Have You Met Miss Jones?:

Identity Construction of a Chick Lit Heroine
Introduction

Take a random woman in her mid-twenties, with a crazy mother, a lousy job and no sex life, add some insecurity and a lot of alcohol and wrap her up in pink, and congratulations, you have just created your own chick lit heroine:

Enter Bridget Jones, who cheerfully announces to her readers her weight of 129 pounds, along with a list of food she has consumed that day, before delving into a single detail of her actual life. Bridget’s resonance with modern women is astounding: she humorously exposes a list of obsessions as they lurk in the dark corners of the single working-woman’s mind. (Umminger 239)

The question is whether a chick lit heroine is this simplistic, as critics often say, or if there actually is a deeper postfeminist message that the heroine expresses through the construction of her identity.

Chick lit has quickly become one of the most popular literary genres among young women. Suzanne Ferris and Mallory Young state in the introduction to Chick Lit: The New Woman’s Fiction that the popularity of chick lit “does not stop with print” (2) but that the genre is successful in many different kinds of media, such as films, television series and newspaper columns. Rebecca Vnuk regards chick lit as “entertaining reading” which is distinguished by its humor-wisecracking characters or ridiculous situations, usually involving work or dating” (42). Vnuk reveals several criteria that the average chick lit novel is built upon, such as fascination for shoes and shopping, the importance of friends, and the urban setting (42). These traits are also often the direct reason for hard-headed criticism,
blaming the genre for being shallow and trite and for creating stereotypical women who are obsessed with their looks and weight and not showing any depth or insight: “[W]hat was once an inventive genre has ‘morphed into books flaunting pink, aqua and lime covers featuring cartoon figures of long-legged women wearing stiletto heels’” (Maher 196). A reply to the criticism is stated by Alison Umminger: “[T]hese novels point to something greater than a narcissistic obsession with one’s physique or sexual desirability” (240). This statement suggests that chick lit novels have a deeper message for the readers to discover rather than reject the novels as trite.

Hand in hand with chick lit novels a new wave of feminism has developed, called postfeminism. According to Sarah Gamble, postfeminism is a phenomenon where “problematic dynamics of intergenerational relationships are an integral part” (61). Further on she states that the cultural aspect is important, and that female writers are born into the feminist society, as liberate daughters of feminists (61). In The World According to Bridget Jones, Katarzyna Smyczyńska refers to postfeminism as a cultural phenomenon with “rebellious and autonomous aspects of female identity and sexuality, challenging traditional definitions of femininity” (Smyczynska 61).

One of the most famous texts explaining postfeminism is Susan Faludi’s Backlash. Faludi argues that postfeminism is a backlash, and that there still are conventions, especially from mass media, on how women should behave. Moreover, Faludi states that a general opinion is that postfeminism is a dystopia where unmarried, independent career-focused women are subordinate and more often suffer from burnouts, health problems, alcoholism and other addictions, and that marriage is the solution (1-2). “You may be free and equal now […] but you have never been more miserable” reveals the backlash, suggesting that the second-wave feminists fought for nothing but their own misery (2). The postfeminist identity is an
identity in crisis; “women are enslaved by their own liberation” according to media and authorities (2), and postfeminism is according to Faludi simply a revolt to these opinions (5). Postfeminism shows that there are still unequal power relations, and also that the general opinion, as presented above, can be proven wrong (8-10). Gamble adds to this that the “mass-produced literary genre now widely known as ‘chick lit’ contains many of postfeminism’s conventions as well as its problems” (Gamble 62).

The novel that brought the attention to this new genre is *Bridget Jones’s Diary* by Helen Fielding, a humorous story about the singleton Bridget Jones, who writes a diary where everyday-issues are described, such as her lack of self discipline, her troublesome love life and her friends. In the acknowledgements in her novel, Fielding briefly explains that the novel reached a large audience since it was first published as a column in the *Independent* (Fielding n.p.) and quickly became a bestseller (Smyczyńska 7). *Bridget Jones’s Diary* influenced a number of young female writers all over the world to produce novels about independent young women, with a slightly ironic touch (Smyczyńska 7). Smyczyńska argues that “Fielding’s novel has instigated a trend so far almost non-existent in popular literature: a discourse of femininity which […] remains openly ambiguous about [man’s] actual value in women’s lives” (56) and that “popular texts may be seen as ‘uncultured’ or unsophisticated” among literary critics (37). Supporters of chick lit assert, on the contrary, that chick lit novels are “social discourses looked upon in terms of messages they mediate concerning various kinds of identity” (37).

The eponymous heroine in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* appears on the surface to be characterized with some central postfeminist features, such as a complicated relationship with her mother, a career-focus, a liberal view on sex and her obsession with finding Mr. Right. Bridget Jones has been a role model for later chick lit heroines, and chick lit authors have
taken the features of Bridget into consideration when creating their own heroine. Thus, this essay will outline to what extent the postfeminist features are depicted in the identity of Bridget Jones, as an epitome of later chick lit heroines.

**The Mother-Daughter Relation**

There is a general opinion in the genre of chick lit that mothers (of the protagonists) are to be regarded as hostile and that mothers have created their children in order to satisfy a “[self-centered] need to have an object to love” (Smyczyńska 90). In general, chick lit heroines can be seen as representatives of postfeminism and products of second-wave feminism, and their behavior can therefore be treated as a reaction to the past, represented by their mothers, who can be seen as characterized in order to represent second-wave feminism. The second-wave feminists who were active in the 1960s are often shown in chick lit as the crazy mothers that the heroines tend to be embarrassed of. The main difference between the second- and the third-wave feminism is according to Gamble the fact that postfeminists often regard second-wave feminists as “stale, outmoded and dogmatic” whereas they themselves are representing a feminism “at once vital and pragmatic, possessing a dynamism that its precursors has long since lost” (62). At the same time the two theories share values concerning equality and liberation. Gamble further explains that postfeminism is ambiguous and contradictory: “Second-wave feminism may have given women more choices […] they can now earn their own money, buy their own drinks, live in their own flats – but it has not altered a romantic ideology which accords them value only through reference to men” (65).

Elizabeth Hale states that mothers in chick lit “tend to be monstrous or exasperatingly daffy” (110) and Smyczyńska shows a list of different mother types that are in one way or another represented in chick lit, preferably by the mother of the protagonist. There is the Good
Mother, the Bad Mother or witch, the Heroic Mother and the Silly, Weak or Vain Mother (Smyczyńska 90-91). Smyczyńska further states that the “mother figure in chicklit novels most often adopts the features of at least two of the above-mentioned types, positioning herself between the Good, Bad and Silly/Weak/Vain Mother” (91). Smyczyńska also discusses the fact that many chick lit mothers are portrayed as unable to “provide genuine support to their daughters” (88), which often tends to make the protagonists feel a kind of “disintegration in their social and emotional functioning” (89). Bridget’s mother appears to be very vain and does not see her own mistakes. When she is caught by the police after having defrauded both family and friends she refuses to accept the imprisonment:

‘Let go of me, you silly billy,’ a voice rang out through the arrival lounge. ‘Now we’re on British soil I’m certain to be recognized and I don’t want everyone seeing me being manhandled by a policeman. Ooh, did you know? I think I’ve left my sunhat on the aeroplane under the seat.’ [...] There was nearly a stand-up fight when they tried to get her into the police car. (279)

Bridget frequently explains to her mother that her behavior is not appropriate, but her mother’s vanity is strong and consistent throughout the novel. Apart from the fact that the generational difference between the mother and the daughter often turns out to be troublesome, chick lit heroines tend to reject their mothers because of the change of priorities, lifestyle and values. The mothers are often described as “dysfunctional” because of the lack of understanding between the women (Smyczyńska 92-93).

Bridget Jones is the perfect example of a chick lit heroine with a dysfunctional mother, and although she often gets annoyed with all the vain and naïve aspects of her mother, she is
greatly influenced by her, which she notices with both fear and irritation: “I was just desperate to start running around opening and closing all the cupboards like my mother […] I stopped, out of breath, realizing I had turned (there was no ‘was turning’ about it) into my mother” (Fielding 174). In response, Bridget’s mother reminds her that since she is the reason why Bridget exists, she expects her to be helpful when her mother wants to have a career in television: “Oh, please, Bridget. Remember, I gave you the gift of life. Where would you be without me? Nowhere. Nothing. A dead egg. A piece of space, darling” (135). The tension between mother and daughter is complicated, since Bridget fears that she will turn into her mother and her mother wants to shape Bridget into a younger copy of herself by arranging make up and clothing sessions for them to go to together: “I’m taking you to have your colours done! […] I’m sick to death of you wandering around in all these dingy slurries and fogs. You look like something out of Chairman Mao” (130). Bridget’s mother is as obsessed with fashion as her daughter, although they do not share the same values of what fashion is.

Another tendency that can be seen in the relation between Bridget and her mother is the constant sermons. Bridget’s mother tells her off when Bridget says the wrong things or behaves inappropriate: “What?’ ‘Don’t say “what”, Bridget, say “pardon”’ (152). Hale explains that the parental role in chick lit is contradictory in several ways. The mother is supposed to give help and advice for the heroine but often the heroine lets her mother take all the responsibility for her life (115). Hale states that “the best educator is the good mother,” but as the mothers in chick lit can be depicted as antagonists the power relation between mothers and daughters never really becomes stable. Even though there is a conflict between the heroine and her mother the heroine tends to be jealous of the power that her mother possesses: “I know what her secret is: she’s discovered power. She has power over Dad: he wants her back […] and everyone is sensing her power and wanting a bit of it, which makes
her even more irresistible […] oh God. I haven’t even got power over my own hair” (Fielding 67). However, Bridget finally realizes that her mother has taught her something, and she sums up the whole year by the line: “Don’t say ‘what’, say ‘pardon’, darling, and do as your mother tells you” (307).

In *Bridget Jones’s Diary* there is a side story, apart from Bridget’s, showing her mother’s love affair with a Portuguese named Julian/Julio. When Bridget sees them together for the first time she reacts strongly on her mother’s changed behavior:

Called Mum up to confront her about the late-in-life smoothie I saw her with after our lunch. […] My parents do not describe their friends by their Christian names. […] I knew straight away that Julian would not turn out to be involved in any Lifeboat luncheons. (55)

Bridget finds it troublesome to accept that her mother is behaving just as Bridget herself is, being careless and attracted to a bad man. That her mother feels freer and dares more than Bridget is also a sign of jealousy: “Bloody Mum, I thought. How come she gets to be the irresistible sex goddess?” (306). Sophia Phoca and Rebecca Wright explain the strange relation between the daughter and her mother as an extension of the Freudian Oedipal phase that the daughter, when realizing she lacks a penis, turns away from her mother and instead gets closer to her father (23). Moreover, Phoca and Wright argue that postfeminists consider this as an example of creating sexual identities rather than thinking of them as biological (25). The tensions between Bridget and her mother are part of the identity construction, just in order to fit in the postfeminist format. This can also be a reason why Bridget is annoyed with
her mother breaking up with her father in favor of Julio: “I’m falling apart […] My mother is sleeping with a Portuguese […] Do not know what to hold on to any more” (Fielding 181).

The fact that Bridget’s mother declares herself independent does not only affect Bridget but it is also a direct cause to her father’s weakened and vulnerable state. Smyczyńska explains that although the father figure is weak he can give full support to the heroine, which is the case in Bridget Jones’s Diary (95). Moreover, Smyczyńska states that the features of the traditional weak father are more commonly “ascribed to maternity” (95) and that the lack of power is the most visible of these traits. Bridget’s father shows several times that he has no power in the marriage and Bridget’s mother often criticizes him for having neglected her. She tends to be ironic when discussing him with Bridget: “‘I was talking about Dad, not ‘Suddenly Single’,’ I hissed. […] ‘Oh, I know, hilarious. Made a complete silly fool of himself trying to attract my attention’” (183). As Bridget takes her father’s part, “[c]onsumed with repulsion of parental, or rather demi-parental sex; outrage on behalf of father” (61), the family structure follows the explanation given by Phoca and Wright.

Smyczyńska regards Bridget’s mother as “a caricature intended to amuse the readers” (89) and discusses that many other chick lit mother characters are more seriously portrayed, with the intent to describe dysfunctional aspects of the modern family life (89). The paratext to Bridget Jones’s Diary suggests that there actually is a serious aspect of Bridget’s mother, since Helen Fielding sends her thanks to her mother, “for not being like Bridget’s” (n.p.) and the back cover of the novel suggests a possible interpretation: “An ironic, tragic insight into the demise of the nuclear family” (n.p.).

Bridget’s mother appears to behave as a postfeminist, showing self-confidence and sexual freedom. She is revolting to the ideas of society, as Susan Faludi presents, concerning sexuality, marriage and career (1-2). Furthermore she, regardless of the naïve and childish
characterization, does not care about society but behaves as she pleases, especially concerning her sexual integrity and power: “Just because I’m ‘friends’ with Julio doesn’t mean I can’t have other ‘friends’” (66). This interpretation makes Bridget appear as neither a true feminist, nor an explicit postfeminist, but instead she confirms the convention of society, that women who are striving for independence are to be seen as mad.

**Complexes and Career**

As many chick lit novels deal with women in the middle of their career it is possible to say that they are celebrating the career girl. Bridget is no exception. However, it is questionable whether her struggle to get out of her singleton state is celebrating something or just an attempt to live happily ever after.

Susan Faludi presents a general opinion of career-focused women as risking health problems as a direct cause of not prioritizing family life (1). She argues that postfeminism is a reaction to this, since the opinion itself shows that inequality is the reason of the health problems rather than women’s career choices (8-9). Faludi states that “hostility to female independence has always been with us” (10). Therefore, chick lit can be treated as representing postfeminism and rather celebrating the career girls than acting hostile towards them. Smyczyńska discusses postfeminist literature, and especially chick lit, and contends that many of the novels where a postfeminist message is visible want to show that “women have finally achieved everything that had so far been denied them” (61). Moreover Smyczyńska states that it is they “who have the power to be who they want to be […] who are able to manipulate the patriarchal system,” and that chick lit attempts to create independent modern women who are able to make a change (62).
According to Smyczyńska, Bridget Jones is characterized to fit in the “‘optimistic’ discourses of postfeminism” (61), which she further points out is visible especially through the “promising professional status and economic independence” (61). However, as Smyczyńska shows, there are tensions concerning a somewhat insecure and vulnerable character inside the shell of postfeminism. She argues that “feminism may have helped women in some spheres, but it has also led to their personal insecurity” (62), which Bridget is a perfect example of, as opposed to Chris Mazza’s statement that the most important traits for the average chick lit heroine are confidence and independence (21). The characterization of Bridget differs from Mazza’s flattering description, since she shows insecurity and obsession with looks and health more often than confidence. The introductory statistics, in almost every chapter, of her own weight, alcohol units and cigarette consumption show that she is affected by the trends and influences in her environment: “9st (oh sod it, cannot break weighing habit of lifetime, particularly after pregnancy trauma – will get therapy of some kind in future), alcohol units 6 (hurrah!), cigarettes 25, calories 1895, Instants 3” (Fielding 120). According to Alison Umminger this is a postfeminist feature that is a backlash to feminism and its beliefs of woman as independent and proud (240). Umminger’s statement contradicts Mazza’s, and this tendency can be interpreted as a conflict within the genre itself, not having a plain definition but being ambiguous and vague. In addition to this contradiction, chick lit is often ironic in the depiction of women, suggesting that the only medicine when feeling miserable is consumption: “[I]t might be interpreted as subjection to the normalizing power of the discourse which allows female individuals to achieve a sense of control over their bodies […] at the price of excessive self-control and self-denial” (Smyczyńska 163). In Bridget Jones’s Diary the anxiety is seen through Bridget’s eyes and mind: “Am seriously considering face-lift” (186).
Chick lit, representing postfeminism, often focuses on showing independent women acting in order to “[establish] the salient characteristics of postfeminism in the popular consciousness” (Gamble 63). Gamble argues that Bridget is punished whenever she tries to take control of her life “while rewarding her for being out of control” (55) and that she does not let go of her old mistakes, which are traits that lead her to insecurity rather than independence (57). Therefore, the independence that postfeminists emphasize is not a trait that Bridget possesses. This is in chick lit treated as “a natural feminine quality” (Smyczyńska 161) together with the constant dissatisfaction with the heroine’s ability to attract men and the worry not to fit into the ideals of media and society (161). When shown in Bridget Jones’s Diary these traits are paid a lot of attention, and her struggle is often shown ironically:

Since leaving work I have nearly slipped a disc, wheezing through a step aerobics class, scratched my naked body for seven minutes with a stiff brush; cleaned the flat; filled the fridge, plucked my eyebrows, skimmed the papers and the Ultimate Sex Guide, put the washing in and waxed my own legs, since it was too late to book an appointment. […] My back hurts, my head aches and my legs are bright red and covered in lumps of wax. (59)

The postfeminist chick lit heroine is questioning farther whether she has any freedom at all, and, according to Jennifer Maher, she also criticizes the general “cultural frustration with, and attraction to, the pleasures of the popular” (Maher 195). Maher continues by arguing that postfeminism is not as shallow as only dealing with heroines’ consumption and career (195), but also bringing up the question of equality that was so important for the feminists. Equal pay for equal work has shifted into a kind of hopeless ambivalence and the heroines long for a
better job (196). Faludi argues that inequality that still is part of the contemporary society is the primary reason why women feel the cultural frustration (10): “The backlash line accuses the women’s movement of creating a generation of unhappy single and childless women - but its purveyors in the media are the ones guilty of making single and childless women feel like circus freaks” (14).

As Vnuk declares, many chick lit novels pay a lot of attention to “trendy drinks, celebrities, jobs in publishing” (42). Bridget, as a role model, works in publishing as an average chick lit heroine but is constantly dreaming of “improv[ing] career and find[ing] new job with potential” (Fielding 2). This, according to A. Rochelle Mabry, depends on the fact that she regards her work as a “dead-end,” an obstacle she has to overcome in order to move on in her life (191).

When she decides to quit her job at the publishing agency in order to start working on the television show Good Afternoon, Bridget is forced to confront her boss and ex-boyfriend, which makes her even more determined to move on and leave the past: “I don’t know anything about television but sod it, I’m stuck in a dead-end here, and it is just too humiliating working with Daniel now. I had better go and tell him” (203). Even though she meets some resistance the heroine shows strength and independence and is resolute to go her own way. An important aspect concerning Bridget’s career is that it is not she who makes the decision to find a better job, but her mother: “It is high time you got out of that silly dead-end job where no one appreciates you. […] I’m going to get you a job in television” (183). Thus the independent postfeminist trait may be questioned in Bridget Jones’s Diary.

One important aspect of the career-focus, related to the heroine’s constant strive and obsession with finding Mr. Right, is pointed out by Faludi, who says that economical independence often is more important to postfeminists than getting a ring on their finger:
“The more women are paid, the less eager they are to get married” (Faludi 31). A successful career is therefore a reason why the love life for chick lit heroines is complicated and does not always end with her walking up the aisle. Bridget, however, is not explicitly characterized as economically independent, and if Faludi’s statement is true, she rather follows the traditional romance structure in her strives for economical independence through her search for the everlasting love.

Identity and Sexuality

One of the most interesting aspects of postfeminism is the belief in independence and liberation. However, societal norms differ a lot, which has led to the dichotomies “‘the spinster boom’ versus ‘the return of marriage’; and ‘the infertility epidemic’ versus ‘the baby boomlet’” (Faludi 94). Chick lit represents the spinster boom, dealing with more important aspects of life than love, whereas traditional romances often end with a “happily ever after”. Stephanie Harzewski states that chick lit “replicates romance’s conventions in the heroine’s union with Mr. Right, though this is not requisite. Frequently Mr. Right turns out to be Mr. Wrong or Mr. Maybe” (37). Harzewski discusses further that the heroine’s relationship issues have to stand back and that more focus is put on her work and social life. However, in the case of Bridget Jones’s Diary this statement appears to be unclear since Bridget often discusses her inability to “form functional relationship with responsible adult” and notes her tendency to “fall for any of the following: alcoholics, workaholics, commitment phobics […] emotional fuckwits or freeloaders, perverts” (Fielding 2-3). Therefore, the fact that chick lit heroines also show interest in men cannot be neglected as easily as Harzewski says. Harzewski continues her reasoning by saying that chick lit heroines “stand as direct beneficiaries of the women’s liberation movement” (37).
The liberation in chick lit can be seen through the heroines’ behavior; they do not focus as much on finding the man of their dreams as they do on sorting out other personal problems, such as ending bad relationships, dealing with troubles concerning family and/or work. Bridget, involved in what Smyczyńska defines as a “toxic” relationship with her boss Daniel Cleaver, knows that Daniel is the personification of an “emotional fuckwit” (Smyczyńska 102) and still she is attracted to him. The relationship is abruptly ended when Bridget discovers that her “boyfriend is sleeping with a bronzed giantess” (181). This is not an explicit example of Bridget learning to discover her emotional priorities, but an epiphany, which forces her to change her lifestyle into a more positive and independent postfeminist state: “Saturday 12 August […] Determined to be v. positive about everything. Am going to change life” (189). In order to change her life, Bridget consults both her friends and loads of books in the genre of popular psychology: “Jude had just been reading brilliant book called *Goddesses in Everywoman*. Apparently the book says that at certain times in your life everything goes wrong and you don’t know which way to turn […] What you have to do is be a heroine and stay brave” (195). The self-help books are one way for Bridget to develop as a heroine, which is one important aspect in chick lit. Smyczyńska confirms that one lesson chick lit heroines often learn is how to see their own emotional priorities, which makes them end bad relationships in order to find the right one (103).

The protagonists in chick lit novels often express a desire “to be beautiful, rich and adored” and a liberal view on love and dating (Harzewski 37). Again Harzewski’s argument appears to be very general. Bridget shows that she is affected by the expectations of how women in their early thirties are supposed to behave: “[r]esolve to begin self-improvement programme with time-and-motion study […] Three hours and thirty-five minutes between
waking and leaving house is too long” (Fielding 91-93). She also tends to think constantly of the sexual aspects of her situation:

> The trouble with trying to go out with people when you get older is that everything becomes so loaded. When you are partnerless in your thirties, the mild bore of not being in a relationship […] gets infused with the paranoid notion that the reason you are not in a relationship is your age, you have had your last ever relationship and sexual experience ever, and it is all your fault for being too wild or willful to settle down in the first bloom of your youth. (143-44)

The only aspect where Bridget’s thoughts confirm Harzewski’s arguments is that the focus is not only on men, but rather on the protagonist’s psychological development (38). In many chick lit novels men are represented by homosexual best friends, which, according to Harzewski, makes the Mr. Right characters appear as shallow and static characters “like the men in bridal magazines” (38). By giving the gay friends more space, the man-woman dichotomy is set aside and the social relations of the heroine are more developed. This change of focus is the main reason the Mr. Right characters appear simplistic in chick lit novels. Smyczyńska confirms this by stating that “chick lit discourses problematise the patriarchal understanding of masculinity, but the protagonists no longer strain themselves to disentangle its mystery” (102). The characterization of men is set aside and they generally only appear in certain, often awkward, situations:

> Dinner was served in the ‘Drawing Room’ on the ground floor and I found myself in the queue on the stairs directly behind Mark Darcy.
‘Hi,’ I said, hoping to make amendments for my mother’s rudeness. He looked round, completely ignored me and looked back again. (230)

Not only can it be hard to see when Bridget starts to show interest in Mark Darcy, but the fact is that he is more talked of by Bridget as the narrator than actually appearing as a character in the story. This may be a cause of Bridget’s mother desperately trying to make them attracted to each other: “Malcolm and Elaine are having the ruby wedding in London now, on the twenty-third, so you will be able to come and keep Mark company. […] Oh, but he’s very clever. Been to Cambridge” (211). Mabry explains that “other elements of the story are recounted in a way that threatens to overwhelm the romance” (201); Mark Darcy is given less space in the narrative than Daniel Cleaver, although he is characterized as a potential Mr. Right, “[h]e’s one of those top-notch barristers” (Fielding 9), even before Bridget has met him.

Although Bridget’s mind is set on men, which in some situations makes her appear as a relationship hunter, she also strives to appear as an independent woman with the possibility to analyze her behavior. As Mabry states, Bridget may express her dreams and fantasies about finding the right man to marry, but the main focus in the novel is her personal development and finally reaching the inner poise (200). Bridget has an intimate relationship with her friends, who always support and encourage her to be independent. When the toxic relationship with Daniel Cleaver has ended, Bridget is desperate to contact him but “Tom has taped a piece of paper to the telephone saying, ‘Do not ring Daniel or you will regret it.’ Should have gone to stay with Tom as suggested. Hate being alone in middle of night, smoking and sniveling like mad psychopath” (181).
Chick lit novels are not explicit in their descriptions of sexual activities, and *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is no exception. Mabry explains this as another aspect that often is set aside in order to show the heroine’s growth and gained experiences rather than a romantic and traditional picture of love and relationships (202). Bridget is a representative heroine in that sense, and also in the sense that she has “a number of sexual partners and experiences” (202) that make her development more visible. There are no sexual intercourses where details are given, but when something happens that interrupts the situation, a lot of emphasis is put to show it. When Bridget has taken a younger man, Gav, out on a dinner with her “smug married” friends, things do not go as planned:

Subsequently, however, I felt guilty about being a prickteaser […], so when Gav rang and asked me round to his house for dinner tonight I accepted graciously […] Was so long since [I] had been on a date that [I] was completely full of myself and could not resist boasting to taxi driver about my ‘boyfriend’ […] who was cooking me supper. (217)

The situation absurdly ends with Gav clumsily trying to be romantic: “Mmm. You’re all squashes” (218). Bridget’s reflection, “I couldn’t go on after that. Oh God” (218), reveals both insight and maturity.

Mabry declares that many chick lit novels and films mock “the most identifiable symbols of traditional marriage,” such as humming to a wedding march, referring to married people as smug and by contrasting the happy couple with the happy singleton (198). Furthermore Mabry states that chick lit protagonists by their actions in the discourse tend to question the conventional view of women in film and literature (198). This may be a reply to
what Faludi calls “man shortage”: “[T]he man shortage had driven single women into ‘brazen’ overtures and wives were advised to take steps to keep ‘the hussy’ at bay” (Faludi 96). Chick lit as a postfeminism-influenced genre reacts to the fear in society that singletons only focus on man-eating and will destroy marriages and families. Bridget expresses her opinion when she is invited to a dinner where she is the only unmarried woman: “I sad, head down, quivering furiously at their inferences of female sell-by dates and life as a game of musical chairs where girls without a chair/man when the music stops/they pass thirty are ‘out’. Huh. As if” (Fielding 213). Bridget’s anger is caused by the statement from a man at the dinner party who can be seen as representative for the general opinion: “Men get more attractive when they get older and women get less attractive, so all those twenty-two-year-olds who wouldn’t look at you when you were twenty-five will be gagging for it” (213). The majority of men appearing in the novel are representatives of society. Although Bridget frequently expresses her opinion she is not capable to change herself into a state of independence. Umminger argues that even though the heroine is reaching a higher level of poise or insight, her power still lies within how she looks: “[B]eauty means power, beauty means happiness, and beauty means success in family, work, and love” (252). This trait is important in *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, since Bridget is very insecure and obsessed with her looks and feels that if she would be a little prettier, she would be more successful. The relation between power and beauty can also be seen as a matter of confidence, and Bridget’s journey to find Mr. Right is a personal development. It is discovered through her epiphany in the toxic relationship, although not as explicit as Umminger’s statement. When Bridget finds out that Daniel cheats on her she loses the little power she has, and by eventually finding Mr. Right, Mark Darcy, she realizes that she is powerful in the new relationship: “‘Why did you bother doing all this?’ ‘Bridget,’ he said. ‘Isn’t it rather obvious?’” (306). Bridget here realizes that
she is attractive only when Mark tells her, which is an aspect that confirms her insecurity and low self-confidence. Her strive to be independent and liberated appears to be nothing but a wish, because Bridget is dependent on her social life to accept her just as she is.

Smeczyńska explains that the love that is shown in chick lit novels is not as obvious and explicit as the traditional romances suggest (119), and that the picture of chick lit protagonists is not as static as the general opinion implies. There is more in the term “love” than simply the love between the chick lit protagonist and her potential partner, according to Smeczyńska. Love functions as a tool for the heroine to find her inner poise, a feature that is closely related to Bridget. It is a way of dealing with friends and family, and also as an escape from reality into daydreaming (120). However, as the heroine strives for independence, she at the same time obsessed with the traditional view on marriage, which signals that chick lit is influenced by the conventions of society. Smeczyńska suggests that this contradiction derives from the fact that “the narcissistic individual needs constant admiration and acceptance exactly because of their insecure self-esteem” (115). Mabry presents another opinion: “Bridget […] may write constantly about her desire for marriage and the right man, but the novel’s emphasis on Bridget’s growth as a person and her relationships with her friends outweigh the quest for romantic partnership” (200). Bridget sums up her year by declaring that she has “finally realized the secret of happiness with men” (307), and although there is no outspoken “they lived happily ever after”-ending, the very final words from the heroine are ”[a]n excellent year’s progress” (310), which can be interpreted as a more conservative ending, influenced by traditional romance novels, than the genre is famous for.
Conclusion

If seen with postfeminist eyes, chick lit is more complex than only narrating young women with a great interest in gossiping, shopping and without any inhibition concerning sex. The reason why protagonists in chick lit appear to be provoking is shown by Susan Faludi, who states that the norm in society says that singletons are subordinate married and that alcoholism and other addictions probably are more common among single women than married. By creating a woman who can deal with love with a liberal view upon it, and who does not care as much about getting married as climbing the next step on the career ladder, chick lit authors strive to redirect the criticism to society. However, the heroine who set the standards for the characterization, Bridget Jones, appears to be more conservative and tied to traditional romance than later heroines in the genre.

Bridget, as the first famous chick lit heroine, embodies many important postfeminist features. Above all the easily defined aspects such as the change of career, the overall problematic relation with her naïve and vain mother and the ambivalence regarding finding Mr. Right, Bridget reaches a higher level of maturity and insight, which she in the beginning only knows by the term “inner poise”. She has several obstacles to overcome in order to reach the new level, but manages in the end. As she gets an important epiphany when realizing her relation with Daniel Cleaver is toxic she decides to end it in order to grow up. The heroine is not as independent as she intends, and often her social relations, with friends and family, are forced to decide what she ought to do, in every aspect of her life.

Even if the heroine has a complicated relationship with her mother, she is influenced by her in several ways. In Bridget’s case, the maturity is interestingly reached with great help from her mother, who on the surface appears to be a silly and childish person but shows that even though she has made some bad choices in life she can help her daughter to get a new job.
Moreover, it is because of her mother that Bridget meets her Mr. Right. This fact shows that even though the postfeminists are mocking their ancestors, they are greatly affected by them and tend to follow advice given by them. Another interesting aspect of chick lit as a postfeminist genre is that it often characterizes the protagonist in a certain, stereotypical way where some traits must be included. The most important of the characteristics that a chick lit heroine embodies is the insecurity, which in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* is visible through the statistics of her weight, consumption and other obsessions that she cannot handle or control. In fact, she feels better when she lets someone else be responsible for her.

Some of the postfeminist traits are applicable to the chick lit heroine, but the search for love and the dream of finding Mr. Right, although not paid as much attention as other aspects that appear in the novels, follows the traditional convention. *Bridget Jones’s Diary* appears ambiguous and not as clearly postfeminist as its spokesmen suggest, characterizing women as insecure and subordinate rather than strong and independent. The contradiction between independence and insecurity creates a difficult situation both for Bridget and for the genre in general. Hence chick lit can be regarded as a true postfeminist genre, as it deals with subjects that are contradictory and unclear. The contradictory aspect influences every trait that a chick lit heroine embodies, and especially the relation to her mother. Bridget expresses jealousy, anger and irritation when referring to her mother, but finally admits that she has many things to thank her for and to learn from her.

Chick lit heroines may through their identities carry a deeper postfeminist message, but it is frequently hidden in a parodying characterization, easily dismissed as plain and simple entertainment reading. Bridget is insecure and confused in many of the situations she is exposed to, and she also appears to be irresponsible when letting other people make decisions for her, but she ends up as a successful heroine who has reached her goal when finding her
Mr. Right. By the setting, the average year for an average woman, the heroine can convey the message that it does not matter how a woman looks or behaves, she will anyhow be successful in the end.

The criticism that has been pointed towards chick lit, judging it as simple and trite, may on the surface be justified, but when analyzing it deeper these messages are possible to discover. As the genre attracts young women as readers the importance of creating a heroine that embodies traits that are easy to recognize has to be considered. Bridget is given an identity that any young woman could recognize and her everyday life issues are easy for her readers to understand, which can make the message reach out to the audience. The final line in the novel, “‘Don’t say ‘what’, say ‘pardon’, darling, and do as your mother tells you” (307), implies that listening to elder people is the lesson to learn from Bridget, as it is what leads to her final success.
Works Cited


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