

The Representation of Female Character in Iron Lady

Mingjun Du

*University of Colorado Denver
Auraria Campus, Denver, Colorado
oliverdu0507@gmail.com*

Abstract: Female characters in movies often carry the gender prejudice and stereotypes of the filmmaker and society at the time. With the development of feminism, the appearance of female roles has become more and more diverse. By analyzing the character biographical film "Iron Lady", the relationship between the presentation of female characters and the authenticity and artistry of the film is analyzed. The research focuses on the content beyond the female surface to critically analyze Thatcher's performance as a female character and the balance of authenticity and artistry in this film. The results show that the reasonable relationship between film authenticity and artistry should be constructed according to the film structure and storyline, and biographical films should objectively portray the positive and negative aspects of real characters. Emotions should be avoided on the gender issue of movies, and the female characters presented in the movie should be considered essentially through real social issues, so as to allow movie observers to change their attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords: Biographical film, Feminist film, Cinematic authenticity, Iron Lady

1. Introduction

Gender issues in movies are usually complicated, because the female roles in movies have been controversial in contemporary society. Although gender issues in movies have different expressions in different eras, this embodiment usually carries certain subjective ideas of directors, screenwriters, and producers. For example, some female characters in movies are sometimes used to promote the development of plots led by male characters, while some movies use women's situations and emotions as the main framework. On the one hand, the plot in the movie will be more artistic and appealing than reality. This is usually to allow the observers' emotions to follow the rhythm of the movie to think about the story of the movie, and the result will always bring some gender stereotypes. On the other hand, movies reflect the gender issues in society through a high degree of authenticity, which arouses audiences' reflections. For example, the women in the movie are the main body, which revolves around the patriarchal society and the gender oppression of women in different eras, reflecting the realistic objective world.

In the category of movies, biographical movies are typically made on the basis of authenticity. This type of film itself has historical and literary value. According to the life experience of real characters, biographical shooting techniques are used to express the life experience and social situation of the characters in the historical background at that time. It is also a record of the spiritual culture and mainstream ideology of the society at that time. With the development of western feminism, women want to get rid of certain social inequality. The presentation of female roles in

biographical movies is becoming more and more diversified, including various elements such as sex, social class, age, ability, and strength, which reflect the characteristics and personalities of women with different social identities. Although there are more and more female-themed movies, these movies are usually a single performance, or the characters in the movie are just for the audience to feel the story and emotional resonance, but the lack of deep reflection from the audience itself has led to women. The value of the biographical film itself has been discounted. At present, most movies are either expressions of feminism or cowardly images of women in need of protection. The female characters in the film should reflect the true social status and maintain the authenticity, which is more worthy of the audience's reflection.

It is valuable to study how the role of women in biographical films is combined with the performance of the real society. Critically examining the female characters in these films and the gender issues in reality will help improve the performance and quality of the female characters in the films. For example, the authenticity of biographical movies and whether the movies actually present works based on gender issues. This research and analysis will help understand the performance of female characters in movies and avoid some female stereotypes spread by movies, such as women who are usually vulnerable, need protection, or are exceptionally independent and powerful. Therefore, studying how female characters in biographical films are presented according to social phenomena and whether to ensure their authenticity can help filmmakers think about more effective ways of presenting women in films, and can also allow audiences to rationalize gender issues through films. Moreover, the research on this issue helps filmmakers to measure and structure the female characters in the film and helps the audience to have real feedback on gender issues in reality after seeing the female characters in the film.

"Iron Lady" is a movie about gender and authenticity in biographical movies that is worthy of research. First of all, in this movie, Thatcher reflects the gender prejudice and gender mainstream consciousness in politics, education and class at that time. And as Thatcher, the first British female prime minister's authenticity in this film, there are also different controversies. This film mainly revolves around Thatcher's age, ability, and different social identities to show her political background, current social situation and her family situation. It is valuable for Thatcher to study the gender in biographical films and compare the authenticity of biographical films with the society at that time.

2. Literature Review

Whether biographical movies or other types of movies, it always belongs to a recordable work of art. In the analysis of the presentation of female characters in a biographical film, on the one hand, we should explore the relationship between authenticity and the artistry of the film itself, on the other hand we should study the social issues of women and the female issues presented in the film. Some scholars contend that "the most salient feature of "women's films" was how they introduced "real women" into cinematic representations"[1]. Reasonable authenticity and artistry. Although the movie "Iron Lady" has outstanding performance in terms of gender and artistry, its authenticity has been questioned by some scholars.

Through the two aspects of the artistry and authenticity of "Iron Lady", the value of this biographical film can be evaluated. In other words, the excessive authenticity and excessive artistry of a biographical film may reduce the value of the film. Damiens "calls for "realist" depictions of women" [2] in his female film research. How to judge the authenticity of a film is easy, that is, whether it is consistent with the reality we verified. Werth stated "Yet, most agree that she was a woman who stood by her convictions, and this is shown throughout the aptly named 2011 biopic *The Iron Lady*." [3]. Chel's determination and self-confidence in disputes as a woman demonstrates the power of women. However, according to Kemp's description: "a cheesily melodramatic fabrication

even Hollywood might balk at" [4]. Because of the artistry of the story of the film itself, many Thatcher's experiences have been rewritten, which has led to the destruction of the authenticity of the film. Werth believes that the film embodies the power of women, and Kemp believes that this kind of unreasonable plot to promote Thatcher's character is unreal. In her research on this film, Leslie believes that the film "glosses over the former British prime minister's politics in favor of a glib, breakneck whirl around her career and marriage" [5]. It is not difficult to see that this film the main theme of the film is to reflect the image of Sacher as an excellent female character, and the producer neglected the authenticity of the film itself in order to highlight the outstanding performance of women. The reason for this problem lies in the positive presentation of Thatcher in the movie, instead of portraying a character through both pros and cons, which leads to the lack of authenticity of the movie.

Regarding the gender study of this movie, "Iron Lady" presents Thatcher's own female characters in a diversified manner. Petro gave a very rational suggestion: "If film studies and feminist theory teach us anything, it is the imperative of critical reflection" [6]. This is a very constructive point of view. Because biographical films with feminism are usually compared with men in social and life aspects, and they will also say some lines calling for women through their own experience, which will stimulate the observers to become emotional. Therefore, a critical analysis of "Iron Lady" allows observers to better reflect on the root cause of gender issues rather than being transiently emotional due to some gender inequality. Damiens mentioned "whether one could speak of a feminist cinema beyond "the superficial levels of women as content" [2]. This sentence also shows that you should not think about films like "Iron Lady" The superficial content, such as how Thatcher treats differently among many male parliamentarians, should explore the nature of the problem, why this situation arises, or what direction should be taken to solve this social problem in reality. Williams Think "with the development of society and feminism, the whole society including the movie directors were changing and reconstructing their recognition of female" [7]. Contemporary movies often appear in female characters becoming more and more active and independent Some female characters are stronger than male characters and dominate in this film. But this often makes the observers not feel the authenticity, and also weakens the educational significance of the film. Sometimes confronting the stereotypes of gender issues and making the audience is truly aware of the contradictions and conflicts brought about by this gender prejudice, so that they can better change their attitudes and behaviors.

"Iron Lady" has an imbalance in the combination of authenticity and artistry. On the one hand, the role of Thatcher in the movie is not evaluated in the two objective historical backgrounds, both positive and negative. In other words, Thatcher's excessive expression of feminism and her own abilities and strengths far outweighed her negative expressions. This usually makes the film observers feel unrealistic. On the other hand, only by critically analyzing the role of Thatcher in this movie can we effectively think about gender issues and the content of feminist expression. If you are emotional because of gender bias, inequality and stereotypes in the movie, you don't think about the source of these. Then the film observers may only produce a temporary change in attitude rather than a change in behavior.

3. The gender representation by Iron Lady

For the analysis of the feminist biographical film "Iron Lady", the research direction first tends to the gender issues in the film, then explores the gender issues in the film in combination with the gender issues in reality, and finally analyzes the authenticity and artistry of the film itself.

3.1. Gender issues in the movie

In the movie, Thatcher's gender issues are portrayed from her social identity and political development at the time. Mainly describes Margaret Thatcher's life in the UK, focusing on the spirit of feminism. This biographical film breaks through the inherent concepts of the past and focuses on showing the femininity of Margaret Thatcher. The most important theme of the film is to spread the spirit of feminism and to inspire the audience to give women individuals equal opportunities and give full play to their potential. In the 20th century, Thatcher was not only able to turn the tide, but also became the mainstay of the vortex of the male world. In the conservative political view of a big country, she is a miracle of female justice. His father always told her to be herself, regardless of other people's opinions. When her husband proposed to her, Thatcher emphasized that she would not be as silent as an ordinary woman, only responsible for beauty, busy with housework, and she pursued the meaning and diversity of women's lives. Thatcher's early experience in the grocery store shows the discrimination against the lower classes in society. At that time, Thatcher was ridiculed by other girls because as a woman, she was going to Oxford to study. Thatcher was not like other girls. Later, he was ridiculed by male members of the Conservative Party. In addition, during her political career, Mrs. Thatcher devoted herself to work, alienated her husband and children, and raised questions about how women balance career and family.

First of all, this film shows that political decision-making is dominated by men and there are many prejudices against female leaders. The obstacles and cynicism that Margaret Thatcher encountered on her way to becoming prime minister reflected this. In this movie, after Thatcher wins her electoral district and enters the House of Commons, only she is a woman and the others are men. Her blue dress is eye-catching. It is mentioned in the movie that men tend to think that women are dependent on their husbands, such as screaming, being overly emotional, having difficulty making rational decisions, being entangled in trivial matters such as the price of milk in the store, and having no long-term vision. When members of the Conservative Party wanted her to look like a persuasive female prime minister, they advised her to take off the hats and necklaces that highlighted her female role as wife and mother. In terms of tone, she was advised to make her voice louder and louder to change the screaming, emotional female image. It indicates that she has to give up some of her femininity, eliminating prejudice against women, and helping her win the election.

Secondly, politically rich people look down on people at the bottom of society, thinking that they have no wisdom and vision. As a young woman, Thatcher was mocked as the grocer's daughter, but she was obsessed with learning and seemed to want to change her life. When she received the acceptance letter from Oxford University, her mother was not very happy, indicating that she had little hope that Thatcher's daughter as a grocer could change her life through further studies. After get off work, she mentioned the price of butter as evidence of the stability of the British economy, but conservatives laughed at her as the daughter of a grocer and knew the details of the price of the goods. So the label of the grocer's daughter is always by her side. People believe that people from the lower classes study hard and have no way out. It is also difficult for them to make far-sighted and rational decisions in terms of political participation.

Wilson mentioned that "women's cinema often flips the notion of politics from one of overt public action to a notion of the private and personal: 'political women's filmmaking is located within the domestic'" [8]. Because usually from the family Describing women with political identities internally will give the audience different feelings. In the movie, Thatcher maintains the image of "Iron Lady" in her work. In the family, the film describes the sentimental side of Thatcher by showing the love story between Thatcher and her husband. In other words, a woman with her own ambitions also needs to find a balance between family and career. When she was elected as a member of the House of Commons, she ignored the fact that her son and daughter were chasing her in the back seat of the car

and were alienated from their family. For most women at the time, doing housework and educating children was what a qualified wife and mother should do. Although Mrs. Thatcher chose to work between family and work, she loved her husband and children very much. Especially in his later years, he could not accept the fact that his husband had passed away. He often looked back at previous videos and missed his children. As a successful prime minister, she should regret that she missed so many happy times with her husband and children.

Margaret Thatcher in the film is a vivid case of feminism criticism, reflecting the existence of feminism in the world, including the existence, power relations and social status of the entire big country. It also reveals the willingness to explore feminism in many aspects such as identity, rights, and status. As a female politician, Margaret Thatcher not only broke the traditional class boundaries, but also broke the unbreakable boundaries of traditional male absolute rule. The feminist trend of "Iron Lady" brought about a female-led reconciliation in politics, education, employment, society, and culture.

3.2. Gender issues in the real world

Thatcher in the movie reflects many gender issues in society. Through the analysis of the film "Iron Lady" combined with gender issues and feminism in the real world, it is found that women do have many contradictions and disharmony in education, family and work that need to be improved and coordinated. Walsh mentioned that "gender is not created from anything material (eg, DNA, hormones, brain cell tissue), but entirely from insubstantial social stuff such as cultural attitudes, values, and role expectations" [9]. Feminism The definition of is to promote equal rights on the basis of equality between men and women. In fact, the second half of this sentence is more meaningful. Everyone should have equal rights, but gender equality is not an easy problem to be solved. Women are beautiful, intelligent, and complex multi-layered creatures, and many men listen to them. Therefore, the definition of feminism is not to let women achieve the achievements of men, but to let women become who they want to be. If men's achievements are used as women's goals, it will become a limitation for women. Thatcher in "Iron Lady" has been working hard towards the person she wants to be, and her belief has inspired many female observers.

Hillary Clinton said in a speech in 1995 that women make up more than half of the world's population, but two-thirds of people who have no literacy education are women. Moreover, although some people think that the longer the education period for women, the better job opportunities and jobs they get, but in some countries with serious gender bias, even if they have a good education, the proportion of women's employment or labor is not very high. In addition, education plays a key role in a person's personal literacy and quality of life. Usually women are the main bearers of caring for children and the elderly. If women's education is not taken seriously, they may lack proper communication or impart wrong values when educating their children. If the education level of the wife and husband does not match in the family, this may cause men to think that women are always ignorant. In fact, it is because women's insufficient education has created a stereotype that women do not need to have such a high investment in education. In the movie Thatcher is mocked as the grocer's daughter, and other girls are mocking her for being addicted to studying. And when Thatcher saw that he was admitted to Oxford University, his mother did not feel happy for her, but believed that further studies by Thatcher would not change her life in the future. "The ranking of groups according to various criteria, with higher positions afforded more value, respect, status, and privilege than lower positions" [10]. The lower the value, the more significant the inequality experienced by women. Most of "Iron Lady" used Thatcher's inequality at work to portray gender issues. "When she arrived in the Commons, it was to encounter an atmosphere of comfortable clubby male exclusiveness, where women were an oddity and emphatically not One of Us" [11]. This problem still exists in contemporary society, there is usually hidden discrimination among women at work. Although gender

restrictions are not mentioned in the recruitment requirements, companies and institutions in certain industries give women few job opportunities and choices. When working female workers face pregnancy and cannot work, they worry that their position will be replaced by others when they take maternity leave. Because every position in the work cannot be done without people, but when the maternity leave ends, those who often work on their behalf get their own positions. These managers or leaders believe that women cannot go all out at work, or they may give more to their families. Thatcher used his own experience to completely dismiss these gender prejudices that it is difficult for women to do well at work. She hates the inequality between men and women. She uses her ability to prove that women also have great power and wisdom and should have the right to be a leader. Although the abilities of women are recognized, it can be seen from the movies that many political workers are still men. This is because "with debate tending to focus on ways to increase women's numbers rather than on thorough diagnosis of the nature of the problem of gender inequality in politics" [12].

As a biographical film, "Iron Lady" plays a positive role in including feminist values and feedback from the real society. However, there is an imbalance between the artistic expression and authenticity of some plots in the film, which gives the film its own value. Discounted. "It is increasingly accepted that a film's sociopolitical implications may need to be amplified and driven home by additional mechanisms if it is to bring about some kind of change in the real world" [13]. In biographical movies, this mechanism should be a balance between authenticity and other factors-the film expresses values and social issues while accompanied by film art.

3.3. The authenticity and artistry of the film

For the analysis of the authenticity and artistry of the movie "Iron Lady", it can be analyzed by why the filmmakers chose these stories and scenes in the movie. First of all, these plots chosen by the film can reflect the challenges that Thatcher faces as a woman and her tough, confident, decisive and intelligent qualities. Every plot promotes the progress of Thatcher's characters. For example, the answer of Thatcher in the movie: "Every day in my life is like war. Men underestimate me, and they will continue to underestimate me, and they will regret it." And in the all-male Senate In the movie, Mrs. Thatcher spoke bravely regardless of male prejudice. It is also depicted in the movie that when Margaret Thatcher entered the parliament, other male members of the parliament, because she was a woman, no one paid attention to what Margaret Thatcher said, but mocked her tone. When Britain encountered the Falkland Islands war, Thatcher was not afraid to send troops to fight. This shows her positive image of "Iron Lady", and at the same time, the condolence letter she wrote to the families of dead and wounded soldiers also shows that she has the advantage of being a female leader. Ignite the light of hope for women through these selected scenarios-find yourself and do what you want to do most, no matter how many people point fingers at you or are ridiculed by many people.

These plots do serve the main point of the story, but when looking at the movie critically, many plots do not conform to the authenticity or reach the artistic quality. On the one hand, the family story is controversial and does not reflect the true side of Thatcher well. First of all, Thatcher's family gave the movie a very negative evaluation. They were mainly dissatisfied with the image of the old Thatcher in the movie. They believed that the dementia and pitiful appearance of the old Thatcher was vilifying Thatcher. What is even more dissatisfactory is that this perspective of the coexistence of Prime Minister Thatcher and Woman Thatcher is not a very good structure. In fact, it is quite ironic to show the observers that the screenwriter and director are still subconsciously biased against the female prime minister. Because the most glorious time in her life must be her time as British Prime Minister. This film chooses to condense this large amount of time, but instead uses her old age as the theme. The prime minister's time switch and interspersed narrative is tantamount to self-inflicted humiliation.

On the other hand, in his analysis of the movie "Iron Lady", Kemp believes that "some rewriting of history verges on the farcical. When Airey Neave is blown up by an IRA car bomb, Thatcher, who's just been chatting to him, is rocked by the blast a mere hundred yards away and rushes weeping to the wrecked car" [4]. This kind of plot obviously makes the observers think it is nonsensical and unreal, which also leads the movie observers to think the film sets up an unreasonable story in order to highlight the image of Thatcher's female. In addition, Thatcher won the Falklands War very well in the movie, but the story only highlights the positive side of Thatcher in this war. However, "she had actually turned down a compromise, which would probably have satisfied the Argentine junta, and had weakened the British presence in the South Atlantic. Consequently, she bore some responsibility for the war" (2003). In Thatcher's politics Throughout his career, the film has always portrayed Thatcher's positive image of feminism and failed to analyze this task appreciably. This is a failure of the biographical film. Therefore, the authenticity of the movie "Iron Lady" is not recognized by many observers, and there is also controversy about the portrayal of Thatcher's old age. The time structure of the film and the combination of the woman Thatcher and Prime Minister Thatcher did not reflect the objective presentation that should be shown in a biography, which led to the questioning of the authenticity and artistry of the film itself.

4. Conclusion

"Iron Lady" is a female biographical film, which has obvious performance on gender issues, but at the same time the authenticity of the film has also been questioned. How to measure the artistry and authenticity of biographical films such as "Iron Lady" should be considered more comprehensively, because the audience's observation perspectives and thinking directions are diversified. Filmmakers can often balance the relationship between the two through the choice of film structure and story. At least it will not make the audience think this movie is boring or fake. On the one hand, when filmmakers are conceiving a biographical film, they should portray characters from two perspectives, both positive and negative. Because the film observers are not a fool, too many positive comments or too many negative comments will lose the authenticity of the film. The movie "Iron Lady" did not do a good job on this point. Most of the stories in this film are about promoting Thatcher's excellent qualities and feminist themes. It cannot objectively let observers understand the true side of Thatcher as a woman in her political career. Although this film attempts to interpret the real Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady", after watching this movie, it is still uncertain to what extent the audience saw Margaret Thatcher and the real Margaret Thatcher. Thatcher in the coincident movie is the director portraying Thatcher as Meryl Streep, not the real Thatcher. Obviously, authenticity is also an artistry. In this movie, Avery walked with Mrs Thatcher shortly after leaving the car and was killed in the car. This kind of plot will only make people feel naive and ridiculous, no one will think that this kind of plot is real and artistic. This kind of plot setting to strengthen Thatcher's character at the expense of one's own companions is very naive. The artistry can be arranged from three aspects: the choice of the story, the change of the rhythm and the structure of the movie story. However, the choice of the film's story and the changing rhythm portray a feminist Thatcher. This kind of feminism does not really make observers believe that women should enjoy equal rights. Because the filmmakers did not arrange appropriate plots to allow observers to think about gender issues outside the framework of women.

For the analysis of gender issues in the movie "Iron Lady", the emotionalization of certain scenes in the movie should be avoided. Observers should not only see Thatcher is such a brave, independent, and powerful person, so that they will be questioned because of gender issues, leading some observers to hate society and men. This short-lived emotional impulse situation will over time. Observers will gradually dilute the impression of the movie and continue to live in the current environment, so the movie does not change their attitude and behavior. However, when observers observe and analyze

the nature of gender issues in movies, they will think about gender issues better. For example, feminism hopes to realize equal rights on the basis of gender equality. This shows that society's standards are more based on ability than gender. This guides observers to essentially think about the social problem of the female role response-why the Thatcher in the movie is ridiculed by male political competitors and even colleagues because he is a female. In other words, what kind of prejudice and prejudice led to this situation. If observers want to change this situation after watching the movie, what attitude should they change after watching the movie? When they talk about this topic or encounter gender inequality, this change in attitude will affect their communication direction and behavior changes, which means that they tend to solve problems and discuss some meaningful points, rather than emotionally criticize These things have caused worsening unfairness or gender contradictions. Observers often change their attitudes and behaviors after watching a movie, and only then will they explore this issue more rationally and put forward constructive opinions instead of complaining.

References

- [1] Cengiz, E. P. (2020). *Cinema Has Split the Girl's Soul Into Pieces: Scrutinizing Representations of Women in Films From Turkey*. *International journal of communication* [Online], 5482+. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A644651643/AONE?u=auraria_main&sid=summon&xid=e140f716
- [2] Damiens, A. (2020). *Film Festivals of the 1970s and the Subject of Feminist Film Studies: Collaborations and Regimes of Knowledge Production*. *Journal of Film and Video*.
- [3] Werth, A. (2021, Spring). *The Iron Lady*. *The Objective Standard*, 16(1), 102+. https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A654225757/AONE?u=auraria_main&sid=summon&xid=95da4ce0
- [4] Kemp, Philip. (2012). *Review of The Iron Lady*. *Sight and Sound*. <http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/review/6744>.
- [5] Leslie Felperin. (2011). *Review of The Iron Lady*. *Penske Business Media, LLC publishing*. link.gale.com/apps/doc/A274699413/STND?u=auraria_main&sid=summon&xid=9389d1b4.
- [6] Petro, P. (2004). *Reflections on Feminist Film Studies, Early and Late*. *Signs: Journal Of Women In Culture And Society*, 30(1), 1272-000. <https://doi.org/10.1086/421881>
- [7] Williams, L. (1992). *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Carol J. Clover. *Film Quarterly*, 46(2), 58-60. <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.1992.46.2.04a00140>
- [8] Wilson, K., & Garavelli, C. (2021). *Gender, Sexuality, Film, and Media in Latin America: Challenging Representation and Structures*. *Latin American Perspectives*, 48(2), 4-16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582x20988718>
- [9] Walsh, Anthony. (2013). *Science Wars: Politics, Gender and Race*. Routledge Publishing.
- [10] Allen, Brenda J. (2011). *Difference Matter: Communicating Social Identity*. Long Grove, IL. Waveland Press.
- [11] Shephard, G. (2013). *The Real Iron Lady*. Biteback Publishing.
- [12] Lombardo, E. (2008). *Gender Inequality in Politics*. *International Feminist Journal Of Politics*, 10(1), 78-96..
- [13] ORTNER, S. (2017). *Social impact without social justice: Film and politics in the neoliberal landscape*. *American Ethnologist*, 44(3), 528-539. <https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12527>