



**THE REPRESENTATION OF SEXISM IN LAUREN  
WEISBERGER'S *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA***

**THESIS**

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**MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY  
UNIVERSITAS JEMBER  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES  
ENGLISH DEPARTMENT  
2025**



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Submitted to English Department Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Jember as  
one of the requirements to obtain the degree of Sarjana Sastra in English Studies

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## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents Anam Mujiyanto and Enung Nurjanah, my beloved siblings Adinda Bellvania Angel and Syarifah Fizria Ningrum. Thank you for the effort, pray, love, and advice you have given to me throughout my study.

## **MOTTO**

“Everyone’s standard of being perfect is different, so no one can be perfect.”

Son Seungwan

## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis entitled “**The Representation of Sexism in Lauren Weisberger’s *The Devil Wears Prada***” is an original piece of writing. I confirm that this study has never been published for another degree or publication. I also certify that I have acknowledged all of the references and the help I received in producing my thesis. This declaration is written without intervention from any individual or group.

Jember, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025

The writer,

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## APPROVAL SHEET

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## ABSTRAK

*Isu mengenai seksisme sudah banyak dibicarakan dalam karya sastra dan dipelajari oleh banyak peneliti. Namun, tidak banyak penelitian yang menjadikan The Devil Wears Prada (Weisberger, 2006) sebagai objek kajian. Penelitian ini berfokus pada bagaimana pembentukan wacana dari seksisme pada novel The Devil Wears Prada. Pembentukan wacana ini dilakukan oleh pekerja laki-laki dan perempuan di Runaway. Penelitian ini menggunakan teori representasi dari Stuart Hall dengan pendekatan konstruksionis, khususnya model wacana Foucault dan konsep seksisme dari Glick dan Fiske untuk menemukan wacana seksisme di dalam teks dengan cara mengidentifikasi tanda berbentuk narasi di dalam novel. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa ada empat bentuk seksisme di dalam novel, yakni heteroseksualitas bermusuhan, diferensiasi gender komplementer, paternalisme pelindung, dan heteroseksualitas intim. Selain itu, penulis dari novel ini memosisikan dirinya sebagai orang yang berusaha untuk menghindari tindakan seksis. Namun, di tengah cerita, terdapat beberapa tindakan negosiasi terhadap seksisme dalam bentuk seksisme kebajikan.*

**Kata kunci:** *diskriminasi pada perempuan, seksisme, wacana*

## SUMMARY

**The Representation of Sexism in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada***; Putri Lukita Sari; 200110101024; 2025; 33; English Department; Faculty of Humanities; Universitas Jember.

This thesis analyzes a novel by Lauren Weisberger entitled *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006) as the subject of the study. This thesis aims to examine how the discourse of sexism in 21st century in the United States is portrayed in the novel *The Devil Wears Prada*. The focus is on the experience of Andrea as the main character and other female characters who work for *Runaway* face sexism. This topic is interesting since the issue of sexism still happens particularly in the fashion industry in the United States in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I use Stuart Hall's theory of representation with Michelle Foucault's discursive approach to analyze this. This analysis purposes to reveal how the discourse of sexism is represented in *The Devil Wears Prada*, also in American society. Ambivalent sexism theory by Glick and Fiske (1997) is used to explore the women's position related to the issue of sexism in the novel and the United States' society. Moreover, the analysis aims to look for the ideological position of Lauren Weisberger as the author. This research collected data in descriptive form such as narrations and dialogues from the novel related to the discourse of sexism. Then, the second data were received from journal articles, news, and interviews related to the social condition of the United States and the social-cultural background of the author.

The research questions were addressed by analyzing primary data specifically how the author of the novel depicted the experience of women workers in the United States, especially in fashion magazines. The primary data were correlated to the historical event of American women workers around 21th century as the novel's setting and the time it was published. Then, it was really important to gather information about the social background of the author relating to her work experiences as being an assistant for editor-in-chief of *Vogue* to understand her ideological position. After that, it was correlated with the way the

author portrays American women workers facing sexism, in particular, in the fashion world.

The result of this analysis exhibits that the author represents the discourse of sexism faced by women workers through various moments experienced by Andrea and Emily as the assistants of the editor-in-chief of *Runaway*, Miranda Priestly. The author described them experiencing gender discrimination and being stereotyped. This is in line with Glick and Fiske's theory (1997) on heterosexual hostility. Another finding from the study of sexism in the novel shows that the main character, Andrea, is protected by the male characters. In addition to this, this study comes to a conclusion that Weisberger showed an attempt to negotiate sexism in the form of Andrea's acceptance of the benevolent sexism which is pictured in the shape of the male characters' love, care, and protection.

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Hopefully this thesis will be able to further advance the field of English literature studies in the future.

Jember, 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2025

The Writer,

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## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

This first chapter discusses the basic idea that gives readers descriptions about the whole research. This chapter consists of the background of the study, the topic of the research, the question of the research, and the goals of the research. Those four sub-chapters are the ideas to conduct the research and will contain the explanation of the reason why this research was chosen through detailed discussion.

### **1.1 The Background of the Study**

Patriarchy as a social system that has been in place since many decades ago still continues almost all over the world until today including in the United State. This social system puts men's position higher than women's by practicing domination, oppression, and exploitation over women (Sultana, 2012). Therefore, inequality happens between men and women. For example, in the United States, no women have ever been elected as US president. The data from Pew Research Center analysis also shows that pay gap between men and women has barely shifted in 20 years (Eliza & Mellisa, 2023). There are many people believe that men and women have different roles and different responsibilities they have to fulfill. Women are assumed to take care of their husbands, the house, family, and children, when men are believed to work outside and be served by women. Men hold control or power in a large household of patriarch in which women, children, junior men, slaves, and domestic servants are under their rule (Sultana, 2012). This patriarchal system is hard to eliminate and raises the development of sexism. Whilst many people in the 21st Century understand and aware about the issue of gender equality, the practice of patriarchal system still occurs in many aspects of life. In the United State, women are paid less than men for the same work even they have the same qualifications and experiences. The data that was revealed by United States Census Bureau, a part of the U.S. Department of Commerce that provides current facts and figures about America, shows that from 2005 until

2019, women with a certificate degree earned 71.2 cents for every dollar earned by men (Kendall et al., 2024). It is a proof that the progress of gender equality is not linear or guaranteed. All of the benefits that women got since the rise of feminist movement could also be lost as no provision in the United States Constitution that explicitly protects against discrimination based on sex, and guarantee the same rights and protections between men and women (Eliza & Mellisa, 2023)

*The Devil Wears Prada* is a novel written by Lauren Weisberger and published in 2006 by Anchor Books. Moreover, since the novel was very popular, it was adapted into a major motion picture (Linden, 2007). This novel is a chick-lit. Based on the Cambridge Dictionary chick-lit is stories written by women, about women, and for women to read. The story centers on the lives and experiences of young, modern women, often dealing with themes such as love, career, and friendship (Somnath, 2021). Chick-lit comes from American slang, “chicks” that refer to women. The concept is originally from Princeton University’s Female Literary Tradition course in the 1980s. As a literary genre, chick-lit addresses issues confronting women, modern women’s chances, and women empowerment that will be enlightening regarding women’s condition in the new era (Lu, 2018). *The Devil Wears Prada* as chick-lit pictures women in an idea of feminism, however they still experience sexism. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* explains that Sexism is attitudes or behaviors that discriminate people based on their sex, especially against women (*Merriam-Webster*, 2024). *The Devil Wears Prada* shows several sexist behaviors that women experience in the workplace. Women are required to look attractive and beautiful. Furthermore, they are expected to be able to do house chores. Women are also portrayed as a creature or human beings who depend on men, seen as weak and incapable of doing something independently.

This novel revolves around the life of Andrea who graduated from Brown University and moved to New York City to get her dream job as a journalist. However, surprisingly, she got an interview for being an assistant to the influential editor-in-chief of fashion magazine, Miranda Priestly. Miranda is a

kind of cold boss who always expects perfection from her employees. Whether it is the way the employees gets dressed or works. Whilst Andrea is described as a pure and smart woman, yet she does not really care about fashion. It causes her to be undervalued by people in *Runaway*. It shows that Andrea confronts a kind of hostile sexism which Glick and Fiske (1997) declare as an act to justify male power, traditional gender roles, and men's exploitation of women as sexual objects through derogatory characterizations of women. As time passes, Andrea is influenced by the way people in *Runaway* get dressed. Therefore, she learns how to be stylish. However, along with her transformation, she is having a lot of problems with her friends, family, and importantly her boyfriend, Alex. Alex becomes unhappy and feels forgotten because Andrea always prioritizes her work and her boss, Miranda Priestly. At the end of the story, Andrea chooses to resign from her job and becomes a writer.

Lauren Weisberger was born in Scranton, Pennsylvania, on March 28, 1977. She moved to Allentown in the sixth grade and graduated from Parkland High School in 1995. She attended Cornell University with a Bachelor of Arts in English and graduated in 1999. She also participated in Alpha Epsilon Phi, a Jewish sorority which decided to helping women become the best they can be. After that, she traveled through Europe, Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Thailand, India, Nepal, and Hong Kong. When she returned to the U.S., she got a job as the Assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of *Vogue*, Anna Wintour. She has written up to 10 books and *The Devil Wears Prada* was the first.

In this research, it is assumed that the novel represents several sexist behaviors toward the female characters in the novel. The topic of this research is still related to today's real-life situation. Even though the understanding of gender equality is growing rapidly, women are still positioned as a subordinate. I use the theory of representation by Stuart Hall to show the sexist behaviors toward the female characters in the story.

## **1.2 The Research Topic**

The topic of this research focuses on sexist behaviors faced by the female characters in the novel, along with the critical view of the author about sexism in society.

## **1.3 The Research Question**

This research applies the representation theory by Stuart Hall (1997) to find out the representation of sexism toward the female characters in *The Devil Wears Prada*. There are two problems in this research:

1. How is sexism represented in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada*?
2. What is the ideological position of the author?

## **1.4 The Goals of the Study**

Based on the research problem, there are two goals of this research are required to be achieved:

1. To find out the representation of sexism toward the female characters of *The Devil Wears Prada*.
2. What is the ideological position of the author.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This second chapter deals with the discussion about the previous research and the theory that is used to get the point of this research. The explanation is started from the previous research which discusses the issue of sexism in *The Devil Wears Prada*. Therefore, the second literature review explains the theory of representation by Stuart Hall.

### 2.1 Previous Research

Previous research is important to show some references related to the topic and choose the new one in this research. Through this previous research, the writer is helped to get a better understanding of subject matters. In addition, readers will recognize the differences between this research and previous research.

The first research was cited from Wijayanti (2023) who focuses on revealing sexism constructed by the acts and behaviors of the characters toward the female characters. Even though this previous research has a similar theory, the use of the object is different. This research helped deepen my understanding of managing and analyzing data using representation and sexism theory that was applied through my research.

Research on the impact of sexism behavior has been conducted by many previous researchers, but sexism discussed through literary works has not been widely done and published in scientific journals. Swim et al. (2001), for instance, discovered that sexism affects women's psychological well-being, increases the feeling of anger and depression, and decreases women's state self-esteem. It is also supported by Choi et al. (2011) who discuss the effect of sexism that causes psychological distress on women. Sexism may be presented in various kinds of places or communities such as in an academic environment as Smith-castro et al. (2019) found that sexism influence women's performance and academic outcomes by shaping their self-identities and self-confidence. Moreover, Stamarski et al. (2015) examine gender inequalities in the workplace which are affected by the

sexist manner in organizational structure, processes, practice, and decision-makers. Bosson et al. (2010) also explain that a lot of people fail to appreciate the emotion impact of hostile and benevolent sexism. They tend to underestimate the damage of benevolent sexism since they see benevolent sexism as less likely as sexist (Barreto & Ellemers, 2005). It is supported by the result found that women perceive different types of sexism unequally. People viewed hostile sexism as more sexist than benevolent sexism (Riemer et al., 2014).

*The Devil Wears Prada* has also received a lot of attention from researchers, but no previous research has discussed sexism in the novel. Adam (2016) studies the relationship of fashion discourse and power through Miranda and Andrea. It is found that Andrea's fashion discourse can manage to break the truth of Miranda's fashion discourse. The theory applied in this research is Foucault's discourse theory of post-structuralism which is different from the theory I use in this analysis. Murtazikoh & Hetami (2022) examines the character of Miranda by using a feminist perspective. Using Judith Butler's postmodernism feminist theory, their study explains that Miranda's gender performance is displayed through her general description and gender reconstruction. The study finds the gender performance of Miranda Priestly was described as a powerful and successful chief editor of *Runaway*. Meanwhile, her gender reconstruction was shown by challenging the gender stereotypes toward women's characterization.

Furthermore, *The Devil Wears Prada* has been researched several times, as in Prasatyo (2018) that conduct to find out the character, characterization, and feminist perspective of Miranda Priestly. Miranda is characterized as Jewish, fashionable, hectic, demanding, influential, and discriminating. Furthermore, she is portrayed as a ruthless, arrogant, and hypercritical perfectionist (Rana, 2023). However, the research by Ye (2021) found that Miranda is still a lovable character even though she represents a bossy leader who is arrogant and perfectionist. Despite these various researches, there have not been any discussions about sexism issues. Therefore, I analyze the sexist behaviors faced by the female characters in the novel.

## 2.2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.2.1 Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation

I apply the theory of Representation by Stuart Hall (1997) to analyze the representation of sexism in *The Devil Wears Prada*. According to Hall's theory as in "*Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*", he stated that representation means using language to say something meaningful about, or to represent, the world meaningfully, to other people. Based on this definition, representation can be understood as a process to produce the meaning of the concept in our mind through language. The link between concepts and words enables us to call up either the real world of items, people, and events, or fictional worlds of objects, people, and events (Hall, 1997). Hall also mentioned that there are two kinds of representation systems related to one another. Those are mental representation and language.

“Mental representation: all things which carry around in our heads. Meaning depends on the system of concepts and images formed in our thought which can stand for or represent the world. Language: to represent and exchange meanings and concepts we can only do that when we also have access to share language. Language depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of sign, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts.”

(Hall, 1997: 17-18)

The quotation above means that mental representation is a system in which all kinds of objects, people, and events are correlated with a set of concepts that we carry in our minds. Mental representation is used to perceive the meaning. Then, language is used to transform the concepts or ideas to other people with certain written words, spoken sound, or visual images. Language is involved in the process of constructing meaning. So, we can conclude that mental representation thinks of ideas that are processed in our mind and language becomes a tool to express it. Through language and the concept, we can understand the meaning of something because those two are correlate each other.

There are three approaches to categorizing the theory of representation to explain how this theory works on the production of meaning through languages correspond to the world. Hall (1997: 24-25) categorized those three approaches into: the reflective, the intentional, and the constructionist approach. All those approaches have differential idea about the use of language to represent the world and concept of representation connects meaning and language to culture. Reflective approach puts the function of language like a mirror which reflects meaning directly and clearly according to what already exists in real life. Hall explains that “Meaning is thought to lie in the object, person, idea or event in the real world, and language functions like a mirror, to reflect the true meaning as it already exists in the world.” (Hall, 1997: 24). Thus, it is also called mimetic. Intentional approach focuses on the producer of the meaning which is the speaker or the author. They use their own language to create the unique meaning. Words mean what the author intends they should mean. It means the author or the speaker plays an important role in understanding a meaning because they determine his or her unique meaning in the world through language. The last is constructionist approach that Hall stated:

“Things don’t mean. We construct meaning using representational system- concept and sign. Hence it is called the constructivist or constructionist approach to meaning in language. We must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructionist do not deny the existence of the material world.”

(Hall, 1997: 25)

Through this approach, it is believed that things do not have meaning. The meaning is carried by the language system or other system that we use to represent our concepts. The entire system of representation, along with the concepts and signs present in language, plays an important role in the process of meaning construction and exchange.

This approach suggests that meaning is constructed in the mind of each audience or reader, and recognizes that there is no absolute meaning. In order to fully operationalize this approach, it is imperative to understand the material

world in which objects physically exist and the symbolic practices and processes through which systems of representation, meaning construction, and language operate and relate to each other (Hall, 1997). Then, because everyone has a different interpretation, the meaning of the construction process becomes different in a group of people.

### 2.2.2 Discursive Approach

There are two models of constructionist in representation theory. Those are semiotic approach influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, the great Swiss linguist, and discursive approach by the French philosopher and historian, Michel Foucault (Hall, 1997: 15). This research will be conducted by using discursive approach. According to Foucault, there are three ideas in discursive approach related to the process of representation. Those are the concept of discourse, the issue of power and knowledge, and the question of the subject.

“By ‘discourse’, Foucault meant a group of statements which provide a language for talking about- a way of representing the knowledge about- a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language.”

(Hall, 1997: 44)

According to the quotation above, the representation does not simply use language to construct meaning but also uses discourse to analyze the meaning by using language. Foucault concerned with the production of knowledge (rather just meaning) through what he called discourse (rather just language) (Hall, 1997: 44). It means that we know things if it has meaning, it is the discourse- not the things itself- which produce knowledge (Hall, 1997: 45). Discourse describes that knowledge exists in consequence of language is used to produce understanding. The written text by the author always produces meaning in which it will become knowledge to the receiver. I use a discursive approach on my research because the representation of sexism, contextual background of this story in relating sexism, and the ideological position of the author are recognized.

### 2.2.3 Sexism

Sexism is anything that uses gender discrepancy to build and preserve an inequality of a particular group like women. Swim and Hyers (2009) define sexism as a manner, beliefs or views, and behaviors of individuals in organizational, institutional, and cultural practices that reflect the negative judgment of individuals according to their gender. Sexism is actually faced by all genders, but it is most often expressed toward women. Especially since women are regarded as the less dominant or second sex in society. Glick and Fiske in the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (1997) explained that sexism is generally divided into two types which are hostile and benevolent sexism.

#### 2.2.3.1 Hostile Sexism

Hostile sexism is seen as a negative thought on traditional gender roles violation (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Glick and Fiske also mentioned that there are three kinds of hostile sexism: (1) dominative paternalism, (2) competitive gender differentiation, and (3) heterosexual hostility which will be explained further below.

##### a. Dominative Paternalism

Dominative paternalism can be known as the belief that women should be controlled by men. This kind of hostile sexism proposes to preserve the power owned by men towards women. Women are viewed as a weak subject and have no capability to do things without any help by men.

##### b. Competitive Gender Differentiation

Hostile sexism considers gender differences need to be classified and ranked. The negative prejudice against women makes men believe that they are better than others. Competitive gender differentiation frequently depicts only can men fulfil particular requirements to gain a higher authority.

c. Heterosexual Hostility

This form of sexism describes or portrays women as simply as a sexual object. Moreover, women consider using sexual attraction to gain power over men. Heterosexual hostility straight-out shows the sexualization of women in men that may be done mentally, physically, or verbally. Women are expected to fulfill men's fantasies because men hold the power that existed in society.

2.2.3.2 Benevolent Sexism

In contrast with hostile sexism, benevolent relies on kinder and gentler justifications of male dominance and prescribed gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1997). It looks fine, better, and more positive. Benevolent can be understood as an idea supporting and respecting the traditional gender roles or sexist attitudes toward women in traditional roles. Benevolent sexism is categorized into three types: (1) protective paternalism, (2) complementary gender differentiation, and (3) heterosexual intimacy.

a. Protective Paternalism

Men put themselves as the most competent subject. Therefore, they feel like they have to protect women. The common thing that we frequently see is how men often provide protection for women when they are crossing the street. This is a form of distrust that women can protect themselves.

b. Complementary Gender Differentiation

Complementary gender differentiation may be similar to the competitive one at some points. However, complementary gender differentiation generalizes the notion or concept about women's inability to achieve what men can due to their 'biological traits'. It makes society believe, that instead of a form of sexist behavior, the way women are treated differently is actually a form of affection.

c. Heterosexual Intimacy

This form of sexism romanticizes women as sexual objects, viewing a female romantic partner as necessary for a man to be “complete”. Heterosexual intimacy covers the women’s sexualization in the name of love and attraction. Furthermore, heterosexual intimacy supports the idea that women shall not be single and have a man as a romantic partner.

The use of ambivalent sexism theory by Glick and Fiske (1997) and Stuart Hall’s theory of representation provides a strong foundation to analyze the representation of sexism in *The Devil Wears Prada*. These frameworks provide an understanding how sexism is constructed through the discourse in the novel. The ambivalent sexism theory introduces two concepts which are hostile and benevolent. Hostile has such several forms like dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation, and heterosexual hostility. While benevolent consists of protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. These concepts operate together to hold gender inequality. Furthermore, by connecting Glick and Fiske’s theory (1997) of sexism with Hall’s representation theory, this research will clarify the perpetuation of sexism through literary work and emphasizes the potential of representation to either upholding of dismantling gender discrimination.

## **CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter consists of three sub-chapters explaining the research methodology that is used to find the result of the research objectively. Those three sub-chapters are type of research, data collection, data processing, and data analysis. The aims of this chapter is to let the reader know the way this research collect the data and to do the analysis.

### **3.1 Type of Research**

This research is conducted by using qualitative research. The qualitative research uses descriptive data such as words, quotations in a literary work, or verbal expression from people to be analyzed. Qualitative research itself collects data by several methods such as interviews, observations, and document analysis in the collecting data (Denscombe, 2010). The qualitative research is used for my research because the data are using words and descriptions from the dialogues and narration of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Therefore, the discourse of sexism can be elaborated and defined using the theory of representation by Stuart Hall (1997) in Lauren Weisberger's *The Devil Wears Prada*.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The most appropriate strategy to collect the data is reading and understanding the novel. It should be done first to make sure that the data are accurate. Reading and understanding the novel is needed to provide a description of the substance of the work. There are two types of data used in this research. They are primary and secondary data. The primary data are the narratives and dialogues in *The Devil Wears Prada* written by Lauren Weisberger and published in 2006 by Anchor Books. Then, I collected the data about how women were expected to be and how they were treated by men and women. I collect the data related to the concept of sexism proposed by Glick & Fiske in Ambivalent sexism theory (1997) which included hostile sexism and benevolent

sexism. The data were taken from the narrations and the dialogues between men to women and women to women related to dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation, and heterosexual hostility (hostile sexism), along with protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy (benevolent sexism). The secondary data were obtained from various articles, essays, and digital news related to Lauren Weisberger's social background. Moreover, the information that showed sexism in general and the condition in the United States society were gathered. The secondary data were used to support the primary data in answering the research questions.

### **3.3 Data Processing and Data Analysis**

After collecting the data, it is important to process and analyze them. As Marshall and Rossman in Denscombe (2010) explain that data analysis is the process of bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data. The data processing and analysis are used to answer the research questions mentioned in chapter one. I apply several steps to reveal and explain the discourse of sexism represented by female characters in the novel.

First, I categorized the data that I found about sexism explained by Glick and Fiske (1997) in Ambivalent sexism theory to classify the data into hostile or benevolent sexism. In addition, for secondary data, other sources were collected to get data about how is sexism portrayed in the United States as the contextual background and the information of Lauren Weisberger. To analyze the data, I applied Stuart Hall's Theory of Representation, especially constructionist and discursive approach to find narrations and dialogues that construct the discourse of sexism, and connect them to the six elements of sexism in Glick & Fiske's ambivalent sexism theory: dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation, heterosexual hostility, protective paternalism, complementary, gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. The analysis focused on the depiction of the way women were treated by men or women in the workplace, how men saw women, and how women were treated in society. By elaborating it,

the first research question of how is sexism represented in the novel can be answered.

Next, after discovering the representation of sexism in *The Devil Wears Prada* the analysis leads to answer the second research question about the ideological position of the author. The author's biography through the internet, her interviews, and her thoughts on her books in the article or website, her social background related to the issue of sexism is looked for. These data help me to find out the purpose of the author in writing the novel. As the discursive approach stated that the discourse produced in each period is different depending on the conditions of cultures in that period. Therefore, the primary data are correlated with the contextual background to demonstrate the actual condition of the environment can influence the literary works. To answer the second research question, the biographical and historical contexts correlating to the primary data were required.

## CHAPTER 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The fourth chapter which contains the result and discussion focuses on developing a discussion to answer the aforementioned research questions. This part consists of two subchapters. The first subchapter of this research discusses the representation of sexism toward female characters in *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006). The second subchapter focuses on analyzing the purpose of the author creating the novel.

### 4.1 The Representation of Sexism in *The Devil Wears Prada*

This research uses a representation theory by Stuart Hall (1997). I connect the data of the novel with the author's contextual background, which is related to sexism. The background of the novel takes place in the United States in the early 21st century. This part of analysis explains that women are excluded from gaining power in society because they are seen as a weakness compared to men and that women are often positioned as inferior subjects which causes them to face unfair treatment.

In this research, the forms of hostile sexism and benevolent sexism which Glick and Fiske explained in Ambivalent sexism theory are used to understand sexism. According to Glick and Fiske (1997), there are six characteristics of sexism. These six characteristics are divided into two main categories. The first is hostile sexism which consists of dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation, and heterosexual hostility. The second is called benevolent sexism and consists of protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy.

The assumption set up at the outset of this thesis is that the subject of this study, *The Devil Wears Prada*, has four characteristics of sexism: heterosexual hostility, complementary gender differentiation, protective paternalism, and heterosexual intimacy. Thus, the analysis of the novel by the utilization of those four characteristics is provided in the chapter below.

#### 4.1.1. Hostile Sexism

Hostile sexism, as conceived by Glick and Fiske (1997), showed in three forms: dominative paternalism, competitive gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. These forms picture many different antagonistic attitudes that are expressed toward women. Since there is no data about dominative paternalism and competitive gender differentiation found in the novel, I will not discuss that further.

##### a. Heterosexual Hostility

As a part of hostile sexism, heterosexual hostility refers to negative attitudes toward women who break traditional roles, as well as fear that women may challenge traditional male authority by using sexual attraction to gain power over men. It is purposed to validate the idea that the power existing in society is held by men, thus women are viewed as men's possessions to be objectified (Glick & Fiske, 1997). Furthermore, this form of sexism aims to make women think that their values are based on their physical characteristics (Wijayanti, 2023).

“It took me twelve weeks before I gorged myself on the seemingly limitless supply of designer clothes that Runaway was just begging to provide for me. Twelve impossibly long weeks of fourteen-hour work days and never more than five hours of sleep at a time. Twelve miserable long weeks of being looked up and down from hair to shoes each and every day, and never receiving a single compliment or even merely the impression that I had passed.”

(Weisberger, 2006: 144)

The quotation above shows the act of heterosexual hostility because it aligns with Glick and Fiske’s theory that the belief of heterosexual hostility puts women as sexual objects. Andrea is always being criticized about her looks by people in her workplace regardless of her work performance. It depicts that women's appearance is everything in *Runaway*. Women are forced to show a good appearance (beautiful, thin, and dressing well) to be valued. Besides those requirements, another form of sexism comes verbally which shows through John by calling Andrea “hottie” (Weisberger, 2006: 315). The noun "hottie" directly

labels someone, making them even more like an object. This label can undermine respect and build an understanding that women are the object of attraction rather than a whole individual. In line with Glick and Fiske (1997), heterosexual hostility views women as objects that are allowed to be sexualized. This objectification may come in the form of physical action or words (e.g., jokes and statements) (Wijayanti, 2023). Based on this explanation, the dialogue above can be categorized as an act of heterosexual hostility.

Salma & Ariyani (2024) analyzed the representation of sexism in *Misbehaviour*, a film by Philippa Lowthorpe, heterosexual hostility is also illustrated in a way of judging women's appearance. The movie shows a scene where the winner of Miss World is announced and a crowd of men is cheering and complimenting the winner's physical beauty. The host of the show further reinforced this norm by praising the attractiveness of the winner. Comparing the analysis by Salma and Ariyani with this research, the similarity of the result is that objectifying women and putting their values on their physical appearance represent heterosexual hostility. As we relate the discourse of sexism that is pictured in the novel through women's objectification with the contextual background in the United States, we can see that it is interconnected since the author is the member of American society. This is in accordance with Hall's view on how "Meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part" (Hall, 1997: 3).

The objectifications of women workers are common in the United States. For example, Anna Baird, who works for *Outreach*, experiences objectification by being asked to wear skirts only (Gonzales, 2022). It shows how women are objectified by controlling what they have to wear. Controlling women's clothes or everything they wear exemplifies the way women's bodies are regulated through heterosexual hostility (Honkatukia & Keskinen, 2017).

#### 4.1.2. Benevolent Sexism

##### a. Complementary Gender Differentiation

This characteristic of sexism is expressed by sharing ideas about women's bodies or personalities. Women are treated differently because society believes they are weaker than men. Thus, the idea that men and women have different responsibilities has been constructed. Society believes that these responsibilities cannot be exchanged and replaced. Women may be expected to and praised for engaging in traditional household labor and childcare (Oswald et al., 2019).

"She does indeed have a cook. She also has a housekeeper, a nanny, and two children. So I have no idea why I was the one sent out for dinner spices. It was especially annoying since Fifth Avenue doesn't have any corner delis, and neither does Madison Park, so I had to go all the way to find one..."

(Weisberger, 2006: 191)

From the quotation above, Miranda shows a sexist act as she demands her assistant to do the house chores, driving the assumption that Miranda is influenced by patriarchal ideology which believes women are suitable for that work. Miranda's assistant is responsible for fetching meals and coffee, helping Miranda's kids with their homework, and preparing Miranda's clothes and bags. Even Emily does that kind of extra job when she is a newcomer. This is explained by the quotation below.

"I'd really appreciate it, Andrea. I mean, I've done your job. I know how much it sucks. Trust me, there were days that I had to go out in the snow and the slush and the rain to get her coffee five, six, seven times in a single day. I was so tired I could barely move- I know what it's like!

(Weisberger, 2006: 185)

Hiring women as an assistant can be understood as an act of complementary gender differentiation since it frames women as the ones who are suited for caregiving which strengthens traditional gender roles. This practice becomes a problem because it limits the opportunities for women's careers and also shapes

the view about gender and work. Similar to this explanation, women workers in the United States in the 2000s were also judged as having double burden because they were expected to be at home taking care of their home and children (Gonzales, 2022). It shows how the real condition in the United States at that time is presented in the novel.

Since Weisberger lived in a patriarchal environment, she was largely influenced by patriarchal values. It aligns with Hall's statement that the concept and the meaning of a thing are influenced by the surrounding (Hall, 1997: 29). Moreover, based on Foucault's concept, discourse is intertwined with power relations. Foucault explains that discourse is used to define what is considered normal and acceptable by those in power (Meilani, 2024). It explains that the truth is constructed by power in shaping and controlling knowledge. Weisberger is influenced by the discourse of her surroundings that believes house chores are originally the responsibility of women. It relates to the condition of women workers in the United States in the 2000s where women were normally responsible for handling main households (Brenan, 2020).

#### **b. Protective Paternalism**

This element of benevolent sexism believes that men are stronger and more competent than women. It can be seen through the act of society when men are frequently associated with protection. Men are required to protect women wherever they are. Furthermore, male figures are believed to be more trustworthy and stronger than female figures. In the novel *The Devil Wears Prada*, protective paternalism is shown by Uri, Miranda's driver, to Andrea.

“Don't you run to me, you hear?” he said in his thick Russian accent. “All day long, you run, run, run. She makes you work very, very hard. This is why I bring the thing to you,” he said, helping me get a grip on the overflowing bags and boxes. “You be a good girl, you hear, and have a nice day.”

(Weisberger, 2006: 160)

The aforementioned dialogue above demonstrates Uri's concern for Andrea and his attempt to shield her by providing services. Uri, who is rarely exposed within the story, unexpectedly shows an act of caring toward Andrea Sachs. Caring can be shown in many ways. In this case, Uri tries to get all the items Miranda requires and hand them to Andrea. This action becomes a formation to build the idea about the importance of men in women's lives. It also fulfills the category of benevolent sexism' protective paternalism since Uri prohibits Andrea from carrying heavy items even though she is capable of doing that (Glick & Fiske, 1997; Oswald, 2008).

Another act of protective paternalism is also shown by Christian, a famous and influential writer who has feelings for Andrea, when he comes to the same party with Andrea.

“Come on, I'll put you in a cab.” and before I could say no, that I was perfectly fine to find my own way home, that it was nice to meet him but he'd better think again if he thought he was coming home with me, I was standing on the red-carpeted steps on the plaza with him.

“Need a cab, folks?” the doorman asked us as we walked outside.

“Yes, please, one for the lady,” Christian answered.”

(Weisberger, 2006: 142)

According to the datum above, it is stated that Christian wants to protect Andrea by preventing her from operating her vehicle to keep her safe. Christian is described as catching Andrea's attention with his charm and sweet act. Therefore, he calls a cab to take her home. This act is rooted by the idea that men should protect women in every situation. It also refers to men's behavior in offering assistance to women as assuming that women need help for their comfort and well-being. To protect and provide for women may be intended as caring, yet it also indirectly brings out a belief that women cannot handle something independently.

Generally, women have always been described as being weaker than men. Men are always associated with dangerous things since they have physical and logical reasoning that are stronger than women. This concept of protective

paternalism is shown in Alex's reaction to his girlfriend, Andrea (Weisberger, 2006: 310). When Andrea is getting mad because she notices a stranger boy named Freak Boy in Lily's room, Andrea wants Freak Boy to leave the room. Freak Boy, though, refuses to leave. After realizing that the situation is getting crazy, Alex tries to convince his girlfriend to leave the room and ask her to take a shower. This act implicitly pictures the idea of protectiveness because Alex does not allow Andrea to argue with Freak Boy.

The construction of the discourse of sexism through caring and protecting is similar to the actual condition in the United States. Based on Foucault's explanation, discourse is something relates to the historical context (Hall, 1997). Historically, sexist acts existed in the United States frequently showing the responsibility of men for making women safe and warm (Notkin, 2024). It is rooted by the norm of patriarchy that believes men are taking control in society and class society. Furthermore, as a part of benevolent sexism, the durability of protective paternalism is influenced by the assumption that benevolent is not part of sexism (Glick et al., 2000). Benevolent sexism is more likely accepted by women across nations including in the United States. Thus, in the novel, Andrea is also pictured to admit the act of benevolent sexism, especially in the form of protective paternalism.

### **c. Heterosexual Intimacy**

As has been mentioned by Glick and Fiske (1997), heterosexual intimacy does romanticize women as sexual objects, viewing a female romantic partner as necessary for a man to be "complete". In the novel, the act of heterosexual intimacy is portrayed through the character of Alex as written by Weisberger, "Well, Andy, I have to say, sometimes I don't totally understand, either. I mean, I know she's a tough lady-trust me, I do- it just seems to you take everything pretty seriously when it comes to her, you know?" (Weisberger, 2006: 223). The quotation above shows the disappointment that Alex feels as Andrea gets busy with her job. Alex becomes annoyed and neglected because Andrea is paying more attention to Miranda rather than to him. Alex feels threatened by Andrea's

success and the fact that she no longer focused on their relationship. Rather than supporting his girlfriend, Alex becomes critical passive-aggressive, commenting that Andrea has been losing herself since she got that job. This is the behavior of heterosexual intimacy, where men need their partner's attention and react negatively to independent women. Alex's discomfort with Andrea's values demonstrates traditional gender roles that women should put their families and relationships over their careers. The construction of heterosexual intimacy does not stop here. Alex blames Andrea for being late to come to the bar. Alex presented his feelings using words as can be seen in Weisberger, "Already? Andy, I've been here watching your best friend drink for the past two hours. I came to see you, but you weren't here. And now it's almost midnight, and I still have essays to correct." (Weisberger, 2006: 193). In line with Hall (1997: 1), language uses signs (e.g. words) to represent to other people our thoughts or feelings. Through the dialogue above, Alex wants to show that he feels annoyed also neglected since Andrea prioritized her job rather than spending time with him. Moreover, if we relate this to the definition of heterosexual hostility, Alex definitely holds sexist beliefs. Another explanation that Alex practices the idea of heterosexual intimacy is that he expects Andrea to be with him every time.

The representation of heterosexual intimacy was once again shown by the character of Christian towards Andrea.

"I tried to protest, but Christian put two fingers to my lips. "Darling Andy, don't worry your pretty little head about it." And before I could move my mouth out from underneath his touch, he reached his other hand behind my head and took my face in both hands. Somewhere deep in the recesses of my completely addled brain, the firing synapses were warning me that he was going to kiss me. I knew it, sensed it, but couldn't move. He took my split-second hesitation to move away as permission, leaned over, and touched his lips to my neck. Just quickly, a brush, really, with perhaps a little tongue, right underneath my jaw and near my ear but still firmly on the neck, and then he reached for my hand and pulled me inside."

(Weisberger, 2006: 279)

Here, heterosexual intimacy is depicted in the form of action. Since physical gesture is used as a language, it also contains meaning (Hall, 1997: 5). From the quotation above, before even considering Andrea's permission, Christian kisses her neck and makes her uncomfortable. This shows that Christian supports the idea of generalizing heterosexual intimacy by casually kissing Andrea. Christian portrays how men believe that they have such an authority and right to women's bodies. He uses romantic feelings as a reason. However, it does not change the fact that he views Andrea in sexual way. Kissing is a part of coercive control which means a concept that illustrates how heterosexual men subvert and entrap women through a regime of domination entailing multiple abusive tactics (Gampe et al., 2024).

#### **4.2 The Ideological Position of the Author**

This subchapter aims to unravel the ideology of Lauren Weisberger as the author of *The Devil Wears Prada*. Some information from Weisberger's personal website and other media publications related to her cultural background will be gathered and connected to the discourse of sexism to reveal that purpose. It becomes the key to figuring out how she was growing up and what kind of environment she was in. Then, the information becomes essential because the story of the novel is mostly inspired by her personal life and experience.

In the novel, Lauren Weisberger pictures the condition of sexism in the United States in the 21st century by the female characters who work in the fashion magazine, *Runaway*. She portrays how women experience sexism in their daily lives. In an interview with *The Cut* (2010) Weisberger said "And unlike Andy I couldn't force myself to wear high heels. It was expected of me, but I ran all day, all over the office, up and down the building 1,000 times and to Starbucks six times a day, so there was no way I could manage even a 2in heel". It shows that Weisberger is really familiar with being a female worker, especially as an assistant to the magazine's editor-in-chief. She understands really well the life of women worker in positive and negative aspects, especially relating to the fashion magazines. Lauren Weisberger had ever been an assistant to the Editor-in-Chief of

*Vogue*, Anna Wintour. After about ten months of being Anna Wintour's assistant, Weisberger decided to resign and write the novel. As an ex-assistant of Anna Wintour, Weisberger is certainly familiar with the fashion magazine and the environment of working there. Therefore, what she shows through the female characters in *The Devil Wears Prada* is something that she considers important since it represents the figure of women workers along with the personal problems that accompany her and how gender discrimination takes place against women. Weisberger is a type of writer who writes everything familiar to her (Odell, 2010). In other word, she is part of society that has experienced that world and tries to present it through her novel. *The Devil Wears Prada* is categorized as chick-lit which written by women, about women, and for women to read. Since it is consumed by many women, it will affect their perception of something that is talked about in the novel.

As mentioned above, it is implicitly known that the story of the novel is the depiction of the real event in Weisberger's surroundings. In *The Devil Wears Prada*, Weisberger constructs the image of the main female character based on her understanding of the society she lives in and is largely inspired by her own experiences as an assistant at *Vogue* (Odell, 2010). Weisberger definitely shares the same culture with American women workers, especially in fashion magazines, and then builds the same concept and meaning of things with her surroundings. This is in line with Hall's statement that 'Maps of meaning' are learned and unconsciously internalized as we become the members of our culture (Hall, 1997: 29). Weisberger has been able to portray how the United States' social condition at that time, in the 21st century, related to gender issues especially sexism can be connected to the position of Lauren Weisberger as the author. Based on the research by *Pew Research Center*, it is reported about 42% of working women in The United States say that they have faced discrimination on the job because of their gender (Parker & Funk, 2017). It also shows that women earn less than male colleagues for doing the same job. It implies how bigger power of men compared to women and how different women were treated in the workplace. Sexism frequently appears in the fashion industry, especially in fashion magazines. The

first women's magazines in the United States were predominantly established for family-oriented roles which guided women to fulfill traditional roles as good wives, and it continues today in some magazines since many feminist newspapers disappeared in the 1970s (Fleurent, 2023). As a good wife, a woman is required to obey her husband, and must also be responsible in domestic activities. This deep-rooted thing has become a habit and a common thing time by time. Thus, it brings out the existence and maintenance of sexism in the fashion industry. Moreover, many fashion magazines depict women as skinny, tall, and white which causes weight loss to become a major concern for women in front of economic, environmental, and cultural issues. Women are expected to conform to the beauty standards and serve the male gaze (Fleurent, 2023). In general, women employees are still facing discrimination and gender stereotypes circulating in the workplace in the United States (Gonzales, 2022). Women are expected to be submissive and able in domestic work. Moreover, they are required to be attractive in their appearance too.

In addition, Weisberger also has her own views about the act of benevolent sexism that she describes through the main female character, Andrea Sachs, during her duty as Miranda's assistant at *Runaway*. The way Weisberger frames the sexism phenomenon experienced by the female characters in the novel indicates that she acknowledges the issue of sexism against women workers, especially in fashion magazines in the United States. Weisberger presents the discourse against sexism by showing the actions of the main character which avoid sexist acts in the workplace. Andrea as the main character, in the end, decides to quit her job as Miranda's assistant and chooses to be a writer at *Seventeen* as what she has dreamed of. However, Weisberger, through the main character also wants to highlight the space of negotiation that women need to overcome. The negotiation process is shown through Andrea in which she tries to survive the discourse of sexism so that she will not be more discriminated in her workplace by choosing to act and dress up like people in *Runaway* (Weisberger, 2006: 9). Furthermore, after she dressed up as expected by a whole people in *Runaway*, she seemed to be appreciated. This makes her feel confident and

happier (Weisberger, 2006: 147). From this quotation, it implies that Andrea gives her power to the society around her and tries to fit in her surroundings. Thus, this idea can be identified as a negotiation process. Weisberger also pictures the negotiation through Andrea who willingly agrees to receive protection from Alex while she has a problem with Freak Boy (Weisberger, 2006: 310). The statements which are made by Andrea indicate that she accepts the act of protective paternalism, where women are weak and should be protected and helped by men. Weisberger implicitly tries to negotiate the formation of sexism by describing the acceptance of benevolent sexism by women since it is considered as care, love, and affection rather than the act of sexism. However, as has been explained before, if we take a look at the end of the story, Andrea decided to leave *Runaway*. It interprets that she tries to avoid sexism. Since the behavior of sexism in *Runaway* is really hard to be destroyed, she decides to take her power back and leave the workplace. Andrea has her hidden agenda by leaving *Runaway*, implying that she free herself from the domination and subordination of Miranda as the one who holds sexist ideas. It shows Andrea's power that she does not want to be outsmarted. By the previous explanation, the author, through her novel, wants to convey the idea that since women cannot really fight sexism; somehow sexism is inevitable and tends to be accepted by some women, especially if it is not harmful for them. But, since the author describes her main character, Andrea, as leaving *Runaway*, it supports the idea of against sexism.

## CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

According to the discussion within the previous chapter, it can be concluded that the first research question has answered that the novel does indeed represent the discourse of sexism toward women workers in the United States. The characters in the novel experience various forms of sexism. Based on the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick & Fiske, 1997), the novel represents two kinds of sexism which are hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. However, there is only one form found in hostile sexism which is heterosexual hostility. While benevolent sexism appears in all three forms which are protective paternalism, complementary gender differentiation, and heterosexual intimacy. The author conveys this issue through dialogues and narratives depicting sexism toward women workers.

The first trait is heterosexual hostility which is pictured through the narration explained by Andrea that she is judged for being different in the way she is dressing up, and also the dialogue between John and Andrea, where he calls Andrea a “hottie” despite him knowing her name. The second trait, protective paternalism, is represented through the interactions between Uri and Andrea, Christian and Andrea, and Alex and Andrea. Those three male characters show their kindness and love to protect the main female character, Andrea. In addition, the depiction of complementary gender differentiation is depicted by the idea of Miranda who believes in gender stereotypes. Then, heterosexual intimacy is represented by the dialogue between Alex and Andrea when he tells her about his neglected feelings. This idea of sexism is also pictured by the action done by Christian when he tries to kiss Andrea without any consent.

In answering the second research question which is the ideological position of the author, it was found that Weisberger wanted to portray and try to avoid the issue of sexism. The issue of sexism was often portrayed in the novel through the experiences of the main character, Andrea, who faced gender stereotypes, discrimination, and subordination, that were expressed in the hegemonic way or benevolent sexism. The form of Andrea’s acceptance of benevolent sexism pictured in the shape of love, care, and protection from male characters shows the negotiation process in the middle of the

story. In addition, Weisberger explicitly pictures how hostile sexism was rude and rejected by Andrea, otherwise, benevolent sexism was not considered as sexist at all. Then, referring to the end of the story when Andrea decided to move to another workplace, it can be known that the author does not agree with sexism and tries to avoid it.

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