

# The Bechdel Test is a low bar

**RAYA MEHNAZ**

The Bechdel Test was introduced in 1985 by Alison Bechdel in her comic strip, *Dykes to Watch Out For*. In one episode, Bechdel surreptitiously jokes, “I only go to a movie if it satisfies three basic requirements. One, it has to have at least two women in it, who two, talk to each other about, three, something besides a man.”

While the requirements for the Bechdel Test sounded easily achievable, it often wasn’t the case. The test initiated conversations about gender bias in the entertainment industry when such inclusion was absent. It made way for the films and television in 2021 that were consciously aware of such biases and actively worked on passing the test.

However, the question remains. Is the Bechdel Test enough?

There seems to be consensus regarding the Bechdel Test and its purpose in evaluating media. After all, Bechdel herself didn’t intend the test to be a one-stop evaluation for feminist media. There are also concerns regarding the context of the inclusion in media, as the test doesn’t analyse the capacity of the role women play in that media. The women could play the oft-used tropes of “damsel in distress” or “femme fatale” that have been historically constructed for the male gaze, yet still pass the test because of a vain conversation. It was true in the movies such as *Twilight* and *Fifty Shades of Grey*. But are these movies truly doing justice for female representation?

They aren’t. It’s partly because the test method is hardly foolproof, and also because it isn’t asking the right questions. It is applauding two minor female characters having a conversation about road-directions, yet not asking whether

the women have agency. For example, *Gravity* and *Highway* are two exceptional films with empowering female protagonists, but it doesn’t pass the test due to not having another named female character.

Similarly, the test disregards the possibility of women finding empowerment in a conversation about men. It effectively disregards the lived experiences of women who are intrinsically affected by patriarchy, gender dynamics of society, not to mention abuse by men. The test also disregards the endowed freedom of expression in a female character who is going after what she wants, be it a relationship with a male character.

The test also doesn’t look into the storylines that were crafted in a gendered manner as opposed to a universal one. For example, *Avengers: Age of Ultron* passes the test, yet it introduces a sterilisation storyline specifically made for the Black Widow. It is one of many instances that uses gendered obstacles in a character arc, especially considering Captain America wouldn’t be subjected to such a dehumanising storyline. In contrast, *Alien* avoids this practice by introducing a universal obstacle that affects not only Ellen Ripley. This is why the Bechdel Test cannot be the only measure of female involvement in media today. It is a thought exercise that implores the primary stage of proper female representation in media. It’s 2021 now, such primary requirements don’t do justice to the multifaceted representation discourse that has sprung up since 1985.

*Raya Mehnaz likes to live life dangerously — one House MD episode at a time. Send help atfb.com/raya.mehnaz*



## Is football banter on social media getting out of hand?

**TAMJIDUL HOQUE**

Social media, for over a decade now, has brought forth a new dimension to being football fans. Fans on social media are now engaged in all sorts of discussions and heated debates. This ultimately leads to fans poking fun and taking digs at their rival fans. But while doing all of this, should we remind ourselves that we are all here to have a good time and not to be hateful?

To outsiders, the football fan community on social media might seem like a group of people that simply likes football but to the fans it is much more than that. For them, it’s a temporary escape from real life responsibilities and pressure, a medium to meet new people that share the same passion, a place where they feel heard.

Indeed, on social media, you can share your joy and excitement with many other people even when you are watching a game alone in your room. This is why it is crucial for fans in the community to create an environment full of love and respect instead of hate and toxicity, because consciously or otherwise, it ends up having an impact in their life.

The football community in Bangladesh is made up of tight-knit groups of people mainly in Facebook groups. The problems arise when people take things too seriously, when their opinions diverge, or when someone says or shares something with the intent of inciting anger. Football fans are very passionate, and when you say something that mocks their passion, rage ensues.

Furthermore, fan emotions are sometimes exploited. People make fun of a team or a player and even use vile language solely to incite anger among rival fans. This is especially noticeable among a group we could call the “fanboys”.

Fanboys are a group of people who are obsessed with someone or something, in this case football players. For example, fanboys of player A mock player B, and fanboys of player B mock back, creating an endless cycle of two groups of fans mocking each other. While this may be some people’s way of “bantering”, the truth is that it creates a toxic environment among the fans.

While casual banter isn’t a big deal, things can get out of hand when a group of fans orchestrates a targeted attack on someone whose opinion differs from theirs. There have been many instances of personal attacks in comments, people creating separate posts to target a specific person, and even threats. Some people appear in other people’s message requests because they said something they didn’t like. Many fans stop interacting and leave football groups after witnessing or experiencing these things. Football is supposed to bring fans together, but it sometimes feels like the fans are more divided than ever.

While it’s not all doom and gloom in the football community, a little more respect amongst each other would really improve the situation a lot. After all, we all get together to celebrate the spirit of football, not just to banter each other.

*Tamjidul Hoque likes spicy food and wants to watch a new anime now that his exams are finished. Give him anime suggestions at tamjidulh@gmail.com*