

**Research Article**

Received: 06/11/2023; Accepted: 01/12/2023; Published: 04/12/2023

The construction of women as the loving subject in Curtis  
Sittenfeld's *Eligible*

**Abstract**

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Women's presence as the dominant figure in the construction of patriarchal society is an emerging issue presented by Curtis Sittenfeld in her Novels. Liz is one of the female characters Curtis Sittenfeld displays in her novel *Eligible*. This figure of women who appear in her novel is very complex with many various dynamics. This study aims to examine the female main character as a loving subject in a male-dominated society. Applying Giddens's theory of loving subjects, the study's results revealed that Liz is described as the loving subject who seeks to build an intimate relationship with the man who became her choice. Through her behaviour and appearance, she was described as a loving subject who has a smooth character, sensitive and romantic. Liz is also shown as a private autonomous and has humanist and psychological dimensions, which are very complex inside. Curtis Sittenfeld as a writer presents the presence of women as the loving subject in a relationship of intimacy that is liquid and unrestricted. In this research, women are presented as an autonomous entity that has the same rights in a male-dominated society.

**Keywords:** Loving subject; Anthony Giddens; *Eligible*; Curtis Sittenfeld

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**1. Introduction**

Culture is an integral part of society. Naturally, societies in different parts of the world construct themselves in a patriarchal culture where men are highly distinguished and superior in their masculinity. At the same time, the role of women in their femininity is merely complementary to men or subordinates (Fachrani, 2015). The gender differences between masculinity and femininity in patriarchal cultures are very pronounced and can be found in societies in different parts of the world. In this case, women do not have independence because the humility, dependence, and self-righteousness of women towards men symbolize the glory of a woman's heart. From the various cultural terms, it can be concluded that women are indirectly placed as objects.

In contrast, men in subjective positions can give concepts of how the roles, duties, and positions of women should be. In this case, all aspects of women's lives are governed by men; the most fundamental thing is when the father with power in the family deceives his daughters with men according to his wishes. This is an overt demonstration of patriarchy since it is centered upon controlling women's sexual and reproductive powers by claiming the female body as man's territory (Sev'er A & Yurdakul G, 2001). Forced marriages have significantly increased over the last two decades (Idriss, 2022). Even in the modern era and entering this twenty-first century, it is still preserved. No wonder many female writers raise the theme of patriarchal culture with the topic of adultery in today's context.

Curtis Sittenfield, a renowned American author, is among the writers who have explored the topic of arranged marriage. Among the numerous novels authored by Curtis Satterfield, her novel “Eligible” stands out as one of the most renowned. The novel’s distinctiveness is readily apparent through its collection of stories, which encompass language, subject matter, storyline, and related concerns. American society vividly portrays a multitude of issues and difficulties that are present within it. The portrayal of societal socialisation is depicted mostly through female figures, with Lizzy as the key figure illustrating how society engages and interacts. This may be observed through the socialisation and interactions within the depicted society.

The primary focus of the work is centered around the character Elizabeth, commonly referred to as Liz. In this particular instance, Sittenfield offers a feminist analysis wherein the character of Liz is seen as a resilient individual who defies traditional gender roles by exhibiting strength rather than vulnerability. Liz's subject was characterized as a woman possessing a very robust personality in contrast to the average woman of that era. The character of Liz is depicted as exhibiting behaviors and thought patterns that align with those commonly observed among American women. It is crucial to keep in mind that the restrictions imposed by a patriarchal culture, which is still deeply ingrained within her familial context, have an impact on these traits. The novel in question is a literary composition that offers a comprehensive and profound exploration of societal dynamics, particularly within the contemporary context. It specifically delves into the everyday experiences of the British populace, shedding light on the prevailing state of society. The distinguishing characteristic of Curtis Sittenfield's works often resides in the narratives centered around the female subjects that he portrays. The depicted subjects in the exhibition are comprised of everyday individuals; however, their distinct personalities are effectively conveyed with meticulous attention to detail, resulting in a genuine sense of individuality that permeates the narrative.

Furthermore, Sittenfield’s literary works revolve around the issue of romance, namely exploring the dynamics of relationships between individuals of different genders. However, it is evident in *Eligible* that the author, Sittenfield, aims to illustrate the complexities of Liz’s character when confronted with the challenge of an arranged marriage. The plot depicts a conflict in which Liz rejects her father's offer to arrange marriages for her and her sisters. The emotional closeness that the protagonist experiences during her interactions with Mr. Jasper Wick, on the other hand, traps her. The female protagonist finds herself caught in a dilemma, torn between her resistance to entering into an arranged marriage and the emotional connection she starts to develop with the male lead.

In this particular case, the role of a woman as the only recipient of affection, devoid of choices within the context of love and intimacy, maintains the unchallenged privilege traditionally associated with men. In the contemporary American society of the twenty-first century, women must be liberated from the oppressive influence of patriarchy. Nevertheless, Sittenfield’s story demonstrates the enduring presence of this phenomenon within the context of modernity. Women are situated as individuals with agency in making choices but within the confines established by the prevailing discourse. The present inquiry pertains to how female characters within the literary work understand the intricate dynamics of love and intimacy regarding individuals of the opposite gender.

According to Anthony Giddens (1992), the conceptualization of love has changed along with the development of modern civilization, moving from romantic love to a subtype known as confluent love. This phenomenon diverges from the concept of romantic love, as it necessitates the establishment of a monogamous partnership. Confluent love encompasses relationships that encompass both heterosexual and gay orientations. Confluent love transforms, giving rise to the concept of a pure connection. A pure relationship entails a dynamic characterized by sexual and emotional parity, challenging established structures of gender-based authority (Giddens, 1992).

Additionally, the notion of loving a subject within a conventional relationship is readily apparent in a romantic relationship. In this case, the subject, typically the woman, actively engages in

the pursuit and selection of a partner in order to establish and partake in intimate romantic connections with her beloved individual. In this approach, women are positioned as affectionate individuals within a framework that facilitates self-actualization. In the context of women, each endeavors to obtain acknowledgment or validation from external entities, particularly their romantic partners. Dynamic phenomena manifest when an individual's subjectivity, specifically in the context of women denoted as the loving subject, persists in a perpetual flux, undergoing an ongoing and ever-evolving alteration. In this case, Giddens (1992) argues that a person will reveal a narrative about himself, which will become a dynamic reflexive project where each individual will always maintain, improve, and change the narrative and biography of himself. A person's self-confidence will emerge, cohere, and integrate with his narrative.

Individuals will appear autonomous in their choices. Likewise, women, as the loving subject, can independently accept, reject, or continue a relationship that happens to them. It is what Giddens calls self-esteem and pride. In this condition, women will become active parties by giving space and building a more comfortable relationship by freely organizing and controlling their relationship. Thus, the ideal intimacy that women crave in their position as loving subjects will be achieved. The built intimacy must be based on pure relationships, as Giddens conveyed in the concept of pure relationships (Giddens, 1991).

In Curtis Sittenfield's novel was chosen as a corpus on the assumption that it is one of the many novels that depict the development of an American female subject in a metropolitan city but is educated like a girl confined by patriarchal culture. This novel also discusses the theme of love with various problems. This novel is also assumed to offer a construction of female subjectivity that tends to differ from the construction of roles in a thick patriarchal environment. In this novel, *Eligible* shows the gaps that occur in women's relationships and interactions in the social environment where they live. The female subjects portrayed in the story in the novel have different complexities. However, they are based on creating a social structure where men play a dominant, solid role because they are the dominant group in a partialist hierarchical order. In the social order, every individual has the same rights to conduct interactions and socialization.

In the plot, women are constructed to be independent individuals who should determine what their goals in life will be, and women should not be pressured by what surrounds them. As Giddens (1992) said, a person has the right to have choices and can negotiate with existing constructions that always place the position of women as an individual who can only choose. Women should be the loving subject who is independent and has the power to build the relationship of love and intimacy she wants. *Eligible* is assumed to be the initial foundation of thought that discusses women as loving subjects free and not bound by existing patterns or rules. Therefore, it is exciting to examine how women are constructed in this novel and the author's purpose in constructing them as such.

## **2. Methods**

This research uses a qualitative research methodology with a primary emphasis on descriptive analysis. The theoretical framework of qualitative methodology is rooted in the positivist paradigm espoused by influential thinkers like as Max Weber, Immanuel Kant, and Wilhelm Dilthey (Maleong, 1989). Qualitative research refers to a type of research that employs interpretive approaches, providing findings in the form of descriptive accounts (Ratna, 2011). Faruk (2020) defines material objects as the primary focus of investigation. In the present study, the material object under examination was the novel titled "*Eligible*" authored by Curtis Sittenfield and released in 2016. In this study, the formal object is approached from the perspective of the loving subject, as proposed by Anthony Giddens.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1 *The Construction of Women as The Loving Subjects in Eligible*

In Sittenfeld's book, "Eligible," the character of Liz is depicted as an autonomous individual, exhibiting independence within a dynamic storyline. Liz is characterized by her privileged status and is presented as the central figure in the narrative. The active representation of the character is evident throughout the several chapters in this novel. In Sittenfeld's portrayal, Liz serves as a deliberate representation of contemporary women.

Liz had spent her entire professional life working at magazines, having been hired out of college as a fact-checker at a weekly publication known for its incisive coverage of politics and culture. From there, she had jumped to Mascara, a monthly women's magazine she had subscribed to since the age of fourteen, drawn equally to its feminist stances and its unapologetic embrace of shoes and cosmetics. First she was an assistant editor, then an associate editor, then a features editor; but at the age of thirty-one, realizing that her passion was telling stories rather than editing them, Liz had become Mascara's writer-at-large, a position she still occupied. Though writing tended to pay less than editing, Liz believed she had a dream job: She traveled regularly and interviewed accomplished and sometimes famous individuals (Sittenfeld, 2016, p.19)

The quotation exemplifies how the author of this literary work develops the portrayal of Liz as a woman representative of the contemporary era. The female subject is characterized as being refreshing and highly vivacious, possessing a successful professional trajectory, and displaying intellectual prowess. Furthermore, Liz also exhibits physical beauty, as exemplified in "the attendance of the beautiful Bennet girls and their parents at the barbecue that the Lucases were hosting for several recent arrivals to Christ Hospital, where Dr. Lucas was both a physician and a high-ranking executive" [44]. This indicates that Liz possesses a comprehensive range of attributes, encompassing both physical and non-physical qualities, indicative of her feminine identity. The character is depicted as a young woman who possesses an ideal physical appearance, exhibits intelligence, hails from a prosperous background, and additionally boasts a successful professional trajectory, encountering minimal noteworthy obstacles throughout her life. The aforementioned elements collectively indicate that Liz embodies a compassionate individual who exhibits a multifaceted nature within the realm of feminine subjectivity. According to Giddens' conceptualization of the loving subject, the novel's portrayal of Liz in the early chapters suggests that she is a woman engaged in the process of self-actualization. This might demonstrate the role and status of women inside a patriarchal society.

The door swung into the kitchen, and Mrs. Bennet appeared, flushed and bustling.  
"Lizzy, what on earth were you thinking? Why, you probably hurt his feelings terribly."  
"Mom, please don't tell me you think I should date Cousin Willie."  
"He's smart, he's successful, and it's late in the game for you to be picky."  
"He's my—"  
"He's your step-cousin, Elizabeth. Don't try to tell me you're related, because you aren't."  
"It's not legal in Ohio to marry your first cousin," Liz aid. During her pedicure, she had checked this information on her phone, hoping to bolster her dismay with facts; she didn't mention that such a marriage actually was legal in California.  
"So let's say we fell madly in love, which would never happen. If we wanted to make it official, we'd need to hire a lawyer." (Sittenfeld, 2016, p. 139)

The quote mentioned earlier by Sittenfeld presents an additional manifestation of Liz's subjective experience as a woman. In this context, Giddens elucidates that the loving subject must possess a sense of autonomy within the ongoing process or trajectory, in order to avoid becoming stagnant or repetitive in a singular form. The author of this story portrays Liz as exhibiting a greater degree of

freedom in articulating her viewpoints and presenting her arguments pertaining to a specific issue or subject matter. Liz is portrayed as an assertive individual who actively resists societal constraints in order to garner acknowledgment from others. This portrayal suggests that women possess their own subjectivity as autonomous individuals and should not be limited in their ability to articulate their perspectives and viewpoints. In this particular instance, Sittenfeld assumes the role of narrator, portraying Liz as an affectionate protagonist who has contrasting perspectives in comparison to her maternal figure. The protagonist expresses her dissatisfaction with the arranged marriage that has been proposed between herself and her cousin. The practice of planned marriages in the contemporary era appears antiquated since it is perceived as redundant by individuals who believe they possess the agency to independently choose a suitable partner, without the need for parental involvement in the matchmaking process. The mother expresses disapproval due to the belief that it is preferable for parents to take the initiative in selecting potential partners and that the current circumstances do not warrant being selective. In this case, Liz is shown as resolute in her position by categorically rejecting and deeming it unlawful to marry a cousin despite the absence of any consanguineous relationship. This aligns with Giddens' thesis, which posits that if the loving subject is an independent and self-governing human, such a stance is expected. The portrayal of Liz exhibits a high level of confidence, as evidenced by her use of direct and assertive arguments. She contends that the planned marriage between herself and Willie is illegal "It's not legal in Ohio to marry your first cousin," Liz said (Sittenfeld, 2016, p.139). This particular subject is characterized by the presence of diverse perspectives on key issues. This demonstrates Liz's astute ability to address these difficulties as a subject matter expert.

"Mom, please don't tell me you think I should date Cousin Willie."

"He's smart, he's successful, and it's late in the game for you to be picky."

"He's my—" (Sittenfeld, 2016, p. 139)

This quotation is derived from a dialogue between the protagonist and her mother, Mrs. Bennet, whereby a divergence of viewpoints arises concerning the practice of arranged weddings and the societal perception of women as commodities selected by men. The mother asserts and underscores that women will ultimately find themselves in a position where they must select a partner rather than having the agency to actively pick. They lack the authority to determine their own marital preferences, "it's late in the game for you to be picky." (Sittenfeld, 2016). Nevertheless, Liz holds a contrasting viewpoint, asserting that in contemporary times, women possess the agency to select their life partners, as exemplified by the subsequent quotation "So let's say we fell madly in love, which would never happen. If we wanted to make it official, we'd need to hire a lawyer." (Sittenfeld, 2016). In contemporary society, the practice of matchmaking is increasingly perceived as impractical, particularly when individuals are constrained by familial obligations. The underlying premise is that every person possesses the autonomy to use their own agency in matters of personal relationships. In the context of arranged marriage, women are definitely perceived as entities subject to selection by males. Nevertheless, in this particular instance, Liz presents a perspective on freedom that centers around the autonomy to make personal choices without coercion or imposition. Instead, the aim is to cultivate a dynamic connection and create avenues for individuals to enhance their independence, free from any constraints. According to Giddens, an ideal relationship of intimacy must be based on a pure relationship. Liz is portrayed as somebody who possesses a proactive and detail-oriented mindset. She is opposed to immediate companionship and rather follows a distinct procedure to establish and cultivate relationships. This elucidates that Liz is the loving subject that Sittenfeld crafts to possess greater autonomy and agency in discerning her desires and aspirations. Liz demonstrates a notable preoccupation with women within her chosen field of study. She exhibits a comprehensive perspective and offers unique problem-solving approaches to address issues about women.

Moreover, women, being the loving subjects, exhibit robust perspectives regarding their arguments, as evidenced by the following quotation:

He shook his head. "It isn't that. It's a sincere question."  
"No," she said. "I don't want children." The ambivalence she usually feigned during such conversations seemed in this instance unnecessary; she was not, after all, trying to endear herself to him.

"Believe it or not, I do understand why people have kids. For most of my life, I assumed I'd be a mother, and I'm sure it is rewarding, when they're not having tantrums. But the older I've gotten, the less I've wanted it for myself. Watching Jane go through her insemination process was the clincher. I like my life now, there's stuff I want to do in the future that isn't compatible with having kids, and it's not even a big, tortured decision. It's a relief" (Sittenfeld, 2016, p. 254-255)

The aforementioned lines underscore Liz's depiction as an autonomous entity who exercises agency over several aspects, including her own identity. A compelling argument may be made suggesting that Liz holds a stance against the exertion of control over her own body, particularly in light of the circumstances affecting both her and her siblings. By choosing not to engage in procreation, she exercises her complete autonomy and control over her own body. Liz desires that the progression of her romantic relationship be rooted in a conventional framework characterized by love and mutual consent, particularly with regard to the decision to start a family. Liz demonstrates a resolute commitment to her beliefs, refraining from employing persuasive tactics to cultivate her partner's attraction through agreeable words. In this instance, Sittenfeld portrays her as very engaged in the process of self-actualization. According to Giddens, individuals engage in a process of dynamic reflection wherein they construct and offer a narrative about themselves. The novel portrays Liz's affirmation as a character who effectively sustains and controls the narrative surrounding her own identity by actively creating opportunities for connection and fostering intimacy with others. Liz achieves this by presenting logical arguments to support her decision to remain child-free, thereby solidifying her unwavering conviction in her rightful autonomy over her own body.

She grinned. "Fitzwilliam Cornelius Darcy, I admire you so much. The work you do, the way you literally save lives, how principled you are—you're the most principled person I know. Even if it means you're insulting sometimes, you're the only person I know, me included, who never lies. And you're amazingly smart, and when you're not telling harsh truths, you're incredibly gracious and kind and decent. I love you, Darcy—I ardently love you. And I want to know—". (Sittenfeld, 2016, p. 446)

Inside this quotation, the character of Liz is portrayed as both a loving subject and as someone who engages in a romantic connection inside the story. The emotions experienced by Liz are stimulated and influenced by the deliberate establishment and development of the interpersonal context. Liz develops a strong emotional attachment to Mr. Darcy. Throughout its progression, Liz exhibits increased levels of engagement and endeavors to foster intimacy and a heightened sense of ease within the established relationship, thereby assuming a greater degree of control. The aforementioned dynamics are developed within a flexible and non-traditional partnership, affording many opportunities for personal growth and diversity of experiences for all those involved. Furthermore, it is evident that women, as subjects of affection, possess their own set of criteria pertaining to the objects of their affection or preference. In addition to the observable attributes and actions, it is necessary to consider the holistic characteristics pertaining to individuals of the opposite gender.

Giddens (1992) also states that the loving subject in a loving relationship should possess the capacity to exercise control over all occurrences inside the relationship that pertain to them. This also demonstrates the impact on persons who develop strong emotional attachments, as the consequences of such attractions persistently influence their psychological well-being. Similarly, Liz experienced

the same phenomenon, exhibiting signs of happiness, excitement, and confidence. These emotions are commonly observed in those with an innate inclination toward affection. The subject of Liz is highly prominent in regard to the function posited by Giddens, wherein each individual's unique emotional investment contributes to the dynamic and active nature of the relationship.

### *3.2 The Construction of Women as The Loving Subject by Curtis Sittenfield*

In this study, it is found that the author, in this case, Satterfield, is very concerned and focused on the role of women who are not just tools, devices, or objects that are rigid and positioned statically in the construction of a patriarchal society in the novel. However, she describes the construction of a different female person. In contrast, Satterfield also describes women as loving subjects who have the freedom to build relationships and the right to love. Sittenfield depicts women through the subject of Liz as autonomous, unattached, and an active party to seek and choose in order to experience relationships within a framework of romance and intimacy with the object of her love. Sittenfield portrays Liz as a complex, loving female subject trying to gain legitimacy by showing herself to gain position and recognition from others. Through the subject of Liz, Sittenfield explains that, as the loving subject, women are depicted as dynamic and seemingly independent individuals. This is illustrated by the dynamics of Liz's subject in the novel, which looks pretty accessible in terms of accepting, rejecting, or continuing the relationship that occurs with her. As the loving subject, Liz is also described by Sittenfield as being able to take an active part in providing space to organize and control her relationship freely. In an interview, Curtiz explained that there are similarities that still occur today, namely regarding social constructions that are felt to oppress women in terms of marriage:

Well, one of the things that I thought about as I was writing is - which of the pressures, or which of the issues that exist in "Pride And Prejudice" still exist today. And I think that, you know, obviously a woman's financial well-being does not hinge on getting married anymore, as it did then. But, at the same time, there's certainly still social pressure to marry, especially if you get to the age of, say, 40.

People might wonder why. They might think - are you not married because you don't want to be? Are you not married because you couldn't meet the right person? Did you want children? And so I think that Mrs. Bennet has a pretty unattractively old-fashioned view of the world. And she has five daughters who go from being in their early 20s to almost 40. And she's astonished that she - none of them have married. And she has such a sort of conventional retro view that she thinks that life is not complete unless you have found your husband. (Rachel, 2016)

The mentioned interview suggests that the literary text has effectively depicted the presence of societal norms that exert pressure on women to hastily enter into marriage while also highlighting the persistent objectification of women in contemporary times. This novel depicts women as entities that are objectified rather than being portrayed as autonomous individuals. Women are often not regarded as autonomous individuals who possess humanistic and psychological dimensions. In this analysis, it is evident that Sittenfield not only advocates for women as empowered individuals, but also highlights the notion that women, like men, possess an inherent awareness and sensitivity to the fact that they exist in relation to men within a patriarchal framework, and thus deserve equal rights. Women possess complete autonomy over their bodies, enabling them to make decisions regarding the timing of marriage or childbirth.

The interview above implies that the literary text has subtly illustrated that the social construction of a society that tends to pressure women to get married immediately is happening in the modern era,

with women constantly being objectified. In this novel, women are positioned as objects rather than subjects. Women are not considered independent entities that have humanist and psychological sides. From this explanation, Sittenfield not only fights for women as the loving subject but also shows and gives the perception that as a woman, she is a human being who is aware and sensitive that women are created in opposition to men, paired with men and have the same rights in patriarchal construction. Women also have total power over their bodies, where they will get married at a certain age or have a child.

The author also finds that by raising the issue of women, it is indicated that Sittenfield is not only fighting for women but there is also another reason, namely to present the figure of women in the construction of patriarchy. Because it is still early days, Sittenfield is very subtle and not frontal. Her gentle and non-extreme way of speaking and not deconstructing anything is very illustrative of a humanist person. The perspective of women who are free from the hegemony of patriarchal construction is very clear from the description of the female subject she presents through the subject of Liz.

## 5. Conclusions

The issue of women assuming major roles in the development of a male-dominated culture throughout the contemporary age frequently emerges and remains prevalent in the novels authored by Curtis Sittenfield. One of the characters in Sittenfield's novel *Eligible* is Liz. The female subject exhibits a multifaceted nature characterized by a range of dynamics. Liz is characterized as "the loving subject" who endeavors to establish a bond of closeness with the man she chooses. Liz is depicted as a kind individual with a self-reliant, empathetic, and vibrant personality, as evidenced by her conduct and physical presentation. Additionally, she is shown as an individual possessing intricate humanistic and psychological aspects. This further elucidates Sittenfield's desire as an author to depict women as the cherished focal point inside a dynamic and unencumbered bond of closeness. It emphasizes Curtis Sittenfield's rhetoric in support of the position of women as a loving subject. In this instance, Sittenfield portrays women as independent individuals who possess equitable rights within the framework of societal norms.

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