

Legally Blonde Male Gaze and Gender Equality

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Abstract: The male gaze and equality between men and women is a problem that society is improving but still not fully solved, and it is also a hot topic that many people are concerned about. In daily life, many women feel afraid and panic more or less because of the gaze of men, and often feel that they do not enjoy the same treatment and equal rights with men in daily life. Film is a medium of emotional expression. It will reflect many realistic problems through the way of deduction, causing the audience to think and give positive guidance. From the perspective of feminism, this paper interprets the issues of male gaze, stereotype and gender equality, as well as the reflection of these issues in the real society, from the dialogue, action and plot relationship of the characters in *Legally Blonde* and analyzes the method and process of the heroine Elle Woods' "counter-gaze" towards the male gaze. And the process of breaking stereotypes and growing up.

Keywords: male gaze, back gaze, stereotype, rights.

1. Introduction

Legally Blonde is a 2001 American romantic comedy film directed by Robert Luketic (in his feature directorial debut) based on Amanda Brown's 2001 novel. It tells the story of sorority girl Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon), who wins back her ex-boyfriend Warner Huntington III (Matthew Davis), amid skepticism, enrolling in Harvard Law School, and in the process of studying at Harvard, overcomes the stereotype of blondes, to be a successful lawyer. She also gradually reduced her dependence on her boyfriend and enjoyed improving her grades and helping other women. Break down the doubts and turn them into compliments.

Throughout the movie, there are pink elements, and the girls use things in pink. The choice of female protagonists fits the image of "pink Barbie," a symbol of traditional femininity. This creates a similar Barbie image, which also hints at the movie's theme. This is a film about women, about their empowerment and self-realization. The film is the carrier of culture. The Barbie image of Elle Woods makes people laugh and taste the reflection of Barbie culture in the heroine image, as well as the values of promoting women's self-worth and self-realization [1]. In movies, girls with blond hair and blue eyes are constantly surrounded by doubts and unfair treatment, and men often stare at them.

My research mainly explained and analyzed the two parts of the male gaze and gender equality in the movie *Legally Blonde* and their extended branches. For instance, the scene where Elle Woods is ogled by her male classmates in the lecture hall is a clear example of the male gaze. I will analyze and understand the dialogues and body movements of the characters in this film and analyze major

issues from a macro perspective so that readers can have a clearer interpretation of this film and have a macro understanding of the male gaze and the equality between men and women.

2. Literally review

Many academic papers have discussed women's rights and female images in film and television. With time, the female image has undergone a significant evolution. From being mere adjuncts to men in film expression, more women now have lead roles and more lines in movies. However, it is still inevitable that in many movies and dramas, gender inequality and stereotypes still exist.

"With the progress of society and the improvement of women's status, the image of women in movies and TV dramas has gradually changed. Female characters began to have more independent thoughts and personalities, no longer just a foil or subordinate to men. At the same time, the image of women began to show a variety of characteristics, not just a single stereotype of beauty, tenderness, kindness and so on. [2]" This is what Zitong Sun mentioned in her paper, pointing out that the awareness of equal rights between men and women in movies and TV dramas is strengthening, and the issues of women's status and gender equality are also being valued and improved. There is also more diversity in the representation of women in film and television, with both men and women not clinging to previous stereotypes. In addition, she mentioned that the issue of equal rights between men and women is easing, but it still needs the joint efforts and promotion of the whole society.

"Women are beautiful and need to be respected, but the way to do that is with eye level, without condescending, without looking up [3]." Wanting Lou, Yuchi Ren, and Fenghua Cai mentioned in their paper that Lou, Yuchi Ren, and Fenghua CAI wanted women's rights to improve. However, women were still generally treated differently in their daily lives. Moreover, film and television works come from life, and gender inequality typically appears in films and television. The author repeatedly stressed that there is no difference between men and women, and we should abandon "colored glasses" in how we look at issues. Moreover, in the eyes of many, it is not that women are not given preferential treatment but that women do not enjoy the same rights as men. At the end of the article, the author also calls on people to treat everyone as ordinary without deliberately distinguishing between men and women, encouraging more women to fight for equal rights.

3. Plot analysis

Berger once proposed that women under the male gaze will be internally divided; there is a female "observer" and an internalized male "observer" in the heart; they constantly watch themselves, pay attention to their words and deeds as men watch them, because the impression they give to men will become the standard for others to judge her success or failure in life [4]. However, Elle Woods, who was *Legally Blonde*, boldly displayed her sexy figure, strengths and shining points in the short video she submitted to Harvard, which was in sharp contrast to the ugly, serious and boring law students in the usual stereotype. Her short video was watched by several male college admissions officers, who were surprised and impressed by Elle Woods' attractive personality and excellent academic ability. One shot, a medium shot, shows the realistic faces of six admissions officers in an office, their surprise and dismay after seeing a short video of Elle Woods. This shot reflects the dominant position of men in society and life; they have absolute decision-making power over things, and women are just stared at and judged by a group of men.

After Elle Woods won the case based on her intuition, her professor called her into his office to negotiate a "deal" with the girl. The professor will give Elle Woods a summer internship, but she will trade her body and innocence, which is often the reality of the "unspoken rules" phenomenon and male gaze. Staring refers to "a method of seeing that carries with it the exercise of power or the entanglement of desire [5]"

"Hidden rule" is a kind of evil behavior rule that goes against society's mainstream values and is non-public and non-just [6]. "You are the beautiful girl." With Elle Woods' excellent academic record, gifted perception, and unique perspective on debate, the professor only cares about her beautiful skin. It also reflects the sad reality that many women are hard to rely on their own abilities to move to a better platform, and most men only care about their faces and bodies. Under the gaze of men and the dominance of the workplace, even women without academic ability can rely on their bodies to go further. And for talented men, they can rely on their own ability to move up. This is an unfair situation, but also deserves people's in-depth thinking about women's rights.

4. Conversation Analysis

"Where's the beach, honey?" When Elle Woods first arrived at Harvard Law School, her incompatible style attracted many classmates to watch and comment. She is full of positive energy, and her pink element adds color and vitality to the Harvard Law School. While staring at her, some male students also made playful mockery and sarcasm. "Hey, Brad, check out Malibu Barbie!" Several boys sat in an upstairs window, watching and mocking Elle Woods from above. "Check her out. Look at the way she walks." Check her out. Look at the way she walks. Shaofang Qiu has mentioned that staring is not looking horizontally but piercing, penetrating, prying, and binding, with some violent tendencies [7]. This gaze attached to a woman is undoubtedly a great harm to the woman herself. It also reflects the real-world stereotype of the blonde -- that she's brainless, sexy, and shallow and shouldn't be at Harvard Law School.

When Elle Woods thought she could get her boyfriend back by getting into Harvard, he said to her, "Elle, come on, you'll never get the grades to qualify for one of those spots. You're not smart enough, sweetie." It's easy to see from the dismissive attitude, In Warner Huntington III's eyes, a girl like her would never be good enough for an ex-boyfriend. And it also deeply embodies the male stereotype of blonde women under the male gaze, that Elle Woods does not belong at Harvard. After this, Elle Woods decided to concentrate on her studies, and wanted to break the prejudice of Warner Huntington III and other people who had written her off.

When Elle Woods successfully gets into Harvard Law School and meets her ex-boyfriend, she learns that her ex-boyfriend is engaged to an "awful" Vivian. While breaking down and confiding in manicurist Bonifante, Bonifante also tells the story of how her husband kicked her out of the house and took everything with him. "What's a girl to do? He's a guy who followed his pecker to greener pastures." People who hold traditional gender concepts believe that women should belong to men in family decision-making [8]. Bonifante was distressed by her husband's dominance in the family and his bullying of her, but she suffered in silence and humbly begged him to come home. Woods encouraged Bonifante to take back what was hers and drove Bonifante to her husband. "Are you ready?" "No." Bonifante did not dare to confront her husband because she had been oppressed by him for a long time and her humble family status. Elle Woods encouraged Bonifante and used her legal knowledge to begin theorizing with Bonifante's husband. As if Bonifante had finally decided to change, "I'm taking the dog, dumbass!" She lashed out at her husband and managed to get her dog back. The film is not just about the growth and change of Elle Woods, but the change of many women, like Bonifante. She walked out of the shadow of her husband's harm to her, and bravely resisted her husband's bullying, growing from a timid and cowardly woman who could only complain to a strong and brave person. In this movie, you can see a lot of women unite and help each other, they use female power to save each other and get better together, girls help girls. Also called for women in real life, facing the same pressure, brave resistance, no longer endure silently.

When the group prepared the materials for the trial, Vivian took the initiative to find Elle Woods in the dormitory, her tone was gentle, and she hesitated at the door of Elle's room. She said, "And I thought that was very classy of you." And later teased Warner with Elle Woods, "Men are helpless,

you know that." "I know. Warner doesn't even do his own laundry." The scene sees pure camaraderie between the girls, they will not because a man really hate each other, but also in response to Warner is not good, Vivian with a peace of mind to find Elle, and compared with other mocking Elle, not optimistic about her, Vivian from the bottom of her heart to appreciate Elle's quality and learning ability. From Elle's easy smile, it is not difficult to see that she has long been relieved and does not care about Warner, and you can see the kindness and pure heart of girls here. Compared with those unworthy men, eventually these girls will make progress together, treat each other sincerely and kindly, which is the foil of female strength and female quality.

"In your office, when we were discussing my career." In open court, Elle Woods brought up the office incident to the professor, which was not only a kind of defiance against the professor's improper behavior, but also a somewhat threatening tone. This is also a kind of "reverse gaze". Counter-gaze is when the observed looks back at the observer in a way that breaks the original gaze relationship [9]. Elle Woods took the professor's place, became a successful defense lawyer in court, and eventually won her defense with keen observation. This is not only the reflection of her academic ability, but also the "anti-gaze" of the professor, even without the "help" of the professor, she can also rely on herself to do better. "I need a boyfriend who's not such a complete bonehead." After Elle Woods won her defense, her ex-boyfriend came to Sue, believing that the identity and abilities of the current Elle Woods could match his. But Elle Woods rebuffed him with an inquisitive tone and a disdainful attitude, firing back with a "backstare." At the end of the film, the heroine is a representative of outstanding students with exceptional academic performance. All the achievements and honors she has achieved are actually the "counter-gaze" of the people who stared at her with stereotypes at that time.

At the commencement, Elle Woods spoke as a distinguished graduate, she said, "Remembering that first impressions are not always correct." "You must always have faith in yourself." Here, these words are not only the encouragement for the future path of graduates, but also Elle Woods said to those who had stereotyped her, did not think highly of her and questioned her, and encouraged the audience and caused the audience to think about the problem of stereotypes. In this scene, the director uses close-up to portray Elle's confident smile during her speech, as well as the heartfelt smiles and applause of her friends and family in the audience, so that the audience can feel the warmth and kindness around Elle Woods, which is in sharp contrast to her questioning and mocking voice on the first day when she came to Harvard Law School. In the voice of doubt, she used her own efforts to grow into a better person and become a role model.

In the film review, some viewers mentioned the "male contract" reflected in the film, that is, the rationalization of male coagulation. When women wear bunny dresses and unusual clothing, men think that they have signed a "contract" with women, and this "contract" is the rationalization of male gaze, because they think that the purpose of women's clothing is to show men their bodies, so that they can boldly stare at women. But women don't know about this unspoken "contract." Some viewers also mentioned the stereotype problem reflected in the film, a woman has a beautiful, sexy, lively cannot be defined as a brainless, should not use stereotype zone to divide the category of people. But this film breaks a stereotype for Goldilocks and all women, letting the audience see that sexy and lively goldilocks girls also have smart minds and hard work in learning. Women who study liberal arts aren't just boring, bespectacled or dull. The film shows the audience more possibilities for women and shows the diversity of women [10].

5. Conclusion

This film is a completely feminist film, which tells the story of a blonde girl trapped in love, who entered Harvard Law School by her own efforts, became excellent and broke away from the bondage of love, and was keen to help women around her protect their rights and interests with law and strive

to improve themselves. She "backstares" at all the men around her who previously taunted her and the professors who disrespected her and breaks the stereotype of blonde women. Many clips in the film also reflect the problems faced by many women in reality, such as the professor's disrespectful behavior towards Elle Woods in the professor's office. This film calls on all women to be brave and resist like Elle Woods when facing such problems and prove with strength that even if they do not rely on men, they will be able to fight back. Women can also move to higher platforms. We also encourage all women to become better and brave the outside world's doubts and negations ---- we can all become the heroine of our life.

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