

Representation of Women Leadership in Nussa and Rara Animation from the Question of Representation Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This research examines gender representation in the animated series *Nussa and Rara*. It applies Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's "Questions of Representation" theory, which is elaborated into three concepts: stereotypes, gender representation, and positive and negative debates. The study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on the character Umma (the mother) as the research subject, while the representation of female leadership in the show serves as the research object. The data analysis employs Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis technique, with the unit of analysis including visual elements such as angles, settings, and gestures. The findings reveal that female leadership in *Nussa and Rara* is portrayed through the character of Umma. The stereotypes associated with female leadership are reflected in her capabilities. Gender representation highlights Umma's feminine traits while also emphasizing her leadership qualities. On the positive side, Umma is depicted as a competent leader, free from harmful gender stereotypes. However, the representation remains limited. It is crucial to recognize that stereotypes, generalizations, and leadership abilities should be evaluated based on individual experiences and competence rather than preconceived notions.

KEYWORDS:

Representation;
Semiotic;
Stereotype;
Women Leader;
Nussa and Rara
Animation

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the role of a mother as a representation of family leadership in the animated series *Nussa and Rara*, specifically in the episode titled *BUNDAKU*. The ideal notion presented is that women may possess leadership qualities; however, the reality depicted sparks controversy regarding women's leadership. Some believe that not all leadership roles are suitable for women, a perspective deeply rooted in patriarchal societal structures. Despite ongoing debates about women's leadership, the animated series *Nussa and Rara* provides a lens through which the representation of female leadership can be examined, offering valuable material for analysis (Nasrulloh & Utami, 2022).

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Animated series combine audiovisual elements, such as moving images and sound, to create compelling narratives. These shows often feature lively characters and vibrant visuals, making them highly engaging for children. Such series can serve as effective educational tools, embedding moral messages within their stories (Jannah et al., 2022).

Nussa and Rara is an Indonesian animated series created with Islamic values. It revolves around a family comprising Umma (mother), Abba (father), a boy named Nussa, his younger sister Rara, and their cat Anta. The series was developed in response to concerns about children's content lacking religious values, inspiring the creation of a show that integrates Islamic teachings and moral lessons (Jannah et al., 2022). The series consistently delivers inspirational stories of kindness and prominently features the character of Umma, who is portrayed as gentle, caring, and wise. Umma serves as a role model for Nussa and Rara and assumes the leadership role within the household while Abba is busy with work. This dynamic challenges traditional stereotypes that often diminish women's roles within the household. From a gender representation perspective, equality in leadership signifies that men and women have equal rights to lead. However, the discourse on women's leadership reveals complexities, especially in the public sphere compared to the household domain (Suhada, 2019).

Branston and Stafford's "*Questions of Representation*" theory examines how media representations shape societal perceptions and power dynamics. This theory highlights the need for critical analysis of media portrayals to understand the influence of narratives and imagery on societal norms and relationships (Branston & Stafford, 2003). Stereotypes, as Branston and Stafford define, are broad generalizations often based on incomplete or inaccurate information about a group, object, or situation. While stereotypes can sometimes facilitate initial understanding, they often lead to categorization and negative evaluations. They assert absolute differences and boundaries (e.g., "us" vs. "others"), frequently resulting in discrimination or misunderstandings (Branston & Stafford, 2003). For instance, gender stereotypes frame women as weak, nurturing, and soft, while positioning men as strong and inherently suited to leadership. These entrenched perceptions perpetuate biases in societal spaces (Astuti, 2016).

Branston and Stafford also explore how we interpret individuals and characters through markers such as gender, religion, and sexuality, relying on societal "scripts" or expectations. This understanding parallels the way we perceive media characters, whether in images or broadcasts (Branston & Stafford, 2003). The discussion of gender stereotypes and representation in *Nussa and Rara* provides a meaningful context for examining the complexities of leadership and societal norms.

Representation refers to the act of expressing something meaningful about the world through various forms, often defined by language. However, representation is not limited to language; it also involves symbols, signs, and images to convey meaning (Prasanti & Janitra, 2016). Two critical elements play a role in the creation of meaning: the concept of thought and the concept of language. The human mind processes the concept of an object, enabling individuals to interpret its meaning (Suryani & Janitra, 2016; Suryani & Hasanah, 2021). The concept of representation often intersects with

gender stereotypes, contributing to the construction of gender representation. Historically, society has perpetuated a rigid gender dichotomy, where men are expected to embody masculinity and women, femininity. This dichotomy has fueled debates, as many still conflate biological sex with socially constructed gender roles. While biological sex distinguishes male and female, gender encompasses societal and cultural norms, assigning roles and evaluating traits like masculinity and femininity. In essence, gender is a socially shaped concept, formed through interactions with the environment (Aviandy & Damayanti, 2022).

The term "gender" encompasses societal constructs such as status, roles, and responsibilities, all influenced by the cultural context in which individuals live (Megawati, 2017). Traits typically associated with masculinity include strength, bravery, rationality, and assertiveness, while femininity is characterized by kindness, beauty, and emotional sensitivity (Wibowo, 2019). Despite these stereotypes, there are men who exhibit emotional sensitivity and nurturing qualities, and women who display strength, bravery, and rationality. This demonstrates that gender roles and traits can evolve, shaped by cultural and social contexts.

According to Gill Branston and Roy Stafford (2023) in *The Media Student's Book*, representation extends beyond gender to include everyday realities. Media representations may reflect actual realities or diverge from them, shaped by the medium's framing and narrative choices. Stuart Hall (1997) identifies three approaches to representation. First, the reflective approach suggests that representation mirrors an existing reality or prevalent meaning within a society. Second, the intentional approach focuses on the creator's perspective or intent behind the representation. Third, the constructionist approach emphasizes how representations emerge through cultural codes and visual cues, shaped by societal influences. Hall elaborates on the constructionist approach in *The Work of Representation*, describing how truth and meaning are mediated through language. He posits that while media may reflect societal views, meaning is often subjective and shaped by perception.

In examining representation, one must also consider its positive and negative implications. Historically, marginalized groups, such as Black communities and feminists, have worked to challenge negative stereotypes and build positive images of themselves. This process involves defining the group being represented, presenting it positively, and considering the impact on societal perception. However, media representations can sometimes polarize audiences due to differences in religion, race, or culture (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

The question of positive and negative representations involves how groups are depicted in the media and the implications of those portrayals. Media representations often carry the "burden of representation," especially for marginalized groups who are portrayed negatively and lack the power to challenge these depictions. For example, in the US and UK, Black individuals have historically been portrayed as societal problems or victims in films and news. To counteract this, when Black characters are included, they are often portrayed as positive figures, such as good teachers, strict parents, or benevolent guardians, creating a more favourable image. However, as Branston and

Stafford (2003) note, no representation can claim 100% truth. Positive and negative depictions must be understood within the context of the narrative, the media's "reflection" of reality, and the cultural realism they reflect. Representation is inherently tied to power, as it involves selective processes that shape societal perceptions. For instance, Black identity is not a reflection of the essence of "blackness" but rather a constructed portrayal shaped by lived experiences and the often negative labels associated with it (Branston & Stafford, 2003).

In the context of gender representation, equality in leadership implies that men and women have equal rights to lead. However, the discourse around women's leadership is complex, especially when comparing the public sphere with the domestic domain (Suhada, 2019). Historically, Islamic traditions and societies have seen men occupying superior positions, while women were relegated to subordinate roles (Lutfiyah & Diyanah, 2022). Despite this, Islamic teachings emphasize that both men and women are tasked with being caliphs, not only for themselves but also for the broader community. Media representations, including films, contribute significantly to shaping societal mindsets and influencing cultural behaviour (Elsha, 2019). Representation, therefore, is a dynamic process, evolving alongside human intellectual and social development (Wibowo & Wahyu, 2013).

Movies and media often reinforce traditional gender stereotypes, portraying women as kind, emotional, and maternal, while men are depicted as strong and rational. These portrayals influence societal perceptions of gender roles and leadership capabilities. The process of accepting women in leadership roles faces resistance, particularly from those adhering to patriarchal norms (Lutfiyah & Diyanah, 2022). Many still believe that not all leadership positions are suitable for women. Nevertheless, the animated series *Nussa and Rara* explores the representation of female leadership, providing material for further research and analysis (Nasrulloh & Utami, 2022).

This research examines the portrayal of female leadership in the *Nussa and Rara* episode *BUNDAKU* and builds on prior studies for comparison and development. The study employs Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as a foundation for analysis. It draws comparisons with research by Anggun Vinizia Vidia Videska, Vina Zahratul Hayat, and Muhamad Afdoli Ramadoni, which analyzed the representation of pluralism in the film *Lima* using Branston and Stafford's *Questions of Representation* theory. In *Lima*, the primary stereotype addressed is racism, where individuals are judged not by their achievements but by their race and skin color.

In contrast, the stereotypes examined in this research focus on female leadership as depicted through Umma in *Nussa and Rara*. The series portrays Umma's leadership with attributes such as emotional intelligence, effective communication, and strong decision-making skills. On the other hand, negative stereotypes include perceptions that female leadership, as represented by Umma, is less suited to roles requiring demanding leadership abilities.

Additionally, research conducted by Thivya Sundaraj and Rani Ann Balaraman, presented in the journal *Gender Representation in Malaysian Animated Films: A Study of the Films Geng: The Adventure Begins (2009) and Boboiboy: The Movie (2016)* (Thivyaa &

Rani, 2022), highlights the predominance of male characters over female characters in both animated films. While their study focuses on gender representation in Malaysian animated films, this research delves deeper into the representation of gender, particularly female leadership, as portrayed through the character of Umma in the animated series *Nussa and Rara*.

Similarly, this research is compared with the journal *Representation of Gender Stereotypes in Male Beauty Influencers in Russia* by Mikke Ayoe Damayantie and Mochamad Aviandy (Aviandy & Damayanti, 2022). This journal explores gender stereotypes surrounding a male beauty influencer in Russia, analyzing the representation of stereotypes through comments made by viewers. Both studies utilize Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's *Questions of Representation* framework to analyze stereotypes and gender representation. The key difference lies in the research subjects: while their study focuses on a male influencer in Russia, this research examines the representation of Umma as a symbol of female leadership within a family context in the *Nussa and Rara* animated series.

These previous journal studies provide a foundation for discussing the *Questions of Representation* as proposed by Gill Branston and Roy Stafford in *The Media Student's Book*. They serve as scientific literature to support theoretical perspectives relevant to this study.

From the descriptions above, the main research problem is formulated as follows: How is the representation of women in leadership depicted in the *Nussa and Rara* animated series, as analyzed through the *Questions of Representation* framework? This primary question is further explored through three sub-questions: a) What stereotypes of women in leadership are portrayed in the *Nussa and Rara* animated series? b) How is women's leadership represented in the series? c) What are the positive and negative representations of women's leadership in the *Nussa and Rara* animated series?

METHOD

This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, as semiotic analysis is generally qualitative in nature. A descriptive qualitative approach is characterized by data presented in the form of words, images, and not numbers. The main objective of the descriptive method is to systematically describe events, imagery, or phenomena (Wibowo & Wahyu, 2013). Qualitative research aims to provide a detailed and in-depth understanding of natural conditions, offering narratives or images rather than statistical data to illustrate the findings (Nugrahani, 2014).

The subject of this research is the character Umma (Mother) in the animated series *Nussa and Rara*, while the object of the study is the representation of women's leadership in the show. The researchers focus specifically on the episode titled *BUNDAKU*. Data collection is conducted using primary data, consisting of snippets from the *Nussa*

and Rara episode *BUNDAKU* available on YouTube. To complement this, secondary data is sourced from supporting literature, such as scientific studies relevant to the topic.

This study employs the semiotic analysis method. In mass communication, semiotic studies can be applied to various media forms, including films, television shows, advertisements, and photographs. This versatility makes semiotics a unique and intriguing field of study (Vera & Nawiroh, 2014). Semiotics focuses on studying signs and their use in communication to convey meaning (Maulida Laily Kusuma Wati et al., 2023). Media texts, particularly in mass media, often require deep analysis as they can contain complex and layered meanings, sometimes hidden or enigmatic. Semiotics helps uncover these hidden connotations (Vera & Nawiroh, 2011; 2014). As a system of relationships based on "signs," semiotics examines the meaning encoded within these signs (Bungin, 2011).

The research uses Roland Barthes' method of semiotic analysis in combination with the three concepts of Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's *Questions of Representation* theory: stereotypes, gender representations, and positive and negative debates. Roland Barthes' semiotics focuses on two levels of signification: denotation (literal meaning) and connotation (hidden or symbolic meaning) (Ginting et al., 2023). This method aims to uncover the connotative meanings embedded within media texts (Vera & Nawiroh, 2014). Barthes' semiotics is particularly suited to this study as it helps examine the representation of leadership in the character Umma, as conveyed through the signs present in scenes from the animated series *Nussa and Rara*. This enables an analysis of how female leadership is depicted.

The study does not analyze every scene from the show but focuses on specific scenes where elements of female leadership are evident in the character of Umma. The units of analysis include visual elements such as angle, setting, and gesture. The setting encompasses elements such as locations, props, and other features supporting the show's concept. Angle refers to the camera's shooting perspective, tailored to the narrative, while gesture examines the body language of characters in the scenes (Wibisono & Sari, 2021).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The *Nussa and Rara* movie is an animated production created by The Little Giant (TLG) production house in collaboration with 4 Stripe Production, first released in 2018. The animated series revolves around a small family comprising Abba, Umma, Nussa, Rara, and their cat, Anta. Nussa, the older brother, is depicted wearing a robe paired with a white skullcap. He is a physically challenged child with a prosthetic leg, showcasing resilience and strength. Rara, his younger sister, is portrayed as an adorable child dressed in traditional Muslimah clothing.

Abba, the father, is described as a hardworking man and a role model for the family. However, due to work commitments, Abba is often away, leading Umma to take on a more prominent role within the family. Umma, the mother, is characterized as a wise

and gentle figure who teaches Nussa and Rara important values such as kindness and honesty, embodying strength and leadership in her nurturing role.

In the first show, the focus is on the role of Umma as both a mother and a leader within the family. This analysis is conducted using Gill Branston and Roy Stafford's representation theory in conjunction with Roland Barthes' semiotic approach. The data for this study is derived from selected screenshots taken from the *Nussa and Rara* YouTube channel, specifically from the episode titled *BUNDAKU*.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the first show



Source: Nussa and Rara YouTube channel 'BUNDAKU' episode

The denotation in this animation portrays Umma in her role as an educator for her two children, Nussa and Rara. The connotative meaning extends this depiction to reflect Umma as both a mother and a family leader. However, this dual role can also generate negative interpretations, such as assumptions that a wife assuming leadership in the family may result from a husband's failure or economic hardship. These interpretations can lead to unfair expectations and judgments about women who take on these roles.

Stereotypically, female leadership is often associated with the perception that women are less competent than men in leadership roles. These stereotypes portray women as more emotional, less ambitious, and less capable of handling conflict within the family. While it is essential to challenge such stereotypes, the depiction of Umma in this show highlights leadership qualities that transcend gender norms.

In the scene analyzed Umma embodies a blend of traditionally feminine and masculine traits, demonstrating that such characteristics are not exclusive to any one gender. Her feminine qualities are complemented by her leadership attributes, such as courage and responsibility. The gender representation in *Nussa and Rara* underscores the importance of women's leadership in addressing societal imbalances. This representation promotes the value of providing equal opportunities, recognizing contributions, and combating negative stereotypes that influence perceptions of female leadership. It also highlights the broader benefits of diversity in leadership, whether within a family or an organization.

The positive representations of women's leadership in the show include Umma's portrayal as a competent and effective mother and leader, free from harmful gender stereotypes. She is depicted as possessing emotional intelligence, strong communication

skills, and sound decision-making abilities. Conversely, negative representations include the stereotype that women, including Umma, are less suited for demanding leadership roles. It is crucial to recognize these as stereotypes—broad generalizations that fail to account for individual experience and competence. Leadership abilities should be judged based on personal qualifications rather than gender. The topic of gender representation and leadership remains a subject of significant discussion and debate within society, highlighting the need for continued dialogue to overcome these stereotypes and promote equity.

In the second show, the denotation in this scene shows a harmonious family with Abba holding umma's shoulder, and Nussa hugging Umma with affection. The real meaning in the snippet above shows that Abba's role is replaced by umma due to situational factors that require umma to have a leadership spirit.

Figure 1. Screenshot of the second show



Source: Nussa and Rara YouTube channel 'BUNDAKU' episode

The connotations in the animation suggest that while Abba is a good head of the family, certain circumstances compel Umma to assume his role. Umma steps in as both a mother and a family leader. This leadership role is not tied to economic responsibilities but rather reflects a stereotype of being accountable and resilient in maintaining the family's well-being.

Upon closer examination, the stereotype presented in the snippet portrays Umma as stepping into the family leadership role only because Abba is working abroad. This can perpetuate the perception that the ideal role of providing and leading a family should inherently belong to the husband. Consequently, this may reinforce the notion that Umma is only fulfilling this role out of necessity and might be viewed as less capable than Abba, who is absent.

However, it is essential to recognize that many women, acting as heads of households, successfully manage their families with full responsibility and competence. Such stereotypes often overlook the strength, resilience, and independence demonstrated by women like Umma in managing daily challenges. Respecting family dynamics and choices is crucial, and abilities should not be judged based on gender.

The gender representation of Umma in this context depicts a woman who is resilient, intelligent, and capable of managing family responsibilities independently. Traditional stereotypes, which often undervalue women's leadership roles, fail to acknowledge the vital contributions and abilities of women in guiding their families. On the positive side, this representation can inspire women to pursue careers or take on leadership responsibilities without being constrained by gender expectations.

It is important to understand that every family's reality is unique, with its own dynamics and circumstances. Representations like this should not constrain societal views of women's roles in families but instead should foster respect for the diverse choices individuals make. Family leadership should be understood as a shared and adaptable responsibility, free from limiting stereotypes.

CONCLUSION

In the animated series *Nussa and Rara* episode *BUNDAKU*, the denotative meaning highlights Umma's role as an educator for her two children. The connotative meaning, however, extends this role, portraying Umma as both a mother and a family leader. Stereotypically, mothers are often perceived as more emotional, less ambitious, and less capable of resolving family conflicts. However, the stereotypes presented in this show challenge these notions by emphasizing leadership qualities that transcend gender.

In the analysis of another scene, the denotative meaning reflects that Abba's role is temporarily replaced by Umma due to situational factors. Umma not only takes on her responsibilities as a mother but also assumes the family leadership role. This leadership is not tied to economic responsibilities but instead fosters a stereotype of accountability and resilience. The connotation suggests that while Abba is a good head of the family, Umma is compelled to step into his role due to external circumstances. However, the stereotype in this context implies that Umma's leadership is borne out of necessity, potentially leading to perceptions that she is less capable compared to Abba.

Positive representations of women's leadership in the series include depictions of Umma as a competent and effective mother and leader, free from harmful gender stereotypes. Conversely, negative representations involve stereotypes that suggest women's leadership is less suited to power-intensive or demanding roles traditionally associated with men.

It is crucial to recognize that stereotypes, generalizations, and leadership abilities should be evaluated based on individual experience and competence rather than gender. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that every family operates within unique dynamics, and representations should respect and reflect the diversity of choices and circumstances families experience.

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