing Bollywood Movies

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This study examines the depiction of reward and punishment in the context of central female characters (CFCs) adherence to prescriptive gender norms in Bollywood films. One hundred top-grossing movies from 2003–4 to 2013–14 were content analyzed for the depiction of reward and punishment toward the CFCs. Irrespective of the year of release, all movies that included a CFC depicted that character following some form of prescriptive gender norms. CFCs in old as well as new movies were rewarded when they adhered to gender norms and punished when they violated gender norms. Instances of punishment were higher in old movies than in new movies; violation of prescriptive gender norms was not related to punishment in new movies, and new movies also lacked identifiable female protagonists on average compared with old movies. Findings are explained in context of Hindi mainstream cinema's role in promoting benevolent sexism.

Keywords: *sex roles, femininity, films, content analysis, Bollywood, gender policing*

Violent crime against women in India has changed in recent decades. The number of reported crimes has increased markedly; according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau of India (2013), there was a 91% increase in reported incidents of crime against women from 2003 to 2013, including kidnapping; rape; domestic violence; sexual intimidation in the form of gazing, groping, verbal abuse, or whistling directed at women in public spaces (Paul, 2011); and cybercrimes. During the same period, policy changes including harsher penalties for violence against women have been implemented (Law Commission of India, 2017). In recent years, several causes have been advanced to explain the increasing violence against women in India, including political apathy, socioeconomic upheaval, societal attitudes, and media effects (Himabindu, Arora, & Prashanth, 2014). Indian media have been scrutinized for their role in promoting violence against women through the depiction of acts of violence against and the sexualization of women (Himabindu et al., 2014; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). More specifically, Indian–Hindi commercial cinema, often referred to as Bollywood, has received attention from scholars because of its reach and popularity (Anujan, Schaefer, & Karan, 2012; Thussu, 2008). In this study, we sought to examine the portrayal of female gender conformity in mainstream Hindi films over a decade. We analyzed the content

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of a large corpus of top-grossing Bollywood films in their depiction of female gender conformity, comparing movies produced a decade apart. We looked at the content of these films as a source of socialization of gender norms in light of cultivation effects and social cognitive theory.

Bollywood films enjoy a global audience. The demand for Bollywood films in Asia and the Middle East has existed since Indian independence (Roy, 2012) and has recently developed globally (Roy, 2012). In 2001, Bollywood sold 3.6 billion tickets, outselling Hollywood movies by a billion tickets (Matusitz & Payano, 2012), and its popularity (Lee, 2014) and critical acclaim (Desai, 2006) continue to grow (Lee, 2014).

Bollywood's globalization has arguably affected the portrayal of Indian women in Bollywood films (Anujan et al., 2012). Anujan and colleagues (2012) noted that globalization has led to the emergence of alternate modes of Indian femininity, as expressed in popular Hindi films that depart from the portrayal of Indian women as upholders of moral code. In an informal survey of Bollywood movies released during 2006 and 2009, the portrayal of women was found to be increasingly Western (e.g., Western clothes, depiction of sexuality), conforming less to traditional gender-role expectations for women in India (Anujan et al., 2012). Drawing on observations from select contemporary Hindi films, feminist scholars have noted that women characters in Bollywood films are portrayed as increasingly independent and strong (Gupta, 2015; Unni, 2015). This reflects, in part, the impact of globalization on Indian society (Kapoor, Bhuptani, & Agneswaran, 2015). Forces of globalization have created a steady demand for labor, encouraging Indian women to enter the job market (Nath, 2000). In contemporary Indian society, women have more access to education (Indian Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011). Both these trends are reflected in contemporary Bollywood films through central female characters (CFCs) that are educated and career oriented (Rasul & Raney, 2016). Globalization also opened up the Indian market to Western attire, which is reflected in the dresses Bollywood heroines wear (Strubel & Josiam, 2016). The degree to which these depictions have become commonplace, and the consequences that accrue to characters thus depicted, are the focus of this article.

Many studies that have examined gender representations in mainstream Indian cinema have been critical in nature rather than quantitative (Tere, 2012). Limited quantitative research has documented the depiction of conformity to prescriptive gender roles for women (Kapoor et al., 2015). Others have suggested that such depictions have been joined in the marketplace by depictions of aggressive female protagonists that challenge these roles (Ghaznavi, Grasso, & Taylor, 2016). Violence against women is also a frequent element of mainstream Indian cinema (Ghaznavi et al., 2016; Manohar & Kline, 2014; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003).

However, much of this research has been based on cinema that predates the recent dynamism in both crime against and depictions of women in India (e.g., Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003) or employed samples that are either extremely small (e.g., four films by Anujan et al., 2012; 15 by Kapoor et al., 2015) or sharply limited (e.g., only advertisements by Ghaznavi et al., 2016). Coupled with the mixed findings they have produced, these limitations warrant a quantitative study of the depiction of gender-role conformity and its consequences in Bollywood films.

Theoretical Background

Gender Roles

Gender roles are standardized patterns of behaviors and characteristics expected of individuals based on their biological sex (Basow, 1992; Lindsey, 2015). These standardized patterns of behavior are based on gender norms, which are shared rules that guide behavior in specific situations (Lindsey, 2015). Messages in films, television, and music provide experiences that teach gender norms (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014). Through the repeated depiction of certain gender-specific behaviors being rewarded, media messages provide lessons in gender-role conformity. Gender-role conformity is the social process of adhering to normative gender roles, through appearance or behavior, of the sex that was assigned at birth (Workman & Johnson, 1994). Gender roles or stereotypes can be dichotomized as descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptive gender roles for women are beliefs about female characteristics that women actually possess; prescriptive roles are beliefs about characteristics that women should possess (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). When women are seen as violating prescriptive gender roles, they often face intentional discrimination or harassment as a consequence (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Gender Roles for Women in India

Prescriptive gender roles are a prominent element of Indian society and culture, which recognize behaviors and characteristics that are considered desirable for men and women (Sethi & Allen, 1984). These gender norms are ingrained in the social fabric; violating them leads to social sanctions against the violator (Rocca, Rathod, Falle, Pande, & Krishnan, 2009). Gender norms for women include gullibility, sensitivity to others' needs, and eagerness to soothe others' feelings (Callahan, 2015; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Indian women are also expected to be submissive, docile, generous, innocent, polite, and family oriented (Sethi & Allen, 1984). Mandelbaum (1986) further observed that women in India are expected to follow a behavior code that includes speaking softly, being modest, and acting shy. Indian women are expected to conform to strict appearance norms laid down for upper-caste Hindu women, by accessorizing themselves with bindi (a dot on the forehead), henna (painting kits for hands), *sindoor* (vermillion), *mangalsutra* (gold chain worn by married Hindu women), and nose rings (Bhattacharyya, 2015).

The normative Indian woman is upper-caste Hindu because the idealization of femininity in India is derived from upper-caste Hindu norms (Parameswaran, 2004; Rao, 1999). Hinduism, as the majority religion in India, plays an outsized role in organizing social reality. Therefore, women's conformity to cultural archetypes of perfection found in the Hindu religion determine their status of respectability (Hegde, 1995). According to these archetypes, respectable Indian women are expected to be dutiful, benevolent, and in control of their sexuality (Hegde, 1995). Violating upper-caste Hindu norms of womanhood results in penalties (Chakraborty, 2003). Strict prescriptive gender norms persist despite the increasingly prominent economic, political, and social roles played by women in India, and in spite of increased education about and laws against sexual harassment (Radhakrishnan, 2009). Indian women are considered respectable only when they abide by traditional prescriptive gender norms; transgressing such norms is seen as inviting and justifying violence (Radhakrishnan, 2009). For instance, Phillips and colleagues (2015) found that certain sections of Indian society attributed blame to rape victims who were described as wearing clothing that

deviated from conservative gender norms. Violently enforcing idealized gender norms has been described as an expression of the Indian patriarchal mindset (Chapman, 2014).

Punitive action against women who violate gender norms takes many forms in India, including sexual assault, physical abuse, emotional abuse, intimidation, forced marriage, and death (Singh, Hurley, & Singh, 2016). Physical abuse takes the form of pushing, slapping, punching, choking, and burning (Bhattacharyya, 2015). Sexual harassment in India often takes the form of eve teasing, which involves making lewd remarks at women, whistling, staring, stalking, groping, fondling, pinching, or singing suggestive songs (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Phadke, Khan, & Ranade, 2011). Punishment for violating prescriptive gender norms may also take the form of ostracism (Arun, 1999; Halder & Jaishankar, 2016). Ridiculing women who challenge established gender norms has also been noted (Majumdar, 2003; Vinze, 1987).

Learning Gender Roles and Norms

The perpetuation of strict gender norms depends on enforcement. Gender roles, norms, and expectations are not inevitable; they are developed through a complex interplay of social, cognitive, affective, motivational, and biological factors (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). One of these social factors is the media environment.

Cognitive and behavioral effects theories have long been used to explore the influence of mainstream media on prescriptive gender norms for women (Perse & Lambe, 2001). According to cognitive effects theories, media content contributes to audiences' knowledge, which in turn guides behavior (Perse & Lambe, 2001). For example, social cognitive theory explains that people learn behaviors by observing others in social interactions, whether those interactions are "in real life" or mediated (Bandura, 2001); behaviors that are rewarded are learned, and those that are punished are subsequently avoided. According to the social constructivist approach, media depict society in patterned and predictable images, and viewers' interaction with these images can influence their perception of reality (McQuail, 2010). For both theories, the depiction of prescriptive gender roles for women, including depictions of the punishment of women who violate prescriptive gender roles and the rewarding of adherence to prescriptive gender norms, likely influence gender-role adherence among audiences as well as attitudes and behavior around the enforcement of adherence among others.

Critical assessments of women in film have suggested that narrative structure in many films depends on the passive role of women and the active role of men (Haskell, 2016; Mulvey, 1989). According to feminist scholars, the category "woman" has been politically constructed and routinely oppressed in films (Byerly & Ross, 2008). Women are often rendered silent and marginal in narratives that operate from a male vantage point. The male protagonist is agentic in films, controlling events, forwarding the story within the traditional narrative, which depicts females in stereotypical roles (Mulvey, 1989).

The narrow roles available for women in Hindi cinema observed by Mulvey (1989), however, are only part of the picture. Moorti (2013) identifies a wide range of representations of femininity as early as the colonial era, noting the presence of aggressive, assertive female protagonists and references to a mythical time of gender equality. In Moorti's (2013) view, the binary of virtuous female characters who uphold traditional gender

norms and "bad" female characters who embrace modernity emerged in the 1960s. However, over the years feminist campaign demand for media reform have led to changes, which as Byerly and Ross (2008) note, have been met with backlash and recalcitrance.

In recent years, some media scholars studying Indian mainstream cinema have recognized a shift in the depiction of female characters (Gupta, 2015; Roy & Sengupta, 2014). However, these observations are based on a small number of movies, often with small audiences. For example, Roy and Sengupta (2014) analyzed female characters in four movies produced by a feminist Indian filmmaker. In their analysis of the changing depiction of female gender norms in Bollywood, Gupta (2015) analyzed only three films. Other scholars have argued that the range of representations of femininity has actually been narrowing (Moorti, 2013). Therefore, whether cinematic depictions of women have reflected the changing discourse around women, gender norms, and violence in recent years remains an open question. In our study, we explored whether a comparison of prescriptive gender norms for females depicted in top-grossing movies from 2003–4 to top-grossers in 2013–14 will reveal a change.

RQ: *Do top-grossing Bollywood films released in 2013–14 have lower instances of prescriptive gender norms for females compared with movies released in 2003–4?*

Many scholars have argued that portrayals of gender in the mainstream media reflect the practices and prejudices of the cultures that give rise to them. For example, Geise (1979) argued that changes in the content of magazines targeting female audiences reflected the changing goals and priorities of women over the same time period. Sex stereotypes in media have been found to occur more often in countries with less egalitarian norms and less often in countries with more egalitarian norms (Eisend, 2010; Furnham & Mak, 1999; Gilly, 1988). Messages in mainstream media, then, often reflect the interests of existing power structures (Goffman, 1979). In fact, past researchers have concluded that women in popular film tend to be depicted as subordinate to men (Haskell, 2016). Women challenging prescriptive gender norms are symbolically not represented or less represented in the mass media (Tuchman, 2000), and advertisements for Indian films frequently depict women in ways that conform to prescriptive gender roles (Ghaznavi et al., 2016). We therefore hypothesized that:

H1a: *Indian mainstream media, or Bollywood, depict negative consequences accruing to women who violate prescriptive gender roles.*

H1b: *Indian mainstream media, or Bollywood, depict rewards for women who adhere to prescriptive gender roles.*

Method

Sample

We analyzed 100 commercial Indian Hindi films that were released in the years 2003–4 and 2013–14. (See the online supplement material for a synopsis of all movies.) This interval was selected due to the cooccurrence, during this period, of a dramatic rise in both crimes against women in India

(Himabindu et al., 2014) and in policies and laws empowering women. Using previous media content analyses as a model (e.g., Sapolsky & Tabarlet, 1991), we chose to make a comparison for movies produced at two discrete time points. For the purpose of maintaining equal sample sizes, we selected 25 movies from each of the four years. The selection criteria included the top-grossing 25 movies released in commercial Hindi cinema for each of the mentioned years. Top-grossing films were defined in terms of the box office gross revenue generated by the movie during their theatrical release. We used data from the Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com) to identify the sample. The average length of movies was 148.16 minutes (*SD* = 24.28).

Coding

Unit of Analysis

Each film was viewed in its entirety, and the presence or absence of each coding category was noted throughout the film (Behm-Morawitz & Mastro, 2008). The entire film was chosen as the unit of coding and analysis to identify consequences of behavior that could unfold over the entire course of the film (Field, 2007). We excluded songs from our analysis because of the distinct and largely independent role songs play in Bollywood movies. Past researchers have described these songs as distractions from the plot of the films in which they appear (Manuel, 1988), or at least as distinct or separate from film narratives, in part to facilitate their commercial activity beyond the films in which they appear (Morcom, 2011, 2016). In addition, this distinctiveness is seen as songs in mainstream Hindi films often serve as the only space in the film's text where sexual fantasies can be expressed and even eroticized (Rao, 2010). Given this underlying theme in songs, we expected that analyzing songs would lead to a homogenous-sexualized category, not providing much scope for comparison.

Coding Categories

Coding focused on the gender conformity and positive and negative consequences accruing to the CFC (or, on rare occasions, characters) in each film (see Table 1 for a list of all coded variables). Each variable was coded in relation to the CFCs, who were identified as the female human characters most central to the plot and listed as stars of the movie (Bleakley, Jamieson, & Romer, 2012; Fouts & Burggraf, 1999). Each variable was coded as 1 when exhibited or experienced by the CFCs and 0 when not exhibited or experienced by them (Krippendorf, 2004).

Prescriptive Gender Roles

We developed our coding scheme by drawing on literature regarding prescriptive gender roles in psychology, women's studies, and Indian culture (Bem,1981; Dasgupta, 1996; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009; see Table 1 for a list of all variables). Gender roles for women specific to Indian culture are prescribed norms of chastity, sublimation of sexuality, and family orientation (Chatterji, 2013; Dasgupta 1996; Mahalingam & Balan, 2016; Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009). To provide clarity to the coders, some of these categories were broken down to highlight specific behavior that could be directly observed in the movies. For example, yielding was further categorized into submissive, passive, compliant,

and self-abnegating. Family orientation was broken down to filial piety and husband worshipping (Dasgupta 1996; Mehta, 2009; Ramasubramanian & Jain, 2009). Having interest in children was labeled nurturance and operationalized as being nurturing or supportive toward children. Being an object of men's desire was added as a category to take into account the aspect of gender norms related to a prescribed feminine appearance as reflected through the male characters' behavior toward the female protagonist (see Table 1).

Negative Consequences

Consequences that accrued to female characters were also coded. To create categories for coding punitive repercussions for violating prescribed gender norms, we relied on literature from women's studies in India, social psychology, anthropology, and previous analyses examining violence against women in Bollywood movies (Manohar & Kline, 2014; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003; Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Sexual harassment, verbal intimidation, abduction, assault, rape, and murder were among the outcomes previously identified in Bollywood movies as sanctions for violating female gender norms (Manohar & Kline, 2014; Ramasubramanian & Oliver, 2003). Name calling (Rudman & Phelan, 2008), social isolation, ridicule, and ostracism (Zippelius,1986) and their ensuing consequences (e.g., psychological distress, confusion, loneliness and emotional suffering; Leary, 2001) were identified from literature on gender norm violations. Emotional abuse was also coded (Hegarty, Sheehan, & Schonfeld, 1999; Keashly, 1997). Because forced marriages continue to be a form of controlling female behavior in South Asia (Anitha & Gill, 2009), we coded this as a separate category for punishment. We also included a category for physical, mental, and social abuse of family members, recognizing them as a type of vicarious punishment (see Table 1).

Positive Consequences

Positive consequences were also coded. Social reward categories included appreciation, acceptance, and social approval, as well as economic or material rewards (Rudman & Phelan, 2008). Winning a love interest and achieving a happily-ever-after ending (Dwyer, 2010) were also categorized as rewards.

Positive and negative consequences were coded regardless of whether they were explicitly tied to the CFC's gender-role conformity. Positive and negative events in the form of plot units form the basic structure of most narratives (Lehnert, 1981; McKee, 1997). Positive and negative consequences were identified in terms of the positive or negative affect state of the CFC as depicted through dialogue, action, or visual cues in the film (Lehnert, 1981; see Table 1).

Table 1. List of Coded Variables With Reliability Measure and
Frequency of Depiction in the Sample.

	Krippendorff's α	**Frequency in sample**
Prescriptive gender norms		
Performing femininity		
Physically weak	.89	33 (37%)
Compliant	.84	25 (28%)
Empathic	.93	63 (70%)
Chaste	.92	22 (25%)
Passive	.96	17 (19%)
Submissive	.95	14 (15%)
Husband worshipping	.95	17 (19%)
Self-abnegating	.94	26 (29%)
Patient	.91	57 (64%)
Filial piety	.85	44 (49%)
Emotional	.88	43 (48%)
Soft-spoken	.91	42 (47%)
Devoted	.93	60 (67%)
Trusting	.89	69 (78%)
Feminine appeal		
Gullibility	.91	29 (32%)
Femininity	1.00	83 (93%)
Object of men's desire	.98	51 (57%)
Other variables		
Nurturance	.92	33 (40%)
Sexual sublimation	.93	26 (28%)
Punishment		
Physical–psychological		
punishment		
Rape	1.00	2 (2%)
Physical abuse	.95	11 (12%)
Isolation	1.00	5 (6%)
Verbal intimidation	.92	19 (21%)
Loneliness	.94	18 (20%)
Helplessness	.93	26 (29%)
Emotional suffering	.98	43 (48%)
Physical suffering	.96	13 (14%)
Psychological distress	.96	11 (12%)
Forced marriage	1.00	3 (3%)
Social punishment		
Ostracism	1.00	4 (4%)

Social ridicule	.95	7 (8%)
Abandonment	.93	9 (10%)
Confusion	.94	8 (9%)
Other variables		
Murder	1.00	8 (9%)
Suicide	1.00	3 (3%)
Abduction	1.00	10 (11%)
Sexual harassment	1.00	28 (29%)
Physical abuse of family	.89	6 (7%)
Social ridicule of family	.91	2 (2%)
Emotional abuse of family	.84	18 (20%)
Rewards		
Material rewards	.93	69 (77%)
Overall rewards		
Appreciation	.96	64 (71%)
Acceptance	.96	61 (68%)
Happily ever after	.91	58 (65%)
Social approval	.92	44 (49%)
Winning love interest	.72	70 (78%)
Satisfaction	.93	50 (56%)

Procedure

Four coders were trained using a sample of 10 Bollywood movies (not included in the study sample). These movies were randomly selected from a list of movies released in 2003–4 and 2013–14, excluding the top-grossing films. After training, coders independently coded the sample; 40% of the cases were coded by all four coders to establish intercoder reliability. Each film was watched in its entirety. Coders were trained to look for instances of gender-norm depiction following previous work (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011): a code of 1 was assigned if (a) other characters stated that the CFC possessed a characteristic, or (b) the CFC exhibited the characteristic through behavior, dialogue, or visual cues. Punishment and rewards were also coded when depicted or suggested through dialogue or visual cues. A category was coded as long as it appeared at least once in the film. The entire coding procedure took place over a span of two months.

Intercoder Reliability

Krippendorff's alpha were computed for each of the coding categories. Good reliability (>.80) was obtained for each of the items.

Results

Movie Characteristics

Of 100 total movies, 11 had no significant role for women. These movies did not have an identifiable CFC and were excluded from analyses.

We conducted a categorical factor analysis (with varimax rotation) on the three broad concepts of prescriptive gender norms, punishment, and reward to identify important factors under each concept. This yielded two important factors for prescriptive gender norms. Factor 1 included characteristics related to submissive and relational norms and was labeled "performing femininity" (α = .73; see Table 1). The second factor emphasized appearance and being an object of men's desire along with gullibility and was labeled "feminine appeal" (α = .93).

Factor analysis was also performed on punishment categories and reward categories. Two punishment categories emerged, one reflecting "physical– psychological punishment" (e.g., rape, physical abuse, forced marriage), (α = .85), the other reflecting "social punishment" (e.g., social ostracism, social ridicule, abandonment; α = .89; see Table 1). For reward, all categories except material reward loaded on a single factor, so material reward was treated as a distinct factor whereas other categories were combined and treated as "overall reward" (α = .85).

In the 89 movies with at least one CFC, some gender norms and negative consequences occurred more frequently than others. Performing femininity was expressed most often through depicting CFCs as patient, empathic, emotional, devoted, soft-spoken, trusting, and with filial piety (see Table 1). Of the two factors obtained for negative consequences, variables under physical–psychological punishment emerged in high frequency across all 89 films, with the CFC shown as helpless, suffering emotionally, intimidated verbally, and lonely (see Table 1 for frequencies).

Of 89 films featuring at least one woman in a central role, all 89 had at least one instance of femininity performance, feminine appeal, physical–psychological punishment, social punishment, material reward, and reward. To compare the nature of this representation, the number of observed traits, behaviors, or consequences within each factor that appeared in each film were summed, resulting in scores reflective of the number of gender norms and types of positive and negative consequences present in each film. Table 2 displays means and standard deviation for each of the factors that emerged in the factor analyses for both new (2013–14) and old (2003–4) films. Comparing films across the two time periods using t tests did not reveal any significant difference in the frequency of femininity performance, $t(82) = 1.42, p = .16$; feminine appeal, $t(84) = .41, p = .68$; a physical–psychological punishment $t(84) = .77, p = .44$; social punishment $t(84) = .75, p = .45$; overall rewards, $t(84) = 1.05, p = .30$; or material rewards, $t(84) = .21, p = .84$. Because these differences were not statistically significant, on average, Bollywood films show consistency across time in adherence to female gender norms, punishment, and rewards with regard to the CFC.

Table 2. Means and SDs for Factors for Old and New Movies.

Dependent variable	Year	Means	SD
Performing femininity	2003–4	5.49	3.43
	2013–14	4.55	2.62
Feminine appeal	2003–4	1.84	.78
	2013–14	1.78	.86
Psychological–physical punishment	2003–4	1.78	1.94
	2013–14	1.48	1.71
Social punishment	2003–4	1.21	.63
	2013–14	1.32	.69
Material rewards	2003–4	1.91	.29
	2013–14	1.90	.31
Overall rewards	2003–4	3.46	1.54
	2013–14	3.12	1.36

Hypothesis Testing

H1a proposed that Bollywood depicts sanctions on female characters who violate prescriptive gender norms. To examine this, a single punishment variable was created by counting presence of punishment in all punishment categories (e.g., loneliness, abandonment, physical abuse, verbal abuse), and a gender-norm depiction variable was created by counting the presence of gender norms across all prescriptive gender-norm categories (e.g., nurturance, compliance, submissiveness). Punishment was found to deviate significantly from normality, even after removing outliers (Shapiro–Wilk = .86, $p < .001$, $N = 86$). A log transformation of punishment was performed. The variables were entered in a regression analysis with punishment as the outcome variable and depiction of gender norms and year of movie as predictors (see Table 3). Prescriptive gender norms and year of movie release (0 = *old*, 1= *new*) significantly and negatively predicted punishment. Compared with new movies, old movies depicted more instances of punishment after controlling for prescriptive norms. The interaction between prescriptive gender norms and year of movie release was also significant, indicating that the correlation between prescriptive gender norms and punishment was different for old compared with new movies. For old movies, there was a significant negative linear relationship between instances of punishment and instances of gender norms, but not for new movies.

Table 3. Regression Coefficients With Instances of Punishment as Outcome,
Year of Release, and Prescriptive Gender Norms as Predictors.

	B	SE B	β	t	df	p
Year of release	−.06	.03	−.53	2.17	81	.03
Prescriptive norms	−.01	.00	−.59	4.81	81	.00
Year × Prescriptive Norms	.01	.00	.48	2.00	81	.04

Note. $R^2 = .23$, $p = .04$

H1b asked if Bollywood depicted rewards for female characters' adherence to prescriptive gender norms. A reward variable was therefore created by counting the presence of any type of reward. Reward was found to deviate significantly from normality after removing outliers (Shapiro–Wilk = .93, p < .001, N = 86). The variable was log transformed and entered as outcome in a regression analysis, with prescriptive gender norms and year of movie as predictors (see Table 4).

Table 4. Regression Coefficients With Instances of Reward as Outcome,
Year of Release, and Prescriptive Gender Norms as Predictors.

	B	*SE B*	β	*t*	*df*	*p*
Year of release	.15	.13	.33	1.22	77	.23
Prescriptive norms	.02	.01	.36	2.54	77	.01
Year × Prescriptive Norms	−.02	.01	−.35	−1.27	77	.21

Note. R^2 = .08, p = .21.

Prescriptive gender norms significantly and positively predicted reward. Year of movie release did not significantly predict reward. The interaction between prescriptive gender norms and year of movie release was also not significant.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the portrayals of female prescriptive gender norms and the punishments and rewards applied to those who adhere to or violate them in a sample of popular Hindi films, understanding that such depictions both reflect culture and influence audiences. Irrespective of year of release, all movies that included a CFC depicted that character following some form of prescriptive gender norms. For example, three movies from 2003–4, *Tere Naam, Veer Zara,* and *Yuva,* each depicted 12 different types of prescriptive female norms, and a single movie from 2013–14 showed 12 prescriptive gender-norm types. Interestingly, after removing movies that had no CFC, our sample size was greater for 2003–4 (*n* = 48) than for 2013–14 (*n* = 41). Most movies that lacked a CFC related to either stereotypical male themes such as war (e.g., *L.O.C, Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*) or sports (e.g., *Hawa Hawai*).

Of the prescriptive female gender norms that are most frequent in popular Bollywood movies, feminine appearance, including body-hugging dresses, traditional feminine attire such as a sari*,* ornaments, and high-heel shoes, was predominant. Even in movies with strong female characters, such as *Shuddh Desi Romance, Queen,* and *Teen Deewarein,* the CFC dressed in traditional Indian clothes, often with ornaments. This could be a requirement of the plot of many stories, such as narratives set during earlier eras, or stories that focus on tensions between traditional values or practices and contemporary alternatives. Central female characters were also portrayed as being easily trusting, empathetic, emotional, soft-spoken, patient, and as an object of men's desire in most of the sample, irrespective of year of release; many of these traits were observed for nearly all the CFCs in sampled films. Bollywood movies clearly and consistently depict women as adhering to prescriptive gender norms (Bharti & Kumar, 2016; Himabindu, et al., 2014).

In line with general public discourse in India—specifically, the expectation that violation of gender norms leads women into trouble—CFCs who adhered to relatively more gender norms experienced relatively

fewer types of punishment. Adherence to gender norms was positively associated with depictions of being rewarded in various ways. Women in Bollywood films experienced better life outcomes when they complied with prescriptive gender norms. The punishment corollary, however, was only observed in 2003–4; failing to comply with gender norms elicited greater punishment, but not among more recent films.

Overall, this combination suggests the likelihood that Bollywood movies function to reinforce traditional gender norms for women. Female characters who adhered to traditional gender norms were more likely to be rewarded and less likely to be punished. Viewers, attending to these models, are likely to learn that adherence to prescriptive norms is desirable or even necessary, or even that enforcing such norms is actually in the interest of those on whom that enforcement is exercised.

These findings, combined with the observation that punishment was less observed in 2013–14 than in 2003–4, also suggest that as a source of socialization of female gender norms, Bollywood movies have changed over the past decade. There was a decrease in sexual violence depicted in new movies on average, and its relation to gender norms decreased over time. As suggested by the interaction effect finding in this study, in movies from 2013 to 2014, CFC's adherence to a high number of gender-normative behavior did not correlate with her facing fewer types of punitive encounters in the plot. In other words, adhering strictly to prescriptive gender norms became less effectively protective in more contemporary movies. This pattern of findings suggests that if top-grossing Bollywood movies function as a model for socializing gender norms, then contemporary movies, to an extent, are moving away from public discourse that links punishment for women to violation of gender norms.

Notably, new movies depict CFCs in gender-normative feminine appearance, embodying stereotypical feminine qualities, but also agentic. For example, in *Haider* (2014), the CFC, Ghazala, is a traditionally attired devoted mother and widow. However, she also engages in a romantic affair after her husband's disappearance, even though her family disapproves. In another movie released in 2014, *Humpty Sharma Ki Dulhania*, the CFC does not hesitate to get sexually involved with her love interest, but she also refuses to go against her father's wishes for her arranged marriage. Instead, she secretly continues her affair with her love interest, even as preparations proceed for her marriage to the boy her father has selected.

In each of these movies, the CFC engages in a moral transgression, and this transgression is depicted as warranting social ridicule. Neither character violates gender norms openly—their violations are hidden from social scrutiny. In the movie *Queen,* hailed as a feminist film (Gupta, 2015), the protagonist, Rani, transforms from a shy "plain Jane" into an independent woman who travels alone to Paris, befriends men, and breaks off her engagement. However, although Rani takes bold steps, she conforms to most prescriptive gender norms. She wears modest clothes, enacts naïveté in sexual matters, and maintains her filial piety, returning to her parents after her transformational journey. In all these examples, the CFCs are agentic, even strong; nevertheless, they mostly adhere to female gender norms. This reflects what Chatterji (2013) notes in her essay on the "new woman" in Bollywood. The new woman has shifted from playing solely the role of devout mother or wife; however, the changes are largely cosmetic, implying that although Indian society accepts that women have become progressive, there is a dilemma regarding how much freedom this new woman should enjoy (p. 1182). It may also reflect an endorsement of what has been

called the "Superwoman" ideal—the expectation that women embody stereotypically feminine traits while competing effectively in traditionally masculine domains (Taylor & Setters, 2011).

Changing female characters are becoming a part of commercial Hindi movies; this reflects Sircar's (2015) observations of gender in Bollywood. The female protagonist in many successful Hindi movies is an individual capable of independence. Gupta (2015) noted that the increased acceptance of feminist-themed Hindi films reflects an increase in female cinemagoers who now have the money, time, and freedom to visit cinemas. Our findings resonate with findings from other studies that find the portrayal of confident and individualistic women in new Bollywood movies (Anujan et al., 2012; Ghaznavi & Taylor, 2015).

As a source of socialization (Holtzman & Sharpe, 2014), film plots that delink gender-norm violation and punishment help discourage gender stereotypes. For instance, a film depicting the CFC staying out late at night but not being harassed or ostracized delinks gender-norm violation and punishment. However, CFCs in Bollywood films continue to embody a host of feminine stereotypes, such as feminine appearance, filial piety, physical weakness, and nurturance, even when they violate other gender norms. Gender-norm adherence was also correlated with the depiction of rewards across both time periods. In separating gender-norm violation and punishment while continuing to associate gender-norm adherence with rewards, Bollywood films are engaging in (and reinforcing) benevolent sexism as opposed to hostile sexism. In contrast to hostile sexism, which is marked by antipathy toward women violating prescriptive gender norms, benevolent sexism promotes sexism by rewarding women who embrace conventional roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001). Repeated exposure to rewards in relation to gender-norm adherence may lead viewers to accept such portrayals as representations of reality (Gerbner, 1998); women who embody feminine qualities may come to be viewed as more worthy of rewards than women who do not.

Limitations and Future Research

As a content analysis, this study cannot demonstrate effects; it only lays a foundation to explore such effects. However, based on the observations from this study, adherence to female gender norms is not rewarded nor its violation punished in contemporary Indian media messages. Future studies should explore the extent of influence that top-grossing Bollywood movies have on moviegoers' attitudes toward female gender norms.

In this study, key variables were measured by counting the various types of prescriptive gender-role adherence and positive and negative consequences present in each film. This is, admittedly, an imperfect measure of these constructs. For example, a film depicting a single type of punishment (e.g., social ostracism) would score lower on social punishment than a film that depicted two types of punishment (e.g., social ridicule and abandonment), even if the ostracism was pervasive and long-lasting, and the social ridicule and abandonment were relatively brief. No coding system, however, can capture the entire complexity of all narratives. However, most movies tend to use a wide range of tools to convey their most important messages rather than simply doubling down on a single tool. The hypothetical character experiencing social ostracism would likely also be depicted experiencing other emotional and social consequences of ostracism throughout the film. Nevertheless, future studies employing alternate operationalization of the study variables could add further insight into the likely effects of complex narratives.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study are promising for gender rights advocates who wish to see a reduction in hostile sexism in mainstream Hindi cinema. However, the findings also raise concern with regard to the portrayal of benevolent sexism. Benevolent sexism encompasses positive attitudes toward women in traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 2001). In the context of the findings of this study, portrayal of rewards accruing to CFCs for adhering to gender normative behavior reflects benevolent sexism. Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001) and cultivation theory (Gerbner, 1998), depictions of benevolent sexism may cultivate sexist beliefs, and this effect may offset benefits of a decrease in depictions of hostile sexism. In the context of Indian society, which has begun to see renewed attention given to women's issues, particularly related to rape, other violence, and financial autonomy (Bagri, 2013), benevolent sexism in mainstream media messages may cultivate beliefs among policy makers that the existing social and legal system is already working in favor of women. In turn, this may result in palliative reforms instead of real reforms addressing the underlying causes of longstanding inequality and injustices. For example, a film that argues that a career woman who is a mother deserves respect at the workplace may facilitate continued tolerance of problematic gender roles, such as the notion that women's most important role is as a spouse and mother rather than as an agent, or that women should be submissive and demure. In doing so, it gives permission for the audience to disrespect unmarried or childless women, or mothers whose professions do not fit into the narrow socioeconomic context provided by virtuous cinematic exemplars. The film *Queen* serves as an example of benevolent sexism by showing that as long as a traditional Indian girl adheres to filial piety and sexual naïveté, she deserves freedom. Cultivating beliefs that a traditional Indian girl can travel abroad does nothing to address issues of sexual harassment that an average Indian female faces daily on Indian streets.

Conclusion

In response to social changes brought about because of forces of globalization, CFCs in Bollywood movies are depicted as transgressing gender norms in their attire, profession, education, and street-smartness. However, almost always, the CFC portrays gender norm adherence, as if to offset the violations she has accrued. Despite being a decade apart, Bollywood movies reward gender norm adherence, sending the message that irrespective of shifting gender practices and expectations, Indian woman deserve to be respected as long as they adhere to some basic gender norms. The decrease in instances of punishment accruing to the CFC in newer Bollywood movies captures the increased awareness of violence against women in India. The message that Bollywood is sending to its audience is that modern Indian women should not be punished for occupying white-collar jobs or enjoying freedom as long as they continue to uphold traditional Indian gender norms. Hindi cinema is evolving in its depiction of female gender norms, but only in terms of eliminating hostile sexism. Benevolent sexism still remains a component of mainstream Hindi movies. CFCs in new Hindi films engage in behavior that could be considered agentic, but must embrace prescriptive gender norms to be rewarded.

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