An Investigation of the Characterization in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* from a Feminist Perspective
Abstract

This essay investigates *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, a novel written by Helen Fielding, from a feminist perspective with an emphasis on gender. The focus lies on Bridget’s characterization and how it can be perceived as problematic from a feminist point of view. On the surface, Bridget seems like a true feminist, but when reading into and analyzing her characterization, one can see that she rejects many of the key ideas within feminism. The study also investigates how one might work with *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the secondary EFL classroom.

Keywords

Feminism, Gender, Femininity, Masculinity, Literature, Education, Didactics, Bridget Jones’s Diary
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1 Introduction

This essay investigates *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, a novel written by Helen Fielding that was first published in 1996, from a critical feminist perspective with a focus on the concept of gender. The critical feminist perspective is utilized in order to analyze Bridget’s character and how it can be seen as problematic from a feminist point of view. The novel brings up society’s view on contemporary women in Western societies and the struggles that a single woman in her thirties might experience. The protagonist of the novel is Bridget, who lives and works in London. She is portrayed as a strong and independent woman, however, what pervades the novel is society’s view on how women should live their lives, and how this affects Bridget. The novel is written in the form of a diary, which gives the reader an authentic insight into Bridget’s life, desires and inner thoughts, at least from her own perspective. By reading her diary entries, readers get to follow Bridget for a year and read about her career, friends, family, relationships and her life in general. Other important characters in the novel are Daniel Cleaver, Bridget’s boss whom she is also in love with in the first part of the book, and Pam, Bridget’s mother. The novel is an archetype of the chick lit genre which is a genre of popular culture where females are considered the target audience (Nilson and Ehriander 7-8).

Feminism could, very briefly, be explained as a term that stresses women’s right to be treated equally and respectfully (Parker 149). This study mainly investigates the characterization of Bridget in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and how this can be considered problematic from a feminist and gender perspective. Bridget’s character is also compared to Daniel Cleaver’s character from the same point of view. In what sense do their characterizations portray norms and stereotypes related to femininity and masculinity? The essay argues that Bridget seems like a feminist heroine on the surface, but when reading into her diary entries more profoundly, one can clearly see that her feminist characteristics can be problematized. In my opinion, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* depicts Bridget as an ironic feminist. She struggles with society’s norms of how a woman should be and even though she tries to go her own path in life, she is clearly affected by society’s construction of what is perceived as “feminine”. Her struggle to go her own path and at the same time live up to society’s expectations of her highlights the power of gender norms in society and what role they actually play. As a reader, one has access to Bridget’s thoughts about herself and the people surrounding her, and by applying a critical feminist
perspective to the reading of this novel, there is much to analyze, regarding both Bridget and Daniel.

The essay also investigates how this novel could be utilized in an EFL secondary classroom. As Beach et al. put it, “We want to help young people understand the social, political and cultural contexts that shape their lives.” (135). With this being said, the novel could be of great use when talking about norms and stereotypes related to gender in the EFL secondary classroom, which are important concepts to know about.

*Brigit Jones’s Diary* is a popular romantic novel known worldwide, famous for its way of depicting Bridget as a modern “everywoman”, a typical and ordinary middle-class woman with an average weight and a good job (Harzewski 59). It is a literary work that many researchers have already touched upon in their own studies. Cheryl A. Wilson writes in her research article “Chick Lit in the Undergraduate Classroom” (2012) that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a novel that could work as a useful tool in the undergraduate classroom when teaching students about feminism, even though there are excerpts in the novel that sympathize alongside with excerpts that condemn feminism, which might be confusing for students when learning about feminism (Wilson 87). However, the fact that the novel both sympathizes with and condemns feminism might lead to a great discussion in the classroom and it also creates an excellent opportunity to teach students about feminism. What makes this study different from Wilson’s is that this essay focuses on how *Bridget Jones’s Diary* could be utilized beneficially in the upper secondary classroom instead of the undergraduate classroom. Also, this essay includes many textual references to the novel that could serve as a good starting point for the didactic approach.

Parker suggests that the term feminism is related to identity (149). This means that when one reads a literary work, one also tries to identify with one or more characters in it. Since *Bridget Jones’s Diary* belongs to the chick lit genre, with a target audience of women, many students may have perceptions about the novel. This could be problematic, since it might make the students dismiss the novel from the start. However, since readers get to take part of Bridget’s uncensored thoughts, it will be quite easy to identify with her. Moreover, if the reader applies a feminist lense to the reading, it would be even easier to understand Bridget as a character and the novel as a whole. Also, if the teacher emphasizes the contemporary aspects of the novel and the societal problems that it brings
up, that both women and men must face in today’s society, the novel will probably be even more appreciated and by more students.

Apart from the introduction section, this essay contains sections that explore the theory of feminism, gender, femininity and masculinity related to norms and stereotypes. These sections will serve as a foundation when analyzing the novel from the perspective chosen for this research. The essay also includes didactic research on how one might work with literature in the upper secondary classroom and it argues for how *Bridget Jones’s Diary* specifically might be used beneficially in a teaching situation. Lastly, there will be a conclusion on the most central aspects of the study.

2 Theory Section
2.1 Feminist and Gender Theory
Feminism, in its widest meaning, is an ideology that has sought to change the inequality among women and men (Parker 149). Green and Kahn argue that when it comes to the discussion about women’s and men’s equivalence in society, many feminists point out that the male perspective has come to be seen as the universal one (1). Scholars within the theory of feminism want to deconstruct the view on males as the dominant gender and reconstruct the view on females as equal the males by “extending knowledge about women’s experience and contributions to culture” (Green and Kahn 1).

Furthermore, feminist literary criticism is a branch within the study of feminism that studies literary works from a feminist perspective. One important aspect to look at when reading a work from a feminist perspective is the concept of gender, which is a crucial focus in this essay. Bradley refers to the concept of gender as the different relationships between females and males. It is a widely used concept in many different contexts and therefore, it can be quite hard to define it. It is very politically and socially charged and it is related to the very long struggles regarding power between females and males (1). Moreover, Bradley argues that “…the growth in interest in gender as an academic concept arose from the rebirth of feminism in the 1970s, which itself was a political movement that sought to help women achieve equality with men.” (Bradley 4).

Two concepts that are essential within the study of feminism and gender are “femininity” and “masculinity” which can be explained as the traits of the different genders’ social
roles in society. To understand gender as something socially constructed would mean that the concepts of femininity and masculinity would also be social constructions. Simone de Beauvoir’s quotation in her book *The Second Sex*, “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman… it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (301), quite explicitly explains that gender, in this case the female gender, is a social construction rather than something biological. In other words, it is a product of society. Furthermore, as Bradley puts it: “…a simple statement such as ‘Harriet is a woman’ or ‘Stephen is a man’ tells us nothing about their gender beyond a basic grammatical assignment or an identification of their accepted sex” (5). The term only becomes evocative when one considers the relation between the female and the male. Gender is therefore a social phenomenon, something that is relevant regarding social roles in society, as opposed to the term “sex”. Moi argues that regarding gender and sex, “…the distinction usually dissolves into a scientistic understanding of ‘sex’ and an idealist understanding of ‘gender’” (113). This would mean that sex is perceived as something biological, while gender is all about how one identifies oneself.

The concept of femininity stands for what one defines as typical female, and the concept of masculinity defines what is typical masculine. When defining what is considered feminine and what is considered masculine, Bradley refers to Parsons and Bales (1956), saying that in the capitalist industrial society, a few decades ago, there was a need for different roles since different social roles and functions in society required diverse personality traits. They talk about instrumental roles and expressive roles. Instrumental roles were related to men and meant that men were characterized as the more aggressive, callous, competitive and intellectual ones. Also, men were the ones who were supposed to take care of the economic and financial aspects within the family. Women, on the other hand, had the expressive roles. This meant that women were seen as the nurturing and thoughtful ones within the family, who were supposed to take care of the home and the children (18). The ideas of what one perceive as typical feminine versus typical masculine have followed us since we were children. For example, Bradley talks about her experience of growing up in the 1940’s and 1950’s (10). She tells the readers that during this time period, boys were expected to do “boy things”, such as sports, like soccer and rugby, and other physical activities, like metalwork. Girls, on the other hand, were expected to be interested in “girl things”, like “…pets and ponies, romantic fiction and gorgeous pop
singers…” (Bradley 10). This was “…the frame for gender relations in the 1950s” (Bradley 10).

Furthermore, what can be closely related to the concepts of gender, femininity and masculinity are norms and stereotypes. This is something that Amanda B. Diekman and Wind Goodfriend write about in their article “Rolling With the Changes: A Role Congruity Perspective of Gender Norms” from 2006. By using the term “descriptive beliefs”, the authors refer to stereotypes and norms of how we perceive women and men. Diekman and Goodfriend also argue that the norms and stereotypes that are related to females and males derive from the “traditional division of labour” (370). When Abbott (144) talks about feminism and gender norms, she uses the phrase “the cereal-packet family”, a phrase established by Edmund Leach (1967). By using this concept, Leach suggests that the man in the family is usually seen as the provider and that he and the children are “all being cared for by a smiling wife” (Abbott 144). Abbott’s quotation can in turn be compared to Diekman’s and Goodfriend’s expression “traditional division of labour”, meaning that in the past, there were different expectations on women and men when it came to their duties in society. This nuclear family has, over time, come to be perceived as the normative family in society, which is something that many feminist movements have problematized. Moreover, feminist scholars identify the problems with the male perspective as the “universal” perspective and the importance of highlighting females’ contributions within literature as well and expand that knowledge (Green and Kahn 1-2). However, Diekman and Goodfriend also highlight how gender roles have recently started to change. Women are now entering the male-dominated roles, and over the last few decades, many women have entered the paid labour force (370). This is something that is important to take into consideration as well.

Regarding gender and what is perceived as feminine and masculine, there are also differences in women’s and men’s speech. These language differences are what Robin Lakoff investigates in her article “Language and Woman’s Place”, written in 1973. Her hypothesis is that women feel that they are discriminated linguistically and that they experience subordination to the man (46). Furthermore, Lakoff suggests that the effect of women’s language, the language that is used when talking about women and the language that is used by women, in many cases, makes her feel less confident. For example, they are denied to express themselves heartily and when they are spoken about, they are
referred to as an object, either sexual or otherwise, instead of an actual individual with personal views (48). Moreover, Lakoff argues that female children are expected to use nice and proper language and to not burst out in anger, which is a behavior that is more tolerated among boys and men (50-51). However, important to note when it comes to Lakoff’s research, is that these standpoints do not apply to all women and men. There are of course exceptions as well, which is important to take into consideration. Also, Lakoff’s research was carried out during the 70’s, and much has changed since then regarding female and male behaviour and language.

2.2 Previous Research on *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

*Bridget Jones’s Diary* brings up a view of women that from a feminist perspective can be criticized. This is something that Kelly A. March touches upon in her article “Contextualizing Bridget Jones” from 2004. For example, in her diary entries, Bridget sets up many goals that she wants to achieve. Examples of these goals are that she will quit smoking, drink less alcohol and read literature that is good for her. However, none of these goals are successfully accomplished, which illustrates Bridget’s non-existing capability of accomplishing her own goals (March 52). Moreover, March accounts for what other critics have claimed about Bridget from a feminist perspective. They claim that Bridget is a character that is obsessed about mundane concerns of her own personal life, such as her body weight and fashion, which affects her in the sense that she does not care about more meaningful aspects of life in general. In this sense, Bridget challenges what feminists have tried to achieve regarding views on females (March 53). The criticism towards Bridget Jones that March brings up claims that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a literary work that presents an anti-feminist view on women (March 53). In turn, this view on *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and Bridget herself is something that can be valuable to bring up in the classroom. The portrayal of this novel as an anti-feminist work can, in the classroom, be utilized in order to start talking about and reflecting over feminism and the ideas and traits that are related to this ideology.

Furthermore, regarding the use of *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the classroom, Wilson writes about how Brenda Bethman argues for the use of this novel as a teaching tool since it could be a good way to have the students start reflecting over the concepts of feminism and womanhood and what these concepts mean. This is partly why this literary work is chosen for this essay. The novel could be of great use in the classroom when teaching
students about these prevailing and important notions and also when teaching them about norms and stereotypes. According to Wilson (84), Bethman claims that readers’ potential disagreement with how Bridget portrays contemporary womanhood could be a great starting point when talking about and analyzing feminism and womanhood through a critical feminist perspective.

Moreover, according to Harzewski, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a novel that sets an example of a chick lit work that engages with feminism in an ironic way (60). This differs from the criticism stated above, where the critics view *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and Bridget herself as an anti-feminist instead of a feminist satire. Besides, Harzewski claims that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* deals with many conservative thoughts about women and presents a slightly provoked relationship to women’s movement within feminism (60). She argues that the novel presents a stereotypical image of feminists as “angry and unremittingly serious” (60), characteristics that might be perceived as quite unflattering.

Additionally, second-wave feminism is a historical movement within feminism, inspired by de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, that can be further related to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. The movement is recognized as a time where women started to reflect over the disadvantages of being a woman and the oppression they had to suffer just because of their gender (Bradley 16). Regarding this specific movement within feminism, Harzewski writes about how second-wave feminism has lead to delayed marriage among women. This is a consequence of the fighting for women’s right to advanced education, which is something that is distinctive within the second-wave feminism era (73). She claims that the quantity of unmarried women doubled between the years of 1970 and 2000 and that almost half of the Americans are turning 30 before they decide to marry (72). This is further discussed and analyzed in the analysis when looking at how Bridget is characterized in the novel. She is over 30 when she meets Mark Darcy, the man that she falls in love with in the latter part of the novel.

### 2.3 *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and the Classroom

By working with a literary work like *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the classroom, many of the points in the English 6 syllabus at upper secondary school will be touched upon. When working with this novel from a feminist perspective with a focus on gender, norms and stereotypes, students will focus on points such as:
• Concrete and abstract subject areas related to students' education and societal and working life; current issues; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; ethical and existential issues.
• Themes, ideas, form and content in film and literature; authors and literary periods.
• Living conditions, attitudes, values, traditions, social issues as well as cultural, historical, political and cultural conditions in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used
• Contemporary and older literature, poetry, drama and songs. (Skolverket)

Furthermore, students at upper secondary school are encouraged to read and to understand texts through different perspectives. The teacher should integrate one or more perspectives or critical lenses in their teaching of and with literature (Beach et al. 138). As mentioned in the introduction, Beach et al. also highlight the importance for young people to understand the factors that shape their lives, and by adopting a feminist perspective with a focus on gender to the reading of a text, this goal will be achieved. Beach et al. argue that the gender perspective will make the readers reflect over, for example, behaviour, power, value and opinions between the different genders (140). These factors affect people in society today, and they can also be adopted to the reading of Bridget Jones’s Diary in order to fully understand the concept of feminism and how readers might see Bridget as a feminist on the surface, but problematize her behaviour from a feminist point of view.

The curriculum for upper secondary school argues that the upper secondary education needs to be based on the basic principles of democracy. This means that the school is obligated to mediate basic democratic values and that it should actively shape democratic citizens. The education should be shaped from these standpoints and convey solidarity among humans. Within this process, the equal rights of all genders are, of course, a very important aspect (Skolverket 4). This makes concepts such as feminism, gender, femininity, norms and stereotypes important to know about. They are extremely relevant, they are shaped by the society we live in and they probably affect us more than we know. A great way to reach out to young adults with these specific concepts is to use literature as a tool and to have the students discuss what they read based on these different concepts.
Beach et al. argue that letting the students discuss what they are reading with each other will aid them in actually understanding the text that they are reading. By encouraging a dialogic classroom like this, the students will be able to create a meaning of what they read and they will also get the opportunity to talk about issues and concerns that are affecting their own personal lives (175).

3 A Feminist Analysis of Characterization in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*

*Bridget Jones’s Diary* is, like already mentioned, written in the form of a diary where readers get to follow Bridget for one year, starting with her New Year’s resolutions. In her diary entries, readers get to read about her concerns when it comes to her appearance, career and the fact that she is a woman in her thirties without a boyfriend. Throughout the novel, Bridget seeks self-improvement, and every chapter starts with a short summary where she states, for example, how many alcohol units she has consumed, how many cigarettes she has smoked, her current weight and other aspects like these that are important for her at that moment. Bridget utilizes a humorous vernacular, and in her diary entries she writes about her quite plain, everyday life. In this sense, she is depicted in a realistic way, which makes the novel (or Bridget as a character) quite easy to relate to.

This essay’s focus is on the problematization of how Bridget is characterized from a feminist point of view. When discussing and analyzing Bridget’s characterization, what will mainly be in focus is the language that she uses, how she behaves and how other characters in the novel perceive her language, behaviour and actions. In order to fully understand Bridget’s character from a feminist perspective, Daniel’s character will also be analyzed, in relation to Bridget. Many researchers have different opinions regarding how Bridget is actually depicted from a feminist point of view. For example, as already mentioned, March claims that *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is an anti-feminist literary work (53), while Harzewski argues that the novel is a feminist satire (60). Either way one chooses to look at it, there is much to analyze and to problematize within the ideology of feminism regarding this novel. As mentioned in the introduction, in my opinion, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* depicts Bridget as an ironic feminist who possesses some feminist traits, even though she can be perceived as an anti-feminist in many cases as well.
3.1 Bridget’s View of Herself as a Feminist

I shall be poised and cool and remember that I am a woman of substance and do not need men in order to be complete, especially not him (Fielding 43).

Just saw Daniel leaving for lunch. He has not messaged me or anything. V. depressed. Going shopping (Fielding 31).

These two quotes say very much about Bridget’s character in the novel. In the first quote, as a reader, you can sense that she is really trying to convince herself about the fact that she does not need Daniel’s approval to feel complete, and this is something that she constantly tries to remind herself of. However, in the second quote, her desire to live up to Daniel’s expectations is very clear. Here, she seems to have forgotten about her wishes to be seen as a fully independent and capable woman. The quotes coincide with the thesis statement of this essay, telling the readers that on the surface, Bridget seems to be a feminist heroine. However, if it really was the case that she felt like she did not need Daniel’s approval to feel complete, she probably would not have to try to convince and remind herself about it in the sense that she is doing. Also, she would not have felt depressed over the fact that he had not messaged her during the day.

...feeling a bewildering mixture of smugness and pride over my perfect new boyfriend whom the girls clearly wished to have a go at shagging, and furious with the normally disgusting sexist drunk for ruining our feminist ranting by freakishly pretending to be the perfect man (Fielding 128).

This quotation also tells the reader very much about her ambivalent character from a feminist perspective. The quotation is taken from a scene where Bridget and her women friends are ranting about feminism, talking about what “bloody bastards” all men are, and particularly, according to Bridget herself, what a bastard Daniel is. However, when Daniel appears in her apartment, she seems to be very proud of having him as a boyfriend as he is acting very nicely and offers to give Bridget’s friends a ride home. The whole event seems to be quite frustrating for Bridget. She is torn between seeing Daniel as a “bloody bastard” who does not respect her and as a perfect and very attractive man, who she
happily and proudly calls her boyfriend. And in the end, she ends up waiting for him to come back to spend the night with her. This explicitly shows Bridget’s multifaceted character and her desire to be perceived as a true feminist, but underneath the surface, she is obviously willing to let these wishes go if it means that she will end up with Daniel. Here, one can see that Bridget is quite easily manipulated by Daniel. Hence, seeing feminism as a movement that strives for equal rights between the different genders, Bridget does not really live up the portrayal of a feminist since Daniel’s opinion seems to be more powerful and important to her than her desire to live up to the key ideals within feminism.

3.2 Society’s View of Bridget and Daniel
One of the aims within feminism, according to Harzewski (73), is the fight for equal rights within education. The following quotation can be utilized to show that this opinion can be clearly related to Bridget:

‘Bridget! What are we going to do with you!’ snapped Una. ‘You career girls! I don’t know! Can’t put it off for ever, you know. Tick-tock-tick-tock. (Fielding 11).

In this quote, Una claims that the only thing Bridget cares about is her career and not the fact that she is in her thirties and still a single woman. Una also refers to the biological clock, which means that she thinks that it is time for Bridget to start thinking about having children. As Bradley puts it, seeing the woman in a family as the one who should take care of the home and the man as the provider was very common a few decades ago and this is probably the reason for why Una is reacting the way she is. She is probably not used to the fact that some women may want to focus more on their career than on marriage. Moreover, by relating this quote to what feminism argues about women’s right to advanced education, one can clearly see that Bridget is prioritizing her career. In this sense, one can claim that she is sympathizing with key ideals within feminism. Like mentioned earlier, second-wave feminism has lead to delayed marriage among women and the fact that Bridget is not yet married is then a consequence of her career being more important to her. On the other hand, Bridget’s characterization can be problematized in the sense that Una’s expression affects her. All these opinions about how Bridget should live her life put much pressure on her and she starts to fantasize about and picture a
marriage between herself and Daniel. She also starts wondering why she does not yet have a husband and if there is something wrong with her.

Moreover, the quote can be further related to what Bradley says about instrumental and expressive gender roles. As mentioned, men are, stereotypically, perceived as the intellectual and callous ones with the financial responsibility, while women have the caring and nurturing roles in the homes. Una is around the same age as Bridget’s mother and she is overtly sympathizing with these ideas, while Bridget, even though she is affected by these thoughts, rejects them. This shows a clear generation gap between Una and Bridget. Daniel Cleaver, on the other hand, does not seem to care about any biological clock, nor the fact that he has not settled down yet. This becomes rather explicit in at least two parts of the novel. On page 168, Daniel tells Bridget that he cannot join the party at her parents’ house as he promised he would do. This could indicate that he does not look at their relationship as a very serious one. Also, on page 178, readers get the knowledge that Daniel is cheating on Bridget. This indicates that he is not very committed to his relationship with Bridget, nor does he respect her. This gives the readers the impression that Daniel is the kind of person that wants to have fun rather than commit himself to just one person. What makes it even more interesting is that none of the characters in the novel expects him to worry about these aspects. He gets away with it without being questioned about it. But when it comes to Bridget, the people surrounding her, especially her family and her family’s friends, find it odd that she is unmarried and without children at her age. This is something that is still present in society and can be problematized. Since we live in such a normative society, we all expect women to behave in one certain way and men to behave in another way, which can make it very hard to eliminate gender norms and stereotypes.

Another interesting aspect to look at is Parsons’s and Bales’s reflection over the perception of men as the intellectual gender in the family and how that can be related to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*. In one section of the novel, Daniel Cleaver disparages Bridget’s ability to write correctly and highlights her disability to spell: “Absent, Jones, not abscent. Blatantly, not blatently. Please attempt to acquire at least perfunctory grasp of spelling.” (Fielding 25) This quotation can be related to the fact that men are used to be looked upon as the more intellectual gender and that women’s duty is to take care of the household and not to make a career. This is something that Daniel might feel the urge to express,
and he does so in quite an abasing manner. The expression shows that he might feel the need to put himself on a pedestal, and it corresponds to what Parsons and Bales argue about the originating view on how females and males were previously perceived. Moreover, the quote also corresponds to what Lakoff says about language and gender. It becomes rather clear here that Bridget is being linguistically discriminated and that Daniel wants to show himself as the superior one when it comes to correct use of the English language.

This need to “show off” is something that can be further analyzed in another scene involving Bridget and Daniel. In this section, on page 166-167, Daniel is being very sarcastic about Bridget’s degree, implying that his degree is more highly ranked than hers. Also, he tells Bridget that her intellectual purpose is to cook him dinner and walk around in his apartment without wearing pants. One can argue that Daniel sees himself as the one who is supposed to work and earn money, while Bridget would be the one that waits for him at home and takes care of the household. Even though Daniel seems to be joking about all this, he is probably being slightly serious at some level. It might be the case that he wants it to seem like a joke to Bridget, more than it actually is, and even though he is exaggerating, he wants Bridget to adapt to her “role” as a woman. As mentioned earlier, this is something that feminists oppose as they strive for equal rights when it comes to for example education, something that Daniel does not cooperate with according to his characterization in the novel. As for Bridget, it seems like she registers the abasement in Daniel’s voice, even though she does not really confront him about it. When Daniel disparages her education, she answers: “Right, that’s it. I’m sleeping on the sofa.” (Fielding 166), but Daniel pulls her back and she chooses to stay with him in bed. Other than that, she does not defend herself from Daniel’s discriminating insult. This proves the point that Bridget desires to be perceived as a true feminist, however, when the pressure is on, she does not want to make a fuss about it. In turn, this shows how deeply engraved the “being nice” is in society’s construction of women. It tells the reader that she is expected to be nice to Daniel, and by “being nice” in this case, she is also being compliant to Daniel’s behaviour.

Furthermore, another aspect that is important to take into consideration when studying the characterization in a novel is the language. The way characters speak and their choice of words are vital for the way we perceive them. When it comes to the language utilized
in Bridget Jones’s Diary, one can argue that the way readers and other characters in the novel expect Bridget and Daniel to speak differ from each other. For instance, when considering what Lakoff says about female and male language, one can argue that Bridget’s mother wants and encourages Bridget to talk more like a lady, which the following quotation shows: “Don’t say ‘what’, Bridget, say ‘pardon.” (Fielding 152) With Lakoff’s research in mind, the word “pardon” seems like a more favourable word to use among women, since this is perceived as a much nicer and more positive word to use compared to “what”. Throughout the novel, Daniel is never corrected when speaking more colloquially, but Bridget is, which tells readers very much about how women and men are expected to speak. Lakoff argues that these expectations are shaped by society. To allow men to use stronger expressions, such as “what” instead of “pardon”, reinforces men’s superior roles in society. The effect of this might be that men are taken more seriously, since people tend to listen to opinions made by strong and independent people, rather than those made by people who give a weak and dependent impression (51).

Even though Lakoff’s research was carried out in the early 70’s, the traits that she presents and discusses are noticeable in Bridget Jones’s Diary, which was written in 1996. The characteristics that she talks about are still today perceived as societal gender norms and can in many cases be further related to Bridget and Daniel. The thoughts and opinions about these gender differences are somewhat engraved in the back of our heads even today and therefore, even though they are not as up-to-date anymore, they are still very relevant when analyzing femininity and masculinity when it comes to language and behaviour among characters in novels. Also, the fact that they are so relevant in society today makes it important to talk about in the classroom.

3.3 The Classroom
Beach et al. say that “We want to help them see that the literary texts we assign them to read are inscribed with issues of power and shaped by ideological influences as they are created and as they are read” (135). The “them” in the quotation refers to the students. Bridget Jones’s Diary is a novel that is full of great textual examples that show readers how norms related to femininity and masculinity can be conceived and these examples can be utilized very effectively to teach students about the importance of these concepts, the role they play in society and how they affect us in our daily lives. The reading of this novel also opens up for an opportunity to teach students about the difference between
gender and sex, which is touched upon earlier in the essay. This difference is important to talk about in the classroom since it relates to identification, which is a topic that might be sensitive and relevant for many students. Furthermore, the novel would also be beneficial to utilize in order to teach students about feminism. For instance, it could be used in order to lecture to the students about second-wave feminism, and also to inform students about other specific movements within the history of feminism. In many senses, Bridget opposes the idea of the typical feminist. She tries to convince herself of her independence as a woman, but underneath the surface, at least during the greater part of the novel, she ends up trying to suit Daniel’s expectations and desires of how women should act and behave. The textual references analyzed in the essay show great issues regarding the different expectations of women and men, and they also depict how humans are shaped by the societal norms and stereotypes that we have been brought up with.

By reading *Bridget Jones’s Diary* from a critical feminist perspective, students will get the opportunity to talk about how the equality between women and men looks like in the novel and how it should look like in their society, from a democratic standpoint. Is it fair that Bridget has to confront and tackle all these demands from society of getting married and having children, while Daniel does not? How can that be questioned from a democratic point of view? By working with these issues, alongside with the characterization of women in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, in particular Bridget herself, the education will therefore coincide with the curriculum for English at upper secondary school. To read and discuss *Bridget Jones’s Diary* might give students a great opportunity to learn about societal issues regarding gender, and at the same time, they will be able to gain knowledge about literature as a work of art as well.

Moreover, Wilson writes about how *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, in many senses, “…both supports and condemns feminism” (87). Furthermore, she points out that this is something that can be very frustrating for students, especially for those who do not understand that feminism is a very complex ideology, with many different thoughts and angles to it. They might see feminism as one single entity rather than a movement that develops over time (87). With the complexity of feminism in mind, students might end up viewing the novel and the work with it as too challenging and therefore reject the novel before even starting to read it. It is therefore of great significance to make sure to present the novel and the concept of feminism profoundly before letting the students start reading it. This means
that the teacher should talk about the novel and the different themes in it and also, talk about feminism in general. What is feminism and why we are reading *Bridget Jones’s Diary* from this particular perspective?

As already mentioned, Bridget is quite an ambivalent character. The novel presents her as a character that desperately wants to find herself a boyfriend, and at the same time, she does not want to be dependent on a male’s acceptance of her. Because of this, it might be hard for students to situate Bridget. Is she a feminist or is she an anti-feminist? Because of her ambivalent character, it is also important to let the students know that there are no right or wrong answers regarding Bridget’s feminist standpoint. To read and analyze a novel is a very subjective task and different opinions and thoughts are to be both expected and encouraged. This is something that should be preferred since it shows that the students are reflecting over what they read rather than just seeing the text as a truth. Moreover, if the teacher succeeds in presenting the novel alongside with the ideology of feminism in a good and understandable way and helps the students understand that a novel like this opens up for many different thoughts and opinions, students will, hopefully, enter the reading with curiosity and a will to further understand what feminism is and how it is depicted (or not depicted) in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*.

In order to make the novel even more understandable and accessible for students, Wilson (87) argues for the significance to distinguish the character of Bridget from the novel as a whole. As mentioned, Bridget presents some feminist traits, such as the will to focus on her career, and to be perceived as independent. However, she also fails to prove herself as a true feminist in other cases, for example during all those times when she desperately tries to live up to Daniel’s expectations of her or of women in general. Besides that, when looking at the novel and analyzing it as a whole, one will realize, as Wilson puts it: “…that Bridget’s own (however limited) definition of feminism differs from the feminist consciousness of Fielding’s novel and that of other contemporary critics” (87). This is another aspect that might confuse students. When working with this novel in the classroom, it is therefore significant to make sure that the students understand the novel’s presentation of feminism through more than one perspective. This proves the complexity of feminism, as mentioned above. When utilizing this novel in the classroom to teach students about feminism, the teacher can effectively utilize Bridget’s anti-feminist traits in order to teach what Fielding and others have to say about feminism. As an addition to
this, there are many interviews with Fielding available on the internet that talks about *Bridget Jones’s Diary* and its relation to feminism. For instance, there is one where Fielding talks about Bridget as an ironic heroine and where she also explains why she chose to write *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the form of a diary and how that affects the reading. This is something that can be explored in the classroom in order for the students to understand the multiplicity of feminism and the novel itself even better.

Other aspects that should be further touched upon in the classroom and that can be related to *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, like already mentioned, are norms and stereotypes related to gender. As Bradley mentions, these norms and stereotypes were socially accepted a few decades ago, but in today’s society they are questioned to a much greater extent. However, ideas about normative feminine and masculine behaviour still affect us. Societal norms like these are hard to eliminate and they play such a great role in our upbringing and the way we act as human beings. Because of their great impact on us, it is highly important to talk about this in the classroom and a great way to do so is to use literature as a tool. When reading *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, we get to consider many different norms and stereotypes related to femininity, and also masculinity. This, in turn, might open up for a very interesting discussion among students in a classroom.

When working with norms and stereotypes in the classroom, a good idea could be to have the students individually start reflecting on norms and stereotypes in general, before letting them start reading the novel. What do they come to think of when they hear these words? How do they relate these thoughts to gender? Are there any normative or stereotypical characteristics in particular that they relate to women versus men? After that, the students could be given time to sit down in small groups and discuss their findings. This could be a good way to create an interest for the novel, and also to have the students start reflecting over these concepts critically.

Another important task for the teacher is to create an interest for the novel before letting the students start reading it. If the teacher fails to do so, it might be very hard to encourage the students to keep up the work. *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is a work of the chick lit genre, and might therefore be easier to promote among girls. With that being said, there will also be girls who are not very interested in reading this novel, and there might also be boys who are genuinely interested in a literary work like this. To choose literature that suits all
students perfectly is probably impossible. However, I believe that this novel might interest most students in a classroom as feminism, gender, norms and stereotypes are all very societal and up-to-date subjects. Regardless of gender, these are aspects that all students, on different levels, will be able to relate to and identify with, which is significant and will make the reading easier.

Furthermore, in order to make the whole reading process meaningful, the students will get time to discuss what they are reading while they are reading as well. As argued by Beach et al., a dialogic classroom is essential if the students are to create a personal meaning of what they read. To give the students time to discuss the issues that the novel presents, like the quotations from the novel that are presented earlier in the essay, will aid them in understanding the problematic aspects and concerns regarding feminism and gender in the novel. If the teacher wants their students to fully understand Bridget Jones’s Diary and the issues that the novel presents, students need to be able to engage in a dialogue with each other. After all, to be able to argue for your point of view, explain your thoughts and reflect critically is very important in society today and this is what the school should teach students to do.

4 Conclusion

This essay argues that Bridget’s desire is to be perceived as a true feminist, something that she personally tries to live up to. However, actions speak louder than words, and in many senses, Bridget can be perceived as a character that does not live up to the feminist ideal. Instead, she corresponds to many of the gender norms and stereotypes that feminists today reject. The analysis in this essay contains many textual examples and thoughts that correspond to the thesis statement, showing that Bridget in many cases do not act as the ideal feminist. Even though she possesses some feminist traits, such as the fact that she has prioritized her right to focus on her career, she is in general conforming to some stereotypical assumptions of women. For instance, even though she is trying to convince herself of her independence as a woman, she is still desperately trying to get Daniel to like her, even though he does not treat her with respect. This might be because she is afraid of ending up alone, unmarried with no children, which is not, stereotypically, very desired among women.
Bridget’s problem seems to be that the expectations from society make her very exposed and vulnerable to Daniel’s negative influence on her self-image. The fact that she is quite a successful woman does not satisfy her and getting Daniel to like her seems much more meaningful to her. Apparently, this is something that her career does not seem to make up for. The fact that the people around her, such as her family’s friends, think that it is odd that Bridget has focused on her career more than the fact that she is an unmarried woman in her thirties is obvious from the very beginning of the novel. These gender stereotypes related to women are visible throughout the book. Feminists today want equal rights for women and men, meaning that anyone, regardless of their gender, should have their right to focus on whatever they want to achieve in their life.

The fact that the novel presents both feminist and anti-feminist thoughts makes it a great novel to work with in the classroom. To work with and discuss this literary work creates an opportunity for students to learn about feminism and it also gives them the opportunity to critically reflect over norms and stereotypes related to gender. As all these concepts are very prevailing in society today, education within this field is essential in schools. By working with *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the classroom, the teacher can plan for the education to correlate with what the National Agency for Education wants students to learn regarding equal rights for women and men.
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