Gender Stereotypes in Students' English Writing

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Abstract
Gender stereotypes are guidelines by which a particular gender group behaves as expected based on the existing ideology in the community. Gender stereotypes that are perpetuated by popular culture usually marginalize women, following patriarchal ideology. This popular culture is consumed mostly by the younger generation as well as students. STIKES Nasional is an educational institution where most students are female, and most student organizations are led by female students. This research investigates gender stereotypes in STIKES Nasional students' writing. This research employs textual analysis focusing on word choice on students' writing. This study shows that students' writing still represents women as passive and also sensitive or emotional. Women are also still constructed in domestic sphere. Those constructions are implicated in activities carried out by women. On the other hand, men are represented as brave, rational, active, and assertive. Men are also constructed to be in public sphere. Those male constructions are also implicated in men's occupation. Based on the results, it can be concluded that students' writing affirms the patriarchal gender stereotypes that marginalize women. Patriarchal ideology is still strongly embedded in STIKES Nasional students, though female students dominate in STIKES Nasional.

Keywords: English Writing, Gender, Patriarchal Ideology, Stereotype

Introduction

To talk about gender, the concepts of sex and gender must be distinguished clearly. Renzetti and Curran conveyed that sex is the biological characteristics that human beings get since they were born. These characteristics are permanent and cannot be changed except through medical treatment. Biologically, there are two sexes of human beings: male and female (Sarwono, 2012). In other words, it talks about women having breasts and men having testicles means that it talks about sex.

On the other hand, the concept of gender is all differences that exist in a society that arise due to sexual differences. This concept is socio-cultural and man-made referring to roles, responsibilities, and behavior patterns. The concept of gender is depicted in language, behavior, thought, taboo, technology, mass media, profession, and so on (Sarwono, 2012).

Simone de Beauvoir probably conveyed the most prominent concept of gender. She said that a person is not born as a woman, but becomes a woman. In other words,

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to be woman is not about birth, but is a social construction. Society or power determines what a woman should be like, and no psychological, biological, or economic destiny determine a woman in society (Gamble, 2004).

Considering gender as a social construction, discussion of gender cannot be separated from how men and women are represented or stereotyped. "Stereotypes reflect general expectations about members of particular social groups" (Ellemers, 2018. p. 276). Stereotypes are simple representations that reduce people to a set of excesses and are usually negative. The way stereotypes work is usually by attaching negative attributes to people who are different from us, things that explain the work process of power in stereotypes (Barker, 2014). This stereotype continues to be shared and accepted as truth. Empirical studies show that gender stereotypes affect how people see themselves and others (Ellemers, 2018).

A gender stereotype is a window used by the public to see how a particular gender behaves. Gender discourses and stereotypes continue to be perpetuated and produced by popular culture, disciplining people, and shaping society as expected. Adorno (Ariani, 2013) stated that in popular culture, one of them is media, the audience or the consumer is not the king as the public's belief, but a passive object. Media as active subjects construct certain ideas to reinforce certain ideologies to control society. Furthermore, Ariani wrote that patriarchal ideology is an ideology that is used almost everywhere in the world to control gender issues (Ariani, 2013).

In a patriarchal pattern, women are all things that men are not the image that men do not want. Women are weak, emotional, and passive, while men are strong, active, and rational (Gamble, 2004). Women are given traditional roles as wives who support their husbands and raise children, whereas men are given a role as being active to defend the nation or become heroes (Tambunan, 2019). According to Renzetti and Curran, in patriarchal ideology, men dominate over women and men have control over women. Men are positioned in public sphere, while women are positioned in domestic sphere (Sarwono, 2012).

Discussions on gender representation or stereotypes have been carried out to criticize the practice of women's marginalization in society. David Gauntlet claimed that media as a pop culture had portrayed males and females equally, and males did not dominate in all aspects as before (Ariani, 2013). It showed that society today has changed in representing males and females. However, in practice, gender stereotypes are still found in daily life.

Textbooks as a medium for children to build knowledge portray women with feminine traits, namely by their role as mothers. Women are also represented as weak, sensitive, and compassionate. On the other hand, men are represented strong (Ena, 2016).

A similar idea is also found on television in Indonesia whose programs reinforce patriarchal ideology (Ariani, 2013). Even though television programs often present women differently, the representation still constructs women negatively. The women domination, as shown on television, is a form of patriarchal perpetuation (Habsari et al., 2011).

Apart from television and textbooks, gender stereotypes are also produced by news. News as a form of popular culture still depicts women in the patriarchal pattern, discrimination, and consumerism lifestyle. Patriarchal gender stereotypes

dominate the news that marginalizes women and legitimizes gender bias by exploiting women's physical appearance (Murtiningsih et al., 2017).

Not only in the field of education and media, but gender stereotypes also occur in the economic or business field. In Indonesia, men are constructed as leaders. Only a few companies have a female director since a gender stereotype stating that men are better at leadership than women. In contrast, the research found that women can lead better than men (Rahayu et al., 2019).

In everyday life, to be a man or masculine is usually associated with dominant, active, aggressive, powerful, and able to perform a variety of important roles that require professionalism, rationality, and strength to complete tasks properly. On the contrary, to be a woman or feminine is usually associated with subordinate, submissive, marginal, and only able to perform limited and unimportant tasks, which are usually related to sexuality, emotions, and domestic (Strinati, 2004). Those negative constructions continue to be perpetuated in various forms of popular culture and are also consumed by the community, including students.

Related to the existing stereotypes, women and men also indirectly occupy various social positions that conform the stereotype. For example, regarded as gentle and caring, women dominate most professions related to motherhood such as nurses. Leaders' positions are dominated by men who are constructed as rational and independent. Gender stereotypes encourage people to choose professions and schools or campuses in line with these stereotypes.

This is reflected in the number of male students who continue their studies in Faculty of Engineering. Most students in Faculty of Engineering are male students. In contrast, Faculty of Health Science is dominated by female students. STIKES Nasional, as one of health science institutions with five study programs, is also dominated by female students.

STIKES Nasional is an educational institution that focuses on health science. It is located in Surakarta Residency. Students on this campus are mostly female. The ratio of female and male students on this campus is always different every year. However, it can be said that the proportion of male and female students is about 1:7. Furthermore, the number of female staff and lecturers on this campus is also higher than the number of male staff and lecturers.

The high number of female students on this campus has implications for strategic positions in student organizations. Student organizations in this campus are mostly led by female students, such as Chief of the Student Senate (SEMA), President of the Student Executive Board (BEM), Commander of the Voluntary Corps (KSR), even Chief of the Study Program Student Association (HMP). Besides, the best graduates from this campus are always achieved by female students.

At first glance, it can be said that in STIKES Nasional, female students not only dominate in numbers but also dominate in various aspects. Female students on this campus seem to challenge the stereotypes in the community. Female students become leaders and excel in science. This research investigates gender stereotypes on STIKES Nasional students' writing.

Method

This research was a descriptive qualitative study with a textual analysis by focusing on word choice that students use in their writing. The word used by students reveals the gender stereotypes in students' writing. This study criticizes gender stereotypes in the sentences made by STIKES Nasional students in English I and English III subjects. Previously, students had been taught English grammar and structure and how to make English sentences using the grammar and structure. English I was taught to make sentences using Simple Present Tense and Simple Past Tense, while English III was taught how to make sentences using Subject-Verb Agreement, Gerund and Infinitive, and Relative Clause. In teaching, the examples given to students attempt to challenge the gender stereotypes that exist in society. For instance, "Dad cooks fried rice every Sunday" was given as an example by the English teacher instead of giving example "Mom cooks every Sunday."

At the end of the class, students were asked to make sentences based on those subjects to get an additional score for the final score. The second way was that students were asked to write English sentences using several words related to gender stereotypes in community, such as sad, cry, brave, win, lead, cook, work, and so on, by using grammar and structure that had been taught to get an additional score.

After the data had been collected, the data were classified according to the purpose of the study. Data that had been classified were then analyzed by considering the representation or stereotype of gender in the sentence. The use of certain words as subjects or actors and certain verbs in a sentence represents gender stereotypes in writing. For example, in a sentence, *Tasya cried last night*, implies that women are still constructed as weak and emotional. After the sentences are analyzed, the data are classified based on gender stereotypes or feminine and masculine traits, and then each stereotype was discussed. By looking at gender stereotypes on STIKES Nasional students' writing, it can be concluded how gender is stereotyped or represented.

Findings and Discussion

Based on sentences that have been made by students at STIKES Nasional, sentences are dominated by female subjects. Of the 507 sentences made, 50.5% of sentences have female subjects. Whereas, sentences with male subjects were 28% or 142 sentences. Besides, sentences with neutral subjects, whose gender is unknown such as *we, they, you,* as well as a common noun, are 109 sentences or 21.50%. This number shows that the topic of women is discussed more frequently in sentences made by STIKES Nasional students. This certainly cannot be separated from the number of female students at STIKES Nasional. However, the dominance of female subjects in those sentences needs to be investigated more deeply, whether is only a number or more than a number.

Public Sphere versus Domestic Sphere

One of the gender stereotypes that is still inherent in our society is that women's place is in the domestic/private sphere, while men are in the public sphere. This has implications for the activities carried out by women and men. Activities and jobs that are usually carried out by men are usually outside the house, such as in an office or a field. While jobs or activities that are usually carried out by women are usually related to the house, such as in the kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, or garden. These

gender stereotypes and gender roles also appear in STIKES National students' writing as following.

> *My mother cooked meatball last Monday.*
> *Indah cleaned the bathroom last week.*
> *He worked in the post office.*
> *Fais worked in the Garden Suites Hotel two months ago.*

Instead of using female subjects in sentences with verb "work", students choose to use male subjects: He and Fais. Whereas cleaned and cooked that are domestic-related verbs are given female subjects (My mother, Indah) that reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes.

In Indonesian culture, there is a construction stating that women have three roles, namely *sumur, dapur, kasur*. These constructions limit women to their role in accommodating the needs of men and families. The word *sumur* or well connotates that women's job is cleaning and washing. This stereotype is shown in the sentence above, "Indah cleaned the bathroom last week."

Some sentences made by students also describe men doing domestic activities such as washing. Those sentences seem to challenge gender stereotype existing in society. Unfortunately, those sentences still puts men higher than women. This can be seen from the use of objects in the sentence.

> *Mother washed clothes yesterday.*
> *Dony washed a car yesterday.*

The use of clothes as the object for mothers as the subject confirms the concept of women's domestication. Whereas, the use of a car as the object and Dony as the subject indicate that men remain in public or outdoor sphere considering that car is usually put outside the house and indubitably, a car is regarded as more prestigious than clothes.

The word *dapur* or kitchen constructs women's role is in the kitchen, as found in the sentence, "My mother cooked meatball last Monday." While the word *kasur* or bed connotates that women's job is breeding and satisfying men's lust. This construction is also reflected in the following sentence made by STIKES Nasional student. Instead of using a male subject, the writer chose to use "a woman" as the subject.

> *I met a <u>woman</u> who has ten children.*

In a patriarchal culture, a successful woman means a woman able to give birth and raise children successfully. A successful woman is a successful mother and wife. Even some men will leave their wives if they cannot get pregnant. Women take full responsibility for the descent of family and take care of children in the family. It is common for a woman or a mother to be blamed when children experience problems in the community. This is also constructed in the sentence above, in which the student chose to use the word woman as a subject instead of using male subject in the second clause. Aryangga and Nurmaily stated that women seem to be born only to get married and give birth. Women are also forced to prioritize the welfare and

happiness of their families. Women must set aside themselves. A woman is said successful when her family lives happily. What women need to do is finding men who are responsible financially. (Aryangga & Nurmaily, 2017)

Active versus Passive

Another gender stereotype that is also inherent in society is that women are passive while men are active. Thus, many women are at home while men work outside the home. In Indonesia, there is a saying that represents the male activeness and female passivity. That saying represents husband and wife relationship in an abbreviation "workshop". The saying "workshop" means that husbands work to make money, then wives spend the money by shopping. This construction also appears in sentences made by the students.

> *My mother shopped in a mall last night.*
> *Catlin and Jessica are eating chicken noodle soup in a restaurant.*
> *After school, Dara and I went to eat cake at Aksara café.*
> *My mother enjoys watching television.*

In the sentences above, instead of male, the subjects of the sentences are women or female. Unfortunately, women are represented as passive or negative subjects, because they are represented as people who spend money and just have fun, such as eating, shopping, or watching television. The lifestyle of consumerism is constructed in sentences above. While in the previous sentences, men are represented active by working. Furthermore, in the following sentences, men are represented at outside with activities that require energy such as sports, fighting, and other activities.

> *My brother did not win the basketball tournament yesterday.*
> *Sutan asked Rasyid to play soccer on Saturday.*
> *Petra spoke with my father after playing basketball.*

Sport is always associated with men because doing sport requires energy and power, and men are represented as more full-energized and powerful than women. Even though the sentences above portray that the subjects did not win the competition, they already represent men as perpetrators of the sport regardless of winning or losing. Since women are constructed weak, sports are rarely associated with women. In a study related to the representation of female athletes in China, successful female athletes in China are still associated with women's bodies, women's roles in the domestic sphere, and some feminine traits (Zhang & Jamil, 2015).

In addition, the male activeness and the female passivity are also portrayed in the following sentence.

> *He left me without saying goodbye.*
> *I keep looking at the windows.*

The sentences above are made by female students. The first sentence represents men as an active subject. Because the writer is a female student, the word "me" refers to the student (female). In brief, *He* (male as subject) leaves me (female as object). The man in that sentence is active while the woman is passive. This representation is also supported by the next sentence whose subject is *I*. That

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sentence shows the passivity of woman who just stared at the window and did nothing useful. This negative representation certainly marginalizes women.

Male activeness and female passivity are also found in the use of subject and object in some sentences. In sentences with female subjects, the object used is whether female or common nouns. While in the sentence with a male subject, the object used is female. This can be seen in the following sentences.

> *He drove me to the party last night.*
> *Rendra taught me about Math last night.*

Both sentences above were written by female students too. The object *me* indirectly represents women as objects or passive or subordinate, while men are represented as subjects or active. Men dominate women and have control over women. On the other hand, in the following sentences, when the subject is female, the object is a common noun (a birthday cake, noodle) or female too (her sister).

> *She tried to make a birthday cake.*
> *Sofia cooked noodles.*
> *Ana taught her sister how to make a cake.*

Strong versus Weak

Some feminine and masculine traits are existing in our society and portrayed in media. Some of the masculine traits are strong, rational, assertive, independent, and brave. Whereas, some of the feminine traits are gentle, loving, dependent, emotional, and timid. Those feminine and masculine traits were also performed in the following sentences.

> *My sister cried last Sunday because she lost her doll.*
> *Lisa can't help getting more emotional on her graduation day.*

The sentences above represent women as sensitive, emotional, and gentle. Whereas men are stereotyped as being assertive, courageous, and strong so that the activities carried out by men are more related to courage, assertiveness, and violence. A similar idea can be found in the following sentences.

> *He kicked me, after that he ran away.*
> *Dito was brave to fight with Risky last week.*
> *My brother is very naughty.*
> *Jimmy hit the rat last night.*

Being naughty is always associated with men, therefore, fighting and other delinquents are always associated with men. Men or boys who are not naughty are regarded as abnormal. Conversely, naughty women will be regarded as abnormal and expelled from the group. Constructed as rational, occupations of men are also associated with knowledge and intelligence. Therefore, jobs in the science field are often associated with men.

> *Rendra taught me Math last week.*
> *Father taught science last week.*
> *Ani didn't win in the Mathematics competition yesterday.*

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The sentences above portray the competency of men in the field of science, whereas women are not competent in science. In addition, the position of leader always fit to men as they are constructed as rational and assertive. That stereotype is also constructed in the following sentences.

> *He led the meeting.*
> *Alex is currently working on some project which is challenging for him.*

The Affirmation of Patriarchal Ideology

Female students at STIKES Nasional dominate in quantity. Thus, they may lead some organizations in the college. However, based on the findings, that dominance has not been able to challenge gender construction or stereotype in society. Students' writing still places women in the private sphere with traditional roles.

In students' writing, women still perform feminine traits with subordinate roles. Suryakusuma wrote that women in Indonesia experience subordination because they are associated with the term *istri* and *ibu* which limit their movements in the domestic sphere. In addition, gender construction in Indonesia is also influenced by Javanese culture which has a belief that women are: *konco wingking, suargo nunut neraka nutut,* and also a belief that the roles of women are *manak, masak,* and *macak* (Ariani, 2013).

Those beliefs are reflected in the sentences which portray women in the domestic sphere (kitchen) with domestic roles such as washing, cooking, and taking care of children. Even though some sentences made by students seem to challenge existing gender stereotypes, the constructions reinforce the women's subordination. Furthermore, Arimbi mentioned that women's subordination is also influenced by the concept of *kodrat. Kodrat* is related to biological destiny. The concept of *kodrat* also limits women's activity outside the household. Society believes that the *kodrat* of women are to be mothers and wives who must be able to cook, give birth, and take care of the family well (Ariani, 2013).

"Traditionally, Indonesian women are accustomed to being active in the public sphere. Traditional markets in Indonesia have traditionally been regarded as women's territory. Indonesian women have also been active in political areas before Independence Day" (Habsari et al., 2011, p. 266). In addition, nowadays many women are active in the public sphere, as in politics. Even the fifth president of Indonesia is female. Female publicization is also reflected in the daily lives of female students at STIKES Nasional who dominate in student organizations and are able to become leaders among male and female students.

However, Althusser emphasized that someone cannot form her/himself. He or she is formed by discourse, regulation, and structure so that he or she eventually becomes the subject that talks about gender according to what is in society. This is called subjectivity which is influenced by ideology (Barker, 2013). Ideology is a set of cultural practices, discourse, beliefs, and rituals aimed at forming each individual and the whole community based on of the dominant worldview (Cavallaro, 2001). Foucault wrote that the subject was produced in discourse. No form of identity or subjectivity exists outside of discourse (Hall, 1997). Students in this context are subjects that speak about gender through their writing.

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Patriarchal gender stereotypes at STIKES Nasional students' writing certainly cannot be separated from patriarchal ideology, which is still very dominant in Indonesian culture. Media, family, and the education system in Indonesia still promotes patriarchal ideology. Cavallaro conveyed that schools, families, religion, mass media are some Ideological State Apparatuses that become a means to unite people in the system by conquering them in ruling ideology (Cavallaro, 2001). Through the Ideological State Apparatuses, students are constructed by patriarchal gender stereotypes, and unconsciously, they live with those stereotypes and they speak about those stereotypes.

Conclusion

In general, this research shows that writing works or sentences made by STIKES Nasional students are still being dominated by topics about women. However, their writing still represents women as passive, emotional or sensitive, and struggling in the private or domestic sphere. Meanwhile, men are constructed as strong, brave, smart, active, and also in the public sphere. In other words. students' writing reveals patriarchal gender stereotypes.

A text produced by an author is a thinking process for what he/she experienced in his/her life (Yamin, 2019). However, this research shows that students' writing is formed by ideology. Stephen Greenblatt emphasizes that text is a result of discourse in society, and the author or creator of the text is the result of the dominance of the discourse and ideology in society (Tiwary, Narendra; Chandra, 2009). Even though in college life female students dominate in various aspects, patriarchal ideology reinforced and perpetuated by some ideological state apparatuses such as family, school, and mass media shaped students' subjectivity in speaking about gender.

Beauvoir wrote that, in childhood, men and women learn a lot about gender from their parents, but in adulthood, they learn a lot from their environment such as from society and the media (Ariani, 2013). In other words, family, education system, and mass media in Indonesia have a role in shaping gender construction in students' writing.

Based on this research, as an ideological state apparatus, education system, especially at STIKES Nasional has to start promoting gender equality. Readings that contain gender perspective need to be introduced to students in the college as students are expected to be the agents of change in society. Research-based on gender equality as echoed by the government must be also conducted more in colleges, especially at STIKES Nasional.

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