

WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN COMPARISON TO ASIAN FEMALE GENDER ROLES AND STEREOTYPES IN CRAZY RICH ASIANS NOVEL

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Article Info	Abstract
Article History Received: July 2023 Revised: August 2023 Published: October 2023	<i>The issue regarding female gender roles has been circulating for so many years in many cultures. The issue can be seen in many media including a novel where it brings up the matter along the plot in the story. This article aims to see women empowerment in comparison to the female gender roles represented in Crazy Rich Asians novel by Kevin Kwan. To support this research, the theory used is Eagly's Gender Role theory and Malhotra's Women empowerment theory. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative method to elaborate on the female gender roles and women empowerment. The results showed that this novel portrays that the female gender roles and stereotypes came from the residual culture and the women empowerment happened when the female characters can choose their own life path for their own sake by their own decisions. It shows that despite the culture that bonds the female characters for generations, they can still speak up for themselves and choose what is good for them.</i>
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INTRODUCTION

These days gender in society have become so diverse that some people might have mistaken one for another. But out of the differences each of these genders have there is one thing people are seeking out for: equality. As we know, inequality, we would have sought something deeper than just the gender the individuals have. It seeks and digs more into what is the interest, talents, needs, capabilities, even the priorities of what they have—this idea would have given bigger things to be considered and it will recognize just how diverse the groups are (UN Women). From Eagly's (1987) theory, he argues that gender stereotypes develop from the gender roles that divide society as it creates a certain characteristic. It started when society separated what a certain gender has to do and the labor that is divided between the two genders then became a culturally associated thing. From there, the gender role then will be creating expectations in the members of the society itself and create stereotypes. With attaching certain attributes or characteristics to others, gender stereotyping will happen.

However, in the midst of gender stereotyping, empowerment rises along with it for a long-time course. Mainly, the feminists are the ones who is raising the consciousness over the matter. The movement for empowerment can be seen in the development in the 1970s. Since then, the empowerment movements have been louder and way more articulated during the 1980s and 1990s as a radical approach on the issues of power relations in the concern of women's rights, asking for equality for both men and women (Batliwala: 1993, 2007).

In this article the novel 'Crazy Rich Asians' by Kevin Kwan is the main object for the research which the novel will be the main source of how gender roles and stereotypes in the novel is presented to the readers. In regards to that, there are a few related previous studies using the same novel that helps contributed as insights for this study. First, the paper by Intan Tawaddada Ilaiha, published on 2021. The author used semiotics theory by Roland Barthes in order to analyze the meaning of the movie of Crazy Rich Asians. This study mainly focused on

the movie and used semiotics theory to elaborate on the women empowerment that was represented in the movie. There is also research by Devi Vijay, was published on 2019. The theory used in this study is Orientalism and Neoliberal Feminism where the study talks about how the Orientalism and the westernization of the story are being shown in the movie. The other previous study is by Nadhifah Salsabila and Dr. M. Thoyibi, M.S. This paper used a sociological approach in order to talk about the stereotypes and prejudices from the movie.

Crazy Rich Asians is a novel written by Kevin Kwan released in 2013. This novel is written in English. *Crazy Rich Asians* is written by an author who is a Singaporean born American—where it became his biggest inspiration of how he wants to tell about his life while living in Singapore back when he was a child to the Americans (Govani, Shinan, 2015. How ‘*Crazy Rich Asians*’ splashed their cash. *The Daily Beast*). This novel became a bestseller after the release and it has two sequels following the book. Not to mention, this novel is also being adapted into a movie in 2018. Despite being adapted to a movie, the novel has a different portrayal of the characters and the story, thus there is striking difference of how the novel is expressing the issues.

One of the common issue in the novel is gender roles. Gender roles were created out of the division of labor that characterizes society (Eagly, 1987). According to the social role theory, it is noted that the differences between men and women came from the distributions in the social roles in the society, where women are doing more domestic work and men are doing the paid employment (Shelton, 1992, cited from Eagly). With the beliefs of gender roles in the society, people will also start to behave like the expectations from the gender roles itself. This behavior of the gender role expectations then manifested into gender stereotypes. The belief and the social expectation then will cause people to act the way they are expected to, thus it developed into a culture for the people. (1987: 151).

Gender roles are influenced by traditions too, such as Confucianism in Asia (Leung, 2003). According to Xiran Fang (2021), Confucianism itself has biases towards a certain gender. In the old rules, it is understood that there is superiority to men and women are inferior. With old values that is still deeply rooted in the culture, it resulted in the idea of patriarchy in the society (Wu, 2009).

In the novel, it also shows the culture clash between the older generation and the younger generation. According to Raymond Williams, culture can be defined as a theory where it shows the reflections between a lot of elements that’s found in a whole way of life (1958: p. 5). The first category is dominant culture. According to Raymond Williams, dominant culture is a culture where it’s being practiced at the present time. The second category is named ‘residual’. The term he uses for residual culture refers to a culture that came from the past. Despite so, it is still active the present cultural process and also actively works as a part of the elements in the present culture (p. 122). On the last category of culture to Raymond Williams, there is an emergent culture. The emergent culture is a culture that is new, in meanings, values, practices, even relationships (Williams, p. 123).

In the novel too, feminism can be the reason why the character can have their empowered moment. Feminism is originally a movement to fight against patriarchy in society. The main goal of this ideology is to seek improvement of status for women (Cott, 1987). Along the rise of ‘feminism’, another term named ‘feminist criticism’ also arose. It refers to the discourse that is critical and theoretical to struggle against the patriarchy that is happening. (Moi, 1996). Tong in her book (2009), emphasizes the different views coming from different people regarding liberal feminisms. Where in the end of the whole idea sums up to the idea and suggestions that liberal feminism is the idea of women being able to gain their liberty of opportunities and choices, where they choose what they most prefer without any external oppression regarding their choices.

The feminism in the story leads to the women empowerment of the female characters. Women empowerment according to Batliwala is a state where there is a process of the powerless gaining greater control over the circumstances of their life (2002). Society has their own set of roles and stereotypes that usually weighs more on the women and would usually affect the women more compared to the men (Hentschel, T: 2019). In order to gain more freedom and choices, the women would seek feminism in order to speak their voices out and gain equal status in the society. (Cott, 1987). The research by Vakkayil (2021), then summarizes the variable of women empowerment. According to Vakkayil, there are a few aspects that can be seen if a woman is empowered. The empowerment can be seen if the woman can freely live their lives with a sense of self-worth, respect, and dignity, or when they have control of their own decisions.

This study used Eagly's Gender Role theory to analyze the gender roles and stereotypes represented which as quoted that gender role is a collection of beliefs about what women and men actually do or ought to do (1987: 130). To analyze women's empowerment, this study is using Malhotra's theory, which was summarized by Vakkayil that empowerment can be seen if the woman can freely live their lives with a sense of self-worth, respect, and dignity, or when they have control of their own decisions. Women are also empowered when they have gained equal status in society, and have rights to access opportunities and resources (Vakkayil, 2021).

The research problem of this study would be: (1) How are gender roles and stereotypes being represented in *Crazy Rich Asians* novel? (2) How is women empowerment represented in the *Crazy Rich Asians* novel? This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing further into the representation of the issues in hope it may contribute to other studies with similar or related topic or source as this study while taking into consideration that most studies take the movie as its main source of data, whilst this study is focusing on the novel and how it shows the Asian female gender roles and stereotypes along with the women empowerment in it. The gender roles and stereotypes would be taken from Chinese gender roles values where most of the characters in the book are rooted from despite living in Singapore.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This research used descriptive qualitative research. Sugiyono (2011) states that qualitative research means it's descriptive. Which means that the collected data is in the form of words instead of numbers. In this study the writer collected and analyzed the data in the form of words, phrases, and sentences from the source of data, '*Crazy Rich Asians*' by Kevin Kwan. According to Bogdan and Taylor quoted by J. Moloeng (2013), the steps for qualitative research are collecting data, analyzing the data, and then drawing a conclusion. This method will aim the result to describe a non-statical or a descriptive data where it is stated that the collecting of the data for qualitative research will be in the form of words or pictures instead of numbers.

The data collected were compiled into sentences that will show the relevance of the topic and the content of the data for the analysis. There are a few things done to collect the data which contains reading the novel so the author can take notes on the important parts or data in the novel that is related to the study. The notes taken from the novel would be narrations, phrases, or sentences in the novel that shows gender roles expectation or stereotypes and women empowerment in comparison of the gender roles expectation or stereotype.

The collected data from the notes taken from the novel then were categorized based on the research questions, then the stereotypes and gender roles found from the words would be analyzed by the theory of Gender Role by Eagly and Malhotra's women empowerment variables. The analysis that was made from the process will be elaborated further on the findings to answer the research questions in order to draw a conclusion from it.

Subject

The primary data source employed for this research study is the literary work entitled 'Crazy Rich Asians,' authored by Kevin Kwan. The central objective of this investigation is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of this novel, thereby facilitating the formulation of well-grounded responses to pertinent research inquiries and the eventual derivation of meaningful conclusions within the scope of the subject matter. Published in the year 2013, 'Crazy Rich Asians' stands out as one of the most renowned works by the author, boasting a global readership that spans diverse geographical and cultural boundaries. This literary creation intricately delves into the lifestyles and experiences of affluent individuals within the socio-cultural context of Singapore, making it a prominent and influential narrative with wide-reaching appeal and relevance. Consequently, the choice of this novel as the primary data source for the research underscores its significance as a rich and informative repository of insights germane to the subject under examination.

Instruments

The research data for this study was meticulously gathered from various sources within the novel 'Crazy Rich Asians' authored by Kevin Kwan. As Sugiyono (2011) succinctly articulates, this research adopts a qualitative approach, which inherently emphasizes description and narration rather than numerical quantification. Indeed, in qualitative research, data assumes the form of words, encompassing narratives, dialogues, and quotations, in order to elucidate the intricate facets of the subject matter. This perspective is consistent with the assertion made by Gay (2006), who posits that qualitative research entails the meticulous collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, culminating in a comprehensive narrative that offers a nuanced understanding of the phenomena being investigated. Building on this foundation, the qualitative research methodology employed herein aligns with the principles articulated by Bogdan and Biklen (1982), whereby it involves the systematic collection, in-depth analysis, and thoughtful interpretation of data. This approach enables the researcher to delve into the underlying layers of meaning within the data, fostering a deeper comprehension and a more profound insight into the research topic at hand.

Data Analysis

The culmination of this research endeavor involved a meticulous analysis of the data that had been gathered. The overarching objective was to derive a well-founded conclusion, which, in turn, provides a comprehensive elucidation of the gender roles and stereotypes conspicuously portrayed within the narrative of 'Crazy Rich Asians.' In parallel, this examination aimed to juxtapose these portrayals with the theme of women's empowerment as delineated within the same literary work. It is essential to emphasize that the analytical approach undertaken in this study adhered to qualitative research methods, characterized by a process encompassing data condensation, data display, and the subsequent synthesis of meaningful insights from the assembled data corpus. By employing these qualitative techniques, the researcher sought to uncover the intricate nuances and multifaceted dimensions of gender representation and empowerment within the context of the novel, thus contributing to a richer and more profound comprehension of the subject matter.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings of this study show that the novel *Crazy Rich Asians* by Kevin Kwan shows that there are female gender roles and stereotypes portrayed in the book and the female characters also have their moments to act in contrast to these gender roles and expectations through their women empowerment moments. The female characters in the novels, mainly Rachel Chu, Astrid, Eleanor, and Kerry Chu are shown to be experiencing the pressure of

gender roles and stereotypes. Those gender roles and stereotypes represented in the novels are: (1) The pressure for women to married before or at 30 due to societal pressure, (2) The role for women the be obedient and inferior to the men in their lives including their husbands, and (3) The women are taught to be filial without questions to their in-laws.

In comparison to that, the book also shows how some characters are brave enough to counter the gender roles and expectations. In the end, the analysis shows that these female characters may have not always win in their situation, especially when they're being faced with a long-lived cultural values created against them. But the novel shows that there are so much more fight left in the female characters despite all the disadvantages they have. The women empowerment in contrast to the gender roles can be seen in how: The women can finally make their own choices for their own life path, The women refusing to be objectified around by the power others have in the society and refused to reinforce the subordinate status that is attached to them, and The women can protect their values and dignity by not letting others control or trample over them.

For further elaboration and examples on how the findings are concluded, the study included the quotations and explanation of why or how it became an example of how gender roles and women empowerment are being represented in the novel. Those elaborations will be presented as follows.

Pressure for Women to be Married Before or At 30

“Being twenty-nine, she was by Chinese standards well into old-maid territory...” (p.1:22)

From this passage of the book, it can be concluded that there are rules in the culture that pressures women to get married. In the Chinese culture, there are certain ages where women are considered should start to look for a partner for marriage. The moment the women reach their late twenties or even thirties, there are bigger possibility for them to be called ‘leftover women’ (Chunhua, 2018). Even though Rachel is a woman with great career as a professor, the old cultural values still haunt her. The idea of marriage in Asian family once again is being reinforced with her mother’s statement when Rachel told her mom about her plan to go with Nick to Singapore, where his family resides.

“...Here, it doesn’t matter how successful a woman is professionally. She isn’t considered complete until she is married and has children.” (p. 2: 232)

Not only that, the book also shows how marriage can be a completion to a woman’s life as shows in the passage above. According to the Asian values were all holding on to the idea that marriage is what created an ideal woman since Rachel is shown to be pressured into getting married ever since she came to Singapore with her boyfriend. This reinforces the idea that woman can’t choose what they want to do without the social pressure for it, where Rachel experienced herself in a place she has not fully adapted to during her holiday with Nick. In Rachel’s frustration, she also expressed another gender role expectations that came from the residual culture and the society. As Eagly (p. 131: 1987) has explained, a certain set of gender roles and stereotypes will have someone to act accordingly to what they are expected to.

Women Are Taught To Be Obedient and Inferior to Their Husbands

Marriage in Chinese family is a filial duty and women are expected to be a competent person in various fields in order to be a competent wife, they are also meant to obey their in-laws who obviously have power over them (Chen, 2017). They are expected to fit the standard that is culturally set if they want to be a part of the family. This is another set of gender roles and stereotypes by the society. Eagly (p. 133: 1987), mentioned how there are personal beliefs about a certain characteristics. Then, the ideas of those beliefs then will become a new compass

of how a certain individual should be; whether it's their physical looks, or their abilities, to their role.

Another example of gender roles and stereotypes shown in the novel is the mentions of how a woman should be obedient. One of the example appears when Astrid, one of the female character in it, is trying to internalize herself with the idea that she's supposed to be accepting upon whatever her husband did to her, even when it means infidelity as shown in:

"It's a normal thing. A status thing. Get used to it. Great-grandpa had dozens of concubines." (p. 1: 110)

From the passage above, it reinforces the idea that again, women are no higher in position than men. In the society where patriarchy is being reinforced over and over again in the culture, women's role is to obey. In the Chinese culture of Confucianism, there are emphasizes of how women are ought to be more receptive and passive as they are stay inside the house serving their husbands or their fathers. This is in line with Eagly's words which says 'social role theory goes beyond the simple statement that people who are in particular social roles perform in role-appropriate ways.' And 'the differing between two genders are the embodiment of histories on the culture where it later created gender roles.' Which is also a behavioural confirmation tendencies of other gender-stereotypic expectations both towards her and her husband. (p. 144: 1987).

"After all," she was keen to say, "he's saving people's lives every day and I'm just a housewife." (p. 1: 46)

From the passage above, the author describes the wife to be self-conscious of her place. Despite no one telling her to, she decided that she should hold herself lower than her husband since she doesn't do 'anything' and this shows how in most cases wives in Asia, as the Yin, would stay behind as a shadow of their husbands. The wives of Chinese men are being held to the role of the ones supporting the husband and Alexandra, is portraying how the 'Yin' in the culture is: domesticated and a shadow of the 'Yang'.

Women Are Taught To Be Filial to Their In-Laws

Another gender roles found in the novel is how a woman is expected to be filial. The complexity that comes in being a wife also shows that it means the wife is ought to understand and tolerates the way her husband's family treats the wife. This derives from the idea that the women is inferior to the men. The example is shown from this quotation;

"Take it from me—even though I have been married to your father for thirty-four years, I am still considered an outsider." (p. 2: 355)

From this passage, Eleanor expressed her frustration due to how she can't see eye-to-eye with her son. Her words portraying just how strict their culture can be towards the in-law, especially when it's the daughter in-law. The culture has rooted rules about backgrounds where most families, especially from the upper class want their partners to be equal and despite so, Eleanor was still being treated unfairly in her in-law's family. Not to mention, the Chinese culture also reinforces the filial piety from daughters, thus, Eleanor as the daughter in-law can't help but to be obedient to her husband and her husband's family as she is deemed to have no place for rebuttal even after years. Eagly mentioned how 'social role theory goes beyond the simple statement that people who are in particular social roles perform in role-appropriate ways' which is exactly what Eleanor does after getting into her husband's family. Especially since they are taught to act accordingly to what they were being held up to (Eagly, 136: 1987).

The reason behind this is mainly the culture they were raised in. In the Chinese culture, the disappointment of having a daughter usually brings the idea that they should strive more for

a partner to bring fortune for the family (Siyu, 2020). But it also affects the wife who is in direct relationship with her in-laws family. The treatment might have come across harsh from the husband's mother to the daughter-in-law, and as the 'yin' in the society, women have the role and stereotypes to accept what was given to them, including the mistreatment in the in-laws family. Thus, the girl who was practically given to a family is usually taught to follow the husband and became the property of the husband's family (Fan, 1996: 101). As shown in the following quotation from the novel:

"At the same time, I was expected to perform a million and one daughter-in-law duties, like preparing tea for her every morning, reading the newspapers to her, and rubbing her shoulders and feet after dinner every night...." (p.2: 417)."

From the passage above, it can be seen as another example how in-laws family can be very pressuring against the female their son got married with. As elaborated above, since women are deemed to be powerless and obedient, they are taught to be quiet and just follow to do whatever they are told to, where they would be constantly reminded to know their place by the family (Chan, 1997: 101). Eagly described this in the article that roles are actually an aspect of a culture. It goes down as beliefs and shared among those who shared the same social system. This shared of beliefs upon the roles then would have constricted someone to act how they were expected to be (1987: 136). In Kerry's case, she was expected to be obedient to her husband's behaviour.

Women Empowerment

In comparison of the gender role, women empowerment was also represented to show how the female characters in the novels are fighting for their lives and not reinforcing the stereotypes that are being attached to them. Here are the women empowerment shown in the novel:

Women can choose their own life path

Rachel had expressed in the book that she has the freedom to be able to choose what kind of life path she wanted to live. She doesn't have to be bounded by the residual culture that it forces her to leave her dreams in order to fulfil the roles the society have set for her as shown in:

"...But I was never raised to believe that marriage was supposed to be my life's goal. My mother wanted me to get the best education first....." (p. 2: 231)

From the passage above, it shows that Rachel is not bounded to the culture and stereotypes until she is being exposed to it. Coming from a family background where her mother provides for her, she focuses on getting a stable life first then marriage comes when she wants it. Rachel's expression here shows that she has the freedom to be able to choose what kind of life path she wanted to live. To Malhotra, this would have given her the definition of 'choices made from the vantage point of real alternatives' and without "punishingly high costs' (p. 4: 2002).

"So you'll have to understand that, as much as I love you, Nick, I don't want to be your wife. I never want to be part of a family like yours...." (p. 3: 390)

The passage above shows how Rachel does not want Nick's family to disturb her any further. She didn't back off from the fact she indeed loves Nick since they've been together for some time. But she also realized that she doesn't deserve the nitpicking she got the time she was there. To Malhotra, this act is a form of empowerment. Rachel was able to made a choice that she thinks is good for her for herself, something that maybe other female in the family can't

do, and by doing so, she has shown the readers that she has the boundaries and lines of respect others can't easily crossed. According to Malhotra, it takes the woman to be the main reason why a change can happen in order for empowerment to happen (p. 7: 2002).

Women not reinforcing their subordinate status

In one of the passage, Rachel's mom, Kerry, was telling her daughter about the actual story about their immigration. Kerry was a wife to a husband whose family is extremely traditional from Henan. Kerry was expected to not only being subordinate to her husband but also her in-laws. She was being mistreated there while knowing so well, she wouldn't be able to go back to her family due to shame.

"...I didn't know any of the bus routes or anything—I just wanted to get as far away from the Zhou house as possible." (p. 3: 422)

From the passage above, it can be shown that Kerry has decided to not let herself being trampled over by her husband's family again. Her situation was difficult since the family wanted to hurt her baby because she gave birth to a girl. But Kerry didn't let her husband's family do that. She managed to run away from the household with her daughter. According to Malhotra, women empowerment can happen when the changes was happening with the woman as the main pioneer in it (p. 7: 2002). Not only that, Kerry's decision to leave also shows how she was able to break free from the subordination of women in her husband's family which was also what Malhotra described as women empowerment (p. 11: 2002).

Women protecting their self-values and dignity

In one of the scene, Astrid had decided to stand up for herself after what her husband did. Astrid was not going to sit around and accept that she has been mistreated by her husband was added after the previous narrative of Astrid's own knowledge where she knows that there are indeed a lot of other men who cheated on their wives and their wives will stay quiet for that. It was shown in the following passage:

"...She was not like those wives. She was not going to be a victim, like Eddie's wife, Fiona." (p. 2: 172)

The women in Chinese culture are taught to be submissive and taught to accept whatever was being given to them by their husbands or the males of the family, Astrid chosen to stand up for herself. She tried to justify what happened but she decided it was not her fault. It could've been seen as an act of rebel—which is why other wives may have not done it. Malhotra describes empowerment in a way where women are the main actors of why a change is happening, (pg. 7: 2002). In this case, Astrid was the one who decided that the situation should change and she can't accept such mistreatment being done towards her out of her dignity. In this passage too, Astrid shows that she can eliminate the subordination her culture deemed her to do when similar circumstances happen (p. 7: 2002).

"...Look, I'm not the one who broke our wedding vows. I'm not the one who cheated," Astrid seethed, her shock transforming into rage. (p. 2: 238)

In a lot of situation like above, it can be clear that the man is trying to speak for the woman. But as seen from the passage, Astrid was shown to not waver under the words that Michael said. She had decided to voice out her own thoughts and expressing her disappointment at him by not letting Michael turning the tables at her to take the blame of the reason why their marriage was broken. In Malhotra's opinion, this can be seen as a way to understanding herself and creating choices where the woman had seen more value in herself (p. 11: 2002) and empowerment happens when a woman have finally secured her self-esteem (p. 13: 2002).

CONCLUSION

From the analysis, the novel showed the representation of gender roles and stereotypes through narratives and dialogues. From those narratives and dialogues, it is shown that the female characters in the novel are portrayed to always have to live up to the stereotypes of the roles that are taught to them and those gender roles came from the residual culture. The analysis also showed the representation of women empowerment in *Crazy Rich Asians* novel through how the female characters managed to assert themselves as the upper-hand despite their original residual culture forbidding them so. They are shown to be able to choose and make decisions that's good for themselves, they are also shown to be able to make changes, and have the self-awareness that they are not supposed to be treated as the inferior and being controlled around by the men or the culture.

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