

Both of these movies came out within a year of each other in the late 1980s. Based on what you see on the posters, what would you expect from each movie? According to what you see, which probably had stronger roles for women in it? Do these posters offer any clues about whether the female characters in the movies interact with one another? ■



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## Does It Look Like Women Have Major Film Roles?

There are lots of movies that feature great relationships between men. There are a number of movies with interesting roles for women. But how many movies out there feature multiple major female characters that interact with each other? That's the question the Bechdel Test for Women in Film tries to answer.

The Bechdel Test, named after cartoonist and graphics novel artist Alison Bechdel, attempts to test whether women have a meaningful presence in a movie.<sup>1</sup> It does so by asking three questions:

1. Are there two or more women who have names in the movie?
2. Do they talk to each other?
3. Do they talk to each other about something other than a man?

Not surprisingly, male-centric movies such as *Fight Club*, *42*, and *Moneyball* don't pass. Movies focusing on the activities of multiple women, such as *Bridesmaids*, the *Sex in the City* movies, and the action-oriented *Hunger Games* and *Aliens*, clearly do pass. But as media critic Anita Sarkeesian points out, some not-so-obvious fails include:

- The original *Shrek*
- *The Big Lebowski*
- *Slumdog Millionaire*
- And even *The Princess Bride*

Remember, the Bechdel Test doesn't judge the quality of the movie or whether it treats women with respect. It only requires that the movie have two or more women who talk to each other about something other than a man.

### WHO is the source?

What is the Bechdel Test? By whom was it developed?

### WHAT are they saying?

What is the goal of the Bechdel Test? What does it tell us? What doesn't it tell us?

### WHAT evidence is there?

Watch a recently released movie and take notes on the Bechdel questions. Which of the questions does your movie pass? What are some examples of why the movie does or does not pass the Bechdel Test?

### WHAT do you and your classmates think?

Were you surprised by how your analysis turned out? Does thinking about the Bechdel Test change how you view movies? Does the Bechdel Test address an issue we should be concerned about? Why or why not?

<sup>1</sup>Lisa Katayama, "The Bechdel Test for Women in Movies," July 22, 2010, [www.boingboing.net/2010/07/22/the-bechdel-test-for.html](http://www.boingboing.net/2010/07/22/the-bechdel-test-for.html); Rachel Sklar, "The Bechdel Test for Movies (and Media?)," July 22, 2010, [www.mediaite.com/online/the-bechdel-test-for-movies-and-media/](http://www.mediaite.com/online/the-bechdel-test-for-movies-and-media/).



Video 8.11: Read several blog posts on the Bechdel Test and watch a great video explanation of it.