

**GENDER INEQUALITY IN SAM MENDES' *REVOLUTIONARY ROAD* (2008):
A FEMINIST ANALYSIS**

Rizka Ardina Nugraheni; M. Thoyibi

**Program studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu
Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta**

Abstrak

Penelitian ini berjudul “Gender Inequality in Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road* (2008): A Feminist Analysis.” Penelitian ini berfokus pada ketidaksetaraan gender dalam film berjudul *Revolutionary Road* karya Sam Mendes (2008). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk (1) mengidentifikasi indikator utama ketidaksetaraan gender yang tercermin dalam film berdasarkan analisis feminis, (2) mendeskripsikan bagaimana ketidaksetaraan gender digambarkan dalam film berdasarkan analisis feminis, dan (3) mengungkap alasan Sam Mendes. dalam mengangkat tema perjuangan ketidaksetaraan gender dalam *Revolutionary Road*. Data berupa percakapan antara tokoh utama dan beberapa potongan adegan yang diperoleh melalui film. Teknik pengumpulan data yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah penelitian kepustakaan dan analisis kualitatif digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Hasil penelitian sebagai berikut; (1) indikator utama ketidaksetaraan gender yang dikemukakan oleh Lynn dan Walby berada di Sam Mendes *Revolutionary Road*. Disparitas tersebut adalah disparitas pendapatan terkait stratifikasi pekerjaan, pendidikan dan karir profesional, marginalisasi struktural, disparitas pekerjaan rumah tangga, dan kekerasan. (2) Ketidaksetaraan gender dalam film digambarkan melalui tokoh, latar, peristiwa, dan gaya. (3) Alasan Sam Mendes mengangkat tema ketidaksetaraan gender dalam film adalah dia jatuh cinta dengan novel dan karakternya setelah dia membacanya, dan dia memiliki sudut pandang yang berbeda tentang novel tersebut.

Kata Kunci: Ketidaksetaraan jenis kelamin, *Revolutionary Road*, Feminisme

Abstract

This research title is *Gender Inequality in Sam Mendes' Revolutionary Road* (2008): A Feminist Analysis. This research focuses on gender inequality in a film entitled *Revolutionary Road* by Sam Mendes (2008). This research aims to (1) identify the main indicators of gender inequality reflected in the film based on feminist analysis, (2) describe how gender inequality is depicted in the film based on feminist analysis, and (3) reveal the reasons of Sam Mendes in raising the theme of struggle for gender inequality in *Revolutionary Road*. The data were in the form of conversations between the main characters and some of the scene cuts obtained through the film. The data collection technique used in this research is library research and qualitative analysis used to analyze the data. The results of the research as follows; (1) the main indicators of gender inequality proposed by Lynn and Walby are in Sam Mendes *Revolutionary Road*. They are income disparity regarding employment stratification, professional education and career, structural marginalisation, domestic work disparity, and violence. (2) The gender inequality in the film is depicted through character, setting, event, and style. (3) The reasons for Sam Mendes raising the theme of gender inequality in the film

are he fell in love with the novel and its characters after he read it, and he has a different point of view about the novel.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, *Revolutionary Road*, Feminist.

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is one of the most discussed issues towards the end of the 20th century in the world. This topic has been analyzed by several researchers. First, a study from Safitri (2020). The writer stated that a woman's autonomy and ability to achieve wealth play an important role in household decision-making. Married women need to get the freedom to have a career and social needs to entertain themselves so they do not get tired of staying home with monotonous activities. A study Francesca (2020) stated that adherence to the suburban social norms that govern gender relations leads to a departure from individuality in favour of conformity. The only options women have are to abide by the rules or to be expelled from the social group. It helps reinforce certain cultural stereotypes that limit sex. A study from Watanabe (2021) stated that women historically have been ostracised for subverting socially constructed roles subordinated to men in the film. Feminist theorists advocate for women's rights, promote women's rights as representatives of the female experience, and fight for women's identities. There is also a study by Ursita (2019). The writer stated that the feminist movement appearing from the protagonist and those around her instilled many moral values regarding gender equality that could be implemented in real life. The research concluded that both gender equality and feminism have a correlation. It is revealed that the feminist movements happened because of gender inequality in the film. A study from Eliyana et al. (2021) stated that there are two types of discrimination experienced by black female characters: devaluation and denial. Researchers have found that the most dominant effects of discrimination occur in the psychological realm. A study by Kunsey (2018) depicts that women were much more positive in films directed by women and those framed by female directors of female characters were much more positive.

Three of the studies above discussed the same object with different focuses. Meanwhile, the rest of the studies discussed the different objects with the same focus. The research from Safitri (2020) focuses on the concept of personal autonomy in women in *Revolutionary Road*. The research from Francesca (2020) focuses on examining how space, both as a physical environment and as a social construct, is called "gender regulation" in *Revolutionary Road*. The research from Watanabe (2021) focuses on body politics at home and work depicted in *Revolutionary Road*. Meanwhile, the research from Ursita (2019)

focuses on gender equality and feminism of the main character in a film: Colette. The research from Eliyana et al. (2021) focuses on the discrimination towards female characters in Hidden Figures film. The research from Kunsey (2018) focuses on gender inequality from the representation of women in popular films. Similar to the research from Ursita (2019), Eliyana et al. (2021), and Kunsey (2018), the topic discussed in this research is gender inequality or discrimination.

The researcher is interested in figure out April's struggle against gender inequality in the household. Therefore the researcher conducted research entitled "Gender Inequality in Sam Mendes' Revolutionary Road (2008) : A Feminist Analysis". The researcher also examined the positions of men and women in a household relationship.

This research aims to identify the main indicators of gender inequality reflected in the film based on feminist analysis, to describe how gender inequality is depicted in the film based on feminist analysis, and to reveal the reasons of Sam Mendes in raising the theme of struggle for gender inequality in *Revolutionary Road*. In analyzing the novel, the researcher used the feminism theory proposed by Moeliono et.al (1993). Moeliono et.al (1993) stated that feminism is a women's movement demanding full equality between women and men, equal rights that cover all aspects of life, whether in the political, economic, social and cultural fields.

2. METHOD

The study is literature research which uses a feminism approach. The material object of this study is a film directed by Sam Mendes entitled "*Revolutionary Road*." The topic being studied is gender inequality. The study used two types of data sources. First, the primary data source of this study was taken from Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road* (2008) in the form of conversations between the main characters and some of the scene cuts obtained through the film. Second, the source of secondary data is taken from previous studies, articles, websites, journals, books and other sources related to gender inequality. Library research was used as the method of collecting data in this study. The present research used qualitative analysis as the method of analyzing data.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

The finding is divided into three parts. The first part identifies the main indicators of gender inequality reflected in the film. The second part describes how gender inequality is depicted

in the film. The last part reveals the reasons of Sam Mendes in raising the theme of struggle for gender inequality in the film.

3.1.1 Main Indicators of Gender Inequality in Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road*

The main indicators of gender inequality proposed by Lynn (2009) and Walby (1989) include income disparity regarding employment stratification, professional education and career, structural marginalisation, domestic work disparity, and violence. These points will be elaborated as follows:

a. *Income Disparity Regarding Employment Stratification*

The existence of individual qualifications or stereotype norms causes income inequality that favours men more than women with the same qualifications. Stereotype is one of the kinds of income disparity regarding employment stratification. It is a negative labelling of a particular group or gender which usually results in discrimination and injustice.

Shep: "I mean, what kind of man is going to sit around in his bathrobe all day picking his nose while his wife works?"(00:40:35)

Shep's dialogue indicates that he believes that women should be the ones at home. Meanwhile man is the one that is at work. It indicates that Shep has a stereotype that women can not be at work because women's work is to stay at home, doing chores, cooking, and others.

b. *Professional Education and Career*

Before the birth control pill, women needed to deal with uncertainty about pregnancy. This makes it harder for women to make long-term decisions about their educational and professional opportunities. One kind of professional education and career is subordination. It arises as a result of gender views towards women. The attitude that places women in unimportant positions, so that many policies are issued without considering women as important.

April: "... And supposing you're right. You make all this money and we have this interesting life here. Won't you still be wasting your life toiling away a job you find ridiculous?"

Frank: "Maybe we let that be my business."

April: "Your business?"(01:02:05)

April does not know that Frank got promoted in his work. She knew it when Frank had agreed to the offered job. Knowing that April will be furious about it, Frank lied that it was still an option. Not including April on choosing what is

the best for them or what they should do on their plan to live in Paris.

c. *Structural Marginalisation*

The existence of a social structure that has institutionalised the conception of gender differences makes a woman feel marginalised. This is worsened by the active promotion of being a housewife. Problems in the country are actually a result of the process of marginalisation that afflicts men and women which can come from government policies, beliefs, religious interpretations, traditional beliefs, and habits or even scientific assumptions.

Shep: "... While she supports you?"

Frank: "Yes. While she supports me ... In the beginning." (00:39:11)

Shep made April and Frank surprised by the question. He makes it look weird to know that April will be at work. He thought that women should have been in their house, doing all the chores instead of being at work.

d. *Domestic Work Disparity*

Traditional gender roles are still prevalent in many societies around the world. Women are usually expected to postpone educational and career goals to raise children while their husbands work. However, there are also women who choose to work while fulfilling their gender role in household chores and taking care of children. Despite the fact that different households can divide the tasks more evenly. Workload is one of the kinds of domestic work disparity. The workload caused by gender bias is often amplified and is caused by a belief or view in society that women have the work that is considered lower and is categorised as non-productive work. In fact, many women carry more and longer domestic workloads than men.



Picture 1. Frank off to work (00:10:42)



Picture 2. April do the chores (00:16:20)

Picture 2 and 3 show the existence of gender inequality in the workload. It depicted that a woman must always take care of the house so that she is not able to achieve the dreams she has always wanted. This is different from Frank who can work what he wants without any interference in having a dirty house.

e. Violence

Violence is an assault on the physical or mental state of a person's psychology. Gender violence is basically caused by the inequality of power that exists in society.



Picture 3. Frank raise his fist to hit April (00:08:47)

The scene shows that Frank tried to hit April, but suddenly he punched the car roof. This act can affect April on her mental state. She can be very scared when someone raises their hand, even when they have no intentions on hurting April.

3.1.2 Depiction of Gender Inequality in Sam Mendes' *Revolutionary Road*

Gender inequality in the film is depicted through character, setting, events and style, below.

a. Characters

Characters are another element of fiction that is essential to the enjoyment of the story (Tomlinson, 2002: 24). There is no good film without characters. Characters are the controllers of a film. Aminuddin (1995: 99) explains that stories had different characters, that is the main character and minor or support character.

1) The Supporting Characters of Gender Inequality

A character who supports gender inequality in the film.

a) Frank Wheeler

Vanity and talkative 30-year-old Frank Wheeler strives to appear masculine, attractive, interesting and extraordinary. Worried about being weak and sentimental, he pretends to be stubborn and confident. He does not know what kind of woman he will attract until he wins against April. He is keen to keep her under his control because he sees her as an extraordinary being and thinks it reflects well on him. He got a job in the New York office at Knox Business Machines. He continues to pretend he hates his job for fear of being looked down upon by April, and Frank learns more and more that he has a real talent for public relations.

b) Shep Campbell and Milly Campbell

Shep and Milly Campbell are a married couple. They were living right next to the Wheelers' house. Shep is grateful that Millie is by his side, but their marriage is not romantic—he is deeply in love with April. Meanwhile, Millie is a happy wife to Shep and she is also the mother of four sons. Millie is good-natured and loyal, but she is uncomfortable around Wheeler.

2) The Opposing Characters of Gender Inequality

A character who opposes gender inequality in the film.

a) April Wheeler

Independent, passionate, but chronically unhappy, April Wheeler is frustrated with life as a suburban housewife. When she first meets Frank, April believes him to be an intellectual who can introduce her to this world. She has two children with him. April may seem reclusive and snobby, but she is also widely admired for her good taste, beauty, and grace. April longs to change something in her life and plans for her and Frank to move to Europe with her family.

b) John Givings Jr.

He is Helen and Howard Givings' only son. An intelligent mathematician. John Givings was taken to a mental hospital and given electroshock therapy. He is the only one who understands the Wheelers' desire to move to Europe. He also is the one that took on April's side when

he knew that the Wheelers decided to not move out. April in particular feels that he understands her.

b. *Setting*

Gil (1995: 148) explained that setting is the location in which the character appears, the character's social background such as family, friends, class, the customs, beliefs, codes of conduct that give identity to society, the specific location of the event, and all of the above. Nurgiyantoro (1995) divided the setting into three parts, below.

1) Setting of place

Setting of place is usually where a work of fiction leads to the location of an event.

a) Wheeler's house

The gender inequality depicted in Wheeler's house was when Frank forbade April to abort the womb and confronted her with the abortion tool. He said that April was insane because she wanted to kill her own child, not like other "normal" mothers (01:06:12). Frank also said that April was a useless, empty, and stupid woman. He wished that April would die while having the abortion (01:28:58).

2) Setting of time

Setting of time is the time when the story happened. The overall film is set in the mid-1950s.

3) Setting of society

Setting of society refers to matters related to the behaviour of the community's social life at the time of the story.

Based on the setting of time, the film is set in the mid-1950s. In the 1950s, women's roles were mainly housewives. They were expected to manage their house, their children, and their husbands (Lehman, 2021). In America, society has clearly defined gender roles. Men were supposed to work and provide for their families financially, while women managed household finances and purchased food, goods, and services for their daily lives. Television and magazine advertisements in the 1950s were primarily aimed at women. Advertisements showed a delicately dressed woman delighted in her role as housewife, mother, and wife (Lehman, 2021).

c. *Event*

An event is a change of state in a story. A significant change in a character's life is changing the world from one state to another in the story (Hühn, 2011).

1) Their plan to live in Paris

Frank's unfulfilled promise of living in Paris still makes April have a dream of it. So, when April has the perfect chance to talk about it, she does it. She expressed her wish about living in Paris to Frank. Frank did not believe what he just heard, at first. However, he agreed to live in Paris because he was also bored of his job.

2) Frank was promoted in his job

When their plan was about to happen, Frank suddenly got promoted. He was chosen by Mr. Pollock to join his team. This is one of the reasons to begin the problem in the film. Moreover, Frank did not tell April that he was promoted.

3) April got pregnant again

The other reason is when April found out she got pregnant again (00:58:18). She was not prepared for it because she was fixated on the plan. It turns out that it was Frank's idea to make her pregnant, so they cancelled the plan to live in Paris.

4) Frank found out April will have an abortion

This happened when Frank wanted to refresh his mind. He suddenly found a paper bag inside the bathroom shelf that turned out to be an abortion tool. Then, he confronted April with the tool and it made the problem grow bigger.

d. *Style*

According to Joos (1967), language style is classified into five types based on the degree of formality. They are frozen style, formal style, consultative style, casual style and intimate style. However, there is only one type of language style that depicts gender inequality in the film. It is a consultative style that can be defined as (1) the type of information provided by the speaker and (2) the type of language used to communicate in everyday life (Joos, 1967:23). Usually used in semi-formal situations.

April: "Could we sort of stop talking about it?"

Frank: "Sure. I just don't want you feeling bad about it, that's

all. Because it's not worth it. I mean, it's bad enough having to live out there among these damn people - what'd you say?"

April: "I said yes. All right, Frank. Could you just stop talking now, before you drive me crazy, please?" (00:05:58)

The consultative style is when April tried to stop Frank from talking about her play. Frank just wanted to calm her down, but it was a bad idea because April just wanted him to stay silent.

3.1.3 The Reasons of Sam Mendes in Raising the Theme of Gender Inequality in *Revolutionary Road*

Based on an interview in Movies.ie, Mendes said that his ex-wife, Kate Winslet, wants to play the role of April Wheeler. He did not want to direct it, at first. However, after he read the novel, he fell in love with it and its characters. His different point of view about the novel makes him want to adapt it to film. He believes that people focus more on the suburbia topic, the community of the era, the 1950s. Meanwhile he focuses more on marriage, on the relationship between men and women.

3.2 Discussion

Based on the types of feminism proposed by MasterClass (2022), the film has the types of mainstream/liberal feminism. It is said that the form mainly focuses on realising women's rights and social justice, such as abortion rights, sexual harassment, affordable childcare, reproductive rights, and domestic violence. April's inability to manage her own body proven with Frank's prohibition on her to have an abortion. This affects April's psychology and made her brave enough to do something harmful to her body. This action has a close connection with this type of feminism which focuses on realizing women's rights.

The theory used in this research is by Moeliono (1993) which stated that feminism is a women's movement that demands full equality between women and men, equal rights encompassing all aspects of life: political, economic, social and cultural. The emergence of feminism began with the women's liberation movement, the process of liberating women from their low socioeconomic status and from legal restrictions that limited their opportunities for development and progress (Moeliono, et al. 1993).

This research also concurs with the previous research by Francesca (2020). The writer stated that adherence to the suburban social norms that govern gender relations leads to a departure from individuality in favour of conformity. The environmental conditions of the suburban landscape focus on the home as the centre of overlapping codes of morality and behaviour, thriving with men as providers and women as caregivers, and the fertility of gender codes in

which individual characters act creating a good soil. The only options women have in this situation are to abide by the rules or to be expelled from the social group. It helps reinforce certain cultural stereotypes that limit sex.

The research from Francesca (2020) focuses on examining how space, both as a physical environment and as a social construct, is called “gender regulation” in *Revolutionary Road*.

The topic discussed in this study is gender inequality. It explain about the main indicators of gender inequality and the depiction of gender inequality that happen toward April Wheeler in the film.

4. CLOSING

The main indicators of gender inequality proposed by Lynn (2009) and Walby (1989) are in Sam Mendes’ *Revolutionary Road*. Lynn (2009) proposed that main indicators of gender inequality include income disparity regarding employment stratification, professional education and career, structural marginalisation, and domestic work disparity. Walby (1989) proposed that main indicators of gender inequality include stereotype, subordination, marginalisation, workload, and violence. This research combines the main indicators of gender inequality proposed by both researchers and makes the main indicators from Lynn to be the main point. However, the last indicator is on its own because it can not be put in the other points. The gender inequality in the film is depicted through character, setting, event, and style. This research explained that there are two kinds of characters in the film, that is the supporting character and the opposing character. This research also explained that women can get a gender inequality everywhere, even in the most comfortable place. Moreover, in the year where women are looked down upon. The story in the film starts to change when April suggests living in Paris. However, the plan failed because Frank got promoted and April got pregnant again. The reasons for Sam Mendes raising the theme of gender inequality in the film are he fell in love with the novel and its characters after he read it, and he has a different point of view about the novel.

REFERENCES

- Eliyana, R., Ariani, S., & Sari L, I. (2021). The portrayal of discrimination towards female characters in. *Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Seni Dan Budaya*, 5(April), 238–250. Retrieved from <http://e-journals.unmul.ac.id/index.php/JBSSB/article/view/3252>
- Francesca, V. (2020). “Being an Instance of the Norm”: Women, Surveillance and Guilt in Richard Yates’s *Revolutionary Road*. *European Journal of American Studies*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejas.15847>
- Joos, M. (1976). *The Style of Five Clocks: A Linguistic Excursion Into the Five Styles of*

- English Usage.* Retrieved from <https://archive.org/details/fiveclockslingui0000joos/page/n131/mode/2up>
- Kunsey, I. (2018). Representations of Women in Popular Film : A Study of Gender Inequality in 2018 I . Introduction II . Literature Review, 27–38.
- Lehman, C. (2021). What were women like in the 1950s?. Retrieved from <https://study.com/academy/lesson/women-in-the-1950s-in-america.html#:~:text=Women%20in%20the%201950s%20were%20not%20allowed%20to%20make%20contracts,Women%27s%20rights%20were%20minimal>
- Lynn, F. B., Podolny, J. M., & Tao, L. (2009). A sociological (De)construction of the relationship between status and quality. In *American Journal of Sociology* (Vol. 115, pp. 755–804). University of Chicago Press. <https://doi.org/10.1086/603537>
- Safitri, W. A. (2020). The Women’s Personal Autonomy in Richard Yates’s Revolutionary Road. *LITERA KULTURA: Journal of Literary and Cultural Studies*, 8(3), 45–51.
- Ursita, L. (2019). Analysis of Gender Equality and Feminism of Main Character in Colette film. *Journal of Research on Applied Linguistics Language and Language Teaching*, 2(2), 149–154.
- Walby, S. (1989). Theorising patriarchy. *Sociology*, 23(2), 213–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038589023002004>
- Watanabe, N. A. (2021). Body Politics at Home and Work: Male and Female Power Drives in Sam Mendes’s Revolutionary Road. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351774800_Body_Politics_at_Home_and_Work_Male_and_Female_Power_Drives_in_Sam_Mendes's_Revolutionary_Road_by_Nancy_Ann_Watanabe
- www.masterclass.com. (2022). 7 Types of Feminism: A Brief History of Feminism. Retrieved from <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/types-of-feminism>

