



The Bechdel Test for Impressionist Art

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INTRODUCTION

My research and goal for the year was to create a modified Bechdel Test that would be applicable to art. The Bechdel test is meant to determine whether a movie accurately depicts women as it can only be passed when two or more female characters discuss something that is not a male character. Despite its seeming simplicity many movies don't pass the Bechdel Test which hints to the fact that the female characters are simply there as a prop to keep the storyline moving for the male characters.

Creating something similar for art was detrimental to me as I realized that there was a difference in the way that men and women depicted women within their art. Like in movies that didn't pass the bechdel test, many men depicted unrealistic women in their art as props for the simple pleasure to look at. This can lead to unrealistic portrayals and overall unrealistic expectations for women. So by creating a basic litmus test for art, I can hopefully reduce the amount of unrealistic depictions created

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

Participants	Art Works	Scoring
❖ 43 People participated in my survey Composed of students, teachers and people roaming during Thursday Art Walk willing to take the survey	❖ 4 impressionist artists: Berthe Morisot (Female), Mary Cassatt (Female), Edgar Degas (Male), Edouard Manet (Male) ❖ From each artists I chose a nude, a domestic setting, and an outdoor setting	❖ 72 questions total across all 12 artworks ❖ Questions: Gender perception, action, background, posing, nudity, and overall idealization ❖ Final score expressed as a % male gaze indicator for each work

DATA AND FINDINGS

- ❖ It is visible that no painting passes the Bechdel test
- ❖ Even the female artists have a high average of male gaze in their paintings
- ❖ The female artists did however have smaller percentages of male gaze even if only slightly less than Degas
- ❖ Degas and Cassatt both show high standard deviation whereas Morisot and Manet had consistent scores throughout their pieces

Figure 1: Displays the average male gaze score across the three works surveyed per artist, revealing significant variation between male and female Impressionist painters.

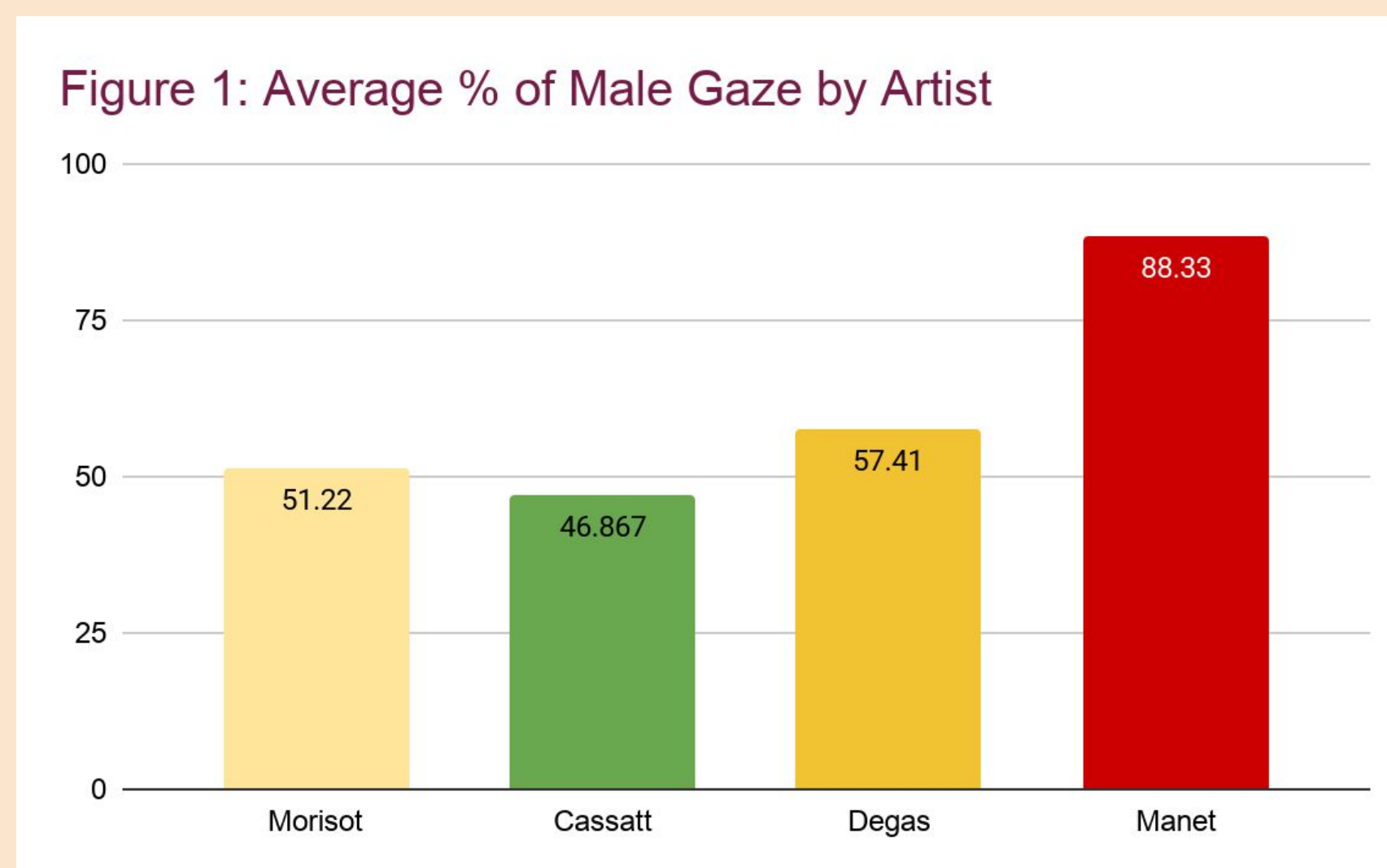
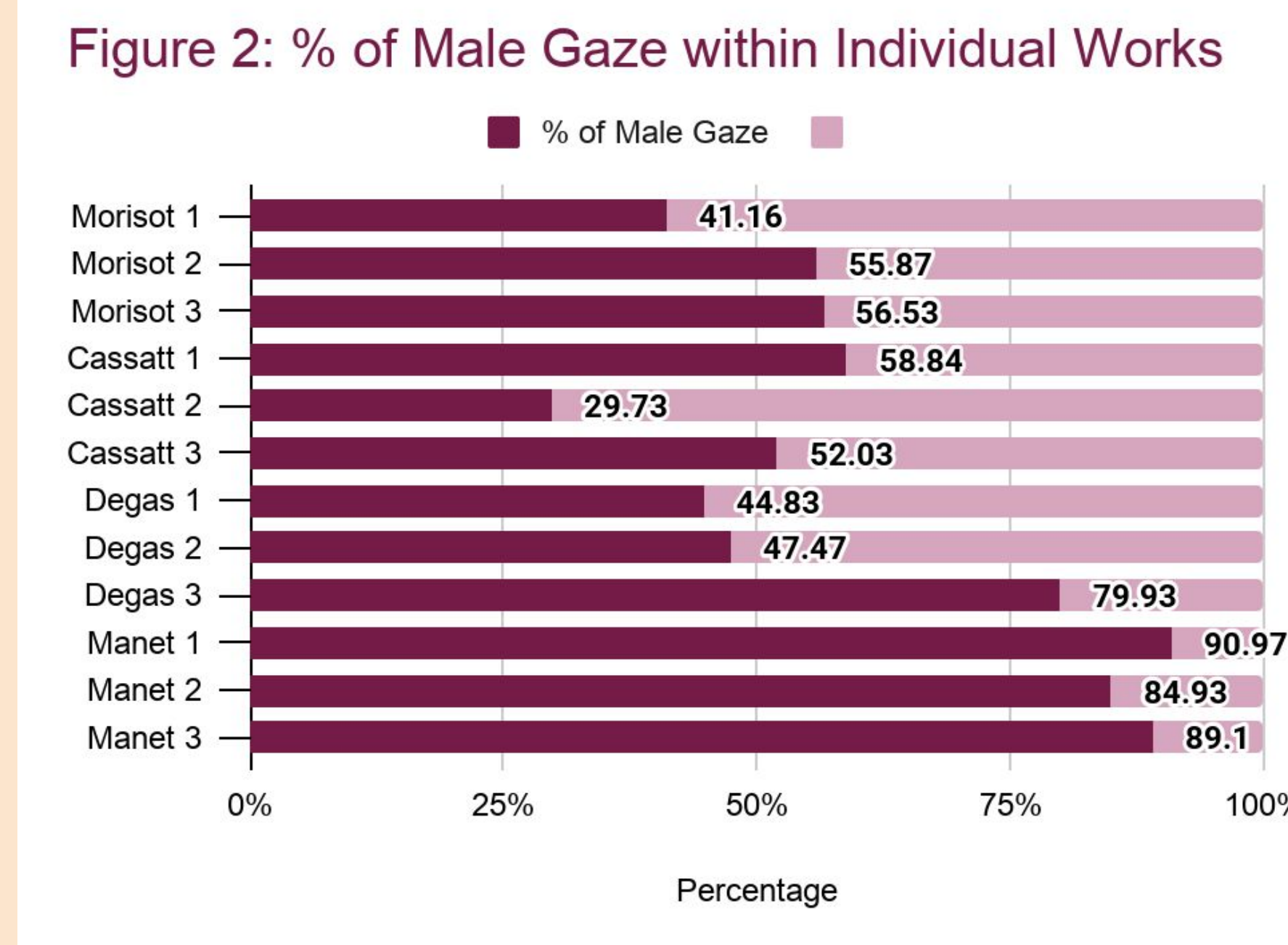


Figure 2: Displays the percentage of male gaze indicators recorded for each of the twelve individual works surveyed, grouped by artist



CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND NEXT STEPS

- ❖ While male artists like Manet scored dramatically higher the fact that even female Impressionists averaged nearly 50% suggests the male gaze is not simply a product of the artists gender but an embedded cultural standard
- ❖ Art is subjective and a freedom of expression so this bechdel test isn't meant to stop anyone from producing their art it is simply made to stop the normalization of unrealistic expectations of women and perhaps give insight on how to create realistic portrayal of women.

DISCUSSION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

Figure 1 shows that Mary Cassatt had an average of 48% of male gaze in her paintings. Yet, the kind of male gaze seen in a woman's portrait is different than in a man's portrait. This is evident in Mary Cassatt's painting "Breakfast in Bed" and Edouard Manet's "Olympia" which both scored highly for different reasons. In Cassatt's it displays the male gaze with an idealized vision of motherhood while Manet's displays the male gaze with its objectification of women. These both show women an unrealistic portrayal of women.

Degas low percentage of male gaze in his art shows that men depicting women doesn't always have to be about objectification or setting unrealistic standards of women and therefore men in general are not the problem.

The Impressionist movement was defined by artists painting what they saw in real life which is why Degas, Morisot's, and Cassatt's nude pieces were very natural in contrast to Manet's stark nudes.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS / REFERENCES

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