



DECONSTRUCTING GENDER STEREOTYPES IN *DON'T WORRY DARLING* (2022): A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze key gender stereotypes and how the main character Alice challenging the gender stereotypes portrayed in the film. To analyze the gender stereotypes and how the main character Alice challenges them gender stereotypes. The data were taken from dialogues and scenes containing gender stereotypes that were analyzed by using Deaux' and Lewis' (1984) and Brinkman's and Hamilton's (2022) theories regarding gender stereotypes. The results show that Alice experienced gender stereotypes in the form of traits, behaviours, physical appearances and occupations, from which the most data are in the traits section and the least in the occupations section. Furthermore, Alice tried to resist the stereotypes by doing many things. Her resistance toward the stereotypes could be identified through these three stages: active, fluid and negotiated.

Keywords: challenges, feminist, gender, movie, stereotypes

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses gender stereotypes and how the main character challenges them in *Don't Worry Darling* (2022). The issue in this movie is interesting because in everyday life, gender stereotypes are shown in various ways, including the opportunities given to them and how they are treated in society and Alice, the main character, tries to break the rules in her society. To support the analysis Feminism theory regarding gender stereotypes is used to analyze the issue that arises in this movie.

Many have conducted research in the same area and some of them studied the same movie from a different topic of research, and some of them studied gender stereotypes in different types of literary works. Cunningham (2023) conducted a study entitled "*The Desire to Be Truly Recognized: How Incels, Don't Worry Darling, and The Stepford Wives Exemplify the Master-Slave Dialectic.*" This study compared two different films regarding social commentary based on the feminist perspective. This study highlights the implication of incel culture, faiths, and justification for subjugation shown by both characters in the films.

Stewart (2023) studied the application of utopias and simulations in literature works and films which depict social problems in society through a study named "*Machismo, Masculinidad Tóxica Y Estereotipos Del Género: Simulaciones Y Utopías en Niebla (1914) y Don't Worry Darling (2022)*". This study asserts that simulated utopias can be impactful implements for societal criticism and analysis.

Bhardwaj & Sanyal (2018) examined the portrayal of gender stereotypes and woman empowerment through their study entitled "*Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in 'Mardaani' – A Film from Bollywood*". The authors highlight the construction of identity for both genders, especially females.

Wulandari (2020) conducted a study named "*An Analysis of Gender Stereotypes. In Brave Movie*" regarding the implementation of gender distinctions portrayed in one of the Animation Disney films, *Brave*, through a qualitative study. The results showed that the movie contains 4 types of gender stereotypes, including domestic behavior, traits, physical characteristics, and occupations. The author found that the portrayal of gender stereotypes in this movie were presented through dialogues leading to feminist perspective.

Moreover, Krahn (2015) conducted study entitled "*Reel Women: Gender Stereotypes in Film*" to examine audience's perceptions of gender stereotypes towards women in a horror film, *Scream*. This session supported the understanding of why audience keep on relishing some films even when those films tend to overstate gender stereotypes towards women.

Ramadhan (2019) confirmed the depiction of gender stereotypes in a Disney film, *Moana*, through a study named “*Gender Stereotypes in Moana (2016): A Film Analysis Of The Main Character.*” The findings indicated that Moana is depicted as a female protagonist who demonstrates the masculine traits as the dominance towards the feminine traits. This clarified that the film opposed the existence of gender stereotypes by illustrating diverse traits of the main character.

Kumar, Goh, Tan, and Siew (2022) investigated a study entitled “*Gender Stereotypes in Hollywood Movies and Their Evolution over Time: Insights from Network Analysis*” to examine how gender stereotypes are presented through products with cultural elements in society. This study confirmed the use of cognitive network science methodology can be more effective in analyzing textual data.

In addition, Manzoor and Seema (2016) analyzed the social framework in society based on conservative cultures from generation to generation portrayed in films regarding the representation of women through a study named “*Analysis Of Gender Stereotypes In Movies.*” This study used content analysis and library research as the method in analyzing the data. The results claimed that women were represented as an objectification towards sex and perceived as commodities in traditional gender roles which impacted negative images of women in audience’s perceptions.

Alola and Alola (2020) conducted a study named “*Gender Stereotypes in Nigerian Films as A Portrayal of The African Womanhood: A Feminist Perspective*” which confirmed the depiction of gender stereotypes in Nigerian movies as a visual representation of African female and male identities and gender stereotypes using the feminist film theory. Women tend to be depicted as wives, while men lead to leaders in accordance with the conservative gender roles.

Trisnawati and Ririn (2021) revealed the portrayal of gender stereotypes in *The Intern* movie by Nancy Meyer through a study of film audience response through a study entitled “*Gender Stereotypes in Nancy Meyers’s ‘The Intern’ (2015): A Study Of Film Audience Response*”. The research findings indicated that the audience’s perceptions of gender stereotypes in the film were affected by causes, namely the movie plots and the audience’s prior understanding of gender stereotypes.

In compliance with several aforementioned studies, it follows that gender stereotypes are often portrayed in literary works, both novels and films. More than that, feminist theory is also widely used in research in various fields of literature. Feminist thinking about gender equality has been widely accepted and well supported by society. This support can be seen through many studies, especially in the field of literature.

The classification of feminism can be comprehensive and varied depending on the context. According to Rosemarie Tong (2009), feminism is defined to include liberal feminism; radical feminism; Marxist and socialist feminism; psychoanalytic feminism; care-focused feminism; multicultural, global, postcolonial feminism; ecofeminism; and postmodern and third-wave feminism.

Feminism itself is a movement that supports women's empowerment, equal rights, and opportunities in the social and political spheres to eliminate women's oppression systems that give rise to patriarchy and gender inequality. Feminism has a strong aim to change the social, economic and political order to ensure gender equality and justice. Hooks (2000) argues that feminism is a movement that aims to eliminate sexist oppression and exploitation. In this case, Feminism believes that the existence of women has experienced losses in various fields of life historically because of the socio-political structure built by society. This movement seeks to address issues based on gender, leadership positions, accessing education and careers, etc. As described in feminist theory, feminism provides a framework for researching and expanding descriptions of the nature of oppression and its implications for elements of sexuality, race, class, identity, and so on.

According to Butler (1990), gender stereotypes are defined as a product that is obtained from various actions that are closely related to the existence of societal expectations of what is considered to be the values of femininity or masculinity which involve self-adjustment of an individual in society. These expectations do not lead to biological differences, but rather are judged based on norms, behavior, and recurring discourse within a group of people. The existence of gender stereotypes results in an individual's freedom and limited choices because these things are only based on societal norms that are quite embedded in them. In this case, gender stereotypes greatly impact the existence of a binary understanding in terms of gender which reinforces inequality so that it excludes those who do not comply with these norms. Retrieved from above, Deaux and Lewis (1984) confirm that gender stereotypes are classified into four basic types, including traits, behaviors, physical appearances, and occupations. As stated by López-Sáez, Morales and Lisbona (2008), traits are defined as psychologically mirrored personalities attached to men and women in society. Similar to traits, gender stereotypes also determine the behavior of each individual based on gender. According to López-Sáez, Morales and Lisbona (2008), behaviors refer to assumptions in terms of actions or activities that are believed to be acceptable for men and women in society. In addition to traits and behaviors, gender stereotypes include societal assumptions about the physical attributes required of each individual based on their gender. Diekman and Eagly (2000) categorize men and women in terms of physical appearances in the dimension of gender stereotypes. Feminine physical appearances refer to being adorable, gorgeous, attractive, beautiful, and sexy. Meanwhile, masculine physical appearances tend to

stereotyped as being sturdy, muscular, athletic, vigorous, and burly. This specifies that genders determine how they appear physically in society. The last type of gender stereotype is occupations. According to Ellemers (2018), in the majority, women tend to set aside extra time to manage domestic responsibilities than men do.

Moreover, Butler (1990) also states the idea and concept of fixed gender stereotypes can be challenged by the reinforcement of reshaping gender identities through cultural and social factors. In this case, gender relies on any kind of things that individuals perform and enact, not something they possess or own. This implies that the core of the challenge itself engages the performative nature and stability of gender due to the formation of gender identities coming to pass from cultural and societal norms in social constructions. Brinkman and Hamilton (2022) reveal the concept of challenging gender stereotypes refers to active, fluid, and negotiated resistance. The core of active resistance suggests that individuals actively challenge the emergence of gender stereotypes by engaging in intentional actions, attitudes, and behaviours.

This can be interpreted that an individual has diversity which should be kept away from acts of oppression in a society by recognizing the equality in society. Conforming to this, the existence of types of feminism lies on the purpose of challenging and dismantling stereotypes in society. Based on some of the above rationales being presented, the researchers are interested in researching this study entitled “Deconstructing Gender Stereotypes in *Don’t Worry Darling* (2022): A Feminist Perspective.”

METHOD

This current study employs the qualitative type of research. Mack, Woodson, MacQueen, Guest and Namey (2005) state that qualitative study is chosen because this research aims to explore a particular phenomenon such as gender stereotyping in a *Don’t Worry Darling* film. In this research, the researchers chose “*Don’t Worry Darling* (2020)” as the subject to study. On the other hand, the object of this research is the gender stereotypes that appear in “*Don’t Worry Darling* (2020).” According to Moleong (2007), collecting data means combining the data that have been collected. The procedure in gathering data in this research is as follows: watching the movie repeatedly, reading the movie script more than one for the purpose to understand the content and the meaning more deeply and then identifying the scenes and dialogues acted by the characters that are related to gender stereotypes represented in the movie. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), data analysis consists of three activities that occur simultaneously: data reduction, data display and conclusion; which are adopted in this research.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter contains results and discussion on how gender stereotypes portrayed in the *Dont Worry Darling* Film and how the main character Alice challenges the gender stereotypes in the movie.

1. The Key Gender Stereotypes Faced by Alice in *Don't Worry Darling* Film from a Feminist Perspective

There are four key genders of stereotypes according to Deaux and Lewis (1984), namely: traits, behaviors, physical appearances, and occupations. The researchers found gender stereotypes experienced by the character Alice as follows:

Table 1. Key Gender Stereotypes Faced by Alice

No.	Type of Gender Stereotypes	Data (scene)	Detail
1.	Traits	(00:20:42)	This scene shows Frank is gathering the people of Palm Spring together, familiarise themselves and praise the husbands in front of the wives.
		(00:24:26)	When Peg and Bunny were sitting together, Peg felt that in Palm Spring she can borrow money anywhere. But Peg felt that there was something strange about Frank's party. And Peg starts gossiping about Kathy and Bob there.
		(00:24:45)	Alice seems to disagree with what Bunny says that Margaret made a mistake. Alice, who cannot stand Margaret being talked about, tries to explain that Margaret is not like that.
		(00:45:49)	Jack is screaming with mixed emotions. Tells Alice to stop talking about Margaret's death. Stop telling Jack what Alice actually saw.

2.	Behaviors	(01:08:08)	In the middle of the event, the jack standing in front of them yells, while the wives just clap their hands. Jack and Frank are saying that they will move forward and the world is theirs.
		(00:08:01)	In the morning, as usual, the wives are gathering in the ballet class room. It is shown that women are more associated with femininity. Shelley is introducing the new member Violet to the others.
		(00:09:50)	In this scene Alice is seen hanging clothes to dry in her backyard, and is also preparing dishes. This scene depicts women is in traditional role in the family.
		(01:12:40)	After Alice finishes welcoming the guests in the house, she goes to the kitchen to preparing food for the guests. Not long after, Frank also entered the kitchen and met Alice. They had a conversation. From Frank's word, it can be seen that women have to do housework such as preparing dinner.
3.	Physical Appearances	(00:18:26)	Frank gathers with most of the residents of Palm Spring. It can be seen that women tend to wear colourful dresses, while men wear basic colours.
		(00:24:34)	By the pool, a woman poses in a swimsuit with additional accessories.
		(01:02:23)	This scene depicts a man at a Palm Spring celebration. The men are dressed as they would be at a formal event.
4.	Occupations	(01:30:13)	In this scene, it depicts Alice in the real world. Alice has not changed into her surgeon's uniform, but is still doing housework as a housewife.

To answer the first question, the gender stereotypes faced by Alice is classified into four types. As stated by Deaux and Lewis (1984), gender stereotypes are classified into four basic types that are consisting of traits, behaviors, physical appearances, and occupations. This first type is traits, the concept of traits is based on masculine and feminine traits. On trait types, researchers found research data that men are demanding, aggressive and dominant or leading while women are sensitive and soft-hearted. The scene when Frank gathers the residents of Palm Spring (00:20:42) demonstrates that all wives should serve their husbands on demand. It is also found in data (00:24:45) when Peg and Bunny sit together and talk about Margaret, Alice is disapproving because Alice does not want Margaret to be talked about. This data is by the statement of López-Sáez, Morales and Lisbona (2008) and Hentschel, Heilman and Peus (2019), that masculine traits comprise bold personality, athletic, emulating the actions of a leader, risk-taking, individualist, selfish, aggressive, and cold-hearted. Meanwhile, feminine traits consist of being warm, sensitive, fond of children, caring, submissive, understanding, soft-hearted, and emotional. Next is the type of behaviour, researchers found research data that there is a significant difference in the behaviour of men and women.

The data (00:09:50) shows that Alice is seen hanging drying clothes and doing other family activities. Whereas the scene (01:12:40) shows that Frank tells Alice women should do housework such as setting dinner. The data found said that women have feminine activities, and play family roles while men only work. This data is by what López-Sáez, Morales and Lisbona (2008) point out role division comprises two focuses, namely family role and work role, where family role belongs to women and work role attaches to men. It is assumed that women do not match masculine traits, and vice versa. In the third type called physical appearances, the scene when Frank gathers with a member of Palm Spring (00:18:26) illustrates that in that scene women mostly wear colourful dresses and men are a bit casual. Diekman and Eagly (2000) categorize men and women in terms of physical appearances in the dimension of gender stereotypes. Feminine physical appearances refer to being adorable, gorgeous, attractive, beautiful, and sexy. Meanwhile, masculine physical appearances tend to be sturdy, muscular, athletic, vigorous, and burly. This theory above is confirmed by the data found by researchers that women tend to dress beautifully, feminine, and add some accessories while men tend to dress casually and wear pants. The last type is occupation. The scene (01:30:13) depicts Alice's life in the real world. Alice goes home to work but does double duty as a housewife which proves that even though women are tired of working, they still must fulfil their family roles. This type of data is by Ellemer's statement (2018) that in the majority, women tend to set aside extra time in managing domestic responsibilities than men do. The researchers found that in her real world,

Alice is doing a double job, namely working as a surgeon and when she is at home she is also required to perform family roles.

2. How Alice Challenges the Existing Gender Stereotypes in Don't Worry Darling Film

There are three concepts of resisting gender stereotypes based on Brinkman's and Hamilton's (2022) theory, namely: active resistance, fluid resistance and negotiated resistance. Here are the data found by the researchers:

Table 2. How Alice Challenge the Existing Gender Stereotypes in Don't Worry Darling Film

No.	Concept of Challenging Gender Stereotypes	Data (scene)	Detail
1.	Active Resistances	(01:17:12)	In this scene, Alice is having dinner with the other members of Palm Spring. Then Alice starts a sensitive topic of conversation. The Victory Project is like a stimulated utopian community where men show their patriarchal roles and women who should act in accordance with traditional roles. By mentioning about Victory Project, Frank strikes back at Alice's statement.
		(01:18:30)	In this scene, Frank asks the others, and also tells him that Alice is mentally ill. Then Alice defends herself by protesting in front of her friends about Frank's control to men and women.
		(01:39:57)	Alice cannot hold back anymore when she starts to remember her real life in the real world. Alice gets angry by trying to protest Jack that her life has been taken away.
		(01:49:48)	This scene illustrates that Alice cannot take it anymore. Alice actively and consciously leaves the utopian world.
2.	Fluid Resistances	(01:13:26)	In this scene, Alice is talking about a serious topic but trying to keep it casual. Alice tries asking to Violet where she comes from since Alice thinks that Violet does not realize what is actually happening in that society. Alice tells the rumor that those who live in the Utopia world forget their memories in the real world.
3.	Negotiated Resistances	(00:40:15)	In this scene, Alice suddenly gets a call from Margaret. They are talking about something serious. Margaret asks Alice not to stay there anymore.
		(00:44:48)	In this scene, Alice is still talking to Jack about the strangeness of Margaret's death. But Jack thinks differently from Alice. Jack thinks it is an accident. Alice rejects that assumptions and causing Jack to get angry and yell at Alice.
		(00:52:34)	In this scene, when Alice starts overthinking, Jack thinks that Alice is unwell and calls the doctor to the house. But when the examination was over, Alice checked the doctor's bag that was left at her house. The doctor who came to Alice's house is the doctor who treats Margaret.
		(01:07:01)	This scene depicts a situation where Alice wants to show Bunny something, but Bunny does not care. Bunny even yells at Alice for trying to go to the headquarters.
		(01:21:59)	This scene depicts a situation where Jack looks frustrated as Alice slowly starts to debate the Victory Project issue. Jack feels that Alice embarrassing him. But the truth is Alice wants to save them both.
		(01:23:13)	It is depicted that Alice is begging Jack. Alice convinced Jack that they should go. Alice feels unsafe there and wanted to rebuild her world with Jack in real life.

Furthermore, in this section, the researchers also delivers the results of the second question in the problem statements, which is how Alice challenges gender stereotypes in Don't Worry Darling film. How Alice challenges gender stereotypes is classified into three concepts. As stated by Brinkman and Hamilton (2022), the concept of challenging the gender stereotypes refers to active, fluid, and negotiated resistances. Firstly, active resistance is

shown in the scene when Alice talks to Jack (01:17:12) which proves that she is really serious with her plans. Alice breaks the stereotypes that women have to be obedient and weak in their reaction. Alice already ignores the rules that exist in the society, especially related to active resistance. This data is in accordance with Brinkman and Hamilton (2022) who state about active resistances, it deals with the basic concept of active resistances proposes that people actively engage in activities, attitudes, and behaviors that actively contest the emergence of gender stereotypes. Desire for social justice and radical change influences those who support this resistance. Protests and other forms of demonstration to support gender equality are examples of this opposition.

Based on the data, Alice also proves that a woman can do what man can do. Alice shows that all work can be done by anyone regardless of gender. This active resistance is shown when Alice has a dispute with her husband in the morning, Alice tells Jack that her life is being stolen by Jack, because she realises that in the real world she is a woman who has a job (01:39:57). Secondly, Alice also breaks the gender stereotypes by performing the concept of fluid resistance. It is shown by the scene when Alice is at dinner with Peg, Bunny and Frank, Alice tells the rumour about a utopia world (01:13:26), which confirms that Alice tries to make Violet realize that they are in a stimulated world. In this scene, Alice is talking about a serious topic in front of them, telling serious topics wrapped in gossip to people at dinner. Brinkman and Hamilton (2022) reveal that fluid resistances communicate a more flexible and dynamic approach based on the circumstances while defying gender preconceptions. This resistance turns into a coping strategy that enables people to survive repressive circumstances. Rumors, gossip, and humour are some instances of this resistance in action. Lastly, another form of resistance is negotiated resistance. Brinkman and Hamilton (2022) confirm that negotiated resistance involve discussions and interactions with people or groups to challenge gender preconceptions. This resistance employs a planned and strategic approach, looking for individuals or groups to negotiate with to advance a change. Alice tries to make Jack aware of the reality by persuading Jack to leave Palm Spring (01:23:13). This related data shows that Alice asks for Jack's agreement to leave the utopia world together for a change. Alice breaks the gender stereotypes but she still takes the consequences. She also proves that women can get a place the same as men.

All in all, the data show that Alice faced several types of gender stereotypes including traits, behaviours, physical appearances, and occupations. Moreover, Alice challenges the existence of gender stereotypes through the three concepts which are called active, fluid and negotiated resistance the most data found is on active resistance and the least data is on fluid resistance.

CONCLUSION

Having analyzed the data regarding gender stereotypes in *Don't Worry Darling* film, the researchers have gathered the key gender stereotypes faced by Alice and the challenges performed by Alice in resisting the gender stereotypes in the film. Based on the results, the researchers found four types of gender stereotypes, namely: traits, behaviors, physical appearance, and occupations based on gender stereotypes theory by Deaux and Lewis (1984). Researchers found the most data are in the traits section and the least is the occupations section. Many gender stereotypes in the form of traits that are faced by Alice are: women are considered sensitive and soft-hearted; while the men's traits are demanding, aggressive and dominating. Furthermore, the researchers also found that the way Alice tried to challenge the gender stereotypes in the movie can be identified into three concepts based on theory of Brinkman and Hamilton (2022), such as active, fluid and negotiated. Active resistance is the resistance that Alice does most often, while fluid resistance is the resistance she does the least.

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