"I was born a man - I'm close to myself": Israeli film directors and cinema in the MeToo era

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ABSTRACT

The MeToo movement exposed distinct inequalities between men and women on and offscreen. It shed light on the latent politics of power relations between the sexes and tremendously influenced various aspects of Israeli social life. Nevertheless, the question, addressed in this study, of how senior male film directors perceive the change in the gender power dynamics, has not yet been sufficiently addressed.

This qualitative study is composed of semi-structured extended interviews with 13 award-winning Israeli directors, who are in the second half of their lives. Applying interpretative phenomenological analysis, the findings indicate that the directors acknowledged that the power relations between men and women have changed. However, the findings also demonstrate remaining difficulties and a backlash in reaction to the change. Based on the findings, two models have emerged. The first, *The Phases of Change*, demonstrates the process of change as consisting of awareness, avoidance, diversity, women's stardom and support. The second, *The Cycle of Perseverance,* elaborates the resistance to change as consisting of tokenism, neutrality, androcentrism and persistence.

Introduction

The MeToo movement helped expose distinct inequalities between men and women onscreen and offscreen. It shed light on the latent politics of power relations between the sexes and greatly influenced various aspects of social life. The movement revealed the manner in which gendered hierarchies can be manifested in sexual abuse offscreen and strengthened public awareness of moral aspects related to the common sexualization of women in films (Frey & Janssen, 2018).

One example that demonstrates the depth of the change in Israel can be found in the responses to the movie, *Metzitzim* (*Peeping Toms*, 1972), which, despite the harsh sexism expressed in the film's name and in many scenes that objectify women, has been perceived, over the years, as one of the best Israeli films (Kleen, 2002). In 2002, Kleen, a senior Israeli film critic,[1] wrote about the film and primarily analyzed it in terms of the longing for the emergence of "normalcy" in Israeli film and

the search for masculine identity, while barely mentioning the film's harsh sexism and voyeurism.[2]

However, the growing awareness for gender inequality, and the MeToo movement, which resulted in a global revolution related to the refusal to accept sexual harassment (Boyle, 2019), did not evade criticism of the film in Israel. Film critiques began to discuss its blunt sexist aspects and its problematics concerning the treatment of women, behind the camera and on the screen.[3] New movements emerged to combat violence against women, including a feminist group that defaced a mural, inspired by the film that portrayed two boys peeking into the women's shower on the beach where the movie was filmed, by spraying graffiti with the words "rape culture." After years of struggle, the protests finally bore fruit in August 2020, when the municipality decided to remove the famous mural.

These changes, in relation to the movie *Metzitzim*, and to its representations in the public space, can exemplify the lack of tolerance for

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harmful representations toward women that have also been taking place in Israel and throughout the world in the context of the MeToo movement (Ghadery, 2019; Harrison, 2018). Alongside this, there is the fact that the struggle against the mural inspired by the film took a very long time. Furthermore, since the protest was advanced mainly by Israeli women, as part of their political, social or activist agenda, and women are the primary spokespeople for gender equality in the world of cinema, it begs the question of men's perspectives on the issue. This perspective is also of importance, since Israeli men dominate the Israeli film industry. Consequently, the voice of male film directors, who can be viewed as part of the old cinematic world, can shed light on what lies ahead. To explore these issues, our study examines the question of how senior Israeli male film directors perceive the changes taking place in the power relations between women and men in the film industry.

Cinema and change in patriarchal power structures

From the beginning, Israeli cinema was characterized by a clear majority of male directors and minority of female directors; in effect, from 1930 until 1983, only 7 out of 255 full feature films were directed by women (Shaer-Meoded, 2016); until the year 2000, only 7% of all fiction films were directed by women (Elefant, Connor-Atias, Hasson, & Dagan-Buzaglo, 2021). This aspect of inequality was also visible onscreen because as part of the Zionist desire to create a new Jewish masculinity, early Israeli cinema excluded women (Yosef, 2010). Even after filmmakers abandoned the nationalistic narrative and began focusing on the world of the individual, women were labeled as the "other" – the polar opposite of the hero and the masculine society that surrounded him (Friedman, 2002).

In many films made by Israeli male filmmakers, women were cast in stereotypical roles that placed them in the home, with no room for their inner world, perspectives, or desires (Shuv, 2002; Zanger, 1998). Only around the year 2000, did Israeli women become central characters with a voice and were depicted as able to express their own view of the world around them (Munk, 2012). This is not surprising given that the privileged, hegemonic positioning of Israeli men is intertwined with the foundation of Israeli society (Sasson-Levy, 2002). Indeed, gender equality in Israel may be regarded as a myth, as patriarchal power structures in Israeli society permeate various aspects of life, including education, health, politics, career and so forth, in a manner that preserves socially gendered differences. The unequal power relations are maintained by a variety of mechanisms that harm, discriminate against, and oppress Israeli women (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2016).

The protest against gender inequality in Israel can be seen in various aspects of life. In the last two decades, this protest has also been reflected in films, articles, and research that examine and explain the limited involvement of women in the film industry and seed to promote women in the world of cinema (Elefant et al., 2021).

To the distinctive phenomenon of a minority of woman directors, that has been labeled "the celluloid ceiling" (Lauzen, 2020), an additional barrier of age has been erected, which leads to a minority of older women working behind the camera (Medina & Zecchi, 2020). Given the existence of power relations for many decades, there are few role models for women.

In front of the camera, the lack of older women is even more noticeable. Despite changes in the representation of older men and women over time, older women continue to be underrepresented in comparison to older men. While older men play active roles, and their age is not necessarily acknowledged, older women frequently become transparent; their sexuality is ignored or they are treated inappropriately. There are far fewer women over the age of 45 in leading roles in the highest-grossing films in relation to men. Moreover, while the media often publishes information about relationships between older women and men, who are slightly younger than they are, it is a cinematic convention for older men in movies to date women who are significantly younger than they are (Medina & Zecchi, 2020). This can also be seen in

family oriented films in which most of the women are under the age of 40, while the majority of men are over that age (Heldman et al., 2020).

These data reflect Mulvey (1989) perception of the dominance of gender asymmetry in cinema. The dominance of the male gaze in the cinematic world leads to women being portrayed as passive objects that are meant to be looked at and please the viewers. In this manner, patriarchal society transforms male-determined representations into something perceived as natural, implying that this is the way things are supposed to be (Voskuil, 1998).

The MeToo movement started in the United States by activist Tarana Burke, who coined the hashtag in 2006. When Hollywood stars began to use it in 2017, it gained momentum in the United States and globally, raising hopes that it would bring forth much needed change and enhance women's agency both on screen and offscreen (Berger, 2020). However, one of the issues associated with the MeToo movement is the opposition to the change that it advocates. This wave of opposition, which is supported by traditional media and men's organizations on social media, repeatedly blames feminists for social problems (Sharoni, 2018). As Roggeband (2018) noted, these movements have become visible, amassed power, and have been actively opposing the movements and agendas that aim for gender equality in film. In essence, the backlash is a historical phenomenon that occurs every number of years, when women achieve significant achievements on the way to gender equality (Faludi, 1991).

In recent years, great efforts have been made to monitor the change from the perspective of women directors (Aharoni Lir & Ayalon, 2022d). However, the voices of men directors and how they perceive the change have yet to be considered. With the understanding that the change of the cinematic male-gaze cannot depend only on women directors, and in order to understand the barriers and the opportunities on the way to achieving gender equality in Israeli cinema, we set out to explore how senior Israeli male film directors perceive the change in gender power dynamics, based on semi-structured interviews with 13 Israeli directors, who are now in the second half of their lives; directors who developed prior to the MeToo era, achieved important achievements in the film industry, and now have to adjust to dramatic global occurrences, which reflect possible changes in gender power-relations.

Methodology

This study is based on qualitative methods and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) that allowed us to explore, in depth, the voices of 13 leading Israeli male filmmakers over the age of 55, who shared with us their personal and social views of the film industry and the gender dynamics within it (Smith & Osborn, 2015). By employing qualitative research, we were able to hear a range of voices from leading directors. This made it possible for us to find common topics, by using a categorical inductive approach. This approach relates to each interview as a single marker, making it possible to reach a comprehensive perception (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Miles et al., 2014). This was done as part of a wider research process that was designed to decipher aspects of age and gender from the viewpoint of Israeli male filmmakers and to focus on the meaning of being a male director in a changing world.

The interviews

The research dataset is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews that were video recorded and fully transcribed. This form of interview assisted us in facilitating rapport; it allowed us to engage in a dialogue with the participants and modify the initial questions in light of the their responses, thus enabling us to produce richer data (Smith & Osborn, 2015).[4]

We sent personal emails to the directors and asked them to

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[4] See Appendix A for the interview questions.

participate in the research. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted on Zoom, and took place over several months. The shortest interview was one hour long; the longest was one and a half hours.[5]

The participants

We chose award-winning directors and focused on those who have achieved public recognition and high status in the field. The age criterion allowed us to concentrate on directors who matured in the era of male dominance in the Israeli film industry, a time when sexist representations of women were common and acceptable. It was important for us to include in the study directors who have perspectives on these topics and have developed their film craft in an industry based on masculine hegemony and, in many cases, on exclusionary representations of women, tainted by sexism (Shaer-Meoded, 2016) (See Table 1.)

Ethics

The study was approved by the university's Ethics Committee. At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked for their consent to participate in the study, and we explained that the interviews would be transcribed and published with their names. Following substantial deliberation, we decided not to expose the directors' names in academic manuscripts related to these interviews. This was done because the presentation of themes, rather than full interviews, might place some verbal statements out of context. As this is a very small community, we provide only limited information concerning the directors to maintain their confidentiality.

Analysis

We applied interpretative phenomenological analysis and reviewed the dataset in a number of stages (Smith & Osborn, 2015). Each interview was read several times and annotated with significant remarks by the respondent. We then undertook an analysis of each interview, by

Table 1
Directors by age and selected awards.

Name	Age	Selected award	Interview date
D1	73	The Film Arts Award; Venice Film Festival Award	17 July 2020
D2	55	Jerusalem Festival Award; Moscow International Film Festival Award	16 March 2020
D3	78	Lifetime Award; Ministry of Culture and Education Award	28 April 2020
D4	67	Silver Bear, The Ophir Award	13 May 2020
D5	71	Guggenheim Fellowship; Sundance Award	11 June 2020
D6	55	Washington Jewish Film Festival; Berlin International Film Festival	7 July 2020
D7	69	The Israeli Oscar; Atlanta Jewish Film Festival	10 June 2020
D8	68	Montréal World Film Festival; WorldFest Houston	12 April 2020
D9	79	The Israel Prize Award; Kinor David	1 April 2020
D10	64	Conrad Wolf Award; Berlin International Film Festival	2 July 2020
D11	84	The Israel Prize award; Zhytomyr Film Festival	3 May 2020
D12	78	The Ophir Award for Lifetime Achievements; International Film Festival of India	9 July 2020
D13	83	The Wolgin Award; Golden Bird Award	21 April 2020

relating to the central aspects connected to the issues that were the focus of the study. We marked the topics that arose from each interview and discerned categories by examining the meanings and the connections between the different sections of the interviews. We paid close attention to topics that were repeated several times in the different interviews. As many themes emerged during the analysis, not all of them were included in this paper. The first two articles explored perceptions of age and creativity among these directors (Aharoni Lir & Ayalon, 2022a, 2022b). In addition, an earlier article addressed the price of the creative act among male directors (Aharoni Lir & Ayalon, 2022c).

Trustworthiness

We employed several mechanisms to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. First, our purposive sample addressed a diverse age group of film directors in the second half of life. Directors also differed with regard to their sexual orientation and ethnic origin.[6] This diversity allowed us to examine commonalities beyond differences in experience. We also fully documented our analysis process to maintain an audit trail (Rodgers & Cowles, 1993).

Reflection

Researcher A who conducted the interviews found most of them illuminating. However, some of the interviews felt complicated as the questions touched on issues of gender change and age. Overall, many of the interviews were inspiring and allowed for a deeper understanding of the field and the starting days of Israeli cinema and its creators. Researcher B was excited about the opportunity to hear behind the scene stories and reflections from famous directors. She found their reflections to be very forthcoming to the most part and was surprised by their sincerity.

Findings

The analysis uncovered two main categories that were connected to and echoed one another. The first focuses on the change in gender relations that has occurred, and the second focuses on difficulties and barriers on the road to change.

1. ***Seeds of change: "Women developed, men developed, the world developed"*** - The first category deals with the seeds of change. It expresses the directors' involvement in the change that has taken place in the world of film, and their identification with the viewpoint that reflects and promotes the change in films. It includes two sub-categories:
   a. *"The world won't let them present women like this."*[7]
   b. "*I would be very happy to make a movie with women in their seventies.*"

2. ***Resistance to change: "This is an uphill battle"*** - The second category deals with the challenges and difficulties on the road to change. It expresses the ambivalence, difficulty, and resistance to change; the preservation of sexist perceptions from the past, and the backlash following change. This category includes three sub-categories:
   a. *"There are so few women characters."*
   b. *"This is how our society is built."*
   c. *"To a great degree, we're still carrying the old world with us."*

   Seeds of Change: "Women Developed, Men Developed, the World Developed".

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[5] See the appendix for the interview questions.

[6] The ethnicities included European, American, Arab and Middle Eastern backgrounds.
[7] Referring to men

Many of the directors we interviewed welcomed and identified with the changes in the status of women behind and in front the screen over the past few decades.

"The world won't let them present women like this".

The interviews repeatedly revealed an awareness of the change in the power relations on and off the screen that was noted by most of the directors:

D6: I think about MeToo, about *oy vey* if Uri Zohar[8] would make films that he made then… In short, it's very complicated. Uri Zohar is a wonderful director. One of the best that we had. But, if you check today's representations of women as well as the ties between men and women and hear what happens behind these scenes, I'm not sure that we would be happy about this. I'm not sure that he wouldn't get into trouble for that…. *That's how people saw women. It's very bad! You know, their objectification, they made them small, they trampled on them. The women developed, the men developed, the world developed. The world does not allow people to do this - even if they want to represent women like this. The world won't allow them to represent women in this way.* I hope that they don't want to. I hope that they changed their inner thoughts…. The world is changing and there are more women working in all the fields of cinema, representing themselves in a more natural way … today, there is more representation of women.

D6's words show a high level of awareness of the change that is taking place, as well as a willingness to promote the change, and identification with the values that the change represents. His involvement is shown in the concern he expresses about the way in which women were represented in the past on the screen, and to what happened to them during filming. D6 relates to the change as a significant development that does not allow for the return to the creation of films that were made in the past, in terms of how women were represented. In his interview, he mentions how the world has changed, and discusses the place of young female directors, whose names and films he had mentioned. This demonstrates acknowledgment of the change and its significance. His perspective of the change corresponds with other directors and with research that marks the change of the last decades (Munk, 2012).

From a different angle, it is possible to comprehend the change in the expression of fear of arousing public fury concerning gender relations.

D2: There was also a thing when *I was afraid of MeToo*.

D2 was one of the few directors who mentioned the factor of fear. He was talking about a scene in his latest film, in which a mature director flirted with a young woman. The panic of possible shaming expressed by the character of the director in the film, and the raising of the topic in the interview, can reinforce the understanding that the significant change that has occurred is related to the general shift in public opinion.

"I would be very happy to make a movie with women in their seventies."

Another aspect of change raised in the interviews touches on the portrayal of women on screen: some of the directors stressed the importance of providing older actresses with more opportunities to be the main characters in the plot.

D3: Here, in *The Straight Story*, this is a story about a very old man, who goes to visit his brother in some town at the end of the world. And he goes to him riding on a lawn mower. You can't not love a guy like this. But, I want to tell you that *if an older woman needed to do this, let's say, a women in her 70s or 80s, perhaps it wouldn't be any less beautiful or touching. Another point, here, a movie needs to be made like this about an 80-year-old woman who goes to visit her grandson and her adventures*.

D3's words reflect one of the main aspects of the unequal power relations in the world of cinema that is expressed in the exclusionary representation of older women (Medina & Zecchi, 2020).

Nonetheless, some of the directors not only expressed awareness of the power and importance of films that focus on women figures, but also discussed their desire to create films that would reduce stereotypes in their characters.

D5: I would be very happy to make a movie with women in their seventies and it will be full of energy and it will be wonderful, and they will be very funny and full of emotion and sorrow and catastrophe and joy and everything. Human emotion does not decrease with age. If anything, it only grows and finds more dimensions. What can I say? It's more complete, more complex. Of course, of course!

D5's words reinforce the understanding that the change in power relations in the film industry is not solely the responsibility of the women in the field. His perspective demonstrates that there are male directors who are eager to revolutionize the presentation of women onscreen by focusing on older women, rather than younger women.

Resistance to change **"This is an uphill battle".**

Alongside the positive indicators of the upcoming change, the interviews also identified challenges and difficulties on the road to change.

"There are so few women characters".

The responses to the questions about ageism and sexism in relation to women onscreen did not only yield optimistic views of upcoming change. The directors' replies indicate how male dominance in the field continues to influence the ways women are perceived. Even though women sexist representation on screen is regarded as a sick evil, it is still taken for granted.

D7: Look, in Israel, there are so few movies and so few women characters, but yes, I … the moment that she passed the age of 40, so she is already … they already look for someone younger, more attractive, a *cusit*.[9]

D7's comments establish a connection between femininity and attractiveness based on sexuality and youth. His remarks raise the idea that the main power women have in cinema is their sexual attractiveness. The term *"cusit"*, in Israeli sexist slang, refers to an attractive girl based on her sexual organ. Its use emphasizes, with a kind of naked truth, the brutality in the choice of objectification. In other words, according to the director, women are often cast in Israeli films not solely because of their ability to act or to be expressive, but rather for their ability to embody an object of desire.

This stance is based on the unequal status of men and women. This is also the approach taken by Hollywood film industry. The film industry perceives moviegoing as reliant upon viewer identification with the main male character, including his perspective on the women's bodies, which are portrayed as objects of desire designed to please the male gaze (Mulvey, 1989).

Various directors emphasized ageism when they focused on the past and the change that is taking place today.

D13: When the cinema began, you would see a man about 60, Gary Cooper; these are actors, they have romances with girls 20 years old, and that seemed completely natural to you. You never saw the opposite. It was very natural. Why? *It was the male's view on the fantasy. That's what they want. That's what they determined.*

D3: I think. Old men… receive more treatment than older women do. I think this is a remnant of the years gone by, in which women were judged or photographed more than anything else because of their sex appeal. That's true. However, *men did not have to have sex appeal to the same degree that women had to. Therefore, old men still survive, and old women, unfortunately or not, do not survive.*

D13 describes the huge age differences between the older male actors and the women who played their love interests. He seemed to be hinting at the film, *Love in the Afternoon*, in which Audrey Hepburn, who was 30 years younger than Gary Cooper, played his love interest. Despite the fact that he brings an example from the beginning of the film industry, this is a phenomenon that became a cinematic norm. This practice is still common today and often noticeable among movie stars, such as Denzel Washington, Liam Neeson, George Clooney, Richard Gere, and Harrison Ford, with age differences that range between 10 and 30 years, between

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[8] The director of *Mezizim*

[9] This refers to a women's vagina in Hebrew.

the main character and the women who play their love interests (Buchanan, 2013).

D3 reminds us that the lack of older heroines is not a remnant of the past and that women are still often perceived as sexual objects in films. His words reflect the fact that while the film audience has aged and there has been a considerable increase in films that give a central place to ageing and old age in their plots, there is a clear preference for older male characters in starring roles (Medina & Zecchi, 2020).

Similarly, other directors were also well aware that the ability of women to be cast in films is still mainly based on their sexuality:

D7: Today, on television, there are all kinds of women actors who are not pretty and not thin. I also believe that there are movie actors [like that]. I can't think of any right now. But, let's say that *it is much easier for a man to do these things. It's a trait that adds to a man. To a woman, it depends. If she is very talented and very charming in other aspects.*

When D7 talks about representations based on sexuality, which are expressed in youth, beauty and slimness among women actors, he mainly relates to television. While he notes that he is talking about the change that is taking place in the world of film, as well, he has trouble remembering the names of women actors that do not fit Hollywood's age, beauty and weight standards as significant for choosing women actors. In accordance with the research literature (Medina & Zecchi, 2020), D7 asserts that the gender bias toward women still exists, and in order to challenge the standards, women are required to exhibit additional traits.

"This is how our society is built".

A few of the directors we interviewed addressed inequality as a natural and normal phenomenon, effectively neutralizing gender power differences. These attitudes emphasize the understanding that the difficulty in effecting change can be attributed to male dominance and the fact that current power relations are perceived as natural and unavoidable (Voskuil, 1998).

D10 described this state of affairs when asked why most film directors are men.

D10: This is how our society is built. Most of the CEOs are men, or I think I saw some article in the newspaper, that there's not even one [woman] CEO. But most of the CEOs are men. Most of the lawyers, at least the famous ones, are men. It is actually in the prosecutors' office that perhaps there is a majority of women, but that, perhaps, teaches us that in the private market, women have less of a chance or less success. Fewer people turn to women. *I'm not sure that the cinema is special in this…. … There's a feeling that it largely reflects the face of society, the way it is.*

D10, like some other directors, noted that this phenomenon exists and stated that the world of cinema is not unique in that it employs few women. While D10 is accurate in his view, and the exclusion of women from senior roles is widespread in other sectors in Israeli society (Crotti, Geiger, Ratcheva, & Zahidi, 2020), his response exemplifies the normalization of the inequality, which is created by male dominance in social institutions (Voskuil, 1998).

The perception that this is the way things are is a result of patriarchal ideology that is based on gender inequality, which is integrated into Israeli society (Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2016). However, the minority of Israeli female directors leads to the formation of the male perspective as the cinematic norm.

D1: Look, you don't have to be a film or cultural researcher in order to know that if we divide this quantitatively, the roles of men are larger than those of women. This is true up until a certain time. Again, I'm not a researcher, so I can't point to a period where there was a dramatic change in this matter. I, *naturally, in a big part of my films, the main characters were men, because what could be done? I was born a man; I'm close to myself and I don't feel a need to apologize for this.*

D1 is a very well-known and esteemed Israeli director. In his films, he addresses humane issues and gives them a central place. Nevertheless, as he notes, it is natural for him to make movies from a male perspective. This point of view carries a price, as the research literature points to the long-term cost of representing women from the male viewpoint, in a world of cinema that is dominated by men (Mulvey, 1975). Thus, the finding leads, once again, to the understanding that the change in the representation of women is dependent, to a large extent, on the numerical change in the power relations in the world of cinema and the appearance of more female directors.

"To a great degree, we're still carrying the old world with us".

While the directors acknowledged the difference between the past and the present in terms of gendered power relations, the change was described as incomplete and fraught with difficulties.

D5: *This is an uphill battle for women to enter the world of cinema.* There's no doubt about this. It's an aggressive medium; it's a medium that demands control of complex systems and because in society … like I told you before, *there are prejudices about the abilities of women to become integrated in the control of complex systems.* They are not spared in the world of cinema either. But it's changing. And I think that it is changing more in film than perhaps in other fields. And, there really are many directors who are women and more than that, there is public awareness about this, and there are many foundations and numerous broadcasting bodies are careful about including women, from the group of movie directors. So, yes, we are where we were… that is, *to a great degree, we're still carrying with us the old world, the former world ….* It is of course leading to a situation in which part of the cinematic expressions … *connect more to the world or to the shape of the world that the men express.*

D5 speaks in two voices: he acknowledges the change and negates it at the same time. He notes the change while describing women's ability to engage in cinema in terms of war. The medium is described as being aggressive and full of prejudices that have not yet disappeared. Therefore, while noting the impending change, the difficulty and the question of how this change will become a reality, he maintains that men continue to dominate the film industry and that cinema expresses the male point of view.

The awareness that significant change in the representation of women has not yet taken place and that the change is, often, just a façade, was also raised by D6.

D6: Our tokenism is someone like Gila Almagor.[10] You know, when you say, 'We have tokenism. Here, we have an old woman, the queen of Israeli cinema…. And I think that Israel, as a society, is, perhaps, more machoistic than other societies, more religious, more nationalistic, more of many things like this, and perhaps racist, in spite of the fact that again, these are things that are always shifting, I think. Some of them improve, some of them regress, some of them […]. But, in a way that is natural, this happens in the world and in Israel. There is less representation of women and there is crazy ageism when it comes to women.

D6 mentions the few examples of old women actors on the Israeli screen and relates to them as tokenism. The reason for the exclusion of old women from the screen connects to aspects of Israeli-ness, such as nationalism, racism, and machoism – which stem from the social viewing of the combat soldier as the manifestation of good citizenship (Sasson-Levy, 2002). Another important aspect mentioned by D13 is the backlash and resistance to change.

D13: The day that the world changed a bit arrived when the people without rights … began saying: 'Stop!' … So, the men came … and said: … 'We are not going to give up our rights so easily…. We're very comfortable. And we will show you.'

As feminist scholars point out, alongside the change toward equality in women's rights, a backlash is emerging (Faludi, 1991; Sharoni, 2018). D13 mirrors this aspect and the fact that women's quest for equality, as an underprivileged group, means an uncomfortable change and loss of power to men as the hegemonic group. A situation that cannot occur without the resistance of those who lose their privileged positioning.

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[10] A renowned Israeli actor, film star, and author, born in 1939.

Discussion

Corresponding to the research literature, our findings demonstrate that from the male directors' perspective, power relations between women and men in the Israeli cinematic world have undergone changes (Gill & Orgad, 2018). However, the findings also indicated the retention of obstacles and opposition to the changes. This finding corresponds with the effect of the historical backlash as a prominent reaction to each major achievement in women's paths to gender equality (Faludi, 1991).

The analysis of the interviews led us to create two models concerning gender power relations in the MeToo era, from the perspective of Israeli male directors. The first model emphasizes the promising aspects of the upcoming change, while the second model stresses its accompanying barriers, challenges, and difficulties.

The model of gender equality change: from awareness to action

Based on the directors' perspective, it is possible to understand the change in gender power relations taking place in the cinematic world in the MeToo era as a process, which consists of five stages: awareness, avoidance, diversity, women's stardom and support.

1. Awareness: almost all the film directors who were interviewed were very conscious of the change. Some identified with it. This awareness was expressed in the understanding that what was once acceptable concerning the representation of women and their status can no longer be regarded as adequate.
2. Avoidance: the awareness of change and the possible consequences of inadequate portrayal of women caused some of the directors to discuss the ways in which they are more careful in their characterization of women. It was reflected in the fear and in the examination of scenes that have the potential to be sexist and the decision to alter or delete scenes with abusive characterization of gender relations.
3. Diversity: the acknowledgement of the need to include more older women in films and rely less on Hollywood standards of beauty and the willingness to do so.
4. Women's stardom: the willingness to make films that focus on women and pride in films in which women characters, from diverse backgrounds, are the central characters.
5. Support: the acknowledgement of the need for more women directors, and the need to promote their films.

The model of the cycle of perseverance

Alongside the different aspects of the change in gender equality in the Israeli cinematic world, the findings indicated the resistance to change, thus reflecting previous literature, which has emphasized the opposition to change (Roggeband, 2018). Based on the findings, we conceptualized a cycle that preserves inequality, that consists of tokenism, neutrality, androcentrism, and persistence.

1. Tokenism – Change is analyzed in terms of a social sham, in terms of women's representation, diversity and power relations. This reveals the discourse about women who 'made it', in terms of tokenism (Laws, 1975).
2. Neutrality - The unequal power relations found in front of and behind the camera in the cinematic world are perceived as natural. Conditions of gender inequality are regarded as the norm with no will to challenge the status-quo (Voskuil, 1998).
3. Androcentrism - Dominant directors in the field continue to make movies from the male perspective. Since they matured in the world of film that had very few women directors, and were exposed to relatively few women filmmakers, their point of view potentially enhances women's objectification and seclusion.
4. Persistence - The influence of new representations of strong assertive women, who view the world through their own eyes, is still less influential due to the continuous male hegemony in the film industry. As long as men still dominate the field and create films from the male perspective, students will continue to be influenced by the male perspective and perceive it as neutral. The cycle is complete.

As the model can indicate, the unequal power relations retain many of their aspects, both in front of and behind the camera. These include the exclusion of women and numerous representations of women that are based on objectification and sexism (Lauzen, 2020; Shaer-Meoded, 2016). Therefore, even though there is no doubt that change is occurring, the direction of the change can still be debated. As the finding implies, from the male directors' point of view, in many cases, there is only a symbolic change, which is only for the sake of appearance, and which is accompanied by resistance to change and a perception of the existing state as natural.

Thus, the results of this study reinforce the understanding that in order to lead to a change in power relations, there is a need for more female directors, working behind the cameras, and for more women in front of the camera, which reflect a diversity in the representation of women, as opposed to a stereotypical representation (Zarkov & Davis, 2018). At the same time, the ability of female directors to feel comfortable making new films, that reflect their world, is dependent upon a wider social change, in which men will take part (Lubin, 1998). However, as this study indicates, not all directors are on board with the ongoing change.

The finding exposed two voices that were heard, at times, from the same directors. On the one hand, most directors acknowledged the change toward gender equality. Some of them expressed the importance of having more female directors and a greater diversity of women's roles in films. However, the directors also acknowledged the continued objectification of women in films. Male dominance and sexist representations of women are perceived as natural. As a result, it is possible to say that the imbalance continues to feed itself, since male and female directors continue to view films made mainly from the male perspective, which might present sexist representations as the norm. The MeToo movement is a landmark on the road to change. But in order for the change to continue and spread, more men and women directors who actively and willingly change the way women are depicted onscreen are needed. In Israeli cinema, as well as around the world, this change is slowly taking place (Elefant et al., 2021).

By understanding the important influence of films that have been made by female directors (Harrison, 2018), future studies can examine film schools' curricula in Israel and worldwide. To what extent are film students exposed to films made by women and to women filmmakers, by their teachers? Can a dialogue about gender power relations be undertaken with film directors, or are we doomed to wait for a new generation of filmmakers who will produce new and strong representations of women on the screen? Filmography Zohar, Uri (1972). *Metzitzim.*

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaging.2022.101039.

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