

Patriarchal Surveillance and Female Vulnerability in A Good Girl's Guide to Murder: A Feminist Study of Power and Resistance

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Abstract

In modern patriarchal communities, young women still face constant supervision and control, which makes them vulnerable to all kinds of factors. Patriarchal surveillance operated based on social norms, moral policing, and gendered expectations that restricted women's autonomy and, at the same time, did not help women to be subjects of violence. A Good Girl's Guide to Murder by Holly Jackson gave a vivid example of this truth by introducing a character of Pip Fitz-Amobi. This paper examines the concept of patriarchal surveillance to create female vulnerability in the novel through the themes of social control, fear, gendered violence, and psychological pressures. Through the analysis of Pip in the investigative trial, the paper has found that young women were supervised, evaluated, and coerced in a male-dominated social system. Meanwhile, the novel highlighted female resistance and agency and demonstrated how young women challenged patriarchal constraints. This article argued that the novel reflected the lived experiences of young women in contemporary society, where surveillance and vulnerability existed together with strength and self-confidence.

Keywords: Patriarchal Surveillance, Vulnerability, Violence, Social Control, Female Agency.

In modern society, young women are still living according to the circumstances that were predetermined by patriarchal surveillance, as their actions, motions, and decisions are under constant control and evaluation. Although there was social development and more access to education, women were not allowed to be independent in both subtle and overt ways. Feminist theorists said that surveillance was not only a form of observation but a disciplinary act that upheld gender relations and female vulnerability in the community. These realities usually found their reflection in literature, and they provided a clue to the functioning of power in real life.

Another vivid example of patriarchal surveillance would be *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, where the life of Pip Fitz-Amobi shows the effects of female inquisitiveness and autonomy in a patriarchal

system. When Pip tried to challenge a conventional story by breaking open a closed murder case, she found herself on the side of suspicion, threats, and psychological experiences, another lesson of how women who wanted to know the truth about things were viewed as disruptive or dangerous. Using feminist theories of surveillance, gendered power, specifically that of Michel Foucault and Sandra Lee Bartky, this article has explored how the aspect of patriarchal surveillance made women more vulnerable in the novel but also brought to light instances of resistance and agency.

Patriarchal surveillance was defined as the societal and institutional pressures to control the conduct, movement and decisions of women which were constantly patrolled to keep male dominance intact. Surveillance in this regard was not only a form of observation but a kind of social control that subjected the women to discipline. The theory of surveillance (Discipline and Punish) by Michel Foucault provided an explanation of the fact that visibility is a trap (Foucault 200). His notion of the panopticon was used to determine how authority works in the light of the ever-present visibility, thus making people internalise discipline and manage themselves.

Foucault did not discuss gender, but feminist scholars used his framework to explore the experience of women in their lives. According to *Femininity and Domination* by Sandra Lee Bartky, women were under a disciplinary regime that brought a modality of power that is exercised on the female body (Bartky 74). She claimed that surveillance was highly gendered because women's bodies, motions, and behaviour were subjected to higher scrutiny than that of men. This type of control was effective in that the women were taught how to control themselves, which, in most cases, limited their freedom despite the lack of direct control.

Such a theoretical premise was explicitly echoed in *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by Holly Jackson, where the patriarchal watch was conducted not only in the most common social interactions but also in the institutional suspicions. Pip Fitz-Amobi was severely interrogated and followed by the authorities and the community members, especially when she decided to reopen a closed murder case. Her inquiry tore up the social fabric, according to which young women were expected to be vigilant, quiet, and obedient. This privacy of surveillance was quietly unveiled when Pip was not confident about taking control of her own home: there was a moment of silence, and Pip did not know what to do next, whether to ask him to come inside or not. He appeared to be expectant of something" (74).

The uncertainty of pip was gendered social conditioning, which conditioned women to be careful of propriety, consent, and perception even in their own houses. The fact that she hesitated was not caused by an explicit threat, but rather by an internalised sense of social judgement, which explains the idea of Bartky, who asserts that patriarchal power disciplines women by creating subjects of self-monitoring. Therefore, the intelligence, curiosity, and independence in Pip were not seen as a strong side but as a problem to distract, which supports the notion that women who went against the disciplinary rules were subject to suspicion and covert punishments that existed in patriarchal societies.

Patriarchal societies had a strong linkage between female vulnerability and gendered violence and the culture of fear that governed the lives of women. Feminist critics have suggested that it was not because women are weak that they were made to be vulnerable, but rather because societal systems encouraged violence against women and, in the process, blamed the women for not taking charge of their safety. Violence against women was frequently perceived as a bad thing that had to happen, and not a form of structural injustice that strengthened the silence and submission. "The Second Sex" by Simone de Beauvoir made it famous that one is not born, but becomes a woman (Beauvoir 283). This state was explained by her idea of woman as the "Other", according to which women were placed in a subordinate position of objects that could be manipulated and kept safe only within the boundaries that were set, but not objects that can exercise their agency and power.

In addition to this point, the Feminist Theory by bell hooks proposed that the violence was an instrument of patriarchal control and domination (Hooks 117). The patriarchal power, she stressed, was perpetuated by the means of fear and domination, specifically through violence against women, who did not comply with the oppression. In *Feminism Is for Everybody*, she contended that gendered violence was used as a means of discipline to intimidate women with the repercussions of going against the expectations of patriarchy. In *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, Holly Jackson effectively used this structural vulnerability by using the experience of Pip Fitz-Amobi as she goes on an investigation, only to find herself in circumstances of intimidation and danger time and again.

‘The fact that Pip was aware of danger was reflected as she recognized a suspicious area, saying, this is the house of the drug dealer, and she was keen on what was going on’ (196). The fact that she noticed danger was an indication that women had to be hyper vigilant in places that were still essentially unsafe. However, this consciousness did not ensure protection, but rather it strengthened the belief that women needed to work on risk at an individual level within the hostile social domains. The element of watching and non-verbal threatening was also used to heighten the vulnerability of Pip since she always had to know how men responded to gauge danger. ‘As she saw that she was looking at the face of Ravi, whose eyes were flicking up and down over the car’ (196), the story brought out her necessity to see a threat through interpretation other than direct attack.

One of the most ubiquitous impacts of patriarchal surveillance was psychological pressure that forced women to make themselves afraid and to control their own conduct even without actual control. This internalised policing was shown graphically in *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, as embodied in Pip Fitz-Amobi's perceived danger. ‘Her body responded instinctively without conscious thought coming in when a word of caution electricity shot up the back of Pip's neck’ (75), showing how surveillance functions internally as opposed to externally through coercion.

Such a process could be interpreted with the help of the so-called concept of gender performativity provided by Judith Butler. Butler held that gender is not something that exists naturally but is constantly enacted based on social norms that are imposed. Women were taught to repeat actions that were in line with ideas of obedience, caution, and respectability, and non-compliance was heavily punished by society. ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ by Laura Mulvey said that women were placed as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning (Mulvey 11), and her theory of male gaze gave more insight into how internalised surveillance was propagated at a psychological level. This persistent awareness limited the feeling of freedom in women since they had to expect to be judged and to adjust themselves to that.

The story of *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* was designed around pervasive surveillance and vulnerability, and developed the female resistance as an essential form of agency in the future. Feminist theorist bell hooks theorized agency as an intentional act of resistance, which empowered marginalised people to oppose and change oppressive regimes of power. In the case of hooks, resistance did not just mean opposition, but it was very empowering, where women were enabled to reclaim voice, autonomy, and self-definition in machineries that were meant to shame them.

The performative agency theory that has been formulated in the works of Judith Butler was an essential critical approach to explaining the resistance of Pip. Subversive agency is a strategy that Butler has argued was created through the enactment and subversion of norms imposed by the society through repetition. In defying the norms of the ideal obedient and wary young woman, Pip not only upset the patriarchal norms, but also reformulated female heroism and power. Her investigations were thus acts of resistance that questioned the authenticity of institutions of male supremacy and power structures of the community.

A recurring pattern of feminist protest was embodied by Pip Fitz-Amobi, who never gave up in her quest to seek the truth. Instead of yielding to fear or social disapproval, she claimed authority

to investigate, as in the case when she is confident in saying, “I have already got one, thanks... It’s Sal’s phone”(74). This scene marked the moment of Pip asserting their knowledge and epistemic authority, which interfered with the patriarchal beliefs of placing young women in a subordinate role or incompetence. The agency was also strengthened when Pip took the initiative to act and not to protect or ask permission. She implied, in asking, “Ready to do some knocking with me? She played the role of the instigator of the investigation” (197). This scene overturned the conventional gender norms according to which power, assertiveness, and leadership were the prerogatives of male characters, showing that in this situation, Pip is the leader and not the victim. Her leadership was disruptive of patriarchal accounts that associated femininity with passivity and obedience.

Patriarchal Surveillance and Female Vulnerability in *A Good Girl’s Guide to Murder* explored how modern patriarchal structures-controlled women via surveillance, fear, and social judgment. Based on the concepts of feminist power, discipline, and gendered control, this paper has shown how the novel by Holly Jackson revealed the platform of female vulnerability and, at the same time, prefigured the emergence of female resistance and agency. The narrative, through the character of Pip Fitz-Amobi, embodied real-life experiences of young women as they physically risked, faced psychological pressure, and were socially controlled, but who nevertheless fought against injustice and imposed silence. Finally, the novel demanded active consciousness of the functioning of surveillance in our daily existence and established the paradigm shift of the strength of women, their self-reliance, and opposition to social injustices in the social order.

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