

AGAINST OR SUPPORT STEREOTYPING? A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON GENDER PORTRAYAL IN THE ONLINE MEDIA *MAGDALENE*

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Abstract

The study investigated the gender portrayal in the Indonesian context and attempted to determine whether the online media reproduced or challenged the gender roles and stereotypes, especially during the new normal era. This study examined six news articles from *Magdalene*, an online media focusing on females and gender, to address the study's objectives. The news articles were analysed using content analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theory. This study discovered that while *Magdalene* tried to strip gender stereotypes mainly for women, the portrayal of both genders showed less discursive support for the attempt of gender equality. Furthermore, it is hoped that study will enrich the insights into how gender, language, and media are intertwined in shaping public mindset on social relations.

Keywords – *critical discourse analysis, gender, online media, new normal era*

Introduction

The Indonesian government has continued to create a dynamic condition of gender equality. This attempt can be seen from the election law reform by allocating 30% of women legislators in the parliament. In addition, the government also appointed the minister for women empowerment and child protection and National Commission for women to ensure gender equality. However, while all of these and other attempts have shown women's appearance as a legislator in the district, provincial, and national parliament, many issues seem direct or indirectly against those attempts, including mass media.

This study analysed how an online media outlet, *Magdelene*, portrays images of women in its news articles. *Magdelene* is a popular online media that publishes news articles on women and calls itself a feminist and gender-based perspective media. The urgency of the study is based on the fact that media discourse plays a vital role in shaping public images. In this context, this study closely examined to what extent news articles published by *Magdelene* support or are against the government or public attempt in creating images of women in the realm of gender.

The study on images of women in Indonesian media has been studied since the New Order period and continue until today. Moreover, the various radical changes in terms of regulation give more preference to women's roles. One of the early studies in Indonesia was conducted by Brenner (1999), Yulindrasari & McGregor (2011), Supratman (2012), Su & Asyiek (2015), and Sandhy and Dwiningtyas (2016). While those studies offered various focus on images of women on popular media, including the concept of beauty, women empowerment, women parenting, motherhood and fatherhood, this study looked on the language of media text on *Magdelene* in portraying women images against the context of gender stereotypes and gender equality.

Shaping or against gender stereotyping in the media were also conducted in several studies outside the Indonesian context. The studies investigated discourse about womanhood in social media (Demirhan & Çakir-Demirhan), a gendered word (Bridges, 2017), women shaming in a political context (Dalton, 2019), black women leadership (Commodore et al., 2020), motherhood and mothering practices in the online realm (Mackenzie & Zhao, 2021), and dilemmatic group membership of single mother (Margalit, 2021). These studies showed that feminine discourse is still received little attention, especially during the new normal era, to the best of the author's knowledge.

The public's knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours about phenomena and policymaking are shaped by media discourse (van Dijk 1989; van Dijk, 1991; Fowler, 1991; Reisigl & Wodak 2016). Thus, this study used a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to investigate how online media shapes or challenges gender stereotypes and inequalities, especially during the new normal era in the Indonesian context. Thus the results of this study will enrich the insights online media strip or put labels and stereotyped both genders regarding sensitive subjects such as motherhood, gender and parental roles, and domestic violence during this particular time.

Methods and Approach

There were six selected news articles analysed in this study. These articles were purposefully selected from *Madalene*, considering two important reasons. First, the news articles were written by female contributors who wrote about womanhood and motherhood. Secondly, the news articles were published in 2020. Thus the discourse was mainly about gender roles transitioning in the new normal era.

This study examined gender representation in online media in Indonesia by employing two approaches. First, content analysis was conducted on the selected articles. Content analysis was employed to analyse pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, and texts in the forms of documents, transcripts of interviews, films, or TV programs. Content analysis was widely employed in examining feminism to find the precise depiction of female and male portraits and activities. Secondly, in addition to the content analysis approach, this study also employed CDA.

CDA was employed to examine the intrinsic meaning, gender and power relations in the *Magdalene* images and texts. By employing CDA, the study revealed how discourse controls what society perceives and utters, thus representing social reality. Therefore, both approaches were applied to identify how *Magdalene* used texts and pictures as power and ideological tools to reinforce the existing power and structure between both genders.

Finding and Discussion

The news articles analysed in this study (see Table 1.) shared similar characteristics that highly focused on women, motherhood, children and other interesting information on the object, such as studying from home and domestic violence that occurred during the pandemic and the new normal era.

Table 1. Titles of *Magdalene* News Articles

No.	Title	Brief Content
1.	<i>Masuki ‘New’ Normal’, Siapa yang Temani Anak Belajar Virtual? (Entering the ‘New’ Normal’, Who Accompanies Children to Virtual Learning?)</i>	Mothers are considered more pressured to accompany their children to study than fathers.
2.	<i>Survei IBCWE: Beban Perempuan Berlipat Ganda Selama masa WFH (IBCWE Survey: Women’s Burden Doubles During WFH)</i>	Women are prone to stress, anxiety, and depression because of the increased workload during WFH.
3.	<i>Rasa Bersalah, ‘Teman Toksik’ Para Ibu yang Perlu Diputuskan (Guilt, Mother’s ‘Toxic Friend’ that Needs to be Cut Off)</i>	It is essential for mothers not to blame themselves for carrying out their role as mothers.
4.	<i>Kekerasan Terhadap Anak Meningkat, Orang Tua Perlu Kontrol Diri (Violence Against Children Rises, Parents Need Self Control)</i>	Domestic violence increases during the pandemic; thus, parents need self-control over their emotions, so they do not vent it to their children.
5.	<i>Masa ‘School from Home’ Ajarkan Prestasi Akademis Bukan Segalanya (The ‘School from Home’ Period Teaches that Academic Achievement is not Everything)</i>	Learning from home should be a momentum for parents to teach essential life values and not just academic values.
6.	<i>Beban Timpang antara Ibu dan Ayah dalam Pendampingan Belajar dari Rumah (Unequal Burden between Mother and Father in the Assistance of Parents in the Learning at Home)</i>	There are increased unequal roles of mothers in assisting children’s learning at home during the pandemic.

Women Sacrifices More than Men

The first news article discussed the long-rooted patriarchal discourse where women are homemakers and men are breadwinners. The article depicted the normalisation of unfair domestic, which intensified during the new normal era where women as homemakers were forced to look after the children learning virtually. In fulfilling this role, women tended to give up on their careers. When it is supposedly taking care of the children is the responsibility of both mother and father, the communal morality, patriarchy, and the glorification of multitasking positioned women as more responsible (in children education).

The news article illustrated a mother’s happiness when accompanying her daughter doing the online study. It suggested a perfect role with a perfect result. Thus, it seemed to approve that helping children study was the women’s role, not men as depicted in Figure 1.



Figure 1. A Mother and Daughter During Online Learning

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/masuki-new-normal-siapa-yang-temani-anak-belajar-virtual>)

The news article also emphasised the silence suffering from this glorification of motherhood by the internalisation of ‘a strong mother’, ‘a great mother’, ‘a mother is her child’s first school’ who must navigate domestic and professional work led to depression, domestic

violence due to economic instability, and unhealthy relationship among the member of the family, especially the children.

In the second news article, the discourse was about overhauling gender roles so that women were free from being overburdened with so many domestic and work spheres during the work from home (WFH), as illustrated by Figure 2.



Figure 2. A Mother Multitasks More During WFH

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/survei-ibcwe-beban-perempuan-berlipat-ganda-selama-masa-wfh>)

The news article included survey results that showed that overburden and unequal roles mainly occurred to women who work and become homemakers. These women were receiving a lack of support from their partners. It was also mentioned that the women's environment and early education internalised these gender roles. So often, women have to sacrifice their careers to get more flexible time in taking care of the family.

In addition, the second news article also highlights the adverse effects experienced by women who multitask, such as anxiety, unstable emotion, and unproductivity. Furthermore, if men help women, even if only a little, they will be given the title of a 'dream husband' while women do not appreciate what they have done. Thus, the contributor urged the discourse for gender equality.

The third news article focused on how women and mothers should be dealing with stress and guilt. Mothers were depicted as vulnerable and prone to panic, burn-out, and depression due to self-blame. Figure 3 illustrates the image of a mother who hugged and comforted a daughter, seemingly upset. It strengthened the discourse that the mother looked after and calmed the child when the child was not feeling well, although she also needed help.



Figure 3. A Mother Hugs and Comforts the Child

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/rasa-bersalah-teman-toksik-para-ibu-yang-perlu-diputuskan>)

In addition, it also highlighted the glorification of exclusive breastfeeding, which made mothers feel guilty when they had to give milk formula. Thus, if a child given formal milk became sick or refused to eat, the mother was haunted by feelings of failure and guilt. Eventually, the third news article emphasised the importance of mothers being more neutral and positive in responding to failure and thus preventing self-blaming. The contributor further suggested that women can redefine the role of mothers from what is standardised by society

and have their standards, society should be less judgmental and avoid mom-shaming, and the mothers should have time and self for self-actualisation.

(Re)defining Parental Roles

Furthermore, regarding more problems involving minors, such as cases of violence and children’s academic achievement, the news article emphasised the roles of women and men as parents, with the central focus being on the children. Interestingly, the figures illustrated supported the discourse about parenting and children in the fourth, fifth, and sixth news articles.

The fourth article discussed the concerning situation during the pandemic as it was reported that cases of domestic violence against children, especially girls, were increasing. As illustrated in Figure 4, a teddy bear covered in blood indicated that domestic violence towards minors was life-threatening and resulted in severe physical and mental injury and even death.

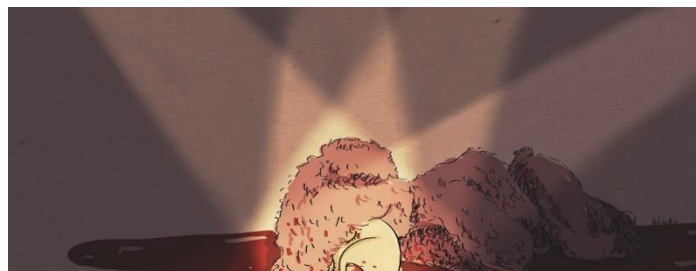


Figure 4. Domestic Violence Against Minor

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/kekerasan-terhadap-anak-meningkat-orang-tua-perlu-kontrol-diri>)

The fourth news article described the fathers, close relatives, and neighbours as someone who tended to commit domestic violence against children and women. However, the discourse of equality in the fourth news article was that while the fathers received the label as abusers, children and women were depicted as the victim; both parents were equally responsible for preventing domestic abuse by exercising emotional control. Furthermore, the parents needed to do counselling at a psychologist, and they were responsible for providing children with communication tools to reach out for help from the domestic violence.

Additionally, during the new normal era, the parents were also the role of parents in achieving children. However, the fifth article did not emphasise academic achievement but the values not taught in school. It showed the discourse that both parents play an equally important role in teaching values to children such as learning style and love language such as words of affirmation. Thus, the children were content by educating them about values instead of merely academic achievement, as depicted in Figure 5.

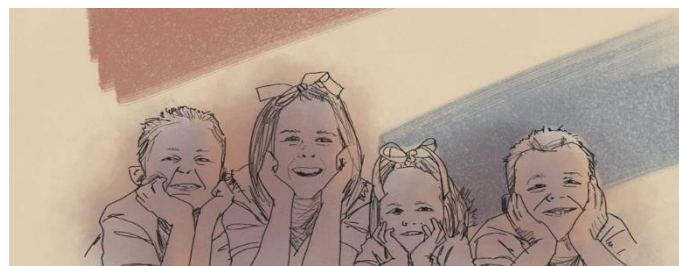


Figure 5. The Children were Feeling Content

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/masa-school-from-home-ajarkan-prestasi-akademis-bukan-segalanya>)

Furthermore, it was stated that putting aside academic achievement during the pandemic could help the mothers directly monitor their children during the study. It was interesting that, although the contributors urged the notion of equal responsibility of both parents, it stated that mothers were responsible for supervising the children when learning. Additionally, it was stated that the school, as the third party, was also responsible for teaching values and thus, they could help these parents instil life values.

In contrast to the previous news articles emphasising women and mothers' massive roles while men and fathers have minimal roles in domestic aspects, the sixth news article attempted to find why men and fathers contributed so little to the domestic sphere. Nevertheless, the company's patriarchal culture and inflexible work system were blamed as the cause because men tended to have a higher number of working hours than women and shorter paternity leave.

Furthermore, the school system did not support parental involvement fairly in school activities, such as handing report cards or committee meetings, often assumed the mother's job. Instead, the discourse of equality of parental roles was highlighted as the balanced role of the mother and father can help the child gain problem-solving skills, mental resilience, and empathy.

It would be unfortunate for children if the fathers did not involve in their education. It was stated that the father figure often disappeared when the children at their higher education because the children had to show independence by studying alone, as illustrated in Figure 6.



Figure 6. A Child Learns Alone

(Source: <https://magdalene.co/story/beban-timpang-antara-ibu-dan-ayah-dalam-pendampingan-belajar-dari-rumah>)

The contributors suggested that schools provided more opportunities for fathers through programs such as orientation and extracurricular activities in assisting children. Moreover, the workplace was also expected to provide more flexible time for parents to accompany their children, such as extending the duration of paternity leave. Eventually, the contributor also suggested that the stigma of children's education as the mothers' responsibility must be eliminated.

Discussion and Limitations

Content and discourse analysis in news articles revealed that womanhood and motherhood were highly represented across a range of aspects such as the domestics such as taking care of school children while studying online, mindset changing and professional sphere such as the increasing workload of women during the pandemic. Meanwhile, men representation was not depicted directly. The news articles did a lesser description specifically about men's roles, the role of husbands, or the role of fathers. It strengthens the argument that masculinity of language was used in news articles written by contributors, which caused the words women and mothers to be highly highlighted to get more attention and engagement from readers. It seemed that women

must be specifically pointed out, while men have been identified naturally, so there was no need for more emphasis.

The emphasis of women and motherhood domestic roles and feminine duty in *Magdalene* news articles also become significant findings in online platform Twitter under the hashtag of #awomanhastobe, resulting in discourse that emphasised women’s domestic values and responsibility and physical beauty, which contributed to patriarchal discourse and promoted less alternative discourse discourses in the social media (Demirhan & Çakir-Demirhan, 2015). Moreover, in Japan’s political discourse, women’s were defined as sexual objects, prioritising their motherhood, and shamed them when they spoke up about sexual harassment resulting in unequal reality between women and men (Dalton, 2019). The news articles also portrayed the unequal reality that women’s domestic workload had doubled while men contributed less to the domestic aspects.

Magdalene also revealed that womanhood and motherhood were glorified in a patriarchal culture. There were some gendered titles given to women such as ‘a strong mother’, ‘a great mother’, ‘a mother is her child’s first school’ as if it is supposedly typical to women to take the roles as children’s primary caregiver, while at the same time, men or the father received the title as the ‘dream husband’ when they made a small contribution in taking care of the children. The results aligned with the previous study that gendered title existed in gender discourse. The previous study also found out by the study about black women’s leadership who were labelled as the Mammy, Matriarch, Sapphire, and Black Lady by the media that constructed narratives of mistrust in these black women’s capacities and their leadership as HBCU presidents (Commodore et al., 2020).

With the responsibility and over workload, particularly in the pandemic and new normal era, the discourse about women in *Magdalene* found out that the discourse in motherhood in the online media emerged the intersections of motherhood with domains such as education, mental healthcare, and gender inequality. Furthermore, similarly to the current study’s finding, motherhood and mothering practices intersected with religion, healthcare, and gendered (in)equalities were also discovered (Mackenzie & Zhao, 2021).

Furthermore, it showed that the news articles discussing the topic of women, motherhood, men, and fatherhood, the contributors made a lesser effort in reflecting equated language consciously, and unfortunately, this happened in online media, which has a reasonably significant influence. However, news articles discussing the role of women, motherhood, and children have equalised the language used by referring to women and men as parents. The gendered word also studied in the social media discourse revealed that women used the gendered word to challenge the stereotyped, and the majority of men expressed a dissenting opinion regarding the word a gendered portmanteau *mansplain* (Bridges, 2017, p. 101).

Further analysis discovered that women and children become the central focus and were highlighted together or separately in figures in each news article, while adult men or fathers did not receive the exact portrayal. Thus, it resulted in an unfair portrayal of the other gender. Furthermore, while none of the mothers in *Magdalene* articles were single mothers, they were mentioned to suffer in silence due to social pressure and lack of support from their partners, leading to anxiety and depression. A previous study also supported the finding that single mothers in the Israeli discourse context were the silent women whom the officials and media confined regarding housing which positioned single mothers as two contradictive groups, the vulnerable group and the regular productive group (Margalit, 2021, pp. 135–136).

Magdalene has presented discourse about women and mothers during the pandemic. In the constructed discourse, women and mothers have become inseparable from children, considering the patriarchy that has been deeply rooted. However, while the discourse attempted

to remove stereotypes against women and achieve gender equality, the six news articles in this study did not convey how men and fathers are portrayed in a fair and balanced manner, which means that the effort to reshape the construction of both genders was still very minimal. Therefore, following the amount of the data and the results, it becomes the limitation of the results of this study, which cannot fully generalise whether online media in Indonesia has wholly reshaped the concept of gender that leads to gender equality.

Conclusions

Online mass media is straightforward to access and read by various groups and ages. *Magdalene* strives to present articles that discuss women, feminism, sexuality, lifestyle, beauty, social, and politics with a gender perspective. It acts as an oasis for women who live in a patriarchal culture to seek justification for their actions and thoughts. However, the study discovered that the discourse in *Magdalene* heavily focused on women and children than men and fathers.

In the context of pandemic and new normal era, which also become the background of most articles, the images of women portrayed by *Magdalene* seemed to stand on against inequality gender roles. However, the portrayal did not fully reflect the discourse of gender equality that was initially promoted by online media. Men or fathers were portrayed as staying away from domestic jobs exactly like normal non-pandemic conditions. Subsequently, women or mothers took most domestic works, including a new form of work including accompanying children attending online classes. In short, online news articles on popular media like *Magdalene* conscious or subconsciously show less discursive support to government and general attempts to realise gender equality, thus strengthening bias and gender inequality.

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