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EMPOWERMENT VERSUS COMMODIFICATION: THE CONTRADICTORY REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN *BLACK WIDOW* (2021)

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to delve into understanding women's representation in the film, especially regarding the issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in a male-dominated, capitalistic industry. Women as commodities is an issue that is often found in films, and Black Widow (2021) is one of the films that brings this issue to light. In Black Widow (2021), the commodification of women is masked as empowerment. While the film portrays strong female characters, their empowerment is destabilized by the Red Room, an institution that commodifies women and transforms their bodies into instruments of violence through mind control, forced sterilization, and militarized training. The object of this study is Black Widow (2021), with a focus on the Red Room as a site of gendered oppression. The objective is to analyze how the film represents women as both empowered and exploited. This research uses qualitative feminist film analysis to understand how the film represents women's empowerment narrative, particularly in superhero characters. This study utilizes Luce Irigaray's "Women on the Market" as the theoretical framework to examine how female bodies are controlled, weaponized, and stripped of agency. Through the findings and analyses, it is apparent that Black Widow (2021) critiques violence against women but still supports patriarchal control over femininity.

Keywords: *Black Widow, commodification, women empowerment, gender oppression, women superheroes*

INTRODUCTION

Modern media, throughout history, have never truly eliminated the commodification of women. Instead, they often disguise it under the appearance of 'empowerment' while continuing to make women's bodies as objects. As explained by Marxist and feminist scholars, commodification refers to the process by which people, relationships, or even identities are transformed into products valued primarily for their marketability or utility, rather than for their inherent worth (Gill, 2008; Gorissen, 2024). Rosalind Gill, in her article, states that the shift from objectification to subjectification does not mark the end of the commodification of women's bodies, but rather represents a more complex and insidious form of it (Gill, 2008, p. 43; Bryzzheva, 2025). Even when women appear to choose to be sexy and powerful (subjectification), they are still subjected to commodification in a more subtle manner (Conway & Lebon, 2021). This phenomenon persists due to the ongoing presence of the male gaze, which views women as objects regardless of what they wear or do. The concept of the male gaze was understood as a means for heterosexual men to degrade or undermine feminine identity throughout history

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(Chakma & Chirom, 2022; Ali, 2021). The patriarchal and capitalist systems sustaining this gaze uphold the process of commodification, reducing women's bodies, identities, and capabilities into objects shaped for public consumption, or more specifically, male consumption. This tension has given rise to various debates, particularly in response to modern advertisements and films that often depict idealized images of the female body to enhance product appeal and marketability (Williams, 2021; Patrocino & Bevilacqua, 2023).

This ongoing issue of commodification is not just present in advertisements or media in general, but also can be seen in popular science fiction works that claim to promote strong female leads (Hosey, 2021; Smith et.al, 2021). A clear example of this is *Black Widow* (2021), which is promoted as a female empowerment film but still reflects problems of how women are treated as commodities. Directed by Cate Shortland and produced by Marvel Studios, the film explores the backstory of Natasha Romanoff, also known as Black Widow in earlier Marvel Cinematic Universe films (Taylor, 2021). The film centers on Natasha Romanoff and her sister Yelena, who work together to take down the Red Room, a dangerous institution that holds young girls captive and exploits them. According to Hidaya (2023), the plot and conflicts in *Black Widow* (2021) are constructed to focus on the oppression of women by men (p.32).

While *Black Widow* (2021) as a whole addresses the issue of women being treated as commodities, a condition rooted in systemic gendered oppression, the Red Room serves as the clearest illustration of this commodification. As Kent (2024) explains, the Red Room is a Russian spy organization that exploits young girls to train them as assassins. These girls are forcibly separated from their families at a very young age and stripped of their agency, subjected to both psychological manipulation and physical abuse. Among the most invasive practices is the involuntary removal of their reproductive organs, framed within the narrative as a means of eliminating the perceived distraction of motherhood, thereby transforming them into more efficient soldiers. The Red Room becomes a central site that reveals how women's bodies are controlled and weaponized under the disguise of empowerment, making it a critical point of analysis in understanding the film's commentary on gendered oppression.

Since the release of *Black Widow* in 2021, several studies have used the film as the subject of their research. Many of these studies explore how gender is represented in *Black Widow* and other female-centered superhero films (Niza, 2023). Similarly, Gransden (2024) explores how contemporary female superheroes embody a duality of empowerment and objectification, showing that despite their central roles, they are often visually framed to submit to heteronormative male desires.

Olufidipe and Echezabal (2021) argue that Natasha Romanoff is hypersexualized through costume design and framing through the male gaze, with her narrative often compromised by romantic subplots and sacrificial tropes. Despite appearing in over eight Marvel Cinematic Universe films, her character development is overshadowed by her role as a support figure to male leads, and her ultimate death in *Avengers: Endgame* (2019). Furthermore, DiMaggio (2023) examined the film's political messaging, arguing that it constructs both personal satisfaction and political liberation through the restoration of the heteronormative nuclear family.

Additionally, other scholars have analyzed Black Widow's cultural and genre significance, highlighting its blend of superhero and espionage elements and its engagement with feminist themes within a multimedia franchise (Kent, 2024). Furthermore, Killian (2023) and Rogers (2022) explores the film's movement away from the male gaze in portraying strong female characters and its redefinition of contemporary family through feminist textual analyses of superheroines in comics and film.

In addition, the male gaze has been an interesting lens to study modern media. By measuring agency bias and appearance bias in 19th and 20th century novels, Luo et al. (2024) reveal that novels written from male perspectives tend to portray women as passive and appearance-focused, while female-authored or narrated works do not use the same pattern. However, while these studies provide valuable insights into gender representation, genre, and feminist themes in *Black Widow* (2021), there remains a lack of analysis on how the film portrays the commodification of women's bodies through systemic control. This study seeks to fill that gap by focusing specifically on the Red Room as a site of gendered oppression, applying Luce Irigaray's theory of women as commodities to analyze how female bodies are controlled and weaponized.

Building on this gap, this study intends to examine how *Black Widow* (2021) portrays the commodification of women through the institutional control of the Red Room. The Red Room stripped them of their own agency, manipulated their femininity, and presented this commodification under the guise of empowerment. This study aims to analyze how empowerment masked the underlying agency control, how the female body is constructed as weapons, and how the Red Room functions as a site of gendered oppression. The Red Room stripped them of their own agency, manipulated their femininity, and presented this commodification under the guise of empowerment.

METHODS

This research employs a qualitative feminist film analysis of *Black Widow* by Walt Disney (2021), using Luce Irigaray's theory of women as commodities from "*Women on the Market*" as the primary theoretical framework. Irigaray's concept, where women are positioned as exchangeable objects within patriarchal systems, provides a critical lens through which the

film's narrative and visual elements are interpreted (Ali, 2021). In addition, Rosalind Gill's work on subjectification of women serves as a supporting framework to analyze how the widows' are being sexualized for commercial purposes.

This research focused on the existence of the Red Room and how the institution exploited and commodified women and children. To conduct this analysis, the researchers engaged in multiple viewings of the film, taking detailed notes with particular attention to the intersections of gender, power, and other sociocultural factors. In addition to close readings of key scenes, the researchers also conducted secondary research by reviewing relevant academic articles, interviews, and popular media discourse related to *Black Widow* (2021). Using feminist film analysis, this research directly addresses questions of representation, the male gaze, and the politics of gendered embodiment in visual culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first discussion focuses on the illusion of empowerment: female agency under control. Depicting Natasha and Yelena, as well as the other widows, as strong women is not the wrong way to show 'women empowerment.' Being unbeatable, have the capability to protect themselves, and would never be afraid to go anywhere else because they have the martial skill, all those bravest kinds of action they have in the film. However, the one thing they do not have is the freedom to control their own bodies. As revealed in the narrative, these women were subjected to forced sterilization, trained from childhood to become assassins, and manipulated by Dreykov, the patriarchal figurehead of the Red Room, only to serve his ego in protecting himself and fulfill his pleasure. The women have no choice in the first place to fight for the agency of their own bodies because they are under control. Their so-called strength is thus a result of coercion, not genuine self-determination.

As Gill said, advertising that has a sexual attraction in it as a means of selling has been contributing to the silencing of women's desires by showing women as objects for male consumption and pleasure (Gill, 2008). Aligns with that, Gill's critique of postfeminist media, where women are constructed as active, desiring subjects, yet their agency remains tightly framed by dominant cultural forces. She points out that sexually appealing representations of women often mask the continued objectification and control of female bodies. It is like what Natasha and Yelena are depicted in the film. They are being objectified, dressed up in a sexy costume to work as the forced assassins and agents who fish the targets to fall into their traps. Also, the sexy image of them and other widows in that film is trying to attract the target audience, both women and men, to watch the film (Figure 1).

As depicted in Figure 3, the industry, like other film industries, is trying to make the female character look 'eye-catching,' in this context, being sexy and pretty, so that their film will reach a great market and get abundant material feedback (Mitchell, 2024). The film dressed the female character to look as pleasant as possible, even in her battle costume (Figure 2). That is how commodification works in the media field. Doanne, in her article, states that many feminist theories tend to envision the terms of 'being' rather than 'having' in the commodity of a woman's relation: she is the object of exchange rather than its subject (Doane, 1989) (Wallace, 2023). Further, she said that the women's commodity form was gained from the objectification by using them as the process of fetishization, making them become a display to rather gain profit or loss, and even situate her in the production of surplus value.

Figure 1 Natasha's superhero landing when she is on the battlefield still looks pretty to attract audience

Figure 2 Natasha's and Yelena's costumes

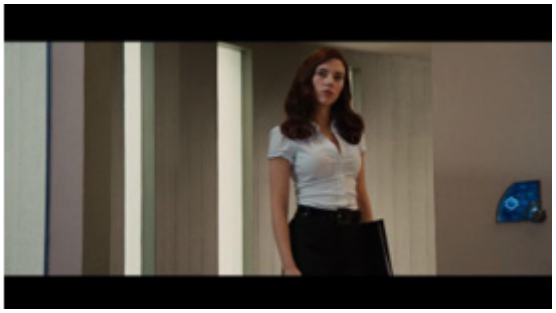

Figure 3 Natasha's first appearance as a spy agent in *Iron Man 2* (2009)

Natasha and Yelena are being sexualized in that way, showing that they are tools crafted for male pleasure and narrative utility, not signs of liberated femininity. These characters mirror how advertising and media industries commodify women's bodies for broader consumption. *Black Widow* (2021) shows how performative empowerment functions within mainstream media (Giusti & Rimmel, 2021). The film is trying to showcase a 'strong woman' image to beat this patriarchal world, but it reinforces existing systems of control by wrapping those women in marketable aesthetics that appeal to mass audiences instead. Empowerment, in this issue, becomes a strategic repackaging of objectification as strength, serving the interests of both narrative authority and commercial success.

Besides the film showcasing a 'beauty in a mess,' it is also clearly depicted how the woman's agency is controlled by a man. In a specific scene, Dreykov revealed how he controlled the Widows, "Smelling my pheromones prevents you from committing violence against me." (Shortland, 1:37:42). This scene presents obvious evidence of how much power Dreykov and the Red Room had in controlling women to obey his command. Other than that, the Red Room also puts a 'brainwash' system on the widows where they are unable to recognize themselves and what they are doing because it is controlled from Dreykov's room. The widows lose their autonomy over their minds and bodies. For Dreykov and the Red Room, the women are just a thing that can be used and discarded.

Figure 4 Yelena, when she was given a potion that could release her from the control of the Red Room

After that released scene (Figure 4), Yelena, who is still under control and doing her mission, gets her consciousness back from Dreykov's control, then realizes that she just stabbed her own colleague. The first thing that came from her mouth was "What did I do?" (20:33), which signifies that Yelena finally regains full control over herself. At this moment, Yelena has a strong emotional reaction; she is shocked because she was unaware of what she had done to her colleague. Through this scene, we can see how the widows controlled by the red room lose autonomy over their bodies and minds; they have no other choice but to obey the orders and missions given.

Furthermore, the other thing that was stolen from the women is their reproductive organs. The Red Room took out their ovaries and uterus from their body so that they would never have kids or menstruation, which could interfere with the mission and control over them. This is presented in the film when Yelena is being sarcastic to Alexei, who asks about her emotions, "I don't get my period, dipshit. I don't have a uterus. They kind of just go in and they rip out all of your reproductive organs." (Shortland, 1:02:24). This scene is a proof of how the Red Room violates women and their right to experience their natural disposition, which is to experience menstruation and other reproductive activities. They do not get justice, as Loretta Ross said in her book titled *Reproductive Justice: An Introduction*, "having the sexual autonomy and gender freedom of every human being is one of the demands of the reproductive justice" (Ross, 2017). What has been done by the Red Room is already a false portrayal of this kind of societal justice. In that book, Loretta Ross emphasizes how important it is to give women the right to have children, not have children, and to raise them in safe and supportive environments, which is the fundamental human right to bodily autonomy. Unfortunately, this right is violently stripped away from Natasha, Yelena, and the other Widows, who are subjected to forced sterilization as part of their indoctrination into the Red Room, and sadly, the environment where they were raised also is not safe at all. This invasive control over their reproductive systems exemplifies a form of reproductive violence, highlighting how their bodies are treated not as their own, but as instruments to serve a patriarchal regime. This kind of state is also shown in the film, where Yelena has a conversation with Natasha, "To him, we are just things. Weapons with no face that he can just throw away." (Shortland, 48:15)

Thus, the film becomes a fictional mirror to real-world practices of coercive sterilization and reproductive oppression, which disproportionately affect marginalized groups. As Balog said in her article, power and agency have a conceptual connection that has been explored by many researchers in post-structuralist thought. Agency and power are interconnected concepts that have been extensively explored in post-structuralist thought. She further said that the agency leads people to have freedom of choice (Balog, 2023). *Black Widow* indeed shows the urgent conversations about reproductive justice and bodily integrity. This portrayal aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDGs), Gender Equality, which calls for the elimination of all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls, including violations and reproductive rights. This issue significantly portrays the violations of women's freedom of choice.

It also goes with the seductive first appearance scene of Natasha in *Iron Man 2* (2010), aligning with Gill's theory, where her sexuality was weaponized not for herself, but male-directed espionage and control. Her being like that is not because of her desire; the skill that she has is not what she has always longed for, the body and the job she got are not her decision at all. She

has no choice but to live with her life, where half of it has been controlled and built by other people. All of that is not depicted as an expression of personal agency, but rather as a strategic tool exploited by patriarchal structures. This weaponization of sexuality, under the guise of empowerment, is a hallmark of performative feminism in mainstream media, a superficial display of strength that masks deeper systems of exploitation. The illusion of choice becomes a narrative tool to legitimize her objectification, aligning with Gill's critiques of media texts that blur the line between empowerment and continued subordination.

Meanwhile, the female hero is usually portrayed as a strong character when depicted like the male hero (Domínguez & Acedo, 2024). Cirkic and Maj state in their thesis that the female hero is commonly depicted as a 'hero' if they are portrayed as taking control, committing violence, and saving the day, which are all the things male heroes do as well (Cirkic and Maj, 2020). Accordingly, this leads to the second discussion, which addresses how female bodies serve as instruments of violence. *Black Widow* (2021) showcases a powerful depiction of the Red Room's 'graduates', or the 'Widows'. These Widows possess extraordinary combat skills and strategic intelligence. They are trained to defeat their enemies at any cost. Thus, *Black Widow* (2021) should appear to empower women by depicting them as strong, capable heroines. However, from the very beginning, the film simultaneously reveals that their 'power' is a result of women's bodies being exploited and turned into weapons under institutional control, no other than the Red Room. This part of the paper examines how the film portrays the Red Room's process of weaponizing female bodies and critiques the thin line between power and exploitation.

Natasha Romanoff, one of the most prominent Widows who has appeared in multiple Marvel films since her debut in *Iron Man 2* (2010), takes the central role in this story alongside Yelena Belova, her sister-figure and fellow Widow. Yelena is first introduced in the film while on a mission to assassinate another Widow named Oksana. During the mission, Yelena appears emotionless and highly efficient. Her precise, controlled behavior reflects the Red Room's systematic training—a clear example of Michel Foucault's concept of the 'docile body,' where institutions discipline and reshape bodies to function exactly as desired (Foucault, 1995, p. 138). However, the following scene reveals the extent of this control: in the middle of a fight, Oksana releases a red antidote that 'wakes' Yelena, breaking her chemical mind control and exposing the artificial nature of her obedience and strength. This moment clarifies that Yelena's strength is not innate empowerment but the result of her body being engineered as a commodified tool of the Red Room, stripped of individuality and reduced to marketable violence.

The Red Room's pervasive control over the Widows' minds and bodies is further demonstrated when Natasha reunites with Yelena in a tense, action-packed apartment fight scene. The audience witnesses not only Natasha and Yelena's deadly skills but also the arrival of another Widow sent to eliminate them. After being injured, this Widow immediately takes her own life under the influence of Dreykov, the Red Room's leader, as shown in Figure 5 where Natasha Romanoff asks the injured Widow, "What are you doing?", and she replies, "He's making me." (Shortland, 38:20), exemplifying the ultimate extent of disciplinary power: the body acts not from free will but under absolute subjection. Through these scenes, Black Widow dramatizes Foucault's idea that institutions produce 'docile bodies'—bodies whose enhanced capacities are inseparable from strict domination and obedience. The Widow's forced self-destruction demonstrates how the Red Room treats women as disposable commodities that are only valuable only while useful, and immediately discarded once injured or ineffective.

Figure 5 Forced termination by Dreykov

Building on this, Luce Irigaray's theory of *women on the market* offers a critical lens on how the Widows are commodified within a patriarchal system. Irigaray explains that women as commodities are divided into two parts: their physical bodies, which are controlled and used, and an outer 'envelope' that is valued but remains inaccessible even to the women themselves. This division also reflects the separation of women's existence into private and social spheres, where their bodies are publicly exploited while their personal autonomy is denied (Irigaray, 1985, p. 176). The Widows' bodies are weaponized and circulated for political and military purposes, stripping them of subjectivity and reducing them to tools of male power (Purewal & Loh, 2021). This is powerfully illustrated when an injured Widow, rendered useless, is discarded through enforced self-termination. This portrayal ultimately reveals that what appears as empowerment is in fact rooted in systemic discipline and commodification, illustrating the film's critique of the blurred boundary between power and exploitation in the Red Room's weaponization of female bodies.

As revealed in the initial scenes of the narrative, the film offers a disturbing depiction of the Red Room's methods through a 3-minute montage (Shortland, 13:20–16:23). Before being taken to the Red Room, the girls are shown being involuntarily sedated, which

suggests an early sign of how their agency is stripped from the very beginning. This forced unconsciousness initiates a broader process of dehumanization. This depiction is illustrated through a visual representation that reinforces the analysis, as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6 Natasha was sedated before being taken to the Red Room

In the 3-minute montage aforementioned, the montage shows how these girls are separated from their families, catalogued, and inserted into a militarized system that processes them like products on an assembly line. The voice of Dreykov overlays the imagery with a cold command: "Remove all the defects," a phrase that exposes how the girls are treated not as people but as defective merchandise in need of correction. Their individuality is erased in favor of uniformity and control. This scene is illustrated in Figure 7. By portraying the girls as items on an assembly line, the montage explicitly frames them as commodified bodies processed for patriarchal use, erasing their personhood in favor of mass-produced value.

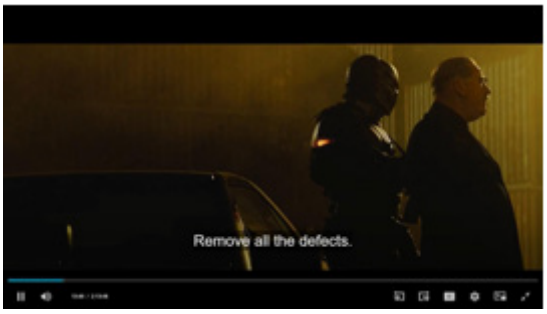

Figure 7 Dreykov's remark that dehumanizes the girls

Within this montage, we see how the Red Room enforces obedience through psychological manipulation, physical training, and ideological programming. The girls are trained to fight, shoot, and kill without hesitation, instilling in them traits that reflect R.W. Connell's (2005) concept of hegemonic masculinity which associates power with emotional detachment, physical dominance, and violent control. By transforming young girls into embodiments of these masculine ideals, the Red Room does not subvert patriarchal power—it replicates and reinforces it. These female bodies are disciplined to function as tools of violence, illustrating Foucault's notion of the docile body: one that is "subjected, used, transformed, and improved" through institutional coercion (Foucault, 1995). In this sense, he emphasizes the act of training as a key mechanism through which power operates to assert its dominance over the docile body (Bayraktar & Tezcan, 2021). In this way, the Red Room commodifies women to their fullest extent by eliminating reproductive capacity, emotional freedom, and identity, it ensures that their only worth lies in their function as weapons.

This transformation is not only disciplinary but also commodifying. As Luce Irigaray (1985) argues, women under patriarchal systems are divided between use and value, private and social functions (p. 176). In the Red Room, the Widows' use-value is maximized for militaristic purposes, while their capacity for subjectivity and autonomy is suppressed. The climax of this commodification is revealed later in the film when Yelena explains that all the Widows—including herself—were forcibly sterilized through the removal of their reproductive organs. This act symbolizes the final severing of their connection to traditional femininity, making their bodies entirely devoted to function and violence. Through this montage and its implications, the film reveals how the Red Room weaponizes female bodies by stripping them of identity, reproductive capacity, and emotional freedom, framing violence as their only value.

The paper now turns to the third and final discussion, which examines the Red Room as a site of gendered oppression. In Black Widow (2021), the confrontation between Natasha Romanoff and General Dreykov marks the peak of the climax in the narrative. Dreykov embodies systemic male control that manipulates and ultimately silences women through both physical and psychological. The scenes mark the tension and gendered power dynamics through invisible forces that condition women's bodies and agency.

As illustrated in Figure 8, despite Natasha's rage and intent to attack Dreykov with her gun and knife, her body remained paralyzed. Dreykov explains it is the result of a pheromonal lock, a biochemical engineered to prevent the Widows from harming him. This mechanism functions as both a literal and symbolic manifestation of invisible patriarchal control. The pheromonal lock not only serves as a plot device but also as a portrayal of the nature of gendered power. Based on Saptiadi (2022) observation, "the pheromone lock is an implication of how women are naturally vulnerable against men."

Natasha's immobilization highlights how women's bodies become sites of regulation, possession, and control, even against their will. This scene reflects how patriarchy exerts dominance not merely through institutional force but by embedding the very biology

and behavior of those it subjugates. The pheromonal lock becomes a metaphor for how patriarchal power naturalizes its authority. Natasha's struggle is not just against Dreykov as an individual mastermind, but against an entire system of control that has claimed ownership over her body, her choices, and her will.

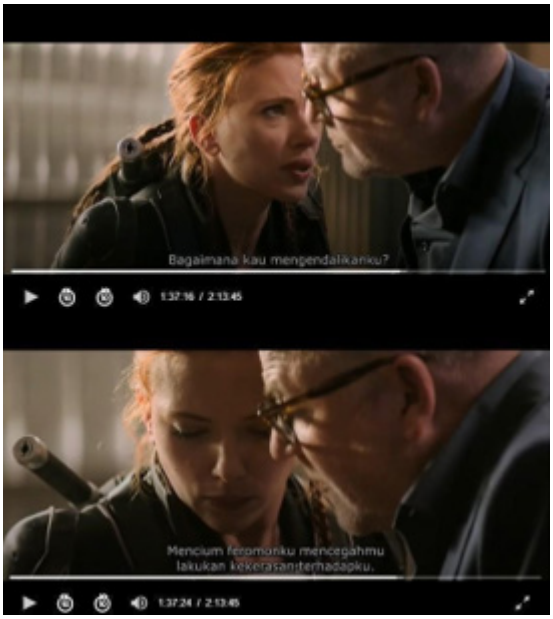

Figure 8 Dreykov uses a pheromonal lock to prevent Natasha from harming him

> "These girls were trash. I recycle the trash and I give them purpose. I give them a life. It's my network of widows that help me control the scales of power. My widows can start and end wars. They can make and break things. With avengers, I can finally come out of the shadows using the only natural resource that the world has too much of; girls."
>
> (Shortland, 1:41:00-1:45:50)

From Dreykov's monologue, he claims to have 'recycled' the girls, explicitly saying that he has provided them with purpose and life. However, this purpose is fundamentally a facade of his true objectives, which are the expansion of his power and control over the world. Dreykov views them as the weapons to serve his driven goals rather than as human beings. This narrative aligns with Luce Irigaray's argument that women are not regarded as subjects of exchange but rather as objects of circulation within a patriarchal society. Irigaray stated, "the work force is thus always assumed to be masculine and 'products' are objects to be used, objects of transaction of men alone" (Irigaray, 1985)

Dreykov's manipulation reflects how he reduces the widows to a tool for his driven ambitions rather than recognizing their true worth. The objectification tends to perceive women as disposable resources, whose worth depends upon their utility to men. According to Kent (2024), the film reframes Hollywood's typical theme of excess by channeling it through the exploited bodies of young girls, with Dreykov viewing them as an abundant and disposable resource. Reflecting Cold War-era portrayals of Russian intelligence, they are depicted as state tools.

Furthermore, the Red Room exemplifies Irigaray's ideas that patriarchal structures thrive on the invisibility of women's exploitation. Like the abstracted commodity, the Widows operate in secrecy, their labor and suffering hidden behind the facade of geopolitical strategy. The Widows are neither free agents nor proper subjects, they are the infrastructure of male power, but denied participation in that power. "They [women] are 'objects' for and among men and furthermore they cannot do anything but mimic a 'language'; that they have not produced." (Irigaray, 1985)

In the Red Room, the Widows are programmed to mimic a system of power that excludes them from authorship. They are taught to speak, move, and kill in certain ways that advantage the institutions. The Red Room does not just take women's agency, it rewrites it. They make the Widows' identities legible only through the needs of the patriarchal project. The Widows are not just controlled, they are formatted and dehumanized within a closed system of male domination.

CONCLUSIONS

Through a feminist film analysis of *Black Widow* (2021), this study has shown that the film offers a complex portrayal of women that both critiques and reinforces patriarchal systems. While it presents strong female characters like Natasha Romanoff and Yelena Belova, the narrative simultaneously reveals that their strength is manufactured through systemic control, coercion, and commodification. The Red Room functions as a central site of gendered oppression, stripping women of their bodily autonomy, reproductive rights, and agency, transforming them into instruments of violence under the guise of empowerment.

This study finds that hegemonic masculinity remains deeply rooted in various aspects of female representation, even in portrayals of strong and empowered women characters. The film still visualizes strong female characters through a male gaze lens. This issue can be extended to contribute to feminist media scholarship by seeing the idea of "strong female characters" that are often marketed as progressive icons yet remain bound within patriarchal aesthetics and capitalist commodification. In doing so, it aligns with Luce Irigaray's framework of women as commodities by showing how even seemingly resistant narratives participate in the spectacle of weaponized femininity.

Thus, the audience interpretation of those contradictory portrayals might be explored in the future research by comparing Black Widow with other female-led superhero films such as Captain Marvel

or Wonder Woman, or examining how weaponized femininity operates in non-Western media contexts. Such avenues would deepen understanding of how gender, power, and popular culture intersect across different cinematic traditions and global markers.

Ultimately, *Black Widow* (2021) does more than expose the illusion of female agency, it embodies the broader paradox of feminist representation in capitalist media industries in patriarchal media while also participating in its aesthetic commodification, revealing the contradictory nature of weaponized femininity in mainstream cinema. Recognizing this contradiction is vital for critiquing not only how women are represented on screen but also how their images are circulated, consumed, and capitalized upon in the contemporary cultural marketplace.

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