

The Gendered Gaze of Silicon Valley: Deconstructing Power, Representation, and Superficial Diversity in *The Internship* (2013)

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Abstract

Shawn Levy's 2013 comedy *The Internship*, starring Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson, might appear at first glance to be a lighthearted tale of career reinvention at Google. However, this article reveals the film to be a potent cultural artifact that exposes persistent patriarchal norms and the hollowness of corporate diversity rhetoric in Silicon Valley's technology sector. Grounded in Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze" and informed by bell hooks' theory of the "oppositional gaze," the analysis dissects how *The Internship* systematically objectifies its female characters, centers male subjectivity, and marginalizes women within the tech workspace. This feminist reading is further deepened with insights from Science and Technology Studies (STS) and intersectional postcolonial critique, illuminating how the film constructs the idea of technological expertise and workplace "meritocracy" while trafficking in racialized, exoticized stereotypes of characters of color. Through detailed textual and discourse analysis of key scenes, characterizations, dialogue, and cinematography, the paper argues that *The Internship* promotes a tokenistic vision of diversity that masks profound gender and racial inequities. The film symbolically silences women in leadership, naturalizes sexist workplace attitudes, and uncritically celebrates a techno-utopian meritocracy that obscures systemic barriers. Despite its comedic tone and the limited scholarly attention the film has drawn since 2013, *The Internship*'s regressive representations remain disturbingly relevant, reflecting enduring cultural narratives that hinder genuine equity in STEM fields. By scrutinizing this underexamined text, the study fills a significant gap in the literature, offering the first comprehensive, theoretically integrated feminist critique of *The Internship*.

Keywords: male gaze, oppositional gaze, feminist film theory, *The Internship*, gender representation, Science and Technology Studies (STS), intersectionality, postcolonial critique, diversity, technology industry

1. Introduction

Cinema is more than just entertainment; It is a cultural mirror reflecting, refracting and possibly enforcing social ideologies and power structures. Though the technology industry is celebrated for being a driver of advancement and ingenuity, it simultaneously faces one of the most highly scrutinized diversity crises in historical context; women and minorities in this field have been underrepresented, sidelined or otherwise marginalized. As a result, when popular movies depict these matters it enables the change of public views which is crucial. Shawn Levy's 2013 comedy *The Internship*, featuring Vince Vaughn and Owen Wilson as middle-aged salesmen navigating a competitive internship at Google, ostensibly celebrates adaptability, reinvention, and the vibrant, diverse culture of a tech giant. However, beneath its comedic veneer and glossy portrayal of Google's playground-like headquarters lies a narrative entrenched in patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and a superficial and ultimately exclusionary conception of inclusion. This article contends that *The Internship*, far from being a harmless farce, operates as a vehicle for regressive ideologies that perpetuate harmful myths about gender, race, and power within the technology industry. Its enduring relevance lies in an uncomfortable resonance with persistent real-world inequities, even amidst increased corporate diversity initiatives since its release.

To unravel the complex ideological work at play in *The Internship*, this analysis is anchored in feminist film theory. Foremost, Laura Mulvey's seminal 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" introduced the foundational concept of the "male gaze." In this view, mainstream cinema is structured by a patriarchal unconscious that positions the spectator as implicitly male. The camera thus functions as an instrument of male desire, transforming women on screen into objects of visual pleasure, beings whose primary quality is to-be-looked-at. This dynamic deprives female characters of agency and interiority, reducing them to passive spectacles that exist only to serve male narratives and desires. For Mulvey, the male gaze manifests across multiple aspects of film: in cinematography (e.g. lingering shots on female bodies, framing women as

visual objects), in narrative patterns (where women appear mainly as motivators for male action or as rewards for male protagonists), and in character development (female roles are given minimal personal arcs or depth).

bell hooks' concept of the "oppositional gaze" (1992) further enriches this framework. hooks, centering the perspective of Black female spectators, contends that marginalized viewers are not merely passive consumers but can actively resist and subvert dominant on-screen representations. Such viewers possess the power to look against the grain, critically interrogating the white supremacist and patriarchal assumptions that undergird mainstream film narratives. Most significantly, *The Internship* offers no space for any form of oppositional gaze within its story or its implied viewing positions. The absence of a character or perspective that challenges the film's regressive representations is a key element of its ideological closure: the film permits no internal critique of its patriarchal worldview.

While feminist film theory provides the core analytical lens, understanding the specific context of the tech industry in *The Internship* necessitates engagement with Science and Technology Studies (STS) scholarship. STS scholarship fundamentally challenges the notion of technology as neutral, demonstrating instead how technology is socially constructed (Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch, 1987) within networks of social values, power relations, and historical contexts. Feminist STS scholars such as Judy Wajcman (1991, 2004) have documented how technological cultures often valorize traits culturally coded as masculine, intense focus, competitiveness, individual genius, rationality, emotional detachment, while devaluing traits coded as feminine, such as collaboration, communication, and care. Even the definition of "technical expertise" is not objective but is socially negotiated, typically privileging styles of interaction and displays of knowledge aligned with dominant (male) norms. *The Internship*'s portrayal of Google as a frictionless, playful meritocracy obscures these underlying power dynamics and the social processes that determine who "belongs" and what skills are valued in the tech sphere. Bringing STS insights into the analysis helps reveal how the film constructs the idea of the ideal tech worker and environment, exposing the gendered and exclusionary foundations lurking beneath its surface narrative.

Furthermore, the film's much-touted "diversity" demands an intersectional lens informed by postcolonial critique. Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality reminds us that systems of oppression based on gender, race, class, sexuality, and other axes intersect and cannot be examined in isolation. A purely gender-focused analysis of *The Internship* would overlook the compounded ways that race, ethnicity, and culture mediate the marginalization of characters like Neha (Tiya Sircar) or Mr. Chetty (Aasif Mandvi). Postcolonial theory, articulated by thinkers such as Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Spivak (1988), provides essential tools for analyzing how the racialized "Other" is represented in Western cultural productions. Said's critique of Orientalism, the Western construction of the East as exotic, irrational, backward, and feminine, and Spivak's examination of the silenced subaltern voice are particularly relevant. Characters of color in *The Internship* are not simply tokens; they are framed through enduring colonial tropes that exoticize, stereotype, and ultimately contain any potential they might have to disrupt the dominant (white, male) tech narrative. Integrating these intersectional and postcolonial perspectives allows the analysis to go beyond merely identifying tokenistic inclusion, uncovering the specific racialized logics underpinning the film's superficial performance of diversity.

Surprisingly, given the film's high profile and subject matter, *The Internship* has received scant scholarly attention. Popular reviews at the time of its release noted its reliance on stereotypes and heavy-handed product placement, but sustained academic analysis of the film is virtually absent. So far, no peer-reviewed articles offering a feminist, STS, or intersectional/postcolonial reading of this text exist. Existing scholarship tends to address broader comedic tropes like Geoff King's (2013) discussions of the "man-child" archetype in Hollywood comedy or general trends in tech-industry representation like studies by Margolis & Fisher (2002) or Master et al. (2016) on media influences on women in computing, but none focus on *The Internship* itself. Analyses of Google's corporate culture exist, for instance, Steven Levy's *In the Plex* (2011), yet they do not engage with Google's portrayal in popular cinema. The present study directly addresses this critical gap. It offers the first comprehensive analysis of *The Internship* through a theoretically integrated feminist lens, demonstrating that the film's comedic façade in fact masks a potent reinforcement of the very power structures that continue to impede diversity and inclusion in the real-world tech sector the film depicts. In this view, the film's representations, particularly its embodiment of the male gaze and its failure to include any oppositional gaze or intersectional awareness, remain culturally significant precisely because they reflect the stubbornly persistent ideologies of tech culture.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative methodology centered on feminist film criticism, using detailed textual analysis and discourse analysis as primary tools to dissect *The Internship* as an ideological text. Feminist film criticism, grounded in the work of Mulvey, hooks, and others provides the overarching framework for understanding how the film constructs gender, power, and spectatorship. This approach demands close attention to the politics of representation and the ways cinematic form encodes patriarchal values. The study adopts textual analysis (McKee, 2003), focusing on the film's formal elements to interpret meaning. This involves meticulous close reading, with repeated viewings to examine Mise-

en-scène (the arrangement of everything within the frame, Cinematography (camera angles, shot types, camera movement, focus, and framing) and narrative structure (plot development, character arcs, and thematic resolution).

Discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1993) also complements the textual analysis by examining the language of the film, the dialogue, character interactions, and the broader narratives constructed about the tech world and its participants. It investigates dialogue, characterization and the underlying assumptions and values communicated about technology, meritocracy, diversity, gender roles, race, and workplace culture.

The integration of theoretical perspectives is central to the methodology but is applied in a targeted manner. Feminist film theory (primarily Mulvey and hooks) drives the core analysis of visual and narrative mechanisms of the gaze, objectification, agency, and potential resistance within the film. STS concepts, particularly those related to the social construction of technology and of “expertise” (Bijker et al., 1987; Wajcman, 1991, 2004), are woven into the analysis wherever they illuminate the film’s portrayal of the tech environment, the criteria for competence, and the myth of meritocracy propagated by the narrative. Intersectional and postcolonial critiques (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2000; Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994) are employed specifically when examining characters like Neha and Mr. Chetty, moving beyond merely noting their presence to dissect the racialized and gendered stereotypes that shape their characterization and the power dynamics surrounding them. In sum, the methodology uses feminist film criticism as the driving engine, while STS and postcolonial/intersectional perspectives function as specialized tools to address particular facets of the film’s ideological fabric, ensuring a focused yet deeply contextualized critique. Finally, the analysis remains attentive to what is not present in the film, most notably, the absence of any hooks-style oppositional gaze or dissenting viewpoint within the story and it considers the implications of this absence for the film’s spectatorship and ideological impact.

3. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

This study draws on a constellation of feminist, postcolonial, and postfeminist theoretical perspectives to examine how *The Internship* constructs gender, race, and power within the cultural imagination of Silicon Valley. This includes classic foundational theories from feminist film studies and postcolonial critique, as well as recent scholarship in postfeminist media culture that highlights how contemporary narratives subtly reinforce gendered inequalities beneath a surface of empowerment.

The analysis is anchored in feminist film theory, particularly Laura Mulvey’s concept of the “male gaze.” Laura Mulvey’s foundational concept of the “male gaze” (1975) provides the central interpretive frame for understanding how *The Internship* constructs gendered spectatorship. Mulvey argues that mainstream cinema is structured around a patriarchal visual logic that renders women as objects of pleasure for a presumed male viewer, a process she describes as “to-be-looked-at-ness.” This framework clarifies the repeated objectification of female characters in the film, particularly through framing, mise-en-scène, and narrative positioning. bell hooks’ theory of the “oppositional gaze” (1992) extends Mulvey’s work by introducing race as a critical dimension of spectatorship. hooks insists that Black female spectators develop a critical gaze that refuses passive identification with dominant white and patriarchal visual structures. Her framework is especially useful for analyzing not only whose gaze is centered in *The Internship* but also whose gaze is excluded, since the film offers no internal position of resistance or critique. To address the racialized construction of characters in the film, particularly Neha and Mr. Chetty, the analysis draws on postcolonial theorists Edward Said (1978) and Gayatri Spivak (1988). Said’s concept of Orientalism explains how Western texts repeatedly produce the racialized “Other” as exotic, passive, and sexually available, while Spivak’s question of whether the “subaltern can speak” illuminates how marginalized figures are visually included yet narratively silenced. Both dynamics structure the film’s use of racial diversity as visual decoration rather than as meaningful representation.

While these foundational theories point to the long-standing ideological work of cinematic representation, recent research in postfeminist media culture exposes how contemporary narratives reproduce patriarchy under the guise of choice, empowerment, and individual achievement. Rosalind Gill (2007) argues that postfeminism operates as a “sensibility” that celebrates female confidence and sexual agency, while simultaneously reinforcing self-surveillance, bodily discipline, and emotional regulation. Angela McRobbie (2020) describes this as a “double entanglement”: a cultural logic in which feminist ideas are acknowledged rhetorically but “undone” by media and policy narratives that restore patriarchal norms. Marni Appleton (2023) further identifies a growing sense of “stuckness” among female protagonists in contemporary literature, who appear outwardly empowered yet feel emotionally or socially immobilized by neoliberal and patriarchal structures. Browning Karasik (2024) shows how viral “girl” trends on social media (e.g., “girl dinner,” “clean girl”) appear playful and feminist on the surface but rely on gendered expectations of bodily discipline, self-crafting, and normative femininity. Likewise, Carys Hill (2024) demonstrates how even body positivity movements place new emotional and affective demands on women, who are expected to display confidence while managing “ugly feelings” such as shame, anxiety, and exhaustion in digital spaces.

Taken together, these postfeminist critiques are invaluable for understanding the character of Dana in *The Internship*, a high-ranking female executive whose professional competence is acknowledged but whose emotional fulfillment is scripted through romantic attachment to the male protagonist. The film's resolution where her storyline is completed not through personal or professional achievement, but through heterosexual union, exemplifies Gill's critique of the re-domestication of female ambition (Gill, 2007) and McRobbie's notion that feminist advances are tolerated only insofar as they remain compatible with traditional gender expectations (McRobbie, 2020). In this way, *The Internship* rehearses the postfeminist fantasy of agency while reasserting patriarchal control over women's self-definition, visibility, and emotional lives.

4. Analysis

4.1 Hypersexualization and Exoticization: Neha under the Male Gaze

The film initially presents a *mise-en-scène* of vibrant diversity with wide shots of Google's headquarters populated by a seemingly heterogeneous workforce (Figure 1). Yet this opening representation of inclusivity swiftly dissolves under the weight of the film's narrative focus and cinematographic choices, revealing a workspace ultimately structured by the male gaze and patriarchal norms. The camera, serving as the instrument of this gaze, relentlessly privileges the perspective and journey of the two male protagonists, Billy and Nick. Women, when they appear on screen, are overwhelmingly positioned as objects of visual pleasure or as narrative devices (obstacles to overcome, prizes to be won, or supportive helpers for the men's success), rather than as autonomous subjects driving the story with their own desires and ambitions.

Figure 1 A wide shot of Google's intern orientation depicts a vibrantly diverse crowd, establishing a facade of



inclusivity

These dynamics are vividly illustrated in the introduction of Neha (Tiya Sircar), the sole woman on Billy and Nick's intern team. Neha is initially identified as a brilliant young Indian-American programmer, but her technical skill is immediately overshadowed and undermined by the film's reduction of her character to a single hypersexualized trait (Figure. 2).



Figure 2. Neha's character is overtly sexualized from her very first scene

In her introductory scene (approximately 00:40:47), she volunteers a fantastical sexual scenario:

I for one, I'm happy to have two mature, strapping gentlemen on the team... I'd be slave girl Leia. Yeah, metal bikini top, metal G-string panty, high-heel leather boots. Of course I'm chained at the neck. Not too constricted but just enough to make things interesting. A few of us get together and whatever happens, happens.

This monologue of self-objectification reduces Neha to a one-dimensional sexual fantasy figure (“slave girl Leia”) existing solely for the view of the “mature strapping gentlemen” on her team. The camera lingers on her during this speech not to highlight her intellect or professional potential, but to firmly frame her as the object of a collective male gaze—both the gaze of the male characters within the scene and that of the presumed male spectator watching the film. This portrayal exemplifies Mulvey’s (1975) notion of woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness”, wherein a female character’s value is defined entirely through the erotic pleasure she offers the male viewer. Moreover, Neha’s treatment draws on Orientalist tropes identified by Said (1978) and on what Spivak (1988) might term the construction of the silenced subaltern female subject. She becomes the exoticized, hypersexualized “Eastern” woman, her cultural identity flattened into a signifier of repressed sexuality unleashed purely for comedic effect aimed at a presumably male audience. The film takes what could have been a multidimensional character (a brilliant programmer), and subsumes her into a crude virgin/whore caricature. Her technical competence is rendered irrelevant beside her function as a sexualized object. This is not character development; it is the male gaze in action, reducing a woman of color to a hollow stereotype for laughs, actively denying her subjectivity and reinforcing the idea that even the most technically skilled women in tech are ultimately defined by their relationship to male desire.

4.2 Career Woman as Romantic Prize: Dana’s Narrative Arc

Dana (Rose Byrne), a high-ranking Google executive in the film, suffers a different but equally telling fate under the male gaze. She is initially presented as intelligent, competent, and professionally successful; however, the narrative swiftly subordinates her arc to a romantic subplot centered on Nick’s pursuit of her. Though Dana holds a position of authority within Google’s hierarchy, the film frames her as personally unfulfilled due to her single status and her purported over-investment in work. Her professional accomplishments serve primarily as a character backdrop, or even a character flaw (“work-obsessed”) that the narrative uses to highlight her supposed lack in the personal realm. Nearly every scene involving Dana pivots to her developing flirtation and relationship with Nick, implying that her emotional fulfillment and completeness as a woman are contingent on securing a heterosexual romantic partner.

Visually and thematically, the film underlines Dana’s perceived loneliness to justify the need for romance. In one scene set in Google’s nap pod lounge, Dana is depicted with a forlorn expression, a moment that suggests isolation and sadness presumably caused by the absence of a man in her life (Figure.3).



Figure 3. Dana, despite her accomplishments, expresses frustration and sadness at not having a man to fulfill societal expectations

This trajectory reflects a pervasive patriarchal message (and a familiar postfeminist media trope): no matter how professionally successful or high-achieving a woman is, true happiness and “completion” elude her unless she finds love, specifically in the form of a relationship with a man. Dana’s character thus exists not as a fully realized independent professional, but largely as a potential romantic reward for the male protagonist. The film’s narrative uses her to validate Nick’s charm and ultimately to provide a satisfying romantic resolution for his storyline. In sum, Dana’s agency and complexity are sacrificed to the male gaze operating at the narrative level: her primary purpose becomes proving the male hero’s desirability and softening his character, rather than pursuing her own goals. The comedy’s happy ending is predicated on Dana acquiescing to romance, reinforcing the notion that a woman’s personal worth is measured by her romantic availability to the male hero.

4.3 Women as “Support Staff”: Marginalization of Female Expertise

The marginalization of women in *The Internship* goes beyond the character arcs of individual figures to pervade the depiction of workplace dynamics and power. Throughout the film, cinematography and staging consistently position women in ancillary or subordinate roles relative to their male counterparts. This is especially apparent in scenes of group work and team competition. For example, during sequences depicting the antagonist Graham’s team developing a software app, the camera’s focus remains intently on Graham, the self-assured (male) team leader, often centering him prominently in the frame (Figure 4 & 5). By contrast, the women on his team are literally and figuratively pushed to the periphery: they appear in the background, out of focus or partially obscured, performing supportive labor rather than leading. Their presence is visually coded as assistance; their intellectual contributions are obscured or implied rather than explicitly highlighted. This visual arrangement aligns with a broader pattern in which women are positioned as little more than “support staff,” resources to be utilized rather than agents of innovation in their own right.

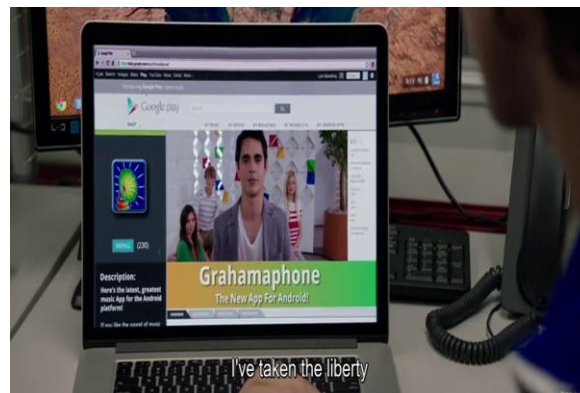


Figure 4 Graham and team discuss their new app, named after him. The camera centers on Graham, emphasizing his importance while framing the women as supporters

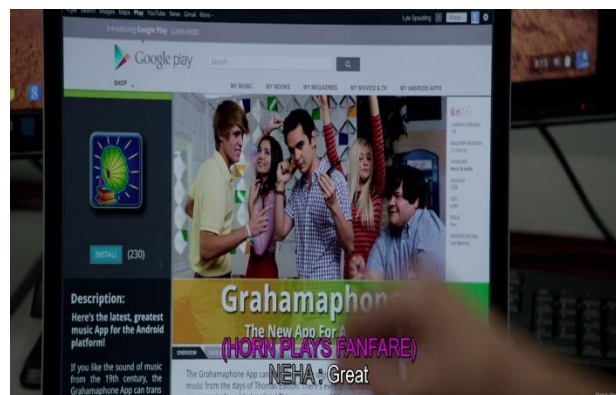


Figure 5. Graham and team post-app creation. Women are positioned in the background, with the camera focusing on the men

This visual reinforcement of women’s subordination echoes Mulvey’s core argument that in patriarchal cinema women exist to serve male-centered narratives. It also mirrors real-world tech culture dynamics documented by gender-in-technology research: studies have found that women in computing and tech environments are frequently relegated to supportive or peripheral roles, their expertise undervalued or appropriated (Margolis & Fisher, 2002). In the film, even women explicitly acknowledged as highly skilled such as Dana and Neha, are narrative-wise tasked mainly with helping the less technically competent male protagonists succeed. Their expertise is subsumed into the service of male advancement, rather than being applied toward their own empowerment or leadership. A telling moment exemplifies this dynamic when Graham, in selecting team members, eagerly recruits a female intern with outstanding credentials, only to treat her expertise as a tool for his success at Google. The cinematography in this scene reinforces the point: as Graham announces her Ivy League background, the camera pans over her in a subtly objectifying way, aligning with the male gaze rather than empowering her. Graham’s dismissive attitude toward her and the framing together signal that her intellect is notable primarily as an asset for him to exploit in competition, not as a sign of her own agency or potential leadership. The underlying notion, repeatedly perpetuated, is that a woman’s primary worth in the tech sphere lies in her

ability to support and elevate male colleagues through her “objectified” intellectual labor, rather than to innovate or lead on her own terms.

4.4 *Strip Clubs and Slurs: Normalizing Sexist Workplace Culture*

Beyond representational omissions, *The Internship* actively normalizes a sexist workplace culture through its comedic scenarios and dialogue. A particularly brazen example is the scene in which Billy and Nick propose taking their diverse team of interns to a strip club as a way to celebrate and bond (under the pretext of brainstorming app ideas). This suggestion, played for laughs in the film, fundamentally positions women as objects of male sexual leisure even within a professional context. The notion that visiting an establishment predicated on the objectification of women could be an appropriate or effective team-building exercise is presented as a source of humor, thereby ingraining the idea that male sexual entitlement has a legitimate place in the tech work environment. The film implies that a venue dedicated to the sexualized display of women for male gratification is a normal, even desirable, extension of the tech workplace. Such framing not only undermines the gravity and professionalism of the industry but also naturalizes an environment that is inherently exclusionary and hostile to women. It suggests that those who do not or cannot partake in this masculine bonding ritual (i.e., women, or men unwilling to engage in the objectification of women) are out of place on the team. This narrative move vividly realizes feminist media critic Anita Sarkeesian’s (2010) warning about cultures where women’s value is defined primarily by their appearance and sexual availability. Moreover, it resonates with social psychological findings on *ambient belonging* (Cheryan et al., 2009): the strip club as a team-building locale serves as a stereotypically masculine cue that can signal to women that they do not belong in the group. In short, the film presents the idea of mixing work and misogynistic play as benign, integrating the male gaze into the very definition of team camaraderie and creative collaboration.

The casual normalization of chauvinistic attitudes extends to the film’s dialogue as well. In a later scene, after Billy commits a technical mistake that jeopardizes the team’s project, Nick attempts to motivate him with a crude pep talk that includes a starkly misogynistic slur. Nick says, “*You forgot to click a button. You’re not a py! You tough!*” Using “py” (a derogatory term for female anatomy, partially censored here) as a synonym for weakness or incompetence is not just juvenile locker-room talk; it is a moment laden with ideology. The script explicitly equates femininity with inferiority, incapacity, and lack of resilience. Billy’s expression of self-doubt and vulnerability, feelings stereotypically coded as “feminine”, is portrayed as something shameful that must be purged in order to reassert his manhood. Nick’s exhortation that Billy needs to be “tough” frames emotional detachment and stoic confidence as the proper (masculine) response, implicitly contrasting it with the despised “feminine” response. This exchange crystallizes the patriarchal equation long embedded in tech culture: technical prowess and belonging are intertwined with performing a narrow, aggressive form of masculinity, explicitly defined in opposition to anything deemed feminine. The film itself offers no critique of this language; it is presented as casual banter, a part of the team’s comedic rapport. By treating the slur as a throwaway joke, the narrative effectively normalizes sexist and misogynistic attitudes as an accepted part of the tech world’s culture. This moment strongly echoes feminist STS critiques of tech culture (Wajcman, 2004), which have documented how valorizing hyper-masculine posturing and disparaging the “feminine” contribute to making technological spaces hostile and exclusionary. In *The Internship*, such misogynistic “pep-talk” is depicted as the glue of male bonding and problem-solving, tacitly endorsing the very attitudes that in reality have alienated many women (and others) in STEM fields.

4.5 *Patriarchal Hierarchies and the Silencing of Female Authority*

Perhaps the most far-reaching consequence of the film’s pervasive male gaze is its near-total symbolic annihilation of women in positions of power. Not a single woman is depicted in an upper-level leadership or authoritative role within the Google ecosystem portrayed by the film. Every executive, team manager (e.g., Lyle or the head programmers), project lead (such as the headphones-wearing supervisor), and mentor figure in the internship program is male. This is no incidental detail but a powerful ideological statement: *The Internship* constructs a tech world where leadership, vision, and innovation are portrayed as exclusively male domains. The camera reinforces this message through its visual techniques. For example, the character of Mr. Chetty (Aasif Mandvi), who serves as the stern head of the internship program, is consistently shot from low camera angles that make him loom large, with tight close-ups emphasizing his severe expression and commanding presence (described in Figure. 6).



Figure 6. Mr. Chetty, the stern head of Google's internship program, is consistently depicted from low camera angles that enhance his authoritative, imposing presence

While the inclusion of a South Asian character in a high-ranking role might superficially appear to add diversity to the leadership depicted, the film's treatment of Mr. Chetty is deeply entangled in a postcolonial stereotype. He is written and performed as the archetype of the "strict, authoritarian Eastern boss", a figure who demands obedience through severity rather than inspiring through vision. This characterization stands in sharp contrast to the movie's idealization of Google's broader corporate culture as playful, creative, and youthfully *cool* (an atmosphere associated mainly with the laid-back white male managers like Billy's teammate Lyle, or with Billy and Nick's own irreverent approach). Mr. Chetty's interactions in the film are almost exclusively with the male interns; tellingly, he barely acknowledges the female interns at all, effectively rendering them invisible to the highest authority figure in the narrative. His presence, while ostensibly a nod to racial diversity in leadership, ultimately reinforces the white male norm by presenting a man of color in power as an alien, humorless enforcer—someone whose rigidity must eventually be overcome by the courageous (white, male) protagonists. This aligns with Bhabha's concept of the stereotype as a site of ambivalence: Mr. Chetty, as a leader of color, is allowed to exist in the narrative but only within the confines of a predefined trope that affirms, rather than challenges, the status quo. The end result is a patriarchal hierarchy on-screen that doubly marginalizes women (by excluding them entirely from leadership) and uses a token male figure of color to further valorize the film's preferred model of leadership.

This symbolic devaluation of women's authority is made especially explicit in the film's depiction of the internship interview process. In a pivotal early scene, Billy and Nick are interviewed by a male and a female interviewer. The decision regarding their acceptance is later discussed in a round-table meeting that includes Mr. Chetty (head of the program), Dana, Lyle, and two additional panel members—a man and a woman. The two female panelists clearly oppose the protagonists' admission, while Lyle voices support and the other male panelist remains silent. Nevertheless, Mr. Chetty ultimately rules in Lyle's favor, overriding the women's shared judgment, and admits Billy and Nick into the program. This narrative turn symbolically enacts the disavowal of female professional judgment: the expertise and legitimate concerns of the women interviewers are dismissed in favor of a male authority's optimistic override. The film frames the women's negative assessment as overly harsh or lacking imagination, while the male authority's perspective (Chetty's gut decision) is validated as decisive and ultimately correct. This sequence underscores a real-world systemic bias in which women's voices and evaluations in male-dominated fields are frequently undermined or ignored. In the context of the film, the male gaze operates not just through visual objectification but through narrative resolution—female authority is literally circumvented so that male prerogative prevails. The implied message is that male gatekeepers will have the final say and that even when women exercise authority competently, their decisions can be swept aside to serve a narrative of male triumph. Such a portrayal normalizes the notion that women's assessments are less credible, reinforcing patterns that contribute to women's marginalization in tech and beyond.

4.6 Ideological Closure and Techno-Utopianism

Ultimately, *The Internship* allows no space for internal critique or alternative perspectives on the biases it perpetuates. There is no character within the film who embodies what hooks would call an oppositional gaze, i.e. no one who challenges the rampant objectification of Neha, the sidelining of Dana's professional identity, the exclusion of women from decision-making, or the casual misogyny in dialogue. The women in the story, such as Neha and Dana, do not voice any discomfort or resistance to their treatment; instead, they seem to accept their circumscribed roles in the tech utopia the film portrays. Likewise, none of the male characters offer a perspective that questions the status quo. This absence of any dissenting voice or critical viewpoint amounts to a complete ideological closure within the narrative. The film's patriarchal worldview is not only omnipresent but also unchallenged from start to finish, presented as the natural, benign

order of things. The audience is effectively positioned to laugh along with scenarios steeped in sexism and to root for the protagonists without ever being invited to question the fairness or inclusivity of the environment in which they thrive.

Compounding this ideological closure is the film's enthusiastic embrace of a glossy techno-utopianism that glosses over the real social challenges of the tech industry. *The Internship* depicts Google as a gleaming playground of meritocracy, where creativity and hard work ostensibly level all playing fields and the best ideas win in a fair contest. In the film's universe, bias and exclusion do not seem to exist; the only barriers to success are personal foibles or lack of teamwork, easily overcome by the final act. Crucially, this narrative utterly ignores the core STS insight that technologies and tech cultures are not neutral, but are products of social power structures and biases. By portraying Google's intern competition as frictionless and "fun," the film obscures how actual tech workplaces are often rife with subtle (and not-so-subtle) inequities. It erases the messy realities of discrimination, implicit bias, unequal access, and the contested definitions of "merit" that shape real STEM fields. There are no hints of the systemic barriers that women, people of color, or other marginalized groups face in tech; instead, structural issues are replaced by a fantasy in which everyone has an equal shot. In this way, the film reinforces the myth of a purely technical, apolitical meritocracy. The problematic behaviors and attitudes we have catalogued (sexist jokes, exclusion of women, overriding of female judgment, etc.) are rendered consequence-free in the narrative, as the story sails toward a feel-good conclusion where the underdog heroes succeed and the tech company is celebrated. By failing to acknowledge these problems or include any critical counterpoint, *The Internship* ends up tacitly validating the very inequitable status quo it ostensibly set out to lampoon. The result is entertainment that doubles as cultural propaganda: it reassures viewers that the tech world is essentially benign and just, while normalizing the exclusionary attitudes that make it unjust.

In the final analysis, *The Internship*, packaged as a buoyant comedy about individual resilience and the exciting possibilities of the tech industry, functions as a surprisingly potent vehicle for regressive gender and racial ideologies. A sustained feminist film analysis centered on Mulvey's concept of the male gaze (and informed by hooks' notion of the oppositional gaze, via its notable absence) reveals a cinematic world in which women are systematically objectified, marginalized, or denied genuine agency. Neha, presented as a prodigious coding talent, is swiftly reduced to a hypersexualized caricature whose technical brilliance is eclipsed by colonial tropes of the exotic "Other." Dana, despite her professional status and capability, finds narrative fulfillment only in serving as the love interest and ultimate romantic reward for the male protagonist. Throughout the film, women are depicted both visually and narratively as support staff or secondary figures whose expertise and labor exist primarily to prop up the male leads' journey. Women with skill and authority are either entirely absent from positions of leadership or, when present (as in the case of the female interviewers), their judgments are overruled and undermined by male decision-makers. In short, the film's comedic narrative is thoroughly orchestrated by a male gaze perspective: it dictates who matters (the men), how women are to be viewed (as decorative, sexual, or serviceable), and what stories ultimately count (the men's stories).

Meanwhile, *The Internship*'s much-vaunted portrayal of "diversity" is shown to be profoundly superficial. Characters of color are certainly on screen, but they are confined within harmful stereotypes or reductive archetypes rather than presented as complex individuals. Neha embodies a toxic fusion of racialized and gendered clichés, simultaneously fetishized and trivialized. Mr. Chetty, the one figure of authority who is not white, is framed through a postcolonial lens as the stern, unyielding foreign disciplinarian, with his presence reinforcing rather than challenging the dominant white male culture. Other ostensibly diverse characters, such as the one heavyset intern who is mocked for laughs or the emotionally fraught Asian-American intern (depicted as driven by an overbearing "tiger mother"), further highlight the film's failure to engage meaningfully with intersectionality. Diversity, in this film, is mere aesthetic tokenism, not substantive inclusion or a depiction of truly varied perspectives and experiences.

Integrating STS insights into our reading makes clear that the film also actively obscures the social realities of the technology sector it depicts. *The Internship*'s uncritical portrayal of Google as a frictionless playground meritocracy ignores the ways technology, expertise, and workplace cultures are socially constructed through power dynamics and biases. The film glosses over the systemic barriers faced by women and minorities, presenting instead a techno-utopian fantasy. Most significantly, it entirely fails to acknowledge or incorporate the possibility of an oppositional gaze or any critical perspective. There is no narrative space, no character, and no implied spectator position within the film that actively resists or questions its regressive portrayals. This absence reinforces the film's ideological messages by presenting them as natural and uncontested.

The uncomfortable resonance of *The Internship* with real-world tech culture is precisely what makes it more than just an outdated comedy; it is a cultural text worth serious examination. While Silicon Valley companies have amplified their diversity rhetoric since 2013, significant underrepresentation of women (especially in technical and leadership roles) and persistent issues of hostile workplace cultures, discrimination, and harassment remain stark realities. *The Internship*'s depiction of a glossy, fun-loving corporate facade masking deep-seated patriarchal norms and tokenistic inclusion serves as a disturbingly apt metaphor for these ongoing challenges. Its comedic tone and association with a globally admired brand

like Google make its regressive messages more insidious: viewers are invited to consume these narratives as harmless entertainment, which in turn allows biased portrayals to seep into popular consciousness without sufficient critique.

5. Conclusion

This study has addressed a notable gap in scholarship by providing the first comprehensive, theoretically informed feminist critique of *The Internship*. In doing so, it demonstrates that even light-hearted popular comedies are far from neutral escapism; they are embedded with values and assumptions that can either challenge or (as in this case) reinforce societal power structures. By applying Mulvey's and hooks' concepts of the gaze as the core analytical lens, and strategically weaving in STS perspectives along with intersectional and postcolonial critiques to illuminate specific aspects of the tech environment and racial representations, we have exposed the multifaceted ways this film upholds the patriarchal and exclusionary structures of the very industry it portrays. The analysis underscores that media texts like *The Internship* perform cultural work: they reflect and can subtly reinforce myths (like the meritocracy of tech) and biases (like gendered assumptions about aptitude and leadership) under the guise of humor and nostalgia.

Looking ahead, there is ample room for further research to build on these findings. Similar feminist and STS-informed frameworks could be productively applied to other tech-themed media such as *The Social Network* or the TV series *Silicon Valley* to evaluate whether those narratives perpetuate or challenge the tropes identified here. Additionally, audience reception studies could offer insight into how viewers, particularly those from underrepresented groups in tech, interpret and respond to these portrayals. Do women and people of color in STEM recognize and resist the biases in films like *The Internship*, or do such depictions influence their sense of belonging in subtle ways? Understanding the interplay between cultural narratives and real-world perceptions of inclusion in tech is crucial for moving beyond superficial diversity metrics toward genuine equity in STEM.

In conclusion, *The Internship* stands as a cautionary example of how easily a feel-good narrative can recycle pernicious stereotypes under the cover of comedy. Celebrating a colorful, playground-like facade of diversity is not enough; meaningful change requires dismantling the pervasive male gaze and the deep-seated ideologies that undergird it. Only by critically interrogating these cultural narratives can we begin to challenge the real inequities they mirror and work toward a tech industry (and a media landscape) that truly values diversity, inclusion, and equality.

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