

## Gender Role and Power Dynamic in Damsel Movie: A Feminist Stylistic Analysis

### *Peran Gender dan Dinamika Kekuasaan dalam Film Damsel: Sebuah Analisis Stilistik Feminis*

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Article Information	ABSTRACT
<b>History</b> Accept: 30 March 2025 Revised: 27 April 2025 Approved: 01 May 2025	This research aims to analyze Damsel (2024), a movie related to gender role and power dynamic that analyzed through the lens of feminist stylistics. This research uses descriptive qualitative approach and conducted into three levels: word level, phrase/sentence level, and discourse level, following the frame of feminist stylistics introduced by Sara Mills (1995). At the word level, strong and assertive language is used by female characters, particularly Elodie and the stepmother, to resist patriarchal oppression. At the sentence level, active sentence structures position Elodie as the driving force of the narrative rather than a passive victim. At the discourse level, the film challenges the trope of the helpless princess and instead presents a protagonist who fights for justice and subverts traditional power dynamics. In conclusion, the feminist stylistic analysis of Damsel (2024) movie reveals that the film actively dismantles gender role and power dynamic by using language and character interactions.
<b>Kata Kunci</b> <i>Damsel, Film, Gender, Kekuasaan, Stilistik Feminis</i>	
<b>Keywords</b> <i>Damsel, Movie, Gender, Power, Feminist Stylistics</i>	<b>Abstrak</b> <i>Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis Damsel (2024), sebuah film yang berkaitan dengan peran gender dan dinamika kekuasaan yang dapat dianalisis melalui lensa stilistika feminis. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk mengkaji analisis. Analisis dilakukan dalam tiga level: level kata, level frasa/kalimat, dan level wacana, mengikuti kerangka stilistika feminis yang diperkenalkan oleh Sara Mills (1995). Pada level kata, bahasa yang kuat dan tegas digunakan oleh tokoh-tokoh perempuan, khususnya Elodie dan ibu tiri, untuk melawan penindasan patriarki. Pada level kalimat, struktur kalimat aktif memposisikan Elodie sebagai penggerak narasi, bukan sebagai korban yang pasif. Pada tingkat wacana, film ini menantang kiasan putri yang tak berdaya dan sebagai gantinya menampilkan tokoh protagonis yang memperjuangkan keadilan, dan menumbangkan dinamika kekuasaan tradisional. Kesimpulannya, analisis gaya bahasa feminis terhadap film Damsel (2024) menunjukkan bahwa film ini secara aktif membongkar peran gender dan dinamika kekuasaan dengan menggunakan bahasa dan interaksi karakter.</i>



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## 1. Introduction

This research is a feminist stylistic analysis. Feminist stylistics was first introduced by Sara Mills through her book published in 1995 entitled "Feminist Stylistics" that examine the three levels of the work including word level, phrase/sentence level, and discourse levels (Sarah Mills, 1995). This approach analyzes how language and style in literary texts can reflect or challenge discrimination against women (Lu'luil Maknun et al., 2023).

Related to gender roles and power dynamic itself, feminist stylistics also examines how linguistic devices can indicate the idea of them. According to (Rahimnouri & Ghandehariun, 2020) it is defined as a subfield of stylistics that examines how gender issues are expressed through language in texts. Besides that, according to Foucault (Foucault, 1983) power is present everywhere and exists independently, but it becomes visible through interactions between individuals.

This research use *Damsel* (2024) movie as the object to analyze. The movie is about betrayal, survival, and breaking free from oppressive traditions. It follows Elodie, as the main character, who is deceived into an arranged marriage only to be sacrificed to a dragon as part of an ancient ritual. (Liderman Panggabean & Saragih, 2024).

*Damsel* (2024) movie have been analyzed by previous researchers before. First is the analysis entitled "The Instrumentality of Women in *Damsel* Movie (2024)" by (Panggabean & Saragih, 2024) explores the depiction of women as instruments within the narrative of the film "Damsel." This study likely analyzes how female characters are utilized to serve the plot or the objectives of other characters, potentially highlighting traditional power dynamics within the story. Second is "Audience Reception Analysis Toward Women's Representation in *Damsel*" by (Wardani, Cahyo, & Meyrasyawati, 2024). This study explores how audiences perceive the portrayal of women in the film "Damsel," examining various aspects of their representation and potential interpretations. And the third is "An Analysis of the Heroine's Journey in The Film *Damsel*" by (Wijayanti & Susanti, 2025). This article explores the narrative arc of the main character in the film "Damsel" through the lens of the Heroine's Journey framework.

However, none of the previous research mentioned above use feminist stylistic. This research analyzes gender role and power dynamic by using feminist stylistic approach in *Damsel* (2024) movie. The researchers choose the movie because the movie explores themes of woman empowerment, defiance against tyranny, and breaking free from oppressive traditions. The themes mentioned are related to gender role and power dynamic. The movie critiques traditional gender role by portraying Elodie as an active, self-reliant heroine rather than a passive damsel in distress. Therefore, this research is distinct from the other previous research.

Feminist stylistic has been analyzed by previous researchers before such as Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Bella Poarch's Song "Build A Bitch" by (Zahra Tarigan et al., 2023) that applies Sara Mills' feminist stylistics theory to examine the song's lyrics at three levels: word, phrase/sentence, and discourse. The study explores how the song critiques traditional gender norms, objectification of women, and

unrealistic beauty standards. Through linguistic and stylistic analysis, the research highlights the song's feminist themes, showing how it challenges societal expectations and promotes self-acceptance and empowerment for women.

A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) by (Rahimnouri & Ghandehariun, 2020) that examines how gender concerns are linguistically encoded in the text, focusing on lexical, grammatical, and thematic elements. The study explores how the language used in the novel reflects power dynamics, sexism, and gender ideologies. It particularly analyzes the character of Harriet, portraying her as a passive and subordinated woman, and discusses whether the novel presents a feminist or anti-feminist perspective. The research applies feminist stylistic theories and Short's model of power relations to analyze the novel's discourse.

Disney's Sexist Language: Feminist Stylistic Approach in *Beauty and The Beast* (2017) by (Romadhon, 2020) that argues that despite claims of progressiveness, Disney's language choices still reflect sexism. The study examines gender-specific terms, generic nouns and pronouns, diminutive naming of female and gay characters, and negative descriptors for women. Findings reveal that male characters are often portrayed positively and powerfully, while female and gay characters face trivialization and derogation. The paper concludes that Disney's language use reinforces traditional gender roles rather than challenging them.

A Feminist Stylistic Analysis of Visuals in Hollywood Movie Posters by (Khan & Mehmood, 2023). This article examines the representation of headless women in Hollywood movie posters. The research collected a sample of images from online sources that display sexist representations of women by accentuating and fragmenting their body parts. The aim is to analyze the visual objectification of women through a feminist stylistics approach and visual semiotics theory.

A Feminist Stylistic Analysis in Taylor Swift's Song 'The Man' by (Gadis Deameysa et al., 2023). This research analyzes the song "The Man" by Taylor Swift, which was released on August 23, 2019. This song discusses the issues of feminism and gender inequality experienced by Taylor Swift. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with recording techniques through in-depth observation and analysis of the language used in the song lyrics. The goal is to identify feminist stylistic elements contained in the song.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Feminist Stylistic**

Feminist stylistics is one of the stylistic approaches. Stylistics is the study of how language and literary texts are used to express meaning, emotion, and style. It focuses on analyzing different writing techniques, with the concept of "style" being a key element in this discipline. Tom McArthur (1996:914) defined stylistics as the field of linguistics that focuses on the study of style, particularly in literary works (McArthur, 1996). The majority of stylistic studies aim to go beyond simply describing textual formalities. These studies are carried out to shed light on the

functional significance of these features in text interpretation (Zahra Tarigan et al., 2023).

First introduced by Sara Mills through her book published in 1995 entitled "Feminist Stylistics", Feminist stylistics examine the three levels of the work including word level, phrase/sentence level, and discourse levels (Sarah Mills, 1995). This approach analyzes how language and style in literary texts can reflect or challenge discrimination against women (Lu'luil Maknun et al., 2023).

Feminist stylistics refers to the examination of texts from a feminist perspective. It is a specific branch of stylistics that focuses on the linguistic portrayal of gender-related concerns within a text. According to Sara Mills (1995) in (Rahimnouri & Ghandehariun, 2020), in early feminist stylistics, the focus was on the similarities between male and female writing styles. It was widely believed at the time that there were no major differences in how men and women wrote, with both using simple and complex sentence structures and making similar lexical choices. However, this perspective has shifted in more recent years. Many feminist stylisticians now argue that women's writing is fundamentally and stylistically distinct from men's. The idea that women may write differently than men is not new and can be traced back to Virginia Woolf, who asserted that women writers have developed sentences called "the female sentences" or "the sentences of female gender" which are different from the male sentences.

## 2.2 Gender Role

Feminist theorists have long criticized naturalistic views that link women's social roles directly to their biology. By separating "sex" from "gender," they reject explanations claiming that biological differences automatically determine women's social experiences. Similarly, phenomenological approaches to embodiment distinguish between the biological factors shaping our bodies and the social meanings we attach to those bodies in everyday life (Butler, 1988). The evolution of feminism through the 19th century saw increased emphasis on gender equality in all spheres, with literary works serving as a key medium for conveying feminist ideologies. The emergence of the feminism rights became more noticeable in 1830 (Br Pane et al., 2024; Grevin, 2022).

According to (Fathallah & Pyakurel, 2020) the term "gender" refers to socially constructed roles of women and men rather than biologically determined differences. They also stated that these gender roles of men and women, with their accompanying responsibilities, constraints, opportunities, and needs, are defined by a particular society'. According to Butler's theory of gender, masculinity and femininity are not traits but rather a result of cultural expectations influencing behaviors and actions (Butler, 1988). The concept of gender performance, as articulated by Judith Butler, is central to understanding how norms and behaviors shape and uphold gender identities (Kiram, 2024).

## 2.3 Power Dynamic

Power is present everywhere and exists independently, but it becomes visible through interactions between individuals (Foucault, 1983). Foucault says power is productive; it is not in a position of exteriority to other types of

relationships. He also said that power plays a "directly productive role;" "it comes from below;" it is multidirectional, operating from the top down and also from the bottom up.

Power plays a "directly productive role", means that power isn't just something that leaders hold over others, it actively creates conditions and shapes our life. "It comes from below", means ordinary people and their actions create and spread power as much as leaders do. Power works in all directions: decisions made by authorities influence communities, and grassroots movements or individual actions can push back and change those decisions. This constant give-and-take makes power a living, dynamic force that both shapes and is shaped by everyone involved.

#### 2.4 Damsel (2024)

The movie is a dark fantasy story about betrayal, survival, and breaking free from oppressive traditions. It follows Elodie, who is deceived into an arranged marriage only to be sacrificed to a dragon as part of an ancient ritual. *Damsel* is a movie released in 2024 directed by Juan Carlos Fresnadillo and written by Dan Mazeau. The film starred by Millie Bobby Brown as Elodie, and other main cast members include Ray Winstone, Nick Robinson, Shohreh Aghdashloo, Angela Bassett, and Robin Wright (Liderman Panggabean & Saragih, 2024).

The movie begins with Elodie and her family traveling to the Kingdom of Aurea for her arranged marriage to Prince Henry, which her father insists upon to help their impoverished people. Though Elodie and Henry initially seem distant, they bond over their shared love of travel. As the wedding approaches, Elodie's stepmother warns her about the royal family, but Elodie remains hopeful for her future. After the ceremony, Elodie and Henry are officially married. But the prince soon betrays her, throwing her into an abyss where a dangerous dragon waits to eat the royal sacrifices. Elodie survives the fall and discovers a place where previous victims have left marks, and learns the truth about the sacrifice ritual. Elodie's father searches for her but ends up dying by the dragon's claw. While Elodie manages to escape, her sister Floria is next in line to be sacrificed. The stepmother and her sister refused and resisted the queen's coercion, but they lost because the queen brought her guards. The queen took and threw Floria into the abyss. Elodie returns to the abyss to save her sister and convinces the dragon that she was never a true sacrifice. In the end, the dragon finally understands the truth and with Elodie they attack the kingdom, including the prince and the queen.

### 3. Method

This research uses descriptive qualitative approach to examine gender roles and power dynamics in the movie *Damsel* through the lens of feminist stylistics. The analysis is conducted in three levels: word level, phrase/sentence level, and discourse level, following the frame of feminist stylistics introduced by Sara Mills (1995). At the word level, the research focuses on the use of specific words and expressions that reflect or support gender conceptions, examining how terms describing Elodie and other womanish characters differ from those used for manly

characters, particularly in terms of dominance, and vulnerability. At the phrase/sentence level, the study analyzes the structure of rulings to identify how power relations and gender dynamics are constructed, paying attention to the positioning of subjects and objects and the use of active or unresistant voice, which can indicate power imbalances or agency. At the discourse level, the study examines the broader narrative structure and how gender representation is constructed throughout the movie, as saying how the overall converse communicates gender testament, particularly in relation to Elodie's part as a promoter who defies traditional gender places. The data collection process involves transcribing crucial discourses and scenes from the movie, which are also enciphered and anatomized thematically. The analysis is guided by the principles of feminist stylistics, which give a frame for understanding how verbal bias, narrative structures, and stylistic choices can render gender testaments.

#### 4. Finding and discussion

The data we took is from the scene when Floria, Elodie's sister, was forced to be subjugated to the dragon by the queen, and how they, Elodie with her stepmother and sister, want to fight.

**Table 1**

The table 1 below contains feminist stylistics analysis from each character: Elodie, Stepmother, Dragon and Floria; that is divided into two levels such as word level and phrase/sentence level.

	Word Level	Phrase/Sentence Level
	Dragon	No. I'll go. I can find her
	Angry	No if I can help it
	No	I'm going to get you out of here
<b>Elodie</b>		Good, i'm angry too
		My sister had this too
		All of us did
		That is how they make us royal
		Take your family and run
		It's not me you should fear
		This is the end of your story
<b>Stepmother</b>	No	You can't



	No	She's just a child
		I have to save her
<b>Dragon</b>		That won't kill me, but it will make me angry
<b>Floria</b>	No	

In Elodie ones there are words **"Dragon"**, **"Angry"**, and **"No"** that categorized as word level because Elodie, who has courage and assertiveness, is ready to fight with the dragon by stating that they have both been lied to and Elodie knows what they have done to the dragon. The word **"No"** from the Stepmother is categorized as word level because stepmother strongly protects Floria from the queen who is trying to take Floria as a sacrifice. Word of **"No"** from Floria categorized as word level because Floria was afraid and refused the queen's coercion.

The sentences are phrases/sentences spoken by the female characters, namely Elodie, stepmother, and Floria, and show the actions taken by them, how emotions are expressed, and injustice is resisted. Thus, Elodie as the main woman, proves her courage and determination through the presence of the following sentences **"No. I will go. I can find her,"** and **"I am going to get you out of here"**. These sentences have an active sentence structure, with Elodie as the subject performing the action.

She also shows determination through the sentence **"No if I can help it"** that she will do everything she can to prevent badness from happening to her or Floria. In addition, Elodie expresses her anger in the line **"Good, I'm angry too"** to the dragon which shows that she is also not afraid to get into a fight, and endure it, just like a young woman.

Elodie showed the incision on her palm to the dragon and said that **"My sister had this too", "all of us did"** and **"that is how they make us royal"**. Elodie showed strong evidence in the form of a cut to convince the dragon that it was not her blood that killed her children. Elodie gallantly and confidently entered the palace just as the next wedding was about to take place. She approaches the bride and strokes her face saying **"take your family and run"**. Showing concern for the woman who will be the next sacrificial victim. The courage grew stronger when Elodie told the queen that **"It's not me you should fear"**. Elodie indirectly said that what the queen should fear is the dragon, not her. Given what has been done to the dragon's child. And using women as victims. And Elodie ended everything with her last sentence to the queen **"This is the end of your story"**. That's the end of the tyranny and oppressive royal traditions.

The **"You can't"** and **"No! She's just a child"** parts of Step-mother also give good action and do real protectionism. In the scene, the queen wants to take Floria as a victim, but the "mother" is against letting it happen. In other ways, Floria is protected very strongly, showing that other women can also protect each other. Then, the sentence **"I have to save her"** more strongly

outlines the stepmother's firm desire to save Floria, which is evidence that she is willing to fight so that her child does not lose her life. The stepmother here is a woman who plays an active role in protecting their family and ignores the gender stereotype that women tend to be weak. On the other hand, the dragon, although not a human character, also shows the continuation of power dynamics through the line **"That won't kill me, but it will make me angry"**. The image of the sentence gives the power and threat of the dragon, but Elodie, although threatened, does not flinch and challenges it, thus showing that women can also be strong and brave.

In table 1, the connections between feminist stylistic with gender role and power dynamic are in the words **"No"** and **"Angry"** as voiced by Elodie and the stepmother display defiance to patriarchal gender norms. Elodie asserts her will by saying **"No,"** and she expresses strong emotions by saying **"Angry,"** both of which contradict the expectation that women should be submissive and frail. Expressions like **"I'm going to get you out of here"** and **"I have to save her"** indicate, from a power dynamic angle, that she has power and are willing to take action for their beloveds. This signifies an alteration in the balance of power in which women remain active participants who do more than merely suffer or become passive victim.

**Table 2**

Processes of Material, Relational, and Behavioral Utilized by Elodie, the Stepmother, and the Dragon.

Character	Verb	Process
Elodie	No. I'll <b>go</b> . I can <b>find</b> her	<b>Material</b>
	No if I can <b>help</b> it	<b>Material</b>
	I'm going to <b>get</b> you out of here	<b>Material</b>
	Good, I'm <b>angry</b> too	<b>Behavioral</b>
	My sister <b>had</b> this too	<b>Relational</b>
	All of us <b>did</b>	<b>Material</b>
	That <b>is</b> how they make us royal	<b>Relational</b>
	<b>Take</b> your family and run	<b>Material</b>
	It's not me you should fear	<b>Relational</b>
	This <b>is</b> the end of your story	<b>Relational</b>
	You <b>can't</b>	<b>Relational</b>



Stepmother	No She's just a child (is)	<b>Relational</b>
	I have to <b>save</b> her	<b>Material</b>
Dragon	That won't <b>kill</b> me, but it <b>will</b> make me angry	<b>Material, Modal</b>

Based on Sara Mills' feminist stylistic model, Table 2 analyzes what linguistic processes are used by the characters in a particular scene: material, relational, and behavioral. In addition, Elodie, who is the main character, also uses some material processes. Elodie speaks, "No. I'll **go**. I can **find** her." This shows the physical action and determination taken by the main character's courage. This is inconsistent with the traditional gender roles that depict women as submissive. Furthermore, in the phrase "I'm going to **get** you out of here", Elodie makes an attempt to physically rescue someone which is a strong and courageous image of a woman. The behavioural process is also evident in the statement "Good, I'm **angry** too" in which Elodie uses her anger as a determinant to act, as ladies can also be strong and brave.

The sentence "My sister **had** this too" uses the relational process and is directly related to the sentence "All of us **did**" which uses the material process. Elodie uses a relational process ("**had**") to show ownership of the experience ("this" = wound) by other women in her family. This is not just a fact, but a linking of collective identities as systemic victims. The word "**did**" (ellipsis of "had this") reinforces solidarity, emphasizing that violence is a pattern not a single incident. Elodie's statement, "That **is** how they make us royal," also reflects the relational process. This sentence connects the violent method ("how they make us") with the nobility status ("royal") by using the relational process "**is**". Elodie challenges the conventional narrative of royal glory by exposing the paradox of a royal system that creates a royal identity through the sacrifice of women. Likewise, the material process is also found in Elodie's sentence "**Take** your family and run". The material process is seen in the part ("**take**", "run") which shows direct physical action. Elodie not only speaks, but actively orders the rescue, reflecting her agency and courage as a woman taking over the protective role usually associated with men. Using the relational process ("**is**") in the sentence "It's not me you should fear", Elodie indirectly tells that it is not her who should be feared but the dragon that they should fear. Because dragons as objects are more worthy of fear. This statement strategically shifts power from her (the woman) to the mythical creature, while still demonstrating her control over the situation. Elodie says "This **is** the end of your story" which shows that this sentence very clearly uses the relational process in the ("**is**") section to declare the end of the queen's power. Elodie takes on a narrative-defining role, shifting the power dynamic from the antagonistic female character, the queen, to herself as the heroine.

Stepmother, however, employs relational processes to convey opinion or judgement in the sentence "You **can't**", the stepmother seems to be worried or even protective of Elodie. The relational process can also be observed in the sentence "No. She's just a child (**is**)", where the stepmother makes a judgement

about a person's age or capability, which is typical of a protective role in a family. Further, in the sentence "I have to **save** her", the stepmother performs a physical action of saving someone, which is impressive, as she is an active and brave character, not conforming to gender stereotypes.

Dragon is not a human character, but he also employs material and modal processes in the sentence "That won't **kill** me, but it **will** make me angry". It reveals the strength and the danger of the dragon. Though the dragon is a mighty and scary creature, Elodie does not blink and picks a fight with it, indicating that women can also be courageous and powerful. All in all, this table demonstrates how the female characters in this scene go the extra mile to depict strength, courage, and determination, which is not conventional for their gender. This analysis also helps in understanding how language is used to construct gender and power in narratives.

The analysis that was done constitutes looking at the language used in the *Damsel* (2024) movie. The structures of the sentences and the way of the storytelling was defined as a case of resistance. It also hence female like-minded to Elodie remain strong and determined in their decision to revolt against tyranny by self-empowerment. It is a similar process of women emancipation.

The results of the study also reveal how the use of narrative in the movie enables the storyteller to speak about women in a different way than they have been in the past. This has a positive effect on society in that women stop being seen as the objects of men's desires and become seen as powerful players who cause change. This work aligns with other feminist works by showing how language and media might have an effect on people's way of seeing things and make people brave enough to question existing gender norms.

Besides that, the study after that may act as a source of reference for upcoming gender representation queries in both written and filmed stories that ought to portray women's enviable traits and autonomy through a broad view, as well as the consideration of all such necessary diverse and varied makeups of the feminine gender.

## 5. Conclusion

The analysis of *Damsel* using feminist stylistics highlights how the movie deconstructs gender role and power dynamic through its language, character interactions, and narrative structure. At the word level, strong and assertive language is used by female characters, particularly Elodie and the stepmother, to resist patriarchal oppression. At the sentence level, active sentence structures position Elodie as the driving force of the narrative rather than a passive victim. At the discourse level, the film challenges the trope of the helpless princess and instead presents a protagonist who asserts her agency, fights for justice, and subverts traditional power dynamics.

The movie challenges patriarchal structures by showing how women are used as disposable pawns to maintain the kingdom's power, as seen in the forced marriage and ritual sacrifices. The betrayal and coercion by the kingdom highlight how power is exercised through deception and control. However, Elodie's defiance, along with her stepmother and sister's resistance, subverts these

norms. Instead of being powerless, she takes control of her destiny, forming an alliance with the dragon to overthrow the corrupt monarchy. This shift in power dynamics reinforces the idea that women can reclaim agency, dismantle oppressive structures, and redefine their own roles in society. In the end, *Damsel* 2024 movie emerges as a shining example of a feminist piece that can and should lead to discussions among people about justice, anti-oppression, and the shift of power.

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