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### Female Lawyers Don't Need Pity; They Need a Paycheck

Meagan S. Bilodeau

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Female Lawyers Don't Need Pity; They Need a Paycheck: Analyzing the Impact of Emotional  
Intelligence on the Female Lawyer Narrative

By  
Meagan Bilodeau

Prepared for  
Dr. Madeleine Esch  
English Communications Department  
Salve Regina University

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Female Lawyers “Don’t Need Pity; They Need a Paycheck”: Analyzing the Impact of Emotional Intelligence on the Female Lawyer Narrative

ABSTRACT

*Whether it's pity or patronization female lawyers have often been criticized. They're visualized on the lower level of the patriarchal hierarchy system in the Hollywood courtroom. However, women that hold emotional intelligence don't need pity. Emotional intelligence encompasses how to set boundaries, stay motivated, hold healthy relationships inside and outside the courtroom, as well as maintain self-regulation. Through analysis of the biographical films Erin Brockovich, On the Basis of Sex, and The Mauritanian this study explores how extensively psychological resilience subfactors are depicted, proving whether or not female lawyers are emotionally prepared to succeed in their noteworthy cases.*

Introduction

When the general population is looking to get an insight into a potential career of interest, arguably the first place they will go is entertainment media. Think famous films such as *Legally Blonde* with Reese Witherspoon still receiving comments today that people have been inspired to pursue law because of her character. While these outlets are often glorified, there’s still a recognizable impact across an influx of generations. With the legal films I chose to analyze *Erin Brockovich*, *On the Basis of Sex* and *The Mauritanian*, Hollywood needs to use this platform of glorification effectively, and why it’s so important to end the stigma that comes from discussing emotional health on screen. Female lawyers are often characterized as irrational, emotional, inferior, and forced to stay at home to care for their families and children. In reality, to succeed female lawyers have to endure the overload that’s required by such a strong-willed career. Corporal lawyers often have to defend their cases at tremendous interpersonal risks; risking romantic relationships, losing valued time with children and family members, having to choose between suppressing their career paths for the sake of others’ wellbeing, putting to

question a soul-searching experience of whether or not they should continue to pursue law. They experience emotions of disillusion, despair, and depression at the cost of their client being found guilty, and must undergo the conscious choice to keep defending themselves, putting their reputation on the line. Breaking away from this stigma, female lawyers should be considered driven, logical, and emotionally in touch. It's one thing to recognize that emotional health exists, but another to analyze those implications in a real-world context. This leads to my research question "How Do Award Nominated Female Lawyer Leads Portray Emotional Intelligence?"

Praiseworthy examples of correct depictions of this stereotype are included in the films *Erin Brockovich*, *On the Basis of Sex*, and *The Mauritanian*. Primarily, *Erin Brockovich* is a legal melodrama encompassing the story of a single mother, Erin Brockovich, in a tight situation. Following a car accident in which she isn't at fault, Erin pleads with her attorney Ed Masry to be hired at his law firm. Upon completing her first project she discovers misplaced medical files alongside real estate ones. She convinces Ed to let her investigate and finds herself in a billion-dollar lawsuit with the power company PG&E involving a contaminated water incident in a community in California. She fights to give money back to the people that have fallen victim to devastating illnesses because of the incident. *Erin Brockovich* grossed \$256.3 million in total at the box office. *Erin Brockovich* has won numerous Academy Awards, Golden Globes, BAFTA's, Critics Choice, and MTV awards to name a few.

*On the Basis of Sex* is the biographical documentary of young Ruth Bader Ginsberg as a struggling attorney and new mother. She faces adversity amongst numerous obstacles in her fight for equality. When Ruth takes on a groundbreaking tax case with her husband Marty, she soon realizes that this will change the course of her entire career. This case ends up singlehandedly changing how the court views gender discrimination. *On the Basis of Sex* grossed \$38.8 million.

It has won numerous awards including AARP, Young Artist, ReFrame, Heartland Film, and more.

*The Mauritanian* is a legal melodrama involving a defense attorney, Nancy Hollander, her associate, Teri Duncan, and a military prosecutor who uncover a far-reaching conspiracy theory while investigating the case of a suspected 9/11 organizer from Mauritania imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for six years. *The Mauritanian* is at the low end of these three films, grossing \$7.5 million at the box office. It was nominated for numerous BAFTA awards, Columbus and London Film Critics, Golden Globes, AARP, and Heartland to name a few. *The Mauritanian* is essentially the most impactful of these films however as it is a very high-profile case that unveils a significant part of the U.S. history that's been covered up by the government for decades.

Female lawyers both in the media and in the real world have long been a component of a male-dominated industry. They've undergone instances of pervasive stereotypes, demeaning of their abilities such as being viewed as the "caring mother" or "office secretary", societal and sociocultural expectations being forced on them, lack of mentoring and an ability to gain seniority leading to higher stress and other mental health effects compared to women working in other fields. However, throughout this historical prejudice, women have maintained high counts of emotional intelligence, possibly through learning how to navigate these experiences.

As someone that plans on going to law school within the next two years, practicing family law, and becoming an attorney I pride myself on knowing how I should expect to be treated in my prospective career field. In addition, it's my goal for this thesis to shed light on how Hollywood directorship can continue to make valuable progress when showcasing how women are portrayed in the justice system.

As defined by psychologist Peter Salovey, emotional intelligence can be broken down into five key values; self-awareness, self-motivation, self-regulation, social awareness, and relationship management. Examples of self-awareness may look like knowing when to set boundaries, refraining from making assumptions or biased judgments, and staying true to promises. Self-motivation may look like a drive to achieve, take initiative, and an eagerness to improve. Self-regulation is keeping one's mind body and spirit in check, as well as recognizing and acknowledging one's strengths and weaknesses. Social awareness is keeping an open mind when dealing with others' perspectives that may not align with one's own, holding empathy and compassion when someone discloses something traumatic, and having an ability to "read the room" meaning picking up on subtle cues (such as body language, facial expressions, and context clues) of a group dynamic. To tie together the five key points relationship management looks like setting healthy relationships inside and outside of the office, actively listening, and having the ability to adapt to constructive criticism. Without emotional intelligence, female lawyer characters would come across as fearful of their male counterparts.

### Literature Review

#### *Understanding Emotional Intelligence*

Emotional intelligence is vital to success in the courtroom. When one thinks of a lawyer they'd want to represent them, generally the answer would be someone knowledgeable, empathetic to their situation, and able to control their emotions enough to the point they would win the case. These traits define "emotional intelligence." The three leads in my films are Erin Brockovich in *Erin Brockovich*, Ruth Bader Ginsberg in *On the Basis of Sex*, and Nancy

Hollander in *The Mauritian*. Together these lawyers convey the true meaning of emotional intelligence in the courtroom and beyond.

Emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in media portrayal. It holds a significant impact on how the audience perceives a career in law which if portrayed appropriately can be one of prestige and honor. While legal melodramas have been studied before, no studies have yet to address the theme of emotional intelligence. According to scholars Machura and Robson of the American Law and Society Association, topics already addressed include social theory, literary theory, the overall nature of legal films, historical precedence of advancements between the 1930s-2000s, and discourse of film studies. There is yet to be a discourse on emotional intelligence. “Ethics and social cleansing” are repeated terminology throughout past research and may be relevant to my continued study as they fall under the category of emotional intelligence. To portray emotional intelligence one must be properly ethically and socially cleansed. Social cleansing is defined as a process of forcing groups of people who are regarded as undesirable to leave an area. In my research, social cleansing may not be used in an extremist context but still has the potential of being relevant. Marchura and Robson argue the most influential discourses come from scholarly reviewed journals, some of which will be reviewed here.

### *The Female Lawyer Narrative*

Contextually, it tends to be the case that female lawyers both on film and in real life are shown in a negative light in terms of ethics, professionalism, and behavior. This is rarely the case for male lawyers. Corcos argues that women in legal melodramas very rarely portray successful women in both their interpersonal and professional lives. It’s nearly impossible to succeed in both simultaneously when pursuing this career. Furthermore, regarding the film, Corcos

identifies that for the female lead to be successful, directorship must stray from stereotypical themes of the male colleague intellectually coming to her defense... or the audience feeling that “women are protesting too much about sexual harassment” (Corcos 1234). Because these topics are directly related to the idea of the ‘male gaze’ it’s critical for it to be discussed here... as although it’s slightly more related to feminist theory, aspects of feminist theory can concurrently affect emotional intelligence.

While Corcos argues that these points are downgrading to how a female lead is perceived, the reason why she’s perceived in this way is mainly because of directing choices. The male gaze is looking through the lens of a typical heterosexual male and placing him into the target audience for said film. Questions then arise such as “How would he think?” “how would he view his female colleagues?” etc. The male gaze is characterized by the ability to objectify women. Of course then when a female colleague is objectified she could experience feelings of depression, anxiety, guilt, loneliness, self-harm, low self-esteem, eating disorders, and so forth that would disproportionately affect her ability to maintain proper emotional intelligence. Therefore, when analyzing my films it’s important to note that in a certain instance if a lead is not portraying intended emotional intelligence, that isn’t necessarily her fault. Directing choices are often required to lean into the ‘male gaze’ which then affects how the actor is portrayed on screen. Directors often feel that they have to follow the “male gaze” as this gains more viewers. According to a media survey by ANEWS Education, “15% of females were shown partially nude and 2% completely naked in most recent films.” These statistics make it obvious that women are designed as a spectacle for heterosexual men as is very much prevalent in modern society.

*Sexism in the Courtroom*



It's clear in many legal films that cinema has a direct link to patriarchy. This is self-evident in the patriarchal hierarchy system that exists in the courtroom. According to the latest demographics by 'Civility,' 38.3% of lawyers are female and 61.5% of lawyers are male (Bagby). While the number of female attorneys existing today is at a record high, male attorneys still shape culture as they continue to dominate senior roles... oftentimes this real-life culture can bleed into media portrayal, as entertainment is the first area to be affected by hard news. Columpar argues that cinema complies directly with male (unconscious) pleasures and their structures. In legal melodramas specifically, the structure is a subtle "sexual division of labor." This term "sexual division of labor" is parallel to gender roles and the patriarchal hierarchy system still existent in today's latest law media including entertainment media such as *House of Cards*, *You Don't Know Me*, and *The Lincoln Lawyer* (Columpar 41). Ultimately as Columpar states "men act and women appear" to conform to these norms. "The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure- who is styled accordingly" (27). I mentioned the above film and shows as even today this statement remains relevant and can be seen in several characters. Columpar advocates that certain discourses in film assign the woman a "position" or a "place" within patriarchal culture. However, while this idea of a hierarchy system is more figurative than factual, in the sense that it doesn't conform to all behaviors and all women in all professions; however, to say that it doesn't exist to at least some extent and knock it entirely would be constituting denial. As Cumpbar states, "an admission of its unreality does not constitute denial." The patriarchal hierarchy system in the courtroom will always exist, whether someone argues against it or not.

A critical aspect of maintaining emotional intelligence despite the male gaze is the ability to break down these barriers and be regarded as the empowered femme. The empowered femme

recognizes gender discrimination exists but works past it and comes out stronger. She recognizes that her fellow women in the field can still experience unequal pay, lack of access to proper resources, good jobs (*Erin Brockovich*), and lack of advancements. However, she's passionate about changing these norms and providing job security in an area where otherwise these ideals would not exist. Corcos and Cumpbar appear complementary in ideals here where they both agree directorship needs to avert the stereotype that "women find themselves in situations of importance only by accident" as they're often caught up in romantic relationships, drama, and prioritizing a relationship over their career. Oftentimes this leads to questioning a woman's resounding "no" (Corcos 1234). Overall, women are much more likely than their male counterparts to be perceived as a failure. Coros ends by stating, "one critic suggests that movies resist presenting the woman as professional in a positive light because such an image is disruptive to the social fabric" (1239). If we want to demolish these gender prejudice norms in the courtroom, we must change the way women are being seen in their professions this starts on an individual interpersonal basis and can certainly start with how we're perceiving women in pop culture.

### *Historical Archetype of Legal Drama*

Even though emotional intelligence is essential to breaking down these barriers, there's been numerous times that it simply hasn't existed in legal dramas. Asimow uses polling data to demonstrate that the popular perception of behaviors and morals of American lawyers, and the reputation of the profession itself has "plummeted" since the 1970s. The lawyer narrative has yet to reach as low on the totem pole as proletariat-type jobs however "lawyers will always be distrusted" (Asimow 2). This is in part because the audience could perceive a lawyer to be

manipulative, cunning, scheming, and not having a client's best interests at heart, simply treating them as an object of their financial satisfaction. According to Asimow, lawyers represent the rich and powerful, meaning that much of the lower middle class resents lawyers as they generally cannot afford a good one. This makes sense in the context that Asimow was working with including television shows such as *Just Mercy*, *The Trial of the Chicago 7*, *The Judge*, *Roe V. Wade*, and *The Lincoln Lawyer* which all aired before 2010. This narrative doesn't quite work in most recent years. We see that this perception can change with a morally and ethically correct film, such as that *On the Basis of Sex* or *The Mauritanian*. The lawyers in these films are characterized as warm, loyal, graceful, considerable, and charismatic. These leads portray no major character flaws, bad habits, or poor personal and work-life separation. To consider going forth, Asimow ends with the question "How would a member of the general public view lawyers if their only knowledge came from a film?"

Concerning barriers women must break down to be considered successful in their careers, gender prejudice comes in outstanding. Women feel as though they're on trial, consistently being judged on their ability to not only deliver well on the podium but win the entire case. In today's post-third-wave feminism, pop culture sees female empowerment as taboo, designed to preempt or offset critiques which in turn creates "anxious constructions of successful women" (Lucia 147 2005). Lucia brings to light the historical context (before second-wave feminism) of female lawyer leads only being successful if they were submissive to their male coworkers, depicting that the man always comes out powerful letting the patriarchal hierarchy win. This shows that she's okay with being pushed to her limits, as long as it gets her somewhere in her desired field. Even if a woman is seen as "heroic" it's often in the contextual framework of a man. Tasker brings up *The Accused* (1988) showing that validity only lies in the male's testimony. For Sarah

Tobias, the rape victim, only the male lawyer can testify to her words- although her prosecutor is a woman she's characterized as weak, and inferior to the rulings of the justice system. Her prosecutor has very little say in the outcome of the trial and can only make advancements if they're accepted by the head male defense attorney. This is a component of gender discrimination in the courtroom as it shows that truth can only ever lie in the male's testimony. For the victim herself, her words mean nothing without a male testifying for her. Understanding the impact of this requires knowing gender role terminology.

Gender role terminology is key to understanding the relationship between emotional intelligence and how a lead is portrayed in a positive light. Ultimately, emotional intelligence has to start from something it doesn't just appear and it's not earned or given to the lead. It's something that she's had to fight for since she began her journey to becoming a lawyer. A critical role in obtaining regulated emotional behavior comes from the ability to break down stereotypes and stigmas against oneself. Most often for women unequal pay, unfair prejudice comments, an overwhelmingly high male-to-female ratio in the courtroom, more pressures put on family life, and inadequate educational rights (specifically when viewing films such as *On the Basis of Sex* that took place in the 1950s). Author Genz uses the term postfeminism to describe this phenomenon of gender discrimination. Cinema offers an exemplary site for combatting subjugation, proving that the gender ratio can have a way of being depleted in the future. Here Genz's overarching argument remains true "Postfeminism's frame of reference opens up a conceptual and semantic bond with feminism, but also relations with other social, theoretical and political areas" including popular media and contemporary film (309).

As part of gender discrimination's relationship with emotional intelligence, physical beauty plays a significant part. Lucia argues that physical beauty within the female lawyer

narrative holds immense pressure on how gender representation is portrayed. While physical beauty can often be considered a blessing (think “pretty privilege”) it can simultaneously be considered a downfall. The male gaze can get wrapped up in only viewing the female colleagues for what they’re portraying on the surface- ignoring their knowledge, fierceness, and resilience. For example, Erin Brockovich in *Erin Brockovich* is often classified as having “brains” but used in the contextual framework of “beauty and brains.” The analysis section will idealize stepping away from these stigmas, showing that the female lawyer is an empowered multifaceted woman, much like Erin Brockovich holds vast amounts of emotional intelligence, and so do many of the other “physically attractive” characters mentioned.

It’s clear throughout these journals that there’s a direct linkage between emotional intelligence and how women are portrayed in cinema. Emotional intelligence holds significant value in how the audience perceives a career in law... and if conveyed appropriately is one of prestige and honor. Despite conveyed emotional intelligence and resilience women are often seen as belittled, beaten down, naive, or given the cold shoulder feeling as though they’re constantly “on trial.” Throughout the analysis, looking beyond these stereotypical norms and looking into the meaning behind the “empowered femme” will become very relevant.

### *An Eye for Emotional Intelligence in Film*

Ultimately, psychological resilience (also expressed as emotional intelligence) is the ability to “bounce back from negative emotional experiences” and “be flexible to changing situational demands” as Tugade and Fredrickson claim (320). These motifs are deemed consistent and highly pertinent to each of the films addressed, *Erin Brockovich*, *On the Basis of Sex*, and *The Mauritanian*. While the characters analyzed in each of these films aren’t necessarily

the “lead” they still hold the same significance- especially when dealing with high-profile cases such as that in *The Mauritanian*. Furthermore, those with higher levels of resilience can “ride out the storm, handling anxieties and frustrations” knowing there’s a greater result to come, and it builds character (Tugade 322). Those with sufficient sustaining psychological intellect can more easily bounce back after a “blow” to their ego. They can use their experiences to buffer negative emotional experiences, an incredible skill to hold in the legal field. Positive emotions are a crucial element of emotional resilience, something that each lawyer in the films studied has been able to attribute to.

Going forth, investigating the paradox of emotional intelligence with gender representation is key to understanding how women have fought for decades at breaking down barriers, proving that there is a direct lineage between the two. Gender discrimination provides greater insight into the reasonings behind why these professionals can withstand not only a demanding career but interpersonal life as well. Each character possesses a complex understanding of emotional regulation, using their familiarity to better them in the long run. As Tugade implies “emotional regulation appears essential for effective and optimal personal and social functioning” (335). The ability to combat life struggles with pressure in the workforce is something all successful lawyers have had to face at some point in their careers. Emotional intelligence has been and continues to remain a key character narrative throughout cinema, showing that the key to success lies in proper psychological awareness. This bridges directly to the question of “How has the award-nominated female lawyer conveyed emotional intelligence and has that attributed to their success?”

## Method

*On the Basis of Sex* (2018), *Erin Brockovich* (2000), and *The Mauritanian* (2021) were chosen as primary texts through a purposeful selection of critically acclaimed films in the past 23 years. 23 years was chosen as the number as these films had to have been released after 2000. Additionally, each had to fit into the framework of biographical legal melodrama and be “based on a true story” with at least 95% accuracy.

Accuracy percentages are relevant here, as I am studying products that aren’t highly edited in the “Hollywood framework.” Concerning *Erin Brockovich*, Erin Brockovich states on her official website that the film is “98% accurate.” Regarding *On The Basis of Sex*, Marty Ginsberg speaking on “Bustle” states “Ruth herself also vetted the entire script.” It’s stated multiple times throughout the article “‘On the Basis of Sex’ Is True to RBG’s Life” that the film is almost 100% accurate. For Ginsberg herself, it’s stated that she had a “zen-like personality” when arguing her cases, often others would wonder how she never lost her temper. This is communicated fluently throughout the film. *The Mauritanian* is about 95% factually correct according to “Rotten Tomatoes” and therefore qualifies under the umbrella of my film category, although it does have more instances of dramatized editing, that doesn’t necessarily matter as the fundamental themes of the storyline remain true.

Box office revenue was an additional qualification for choosing the primary texts. Revenue was deemed highly successful for each. *On the Basis of Sex* grossed short of \$25 million at the box office domestically in the opening week, and 38.7 million worldwide. Noteworthy awards include Heartland Film, nominees for AARP, Cinema for Peace, and Women Films Critic. *Erin Brockovich* grossed 125 million domestically and 132 million internationally, however, it has been around for 20 years longer. It’s won the award for best actress in a leading

role as well as multiple nominations for best actor in a supporting role, best picture, best director, best writing, and best screenplay. Additionally, it's won BAFTA awards for best performance for an actress in a leading role. *The Mauritanian* has received and been nominated for numerous awards including BAFTA Film Awards for best film, best screenplay, best British Film of the Year, best leading actor, and best cinematography. It's received the AARP Movies for Grownups award as well as been nominated worldwide in countries such as Scotland, Glasgow, and England, and has been featured at Santa Barbara's international film festival. The award nominee status on IMDB is the most extensive for *The Mauritanian* out of all the films chosen. This information was deemed accurate through IMDB.

Upon finalizing my film choices, I created an Excel sheet where I distributed my data categories into five different topics concerning emotional intelligence "perceiving emotions", "identifying emotions", "self-motivation", "self-regulation", and "relationship management." From there I tallied each instance of emotional intelligence I found based on psychologist Peter Salovey's definition of the term. Some of these instances looked like breaking down barriers of gender representation, handling sexism, camerawork, and directorship choices. More specifically, some of the examples defined by Salovey included knowing when to set boundaries, an ability to stay motivated, holding healthy relationships inside and outside of work and setting a clear boundary between the two, holding social awareness which may look like keeping an open mind, actively listening to others, an ability to "read the room", recognizing and acknowledging others strengths and weaknesses, holding empathy and compassion when someone discloses something of significant importance, identifying diverse and inclusive cultural norms, and showing concern for others. It's important to distinguish that emotional



intelligence is very complex. Just because someone portrays more instances in one area and lacks in the other doesn't make them any less qualified to do their job successfully.

### Analysis

The first film analyzed *On the Basis of Sex* is ultimately a living testimony to the second woman in the U.S. Supreme Court- Ruth Bader Ginsberg. The film shows Ruth as a struggling attorney attending Harvard law school. Her husband gets diagnosed with cancer and she has to ultimately become a single mother to her child, while simultaneously carrying two loads of coursework- both for her husband and herself. Upon graduating with her husband in a better health condition and moving to a better medically inclined area, she fights to find her way into the field in a sexist, prior second-wave feminism era. When Ruth takes on an unorthodox tax case it changes the direction of her outcome seamlessly depleting the gender discrimination she's had to face as this case brings to light her prestigious qualities as an attorney.

*Erin Brockovich* is the story of a single mother of three children who are struggling to make ends meet. Preceding a car accident in which Erin is not at fault, she sues the doctor who hit her. Her lawyer expects to win the case, but because of her courtroom behavior, they wind up losing. She then requests to join the law firm her attorney represented her at. At the office, Erin stumbles upon medical records in real estate files and decides to investigate their purpose. She discovers a cover-up involving contaminated water causing residents to develop chronic health issues and brings to light the truth behind the case. Just as Ruth experienced and overcame instances of sexism in *On the Basis of Sex*, colleagues don't take Erin seriously either based on her ditziness, reputation, and dress.

*The Mauritanian* touches on an entirely new field of topics, with the female lawyer appearing less in the spotlight yet still of incredible importance based on the high-profile nature of the case. The defense attorney, Nancy Hollander, and her partner Teri Duncan unfold a radical conspiracy whilst investigating the case of the suspected 9/11 organizer from Mauritania detained at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba for 14 years. “The Mauritanian” was never charged with a crime. The film touches on disturbing instances of torture techniques that bring to light the dark truth about Guantanamo Bay prison.

There were clear and consistent themes throughout each film viewed. These trends indicate there’s a clear focus on lawyers portraying instances of identifying emotions, perceiving emotions, and self-motivation. Self-regulation and relationship management were a bit unbalanced between the three texts. Some films excelled in some areas, while others lacked in the same. *On the Basis of Sex* indicates there are 13 total counts of relationship management while *The Mauritanian* only has two. This shows that emotional intelligence isn’t linear for every individual. If one character portrays stronger examples of one area and lacks in the other it doesn’t make them any less qualified to do their job successfully. Figure 1 shown below showcases an exemplary visual of how emotional intelligence was analyzed with an average of seven counts in each category self-regulation, identifying emotions, perceiving emotions, relationship management, and self-motivation.

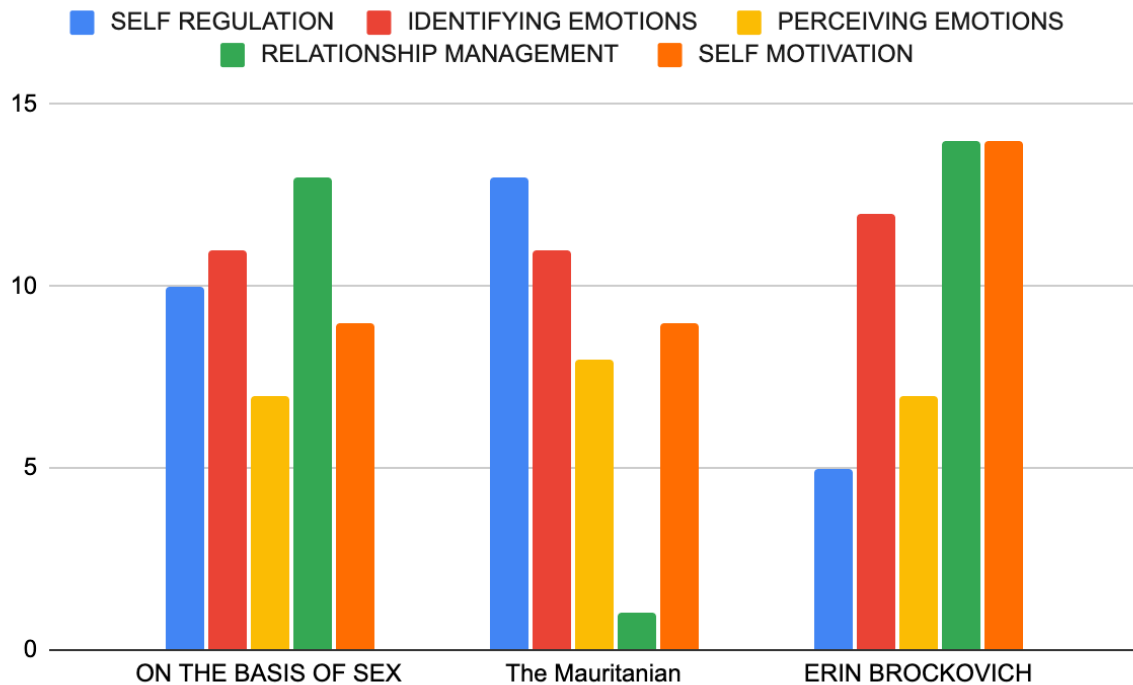


Figure 1: Key Terms in Conveying Emotional Intelligence on Screen

*On the Basis of Sex*, scenes have consistent tones of young Ruth Bader acting gracious, calm, polite, and portraying maturity. In the opening scenes, Ruth Bader is seen entering Harvard Law with the song “ten thousand men of Harvard” playing in the background. Post-graduating, potential employers were often seen belittling, mocking, or making sexist comments toward her. She’s thrown comments in job interviews such as “We’re a very close-knit firm” and “I would hire you, but the wives may get jealous.” Despite this Ruth remains confident in herself. She instills her mother's quote in her that she should “not give way to emotions.”

*The Mauritanian* is a very intense film that has numerous instances of self-regulation, identification of emotions, and self-motivation. Nancy Hollander is a seasoned defense attorney but has never taken on a case with quite the weight of a potential terrorist. She along with Teri, her assistant, put their reputations and their family relationships on the line when defending the man who was being sentenced for recruiting hijackers on 9/11. In the climax scene, Teri is shown

conversing with Nancy “My dad told me I’m not welcome home for Thanksgiving this year” to which Nancy replies “That’s not a part of my job.” While Nancy seems like a stone-cold woman, she is simply confident in her success. Before even meeting Mohamedou, the victim of Guantanamo Bay, they have this spiritual sense to trust their gut that this man did not commit these crimes. They were right. Guantanamo Bay has a very dark history. Many other lawyers have had to drop cases that involve prisoners there because the conditions are so appalling. They are both highly knowledgeable and can compartmentalize. When Teri takes the call from Mohamadeou’s mother and begins crying, Nancy is completely unphased by the depressing conversation they’re having. One of the most influential scenes is the riot outside of the courthouse with protestors holding up signs saying “Remember 9/11” and getting in Nancy and Teri’s faces. Despite this Nancy acts as though they’re not there and rushes on to continue with her work. While *The Mauritanian* doesn’t hold sexist tones, it touches on incredibly heavy topics of fear, isolation, neglect, torture, and being an outcast. All of these aspects, even individually, would affect how one reacts to proper emotional health. Despite the impact of them, Nancy Hollander seems so collected that she cannot only triumph in high-profile cases such as this but train others to do the same. To shed light on the outcome, the ending credits show Mohamadeou, Nancy, and Teri reconnecting in his home country where he gives them hand-crafted jewelry, visualizing their graciousness's impact on him.

*Erin Brockovich* shifts back into a “romantic drama” framework. It holds numerous instances of self-regulation, relationship management, and identification of emotions. Relationship management is seen in a positive light and may seem slightly skewed as she’s gone through the loss of relationships and not feeling as though she’s shown up for her children in the best way possible. She’s had to miss significant moments in their lives like her 10-month-old’s

first words. However, by the end of the film, she's able to prove herself and the reason why she's so invested in her work. Erin remains passionate and true to herself. She sees the children that have been affected by the contaminated water as her own and want to fight for justice. In the scene where Erin meets the child who's been affected by cancer at eight years old and doesn't have much longer left to live, she feels for her. The camerawork angles her in a way that makes the viewer feel the emotion through the screen by zooming in on the tears streaming down Erin and the parent's faces.

It becomes clear quickly that Erin Brockovich has to fight sexism. She's questioned on the way she dresses as she tends to dress more racy- something that's audibly made other girls in the office "uncomfortable." Additionally, directorship forces her into a "romance drama" light. About 80% of the film adds up to Erin's relationship with George, her next-door neighbor, and Harley-Davidson biker. It's as though she wouldn't be perceived the same if she didn't have a relationship with him. To an extent, this can be a component of the male gaze as the director chooses to contribute a large part of the film to glorifying George's actions, such as taking care of Erin's kids while she's gone to work. George was there for Erin's daughter's first words, which ends up being a moving scene on Erin's drive home from her job. It seems in this narrative that women can only be successful if they're accompanied by a loving man. Because of this Erin's character is framed in the context of "beauty and brains" and not just "brains."

Throughout these films, the overarching theme is made clear that not all emotional intelligence looks the same for every individual, yet that never makes anyone less qualified to succeed at their job. Ruth Bader seems like a flawless lawyer, especially considering she was the second woman to the U.S. Supreme Court, however, the film still brings to light her flaws. While Erin Brockovich and Ruth wouldn't necessarily be contrasted with one another, they fall in the

same profession and have had to face similar battles, putting relationships with children on the forefront, breaking down barriers of sexism, etc. On the other hand, Nancy Hollander isn't shown dealing with any of these matters, but because her case is so distinguishable to succeed both she and Teri have to hold psychological resilience at the same amounts as Erin Brockovich and Ruth Bader's characters. Every one of these personalities is distinctive in its own way showing that emotional intelligence isn't linear and is required in every topic of case encountered.

### Conclusion

Whether it's pity or patronization, emotional intelligence has often been ignored in the courtroom. Female lawyers have continuously been criticized and visualized as the bottom tier of the patriarchal hierarchy system. However, women that hold psychological power don't need pity. It's important to understand that emotional intelligence is not always portrayed on the same level. Throughout constant trials and tribulations, empowered women can present confidence in their cases. However, simply because one character may visually contain more psychological resilience on screen than the other doesn't make them any less qualified to do their job. For example, comparing Ruth Bader Ginsberg to Erin Brockovich is similar to comparing apples to oranges... there are going to be obvious differences.

Sexist themes and emotional intelligence have both been studied before, but never in regard to legal drama. Therefore, this study is so important as it provides an ability to render how women are psychologically viewed. Women, especially in law, are expected to conform to a certain standard, oftentimes having to put their mental health on hold. However, throughout this study, it becomes evident that emotional intelligence is the key to success, something that can no

longer be disregarded. This new statement challenges the fundamental values of psychological resilience and the empowered femme.

The women in these legal films studied are powerful because they're authentically empathetic. This has the potential to change how the justice system views women. The average viewer looks to popular media to get a glimpse into aspects of life they may not understand. If we want women to be seen for their intellect that goes beyond a surface level, this narrative has to change and that starts with understanding internal conflict and behaviors. While research on psychological resilience and its correlation with empowered women in law is beneficial to understanding how women are painted in the justice system, it's impossible to speculate why these films have been deemed critically acclaimed. While it's possible to propose that emotional intelligence can contribute to this perception there need to be longitudinal studies in defining a direct interrelationship between award-nominated female lawyers and the psychology of the brain leading to award-nominated success. Furthermore, because this research falls under the framework of media studies, it would be interesting to see how emotional intelligence is conveyed in the criminal justice field. Some potential limitations to this research include how the narrative of emotionally intelligent female lawyers could be damaging because they keep the focus on emotions and gender normative relationships versus simply showing women as intelligent. Additionally, it would be interesting to note whether or not male lawyers are depicted as emotionally intelligent, and if they are how that is portrayed.

Whether or not these questions will be answered in the future, the principal remains that female lawyers "don't need pity, they need a paycheck": emotional intelligence will always play an important role in determining someone's holistic success in the courtroom.

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Figure 1: Key Terms in Conveying Emotional Intelligence on Screen



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