Gender Stereotyoes in Etaf Rum's Novel "A Woman is No Man"

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse gender stereotypes and how the main character deal with it that is portrayed in the novel entitled A Woman is No Man by Etaf Rum. This study uses the qualitative approach by describing and analysing the characters in the novel. In order to analyse the data, the writer uses theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1999). The result of this study shows the analysis of gender stereotypes on how male and female bodies are differentiated through certain standards of appearance, personality traits, also responsibility that are considered appropriate for both genders. It also describes that the main character can deal with the gender stereotype by understanding herself to take opportunity for growth. Through analysing this study, it concluded that female and male bodies identified being feminine and masculine as they performed certain acts and attributes purpose for female and male.

Keywords: *Gender Stereotypes, Feminine, Masculine, Novel.*

A. Introduction

Feminism refers to a social and political movement that advocate the equality of women (Brunell & Burkett, 2021). It demands the equality in opportunities without deny the biological differences between the sexes. This movement is not just benefit for women, since it allow individuals to live freely without getting tied by the restriction in the society (Toppr, 2021). Individuals should have the same rights and opportunities in every aspect in social life that it will not discriminate them based on the gender. Thus, it can be concluded that gender is the center issue in feminism.

Most people naturally behave according to their gender. The term gender itself is related to women and men behavioral which are different depend on their sex. Gender and sex are two different ideas that are correlated. The term sex refers to biological phenomena, while gender is a social construct. Butler (1999) points out the concept of gender divided male body associated to be masculine, while female body related to being feminine. The identity of human being is reflected through the appearance, personality traits, roles, also behaviour. These aspects may appear differently because individuals are expected to adopt certain standards to be accepted within the society. Society has a certain standard where individuals play different roles depending to their gender. Masculinity and femininity are the center concept of gender roles. WHO defines gender roles as "socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women" (World Health Organization, 2011).

Thus, gender roles in society may be defined as how individuals are expected to act, dress, speak, and conduct themselves based upon the assigned sex. Though, without considering the possible exception of individuals can perform and adopt what is fit for them, they often get overly generalized from the society. Due to this form, stereotype belief may happen to both genders.

Gender stereotypes are the beliefs that people have about the characteristics of males and females (Martin & Dinella, 2001). Gender stereotypes can hold back men and women in defining their identities. Furthermore, gender stereotypes make people culturally restricted in personality traits and behaviors, it can limit the life opportunities for both men and women in general. This may negatively affect an individual that they may get discrimination due to this stereotypes belief. Even though gender stereotypes generally inappropriate, society has accepted such belief and recognized it as a truth. Despite, Butler's theory of performativity give another perspective in defining gender binary.

Butler (1999) defines gender as continuous process that performed repeatedly. Gender performativity give another insight in defining gender binary. Gender performativity is the opposite acts that break gender stereotypes. Individuals can present themselves as how they show the truly they are without following the rules of gender stereotype within the society. The biological sex is not following the real gender as society rules for every individual. Butler (1999) also argues that performativity is not only an action but a repetition of acts. Thus, the theory of gender performativity criticized gender binary opposition that limiting individuals' identity.

The form of being masculine for males and feminine for females are the product of gender as binary results that explained by Butler (1999). She argues that gender is not about what someone is, but what someone does. However, individuals' gender within society is not a true expression of their gender identity, but it is just a performance to fit social expectations. The individuals' performance based on the binary product creates behaviors that causing the limitation of gender roles. For example, female identically wear pink skirt, while male cannot wear such that cloth. Female also commonly stereotyped has less power than male. It is often being compared to male, female frequently cry to express the disappointment.

Gender stereotypes also occur in the social life such as: women have a multi-role in the household, while men have an opportunity to get a higher position in the company. In the household, women are expected to be the one who are responsible for domestic chores, children education, and managing the family finances. Despite, some of them also having a job in a company, but their opportunity to have a higher position is less compared to men. Moreover, gender stereotypes cannot be separated in the workplace where some roles are dominated by one gender. Especially in Indonesia, it can be seen that mostly secretary and nurse are women, while most of the pilot and engineer are men. Thus, gender stereotypes in the society may influence different roles. The gender stereotype also appears in literary works such as novel.

Gender stereotype is not only happens in many aspect in our life, but also literary works such a novel. The novel entitled A Woman is No Man (2019) is Etaf Rum's debut novel that count as a New York Times bestseller and one of Cosmopolitan's best books by POC for 2019. This novel contains gender stereotype that is the concern of this study. It shows how Palestinian – American women and men are often get overly generalized within their community that woman as a wife is the one who bear their children and life under the men's rules, while a man as a son is needed to bring their family name and help the family in financial. In order to reveal gender stereotypes and how the main character deals with it, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is used to analyze the novel. The title of this study is "Gender Stereotypes in Etaf Rum's a Woman is No Man Novel."

B. Method

This study employs qualitative content analysis to explore gender stereotypes in Etaf Rum's novel "A Woman is No Man." Firstly, a comprehensive literature review on feminism, gender, gender roles, gender stereotypes, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity is conducted to establish theoretical frameworks. Then, the novel is thoroughly read and analyzed to identify instances of gender stereotypes portrayed within the narrative. Using Butler's theory, the analysis focuses on how characters perform gender roles and challenge stereotypes. Data is systematically coded and categorized to extract key themes and patterns. Finally, findings are interpreted to elucidate the novel's portrayal of gender stereotypes and their implications.

C. Findings and Discussion

This section discusses gender stereotypes in Etaf Rum's A Woman is No Man novel. The novel portrays a common rule in society that divides individual gender identity into masculine and feminine depending on their biological sex. The novel shows how the distinct stereotypes and characteristics between female and male characters are portrayed. The issues are analyzed through physical appearance, traits, behaviors, and roles of the female character compared to the male character. A Woman is No Man novel tells about how Palestinian-American women and men who live in Brooklyn often get overly generalized within their society.

This novel depicts traditional roles through conversation and characters' feelings descriptions. As the title A Woman is No Man suggests, this novel actually explores womanhood and its constraints. However, male characters in this novel are represented as sons expected to bring their family name and take responsibility for the family's financial needs. Due to all of the pressure that he gets, his life becomes darker. Thus, it is always highlighted that male characters are the ones who are expected to have great power and authority over the female characters. Even so, all of the characters experience so much pressure that they are oppressed by the gender roles within their society.

Gender Stereotypes in A Woman is No Man Novel

Gender stereotypes can be seen through the way the characters dress. How they choose what kind of cloth and the color itself are associated with a particular gender identity.

"She met Isra's eyes. 'Don't forget to wash the garlic smell off your hands before greeting our guest.' Isra washed her hands, trying not to dirty the rose-colored kaftan that Mama had chosen for the occasion. 'Do I look okay?' Isra asked. 'You look fine,' Mama said, turning to leave" (Rum 2019, p. 9).

The quotation above shows the feminine stereotypes toward the representation of females. It portrays that Isra wore the rose-colored long loose dress that her mother had chosen. It depicts the rose-colored dress as preferred for women. In addition, Isra's mother chooses the best new dress for the occasion, showing how women are expected to look nice to make a good impression. Moreover, the garlic smell on Isra's hands suggests that she is cooking in the kitchen, as females are expected to do certain housework, including cooking.

"Adam wore a navy-blue shirt with buttons lined up the front and tan khakis, cuffed at his ankles. His shoes were shiny brown leather with tiny holes pricked in them and a solid black heel of good quality. His feet caressed the dirt with ease" (Rum 2019, p. 18).

The quotation describes Adam dressed casually with a navy-blue shirt and tan khakis with shiny brown leather shoes. The set of attributes he wears shows the distinct characteristics of being female and male. As a male representative, Adam wears clothes that are preferred for a man. He dressed casually for an informal occasion to meet Isra. Masculine stereotypes expect a male representation to have certain characteristics to differentiate male and female bodies.

The data above portrays how gender identity is constructed through the way they dress. It is pictured as how the clothes themselves are associated with a particular gender identity. Moreover, it depicts the rose-colored dress as preferred for women and the navy-blue shirt for men. It shows the way they are expected to act and the attributes they are expected to wear are considered as a pre-existing identity. However, how Isra and Adam dress clearly shows how female and male bodies are differentiated by the attributes they wear. Thus, it also shows how Isra identifies as feminine as she performs certain acts and attributes meant for females, and Adam uses attributes meant for males, expected to be masculine.

"Fareeda was very much like Mama, Isra soon realized. She cooked and cleaned all day, dressed in a loose cotton nightgown. She sipped on chai and kahwa from sunrise

until sunset. … Fareeda awoke each day at sunrise and headed straight to the kitchen to make chai" (Rum 2019, p. 78).

Fareeda is Adam's mom. Isra describes her as a mother-in-law stronger than Isra's mother. She encourages herself to stand for what she wants and what she considers best for her family. Although feminine stereotypes are also implied through her acts and attributes she wears. From the quotation above, it implies that the stereotype of being female is also reflected through Fareeda's behavior and appearance. Moreover, she is pictured performing certain housework and wearing a loose cotton nightgown that she usually wears every day, as comfortable dress supports her activities. The way she is described enjoying her tea from dawn until dusk also portrays she is used to staying in the house, as females are expected to. Thus, Fareeda also identifies as feminine as she performs certain acts and attributes related to the female body.

"The woman had deep black hair and fair olive skin. Yet her hair fell wild and wavy over her shoulders, her cheeks were full and bronzed, her lips a crimson red. … She was startled to see the woman wearing a short skirt, her legs covered only with sheer pantyhose" (Rum 2019, p. 129).

From the quote above, it can be seen how a female body is described through certain attributes she wears and how the kind of cloth itself relates to a particular gender identity. The quote also implies that a female body can be identified by performing certain attributes related to femininity. In addition, feminine stereotypes portray wearing a skirt as a symbol of being female, so society already believes that a skirt can only be worn by a woman. Thus, a set of standards of being female portrayed through the physical appearance of the female character can be considered the result of a pre-existing identity.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing A Woman is No Man novel by Etaf Rum using Judith Butler's perspective about gender performativity, the writer could draw conclusions. The analysis of gender stereotypes in this novel portrays male and female bodies as differentiated through certain standards considered appropriate for both genders, such as appearance, personality traits, and responsibility. Moreover, the binary division of biological sex into masculinity and femininity creates expected roles determined by particular characteristics. Male and female characters in this novel are depicted according to societal expectations. Therefore, they must grapple with gender stereotypes due to the rigid categories that limit their autonomy. The main character in this novel copes with gender stereotypes by gaining confidence through understanding her life. She cannot fully escape the stereotypes prevalent in her society, but she views them as opportunities for personal growth. Accepting her arranged marriage as a necessity for both genders, she sees it as a chance to begin anew. Despite society considering women burdensome, she views her daughters as blessings. Although confined to her house, she travels through books she secretly

reads whenever she can. She finds solace in her home, allowing her to discern her desires easily. While conforming to societal expectations of women, she learns to navigate them.

It can be concluded that gender stereotypes lead to the belief that femininity solely belongs to the female body, while the male body is only appropriate for masculinity. Thus, it clearly demonstrates how pre-existing identities limit male and female bodies from expressing their true gender identities. They are unable to pursue their desires or preferences freely. Moreover, it forces both genders to contend with stereotypes due to rigid societal expectations. Therefore, the main character in this novel discovers that understanding oneself allows for growth and the ability to confront stereotypes.

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