Abstract:
This outline examines gender stereotypes in film. Research has proven that depictions of women as marginalized, hyper sexualized, or weak characters in film can negatively affect the way women view themselves and their potential. *Stars Wars VII - The Force Awakens* introduces a strong female protagonist who breaks free from the traditional stereotypes of women in film and the *Star Wars* franchise.

I. Traditional portrayal of women in *Star Wars*:
   a. Princess Leia hyper sexualized and dependent on men in film
      i. Leia supposedly has the force but never uses it
      ii. Leia is depicted as “bossy” not strong
      iii. Leia is a damsel in distress – needs to be rescued in all films
      iv. Leia’s sexualized clothing – “slave Leia bikini”
   b. Padme is marginalized and weak
      i. Padme dies of “broken heart”
      ii. Padme serves as consort to Anikan
   c. Bechdel test
      i. To pass the test a film has to meet the following three criteria: one, it has to have at least two women in it who, two, talk to each other about three, something besides a man” (Bechdel)
      ii. Previous *Star Wars* films fail the Bechdel test (Dockterman)
      iii. *The Force Awakens*: passes the Bechdel test (Dockterman)

II. Objectification of women in film
   a. More often focused on appearance than ability
      i. Media displays male faces at a higher rate and women’s bodies at a higher rate. (Fredrickson & Roberts 177)
      ii. In some cases, the face is not visible and only body is visible (Fredrickson & Roberts 177)
   b. In 2014 only 12% of protagonists in film were female (Lauzen 2)
   c. Women in superhero/action films are often portrayed as someone who is vulnerable and needs to be protected (Stabile 87)

III. Objectification affects mental health
   a. Girls and women may view themselves as objects
      i. Women receive feedback that their appearance is their most valuable asset (Fredrickson & Roberts 183)
      ii. Women often internalize the viewpoint of the person objectifying (Fredrickson and Roberts 178)
iii. Women exposed to images of sexual objectification are less likely to view their appearance positively (Aubrey, Jennifer Stevens, et al. 280)

b. Women experience Shame for not meeting the “ideal” standard (Fredrickson and Roberts 181)
   i. Shame leads to body “correction” including excessive dieting, exercise, surgery, and eating disorders (Fredrickson and Roberts 182)
   ii. Viewing images of “sexualized heroines” increases low self-esteem (Pennell and Behm-Morawitz 211)
   iii. May contribute to depression (Fredrickson and Roberts 187)
   iv. By age 13, girls have more depressive symptoms and more problems eating than boys (Fredrickson and Roberts 193)

IV. How is Rey different?
   a. Not hyper sexualized or overly feminine
      i. Outfit/hair is practical
      ii. Mannerisms and body language not “delicate” or ladylike
      iii. She is not a princess
   b. Independent, self-sufficient, able to survive
      i. Survived on her own in desert
      ii. Able to fight (better than the men) and not afraid to
      iii. Does not need to be rescued by anyone
   c. Not overcome by emotion or depicted as typical “emotional woman”
      i. Contrasted with Kylo Ren who is overly emotional
      ii. Hints at possible love interest between Finn and Rey but she is not defined by it
      iii. Chooses to pursue her mission rather than relationships

V. There is still room for improvement
   a. Carrie Fischer criticized for not “aging well”/being sexy enough in film (Drexler)
      i. Reinforces woman’s value determined by appearance
      ii. Fischer is still being compared to her former hyper sexualized role (Drexler)
      iii. Male actors in the film were not criticized for appearance (Drexler)
   b. #whereisrey – Rey was originally not included in the action figure toy set, monopoly game, or millennium falcon toy set (Boboltz)
      i. Reinforces marginalization of female characters
      ii. Star Wars franchise is still marketing to primarily to boys (Boboltz)
Work Cited


Stabile, Carol A. "“Sweetheart, This Ain't Gender Studies”: Sexism and Superheroes."