

## Constructing Female Leadership Through Andromache of Scythia's Character: A Representation Study of Old Guard 2

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the construction of female leadership in *The Old Guard 2* through the character of Andromache of Scythia. Although recent scholarship highlights increased visibility of women leaders in action cinema, many portrayals remain narratively marginal or symbolically constrained. Addressing this gap, the study employs a qualitative descriptive-interpretative design grounded in textual analysis and Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation, complemented by contemporary female leadership frameworks. Data were analyzed through systematic scene-based examination of visual and verbal signs related to authority, ethics, relationality, and collective action. The findings demonstrate that Andromache's leadership is constructed as legitimate, ethical, relational, and enduring, independent of physical dominance. Female authority is normalized through narrative recognition, emotional competence, and collective orientation. The study concludes that *The Old Guard 2* offers a progressive representation of female leadership that challenges conventional gendered norms in action cinema.

**Keywords:** Female Leadership, Film Representation, Stuart Hall, Action Cinema, *The Old Guard 2*

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### INTRODUCTION

Representations of female leadership in contemporary cinema have increasingly become a significant subject of scholarly attention. Particularly, as global media industries attempt to respond to long-standing critiques regarding gender visibility, agency, and narrative centrality (Calver et al., 2025; Pennell & Behm-Morawitz, 2015; Santoniccolo et al., 2023). Within the superhero and action-fantasy genres, which have historically been dominated by hyper-masculine narratives, the construction of women leaders offers an important site for examining how popular culture imagines authority, power distribution, and gendered identity. Central to this discourse is Stuart Hall's representation theory, which emphasizes that media texts do not simply reflect reality but actively construct cultural meanings (Hall, 1997; Perreault, 2023). Through characterization, narrative structure, and visual codes, films shape the social imagination of what leadership "looks like" and who is deemed legitimate to perform it.

Prior scholarship demonstrates that meaningful portrayals of female leadership tend to anchor authority in competence, moral reasoning, and strategic agency rather than mere symbolic presence. Studies of Peggy Carter in Television Series *Marvel Agent's* show a leader who navigates systemic exclusion while exerting tactical command and ethical clarity, thereby challenging institutional constraints and resisting the tokenism often imposed upon female characters (Sulistio, 2023). Research on *Wonder Woman* (2017) highlights a model of leadership rooted in compassion, diplomacy, and principled resistance, distinguishing her from earlier depictions of women in action cinema that were visually empowered but

*Constructing Female Leadership Through Andromache of Scythia's Character: A Representation Study of Old Guard 2* narratively marginalized (Karsum et al., 2025). Analyses of Evelyn Wang in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* demonstrate how emotional intelligence, relational decision-making, and adaptive conflict mediation can function as alternative but equally powerful leadership modes (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Maharani & Ningsih, 2025). Scholarship on character Mulan in Disney live action 2020 further emphasizes culturally grounded leadership marked by discipline, resilience, and strategic skill (Rudy, 2024; Sarah Ariella et al., 2025).

Despite these advances, many superhero and action films continue to feature women who possess extraordinary abilities but remain narratively peripheral, underdeveloped, or dependent on male protagonists. For example, although Black Widow plays a significant combat role in early Avengers films, her narrative is frequently overshadowed by male-driven storylines (Clarke & Hine, 2024; Killian, 2023). Similar patterns appear in other franchises. Harley Quinn and Poison Ivy in *Suicide Squad* (2016) are portrayed as visually and thematically powerful but are constrained by plot structures centered on male characters (Ross, 2022). *Alice in Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* (2016) demonstrates exceptional physical capability, yet her role unfolds within a storyworld that prioritizes visual spectacle rather than her leadership agency. These cases collectively show that even when female characters possess extraordinary capacities, they often lack narrative centrality, decision-making autonomy, or sustained leadership roles. This pattern reveals a persistent structural imbalance within action and superhero cinema.

Against this backdrop, Andromache of Scythia or Andy, the immortal warrior at the center of *The Old Guard* franchise, presents a uniquely compelling case. In contrast to many female characters who gesture toward leadership without substantive narrative follow-through, Andromache functions as the strategic core, moral anchor, and operational commander of her team. Her leadership is neither decorative nor symbolic; it is enacted through decision-making, battlefield strategy, and interpersonal ethics. *The Old Guard 2*, which expands the franchise's world-building and offers deeper character exploration, provides a critical site for examining how a female leader is constructed within a transnational, action-driven narrative that blends mythic temporality with contemporary political conflict.

Although the film reached a global audience through streaming platforms and presents a thematically rich portrayal of immortal leadership, the representation of Andromache in *The Old Guard 2* remains underexamined in academic literature. Previous studies of female leadership in film tend to focus on dominant franchises such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, DC films, and Disney's live-action adaptations. As a result, alternative portrayals outside these mainstream systems have received limited scholarly attention. Furthermore, no study to date provides a focused representation analysis of Andromache's leadership in the sequel, particularly through the lens of Hall's representation theory and contemporary frameworks on female leadership.

This study seeks to address this gap by examining how *The Old Guard 2* constructs female leadership through the character of Andromache of Scythia. Her portrayal is interpreted as a complex and culturally resonant representation of authority, ethics, and collective responsibility. By situating Andromache within broader discussions on gender, leadership, and media representation, this research contributes to expanding the theoretical and empirical understanding of female leadership in contemporary cinema.

## METHOD

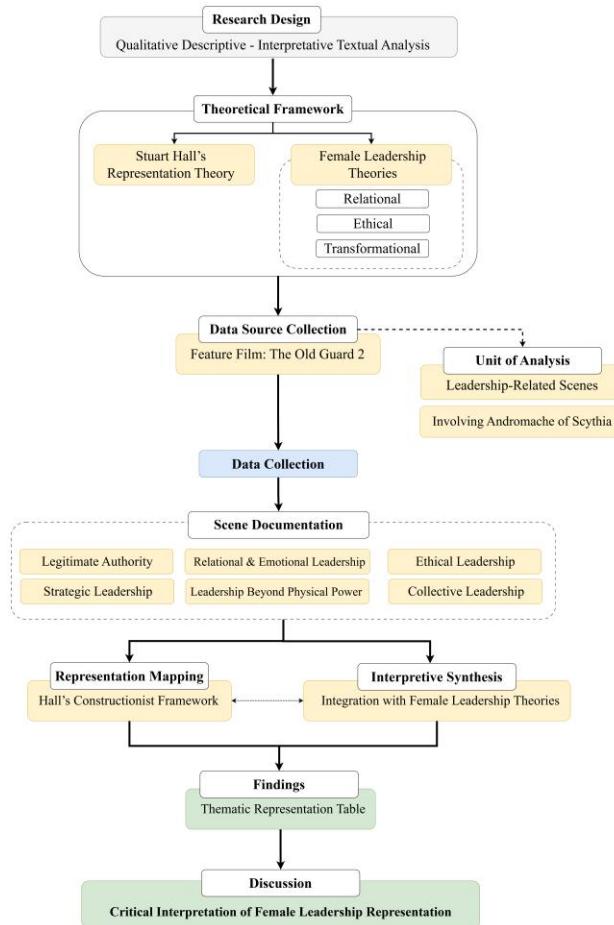


Figure 1. Research methodology flowchart illustrating the qualitative textual analysis process used to examine the representation of female leadership through the character of Andromache of Scythia in *The Old Guard 2*

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-interpretative research design situated within the field of film and media studies. The research is grounded in a textual analysis approach, which treats film as a cultural text through which social meanings related to leadership, authority, and gender are constructed and circulated. This design is particularly suitable for examining how cinematic texts encode ideological meanings, rather than for measuring audience reception or production intentions.

The analysis focuses on *The Old Guard 2* as a narrative and visual text, emphasizing the ways in which female leadership is constructed through characterization, dialogue, mise-en-scène, and narrative development. By employing a qualitative approach, this study seeks to identify recurring representational patterns that shape the meaning of leadership as embodied by the character of Andromache of Scythia.

### Theoretical Framework

This research is theoretically informed by Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation, which conceptualizes representation as an active process of meaning-making rather than a passive reflection of reality. From this perspective, media texts produce meaning through systems of signs, visual codes, language, and narrative conventions that are culturally and historically situated.

Hall's framework guides the identification and interpretation of visual and verbal signs that signify leadership, authority, and legitimacy in *The Old Guard 2*. These signs are analyzed in relation to broader cultural discourses on gender and power. To enrich the interpretive depth, the study also incorporates contemporary theories of female leadership, particularly relational, ethical, and transformational leadership perspectives (Eagly et al., 2003; Fletcher, 2004; Pullen & Vachhani, 2021). These frameworks enable leadership to be examined not

merely as command or dominance, but as ethical responsibility, relational influence, emotional regulation, and collective orientation.

### Data Source and Unit of Analysis

The primary data source for this study is the feature film *The Old Guard 2*, which was distributed globally via a digital streaming platform. The film was selected due to its central female protagonist who occupies a sustained and authoritative leadership position within an action-fantasy narrative. The sequel was chosen in particular because it expands the narrative scope, ethical dilemmas, and leadership dynamics introduced in the first installment, thereby providing richer material for analysis.

The unit of analysis consists of selected scenes involving Andromache of Scythia in which leadership is enacted, negotiated, or challenged. These scenes include moments of strategic decision-making, interpersonal interaction, ethical deliberation, conflict management, and collective action. The focus on scene-level analysis allows for a detailed examination of how leadership is constructed through both visual and discursive elements.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through repeated and systematic viewing of the film. Multiple viewing sessions were conducted to ensure analytical depth and to minimize the risk of overlooking subtle representational cues. During each viewing, relevant scenes were documented using time-stamped analytical notes that captured key visual signs, including framing, body positioning, facial expressions, gestures, costume, and spatial arrangement, as well as key verbal signs such as dialogue, forms of address, tone, pauses, and moments of silence. The documentation process also recorded narrative context, particularly leadership challenges, conflict situations, and narrative outcomes, alongside emotional and relational dynamics reflected in interactions that conveyed care, authority, trust, or ethical restraint. All visual observations were recorded descriptively through detailed field notes, and the analysis relied exclusively on textual documentation of cinematic signs without reproducing visual images in the manuscript.

### Data Analysis Technique

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis integrated with representation analysis. This combined analytical approach enabled the identification of recurring patterns while allowing for theoretically grounded interpretation of meaning. The analytical process began with open coding, in which all documented scenes were examined to identify recurring leadership-related actions, expressions, and interactions. During this stage, preliminary codes were generated to capture patterns such as authority recognition, strategic coordination, ethical decision-making, emotional regulation, relational care, responsibility-taking, and vulnerability. These initial codes provided the foundation for subsequent analytical stages.

Following the coding process, codes with conceptual similarity were grouped into broader thematic categories that reflected dominant patterns of leadership representation. This thematic categorization resulted in several core themes, including legitimate authority, strategic leadership, ethical leadership, relational and emotional leadership, leadership beyond physical power, and collective leadership. Each theme was then examined through Stuart Hall's representation framework to identify how meaning was constructed through specific representational strategies, such as the repetition of visual and verbal signs, narrative positioning of the character, visual centrality and framing, discursive closure or the absence of challenge, and emotional framing through affective cues. This stage enabled the analysis to establish clear connections between cinematic techniques and the ideological construction of female leadership.

In the final stage, the identified themes were interpreted in relation to contemporary theories of female leadership, particularly relational, ethical, and transformational leadership perspectives. This interpretive synthesis moved the analysis beyond descriptive categorization toward critical explanation, situating the film's representation of leadership within broader scholarly discussions on gender, power, and authority in popular culture.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

## Findings

Table 1. Comprehensive Thematic Representation of Female Leadership in *The Old Guard 2*

Theme	Timestamp	Key Visual Sign	Key Verbal Sign	Representation Code	Leadership Dimension	Interpretative
Legitimate Authority	00:31:05	Andy framed at center of group	"Boss" (Joe)	Social recognition	Legitimate leadership	Authority constructed as collectively accepted
	00:32:05	Team maintains eye contact with Andy	"We got this, boss" (Nicky)	Repetition of sign	Institutional legitimacy	Leadership reinforced through repetition
	00:36:40	Silence follows Andy's decision	Absence of challenge	Discursive closure	Accepted authority	Authority normalized, not contested
Strategic Leadership	00:04:41	Andy gestures while assigning positions	Tactical instruction	Narrative positioning	Strategic leadership	Leadership encoded as coordination
	00:05:12	Andy moves ahead of team	Minimal dialogue	Symbolic action	Operational leadership	Leadership shown through action
	00:06:54	Andy steps forward under fire	"I always go first"	Responsibility code	Accountability-based leadership	Risk ownership defines authority
	00:07:30	Andy signals retreat	Short command	Efficiency framing	Tactical leadership	Leadership as situational awareness
Ethical Leadership	01:07:29	Andy listens before deciding	"We have to go"	Moral closure	Ethical leadership	Decision balances risk and duty
	01:10:42	Andy resists emotional provocation	Calm facial expression	Emotional restraint	Ethical self-control	Leadership framed as composure
	01:25:43	Open body posture toward Quynh	"Each one of us has to decide..."	Moral discourse	Facilitative leadership	Authority respects autonomy
	00:44:49	Confrontational framing with Quynh	Accusatory dialogue	Oppositional code	Moral leadership	Leadership tested through conflict
	00:46:02	Andy refuses escalation	"This isn't the way"	Boundary setting	Principled leadership	Authority limits violence
	00:48:22	Andy disengages physically	Silence	Ethical withdrawal	Moral restraint	Leadership as refusal
Relational and Emotional Leadership	00:14:06	Hand on Nile's shoulder	Soft reassuring tone	Affective sign	Relational leadership	Care encoded as competence
	00:16:49	Andy listens without interruption	Minimal verbal response	Listening code	Empathetic leadership	Leadership enacted through presence
	00:18:53	Andy steady gaze amid	"Breathe"	Emotional regulation	Stabilizing leadership	Leader absorbs

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## Constructing Female Leadership Through Andromache of Scythia's Character: A Representation Study of Old Guard 2

		panic				
	00:20:10	Andy lowers her voice	Short reassurance	Tone modulation	Emotional leadership	anxiety Authority linked to calmness
	01:18:23	Close-up on Booker's action	"You have purpose"	Sacrificial sign	Relational legitimacy	Leadership validated by trust
	01:19:40	Andy's visible shock	No dialogue	Humanization	Emotional leadership	Vulnerability humanizes authority
	01:20:11	Andy remains standing despite grief	Suppressed emotion	Stoic framing	Enduring leadership	Leadership persists through loss
Leadership Beyond Physical Power	01:12:28	Andy fights cautiously after mortality	Reduced physical dominance	Narrative shift	Transformational leadership	Authority independent of strength
	01:15:55	Andy issues orders despite injury	Firm tone	Continuity code	Sustained leadership	Legitimacy unaffected by vulnerability
	01:17:56	Andy steps in front of Booker	"Stay behind me"	Protective framing	Responsibility leadership	Leader prioritizes others
Collective Leadership	01:33:00	Andy studying maps/books	No dialogue	Temporal framing	Visionary leadership	Leadership oriented to future
	01:34:10	Andy prepares weapons quietly	Silence	Preparation code	Strategic foresight	Authority as readiness
	01:35:00	Andy turns toward Quynh	"Fight with me"	Inclusive gesture	Collective leadership	Leadership framed as solidarity
	01:35:58	Side-by-side positioning	Shared gaze	Equality code	Shared authority	Leadership as partnership

## Discussion

This study set out to examine how *The Old Guard 2* constructs female leadership through the character of Andromache of Scythia by applying Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation and contemporary frameworks of female leadership. The thematic patterns identified in Table 1 indicate that Andromache's leadership is not only narratively central but also ideologically progressive, offering a sustained challenge to dominant gendered conventions in action cinema.

### Normalizing Female Authority Through Representation

One of the most significant contributions of *The Old Guard 2* lies in its normalization of female authority. As demonstrated in Table 1, Andromache's leadership is repeatedly affirmed through verbal recognition, narrative positioning, and visual centrality. According to Hall (1997), meaning is produced through repetition and circulation of signs. In this film, repeated address forms such as "boss," along with the absence of overt challenges to Andromache's authority, function as representational practices that normalize female leadership rather than framing it as exceptional or provisional.

This finding contrasts with earlier action and superhero films, where female authority is often contested, temporary, or symbolically granted (Feeney, 2017; Ferdous Himika & Ahmed, 2025). By embedding leadership seamlessly into Andromache's character, *The Old Guard 2* aligns with feminist leadership scholarship that identifies legitimacy as a central barrier for women leaders (Eagly et al., 2003; Khan, 2024). The film thus participates in a broader cultural rearticulation of who is allowed to occupy positions of authority without justification or apology cinema.

## Leadership as Accountability and Ethical Commitment

Another key theme emerging from the analysis is the construction of leadership as accountability rather than dominance. Andromache's repeated willingness to assume risk, particularly in high-stakes missions, reframes leadership as responsibility for collective outcomes. Her declaration, "I always go first," encapsulates a leadership ethic grounded in accountability, a characteristic often associated with transformational leadership models.

From a representational perspective, this framing disrupts traditional action-film tropes that equate leadership with coercive control or physical superiority. Instead, *The Old Guard 2* encodes leadership as ethical commitment, a form of authority sustained through action and responsibility rather than force. This aligns with Fletcher's (2004) concept of postheroic leadership, which emphasizes relational influence and moral responsibility over command-and-control hierarchies (Fletcher, 2004; Furtado, 2023).

## Ethical Leadership and Respect for Autonomy

The ethical dimension of Andromache's leadership is most evident in her interactions with Quynh, where leadership is articulated through moral restraint and respect for individual autonomy. Rather than imposing decisions, Andromache explicitly affirms the right of others to choose their own paths. This discursive framing constructs leadership as facilitative rather than authoritarian, reinforcing Pullen and Vachhani argument that feminist leadership practices privilege ethical reflection and self-limitation (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021).

In representational terms, these scenes challenge dominant cinematic narratives in which leaders resolve conflict through unilateral decisions or violent enforcement. By encoding leadership as moral guidance rather than control, *The Old Guard 2* expands the ideological boundaries of leadership representation within the action genre, positioning ethical restraint as a form of strength rather than weakness.

## Relational and Emotional Leadership as Competence

The findings also highlight the centrality of relational care and emotional regulation in Andromache's leadership. Non-verbal cues such as attentive listening, calm facial expressions, and supportive physical gestures consistently function as signs of authority. Contrary to stereotypes that associate emotional expression with diminished leadership capacity, the film constructs emotional intelligence as a stabilizing and strategic asset.

This representation resonates strongly with leadership studies that recognize emotional labor as integral to effective leadership, particularly among women (Coronado-Maldonado & Benítez-Márquez, 2023; Eagly et al., 2003). From Hall's representational framework, these affective signs actively redefine competence by embedding care and empathy within authoritative leadership practices. As such, *The Old Guard 2* resists the masculine normativity of emotional detachment often valorized in action cinema.

## Leadership Beyond Physical Power and Invulnerability

A particularly significant representational shift occurs when Andromache loses her immortality. Despite this loss of physical invulnerability, her leadership remains intact through narrative focus, decision-making authority, and moral influence. This decoupling of leadership from physical dominance challenges a foundational trope of the action genre, which traditionally equates authority with bodily superiority.

This finding extends feminist critiques of cinematic power by demonstrating how leadership can persist through vulnerability. In line with Fletcher's (2004) notion of postheroic leadership, Andromache's authority is sustained through trust, ethical consistency, and relational commitment rather than invincibility. The film thus offers a rare depiction of a female leader whose legitimacy endures precisely because of her vulnerability, not in spite of it.

## Collective, Enduring, and Future-Oriented Leadership

The film's concluding sequences position leadership as collective and future-oriented. Andromache's continued preparation and her invitation to Quynh to fight alongside her frame leadership as an ongoing relational process rather than a singular heroic achievement. This representation contrasts with narratives in which female leaders are permitted authority only during moments of crisis before being sidelined. From a representational standpoint, this



*Constructing Female Leadership Through Andromache of Scythia's Character: A Representation Study of Old Guard 2*

future-oriented framing encodes leadership as endurance and solidarity. It aligns with feminist leadership perspectives that emphasize sustainability, collective responsibility, and shared purpose (Pullen & Vachhani, 2021). Through this lens, *The Old Guard 2* constructs female leadership not as an exception within the action genre, but as a viable and enduring model of authority.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored how *The Old Guard 2* constructs female leadership through the character of Andromache of Scythia by applying Stuart Hall's constructionist theory of representation alongside contemporary perspectives on female leadership. Through qualitative textual analysis, the research demonstrates that Andromache's leadership is not framed as exceptional, provisional, or symbolically granted, but as legitimate, normalized, and narratively sustained within the action-fantasy genre. The findings reveal that female authority is constructed through repeated verbal recognition, visual centrality, ethical decision-making, emotional regulation, and collective responsibility. Leadership is represented not as dominance or physical superiority, but as accountability, moral restraint, relational care, and trust-based legitimacy. Notably, the persistence of Andromache's authority following the loss of her immortality underscores a significant representational shift, decoupling leadership from invulnerability and rearticulating vulnerability as a source of ethical and relational strength. By situating Andromache's portrayal within broader discourses on gender and leadership, this study contributes to expanding the analytical scope of female leadership representations beyond dominant cinematic franchises. The findings suggest that *The Old Guard 2* offers a viable alternative model of leadership in action cinema, one that foregrounds collective orientation, emotional competence, and ethical responsibility. Future research may extend this analysis by examining audience reception or by comparing similar representations across transnational action films to further assess the cultural impact of such leadership portrayals.

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