



# Gender-inclusive Language in Press Releases: A Corpus-based Analysis

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**Abstract.** United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is a world organization dedicated to protecting and defending the rights of refugees and stateless people. In communicating with the public, UNHCR publishes press releases on its website promoting gender equality as one of the goals in Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to support the UN Women System-wide Strategy on Gender Parity. To promote gender parity, the UN publishes gender-inclusive guidelines on how to use epicene pronoun, suffix, pronoun, working title, gender-neutral word, and social title in publication. The study explores the utilization of gender-inclusive language in UNHCR Indonesia press releases and examines whether UNHCR Indonesia follows the UN guidelines to promote gender equality. This corpus-based research analyzes a corpus of 19 press releases consisting of 13,227 tokens from UNHCR Indonesia official website and employs AntConc 3.5.9 for key-word-in-context examination. The results show that epicene pronoun they is the most frequent pronoun used, occurring 119 times in the corpus. In contrast, the epicene pronoun he is used 27 times while the combined use of he or she is absent in the data. Moreover, inclusive language is evident in the utilization of gender-neutral terms such as refugees, children, and person with 433 appearances or 97.30% of the total instances. Conversely, terms associated with the female gender are used 5 times (1.12%), and male-specific terms are used 7 times (1.57%). The data showcase the active commitment of UNHCR Indonesia in employing gender-inclusive language in its press releases.

**Keywords:** UNHCR Indonesia, Press Releases, Gender-inclusive Language.

## 1 Introduction

The history of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Indonesia began in 1979 when the Indonesian Authority requested UNHCR's assistance in building a refugee campsite on Galang Island for more than 170,000 refugees from Southeast Asian conflicts. After 17 years of existence, the refugee campsite on Galang was shut but UNHCR continues to aid the Indonesian Authority in providing refugees with international protection [2]. Indonesia is not a ratification country of the 1951 Refugee Convention which makes Indonesia exempted from responsibility for handling

refugees in the global regime but acts as a stopover destination country [1]. Responding to this role, UNHCR which has a full mandate over the refugee population takes over this responsibility. It has been facilitating Indonesia in hosting more than 13,100 displaced people, 57% of whom are from Afghanistan, 10% from Somalia, and 5% from Myanmar [2]. Moreover, it has also aided the Aceh Regional Government and residents in providing shelters to 190 Rohingya refugees in Aceh [27].

UNHCR Indonesia strives to continue its mission in Indonesia. Currently UNHCR Indonesia operates in Jakarta, Medan, Pekanbaru, Tanjung Pinang, and Makassar [2]. The UN body also actively communicates its programs through its website (<https://www.unhcr.org/id/>) as well as social media Facebook (UNHCR Indonesia) and X (@UNHCRIndo). UNHCR Indonesia also utilizes press release published on its website to communicate with stakeholders. Press release is one of the public relations publication activities, both online and offline, to disseminate various activities and events conducted by industry, institution, or organization [3]. Press release articles can be accessed publicly by the editors of mass media (TV, radio, printed media, online media) and press managers to be published in those mass media as means of building relationships with the public [4].

As one of the UN bodies, UNHCR must conform to UN programs and guidelines, including the conformity to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Commenced in 2015, the 17 goals and 169 targets of SDGs set out an agenda for sustainable development for all nations that embraces economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection [5]. Commitments were agreed by the nations to achieve sustainable goals by 2030 [6].

One of the goals is promoting gender equality (SDG 5) which can be achieved, among others, by producing communications materials in a gender-inclusive manner. This strategy is carried out by using gender-inclusive language (GIL) or gender-fair language in communicating both orally and in writing, both formally and informally [7]. Communicating using a GIL means communicating both with internal and external parties without discriminating against a particular sex, social gender, or gender identity, and does not perpetuate gender stereotypes [2]. Furthermore, the use of GIL is committed to opening opportunities which aim for inclusion [8]. However, the use of GIL is a personal decision that is effortful, which can be enhanced through the reading of gender-fair texts [9, 10]. Merely reading gender-inclusive texts enhances women's inclination to use gender-fair language, whereas men need to be made aware of the use [11].

The relationship between gender and sex is complex and can be seen from various perspectives. While some associate gender behavior with pre-existing biological sex differences, others suggest that the relationship between sex and gender may be arbitrary, but there will always be gender behavior differences that reflect biological sex, which then become symbols of gender [12]. The conceptualization of gender can be highly complex and influenced by culture and social context. In some cases, ideas about gender can even influence perceptions of certain biological characteristics, such as muscles in men who lift weights because "that's what men do." Additionally, medical practices such as surgery on newborns who cannot be clearly identified as female or male show how gender perceptions can affect the social construction of sex. The discussion about the social construction of sex and the role of gender in this construction has been

an ongoing debate in gender and language studies. Therefore, understanding of gender continues to evolve with recognition of the complexity of the relationship between gender, sex, and social construction [13].

Quoting from un.org, in determining what strategy to use to communicate, UN staffs are required to pay attention to the type of text or oral communication, context, audience, and the purpose of the communication. Besides, ensuring that the text can be read clearly, fluently, and concisely must be ensured. Not only for UN staffs, the United Nations suggests the use of combination of various strategies in various types of communication which include:

1. Using non-discriminatory language by using forms of address and pronouns that are consistent with their gender identity when referring to or addressing specific individuals.
2. Using non-discriminatory language by avoiding gender-biased expressions or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g., She throws/runs/fights like a girl; Men just don't understand.)
3. Make gender visible when it is relevant for communication by pairing feminine and masculine pronouns (e.g., *he or she*; *she or he*)
4. Making gender visible when it is relevant for communication by using two different words (e.g., *boys and girls*; *men and women*)
5. Not making gender visible when it is not relevant for communication but use gender-neutral words instead (e.g., *humankind*, *human race*, *human-caused*)
6. Not making gender visible when it is not relevant for communication but use plural pronouns/adjectives instead (e.g., *their*, *they*)
7. Not making gender visible when it is irrelevant for communication but use the pronoun *one* instead
8. Not making gender visible when it is irrelevant for communication but use the relative pronoun *who* instead
9. Not making gender visible when it is irrelevant for communication but use a plural antecedent (e.g., *they*, *themselves*) instead
10. Not making gender visible when it is irrelevant for communication but omit the gendered word instead
11. Not making gender visible when it is irrelevant for communication but use the passive voice instead

Numerous governmental and non-governmental organizations [14, 15], adopt GIL guidelines to decrease gender discrimination and promote equality [15]. In contrast to GIL movement in the 20th century, the latest gender-inclusive language movement strives for a more gender-neutral or genderless language expression.

Previous linguistic research examining GIL have been conducted for various types of texts. [17] examined the use of generic nouns and pronouns in educational texts taken from the Singapore and Philippine sections of International Corpus of English. The study shows minimal adoption of gender-inclusive alternatives for generic *he* and masculine generic nouns. [18] conducted a diachronic corpus-based study analyzing gender-marked language in written discourse (i.e., press, fiction, etc.) in British English in 1931, 1961, 1991, and 2006. The study examined the application of gendered pronouns, gender-related professions, and terms of address; and found the usage of male pronouns

has decreased since 1961 and the usage of female pronouns showed a moderate increase. Despite, there was a significant gap between the usage of male and female pronouns in British written discourse. The usage of *man* and *men* decreased between 1960 to 1990 and slightly escalated in 2006. As for gendered working titles (e.g., *spokesman*, *spokeswoman*, and *spokesperson*), the study showed the gender-neutral term *spokesperson* was the least popular, yet the term *policeman* was the most popular up until 1961.

However, the term *police officer* overtook the popularity of the term *policeman* in 2006. A study discussing English as Foreign Language in Indonesia combines corpus linguistics and critical micro-semiotic analysis to investigate the representation of gender in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesian junior high schools Grade 9 textbook [19]. The research found that to avoid gender-marked words, the textbook writers constructed gender fairness by including gender-neutral vocabularies in both verbal and visual texts. Other results indicate a balanced ratio of male and female images throughout the textbook. However, gender stereotypes situated in academic and non-academic accomplishments, domestic chores, and interests or hobbies are semiotically captured in the textbook. [28] observed the implementation of GIL strategies in a sample of websites of ecotourism companies from Southern Spain. Quantitative analysis conducted for the study found that the companies do not generally apply inclusion strategies in verbal language. However, the websites apply positive visual strategies by portraying women in less stereotypical ways.

The present study particularly evaluates the use of GIL in specialized corpus built from UNHCR Indonesia press releases published from 2015 to 2022. The gender-inclusive language strategies observed include the use of epicene pronoun, suffix, pronoun, working title, gender-neutral word, and social title.

## 2 Methodology

The study uses a corpus-based methodology which examines how language analysis is applied to a group of texts building the corpus [20]. The frequency-based approach is mostly used in corpus linguistics to investigate the propensity of occurrence of specific linguistic features that represent normal and popular usage. The most distinctive aspect of corpus-based research is the use of authentic language in real circumstances to describe how language features are employed [21, 22]. Another advantage of the corpus is the identification of each token, making it possible to investigate linguistic aspects in detail [23].

The corpus data of the study are 19 press release articles published from 2015 to 2022 taken from the official website of UNHCR Indonesia. The majority of the articles are reports on the conditions of refugees in Indonesia and the humanitarian roles of UNHCR Indonesia. The relatively small-sized corpus has 13227 tokens and is subsequently named press release articles corpus (PRAC). PRAC are extracted to conduct a keyword-in-context (KWIC) search to investigate how UNHCR Indonesia uses gender-inclusive language in its press release articles by examining the use of epicene pronoun (e.g., *he*, *they*, *he* or *she*), suffix (e.g., *-ess*, *-ette*, *-enne*, and *-trix*), pronoun (e.g., *she*, *him*, *themselves*, *one*, *who*), working title (e.g., *spokesman*, *businesswomen*, *fisherman*), gender-neutral word (e.g., *person*, *humankind*, *refugee*) and social title (e.g., *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*) that based on United Nations guideline for gender-inclusive language in English. In a previous study, it is noted that *Ms.* as a favored form of address for females in the UK was far from achieving widespread acceptance [18]. This research, delves into the usage of social titles, specifically *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, and *Miss* within UNHCR Indonesia press release articles.

Those selected keywords are analyzed using the concordance and KWIC functions of a corpus linguistic tool AntConc 3.5.9.0. It is a freeware corpus analysis toolkit for concordance and text analysis software tool designed for text analysis and corpus linguistics developed by [24]. AntConc 3.5.9.0. assists in identifying and analyzing the context and pattern of gender-inclusive language use in the corpus. The details of PRAC Corpus are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** The description of the press release articles corpus (PRAC)

Name of corpus	Source of corpus	Date of data	Spoken or written	Corpus size and design
PRAC Corpus	UNHCR Indonesia press release articles	2015 to 2022	Written	13227 tokens from 19 press release articles

From this corpus, instances of the three most used epicene pronouns in English are gathered. These pronouns include: (1) generic he (i.e., *he, his, him, himself*), (2) various combinations he or she (i.e., *he or she, him or her, his or her, himself or herself, he/she, him/her, himself/herself, s/he, he/she, she/he, she/he, she or he, her or his, her or him, herself or himself*), and (3) singular they (i.e., *they, their, them, themselves*). All variations of these pronouns are collected in the dataset. Notably, an initial search for the pronoun *she* does not yield any instances of generic usage, so it is not further investigated in the study. The details of the search term can be found in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Search term use to extract instances of epicene pronoun

Generic he	Coordination he or she	Singular they
he, his, him, himself	he or she, him or her, his or her, himself or herself, he/she, him/her, himself/herself, s/he, he/she, she/he, she/he, she or he, her or his, her or him, herself or himself	they, their, them, themselves

Furthermore, the research analyzes the use of suffix associated with specific gender roles and social expectations, and nouns with feminine suffix can imply smallness and lower status [22]. Some suffixes that correlate with working titles/words in English are derived from corresponding male titles such as: *-ess, -ette, and -trix*. Suffix analysis is carried out using the concordance and search term or filter for regular expression features in the AntConc corpus tools. The rest of the search term: pronoun (i.e., *one, who*), working title (e.g., *spokesman, businessman, businessmen, chairman, fishermen*), social title (i.e., *Mr., Mrs., Ms., Miss*), gender-neutral (e.g., *humankind, human-caused*) & bias (e.g., *mankind, man-made*), plural antecedent (i.e., *they, themselves*), and gender term (e.g., *man, women, husband, mother*) are searched using search term checklist for words of AntConc. Details of the term can be found in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Search term use to extract instances of suffix, pronoun, working title, social title, gender-neutral & bias, plural antecedent, and gender term

Suffix	Pronoun	Working title	Social title	Gender-neutral & bias	Plural antecedent	Gender term
-ess,	one, who	spokesman, spokeswoman,	Mr.,	humankind,	they, them-	man, woman,
-ette,		spokesperson, policeman,	Mrs.,	mankind, hu-	selves	men, women,
-enne,		policewoman, police of-	Ms.,	man-caused,		husband,
-trix		ficer, fireman, firefighter, businessman, business-	Miss	man-made		wife, mother,
		women, businessperson,				father, girl,
		chairman, chairwoman,				boy, daugh-
		chairperson, fisherman,				ter, son, sis-
		fishermen, fisherperson				ter, brother,
						niece

### 3 Results and Discussion

Table 4 presents the information regarding the occurrences of epicene pronouns *he*, *he or she*, and *they* as subjective (i.e., *he*, *he or she*, and *they*), objective (i.e., *him*, *him or her*, and *them*), reflexive (i.e., *himself*, *himself or herself*, and *themselves*), and possessive (i.e., *his*, *his or her*, and *their*) epicene pronouns.

**Table 4.** Occurrences of epicene pronoun in PRAC Corpus

Epicene pronoun	Subjective Epicene Pronouns (He, They)	Objective Epicene Pronouns (Him, Them)	Reflexive Epicene Pronoun (Himself, Themselves)	Possessive Epicene Pronoun (His, Their)	Total
He	18 (12.32%)	0	0	9 (6.16%)	27 (12.7%)
He or she*	0	0	0	0	0
They	30 (20.54%)	18 (12.32%)	1 (0.68%)	70 (47.94%)	119 (81.5%)
Total	48	18	1	79	146 (100%)

\**He or she* includes the combination of *he or she*, *him or her*, *his or her*, *himself or herself*, *he/she*, *him/her*, *himself/herself*, *s/he*, *he/she*, *she/he*, *she/he*, *she or he*, *her or his*, and *her or him* as a non-binary gender.

PRAC analysis results in 146 cases of epicene pronouns. The epicene pronoun *he*, *he or she*, and *they* used in the press release articles produced by UNHCR Indonesia. The frequencies and context of use may vary. The distribution of epicene pronoun in corpus are shown in Table 2. Subjective epicene pronoun analyzed, a total of 48 instances were identified. The data reveals that the pronoun *he* was used 18 times, accounting for approximately 12,32% of the total usage. This indicates that *he* is a relatively common choice among the three pronouns. Notably, there were no instances of the combined use of *he or she* resulting in a 0% usage rate. This suggests that in the analyzed text, authors did not employ this form. The pronoun *they* is used the most frequently, with 30 instances, representing approximately 20,54% of the total usage. This suggests that *they* is a popular choice in this context. Here are the examples of the use of subjective epicene pronoun they:

- 1) Nine passengers had reportedly passed away.
- 2) In a talk show format discussed how they are helping refugees.
- 3) ...96 living in Mindanao. This means that they can finally enjoy the rights and benefits.
- 4) Once free from detention, they are able to live their lives better...
- 5) Take care of refugees, given the hardships they face, we are very grateful for.
- 6) The people of Rakhine State, so that they are not forced to move in the...

The objective epicene pronoun was investigated. A total of 18 instances was found in the text. The pronoun *him* was not used at all in the text, resulting in a 0% usage rate. This means that *him* as an objective epicene pronoun was absent. Similarly, there were no instances of the objective epicene pronoun *him or her* in the text, also resulting in a 0% usage rate. This indicates that *him or her* was not used as an objective epicene pronoun in the analyzed data. In contrast, the pronoun *them* is used 18 times, constituting approximately 12,32% of the total usage. This means that *them* is the only objective epicene pronoun used and is relatively common when it did appear. The analysis reveals that in the analyzed corpus, *him* and *him or her* are not used as objective epicene pronouns. Instead, *them* is the exclusive choice, making up about 11.84% of the total usage. This data provides insight into the specific pronoun preferences used in the context of objective epicene pronouns.

Reflexive epicene pronouns, specifically *themselves* are examined in the data. There is one instance of these pronouns found. Notably, *themselves* accounted for 0.68% of the total usage, while *himself* and *himself or herself* are entirely absent, each having a 0% usage rate. This data indicates that in the analyzed text, the reflexive epicene pronoun *themselves* is the only one used, and it made up 0.68% of the total usage.

The entire dataset comprises 79 instances of these possessive epicene pronouns. *His* was applied 9 times, accounting for about 6,16% of the total usage, indicating that *his* is applied but not the most common choice among the three pronouns. Notably, there are no cases of using *his or she* resulting in a 0% usage rate, implying that this specific combination was not employed. *Their* is the most frequently used pronoun, occurring 70 times and constituting a substantial 47,98% of the total usage. This indicates that *their* is the prevalent choice in this context.

The dataset includes a total of 146 instances of epicene pronouns. The pronoun *he* is used 27 times, constituting approximately 12,27% of the total usage. This indicates that *he* is employed, but it's not the most dominant choice among the epicene pronouns. There were no instances of the combined usage of *he or she* resulting in a 0% usage rate, suggesting that this specific combination was not used. The pronoun. The pronoun *they* is used most frequently, with 119 instances, representing a substantial 81,5% of the total usage. This suggests that *they* is the predominant choice in this context.

In summary, the analysis reveals that *they* is the most frequently used epicene pronoun in the given text serving as both the subject, object, and possessive form of the epicene pronoun. This suggests that the text predominantly employs gender-neutral language when referring to individuals. While *he* is used but less frequently. Surprisingly, there were no instances of *he or she* in the text. This indicates a complete absence of binary gender pronouns in the text. This data provides insights into the pronoun preferences used in the context of epicene pronouns.

**Table 5.** Occurrences of gender neutral

Gender neutral	Total	Gender bias	Total
Humankind	0	Mankind	0
Human-caused	0	Man-made	1

The data provided in Table 6 indicates the occurrences of gender-neutral terms in the context of *humankind* and *mankind*. However, in this specific dataset, there are no instances of either term, resulting in a total count of 0 for both *humankind* and *mankind* while the use of the gender bias term *man-made* is identified as appearing 1 time (i.e., However, as statelessness is a man-made problem, it can be solved.).

**Table 6.** Occurrences of working title and social title

Working title	Total	Working title	Total	Male title	Total	Female title	Total
Spokesman	0	Businessman	1	Mr.	0	Miss	0
Spokeswoman	0	Businessmen	1			Mrs.	0
Spokesperson	2	Businesswomen	0			Ms.	3
Police officer	0	Chairman	1				
Policeman	0	Chairwoman	0				
Policewoman	0	Fisherwoman	0				
Fireman	0	Fisherman	0				
Firefighter	0	Fishermen	1				
Businessperson	0	Fisherwomen	0				

In 2005, the use of term *police officer* had not supplanted *policeman* [29]. Conversely, by 2006, *police officer* had surpassed *policeman* in terms of popularity [18]. However, the data indicates that in the given text, gender-specific titles related to job namely *spokesman*, *spokeswoman*, *policewoman*, including *police officer* and *policeman* have no instances. Additionally, terms like *fireman*, *firefighter*, *businessperson*, *businesswoman*, *chairwoman*, *fisherwoman*, *fisherman*, and *fisherwomen* are not found. Some gender-neutral working title *spokesperson* is used twice:

1. To speak to a UNHCR spokesperson about this report: ...
2. Don't see a spokesperson listed near you? ...

In addition, term *businessman*, *businessmen* as well as *fishermen* are used sparingly.

1. ...today appointed prominent Indonesian businessman and philanthropist, ...
2. ...Indonesia's wealthiest and most generous businessmen, said in a statement.

The data suggests a shift towards more gender-neutral language, but it may not be consistent across all terms. Furthermore, the data provided in Table 6 shows the usage social titles, including *Mr.*, *Master*, *Miss*, and *Mrs.*. In this specific dataset, there are no instances of any of these titles, except *Ms.* which is mentioned 3 times. This suggests that, in the analyzed text, gender-specific titles are not strongly utilized, and a more neutral approach to addressing individuals is taken.

**Table 7.** Occurrences of gender term

Female	Total	Male	Total	Neutral	Total
Woman	0	Man	0	Person	0
Women	1 (0.22%)	Men	7 (1.57%)	Refugees	261 (58.65%)
Mother	1 (0.22%)	Husband	0	People	104 (23.37%)
Girl	0	Father	0	Child	8 (1.79%)
Daughter/s	1 (0.22%)	Brother/s	0	Persons	6 (1.34%)
Sister	1 (0.22%)	Boy/s	0	Children	54 (12.13%)
Niece	0	Son/s	0		
		Nephew	0		
Total	5 (1.12%)	Total	7 (1.57%)	Total	433 (97.30%)
Total Gender Neutral 445					

The study examines the usage of gender- terms within press release articles. The data indicates that the female gender terms woman, girl, and niece do not appear, constituting 0% of the total usage for female terms. Notably, the term *women* and *mother* are each used once in the articles, accounting for 0.22% of the usage. Similarly, the terms *daughter*, *niece*, and *sister* also appear once, totaling 0.22%.

Table 7 also provides information on the use of male gender-terms, with the term *men* being the most used, appearing 7 times and accounting for approximately 1.57% of the overall usage. However, terms like *husband*, *father*, *brother/s*, *boy/s*, *son/s*, and *nephew*, are not found in the data.

Additionally, gender-neutral terms such as *refugees* are the most frequently used in the text, with 261 appearances, representing 58.65% of the overall usage. The term *people* is used 104 times, accounting for 23.37%, while *person* is used 6 times (1.34%). The term *children* appears 54 times, making up 12.13% of the total usage. Out of the total 445 gender-terms used in the article, gender-neutral terms are the most prevalent, being used 433 times, which is 97.30% of the total usage. In contrast, female-related terms are used 5 times (1.12%), and male-related terms are used 7 times (1.57%) of the overall usage.

**Table 8.** Search of Pronoun

Pronoun	Who	29 (87.87%)
	One	4 (12.12%)
Total	33 (100%)	

The data reveals a total of 33 pronouns used within the dataset. The pronoun *who* appears significant 29 times, constituting 87.87% of the overall usage. In contrast, the pronoun *one* is identified only 4 times, making up 12.12% of the total usage.

## 4 Conclusion

This study investigated how UNHCR Indonesia used gender inclusive language in its press releases and examine whether it acts in accordance with UN guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English. The PRAC Corpus consist of 13227 tokens extracted from 19 press release articles published from 2015 to 2022 in UNHCR Indonesia official website. The analysis highlights that the epicene pronoun *they* is the most frequently used in the UNHCR Indonesia press release articles, appearing as both the subject, object, and possessive form of the epicene pronoun. This indicates a strong preference for gender-neutral language when referring to individuals in the press release articles written by UNHCR Indonesia. Otherwise, *he* occurs less frequently, and notably, there are no instances of *he or she* in the text, indicating a complete absence of binary gender pronouns. Furthermore, the data reveals that gender-neutral terms like *spokesperson* is used twice in the text as a working title. Additionally, certain gendered terms (e.g., *fireman*, *businesswoman*, *chairwoman*, *fisherwoman*, *fisherwomen*, etc.), are not used, whereas less inclusive working title namely *businessman*, *businessmen*, *chairman*, and *fishermen* have limited adoption per each. This suggests a trend towards more gender-neutral language, although it may not be consistent across all terms. The data also indicates the absence of traditional social titles, including *Mr.*, *Master*, *Miss*, and *Mrs.* in this specific dataset, indicating that gender-specific titles were not used. Instead, a more neutral approach to addressing individuals is adopted where the social title of address *Ms.* appears 3 times in the dataset. The use of gender-inclusive language in the press release articles shows an active commitment of application by UNHCR Indonesia and is in accordance with UN Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English although some gender-bias language is still found.

Further research with bigger size of corpus is needed to analyze the use of gender-biased expressions and/or expressions that reinforce gender stereotypes by digging deeper into the social as well as cultural context within the texts.

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