

REPRESENTATION OF FAMILY GENDER ROLES IN “BIG LITTLE LIES” NOVEL BY LIANE MORIARTY

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Abstract

This research describes family gender roles in *Big Little Lies* novel. Gender roles discussion has been important to see how social creates expectation or standard that men and women should behave. Society gives appropriate role to appropriate gender. In order to describe this phenomenon in the novel, the researcher used Eagly's social role theory with feminist approach. The research is designed with qualitative approach. In collecting and analyzing the data, the research applied method of documentation and content analysis. The result showed that there are two kinds of gender roles in family domain in the novel; the breadwinner and the homemaker. Mainly, women were expected to be the homemaker whereas men were expected to be the breadwinner. The expectation came from the typical activity of men and women in the novel's environment. However, the research also found that agentic women like Madeline, Renata, and Jackie, they could participate in the role of the breadwinner. Communal men like Ed, Jonathan, and Stu, they could participate in the role of homemaker. The research concluded that the novel's society did not project the typical gender roles strictly because husbands and wives in the novel are allowed to shift roles.

Keywords: Big Little Lies, Feminism, Gender Role, Literature, Stereotypes

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender role is one of the phenomena that feminists still examine to this day. The traditional belief of gender roles is still hold by many individuals in society as a social standard or norm or default. This is why it becomes an issue. By making it the only standard for everyone, such role could make some people feel restricted because they do not fit or feel comfortable to the roles. There are some instances related with gender roles that restricts people especially women. In today's society, women are allowed to be the breadwinner, but they are still expected to manage the household by the society at the same time (Putri & Anzari, 2021; Zuhdi, 2019). In workplace, gender role and stereotypes contributed in limiting the roles available to women making them difficult to enter leading roles

(Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). This happens because they believed that women's emotional and caring traits are not suitable to be in leading positions. In a local English textbook, there are materials suggesting men works in areas that demand physicality and women works in areas that nurtures children (Azisah, 2020).

Gender role phenomenon also appears in many literatures. This is possible because literature reflects author's experience and inspiration from the world. For example, in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner* novel, men's role is dominant in public settings (Afandi, 2020). It was only when woman characters were getting opportunities in education and occupation, their role started to change. In *I La Galigo* epic, Bugis' concepts assigned modesty to women whereas

brave is assigned to men (Mahmud, 2015).

Over other novels, *Big Little Lies* novel (Moriarty, 2014) comprises interesting gender role dynamics that also appear in today's society. The novel is written by Liane Moriarty, and it is about secrets and lies that are kept by the parents which leads to someone's death. *Big Little Lies* is worth to be analyzed because it showcases various gender roles. For instance, the women could be the breadwinner of the family. This phenomenon could be seen below.

“Lucky for some. I have four children, and no staff to help out! Of course, I don't have a problem per se with working mothers, I just wonder why they bothered having children in the first place.” (Moriarty, 2014, p. 9)

In a family domain, there are two roles; the breadwinner and the homemaker. Usually, the breadwinner is the husbands that have the agency to control and lead whereas the homemaker is the wives that have social skills. This excerpt shows that women were allowed to be the breadwinner, but they are still expected to be the homemaker in order to take care the children. It is interesting to see what makes someone capable to be the breadwinner and/or the homemaker in the family. For the analysis of gender role, the research decides to use *Big Little Lies* novel. The consideration for literary analysis happens because literature is the best place to understand and make sense of experience or issue in everyday life (Felski, 1989). Most importantly, literature could give a cultural prominence to ideas such as gender roles that is not constraining.

For gender role analysis in *Big Little Lies*, the research applies feminist approach for few considerations. By definition, feminist approach is one of literary criticism whose discussion primarily focuses on women through

psychological, social, cultural and political examination (Dobie, 2012). In this case, the researcher is equipped with a social psychology theory called Social Role Theory of Sex Differences. This theory is developed by Eagle (1987) and it helps identifying gender roles by the individual attributes or qualities of the characters in family domain. It also helps explaining how all of the attributes in total make up one belief of gender role in the society within the novel.

There are six recent studies of gender role in literary analysis. First, Arif et al (2020) studied gender role in *Desirable Daughter* novel using Butler's and Beauvoir's theory. They found two kinds gender roles exist in the novel's society; traditional and progressive. Second, a study analyzed gender roles shifting in *The Joy Luck Club* and *The Kite Runner* novel using Marx's conflict theory (Afandi, 2020). The study found the shift roles increased alongside the increasing female education and job opportunity. Third, a study examined how forced migrations affected the transformation of gender identities and gender roles in *Gott ist nicht schüchtern* and *Nachts ist es leise in Teheran* novel (Kofer, 2020). Fourth, Lobo (2019) studied gender role in *Wives and Concubines* novel. Using gender role theory from constructivist experts, this author found how the sexual policy, traditions, and gender and class hierarchies undermined women position bounded to their husband. Fifth, Badinjki (2019) analyzed how *Pride and Prejudice* novel constructs new gender roles while criticizing the stereotypical roles. Lastly, Köseoğlu (2018) investigated the portrayal of gender roles in *The History of Tom Jones: A Foundling* comic novel using Cixous' binary oppositions theory.

As apparent, the research aims to describe gender roles existing in *Big Little Lies* novel. Besides, the result

analysis could draw gender roles in today's society. This helps not only in understanding better of the novel and the gender dynamic existed within, but also it helps measuring the progression of feminism towards flexible gender roles in society. To measure the progression, one could rely on mainstream and popular literature. That literature is entitled *Big Little Lies* and it would be analyzed with feminist approach equipped with social role theory of sex differences.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Role Theory of Sex Differences

Gender role differentiates men and women according to the role they are assigned. The role difference comes from a shared expectation, values, and beliefs about gender about what sort of behavior that is appropriate to men and appropriate to women (Blackstone, 2003). In family setting, men are expected to lead the family whereas the women are expected to serve their husband's wants and manage the household's need. This is one of the common examples of gender roles, and every society is affected with their own concept of gender role in nearly every aspect of life (Saewyc, 2017). This kind of expectation divides the society based on gender. However, in this research, the scope is limited into family domain.

Social role theory explains how men and women behave differently. Eagly (1987) identified how gender roles are the product of social roles regulating people's behavior. The role exists after the people observed the connection between the sexes' personal attributes and the sexes' typical activity in a society. When people share similar belief and expectation and they persist it into a norm, people simultaneously start

to adopt it as the standard way to live. Since childhood, the norm of gender roles have been socialized by parents or other adults (Eagly & Wood, 2016). It was once started from social expectation then it develops into psychological adjustment (Eagly, 1987). People become what other people said. If people said this activity is for men and that activity is for women, then people started to adopt just like what they said.

2.2. The Content of Gender Roles

Interestingly, gender role appears different between societies and even cultures. Eagly (1987) had comprised universal contents of gender roles into two major categories that is borrowed from Bakan findings; agentic attributes and communal attributes. Agentic attributes describe how a person of gender possess personal qualities that leans to assertive and controlling tendency. This quality prepares them towards goal achievement and task functioning (Sczesny et al., 2019). Usually, in patriarchal societies, men are more likely to possess agentic such as self-assertion, independence, personal efficacy and other personal styles. For self-assertion, the attributes are aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, and leadership. For independence, there are independency, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, confidence, superiority, and ability to make decision. For personal efficacy, the person possesses qualities such as self-confidence, superiority, and responsible in decision-making. Lastly, there is personal style which are qualities such as directness, adventurous feeling, and persistence.

On the other hand, communal attributes are the opposite one. Communal attributes work towards maintenance of relationships and social functioning (Sczesny et al., 2019). It represents major attributes such as caring and nurturant, interpersonal sensitivity, emotional expressiveness and other aspects of personal styles. For caring and nurturant, the examples are affectionate, devout, healing, helpful, kind, sympathetic, and loving children. For interpersonal sensitivity, it shows examples such as awareness whereas, for emotional expressiveness, it shows qualities of tender feelings. Lastly, there is personal style that leans into communal attributes such as gentle, and soft-spoken.

In order to describe gender role existing in *Big Little Lies*, the research adopts concepts of agentic and communal attributes. These two major concepts whose terms Eagly borrowed from Bakan are important so as to characterize role differences of binary gender between men and women. These concepts also help the research to achieve its objective which is to describe gender roles existing in the novel. In doing so, the research examines roles and attributes of characters from their own behaviors in family setting, perspective of other characters, and conversation about gender role. Only then, the result is matched with other information about social expectation of gender. This is to see clearly of typical activities of gender that shapes the gender roles in the environment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research undergoes in qualitative design. This is considered

based on the intention and direction the research aims to. The research aims a descriptive and in-depth analysis of gender role as the object of the research. In regards to the aim, the research is conducted in three stages; collecting the data, analyzing the data, and presenting the data. In collecting the data, the research documents textual data from the novel *Big Little Lies* through documentation method with note-taking technique. The process starts from (1) reading entirely of the novel, (2) highlighting or marking textual data concerning to the gender role, and (3) grouping the data into classification. Then, the collected data is analyzed through content analysis. This helps aiming the content within the textual data. The process of content analysis is; (1) codifying the data, (2) criticizing, and (3) evaluating the data in the code as informed with theory of gender role. At the last stage, the research presents the result analysis in narrative text.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Result

The analysis collects data from personal qualities of the characters and the typical activity of the genders. For personal qualities, the result shows that some wives are agentic (Madeline, Renata, and Jackie) and some wives are communal (Celeste, Bonnie, Nathan). However, between them, they all are consistently share nurturant (communal quality) in their character. On the other hand, there are husbands who are significantly agentic (Perry, Geoff) and significantly communal (Ed, Nathan, Jonathan). Interestingly, they consistently share self-reliant in their character. The typical activity done by women is the homemaker role whereas by men is the breadwinner. This confirms Eagly's theory in which such gender roles are shaped from people's observation of typical or consistent

activity. However, the novel does not show any instances where the gender norms are projected strictly. Instead, agentic women are allowed to be the breadwinner and communal men are allowed to be the homemaker.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Individual Roles and Personal Qualities of Characters

There are two roles in the family domain; the breadwinner and the homemaker. Oftentimes, husbands and wives would have one role for each. However, this does not close any possibilities that husbands and wives have two roles in each of them. Here, the study described personal qualities of the husbands and wives.

Celeste-Perry

Celeste is the homemaker of the family. This is because most of her attributes are significantly communal. Marrying a rich and lovely husband, she devoted to him to the extent that she left her lawyer career for him. Friends and colleagues of her called their family as a “perfect marriage” (2014, p. 421) in which the wife only manages the children and the husband works. She appears tender. She often smiles. She is also nurturant. She drove them to school. She accompanied the twin boys playing together. These selfless qualities are communal and it allows her to be the homemaker of the family. Another significant indicator of her role is her devoutness to Perry and her twin boys. She dedicated herself to Perry, “She loved Perry. She was still in love with him.” and even in the following sentences, she still emphasized how she enjoyed to be with him despite his frequent abuse (2014, p. 142). Her enjoyment relies on what Perry gave her; from the enjoy talk, watching TV, being in bed with him. Her devoutness also extends to leaving her job to

manage household, “She would never leave Perry any more than she could leave the boys” (2014, p. 144). Her tenderness, smiles, nurturant, devout, and passiveness are communal qualities. Celeste could not be seen as the breadwinner because she does not show any significant agentic behavior other than when she decided to go by herself to a place where they could talk about her experience of abuse (2014, pp. 174 & 206). For the most part, Celeste is the homemaker.

Perry is the breadwinner in the family. His agentic traits appear to be very significant. He has control especially on the means of leading his wife and their twin boys. He is self-reliant in providing the family. He also appeared very confident and embraced the “daddy role” (2014, p. 320). Aside from that, he speaks with directness and behaves that everything is under control. For the most part, Perry is aggressive towards her wife, Celeste, as he hit her just because Celeste laughed at his false pronunciation of “menial” (2014, pp. 374–375). Perry had hit Celeste when he could not fix the computer that his wife asked to fix (2014, pp. 74–75). In the family, he appears dominant to the extent that Celeste’s passive and devoutness made her denial as quoted, “Perry wasn’t a villain. He was a man who just sometimes behaved very badly” (2014, p. 250). Despite how much agentic he is, there are few communal attributes Perry possessed. To their children, Perry is very nurturant and caring as he often plays toys with the twin boys. When Celeste seemed tired, he took over to handle the boys.

Madeline-Ed

Madeline is the breadwinner and the homemaker in the family. This is because she has agentic and communal

qualities that allows her to be both. Starting from agentic qualities, she is also controlling, ambitious, dominant, self-reliant and aggressive. She controlled much of Abigail's life to the extent of surveilling her social media and account passwords (2014, p. 349). Madeline is often depicted to have some sort of confidence or self-reliance. It is herself who drives the children to school (2014, p. 10). She also contributes in providing the family. Madeline is reliable in decision-making even with Ed. Her friends and colleagues also did the same (2014, pp. 437–438). In relation to family domain, she appears dominant and stands up well under pressure. Madeline displays aggressiveness to defend her son no matter who she fights (2014, p. 43). She is angry “when the children wouldn't do as they were told” (2014, p. 238). Having these agentic traits allowed her to be the breadwinner of the family. However, she could also be the homemaker of the family. Her communal qualities are nurturant, expressive, devoted, and understanding. One time, she was protective of her children (2014, p. 43). She always drives their children to school despite working. At challenging moments, Madeline was able to show affection to Ed and their children. She was sympathetic and understanding to Jane's life, Celeste's, and even Bonnie's and Renata's at the end of the novel. Madeline has two roles and it is clear that it shifts pragmatically.

Ed is also the breadwinner and the homemaker of the family because he has both qualities that allows him to so. Ed is significantly communal with enough agentic attributes. Ed is Madeline's husband who works as a journalist. His communal or homemaker side could be seen when he was attentive to their children especially to

Chloe and Fred whom “he knew and understood them” (2014, p. 176). As a step-father to Abigail, he tried his best to understand her despite not being there from her earlier age. Besides, he is also cooperative, patient and understanding that he even left his previous “high-grade job” with “much better pay” for the sake of sharing parenting duties with Madeline (2014, pp. 307–308) and “he'd never once complained” about his current job (2014, pp. 307–308). Ed is also patient for his step-daughter named Abigail who had difficulty of understanding math (2014, pp. 306–307). This means he tried his best to help her and tried best to enhance his relationship to the step-daughter. These are all communal because he shows selflessness. Ed does have few agentic attributes that allows him to be the breadwinner; self-reliant, confident, direct, and stoic. When Madeline and Abigail had a little conflict on dinner table, Ed simply told them to calm down, “there's no need to be dramatic” (2014, p. 154) as if the conflict would calm immediately. Another instance is when Madeline's could not control her emotion by cursing in front of him “shut up” and “fuck off then” (2014, p. 119). Ed appeared stoic. There is no indication that he was affected by what she said. It seems like he was used to this. Ed instead responded with calm-headed.

Renata-Geoff

Renata is the breadwinner with a successful business. Many of her behavior are indicated as agentic because she appears ambitious, self-reliant, independent, dominant and aggressive. Renata displays her self-reliance and independence to also provide the family alongside Geoff. This caused her to often say “she has board meetings to attend” whenever she

asked by other mothers (2014, p. 36). Renata is also ambitious knowing that she has a career with higher paycheck and busier than Geoff's (2014, pp. 229–230). Her ambition gives her little opportunity to be with her own children. She has dominant quality in conversation with other school mothers (2014, pp. 44–45). In front of Harper and Madeline, she was painted as an honorable, independent, and successful career woman. She is also very assertive when she faced Jane and the headmaster of the school (2014, pp. 234–236). These agentic behaviors confirm her role as the breadwinner in the family. Renata could also be the homemaker because she has few communal qualities such as nurturant and kind. Renata is known to be protective of their children especially Amabella, who was bullied by her male peers in classroom (2014, pp. 50–51). She protested the school teacher and the parent accused for treating her Amabella badly (2014, p. 258). However, these two qualities are less significant compared to her agentic traits. This explains why Renata is mainly the breadwinner. She could not be a full-time or even part-time homemaker. This role is transferred to the nanny they hired to overcome this situation. Despite having little time for children, Renata tried her best to give what their children needs especially Amabella who is clever and could read at earlier ages.

Geoff is only a breadwinner. He has agentic traits such as ambitious and individualistic. Geoff has a job with “long hours” which indicates his ambition (2014, pp. 229–230). Similar with Renata, Geoff did not have a time to spend enough with Amabella and Jackson especially when many parents “don't see much of Geoff at the school”. This also shows how he is individualistic. Geoff is too focused on

self. He did not partake the homemaker role even a little. Besides, Geoff was caught to have an affair with the nanny of the family (2014, p. 326). On another instance, he had little concern towards Amabella's bullying case. When arriving at school for interference, there is no sign or indication that Geoff concerns on Amabella. He simply just accompanied Renata to school. Throughout the novel, Geoff did not show any behavior or attitude that leans toward communion. This is understandable because Geoff is a minor character and he is intentionally painted as absent in the family especially in Renata's life. At this point, it is concluded that Geoff is completely the breadwinner of the family.

Jackie-Jonathan

Jackie is mainly the breadwinner of the family with successful career. Jackie is known for her leadership and ambitiousness. She came from “corporate world” whom Madeline described as “the CEO of bank” (2014, p. 36). She works full-time and she rarely appeared on school (2014, p. 36). Jackie planned for corporate takeover as she said in the interview “sounding terrifyingly precise” and “putting the journalist in his place” (2014, p. 161) and this even marks her ambition. Jackie is the breadwinner because of these agentic traits. Jackie does have few communal traits. Her nurturance was shown when saying “my children are only one part of my life” (2014, p. 115) or when responding to the forgotten petition to exclude the false-accused boy, “hopefully the kids can be left alone now to learn to read and write” (2014, p. 457). She shows an understanding trait which is a part of communal traits. However, for the most part, Jackie is significantly agentic.

On the other hand, Jonathan is mainly the homemaker. He has the nurturant quality to take care of their children (2014, p. 36). He enjoys and embraces the role (2014, p. 137). Jonathan also showcases his capability to understand and sympathize others when he said “I think the school has to take responsibility. Where were the teachers when all this bullying was going on” (2014, p. 230). Another communal attribute of him is friendly. Jonathan is dearly close to all parents in the school. He is close to Stu, the school father (2014, p. 39). He is close with stay-at-home mothers whom Jackie felt annoyed (2014, p. 230). For the most part, Jonathan is selfless. He joined Madeline’s “perfectly ordinary book club” for school parents (2014, p. 131). Jonathan volunteered as a referee for mothers’ running event at the carnival (2014, pp. 160–161). He basically devotes himself for other sake. His ability to understand, sympathize, be friendly, and be selfless is communal attributes. However, throughout the novel, there is little to no description that showcases his agentic attributes.

Bonnie-Nathan

Bonnie’s main role in the family is a homemaker, but she also opens a yoga class every Thursday. Starting from communal qualities, she is nurturant, warm, friendly and kind and these orient toward social matter suitable to be homemaker. To school mothers, she appeared friendly (2014, p. 30), soft, understanding and sweet when speaking (2014, p. 292). Bonnie also brought meals after knowing that Madeline had hurt her own ankle (2014, p. 30). Bonnie is also significantly nurturant and committed to work with Madeline to assist Abigail (2014, p. 72). Bonnie also never misses to attend Abigail’s concert which shows how much

supportive she is (2014, p. 156). These attributes show how selfless she is as a person. In the second half of the novel, Bonnie shifted into agentic, but interestingly it does not make her the breadwinner. These attributes are self-reliant and responsible in decision-making. These only appear within implication throughout the novel. On one instance, she arranged the family to do a volunteer work (2014, p. 57). She is self-reliant like Nathan to the extent of not asking other people to help Abigail’s mess (2014, p. 336). Bonnie also hid past trauma from her abusive father (2014, p. 439) thinking she could handle it by herself. Bonnie in fact is not expressive or angry (2014, pp. 312–313). For this case, Bonnie is the homemaker in terms of managing the husband and the children. Bonnie could also be the breadwinner but only in terms of decision-making and leading the family.

On the other hand, Nathan is mainly the breadwinner of the family. Nathan has a career that demands him to be a “tech savvy” (2014, p. 336). For the most part, he displays warmth expression, sympathy, and nurturance which indicates communal attributes. He is warm and talkative to other school father like Stu (2014, p. 39). Nathan warmly forgave Celeste’s boys for bullying Skye by dismissing, “no need to be worry! Gosh! They’re kids!” (2014, pp. 413–414). In his new marriage with Bonnie, Nathan is now known to be nurturant sharing responsibility in managing Skye and Abigail. He accompanied Skye to carnival. He with Bonnie attended Abigail’s concert. He even patiently dealt with Abigail’s mess. Nathan does have agentic attributes such as self-reliant and persistent. Nathan hides his struggle from everyone until later in the second half of the novel. He hid his

struggle but then revealed whether their family could provide Skye and Abigail (2014, pp. 156–157). He hid his struggle to fix Abigail’s mess but then revealed (2014, pp. 333 & 336). Despite so, Nathan is persistent that he and Bonnie could handle everything. Like Bonnie, Nathan has two qualities which allows him to shift when necessary.

Jane

Jane is the breadwinner and the homemaker. Her character tends to display agentic attributes than communal, but it allows her to shift roles according to situation. Jane is a single mother with one child named Ziggy. Starting from agentic traits, Jane is described as self-reliant, independent, and stoic. Having no partner explains how she needs to be self-reliant to provide and sustain her family by working with bills and invoices until late night (2014, pp. 125–126). Jane is also independent in terms of decision-making (2014, p. 50) and sparing time between work and children (2014, p. 126). Jane rarely asked for advices to anyone but herself. It is only when urgent, she did ask for help to Madeline dealing with Ziggy’s school assignment that needs to be done immediately (2014, p. 181). Her independence and self-reliant even makes her mother expressed concern and asked Madeline to guide her (2014, pp. 121–124). Jane handled every matter by herself especially after her trauma of the abusive sexual encounter. She took it by herself and only later she told to Madeline and Celeste which they in return supported Jane. This made Jane built this persona and behavior that exclude people and wall herself.

Jane also displays communal traits. Jane displays tenderness, kind, and nurturance. She still has the quality of being selfless and sociable in her family

and environment. Jane appeared tender as an “active listener” when talking with Madeline (2014, pp. 24–30). Jane tried to smile the school parents she met amidst the mistargeting of Ziggy as the bully (2014, p. 128). Jane is also kind as she brought cupcakes to Madeline (2014, p. 87) and to people in the book club (2014, p. 276). Jane is also the one who helped Madeline when she accidentally twisted her ankle (2014, pp. 17–19). For the most part, Jane is nurturant. She deeply cares Ziggy and she would do anything to protect him (2014, p. 50) and to help her son’s school assignment (2014, p. 179). Having both qualities allow her to shift both roles to accommodate Ziggy.

Other Wives and Husbands

This section is exclusive to other minor characters. While their characters provide little information, such is still considerable to reach the gist of typical activity done the genders. Hence, the discussion would be short.

Many of the minor wives display communal behavior. There are Thea, Carol, and Lorraine who are significantly communal. It allows them to be homemaker. They have the quality to be nurturant and expressive. On the other hand, Harper and Samantha have a balanced attribute which allows them to be the breadwinner and the homemaker. Harper's agency could be seen in her dominance when talking (2014, p. 44) and making petition (2014, p. 256). Harper's communal could be seen in her being obsessively nurturant and expressive. On the other hand, Samantha's agency is in her self-reliance in providing the family alongside her husband, Stu (2014, pp. 39 & 258). Samantha's communal appeared to be nurturant when she spared time with her daughter (2014, pp. 136 & 259), sympathetic when

people mis-accused a boy for bully (2014, p. 259), and expressive when protesting against the boy's exclusion (2014, pp. 257–260).

Many of the husbands are significantly agentic. For instance, Graeme appears dominant (agentic) when threatening Jane for Ziggy's behavior that is accused of bullying (2014, p. 342). Another husband named Stu is also agentic. He is Samantha's husband working as a plumber (2014, p. 303). Stu has this confidence and directness when talking. In the family, Stu did display communal attributes such as nurturant when he shared responsibility to take care the children (2014, pp. 39 & 258). Stu is also very social-oriented where often he interacted with other school father and he participated in assisting the students (2014, pp. 39 & 293).

4. 2. 2. Gender Roles in Big Little Lies

In this section, the map of gender roles in the novel's society could be derived. On individual-level, it is clear that there are agentic wives (Madeline, Renata, Jackie, Bonnie, Harper, Thea, Samantha). They take the role of homemaker and breadwinner of their family. They share this pragmatic responsibility with their husbands who also partake in communal work such as Ed, Jonathan, Stu, and Nathan. However, the social expectation displays a different reality.

For the wives, their main role is expected to be the homemaker of the family. In Social Role theory, this is so because of the reproductive ability that many females possess. Nurturing is typically done by the wives even the agentic wives such as Madeline and Renata. This is more confirmed when people frequently saw more mothers

than fathers driving the children to school (2014, pp. 4 & 39). They are the "main players" in managing the household (2014, p. 7) even though they have a job to do (2014, p. 4). There is only one husband who decided to be the stay-at-home father (Jonathan) and another who has enough time for children (Stu and Ed). It is a rare case in the novel where the wife decides to be completely the breadwinner of the family (Jackie). This explains why the main role of the women in the family is to nurture. It is because people in the environment observed the nurturing activity done by the women regularly and consistently in that environment. Below are important excerpts that describes women's role in the family.

For the men or the husband of the family, their main role is to provide the family. In Social Role theory, this is because society perceived men's physicality helped sustaining life. In the novel, society observed working and providing typically done by the husbands (Perry, Ed, Geoff, Nathan, and other husbands except Jonathan). For instance, Perry has a corporate job and he often commutes to overseas countries (2014, p. 274). Geoff is also busy with his job causing him absent in taking care of his children (2014, pp. 229–230). Ed works as a journalist (2014, p. 120) and Nathan works as a technician (2014, p. 336). This inform how social expectation of men in the family is mainly to provide. Many husbands in the novel are expected to be self-reliant. Notice how many husbands are reliable to handle all the matter in the family by themselves whether it would be children's mess (2014, pp. 333 & 336), economy struggle (2014, pp. 156–157), and even mental health (2014, pp. 77 & 397).

It is important to note that the novel's society did not create this social

expectation strictly. The society allows both genders are allowed to be agentic (breadwinner) or communal (homemaker). Many wives contribute to provide family especially Jackie who committed to be the breadwinner completely. Husbands like Jonathan and Stu are also allowed to take the role of nurturing. They share responsibility to each other based on their attributes. If one is more communal, they are more likely to take the homemaker role. If more agentic, they are more likely to take the breadwinner role. If one has balanced attributes, they might take both roles that shifts according to circumstances.

5. CONCLUSION

Gender role analysis is important to keep track on how gender role progresses. One of the ways to do it is by analyzing literature. In this case, the research described gender role in *Big Little Lies* novel. Using Social Role theory, it explains and confirms this research finding in which the society constructs gender role based on daily observation of typical activities done by women and men. It is found that some wives were significantly agentic (breadwinner) such as Madeline, Renata, Jackie, Bonnie, Jane, Harper, Samantha, and some wives are significantly communal (homemaker) such as Celeste, Thea, Carol, and Lorraine. For the husbands, the agentic males (breadwinner) were Perry, Geoff, and Graeme whereas the communal males (homemaker) were Ed, Nathan, Jonathan, and Stu. However, on a general level, it is found that women's role was still mainly to be the homemaker whereas the men's role was still mainly to be the breadwinner. This is so because nurturing was usually done by the women in that environment. On the other hand, men were seen to be

absent on nurturing children. The novel shows no instances of strict projection that the person of gender must follow the gender norm. Instead, each individual was allowed to share responsibilities; to provide and nurture the children. This concluded that in the novel, men were allowed to be nurturant, tender, expressive, and sympathetic, and women were also allowed to be assertive, ambitious, independent, and dominant. In short, they were allowed to shift roles.

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