

# *An Analysis of the Movie “Pride and Prejudice”*

## *— From the Perspective of Social Psychology and Sociology*

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**Abstract:** Social psychology is closely related to popular life; therefore, there are various applications of theories related to social psychology in many media. The film “Pride and Prejudice” has been widely concerned and discussed by the public since its book became a masterpiece across the world. This paper discusses how several specific social psychology theories and assumptions were put forward and used in the development of the heroine's plot. It analyzes the view of marriage from the perspective of sociology, in order to find out how to explain some of the role's behaviors from the perspective of social psychology. It uses the methodology of media analysis to draw a conclusion that there are mainly 3 theories and hypothesis related to social psychology which are shown in the character's behavior: Maslow's Hierarchy Theory, Framing & Agenda Setting Theory, and The Contact Hypothesis. Furthermore, the author of the movie claims her advocacy of marriage which is to pursue the combination of true love and economic situation in marriage.

**Keywords:** self-esteem, first-impression based on prejudice, social status for women in marriages, Elizabeth & Darcy, social psychology

### 1. Introduction

The film “Pride and Prejudice” has been widely concerned and discussed by the public since its book became a masterpiece across the world. The movie mainly focuses on the marriage between Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy, provided are a few more marriages to form contrast with the primary one. In the movie, Pride and prejudice are displayed in every character in some form or another. It is pride of those of a higher economic status which genuinely withholds prominent relationships of those who are of lower economic status. Darcy's pride causes him to look down on those who are in a lower social class, due to his mentality that he supersedes those who are not within his social circle. Given that Elizabeth Bennet is of a lower class than Darcy, this places immediate restrictions to their relationship. Elizabeth also displays significant pride. Though not influenced by economic status, Elizabeth is most proud of her ability of perception: although it is her ill perception which causes her to misjudge Darcy and also Wickham. When Elizabeth hears of Wickham's accusations of Darcy, she trusts the negative perception of him, and mistakenly views Darcy's confidence as conceit. But with the development of the story, the misunderstanding between Elizabeth and Darcy gradually dissolved into a sincere love [1].

At present, a large number of studies on the interpretation and analysis of this film focus on the analysis of literary technique, sociological analysis and the analysis of the technique of film shooting. However, in this part of research that focuses on the psychological analysis of characters, there has been few researches that put characters in the mass environment and society to analyze their psychology. Therefore, after understanding the current research results, this paper mainly focuses on analyzing the characters in the film *Pride and Prejudice* from the perspective of social psychology, which enriches the research in the field of film analysis. So, the research carried out in this paper supplements the lack of elaboration of knowledge in the field of social psychology reflected by film media in the current research progress, and is expected to further popularize the understanding and cognition of social psychology knowledge among the recipients of film media.

## 2. The First Meeting of Elizabeth and the Hero Darcy — The Formation of Prejudice

Mr. Darcy, a friend of Mr. Bingley's, appears as an extremely wealthy, handsome man. But at the same time, Mr. Darcy's very quiet and proud. The heroine Elizabeth overhears the conversation of Mr. Bingley and Darcy in the ball. Mr. Darcy says that none of the girls present are worthy to be his partner, and that Elizabeth's appearance is "barely tolerable", but far from arousing his interest, which directly causes Elizabeth, a lady with exceedingly strong self-esteem, to form a negative first-impression of him as "extremely arrogant" [2][3]. As shown in figure 1, in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, self-esteem is based on physiological needs, life security needs, and the need for love and belonging. It is located at the second level of the pyramid, which means that people must satisfy the three levels of needs mentioned above before they can possibly become a person with high self-esteem. The film well reflects that although the Bennet family is not rich, the heroine from a rural family does not lack a variety of material necessities for life and correct guidance in love and spiritual education since childhood [4]. So the paper concluded that in story line part 1, there's an use of Maslow's Hierarchy Theory to map the most objective situation of the Bennet family, in order to further clarify the overall movie background.

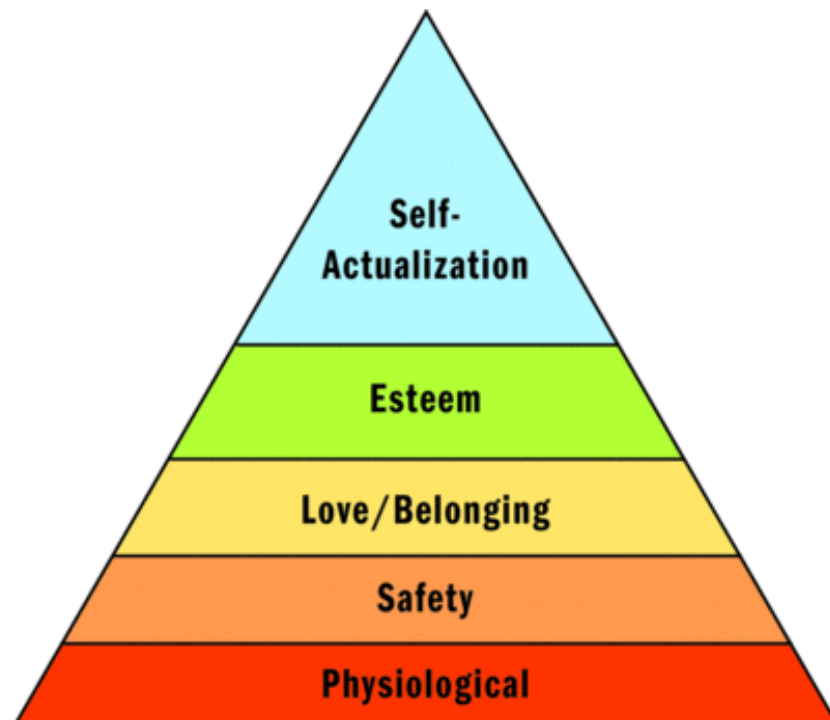


Figure 1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs [5].

### **3. Be Confused by the Calumny of Others — Deepening Prejudice**

As the story line progresses, the disagreeable Wickham comes into Elizabeth's view as a handsome officer, which is indeed deceptive. On the basis of having a certain favorable impression on Wickham, Elizabeth believed the calumny told which said that Darcy took the property that should belong to Wickham himself, while the fact remains that it was Wickham himself who squandered the property, and even trying to seduce Darcy's sister into elopement. And this is exactly an access of Framing & Agenda Setting Theory. According to Richard Weaver & Kenneth Burke, 2 key rhetorical theorists of the mid-20th Century, language can be as sermonic and is especially selective. Whatever language, there are no neutral language choices [6]. Applying that to the plot above, the paper discovered the significant feature of Wickham's language choices as deliberately distorted, directed, or selective. Furthermore, it presents viewers with Wickham's inner intention to win the sympathy and favor of young ladies by whatever means, which is rather lewd. To conclude, the introduction of Framing & Agenda Setting Theory here provides viewers with a more vivid image of Wickham as a character, and paves a way for viewers to better comprehend the following plots, and better understand how the same events can be stated diametrically [7].

### **4. Increased Contact — Elimination of Bias**

After a period of time, under the plot design of a variety of coincidence, the heroine Elizabeth and Mr. Darcy met again in Mr. Darcy's manor, which opens the window for reality contact between the two of them. At first, by observing Mr. Darcy's behavior with her uncle and aunt, Elizabeth finds that he is indeed polite rather than arrogant; then at Mr. Darcy's estate, they unexpectedly receive the news that the little sister Lydia has eloped with the debt-ridden Wickham. In the face of this sudden situation, Mr. Darcy, to Elizabeth's surprise, immediately figured out a way to solve the problem for the Bennet family: he put aside the past grudge, generously paid off Wickham's gambling debts, and gave him a large sum of money, so that Wickham and Lydia can be married. The Contact Hypothesis informed people that the best way to decrease prejudice is through direct contact under certain circumstances. Looking back to previous plots, the author discovered that though the actual social status of Elizabeth and Darcy may not be of exact equivalence, their intellectual height and cognition towards things are at the same level. In that case, Elizabeth's prejudice against Mr. Darcy was completely eliminated after increased contact in reality, which laid a solid foundation for their eventual two-way travel at the mean time.

### **5. Marriage View and Social Status for Women**

"The movie 'Pride and Prejudice' emphasized marriage should be of equal importance both because of love and because of economic consideration, but love plays the guiding role." [8] From the view of marriage and the choice of marriage it leads to, the heroine Elizabeth and the hero Mr. Darcy are unique representatives of the new trend in the backward social concept of marriage at that time. Their marriage is in stark contrast to the other two marriages in the film, Charlotte to Mr. Collins and Lydia to Wickham. On the one hand, the marriage of Mr. Collins and Charlotte represented the view of marriage held by the majority of middle-class and lower-class women at that time, that their lifelong happiness was tied to "marrying a rich man". In the 18th century, getting married was the only provision for well-educated young women of modest fortune to gain financial security and a decent life in the long term; otherwise, they would either live in misery as a spinster or a governess, both of which were the objects of mockery and discrimination in society [8]. Mr. Collins in the film is a man who is extremely eccentric and hardly has masculine charm other than wealth. On the other hand, the marriage between Lydia and Wickham represents another extreme, namely, the blind belief that marriage is equal to love while ignoring each other's family background, specific circumstances, and

other factors that must be taken into consideration as the premise of marriage. Moreover, this blind and impulsive pursuit of love is only Lydia's own emotion, while Wickham only accepted the marriage as it was profitable [9][10].

The marriage of the two protagonists, with its relatively comprehensive and rational consideration and the essence and passion of love, is distinguished from the above two extreme marriages, which are exaggerated to be artistic to certain extent but at the same time, very representative [11]. In conclusion, the paper gained an insight that the author of the original novel of *Pride and Prejudice*, Jane Austen, who is therefore also considered the original writer of the movie, fully expresses her personal, and in a way, forward-looking view towards marriage through the heroine Elizabeth. It is the author, Jane Austen's voice in the social trend as a group of women with rising ideas, indicating that women should have equal social status with men in marriage, clarifying the rational and sober marriage view in the new era without losing the significance of marriage itself [12].

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, there are mainly three theories and hypothesis related to social psychology which are shown in the character's behavior: Maslow's Hierarchy Theory, which is applied in the period of "the formation of prejudice" to further clarify the movie background; Framing & Agenda Setting Theory, being used in the period of "deepening prejudice" to more vividly portray characters and foreshadow for the approaching plots; and lastly, the Contact Hypothesis, shown in the period of "elimination of bias" as a motivation behind the development of the story line of the hero and heroine. Furthermore, the author of the movie claims her avocations of marriage which is to pursue the combination of true love and economic situation in marriage. To sum up, there are still many loopholes and defects in this paper: First, this study only focuses on the understanding and analysis of part of the plot of *Pride and Prejudice*, and lacks comparative analysis and research among multiple films, so no general and comprehensive research conclusion has been drawn. In addition, due to the lack of in-depth knowledge about media communication, this study has not yet analyzed the presentation skills of the film itself at the source of the film plot from the perspective of media communication, which may cause certain limitations to the current research. Another drawback worth noting is that this study provides little social background information, which has a certain negative effect on the comprehensive, objective and dialectical understanding of the formation of character behavior. However, on the whole, the above loopholes and defects do not prevent this study from being of reference value in terms of proposing a way of thinking to apply the perspective of social psychology to the analysis of media films and the analysis of the application of three social psychological theories in *Pride and Prejudice*.

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