

## ABSTRACT

**Rofiqoh, Nushrotin.** 2011. *The Dynamics of Gender Stereotype Depicted by Othello and Desdemona in Othello The Film*. Submitted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Sarjana Degree of English Department, Faculty of Humanities, Airlangga University Surabaya.

This study examines the dynamics of gender stereotype depicted by the main characters in the film version of Shakespeare's Othello, *Othello* the film. The main characters, Othello and Desdemona, depict different gender presentation compared to the first portrayal in the beginning of the movie. Thus, the main concern of this study is to fully explore the depiction of the characters of Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film from gender perspective and also to explain the presentation of the shifts in gender presentation of both characters in *Othello* the film. The changes are constructed through the binary opposition of masculinity and femininity. The theory of gender stereotype by Deaux and Lewis is used in analysing the shifts of gender stereotype in the film. The study sums up that there are dynamics of gender stereotype depicted by the Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film. It is also found that love, trust, and race are the big causes of the dynamics of gender stereotype in this film, and Othello as a Moor is not considered as a "true man."

## KEYWORDS

Gender stereotype, Masculinity, Femininity, Patriarchal ideology, Binary opposition.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1. Background of the Study

Male and female, what is your idea about those words? What is your opinion about masculinity and femininity? Do you ever heard “Women at the mercy of the feelings of their hearts, while men follow the reasons provided by their heads” (Nicholson 61)? What does it mean? If your answer is related to what male and female should do or what characteristics they are supposed to have in society or how their characteristics deal with their sexes, then welcome to the gender stereotype world.

We might often heard the word “masculine” or “feminine” and people will possibly associate it with men and women, such as men are masculine and women are feminine. If men are changed to be feminine and women are changed to be masculine, then it will lead to an opinion that those men and women are not “true men” and “true women”. Whereas, men and women are not just about being masculine or feminine. Many people seem to create assumption about it. They do not realize that they are making a judgement in the term of gender stereotype.

Gender is often associated with sex, but gender is different from sex. Sex refers to biological differences between males and females while gender refers to the culturally specific ways of thinking, acting and feeling (Baldwin, et. al 293). Therefore, gender stereotype is related to the ways of thinking, acting and feeling of men and women which are expected and accepted by people in a society (293).

It is when male has to be “man” and when female has to be “woman”. Those concepts above are given by the society to define the characteristics of male and female. In general, people classify themselves into male or female. In other words, they compare men’s characteristics and women’s characteristics. This comparison, which is called binary opposition, is based on their perception of what men and women should behave. People perceive the binary opposition of man’s and woman’s characteristics in society in terms of masculinity and femininity.

Femininity and masculinity are two ideas which are used to define man and woman. Femininity refers to gender behavior which is associated with woman while masculinity refers to gender behavior which is associated with man. Woman is often associated with inferiority, weakness, and powerlessness whereas man is often associated with superiority, strength, and powerfulness. Man and woman are considered having characteristics which are same with society’s conception of man’s and woman’s characteristics. If men are not having “men’s characteristics”, they are not considered masculine and if women are not having “women’s characteristics”, they are not considered as feminine.

These concepts take over the world’s point of view, even spread in the making of a film. Jacques Derrida stated that film demonstrates the binary opposition and narrative functions which show the implicit meaning of the film itself (qtd. in Storey 88). It is because a film often reveals an embedded basic set of structuring oppositions such as a strong or a weak character. Then, film is a media to present the visual depiction (in this case is the visual depiction of

masculinity and femininity) in narrative and non-narrative aspects. That is why, literary works (including the adaptation works), are often visualized in form of a film. One example of adaptation works from a literary canon which depicts issue of gender stereotype is the adaptation film of Shakespeare's *Othello*, *Othello* the film.

*Othello* the film is a loose adaptation of a drama tragedy by William Shakespeare in 1603 entitled *Othello: The Moor of Venice*. *Othello* the film was produced in 1995 and directed by Olivia Parker also starred by Laurence Fishburne as Othello, Irène Jacob as Desdemona, and Kenneth Branagh as Iago. It tells about a brave Moorish general, Othello, who is provoked by Iago, his second lieutenant. Iago said that Othello's beautiful wife, Desdemona, has an affair with Othello's new first Lieutenant, Cassio. In the end, Othello trusts Iago and kills his wife when Desdemona is on her bed before Othello kills himself.

*Othello* the film was nominated in Image Award as an outstanding motion picture in 1996. In the same award, Laurence Fishburne, who played as Othello, won the category of an outstanding lead actor in a motion picture. *Othello* the film also won the Screen Actors Guild Awards in the same year in a category of an outstanding performance by a male actor in a supporting role by Kenneth Branagh who played as Iago (Imdb Online).

The representation of gender stereotype which is portrayed by the director in the film is considered as the interesting object to be analyzed compared to the Shakespeare's drama version. However, jealousy, passion and misplaced trust are the themes of Shakespeare's towering tragedy (Olivia Parker, dir. *Othello*).

Othello is the example of Shakespeare's work which uses jealousy as its theme. In *Othello* the film, there is an impression that Othello is described as a masculine character and Desdemona is described as a feminine character. However, the characterization of each character is considered to be changing throughout the film. There is no longer strong depiction of gender stereotype. The representation of masculinity by Othello and femininity by Desdemona undergoes a change. Othello and Desdemona show a different depiction from the early depiction. Femininity (which is associated with woman's characteristics) represented by Desdemona and masculinity (which is associated with man's characteristics) represented by Othello seem to turn to be not as strong as the first description of their performance.

Most of us still believe that men are supposed to be strong, aggressive, rational, and unemotional while women are supposed to be gentle, irrational, submissive, and emotional (Marsh 1). Those concepts affect people's perception in how men and women are supposed to behave in a society. It limits and dominates people to perform particular act because that concept has influenced them in many ways. It is the concept of patriarchy which forms people's thought. So, the issue of gender stereotype becomes significant because it becomes the basic form of what people are thinking.

People absolutely still remember the bedtime stories which are dominated by the stories in fairy tales' world. Cinderella, Snow White, and Sleeping Beauty are the examples of fairy tales which use the same "motive" such as a weak princess who is married to a strong prince or a bad stepmother meets a good

princess and so on. Those patterns contain gender stereotype in which one character of one gender has an opposite characteristic with another character and gender.

The appearance of the same structural principle (in this case is the “motive” of fairy tales) is also found in *Othello* the film. At the beginning of the movie, the character of Othello represents the concept of masculinity while Desdemona represents the concept of femininity. As stated before, there is a change in gender stereotype of both characters. The change of gender presentation throughout the film depicted by Othello and Desdemona is because of Iago’s provocation. Iago’s provocation creates a shift, making a different gender presentation of Othello and Desdemona. Due to the phenomenon, binary opposition concept is needed in order to explain what is going on in the movie (in terms of gender stereotype) through the performance of the characters.

Nowadays, binary opposition becomes a normal perspective in the cultures. The concept of patriarchal binary might be defined as seeing the world in terms of polar opposites, one of which is considered superior to the other (qtd. in Tyson 100). For instance, black opposes white, hate opposes love, bad opposes good and so on. In other words, people observe an entity as the opposition of other entity. Binary opposition has been internalized by many people nowadays (Englishbiz Online). This is because binary opposition is a concept which becomes people’s point of view. In accordance to this study, binary opposition helps to explain how the gender presentation is depicted in *Othello* the film.

The depiction of gender stereotypes is able to be analyzed by the components which show how the gender stereotypes occur. According to Deaux and Lewis (1984), there are four components which are used to analyze the gender stereotypes (qtd. in Rollins 96). The components are traits, role behaviors, occupations, and physical appearances. This theory compares the stereotypes of masculinity with the stereotypes of femininity through binary opposition in those components to make it clear about the gender stereotypes which occur in the film. Through all the gender depiction of the characters, it is found that there are dynamics of gender stereotypes depicted by Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

Based on the background of the study above, the problems are formulated as follows:

1. From gender perspective, how the characters of Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film are depicted?
2. How the shift in gender presentation of Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film is presented?

## **1.3. Objective of the Study**

The objectives of analyzing this study are achieving the following points:

1. To fully explore the depiction of the characters of Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film from gender perspective.

2. To explain the presentation of the shifts in gender presentation of Othello and Desdemona in *Othello* the film.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Study**

There are two significances which are expected in this study. The first is to contribute in broadening the knowledge of gender stereotype. The second is to give the understanding of the change in gender stereotype that is possible to occur in the characters that show the strong concept of masculinity and femininity, in this case are the characters in *Othello* the film: Othello and Desdemona.

Moreover, this study is expected to be a related study for similar or different study through, for instance, the original drama or other literary works. It is also expected that this study will lead the audience to a deeper understanding in the portrayal of gender stereotypes and the dynamics in a film.

#### **1.5. Scope and Limitation**

This study focusses on the film version rather than the original drama. This study is also limited on the loose film adaptation of *Othello* that was produced in 1995 and directed by Olivia Parker with Laurence Fishburne as Othello and Irène Jacob as Desdemona. Both narrative and non-narrative aspect are included in analyzing this film, but the non-narrative aspect which is used is only the particular part to support and explain the analysis.

Furthermore, this study concerns on two main characters in *Othello* the film, Othello and Desdemona, because the portrayal of the gender stereotype's



phenomenon in the film is obviously described by their characterizations as the main characters. This study also focusses on gender stereotypes in binary opposition's framework. However, the foundation of the deep analysis is based on the theory of Kay Deaux and Laurie Lewis because it is helpful to explain the aspects which contain gender stereotype. Then, the classification of masculinity and femininity is divided due to the portrayal of gender stereotype .

### **1.6. Theoretical Background**

In analysing the phenomenon of gender stereotype in *Othello* the film, the theory of gender stereotype by Deaux and Lewis is used. Karl Deaux and Laurie Lewis (1984) stated that there are four components of gender stereotype that are independent but affecting each other (qtd. in Rollins 96). The four components are traits, role behaviors, occupations, and physical appearances. Trait is about all the characteristics in someone's personality; role behavior is related to the role of a person in society or how his or her behavior has to be interpreted by the others; occupation is limited to the work that is supposed to be done by one particular gender; and the physical appearance refers to the physical "look" of the character. This theory can also be used to identify the dynamics of gender stereotype. In addition, other gender stereotype's points of view from other sources are helpful to classify the category of what is considered to be masculine or feminine.

In particular, the changes of gender stereotype's concept in *Othello* the film that represent the portrayal of masculinity by Desdemona's character and femininity by Othello's character are the unusual thing in the patriarchal ideology.

The theory of gender stereotype by Deaux and Lewis (1984) is helpful in explaining the categories of the stereotypes to be perceived by the society. It is because their theory makes a boundary of the stereotypes. As argued by Six and Eckes (1991), the study above provides further evidence not only the multi-component nature of gender stereotype, but also subcategories of gender stereotypes defined by traits and role behavior, including sexual behavior and physical appearances (qtd. in Rollins 96).

### **1.7. Method of the Study**

The method that is used in this study is a qualitative method. The first step is watching the film many times to gain clearer depiction in order to acquire the important parts (including images and dialogues) related to the issue in this study. Then, the collecting data from the film itself, various books, journals, articles, the drama version, and other printed materials from online books and journals (which are related to this study) are needed as secondary sources. In addition, internet sources are also used to support and complete the study. The third step is analyzing the parts of the film which is related to the issue of gender stereotype in order to answer the statement of the problem. The collected data is read and analyzed to support and make a deeper understanding toward the study in order to answer the statement of the problem. Indeed, the narrative and non-narrative aspects are included to make a deeper understanding of what this study observes so that the reader can get more understanding about the issue being discussed. The

last step is arranging the conclusion as the final part that is aimed to give more understanding about the result of this study.

### **1.8. Definition of Key Terms**

To get more comprehension of the study, there are terms of guidance:

*Adaptation* : A work of reaccentuation, whereby a source work is reinterpreted through new grids and discourses (Stam and Raengo 45).

*Hegemony* : A process of condition in which the dominant class maintain the subordinate class by making concessions (Storey 119).

*Ideology* : A systemic body of ideas articulated by a particular group of people (Storey 3).

*Narrative* : A chain of events in a cause-effect relationship (Villarejo 157).

*Non-Narrative* : A second arena of film which refers to as “experimental” or avant-garde cinema (Villarejo 13).

*Patriarchy* : A system of domination in which men as a group have power over women as a group (Storey 125).