Gender Representation and Traditional Character Roles in the Television Series Nightmares and Daydreams

Kennedy Purnama Chandra*
Program Pascasarjana BINUS, Magister Komunikasi Pemasaran
Strategis, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta Barat, 11530, Indonesia
kennedy.chandra@binus.ac.id

Viriena Puspita
Program Pascasarjana BINUS, Magister Komunikasi Pemasaran
Strategis, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta Barat, 11530, Indonesia
virienia@binus.ac.id

Kevin Irianto
Program Pascasarjana BINUS, Magister Komunikasi Pemasaran
Strategis, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta Barat, 11530, Indonesia,
kevin.irianto@binus.ac.id

Satriyadi Mandala Putra
Program Pascasarjana BINUS, Magister Komunikasi Pemasaran
Strategis, Universitas Bina Nusantara, Jakarta Barat, 11530, Indonesia
satriyadi.putra@binus.ac.id

Abstract
The purpose of this study is to examine the depiction of gender and the traditional role of characters in the television series Nightmares and Daydreams. The television series Nightmares and Daydreams was made to provide an explanation to the public regarding the dynamics of family life problems in Indonesia combined with science fiction works. This study uses a narrative analysis approach with Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm. The series featured in each episode of Nightmares and Daydreams shows that it has narrative possibilities in the context of everyday life. The traditional role of the figure reflects the cultural life of Indonesia, which has a tradition of talking while at home. Returning to the role of gender, which has an important role in depicting problems that are often experienced in life in Indonesia, by combining science fiction works. The findings show that the series challenges gender stereotypes through several main

characters in each episode who are often placed in conflict between traditional values and personal identity. By using qualitative methods, this research explores how men and women are portrayed through social roles, emotional expression, and life dynamics in stories. This research also highlights how popular media can play an important role in shaping gender meaning in society.

1. Introduction

Amidst the rapid growth of the entertainment industry, television series have become a powerful medium for representing social realities and cultural values. One Indonesian series that stands out is Nightmares and Daydreams by Joko Anwar, which combines supernatural and science fiction elements with stories rooted in family and societal issues. The series explores complex familial conflicts between spouses, parents, and children, and siblings, reflecting how traditional values and cultural expectations manifest in everyday life (Tempo.co, 2024).

What makes this series distinctive is its use of character roles grounded in myths, religious beliefs, and social norms. It critiques the construction of identity and power structures, especially in the context of gender roles within Indonesian culture. The narrative thus becomes a lens through which viewers can examine both the endurance of traditional values and the potential for transformation within modern society.

Narratives are central to human communication and identity construction, enabling individuals to organize their experiences and find existential meaning through coherent, interconnected events (McAdams, 1996; Westby & Culatta, 2016). Within the realm of film and television, narrative serves as a persuasive mode of communication by conveying values, beliefs, and moral reasoning through character development and plot progression (Hamby et al., 2018; Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). Fisher's Narrative Paradigm (1989) Argues that people assess stories based on coherence and fidelity, and that stories must resonate with lived experiences to be persuasive. Narratives in media function not only as storytelling structures but also as cultural tools for shaping ideologies and social identities (De Fina, 2021; Setiadi et al., 2025; Yang & Hamid, 2024).

Gender representation in visual media has been a longstanding concern. Malhotra (2019) found that female characters are often portrayed in limited, subordinate roles, reinforcing male dominance. Similarly, England et al. (2011) analyzed Disney Princess films and found that traditional gender stereotypes persist despite slight shifts. These patterns

highlight how the media plays a role in maintaining unequal gender norms. However, such studies are largely focused on Western contexts. Research on Indonesian television, especially that which critically explores gender through culturally embedded narratives, remains limited.

A relevant comparison comes from Ikawati (2020) study of *Chloe*, which demonstrates how narrative can reflect gender identity and social critique. Although differing in genre, both *Chloe* and *Nightmares and Daydreams* use narrative to interrogate traditional gender roles, making them suitable for comparative reflection.

While many studies have explored gender representation in Western media, there is a notable gap in research analyzing gender roles in Indonesian television, especially in speculative genres like horror and science fiction. Most existing literature does not engage with local cultural narratives or use analytical models rooted in communication theory. This study addresses that gap by using Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm to analyze how *Nightmares and Daydreams* constructs, reinforce, or challenge traditional gender roles within an Indonesian socio-cultural setting. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the construction of gender roles in the Indonesian series Nightmares and Daydreams using Walter Fisher's Narrative Paradigm.

The novelty of this research lies in its contextual focus: using a culturally specific television series to explore gender identity through narrative, supported by a theoretical framework that emphasizes storytelling as a form of moral and cultural reasoning.

Understanding gender representation in media is crucial in shaping cultural perceptions and societal values. In Indonesia, where patriarchal norms are deeply rooted, media representations can either reinforce or challenge the status quo. This study offers practical insights into how narrative structures in television contribute to the public's understanding of gender roles, highlighting the urgent need for more inclusive and equitable representations.

By identifying narrative patterns that support or subvert traditional roles, this study can inform future creators, educators, and policymakers about the impact of media in shaping gender discourse. It also contributes to broader discussions around how localized content can serve as a vehicle for cultural reflection and social change.

2. Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with narrative analysis based on Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm, which views humans as homo narrans or storytelling beings. This approach was chosen because

narratives are understood as a way for humans to interpret experiences, values, and worldviews in everyday life (Connelly & Clandinin, cited in Faizin, 2020). Narrative analysis can also be used for both fictional and non-fictional narratives (Andersson & Engren, 2022), making it suitable for examining the Netflix series *Nightmares and Daydreams*, which reflects cultural values, traditional roles, and gender dynamics in Indonesian society.

Research data was obtained from documentation in the form of dialogue transcripts, scene observations, and storylines from selected episodes using systematic sampling techniques to represent the gender and cultural themes to be analyzed. Additionally, literature related to narrative theory, gender representation, and previous research was used as secondary data to strengthen the interpretive findings. To provide an overview of the data used, Table 1 presents excerpts from the official trailer for the series *Nightmares and Daydreams.*

Table 1. Highlights of the characters "Nightmares and Daydreams."

No	Character Name	Cast	Picture	Character Explanation
1	Panji	Ario Bayu		Aver oles as a husband, father, and as the head of the household.
2	Rara	Asmara Abigail		Have a role as a wife, mother, and at the same time as a housewife.
3	Ranti	Sita Nursanti		It has a role as the figure of Panji's mother, a grandmother, and as a mother-in-law.
4	Iyos	Yoga Pratama		Aver oles as a husband, father, and as the head of the household.

No	Character Name	Cast	Picture	Character Explanation
5	Ipah	Nirina Zubir		Have a role as a wife, mother, and at the same time as a housewife.
6	Wahyu	Lukman Sardi		Have a role as a husband and as the head of the household.
7	Bandi	Kiki Marendra		Aver oles as a husband, father, and as the head of the household.
8	Dijah	Sita Nursanti		Have a role as a wife, mother, and at the same time as a housewife.

Source: YouTube Channel Netflix

The analysis process was carried out in several stages. First, the researchers identified the storyline, characters, conflicts, and resolutions that appeared in the narrative (Cherise et al., 2023). Second, the analysis was conducted using Walter Fisher's framework to assess narrative coherence or consistency, and narrative fidelity or the conformity of the story with cultural values (Armstrong & McCain, 2021). Third, narrative findings are interpreted to reveal gender representations and social practices formed through the story (Umam & Kusuma, 2019). The research flow can be seen in Figure 1.
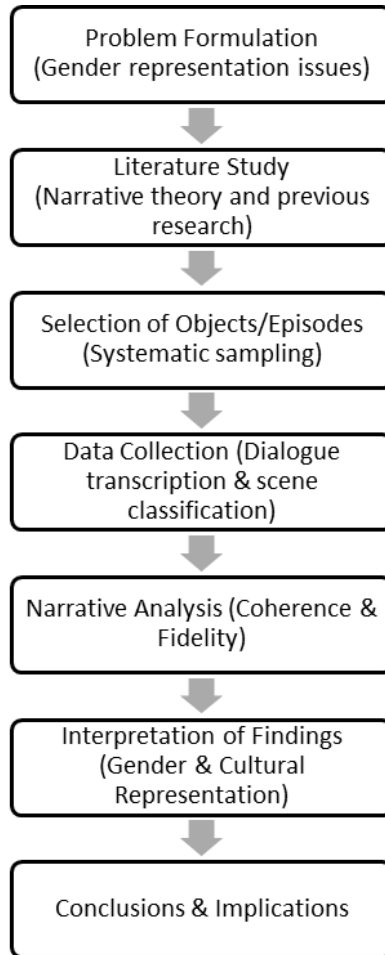
Figure 1. Research Flow Chart

3. Results

In this section, the author will present the results of the research in detail, which includes an analysis of gender representation in film characters and the traditional roles of the characters shown.

3.1 "Old House" Episode

This series begins with the story of a male figure, named Panji, as the main character in this episode. Panji had a small family living in a modest flat. Panji has an elderly mother. One day, Panji and his wife were doing household activities. Panji's wife washed the dirty dishes after use, while Panji helped wipe the dishes that had been washed by his wife. When they were washing dishes while discussing Panji's plan to leave his mother in a nursing home, suddenly, Panji and his wife were surprised when their child was not in the house. Panji asked his mother about the whereabouts of his

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son, but because his mother suffered from dementia and was elderly, finally Panji and his wife went around the flat, going up and then down each floor, until finally Panji found her son on the roof of the flat.

Since the incident, Panji decided to leave his elderly mother, who was suffering from dementia, in a nursing home. Initially, Panji's wife did not agree with Panji's decision because she felt that she did not have the heart for her mother-in-law, but Panji's decision to leave her mother in a nursing home was unanimous, so that the next day, after the incident of Panji's child whom her grandmother left on the roof of the flat, Panji and his wife left their mother in a mysterious nursing home. Upon arrival at the nursing home, Panji's mother felt scared and did not want to be left in the nursing home. But full of sadness, Panji was forced to leave his mother, who was crying in fear, because he did not want to be left alone.

From the gender roles shown in the scene of Panji and his wife, along with their children. The message is that the husband's decision as the head of the household must be respected, but there are times when the husband should also consider the opinion of the wife. Without realizing it, it turned out that Panji's decision to leave his mother in a nursing home was a wrong decision, because after it was known, apparently, the mysterious nursing home was a nursing home with a heretical sect in it, which made Panji lose his mother.

Narrative fidelity refers to a commitment to a narrative of a story, where the story is made identical to family life in Indonesia (Primayanti & Puspita, 2022). In the Old House episode, when a family is faced with a problem, the husband must be the absolute decision-maker and tends to be unwilling to listen to the advice of his partner. This narrative warns that when a man wants to make a decision, he should first discuss it with his wife.

Panji, Rara, and Ranti show their respective gender roles, where Panji has a firm attitude in decision-making, but does not think longer. Then the figure of Rara as a wife who obeys her husband's words and does not dare to give advice to Panji, which causes Panji to feel that his decision is right. Then the figure of Ranti, who shows the role of someone who is elderly and an attitude that does not understand Panji's decision, that as a child should be a filial and obedient child, but makes the wrong decision to leave his parents in a nursing home, without looking more deeply into the existence of the old nursing home.

The gender role of the figure of Panji also gives an idea of human nature, who always regrets at the end, but at the beginning does not analyze the decisions that have been taken.

3.2 "The Orphan" Episode

The episode "*The Orphan*" starts with the story of a married couple named Iyos and Ipah who work at the Final Disposal Site (TPA). Starting with a decent income, this married couple wants to get a large amount of money, but in a way that is not halal. This episode explores human greed and ambition through an orphan named Syafin, who is also the main character in this episode. Syafin is rumored to have demonic powers. Syafin can make his adoptive parents rich within six days and then kill them on the seventh day. This is a clear narrative of gambling with the devil, which is often found in stories about the devil. One day, when Iyos and Ipah finished scavenging at the landfill, they headed to an orphanage to adopt Syafin. Not long before Iyos and Ipah adopted Shafin, Iyos' colleague named Bagas had adopted Shaafin and became rich after six days, then died on the seventh day because Shaafin killed him after a pact with the devil.

Iyos, who was in debt at the time, finally decided to adopt Syafin and gave his wife the confidence to take this opportunity to improve his life. Picture 2 below shows the gender role of Iyos as the head of the household, but she has no desire to fight in life and takes shortcuts. Meanwhile, the figure of Ipah shows the figure of a wife who is afraid of her husband's decision and always thinks that her husband always has the right decision in any matter. Humans sometimes make bad decisions for their families, and this is often experienced in many family lives.

Many questions arise related to how the figure of the devil can work? At the beginning of the story, an orphanage administrator tells Iyos and Ipah that in order to get something from Shafin, they have to give him something. The orphanage administrator also gave an important sentence where the administrator conveyed a message for Iyos and Ipah to "love" Syafin with all their hearts. However, the words conveyed by the orphanage management were not heard or done by Iyos. Iyos portrays the gender role as a greedy father who wants everything to be obtained instantly. Iyos interpreted the message that had been conveyed by the orphanage management too literally by giving gifts to Syafin every day after finishing work. Actually, what Syafin needed was not a gift in the form of toys that Iyos bought every day, but warmth and comfort in contrast to the figure of Ipah, who every day pays attention to Syafin like his own child. Syafin got the warmth and comfort from Ipah, then Syafin gave them something in return.

Initially, the first reply given by Syafin was in the form of a sum of money in the hut belonging to Iyos and Ipah. Then the next day, and continuing every night, Iyos and Ipah always received a certain amount of

money and gold jewelry. At one point, Iyos had a plan to kill Shaafin, but on the seventh day was killed by a demon figure. But Ipah, who knew this, immediately opposed the evil intention of Iyos, who wanted to kill Shaafin before the seventh day. Ipah felt she got a second chance after having a miscarriage in her first pregnancy. This section shows the gender role of Ipah, who is a mother figure who always wants to protect her child from bad things. Ipah felt that he had been helped a lot by Syafin and did not want to consider Syafin only as an object used to make money.

Until one day, Iyos and Ipah got a luxury house given by Syafin on the fifth day they adopted Shafin. But on the fifth day, Iyos realized that he had not received anything from Shafin. As a result, Iyos lost his patience and planned to kill Shafin, but was again prevented by Ipah. Ipah, at that time, also forgot if Syafin had allergies, so Ipah immediately took Syafin to the hospital. Then the next day, Syafin was already feeling well and was playing in the garbage pile. But when the pile of garbage began to shift and fall on him, Ipah immediately ran to save Shafin. However, when Ipah dug through a pile of garbage to look for Shafin, another pile of garbage fell and buried Ipah, Shafin, and Iyos, who came to save Ipah and Shafin.

In the next scene, they woke up again in a luxury house, and at that time, Iyos, with his greedy nature, immediately left Ipah and Syafin and sold all the things in the house. But in the end, Iyos got himself unfortunate, and in the end, only Ipah and Shaafin remained. Syafin considers that parents, especially the most loyal mother figure, as long as they are adopted by various parents, are Ipah.

Narrative fidelity refers to a commitment to storytelling, where the story is made synonymous with socio-cultural life and is often experienced by many families. Greed certainly makes a person fall. The message obtained in the role of gender Iyos is that we should always be grateful for the fortune that has been given by God, because everyone already has their own portion of fortune.

The gender role displayed by the figure of Iyos is the head of the household, who is also a husband, but does not have a high spirit and wants to get something without effort. Then the figure of Ihah, who is a wife, still has to help the figure of the husband in doing work to meet household needs. The figure of Iyos, who, in addition to wanting something instantly, also has a gender role as a husband and head of household, has no sense of gratitude. When given fortune from the almighty through the intermediary of an orphan named Syafin, Iyos even abused the opportunity by squandering the fortune that had been given. In the end, Iyos did not get fortune but instead got a disaster because of his own greed.

3.3 "Poems And Pain" Episode

The episode "Poems and Pain" tells the story of a talented writer named Rania. Rania has a daily life in writing a novel. One night, Rania is writing her latest novel that will be released soon. Pada saat ingin sedang menyelesaikan novelnya, secara tiba-tiba Rania mengalami kejadian aneh, dimana cerita yang Ia tuliskan kedalam novel membuat dirinya luka-luka dan membuatnya menjadi frustasi. This episode not only tells about Rania, who is a novelist, but also the acts of domestic violence that are shown very harshly in this episode. The violent scenes shown made the audience feel what the victims experienced in the violence. This episode succeeds in developing the narrative well, which combines supernatural elements and everyday life.

In this episode, there is also an exploration of the relationship between art and life. The episode "Poems and Pain" provides an exploration of how creativity becomes a mirror of the soul of human life, delves into internal conflicts, and takes humans on an introspective journey full of challenges. The gender figure shown in this episode is Rania who is an older sister to a twin sister, which turns out that the strange incident experienced by Rania while writing the novel is a sign that her twin sister has been tortured by her husband and the gender figure of an older brother who does not want his sister to be hurt, tries to find out the whereabouts of a younger brother and tries to save her.

After trying to find out the whereabouts of her sister, Rania finally managed to find her sister underground in a luxury house and kept her away from her husband. In this incident, there was resistance between Rania and the husband of her twin brother. In order to protect her twin sister, Rania's gender figure as an older sister is willing to be hurt by her husband and tells her twin sister to leave first. Until finally Rania managed to drop the husband of her twin brother and came out of the underground to approach her sister to leave the house immediately.

After successfully escaping from the house, a few days later, Rania reported to the police about the act of domestic violence experienced by her twin sister. But when the police arrived at the luxury house owned by the husband of the twin sisters, the police did not find an underground location, which surprised and confused Rania. And in the end, the location of the underground became an unsolved mystery, and the husband of her twin sister could not be brought to the legal process.

3.4 "The Encounter" Episode

The episode of The Encounter tells the story of a quiet shellfish fisherman, named Wahyu, who is also the main character in this episode. Wahyu had a wife named Dijah. From the beginning, Wahyu always

dreamed of approaching his mother, who was in Arabia. One day, Wahyu captured a moment of the appearance of a mysterious creature in the night sky using his camera. The mysterious sighting triggered various speculations among fishermen in the village. Many fishermen believe that this mysterious phenomenon can save their villages from eviction.

One day, when Wahyu returned home from the sea, he found that the savings he had kept in his hiding place in his hut had suddenly disappeared. Wahyu realized that the one who took the money was his own wife. Wahyu, at that time, felt very sad and could only stare at the photo of his mother that he always kept in his pocket. Wahyu did not expect that his wife, whom he had been trusting all along, would turn out to have the heart to take the money from the only savings that Wahyu had collected to approach his mother. Before his wife stole Wahyu's savings, she had asked Wahyu about the whereabouts of her mother. Dijah feels that Wahyu's mother may no longer be there and tries to persuade Wahyu to stop looking for her mother. However, Wahyu remained firm in his stance to continue looking for his mother. But Wahyu's dream of finding his mother ends when Dijah willingly takes her money and leaves her. At that time, Wahyu could only lament the fate he experienced while sitting in front of his simple hut. Figure 3 below shows the gender role of a man who experiences despair in life and laments the fate of having been abandoned by his wife. Meanwhile, Dijah, who plays the role of a wife, portrays a character who is unfaithful to her husband and commits bad deeds. Narrative fidelity refers to a commitment to the narrative of the story, where the story is made identical to the life that is often experienced by many people, where we often hear cases of a husband who is abandoned by his wife or vice versa.

At one point, when Revelation was resting, he suddenly heard a sound of shouting like a commotion. Then he peeked out of the window of his hut, and sure enough, there were already many fellow fishermen out there who were rebelling because they wanted to be evicted. Wahyu, at that time, only felt afraid and did not have the courage to face the evictions that were planned. But suddenly, one of the fishermen came to him and told him to join in defending his village. Wahyu, at that time, had no choice but to obey the orders of his friend.

Suddenly, when Wahyu was daydreaming, he saw a white light shining on him that resembled an angel coming towards him. Then, after that, he suddenly gained magical power by hovering over his fishermen and evictions by saying "Stop". This word has the meaning that Wahyu, on behalf of all his colleagues, wants to give an explanation that no one can displace his village, and Wahyu really defends his village area.

The message obtained in the gender scenes of this film is not to underestimate the partner we have, because none of us ever know what the fate of people will be in the future, as experienced by Wahyu, who was initially only seen as a timid person, then abandoned by his wife, until finally sent by an angel to become the savior of the village.

The gender role shown in the figure of Wahyu in the episode "The Encounter" is that of a head of household who is willing to work desperately and try to meet daily needs.

3.5 "The Otherside" Episode

This episode tells the story of a man named Bandi. Bandi had a small family. Bandi is a head of household whose daily job is to welcome guests at a cinema hall. One day, his wife, Dewi, became ill. Bandi felt that as the head of the household, he had a responsibility to treat his wife. At that time, Bandi had no money, but because he didn't want to see his wife sick, Bandi also spent money as a memento with his wife when they were still dating. Then Bandi got out of the house and went to the pharmacy to buy medicine for his wife. While on his way, he suddenly came across the cinema where he was working at the time.

The next scene shows Bandi trying to enter the cinema building. Upon entering, it is discovered that the building is actually empty. However, due to the influence of his subconscious, Bandi feels as though he has entered the cinema building where he used to work. Then at that time Bandi forgot that the main purpose of his going out was to buy medicine for his wife. However, because he was already affected by negative things, Bandi remained in the abandoned cinema building. But not long after, when he came back out of the cinema building, he was surprised because the date on the calendar showed two years later. And immediately at that moment, Bandi fainted in front of his son and wife, Dewi.

The gender role shown in a Bandi is a husband who is also the head of the household, but does not have a stance in his life and is easily influenced by talk or invitations from others, so that Bandi feels regret and tries to protect his family because he has been away for two years.

The next scene shows Bandi, who has regained consciousness from his fainting, and is having dinner with his family at a food stall. At that time, Bandi and his family were talking about their son's college plans. Then, while talking, Bandi suddenly wanted to buy cigarettes at a stall near his place to eat. And when Bandi was heading to the stall to buy cigarettes, suddenly a motorbike fell. Bandi wanted to help, but Bandi was instead accused of causing harm until finally Bandi escaped and went back into the abandoned cinema building, where he used to work. At that time, Bandi again showed a figure who had no standing by obeying the words of a bad

figure, and when he woke up, he was again surprised that it turned out that the calendar date showed a different year. Bandi, at that time, was also surprised when it turned out that Dewi had remarried to another man because she felt that Bandi had left her and also her child for the second time.

The gender role displayed by the figure of Dewi is the figure of the wife who feels hurt by her husband because he has abandoned his child and wife, but Dewi is also too quick in making decisions without first finding out what really happened to the figure of Bandi.

At one point, his wife Dewi began to think, why does every Bandi find herself and her child after disappearing always in a bad state. Apparently, Dewi just realized that Bandi had not lied all this time, but it was true that Bandi was influenced by an evil figure that made him enter another dimension.

The message obtained in the narrative side of the story, as Bandi's role is to have a stance as the head of the household. Don't be easily influenced by others, especially if the person is a stranger. Sometimes people are easily influenced by bad things, such as Bandi, who, according to the words of people he does not know, should be avoided. Bandi and Dewi exhibit their respective gender roles, displaying human traits that are indecisive, prone to quick judgment, and fail to thoroughly analyze the situation.

3.6 "Hypnotized" Episode

In the episode titled Hypnotized, it tells a dark and suspenseful journey into the psychology of a person who is entangled in the world of hypnosis. The story focuses on Ali, an electronics technician who is trapped in a desperate state. The gender figure shown in this episode is the figure of Ali, who is the head of the household, a father, has the responsibility of providing for the family and providing education to his children through school, but the income from Ali's profession is not enough to meet his household's needs. So the thought arises to hypnotize someone, in order to fulfill their responsibilities as the head of the household.

At first, Ali thought about not wanting to do hypnosis for criminal acts, but one night, with mixed feelings, Ali was forced to hypnotize the figure of a mother in the ATM room. Ali managed to hypnotize the mother, but since the incident, Ali's life has changed drastically. Just because the money was obtained in an illegal way, psychological terror attacked him.

One day, Ali wants to hypnotize someone again. Ali spoke to himself that he would do this for the last time, as his son's school fees were about to be due. But while on his way to the ATM, Ali was suddenly approached by the figure of the mother whom he had hypnotized. Then Ali was talked to by his mother, who suddenly felt something strange in him. Ali feels that

he is being entranced by an illusory world, and he realizes that the purpose of the mother is to hypnotize him. Ali also realized that the mother turned out to have extraordinary hypnotic abilities and forced Ali to get out of the illusory world.

When Ali managed to get out of the illusory world, the mother who had hypnotized him congratulated him and recruited him into a special team. The gender role displayed by Ali's figure gives an image of the figure of the head of the household who tries to rise back from the downturn, until finally getting a better way.

3.7 "P.O. BOX" Episode

This episode is the final episode of the television series "Nightmares and Daydreams". This episode takes viewers on a quest full of mystery and suspense in the final minutes. In this episode, there is a figure of Valdya who works as a diamond observer. Valdya is looking for her missing sister. Valdya's search leads him to mysterious clues, which lead him into a dangerous situation.

Set against the backdrop of a world full of secrets and hidden threats, this episode is filled with suspense until the end. The uniqueness contained in this episode is how P.O. BOX ties all the story threads from the previous episodes. The biggest surprise in this episode is the appearance of a man who is the husband of the twin brothers shown in the third episode. His most terrifying moment was when the mysterious man ate the human brain by scooping it up like jelly food.

The gender role is shown when the figure of Valdya tries to save her sister, where the element of an older brother has an important role as a protector of a creature that resembles a human. The figure tries to charm Valdya's younger brother, and the figure is named Agarthan.

With the help of the characters in the previous episode, namely Panji, who is a taxi driver in the first episode, Rania, a novelist in the third episode, Wahyu, the fisherman who gets a gift in the fourth episode, Dewi, whose husband is played by a foreign entity in the fifth episode, and Ali, the hypnotist in the sixth episode. They all unite to save Valdya's sister from the creatures of Agarthan. In the end, Valdya manages to save her sister from the figure of the Agarthan creature.

The role of gender is again shown in the characters in each episode, where it is explained that men and women, in essence, have the same attitude, namely the attitude of helping each other, which is one of the Indonesian traditions to help others and work together.

The episode ends with the formation of a special team that has its own expertise from each episode and has one goal, which is to save humanity.

The characters in each episode who we think are weak people turn out to have extraordinary strengths, and can be seen in the P.O. BOX episode.

To provide a clearer comparison across episodes, the findings of gender representation and their associated messages are summarized in Table 2. This table highlights how different characters, both male and female, embody traditional roles or challenge them through their actions and consequences.

Table 2. Comparison of Gender Representation and Key Messages Across Episodes

Episode	Main Character(s)	Gender Representation	Key Message
Old House	Panji, Rara, Ranti	Male dominance in decision-making; female obedience	Unilateral decisions can be destructive
The Orphan	Iyos & Ipah	Male greed and shortcuts; female as protector	Greed leads to downfall; maternal love sustains the family
Poems and Pain	Rania	Female as protector and resistance agent	Resistance against domestic violence: women's agency
The Encounter	Wahyu & Dijah	Male transformation (weak → hero); female betrayal	Inner strength emerges under crisis
The Otherside	Bandi & Dewi	Male indecisive, weak; female reactive	Avoid impulsiveness and external manipulation
Hypnotized	Ali	Male under economic pressure; eventual redemption	Poverty pressures can lead to crime, but allow transformation
P.O. BOX	Valdya + all characters	Male & female unity; shared leadership	Equality and *gotong royong* as Indonesian values

As shown in Table 2, each episode reflects variations in gender portrayals, ranging from reinforcement of patriarchal dominance to

transformations that promote equality. This comparative view demonstrates the narrative's role in both reflecting cultural traditions and offering possibilities for social change.

4. Discussion

The results of this study show that the television series Nightmares and Daydreams utilizes narrative storytelling to challenge and reflect gender roles within Indonesian cultural contexts. Each episode presents different portrayals of male and female characters, where the traditional gender roles, such as the man as the sole decision-maker or breadwinner, and the woman as a passive supporter or caregiver, are either reinforced or questioned. This is particularly evident in episodes like Old House, where Panji's authoritarian decision to leave his mother in a nursing home leads to devastating consequences, and Poems and Pain, where Rania's character breaks traditional gender boundaries through her protective role and resistance. While these episodes are illustrative, the interpretation of character roles may be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity, highlighting the need for caution in generalizing the findings across all Indonesian media or even across the series itself.

To illustrate the recurring themes of gender representation across the episodes, Figure 2 presents the thematic distribution identified in the analysis. These themes include male dominance, greed, female resistance, male transformation, economic pressure, and equality.
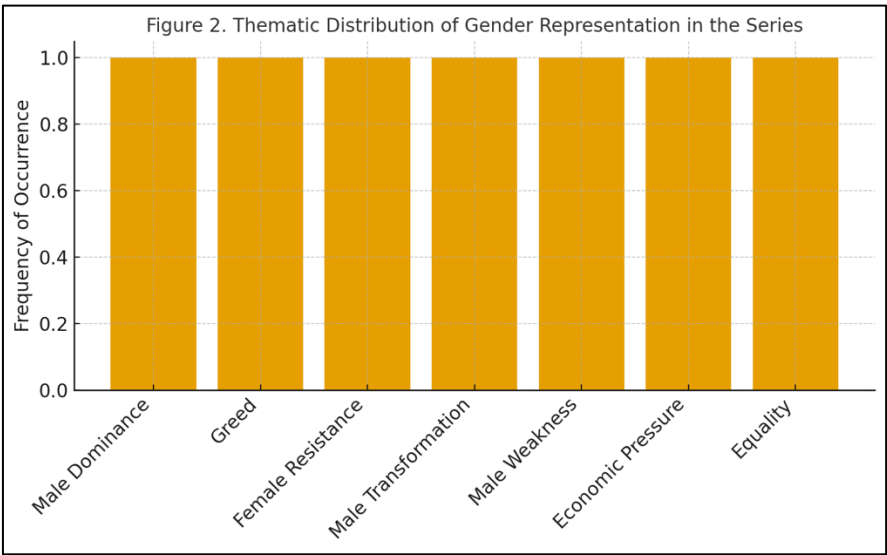

Figure 2. Thematic Distribution of Gender Representation in the Series Nightmares and Daydreams

As shown in Figure 2, the series balances between reinforcing patriarchal values (through male dominance, greed, and economic pressure) and offering transformative narratives (through female resistance, male transformation, and equality). This highlights the dual role of the series as both a reflection of cultural norms and a site of resistance against them.

These findings are consistent with the theory of Narrative Paradigm proposed by Fisher, which posits that communication is essentially storytelling and becomes meaningful through narratives that resonate with lived human experiences (Grafiani, 2023). The characters and plotlines in Nightmares and Daydreams gain strength through narrative fidelity, where the stories align with social and familial realities in Indonesia and narrative coherence, where a logical sequence of events supports the authenticity of the story (Dewey, 2021). Nevertheless, the reliance on a single narrative framework may overlook alternative interpretations of meaning-making in non-Western contexts, suggesting that future studies might benefit from integrating local narrative theories or indigenous storytelling models to better reflect cultural nuance.

To further clarify the relationships among the themes, Figure 3 illustrates the causal flow of gender representation. It shows how male dominance, greed, and economic pressure often trigger family conflicts, which then lead to female resistance and, ultimately, transformation toward equality.
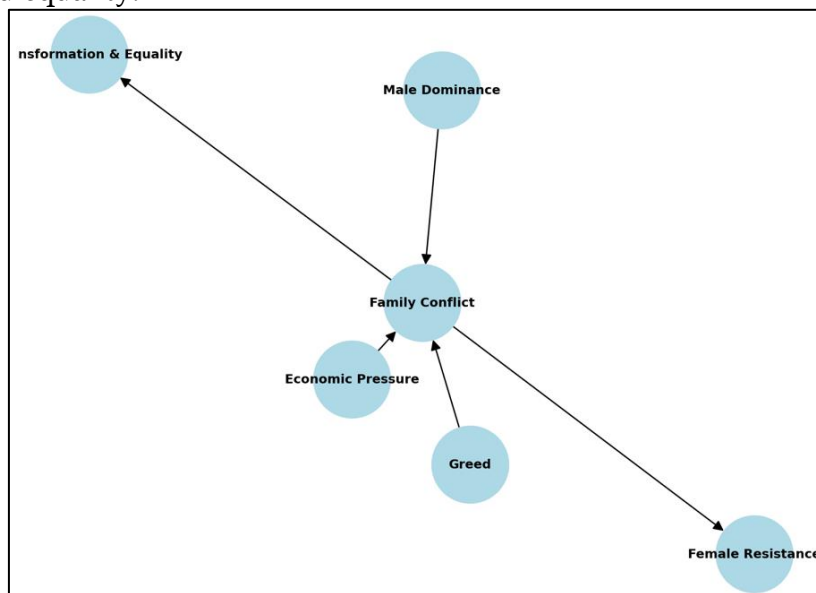
Figure 3. Causal Flow of Gender Representation Narratives in the Series Nightmares and Daydreams

As seen in Figure 3, conflict serves as a narrative turning point where traditional gender roles are contested, and alternative possibilities such as resistance and equality emerge. This causal flow underscores the narrative paradigm's emphasis on coherence and fidelity, as the stories resonate with real-life cultural struggles in Indonesian society.

When comparing these findings with previous literature, such as the study by (England et al., 2011b) In Disney Princess films, it is observed that traditional gender roles continue to dominate character portrayals, although gradual shifts are apparent. However, unlike Disney films, this Indonesian series introduces more socially grounded narratives and moral ambiguity, where characters are not strictly good or evil, but rather shaped by difficult life circumstances and emotional complexity. This could be attributed to the qualitative narrative method employed in this study, which allows for a deeper exploration of character motivations, moral dilemmas, and socio-cultural expectations. These results contribute to the current discourse on gender representation in media by expanding it beyond Western-centric narratives and providing culturally embedded perspectives that enrich our global understanding of gendered media portrayals.

The distinct difference in findings compared to existing literature lies in the cultural specificity and genre of the Nightmares and Daydreams series. Unlike western animated films that often simplify gender expressions, this series integrates science fiction and horror elements with realistic domestic issues, offering a more complex and culturally resonant portrayal of gender roles. For example, in The Orphan, the figure of Ipah evolves from passive obedience to maternal protectiveness, showing how traditional roles can transform under emotional and ethical pressure. This kind of transformation highlights the potential of genre fiction, particularly in the Indonesian context, as a narrative space for testing social boundaries and negotiating collective anxieties about gender and family. Future research could explore whether this genre-based flexibility extends to other sociocultural themes such as class, religion, or intergenerational conflict.

Furthermore, the character dynamics reveal that both male and female figures experience internal conflicts when navigating traditional values and personal identities. This suggests that media portrayals are not static, but adaptive to modern concerns, especially within Indonesian society where patriarchal norms still hold strong influence, yet are increasingly challenged. A potential avenue for further inquiry could involve studying audience reception to determine how these portrayals are perceived and internalized by viewers from different demographic and cultural backgrounds.

In practice, these results highlight the importance of narrative-based media in influencing public perceptions of gender roles. Media like Nightmares and Daydreams can be a powerful cultural tool in promoting gender awareness, especially when female characters are depicted with depth, agency, and moral complexity. However, the study also reveals the persistent reinforcement of certain stereotypes, particularly when male figures dominate decision-making without sufficient narrative consequences, or when female characters remain reactive rather than proactive. This raises questions about whether the series ultimately challenges or subtly reinforces the patriarchal structures it portrays, a theoretical tension that future studies may wish to investigate more systematically.

Ultimately, this study emphasizes the relevance of narrative analysis in understanding how gender is constructed and represented in contemporary Indonesian television. The results suggest that while traditional gender roles are still present, there is a growing space for alternative portrayals that reflect the evolving values of Indonesian society. Moving forward, content creators and media practitioners should be more aware of how their narratives influence societal norms and strive for more equitable gender representations that resonate with both cultural values and modern aspirations.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The focus on a single series restricts the breadth of interpretation, and without audience analysis, the societal impact of these narratives remains speculative. Additionally, the subjectivity inherent in qualitative interpretation may lead to different conclusions if analyzed by another researcher. To enrich the current understanding of gender representation in Indonesian media, future research should incorporate comparative studies involving multiple genres and platforms, as well as empirical audience reception data. A promising theoretical direction could involve integrating intersectional feminist theory with the narrative paradigm to examine how gender interacts with other identity categories, such as class, religion, and age, in shaping character development. Testing this integrated model across various media formats may provide a more comprehensive view of how Indonesian society negotiates its cultural values through storytelling.

5. Conclusion

This study set out to examine how the television series *Nightmares and Daydreams* portrays traditional gender roles and how these roles are both reinforced and subverted through narrative storytelling. The main

finding reveals that the series utilizes its characters and plotlines to reflect the complexities of gender dynamics within Indonesian society, offering both critical commentary and cultural resonance. Through its diverse and evolving characters, the series illustrates how traditional norms are negotiated and challenged, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of how Indonesian media reflects and constructs cultural expectations around gender, power, and family. By employing a qualitative narrative approach, the study highlights the role of storytelling in shaping societal perceptions, demonstrating the potential of media to either uphold or transform patriarchal values.

While this study provides valuable insights, its focus on a single series may limit the generalizability of the findings. However, the narrative paradigm offers a strong analytical framework for interpreting character development and cultural symbolism. Future research should explore additional Indonesian or Southeast Asian series to allow for comparative analysis and to capture a broader range of gender representations. These efforts can inform content creators, educators, and policymakers in promoting more inclusive and equitable portrayals in visual storytelling.

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