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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# A Reflection of Gender Inequality: The Analysis of *Bridget Jones's Diary* through the Gender Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the 2001 film *Bridget Jones's Diary* from a gender perspective, exploring how the movie reflects gender inequality through its portrayal of body image, family roles, and career dynamics. Although the film is often categorized as a romantic comedy, it subtly critiques societal norms and gender disparities. The analysis reveals that the protagonist, Bridget, is subject to body standards shaped by mass media, which are predominantly influenced by the male gaze. The film's portrayal of Bridget's body, particularly in intimate scenes, highlights the unequal representation of men and women in terms of physical exposure and objectification. Furthermore, the family dynamic in the film exemplifies gender inequality through the division of labor, where women, despite being at the center of family life, are still relegated to secondary roles, while male authority is implicit in family decision-making. Lastly, career-related gender segregation is evident, with Bridget initially employed in a low-status position and later facing sexual harassment in her new job as a journalist. The film portrays the contrast between female and male characters, with men holding more prestigious and well-paid roles. This analysis contributes to the ongoing discussion of gender inequality in popular culture, providing a fresh perspective on a well-known film and offering insight into the subtle ways gender bias is perpetuated in everyday life.

## KEYWORDS

Gender Inequality; Gender Perspective; Body Image; Bridget Jones's Diary; Male Gaze

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

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## 1. Introduction

*Bridget Jones's Diary* is a novel written by Helen Fielding. The book was in the form of a diary which was published in London in 1996. The story narrates the life of Bridget Jones, a career woman who is still single in her thirties. The exciting story of this novel initiated Sharon Maguire to shoot this novel. The movie entitled same based on the novel and first, presented on April 4th in 2001 in London. The movie tells the life of Bridget Jones in her thirty-two years old. She is a single woman, working for a publisher. She falls in love with her boss, while her mother wants to fix her with Mark Darcy, a human right barrister who has been the neighbor of Jones. However, her boss cheats with a young slim secretary in the company. So Bridget leaves the publisher company, and then succeeds in finding a new job to become a journalist. With the help of Mark Darcy, she becomes a successful journalist in TV station. Bridget and Mark fall in love and became a couple at the end.

This film is classified as a romantic comedy, while its original novel is considered the representative works of "chick lit" literature. After 20 years, a new interpretation will be explored from the perspective of gender. By analyzing the main character's individual images, family status and careers in *Bridget Jones's Dairy*, from the gender perspective, this research aims to interpret this movie, though covered with a surface of romantic comedy, is actually a reflection of gender inequality.

## 2. Literature Review

Although the film *Bridget Jones's Diary* was released in 2001, its original novel was published in 1998. Compare with movie, the novel has been discussed more frequently. Since this film adaption is roughly similar to novel, the author will review the

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research and critics both on novel and movie. The critics and research on *Bridget Jones's Diary* are mainly divided into three perspectives.

The first perspective is to do a comparative analysis with other novels. Many researchers tend to make the comparison between *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *Pride and Prejudice*, since Helen Fielding, the writer of *Bridget Jones's Diary* is a zealot of Jane Austen, so she gives her male protagonist the same name "Darcy". Opreanu (2011) attempted to reveal the numerous levels of dialogic interaction established between *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones's Diary* through the analysis of the female protagonist. Ferriss (2006) explored the narrative and cinematic doubleness both in *Pride and Prejudice* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Yamane (2017) examines the identities of Elizabeth Bennet and Bridget Jones in terms of nationalism, feminism and the family relationship by making a comparative study of these two books. Apart from comparing Bridget with Elizabeth Bennet, Axelsson (2019) discovered the passive and active heroines through a comparative feminist study in *Jane Eyre* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

The second is from the feminist and postfeminist perspective. Although *Bridget Jones's Diary* itself does not readily submit to stringent definitions of feminist or antifeminist, instead rendering female characters that are rich in contradiction. Critics such as Zeisler (2016) saw *Bridget Jones's Diary* as problematic for its representation of a highly individualistic and interior notion of female empowerment. Cobb (2008) discovered generic intertextuality and postfeminist in *Bridget Jones's Diary*.

Some research related to *Bridget Jones's Diary* are from other perspectives. Kaur (2019) delineated the concept of beauty in the novel *Bridget Jones's Diary* through the analysis of beauty myth and the discussion of its influences. However, most of the current research related to *Bridget Jones's Diary* has been discussed based on its novel, few researches were done based on its adapted movie, and only Arifin (2019) made a comparative study of the main characters in both *Bridget Jones's Diary* film and movie.

In conclusion, as mentioned above, the previous studies on *Bridget Jones's Diary* have mainly focused on comparative analysis with other novels or from the perspective of postfeminist. Therefore, the exploration of this research to *Bridget Jones's Diary* is new in two senses. First, it takes the movie released in 2001 into account. Second, this research will attempt to analyze gender inequality reflected in this movie from the gender perspective.

### **3. Significance**

The movie *Bridget Jones's Diary* received critical acclaim since it was released in 2001. Cobb (2008) claimed that "Bridget Jones had become a postfeminist icon and her appeal surpassed media boundaries." Bross (2016) defined the movie is a romantic comedy which was embedded in the British culture and ideological context. However, as time went by, the audiences' views had changed. Some audiences made critics on "Douban", a Chinese film review platform, that they considered *Bridget Jones's Diary* a "Mary Sue" film, because no matter how awful Bridget behaves, the two handsome men would always fight for her. The movie which was released two decades ago certainly can have a new interpretation nowadays. Previous research and critics mostly focused on the romantic plots and the characteristics of the main characters.

The significance of this research is that the author will give another interpretation from the gender perspective which was a rather new perspective to reveal gender inequality which was ignored by the audience and critics reflected in the movie. From the perspective of gender, two research questions will be explored: In what aspects will gender inequality will be reflected? Which plots and images/scenes in *Bridget Jones's Diary* will account for the reflection of gender inequality?

### **4. Methodology**

This research will lay emphasis on analyzing the main characters, plots, clothing and talks in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. As a result, the text analysis will be chosen as the primary method. In order to have close observation of the movie, images analysis will be chosen as the auxiliary method to assist the research.

### **5. Arguments and Evidences**

Based on the text analysis and images analysis, there are three aspects in the movie that gender inequality was reflected, including body, family and career. The author will explain the gender inequality reflected in the movie in detail.

#### **5.1 Gender Inequality Reflected in Body**

From the perspective of gender theory, gender is a kind of performance through the expression of representation. Foucault considers that the body is constructed by power, culture, economy and hegemony. There is no individual with absolute freedom (Li, 2001). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to review these theoretical perspectives in detail. Bordo (1993) refers to that the body is defined by culture. The cultural value (including economic values, politics values and gender values) of the body's imagination is engraved on our bodies. Although both male and female's body is controlled and constructed by culture, traditional culture mainly regards male's body as the host of spirit, while female's body is nothing but the tools to cater for male's preference.

With the development of films and TV-dramas, a large amount of the rule of femininity has broadcasted through the standardized visual images. According to Simone de Beauvoir that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir,

1949). It is said that we are born as male or female, but not born with muscularity or femininity. On the contrary, we shape and express our own gender temperament through the discipline of the body.

With the influence of globalization, the mass media take the images of Anglo-Saxon Beauty as a typical beautiful woman to attract females from different classes and different countries. However, this image is so perfect which is beyond most females competence that most of them could not reach this standard. Besides, many advertisements related to make-up or cosmetology are always reminding and hinting females that they still have defects in their bodies. The mass media uses the posters or photos of beautiful movie stars to remind other ordinary women all the time and makes them believe that they are out of standard.

In *Bridget Jones's Diary*, the main female character Bridget is a 30-year-old single woman who worked in a publisher. She receives a good education, and lives in her own apartment. In spite of these above, she still cannot avoid the influence of mass media. One of her new year's resolutions is to "lose 20 pounds". She is to blame the reason why she is still single for her appearance. As a result, she considers herself not "looks gorgeous" because she is not slim.

Although the film was adapted from a first-person from a female character, this film has many scenes of Bridget's body. It was shot from the male's gaze. According to Laura Mulvey, "The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female form which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey, 1989). The close scenes of Bridget's body appeared before she had her first sex experience between her boss, Cleave. Female's body has many disciplines, Shen (2005) points out some disciplines which the culture and society tied on female's body. When a woman's body is displayed, it had better be perfect. First, her skin should be soft, elastic, hairless and smooth. Second, her figure should be just right, slim and slender. The movie reveals the disciplines of female's body that were constructed by mass media and societies. One of Bridget's best female friends tells her that she must "look gorgeous" all the time. So she takes a shower and waxes her legs, and does her hair, then puts on the sexy black dress to "look gorgeous" in the book launch in order to attract her boss, Cleave.

Shen (2005) also refers to that "In the gaze, femininity is a landscape that requires all women to participate in and be part of the landscape, that is, each woman needs to change her impossibly perfect body", that is to say, under the male's gaze, female has to try their best to make their bodies look perfect which fits the male's aesthetic beauty.

Gender inequality is revealed in this movie, while the film doesn't have any shots or scenes to show males' body. Even in the sex scenes, one of the main male characters, Cleaver (Bridget's Boss) is wearing his tops.

## 5.2 Gender Inequality Reflected in Family

According to Bao (1995), industrialization and commercialization defined the division of labor in America. The division of labor separates males and female and makes them active in two different fields. Male's labor value in the public sphere is recognized by society, while female's labor in the family is not.

The work place is regarded as the public sphere while the family is considered to be the private sphere. Since female are regarded as the protagonists of the family, they are classified into the private sphere (Shen, 2005). Although the protagonists of the family are female, the director of the family may be male. In the movie, we can see that Bridget's mother is always preparing the food for all kinds of parties, including the Barbecue cosplay party and the Christmas party. However, Bridget's father just stands right there, waiting for Bridget's mother to feed him. There is no doubt that the cuisine her mother delivered is always her father's favorite. From the surface, we can feel that Bridget's mother is the protagonist of the family, she busied herself in cooking meals, greeting guests, all the things are under her control. However, the director of the family is Bridget's father, he doesn't have to do these trivial things, her wife will cook meals which cater for her appetite, entertain the guests he invited. As a result, gender inequality has reflected on Bridget's parents.

## 5.3 Gender Inequality Reflected in Career

Gender inequality in career is reflected in gender segregation and occupational segregation in the labor market.

According to the report, The United Nations(1993) has pointed out that Workplaces are segregated by gender all over the world. That is to say, different job categories in different industries are marked by gender. It is gender differences causes segregation among various jobs in different industries.

The gender segregation of work in the UK (where Bridget lives), and in many other countries, is a commonly reported fact (Francesca & Alina, 2009). A large number of theoretical explanations have been proposed to explain it. Each tends to focus on one possible set of reasons. For instance, differences in human capital and education have been at the core of neo-classical economics approaches and their focus on gender pay differences (Jacob & Solomon, 1974). Others have explained segregation in terms of patriarchy: the notion of male power and control in various spheres of life, resulting, in the exclusion of women from the best jobs, their dependency on men since female earning were typically lower, and in general exploitation of women both in work and home (Walby, 1990).

Shen (2005) defines gender segregation in labor markets that people will consider females to be good at in some industries. For instance, for the following jobs such as architects, porters, programmers and police, most people will believe that these fields

belong to male. While nurses, housekeepers, and kindergarten teachers are considered a female dominated industry. It is also easily found that, females usually work in relatively lower social status with lower pay compared with males.

Gender segregation is clearly reflected in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. Bridget works as an unremarkable clerk in Press. Her work is dull and monotonous, what she has to do is picking up the phone and give correct information of the publisher's business. After she breaks up with her boss, she chooses to leave the publisher and find a new job, and then she becomes a journalist for a TV station. However, the director in TV station always commands Bridget "put on some more makeup, I'm thinking miniskirt, I'm thinking fireman's helmet. I want you pointing a hose, I want you sliding down the pole, the go straight to the interview." He attempts to make use of Bridget female's characteristics to attract the audience. Apparently, although Bridget changes her job, she still works in lower status and has to obey the director's requirements which is kind of a sexual harassment.

Similar things happen to Bridget's mother, another important female character in the film. Since her mother is tired of being a housewife, and taking care of Bridget's father, she finds a job in supermarket. She has to display how to use the newly invented kitchen appliance. In the supermarket, she meets a male salesman who promotes jewelry on TV. Soon, she becomes the model of this salesman. The movie conveys the fact that there inadequate jobs available for a housewife who tends to find a job. Even if they find a job, the work is still related to housekeeping. Although Bridget's mother becomes a model, she still works as an assistant for the salesman. She is a tool for the salesman to promote more jewelry and make more money.

However, the male characters in the movie, almost all of them have decent and well-paid jobs. For instance, the main male character is a human rights barrister who finally uses his privilege to save Bridget's career. The supporting male character is Bridget's boss, Clever, who runs a big publisher and flirts with Bridget while they are working.

As a result, both gender segregation and occupational segregation are reflected in this movie.

## **6. Conclusion**

From the perspective of gender, this research explored the reflection of gender inequality in *Bridget Jones's Diary*. There are three aspects of the inequality reflected.

The first aspect is reflected in the body. The beauty appreciation of a female character's body is always controlled by mass media rather than by herself. The shots and images of female characters are always from the male gaze. When it comes to sex scenes, the female character exposed more naked part of the body than the male character. The second aspect is reflected in the family. The division of labor makes the female's labor still not recognized by society. And the hostess' status in the family is subordinate to the host. The third aspect is reflected in career, gender segregation and occupational segregation in the labor market, which was revealed in the movie. The female characters were mostly engaged in some secondary jobs. For instance, Bridget is an obscure clerk in a publisher before becoming the journalist in the TV-station where she has to obey the director's command to wear sexy dress with sexual implications. Another example is that even Bridget's mother finds a job to get rid of being a housewife, the new job she found was still related to housekeeping. The male characters in this movie are mostly engaged in the decent and high-pay job, for instance, Mark is a human rights barrister, Cleaver is the boss of a publishing company, and even the director of Bridget's TV station is male.

To sum up, a new interpretation was explored by the author, that from the gender perspective, gender inequality was reflected in aspects of Body, Family and Career.

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