



**GENDER ROLE CONSTRUCTION AND ITS IMPACT PORTRAYED IN *THE GLASS MENAGERIE* PLAY  
(KONTRUKSI PERAN GENDER SERTA DAMPAKNYA DALAM DRAMA *THE GLASS MENAGERIE*)**

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**Abstract**

*The aims of this study are to explain how gender role concept constructed toward the children and also to identify the consequences of gender role differences that profoundly affect the quality of individual lives as reflected in play. I employed Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie* play as the object of my study. This study was a qualitative study with Sociological approach. The data were in a form of words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues. They were collected by reading the script of the drama thoroughly, interpreting, triangulating, identifying, inventorying, and reporting the data. Some relevant theories were also used to support the analysis and answer the statements of problem. From this study, it can be concluded that parent exerts strong influences on person in perceiving their gender role concept. Masculine and feminine are quite conventional and the expectation connected to each gender become important to fulfill. However, the presence of gender roles gives consequences in life. It creates different gap toward men and women existence because women tend to be more dependent on men because they are powerless and subordinate to men. In fact, unequal power and position heighten gender based social inequalities.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Gender socialization is a tendency for males and females to be socialized differently. Males are raised to conform to the male gender role and females are raised to conform to the female gender role (Crespi, 2003). Then the way people think and behave are two products of socialization. However, the presence of gender role creates stereotype in society (Popenoe, 1983). This stereotype means that male and female need to follow their specific gender roles in order to be socially accepted. The first and one of the strongest influences on a person's in perceiving gender role concept is his or her parents. Through socialization they also learn what is appropriate and proper for both genders.

The problems of this study are divided into two. First, how gender role concept constructed toward the children as represented in *The Glass Menagerie* play. Second, what kind of consequences of gender role differences that profoundly affect the quality of individual lives as reflected in *The Glass Menagerie* play.

I will focus on the social construction of gender role and life consequences of gender role differences as the main concern of this study. I apply sociological approach in answering the statements of problem. To support the analysis, I use social role theory proposed by Alice Eagly (1987). According to this theory, the social structure is the underlying force for the gender differences. Social role theory recognizes sex-differentiated behavior is driven by the division of labor between two sexes within a society. As a result, it creates gender roles which in turn lead to gendered social behavior.

Gender construction is something that does not exist independently in the natural world, but is an invention of society instead (Blackstone, 2003). To support the analysis, I also use conflict theory of gender proposed by Randall Collins (1971) that deals with the consequences of gender role differences. Conflict theory does not deny the presence of differentiation by gender. In fact, conflict theorists contend that the relationship between females and males has been one of unequal

power, with men in a dominant position over women. This theory is used because it tends to view gender role differences as producing gender inequalities both for male especially for female

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The type of data in this research is qualitative which merely focuses on the analysis of textual data. A qualitative research does not focus on numerals or statistic but gives most attention to how deep the researcher's knowledge toward the interaction among concept which is being learnt (Miles and Huberman, 1994:1).

I employed Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie* play as the object of my study. This study is a qualitative study with Sociological approach. The data were in a form of words, phrases, sentences, and dialogues. They were collected by reading the script of the drama thoroughly, interpreting, triangulating, identifying, inventorying, and reporting the data. Moreover, the data were also gained through reading some related sources, such as theoretical books, articles, essays, and journals. Some relevant theories were also used to support the analysis and answer the statements of problem.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 1. The Construction of gender role Concept

In Tennessee William's *The Glass Menagerie* play, I found that this literary work has a possibility to carry the idea of gender role concept as one product of patriarchal ideology. There is tendency that the author has adopted gender values and socialized to the society by using the description of gender-role socialization process in his work. Masculine and feminine roles are quite conventional and the expectations connected to each gender become important to fulfill. The entire drama focuses on gender division which makes the sexes stand sharply apart. There are three major characters in this drama,

Amanda Wingfield as a dominant mother, Laura Wingfield as a daughter, and Tom Wingfield as a son.

This study is divided into two main points, they are society and gender roles and gender role socialization. The elaboration of both points will be presented as follows:

### 1.1 Society and Gender Roles

In the 1930's, the males were socially constructed to be the breadwinners and providers for the family, while the females were constructed to be the caregivers and the housewives. Traditionally, men are expected to begin finding his own level in society as soon as they grow up and become independent. However, this is not so for women. Adulthood for women did not mean economic independence or the chance to achieve her position in society through her own efforts. Instead, it generally means marriage, which make her dependent on her husband. In this drama, this kind of condition is clearly portrayed in conversation as quoted below:

**LAURA** : *I couldn't face it.*

**AMANDA** : *... we won't have a business career – we've given that up because it gave us nervous indigestion! [Laughs wearily]. What is there left but dependency all our lives? I know so well what becomes of unmarried women who aren't prepared to occupy a position. I've seen such pitiful cases in the South – barely tolerated spinsters living upon the grudging patronage of sister's husband or brother's wife! – Stuck away in some little mouse-trap of a room – encouraged by one in-law to visit another little birdlike women without any nest – eating the crust of humility all their life! Is that the future that we've mapped out for ourselves?*

*I swear it's the only alternative I can think of! It isn't a very pleasant alternative, is it?*

*Of course – some girls do marry.*

*(William, 1945:757, scene II)*

From the conversation above, we can clearly see that as a mother, Amanda tries to persuade her daughter to marry. Amanda uses the gender roles of her own time to prescribe certain goals and desires for her daughter. She really has a great ambition for her daughter to marry someday. According to Amanda, Marriage is very important thing, especially for a young lady like Laura.

**AMANDA**: *Girls that aren't cut out for business careers usually wind up married some nice man. [Get up with a spark of revival] Sister, that's what you'll do.*

*(William, 1945:757, scene II)*

The above dialogue indicates that Amanda gets her thoughts on gender roles from observing the outside world around her. Moreover, we can infer that women are likely to be dependent for most of their lives. If a woman is married, she most likely depends on her husband for at least part of her economic support. However, economic dependency is uncommon among men. That's why, in Amanda's society, the tendency for a woman to marry is greater than a man.

### 1.2 Gender Role Socialization

In *The Glass Menagerie*, gender roles play a large part to determine the future plans and proper behaviors of each character, Laura must get married because she is a girl; Tom should go to work because he is a man. Gender roles seem to arise from tradition, as Amanda discusses what women should do and what men should do according to her Southern upbringing. Here Amanda socializes gender roles to her children through her advices. In fact, gender roles also dictate values, or how women and men are judged differently. She places great importance on Laura's staying 'fresh and pretty', while she believes that 'character' is the most important thing for a man.

*AMANDA: Resume your seat, little sister – I want you to stay fresh and pretty – for gentlemen callers!*

*LAURA: I'm not expecting any gentlemen callers.*

*AMANDA: No, dear, you go in front and study your typewriter chart. Or practice your shorthand a little. Stay fresh and pretty! – It's almost time for our gentlemen callers to start arriving. How many do you suppose we're going to entertain this afternoon?*

*LAURA: I don't believe we're going to receive any, Mother.*

*(William, 1945: 754, scene I)*

*AMANDA: He's not right-down homely, though?*

*TOM: Not right-down homely just medium homely, I'd say.*

*AMANDA: Character's what to look for in a man.*

*(William, 1945: 767, scene V)*

According to Amanda, physical attractiveness is a more central part of self-concept for women than for men. She assumes that charm is matter only for a girl as what she expresses when she is looking back on her life before her husband left her behind. She reveals her regret of her life due to the fact that she had fallen in love with her husband's charm instead of her common sense which finally left her with a large amount of debt without any regret. That's why she always emphasizes that character is the most important thing for a man.

*AMANDA: They knew how to entertain their gentlemen callers. It wasn't enough for a girl to be possessed of a pretty face and a graceful figure – although I wasn't slighted in either respect. She also needed to have a nimble wit and a tongue to meet all occasions.*

*TOM : What did you talk about?*

*or vulgar.... My callers were gentlemen – all!*

*(William, 1945:754, scene I)*

Here, when the Wingfield family is having dinner, again Amanda advises Laura to master the art of conversation because young lady cannot always count on their pretty face and graceful figure to attract men, but also has to be a good conversation partner for her gentlemen callers. It seems Amanda emphasizes that she has received traditional upbringing and has adopted the value of a Southern belle through the way she treats her gentlemen callers. She tends to share those values that deal with the proper behavior of a young lady to make young man attracted to her. She places great importance on women's manners and also underlines how important it is for women to make themselves as appealing as possible for men.

that Amanda assigns certain responsibilities to her daughter according to the gender role as she has adopted. The life of the women of her time was defined as a competition for the best gentlemen callers.

From Amanda's Conversation with Tom, it seems that Amanda prepares a housewife role for Laura through plans. She thinks that Laura cannot handle everything right by herself. All her efforts for Laura's better life seem to end with failure. Worried about Laura's empty life, she insists to involve Tom in her plan to look for a husband for her sister, somebody to love her and take care of her.

*AMANDA: I remember suggesting that it would be nice for your sister if you brought home some nice man from the warehouse. I think that I've made that suggestion more than once.*

*TOM: Yes, you have made it repeatedly.*

*(William, 1945: 765, scene V)*

From Tom's word in his dialogue 'repeatedly', it is very clear that Amanda

again and again forces her son to help her finding a 'gentleman caller' for Laura. It is strongly emphasized by Amanda's saying 'more than once' about her plan for Laura. Amanda hopes that Laura someday will become an independent woman, but she forces her daughter to marry somebody. It means that Laura still needs a male figure to help her face her life and be dependent to her husband someday.

In this drama, Amanda not only socializes the gender roles toward her children through advises and plans but also through some actions. Amanda believes in using looks, not personality to attract men, that's why she constantly exaggerates and fabricates qualities to make her daughter seem to be more attractive.

*[AMANDA produces two powder puffs which she wraps in handkerchiefs and stuffs in LAURA's bosom]*

*LAURA: Mother, what are you doing?*

*AMANDA: They call them "Gay Deceivers"!*

*LAURA: I won't wear them!*

*AMANDA: you will!*

*LAURA: why should I?*

*AMANDA: Because, to be painfully honest, your chest is flat.*

*LAURA: you make it seem like we were setting a trap.*

*AMANDA: All pretty girls are a trap, a pretty trap, and men expect them to be.*

*(William, 1945:769, scene VI)*

Again, Amanda tends to view appearance as the important way to attract man. Amanda determines what clothes are appropriate for Laura. She arranges Laura's hair, and as the result Laura becomes different with an impression of a pretty young lady. Amanda also adds two pieces of powder puffs to Laura's chest to make her appearance more attractive to her first gentleman caller, Mr. O'Connor. All that perfect preparation are arranged with the

purpose that their relationship can be continued seriously to the marriage.

## **2. The Consequences of Gender Role Differences that profoundly affect the quality of Individual Lives**

Gender is social construction which is created by the norms and cultures. Consciously or unconsciously women and men adapt to the cultural ideas established by the society. The hegemony of stereotypical gender roles is almost impossible to escape in the world in which this drama take place. It seems that masculine and feminine roles are quite conventional and the expectations connected to each gender become important to fulfill. The Glass Menagerie play reflects the social norms, roles, and values of its time and portrays characters whose gender roles trigger the fears of dependence.

The conflict perspective assumes that social behavior is best understood in terms of conflict or tension between competing groups. Conflict theories of gender view the sexes are in some ways competing interest groups. Gender roles are beneficial to men, as their role as the main breadwinner gives them more power than women. Conflict theorists tend to see power and economic differentials between men and women.

This study is divided into two main points, they are consequences of gender roles differences toward women and consequences of gender roles differences toward men. The elaboration of both points will be presented as follows:

### **2.1 The Consequences of Gender Roles Differences toward Women**

Gender division between man and woman in society causes many problems in life. It is because of the injustice of the right and equality toward woman. For women, there is the push to be feminine, to work in

feminine jobs, to have children and start a family and to be a housewife. As a result, it creates a different gap towards men and women existence because people still regard that women are powerless and subordinate to men.

There are two kinds of woman dependency on men figure as presented in *The Glass Menagerie* play which will be elaborated as follows:

### 2.1.1 *Economic dependency*

The Wingfield family is powerless because they are in the shackles of dissolving economy during the Great Depression era. Moreover, nothing in Amanda's growing up or in her role as a wife and mother educate or prepare her to compete in the workplace. She is totally dependent upon her husband to provide an income to support the family. That's why she always blames her husband for deserting his family and escaping his responsibility as the breadwinner of the family.

*TOM: This is our father who left us long time ago. He was a telephone man who fell in love with long distances; he gave up his job with the telephone company and skipped the light fantastic out of town. The last we heard of him was a picture postcard from Mazatlan, on the Pacific coast of Mexico, containing a message of two words- "Hello – good bye! And no address.*

*(William, 1945:753, scene I)*

Because of the abandonment of Mr. Wingfield, Amanda is financially unstable and must rely on the support of her son. She blames her husband many times for all the mistakes which cause the Wingfield family in a big trouble. It indicates that women relying too much on men to provide for them and the family. Moreover, she also expresses the feeling of regret for choosing Mr. Wingfield as her husband instead of the other gentlemen callers. Marrying a men

with charm without considering their wealth is big mistake for Amanda.

*AMANDA: That Fitzhugh boy went North and made a fortune – came to be known as the Wolf of Wall Street! He had the Midas touch, whatever he touched turned to gold! And I could have been Mrs. Duncan J. Fitzhugh, mind you! But – I picked your father!*

*(William, 1945:754, scene I)*

Again, it demonstrates that women are weak and unable to move on and adapt to the realities, rather they live in the world of fantasies of the good past which they consider very much valuable. Amanda reflects a Victorian culture in the Beautiful South which emphasized that females should be ladylike and charming but never breadwinners.

From Amanda's point of view, dependency comes when a woman has no husband or when she cannot work until a suitable husband comes along. Dependency, of course, comes as the outcome of a sexual division in which primary responsibility for child care and family work falls to women while the charge of securing an income for the family falls to men.

The women in this drama seems to be dependent while the men, on the other hand, are presented as the providers who are expected to support the family. Amanda believes that the traditional role of woman in a society is that the woman is supposed to marry gentleman caller one day. However, this is not so for man. It seems that she does not do the same to her son, Tom. In Amanda's society, the tendency for a young lady to marry somebody is stronger than the tendency for a young man to marry somebody. Amanda always emphasizes to Laura that the ultimate goal of being a woman is marriage. On the other hand, she never talks about this with Tom. Amanda always emphasizes that having a good job and being a good provider for the family is

the most important thing for a man. Therefore, it indicates that women in Amanda's society have a great dependency on male figure in order to survive in a society.

### 2.1.2 *Dependency on Decision Making*

The great dependency female on male figure in this drama is also described through the ways in which Amanda treats her children in decision making. It can be said that Amanda never asks her daughter about her dream or her plans for her future life. In their conversation, Amanda only gives direction and advices and how young lady should do and become as what the values she adopted in the society. On the contrary, Amanda shows that she often interacts with her son, Tom. This treatment is quite different when it is compared to the conversation between Amanda and Laura. Amanda never asks Laura about her plans or opinion about her own life instead of discuss it with Tom. Amanda repeatedly asks Tom to find the best gentleman caller for Laura. It demonstrates that Amanda tends to show her great dependency on male figure by trusting her son to help her in making decision for Laura. The female characters in this drama lack the power to determine, direct control on their own lives.

*AMANDA: You have five minutes. I want to talk to about Laura. [LEGEND: "PLANS AND PROVISIONS."]*

*... We have to be making plans and provisions for her. She's older than you, two years, and nothing has happened. She just drifts along doing nothing. It frightens me terribly how she just drifts along ... I mean that as soon as Laura has got somebody to take care of her, married, a home of her own, independent.-... I say for your sister because she is young and dependent. I put her in Business College – a dismal failure! ... I took her over to the Young People's League at the church. Another fiasco. She*

*spoke to nobody, nobody spoke to her. Now all she does is fool with those pieces of glass and play those worn-out records. What kind of a life is that for a girl to lead?*

*(William, 1945:763, scene IV)*

Amanda only discussing family life and also her plans for children's future with Tom instead of involving Laura. It is because of the position of Tom as the only male in the family which is considered higher than Laura, though she is actually two years older than him. In the family, Tom also replaces his father's position as the partner of Amanda in decision-making.

In this drama, it can be seen that Amanda believes that only man can take them out of the painful reality. She believes that men's role is to support women. This shown when Amanda constantly nags Tom to bring gentleman caller for his sister. She believes this is considered as man's role to bring home suitable candidates to show how domestic and capable Laura would be as a wife. In the absence of a father, Tom must take on what would be a masculine role in order to protect Laura.

The presence of this gentleman caller, Mr. O'Connor, is considered important for Amanda. She has a great expectation on this gentleman caller to marry her daughter and then support the financial security of Wingfield family. Unfortunately, this expectation breaks into pieces.

*AMANDA: That's right, now that you've had us make such fool of ourselves. The effort, the preparations, all the expense! The new floor lamp, the rug, the clothes for Laura! All for what? To entertain some other girl's fiancé! Go to the movies, go! Don't think about us, a mother deserted, an unmarried sister who's crippled and has no job!*

*(William, 1945:784, scene VII)*

It can be seen that the first gentleman caller, Mr. O'Connor fails to fulfill Amanda's hope and ambition because he is already engaged with someone else. Therefore, because Jim is engaged, Amanda believes that Tom has failed to fulfill his obligations to the family.

## 2.2 The Consequences of Gender Roles Differences toward Men

In times of economic hardship, men have more option than women. It is difficult for women to survive without the presence of men in a family. In fact, being a man and having a job is at least some help. However, this kind of situation seems to put men in a difficult position since men are in charge of earning money in a family. If they can not maintain the financial security of the family, it assumes that they fail to run their role as breadwinner. In this drama, it can be seen that men tend to feel more pressures as the result of gender role differences in family. This situation will be elaborated as follows:

### 2.2.1 Economic Pressures

In this drama, the male character is under the economic pressures. Because of this kind of situation, he can not fulfill his own desire. He has very big responsibility to the family. Tom Wingfield is a character in the play as well as the narrator of memories of a difficult period in his life when he lived with his mother and his sister in St. Louis. He works in a shoe factory in order to support his family in the absence of his father. He is trapped by economic pressures which force him to do work.

Tom likes adventure but in order to fulfill his responsibilities, he had to suppress his desire. Due to father's absence, Tom has to take all the responsibility on his shoulder. Tom struggles with his role as a breadwinner of the family. As he tells Amanda:

*TOM: Every time you come in yelling that God damn "Rise and Shine!" I say to*

*myself, "How lucky dead people are!" but I get up. I go!*

*(William, 1945:759, scene IV)*

Tom's above speech indicates that he doesn't enjoy his work in the warehouse. He associates that his role as the breadwinner with a living death. For him, his responsibility is not that easy. His wage in a shoe factory is insufficient for a man who has to pay rent and supply the family needs. His mother and especially his sister really depends on him because he is the only man in the family.

Because of the family situation, Tom has been forced into the breadwinner role for saving the family from the economic pressures. Amanda's attitude towards his passion of adventure filled him with the feeling of being entrapped, as Amanda said to him:

*AMANDA: Most young men find adventure in their careers... The world is full of young men employed in warehouses and offices and factories... they do or they do without it! Not everybody has a craze for adventure.*

*(William, 1945: 763, scene IV)*

It can be interpreted that Amanda gives less attention on Tom's passion for adventure. Moreover, she has never realized the fact that Tom also a young man who also has dreams and passions which he cannot fulfill due to his overloaded works and expectations.

### 2.2.2 Psychological Pressures

In this drama, we can clearly see that Amanda is really influenced by her stereotypical vision of conventional role of a man. She always emphasizes what things that her son should do or should not do according to the value of gender roles she adopted. As a result, it causes such a kind of

pressures for her son to hold his role as the breadwinner of the family that can be seen through her son's behavior.

*AMANDA: And you – when I see you taking after his ways! Staying out late – and – well, you had been drinking the night you were in that – terrifying condition! Laura says that you hate the apartment and that you go out nights to get away from it! Is that true, Tom?*

*(William, 1945:762, scene IV)*

Tom's dissatisfaction at the warehouse and the position in family drives him to lead a life where he often goes out and drinks heavily just to escape his miserable existence. Tom goes up against his mother by drinking and behaving more like his father. It seems that none of family member understands what he really feel until it reaches the end of his patience as he shouts to Amanda:

*TOM: House, house! Who pays rent on it, who makes a slave of himself to –*

*AMANDA: [Fairly screeching] don't you DARE to –*

*TOM: No, no, I mustn't say things! I've got to just –*

*AMANDA: Let me tell you –*

*TOM: I don't want to hear anymore!*

*(William, 1945:759, scene III)*

Tom suffered from the emotion due to the suppression of his passions and desires. He is not interested in success and not willing to spend his whole life by working in the shoe factory. All he wants to do is only a real adventure. Men in those days are really crazy of finding adventure on the open seas. However, it seems that his mother constantly berates him for his dreams and ambitions. As a consequence, the only way he can escape is only through movies which present adventures as what he dream of. Therefore, it drives him mad

when his mother forbids him to go to see the movies.

*AMANDA: Where are you going?*

*TOM: I'm going to the movies!*

*AMANDA: I don't believe that lie!*

*TOM: ... Mother, I've joined the Hogan gang, I'm a hired assassin, I carry a tommy-gun in a violin case!... Oh I could tell you things to make you sleepless! My enemies plan to dynamite this place.... You'll go up, up on a broomstick, over Blue Mountain with seventeen gentlemen callers! You ugly – babbling old – witch.*

*(William, 1945:760, scene III)*

From the above conversation, we can see that Tom shows his emotion to his mother as a result of his disappointment toward his mother's constant direction upon him. It can be said that Amanda associates the activities of going to movies as an undesirable thing. Therefore, she really forbids him to go to the movies. However, according to Tom, movies provide the convenient excuse for escape from unpleasant surroundings. Going to a cinema seems to be the best place for him to take a rest from the responsibilities of being the breadwinner for his family and also from the reality that distress him. Amanda victimizes Tom by assigning inappropriate roles of parent to Tom and treating him as if he has only a single personality characteristic instead of a wide range of human feelings and attitudes. She focuses only on herself and the family survival of economic hardship without considering the happiness of her children.

## CONCLUSION

In *The Glass Menagerie* play, gender role socialization has great influence in the realization of gender role concept. This socialization is conducted by mother in some ways. It can be through giving advices, making

plans, and also becoming role model toward her children. She sets certain standards that she wants her children to follow based on the values she adopted in society around her. In fact, parent exerts strong influences on person in perceiving their gender role concept.

Masculine and feminine are quite conventional and the expectation connected to each gender become important to fulfill. They have to follow this certain standards to be socially accepted. However, the presence of gender role gives impacts on the quality of individual lives. It creates different gap toward men and women existence because women tend to be more powerless and subordinate to men. As a result of this, there will be great dependency of women on men figure, especially on economic dependency and dependency on decision making. Moreover, the entire drama focuses on gender division which makes the sexes stand sharply apart. As a result, this condition also leads men to experience the pressures for being the breadwinner of the family during the economic hardship. Men tend to experience the economic pressures and psychological pressures. In fact, unequal position and economic power heightens gender-based social inequalities.

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