

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE MOVIE LEGALLY BLONDE (2001)

**Marilyn Fiona Sinurat**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

**Asih Prihandini**

Universitas Komputer Indonesia, Bandung, Indonesia

### ABSTRACT

The research aims to analyze gender inequality in the movie *Legally Blonde* using gender theory by Mansour Fakih (2005) which includes marginalization, subordination, stereotype, violence, and workload. This research applied descriptive qualitative method. According to Mukhtar (2013: 10) qualitative descriptive research as a method used by researchers to discover knowledge or theories of research at a specific time. The result showed from this research that three types of gender inequality found in this research. The types are subordination, stereotype, and violence. The result also showed the effect of gender inequality experienced by Elle Wood as the main character is a change by herself for acceptable and getting emotional and psychological impact because of the sexual harassment that she got.

**Keywords:** Gender Inequality, Movie, Legally Blonde

### INTRODUCTION

Gender is known as the concept of encompasses the socially constructed roles, behaviors, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate between men and women. Gender is a complex construct that is shaped by organization, historical, and cultural factors. Gender roles set social expectations in terms of how individuals should behave, express themselves, and interact with others based on their perceived gender identity.

Gender study is fascinating; moreover, stereotypes about gender influence many people, including kids, to view themselves (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Although gender stereotype is commonplace in society that not everyone in that society is aware of what they mean. The society shows us that "boy" and "girls" as gender roles. Gender differences cause various inequalities, both for men and especially against women (Fakih, 1997). Gender inequality being favoring just one gender, can be both male and female. A system and structure known as gender inequality makes it possible for both men and women experience from it. Gender inequality occurs when women and men differ from each other.

One way that gender inequality is perpetuated is through media representation, including in movies. The film "*Legally Blonde*" is a popular comedy that follows the story of Elle Woods, a blonde sorority girl who decides to attend Harvard Law School to meet her Ex-boyfriend. Elle Woods (Witherspoon), a stunning Miss Hawaiian Tropic, sorority president, and calendar girl, is well-liked on her sun-kissed Los Angeles college campus. Warner

Huntington III (Matthew Davis), a wealthy East Coast blue blood, is also her ideal boyfriend. But Warner dumps Elle before leaving for Harvard University's graduate law program, believing that his snobby friends and family will never embrace the narrow-minded Elle. Elle enrolls in the same intimidating institution, determined to win her man back, and soon finds herself the target of mockery and derision, particularly from Warner's former prep school flame (Selma Blair). Elle is no fool, and she will soon be teaching confidence, and winning in court. While the movie is entertaining, it also raises questions about gender inequality and the representation of women in the legal profession.

The previous studies related to gender inequality have been discussed in several kinds of research. one of the research is from (Hasna & Yuliani, 2022) that discussed about Gender Inequality Analysis Of The Main Female Character In Niki Caro's *Mulan* Movie: A Feminism Study. According to the result, the research was found gender inequality which discriminates against women and limits them from doing important tasks. Another research (Juhana, Qalbi, & Arfani, 2021) that discusses Gender Inequality in The Novel "Death of an ExMinister" by Nawal El Saadawi. According to the result, there was four forms gender inequality that was found: marginalization, subordination, stereotyping, and violence. The research (Mardiyani & Tawami, 2022) that focus Gender Inequality and Feminism in Arundhati Roy's *The God Of Small Things*. The result show three are gender inequality portrayed in the novel: subordination as the part of liberal feminism, marginalization as the part of socialist feminism and violence as the part of radical feminism. Another research (Maryam, Astuty, & Pradana, 2022) that discusses about gender inequality on black women characters in hidden figures film. According to the result, that there was found two types of gender inequality: marginalization and subordination. And the last research (Lestari & Nugroho, 2022) that discusses about Gender Inequality in Tri Utami's Novel Entitled *Dunia Padmini*. The result show was found the issue of gender equality which are the roles and rights of women in social life based on socio-feminism theory.

From the previous research above this research from the earlier studies the researcher discovers similarity between the research that will be studied and the journals that were already reviewed, specifically that they both analyze gender inequality. Gender inequality impacts women because of the way they are treated by society, denied possibilities to reach their full potential, and forced to live with the stigma that has been placed on them. In this research it will be analyzed the portrayal of gender inequality in "Legally Blonde 2001" and the impact on female character. This research analyzed the characters, plot, and themes of the movie to understand how gender inequality occurs on women. Through this analysis intend to contribute to the ongoing conversation about gender equality and representation in media.

This research focuses on analyzed the portrayal of gender inequality in the film, and their impact that experienced by the main character Elle Woods.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender inequality impacts one of the genders because of the difference treated by society. Gender inequality has been a topic of discussion for decades, and it continues to be relevant today. Gender division behavior is created by society to differentiate between men and women based on what they think important. The victims of this gender inequality are mostly experienced by women. Gender inequality is started in the home and is a direct result of the patriarchal culture, which then exists in society. Women are therefore usually the ones who suffer from gender inequality. Gender inequality shows up in many forms and affects women often. Gender inequality is system and structure that places women and men as unequal in social system. According to Fakhri (2005) there are five types of gender inequality namely, marginalization, subordination, stereotype, violence, and double burden. The factors that cause gender inequality are: (1) the existence of men's organizations that do not allow women to develop optimally, (2) men as the main breadwinner in the family, (3) culture that always takes up men have taken root in society, (4) discriminatory legal norms and political policies, (5) women are very prone to rape or sexual harassment and if this happens it will damage the image of family and society (Fakhri, 2005).

Gender inequality also occurs in movie as the social issues. However, there is a need for further research on the portrayal of gender inequality in law school and professional that mostly dominant by men and the impact on women and their opportunities. These aspects of gender inequality are relevant to the portrayal of gender inequality in the movie "Legally Blonde 2001". By analyzed the context of the film, this research aims to provide analysis of the portrayal of gender inequality in law school and professional and the implications of women and their opportunities in law.

### METHODOLOGY

Descriptive qualitative method is used to analyze the portrayal of gender inequality in the movie. Descriptive qualitative method is used in this research. Lexy J. Moleong (2011), states that qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observed behavior. By employing this method, the researcher analyzed gender inequality through narrative, character behavior and dialogue. While collecting data, this research used some steps: 1) Watching the movie, 2) Understand the movie's plot and conflict, 3) Point out the part of the dialogue where the movie represents gender inequality, 4) Analyzed the dialogue to the types of gender inequality as well as its contributing factors and 5) Create a conclusion.

### DISCUSSION

The result showed from this research that three types of gender inequality found in the movie Legally Blonde (2001)

#### 1. Subordination

Subordination is the idea that one sex plays a role that is inferior to another. Gender stereotypes lead to women being subjugated to men who were once superior to them. For example, women often receive easy and simple tasks because they are considered as less capable and superior to men. There is also the presumption that women should be assigned to unimportant roles because they are emotional and illogical, making them incapable of taking on leadership roles. It is found in this movie:



**Figure 1: Scene 57:59 seconds**

*Professor Callahan: Vivian, get me some plum sauce.*

At 57:59 seconds, Professor Callahan asked Vivian to get him plum sauce when they are talking about law cases.



Figure 2: Scene 01:06:03 seconds



Figure 3: Scene 01:06:34 seconds

*Vivian: Did you ever notice how Callahan never asks Warner to bring him his coffee? He's asked me at least ten times.*

*Elle: Men are helpless. You know that.*

In the scene, Vivian, the supporting character who also accepted Professor Callahan's internship offer from Elle, is tasked with doing dull, mindless work that has nothing to do with law. Pursuing personal tasks to appease the monk. It appears that their assistance and nurturing were the sole reasons they were given the internship.

This is an example of gender subordination, where women are assigned tasks that are considered less important, or menial compared to their male counterparts. Vivian is treated unequally by Professor Callahan, who always commands her to bring his coffee, while none of the other students except her were being asked to do the same work. This portrayal of gender subordination in the movie highlights the issue of gender inequality in the workplace and the challenges faced by women in male-dominated professional environments.

## 2. Stereotype

Kite, Deaux & Haines (2008) stated gender stereotypes affect the way women and men think and know how they behave and this behavior they know since childhood. A stereotype is an inaccurately perceived picture or description of an individual or group. One of the biases that arises from the idea of gender, that affects one sex which is women, is the negative labeling of women, which results in inequality that is harmful to women. It is found in this movie:



Figure 4: Scene 41:59 Seconds



Figure 5: Scene 42:27

*Elle: I know what you mean. I can't imagine doing all this and Callahan's internship next year. That's gonna be so much.*

*Warner: Elle, come on, you'll never get the grades to qualify for one of those spots. You're not smart enough, sweetie.*

In those scenes, there is Elle, representation of a "girly" woman with interests and appearance typical of a woman. Elle's looks give the impression that she is not a serious person and lacks the intelligence needed for Professor Callahan's internship.

This is an example of gender stereotype, where women are expected to conform to certain gender norms and roles. The portrayal of Elle as a "girly" woman highlights the issue of gender stereotypes and the challenges faced by women. Women who are interested in fashion, makeup, and other feminine pursuits show the misconception that feminine-looking women are only interested in their beauty and are incapable of being serious and competent in educational fields.

### 3. Violence

According to Begum (2014) has stated violation is the most direct expression of the imbalanced power between men and women. Violence committed because the community views one sex as having a stronger or weaker understanding than another is referred to as gender-based violence. Acts of violence eventually follow the distinction. Disparities in treatment based on gender lead to violence against women in many forms. It is found in this movie:



Figure 6: Scene 01:14:24 seconds



Figure 7: Scene 01:15:55 Seconds

*Professor Callahan: Have you thought about where you might be a summer associate?*

*Elle: Not really. I know it's very competitive.*

*Professor Callahan: You know what competitions really about? It's about ferocity, carnage. Balancing human intelligence with animal diligence. Knowing exactly what you want...and how far you'll go to get it. How far will Elle go?*

*Elle: Are you hitting on me?*

*Professor Callahan: You're a beautiful girl.*

In this scene, Professor Callahan talk about future career of Elle woods even he offers to be a partner in future cases. Professor Callahan takes taking advantage of his power to harass Elle. He places his hand on Elle's leg in an unwanted and inappropriate manner, which is a clear sexual harassment. Professor Callahan uses his power and authority to make unwanted sexual advances towards Elle, creates a hostile work environment for her. This type of behavior is a form of gender violence because it is rooted in the unequal power dynamics between men and women in society, and it perpetuates harmful gender stereotypes and norms.

Effect the gender inequality faced by Elle Woods in this movie.

1. Change herself for acceptable.



In the movie "Legally Blonde," Elle Woods' journey to change her appearance and style can be seen as a representation of the effects of gender inequality. As she chooses a more neutral and black color style in place of her signature pinks and daring fashion choices, her true self is further dissociated. This change in appearance is a result of the societal pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations, which can be seen because of gender inequality.

2. Getting emotional and psychological impact.



The effect of sexual harassment experienced by Elle in "Legally Blonde" accurately depicts the objectification women experience in these situations, when their gender undermines the value of their talents and hard work. Even Elle respectfully refused and pointed out that her professional attitude resulted to harassment because of her gender. This scenario reflects the pervasive issue of women being mistreated based on their gender, rather than being recognized for their skills and contributions. Elle's desire to quit immediately and return home further emphasizes the emotional and psychological impact of sexual harassment on women.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

At the end of the Elle was able change their opinion of her and show it is possible for women to succeed in the legal profession without sacrificing their femininity. Elle Woods seeks support from her friends, family, and mentors to navigate the challenges she faces in her academic and professional life. Elle defends women who embrace their femininity, rather than conform to traditional gender expectations. She demonstrates that women can be feminine, intelligent, and strong simultaneously. Elle's character challenges the stereotype that being feminine means being weak and she defies the expectation that women should reject fashion or other feminine interest pursuits to be taken seriously. The movie highlights the issue of women being judged based on their appearance and not being taken seriously because of their feminine interests and appearance. The main character 'Elle' is known as a woman who loves pink, dresses up, shops, and goes to the salon. These stereotypes illustrate that women are seen as lower beings who take less honor in carrying out tasks that seem important. Subordinate of women that are considered less able or menial compared to their male counterparts and violence shows that Women are treated lightly since they are seen as weak people.



#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The author are grateful for the support of Universitas Komputer Indonesia.

#### REFERENCES

- Aimir, Z., abidin, H., Darus, S., & Ismail, K. (2012). Gender Differences In The Language Use Of Malaysian Teen Bloggers. *GEMA OnlineTM Journal of Language Studies*, 12(1), 105–124.
- Begum, R. (2014). Violation of Women Human Rights in India. *International Journal Od Humanities & Social Science Studies (IJHSSS)*, 1(3), 216–224.
- Daulay, H., S Meliala, W., & Humaizi, H. (2019a). Gender Analysis of Women Farmers (Case Study of Corn Farmers in Tigabinanga District Tigabinanga Subdistrict Karo). *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 6(4), 115. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i4.953>
- Daulay, H., S Meliala, W., & Humaizi, H. (2019b). Gender Analysis of Women Farmers (Case Study of Corn Farmers in Tigabinanga District Tigabinanga Subdistrict Karo). *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 6(4), 115. <https://doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v6i4.953>
- Fakih, M. (2005). *Analisis gender dan transformasi sosial* (9th ed.). Pustaka Pelajar.
- Hasna, A. M., & Rahayu, E. Y. (2022). GENDER INEQUALITY ANALYSIS OF THE MAIN FEMALE CHARACTER IN NIKI CARO'S MULAN MOVIE: A FEMINISM STUDY. *Dinamika Bahasa Dan Budaya*, 17(2), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.35315/bb.v17i2.9066>
- Juhana, J., Qalbi, N., & Arfani, S. (2021). Gender Inequality in The Novel “Death of an Ex-Minister” by Nawal El Saadawi. *Eralingua: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Asing Dan Sastra*, 5(1), 107. <https://doi.org/10.26858/eralingua.v5i1.12543>
- Keong, Y. C., Gill, S. K., Noorezam, M., & Abdulrazaq, A. (2012). Gender Differences and Culture in English Short Message Service Language among Malay University Students. *3L: The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 18(2), 67–74.
- Kite, M. E., Deaux, K., & Haines, E. L. (2008). Gender stereotypes. *Psychology of Women: A Handbook of Issues and Theories*, 2nd, 205–236.
- Lestari, S., & Nugroho, A. (2022). Gender Inequality in Tri Utami's Novel Entitled Dunia Padmini. *Poetika*, 10(2), 171. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v10i2.69549>
- Mardiyani, R., & Tawami, T. (2022). GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMINISM IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS. *MAHADAYA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, 2(2), 165–174. <https://doi.org/10.34010/mhd.v2i2.7598>
- Maryam, L. H., Astuty, L. T., & Pradana, A. (2022). An analysis of gender inequality on black women characters in hidden figures film. *Criticism Litetary*, 9(1), 44–50.
- Mohd Shamsuddin, C., & Abdul Hamid, B. (2017). Representational Meanings of Gender Stereotyped Professional Occupation Images in Selected Malaysian English Language Textbooks. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 23(4), 128–142. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2017-2304-10>

- Raza, A., Rashid, S., & Malik, S. (2022). Cultural Violence and Gender Identities: A Feminist Post-Structural Discourse Analysis of This House of Clay and Water. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 28(4), 124–136. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2022-2804-09>
- Yuan, R., Vengadasamy, R., Shamini Perry, M., & Hashim, R. S. (2024). Exploring Feminist Consciousness Through Music in Eileen Chang’s Postcolonial Narratives. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies*, 24(1), 173–183. <https://doi.org/10.17576/gema-2024-2401-10>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marilyn Fiona Sinurat, email: [marilynfiona9l@gmail.com](mailto:marilynfiona9l@gmail.com)

**Marilyn Fiona Sinurat** is an undergraduate student at Universitas Komputer Indonesia majoring in English Literature at the Faculty of Cultural Sciences. Marilyn Fiona enjoys finding out more about previously mentioned groups and learning more about the music groups, albums, and personalities. Also likes to share her thoughts on social media regarding music, particularly those of K-pop girl groups. Her previous work involved reviewing the album NewJeans 1st EP “New Jeans”. She discusses the album’s design and how interesting it is for several reasons. You can find her blogging <https://revertify.sais2021.com/3-reasons-newjeans-debut-album-worth-getting-new-fans/>

**Asih Prihandini, S.S., M.Hum.** is an English literature lecturer at Universitas Komputer Indonesia.