# Beyond Gender and Media: The Study of the Impact of Movie Industries on People's Ideas about Gender —Take Fifty Shades of Gray as an Example

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*Abstract:* Gender equality has been discussed widely in society these days. The film industry, as one of the cultural industries, reflects the ideology and deeper values in people's minds. This paper aims to discover the reflection of gender inequalities in film industries in today's society by using the case of one Hollywood film and trying to discover its relationship with gender identities, sexuality and people's views towards the body and tries to explain and demonstrate the reasons by using key perspective and theories in media studies. In this paper, the author uses the official data from the Office of National Statistics in the UK to clarify the situation in society and uses the key theories in media studies and cultural studies to analyze the scenes in the film and discuss their possible impact on its audiences. Some other cases in the digital industry like the "body filter" of Alipay will also be studied to provide more evidence in studying the relationship between gender and media. The author also mentions the possible suggestions and the limitation of this research.

*Keywords:* Gender, media, film industry, cultural studies

## 1. Introduction

Modern societies put a lot of attention to gender equality. Compared with past decades, people paid much attention to equal rights among genders. Feminists and Queer theorists have been working on the field day after night. Media institutions have been trying to convey to their audiences that all genders should be respected. Politicians have been highlighting the meaning of gender equality and describing the future in their minds to their voters and the public. It seems that the gender issue has been discussed widely among people. However, various pieces of evidence could still be noticed to show that there are still huge gaps between males and females.

The income between genders is unequal, which is the basic factor of gender equality and it will lead to the power imbalance in many aspects of social life. The male senior managers could earn far more money than their young female staff or subordinates. The "power" in the societies that male "elites" process is more than their female assistant have. The imbalance in the economy between both sides of couples in a relationship may lead to conflicts because both sides want to control the other person. This situation may also exert a negative impact on women's rights and well-being.

Statistics from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) in the UK show that a positive gender gap still exists in most of the jobs in England, Scotland and Wales [1]. In general, men earn more money

in most jobs than women, especially those related to the economy, management and running a company or a governmental organization. Women earn £14.64 per hour in the "administrative occupations: Office managers and supervisors" while men earn £15.86 per hour in the same position. It shows that women earn 7.7% less than men [1].

While females could minimize the gap or even make more money in the areas like caring services which was traditionally considered to be "women's job" compared with their male counterparts. Women earn £10.54 per hour, while men earn £10.85 per hour as workers for "caring personal services". The gender gap between women and men is only 2.9% [1].

The statistics are evidence that could clarify that inequality among genders still exists and needs to be solved in the future. The fact that the income gap between both sides in the heterosexual framework was caused both historically and temporarily. The coming of the age of mass media strengthened the idea and value that men should earn more to become the "breadwinner". According to Molina-Guzmán, Hollywood, as a film and cultural institution, reflected American values [2]. The writer also uses the research result of The Comprehensive Annenberg Report on Diversity in Entertainment (CARD) to clarify that the representation of women has become much more than ever before. Hollywood is "still functions as a straight, white boy's club" [2]. If people expand the assumption to the whole film industry, it is still the same. Women in the film are represented as passive and always need help from male partners or supervisors. The cultural industries, especially film production had shaped people's view of the world. The negative representation of females might lead to a relatively wide range of "misogyny". Sarah and Kate defined the term as, "Popular misogyny is, at its core, a basic anti-female violent expression that circulates to wide audiences on popular media platforms. [3]" Most of the males with less power are more likely to consider the society as unfair, which is not good for social stability.

Due to the difficulties in collecting quantitative data and analyzing them, this research chooses discourse analysis of the chosen film as a basic research method.

This research tends to understand what the filmmakers, or all the media workers and their supervisors in the creative industries could do to raise awareness of the fact that all genders are not equal enough and what they can do to develop and train themselves as qualified and responsible professionals. The research also aims at telling the public what they could do to understand and construct their own gender identity and help to promote gender equality.

## 2.    The Brief Summary of the Film Fifty Shades of Gray

The 2015 film Fifty Shades of Gray was based on the 2011 novel written by Erika Leonard James. The film tells a story of a female graduate who met a bossy boss and changed her life. At first, Anastasia "Ana" Steele, who is a 21-year-old Student majoring in English literature, helped her flatmate Kate to interview Christian Grey because Kate is ill and can not participate in the interview. Ana found this man both attractive and threatening. Ana did not expect to meet Christian after the interview but Christian offered her a photo session.

When Ana told Christian that she had not even been in a sexual relationship with anyone else before, he was surprised that she was still a virgin. Then Christian had sex with Ana for the first time. On the next day, after letting Ana meet Gray's adoptive mother, Christian went back to his office and prepared the contract for Ana. The man gave Ana plenty of presents which Ana liked, such as a classic novel and a new laptop. Ana continued to visit him after she moved to Seattle with her roommate Kate. When she was having dinner with him at Christian's parents' home, Ana mentioned that she has to leave to see her mother. Later when Ana said she wants more than the relationship he gave her, Christian feels frustrated and angry. During the time when Ana came back to see her mother, Christian came to visit her again and he took her for a flight using a personal jet. After they came back to Christian's city and company and the man finished his work, they continued their life as a couple

between them. Finally, Ana felt disgusting and upset and break up with Christian. The movie ends in the lift. They call the name of each other [4].

## 3. Impact on Audience's Gender Identity

Most people in the contemporary world agreed that all genders and their characters are equal. Both Masculinity and femininity or even non-binary features should be respected. Many scenes of sexual activity between heterosexual partners could be seen in this movie.

In this film, Ana could have been given more time to spend with her families and flatmates. But Christian, her supervisor with power has signed an agreement with her, requiring her to stay with him and do whatever he like with him.

Rajasakran et al. have analyzed the case of Malaysia. Rajasakran et al. pointed out that this Southeast Asian country is still a patriarchal society although women have been given lots of rights, for example, maternity leave. Problems still exist that their male partner is given less time to take care of them and the people they love. A man in a "male ego-centric nation" are more privileged and powerful but sometimes they might have more prejudice towards women. They show their power by controlling and gazing. This process also led to biased gender identity [5].

The author also quotes the word of Quinn, claiming that the sexual gaze from the male is, essentially, a kind of "girl watching" [5]. That is, the gender identity of females has been degraded and objectified under the system. Girls, in the patriarchal society and for those people who believe that women are not advantaged, and man is superior to them and should always lead them, is considered to be the group who should be dominated and disciplined. Showing one's body is actually showing the "I" instead of "me" [6].

According to Mead, "me" is the personal features that were given by others, with the preconceived judgements from other people and social expectations. On the contrary, "I" is the concept of self-recognition. Christian was considered to be a successful businessman full of energy at work and strict in his personal life. When the movie begins, he dressed as a professional. He wears white shirt in the film as a high-level manager in the company. At the beginning of the film (2' 03"), a shot from the back was given to him when he was putting his shirts on. Goffman has put forwarded the idea of "Dramaturgy" [7]. He claimed that the whole society is just like a theatre and the "actor" and "actress". A "front stage" is a metaphor for the presentation towards the public which the general people expect, while a "backstage" indicates one's personal life and his or her values and attitudes towards the world and people close to him or her [7].

The author has discussed a lot of gender equality and the value of women these days. But the fact is gender equality is still a problem in today's world. In fact, in most countries in the world, especially those masculine societies (like the United States, China and the United Kingdom) defined by Hofstede, the male is considered to be the dominant sex while their female counterpart is believed to be submissive [8]. In the film, Ana is performed as an innocent girl who never had sex and needs someone to "guide" her and helped her to "find a situation". Christian will not help her if she refuses to do what she has been asked [4].

The feeling that Christian had for Ana is more likely to be "lust" instead of "love". This so-called "love" is filled with manipulation and exploitation. Although Christian has informed Anna that what he wants might not be what Ana expected and it seems that Ana enjoys this relationship, the power Christian and Ana had been not equal. In fact, masculine societies and those societies put much on hegemony and power.

## 4.     Influence on Audiences' Ideas Towards Sexuality

According to the investigation of Scott McKinnon, Hollywood, is one of the most powerful cooperations in the film industry. People have a biased view towards gender and sexuality, for the "non-heterosexual lives are almost absent from these films" and "heterosexuality has been a defending element in Hollywood's representation of disaster-impacted spaces" [9]. The author would like to use the term "heterosexual-normatively" to explain the situation why male-to-female relationship, like the "love" between Christian and Ana in the movie, is considered to be the "nature" of the world.

The movie is filled with scenes of male-to-female sexual activities. At first, when Christian met Ana, he tried to flirt with her through eye contact or by other body language. Then he tried to persuade her to do whatever he wants for him. Ana is a young graduate and Christian is a successful businessman. He could either satisfy all she needs or destroy her life with his power and network. Hedda Hakvag has challenged the traditional feminist idea of "Only yes means yes", and "No means no" and put forward the idea of "grey rape" [10]. Hakvag also mentioned Stepp's definition of "gray rape" and criticized it as "harmful to anti-rape activism and clearly problematic". In the film, Ana seems to agree with the contract between her and Christian, she looks satisfied with the requirement of her boyfriend. But the audience could also notice that she has bitten her lip and in fact, she has a bite 15 times. Those things show that she was actuarially forced to do so. Hakvag also pointed out that the popularity of sexual enforcement has challenged the "anti-rape activism" based on consent in male-to-female romantic relationships [10]. In the movie, Ana was threatened by the power and economic advantage that Christian had. It is clear that Ana was not happy with this kind of sexual relationship at first but she has to follow what her boss had said because of the force of power. Her sexuality is extremely different, at least at the beginning of the movie, with it is of Christian's. However, the audiences, especially those young girls might consider it a "normal" way to release their desire. In summary, the public should realize that this behavior should be respected but not everyone should accept and enjoy that. The filmmakers also need to recognize this and take more ethnic and generations into consideration.

## 5.     Shaped the Biased Idea of a "Beautiful Body"

Body shaming, especially towards women, have been existing in masculine societies for a long time. People always judge female bodies by their shape (whether they are slim or fat), their age (young or old), or whether they could satisfy the need of their male counterparts (whether they are sexy) and so on. Many "standards" appeared and people have already been controlled by the systems that can be defined as "beauty". Altman Yuzhu Peng has mentioned that Alipay, a Chinese payment application, has added "beauty filters" to its list of functions. Women do not have to worry about their appearance when they want to buy something by turning on the camera of their devices. Yuzhu also mentioned the concept of "techno-feminist" to show why "beauty filters" are popular [11]. The reason why women want to use this "beauty filter" is they want to release their anxiety about their own appearance. But the fact is that they feel more worried about their look of themselves after using it. The new function is actually a new "gaze" toward the female body. It is the same when people think and analyzes back again to the movie. Although mobile applications and movies are different forms of media, they share common problems when dealing with the issue of the human body. The example of Alipay's body filter was born under the phenomenon of anxiety and pressure on the body. The transcript (original story) of the movie was written by one of the middle-aged women and popular among people who has the same feeling as her. In the film, the main male character was described as a successful handsome businessman, with "abdominal muscles" and fewer nude scenes were shown.

His girlfriend is slim and seems to satisfy all the needs of males. The shot focused on the parts which highlighted the femininity of her body. The representation is the discourse of male power.

By contrast, the patriarchal ideology towards the female body also shaped people's views towards a male body.

In fact, not only does photography contribute to more gaze on females, film, as another form of modern art, but has also represented and influenced more on the whole society. In the movie Fifty Shades of Gray, besides showing Ana's innocent and perfect body to the audience, more scenes have been given to Christian's strong, young and energetic body which showed typical male characteristics and masculinity. In one frame (1'23"), a close-up, followed by an extreme close-up was given to Christian. He has a lined face. Fewer smiles or facial expressions could be noticed on his face. He also shaved but kept some of the beard and mustache. These are stereotypical male appearances, especially those who have the power to manipulate a group of people. A close-up shot is one that covers most of the screen [12]. It focuses on the detail of the face of the actor or the actress. In the "romantic film", it is used to create a sense of closeness and intimacy. But this film seems to misunderstand this kind of human emotion. The expression on his face shows that he wants to dominate the lives of others.

Another frame (1'21") is a medium shot that shows the upper half of the body of the 28-year-old man. He took off his clothes in a "gentle and handsome" (at least the target of the audience thinks so). this may lead to some misunderstandings about beauty [4].

A medium shot "captures the subject in more detail" [12]. By using this shot, the director shows the character "from waist up" and some of the backgrounds could be seen. The filmmaker tries to focus on the detail of the man's body and its background, a dark room with less light, the phenomenon is not a warm and sweet one that Ana always looking forward. In fact, at the same time, this is the first-time female graduates to do such things as that. Christian did not ask her for direct consent. These slots pay attention to the details of the body of the leading actor and actress, especially those part that is essential to show their sexual characteristics.

## 6. Conclusions

The product of the cultural industry, creative industries and film production is the reflection of the ideology, values and norms. The film has an impact on people's views towards gender identity, sexuality and their definition of what is an excellent human body. It is the filmmaker's responsibility not to create a movie that is misleading. Policymakers could also set the system to regulate the industry. The market is also the key to deciding whether a film is successful or not so the public could restrict the production end by making reliable comments.

The paper is based on the case of the Hollywood movie Fifty Shades of Gray filmed by Universal Pictures and some theories in cultural studies to analyse the film industry as a representative of media creative industries. It has implicit or explicit influences on the values and behavior of the general public. However, the discourse (the film Fifty shades of Gray) is just the first episode of "The fifty shades series" (the second released in 2017 "Fifty Shades Darker" and the third released in 2018 "Fifty Shades Freed"). In the second and third episodes, followed by the breakup and the leaving of Ana, Christian began to rethink the relationship with Ana. At the same time, Ana began to understand the complexity of a romantic relationship and the working partner, and of course, how those relationships interact with each other. If the two sequels can be considered as a whole with the first one and being taken into consideration as an object of the research. More interesting theories, views and ideas could be put forward.

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